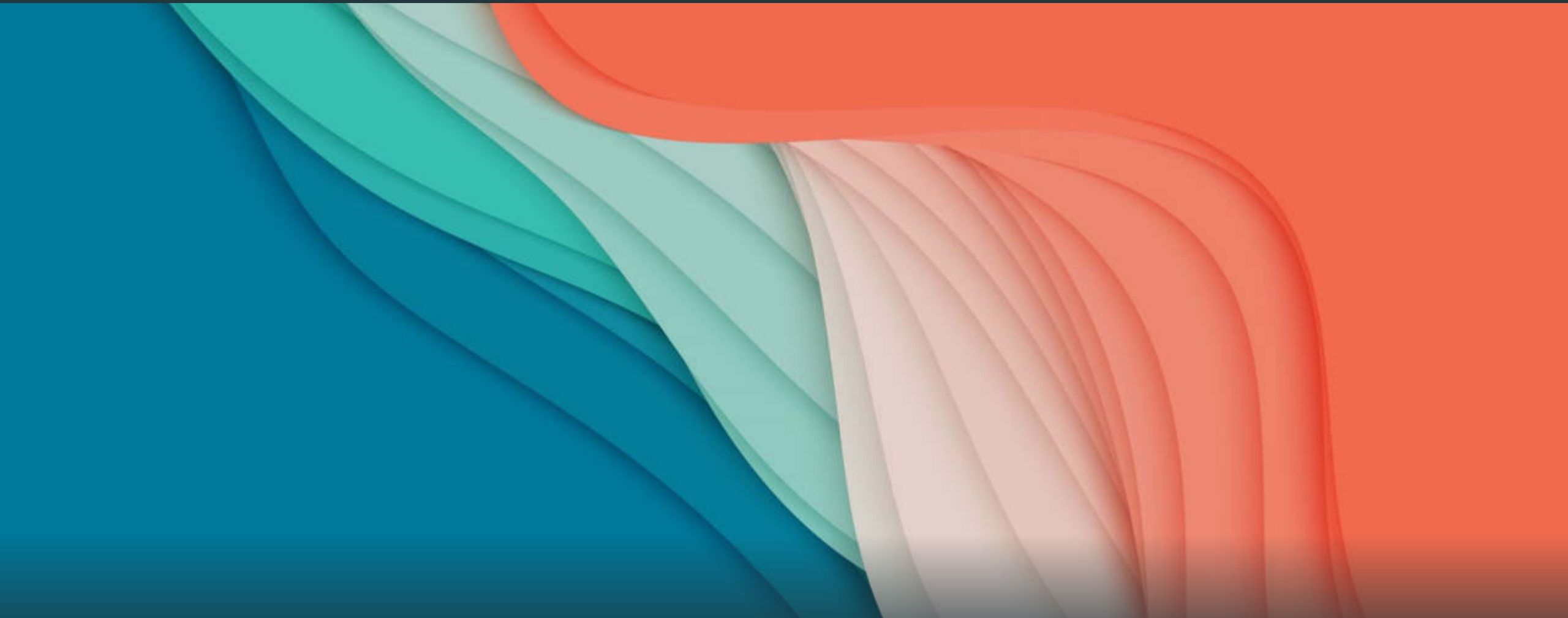


The sharing economy's past and our platformed future through a digital ecology lens

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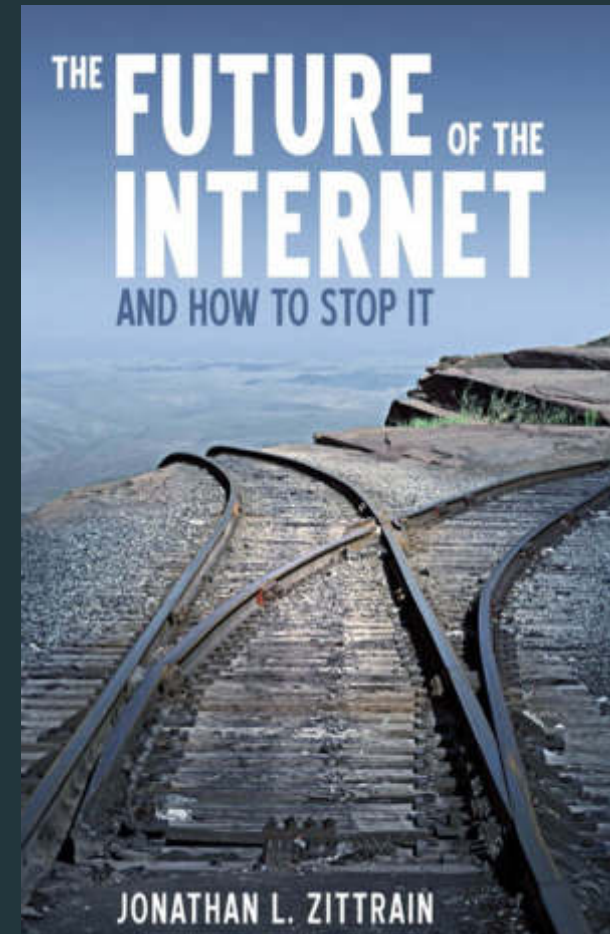
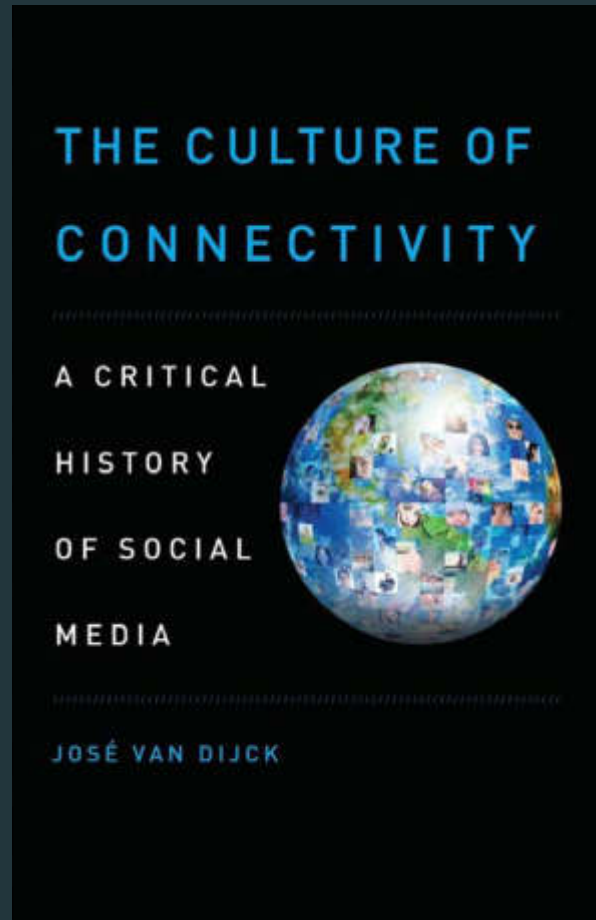
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How did we end up with a platformized Web?

Narrative 1: 'Loss of innocence'

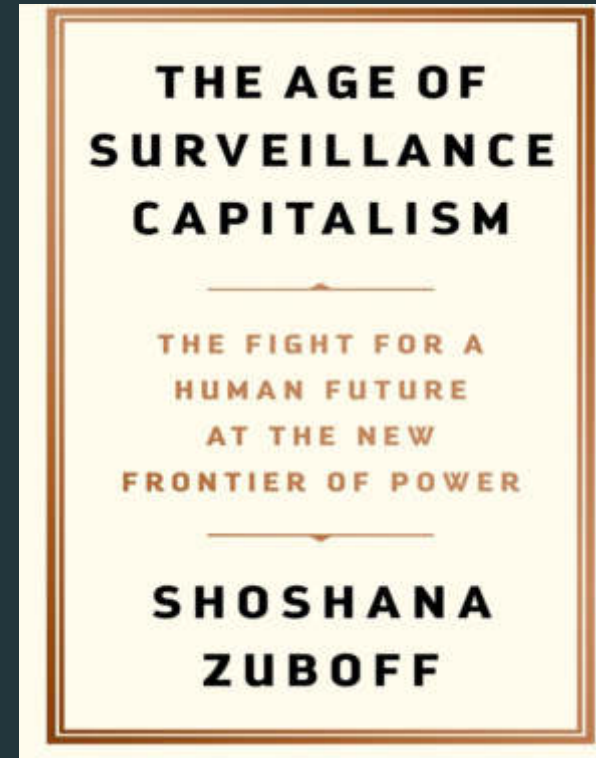
... or a 'fall from grace', see:
Burgess and Baym, 2020.



How did we end up with a platformized Web?

Narrative 2

- Zuboff (2022: 2): „...surveillance capitalism as a *unified field of institutional development*. Its four already visible stages of development are examined through a two-decade lens on expanding economic operations and their societal effects, including extraction and the wholesale destruction of privacy, the consequences of blindness-by-design in human-to-human communications, the rise of AI dominance and epistemic inequality... *Structurally, each stage creates the conditions and constructs the scaffolding for the next, and each builds on what went before*’ (emphasis added).



THE YALE LAW JOURNAL

LINA M. KHAN

Amazon's Antitrust Paradox

ABSTRACT. Amazon is the titan of twenty-first century commerce. In addition to being a retailer, it is now a marketing platform, a delivery and logistics network, a payment service, a credit lender, an auction house, a major book publisher, a producer of television and films, a fashion designer, a hardware manufacturer, and a leading host of cloud server space. Although Amazon has clocked staggering growth, it generates meager profits, choosing to price below-cost and expand widely instead. Through this strategy, the company has positioned itself at the center of e-commerce and now serves as essential infrastructure for a host of other businesses that depend upon it. Elements of the firm's structure and conduct pose anticompetitive concerns—but it has escaped antitrust scrutiny.

This Note argues that the current framework is antitrust—specifically its pegging competition to “consumer welfare,” defined as short-term price effects—is unequipped to capture the anticompetitiveness of market power in the modern economy. We cannot recognize the potential harms to competition posed by Amazon's dominance if we measure competition primarily through price and output. Specifically, current doctrine underappreciates the risk of predatory pricing and how integration across distinct business lines may prove anticompetitive. These concerns are heightened in the context of online platforms for two reasons. First, the economics of platform markets make incentives for a company to pursue growth over profits, a strategy that investors have rewarded. Under these conditions, predatory pricing becomes highly rational—even an existing doctrine treats it as irrational and therefore implausible. Second, because online platforms serve as critical intermediaries, integrating across business lines positions these platforms to control the essential infrastructure on which their rivals depend. This dual role also enables a platform to exploit information collected on companies using its services to undermine them as competitors.

This Note maps out facets of Amazon's dominance. Doing so enables us to make sense of its business strategy, illuminate anticompetitive aspects of Amazon's structure and conduct, and underscore deficiencies in current doctrine. The Note closes by considering two potential regimes for addressing Amazon's power: reinvigorating traditional antitrust and competition policy principles or applying common carrier obligations and duties.

AUTHOR. I am deeply grateful to David Elgert General for encouraging me to pursue this project and to Barry C. Lynn for introducing me to these issues in the first place. I'm thoughtful feedback at various stages of this project. I am also grateful to Christopher R. Leslie, Daniel Markovitz, Stacy Mitchell, Frank Pasquale, George Priest, Maurice Stucke, and Sandeep Vahegama. Lastly, many thanks to Juliana Brink, Uja Mittal, and the Yale Law Journal staff for insightful comments and careful editing. All errors are my own.

How did we end up with a platformized Web?


Narrative 3

- APIs as a tool for creating platform ecosystems as *stellar systems* made up of ‘connectors’ and ‘complementors’ (see: van Dijck, Poell, De Waal, 2018).
- Shifting emphasis to ongoing genesis, relationality (Mackenzie, 2018).



Where are they (almost) all gone?

TED Ideas worth spreading WATCH



Car sharing 🚗 bike sharing 🚲 social lending 💰 errand networks 🐾
space rental 🏠 co-working 🏢 skill sharing 🛠️ dog sharing 🐕 p2p travel ✈️
time banking ⌚ ride sharing 🚲 solar power ☀️ toy rental 🧸 textbook rental 📖 art rental 🎨
fashion rental 👗 p2p travel ✈️ online rental 📺 neighborhood rental 🏠 big marketplaces 🛒
gift exchanges 🎁 used electronics 📱 book swaps 📖 baby goods and toys swaps 🍼 clothing swaps 👕 games 🎮
neighborhood marketplaces 🏠 co-working spaces 🏢 social lending 💰 garden sharing 🌿 p2p travel ✈️ bartering 🔄
crowd funding 🤝 garden sharing 🌿 skill sharing 🛠️ shared storage 📦 p2p parking marketplaces 🚗 neighborhood marketplaces 🏠
errand & task networks 🐾 experience marketplaces 🎭 social food networks 🍷 storage networks 📦 time banking ⌚ local exchange trading schemes 🏠 movies 🎬
bike sharing 🚲 social lending 💰 p2p travel ✈️ space rental 🏠 co-working 🏢 skill sharing 🛠️ dog sharing 🐕 paper sharing 📄 bike sharing 🚲 ride sharing ⌚
car rental 🚗 dog rental 🐕 textbook rental 📖 art rental 🎨 fashion rental 👗 movies 🎬 general online rental 📺 neighborhood rental 🏠 big new businesses 📱 p2p marketplaces 🛒 used electronics 📱
baby goods and toys swaps 🍼 clothing swaps 👕 games 🎮 neighborhood marketplaces 🏠 co-working spaces 🏢 social lending 💰 social networks 🌐 peer-to-peer travel ✈️ bartering 🔄 crowd funding 🤝 garden sharing 🌿
... and many more ...

1,524,835 views | Rachel Botsman • TEDGlobal 2012

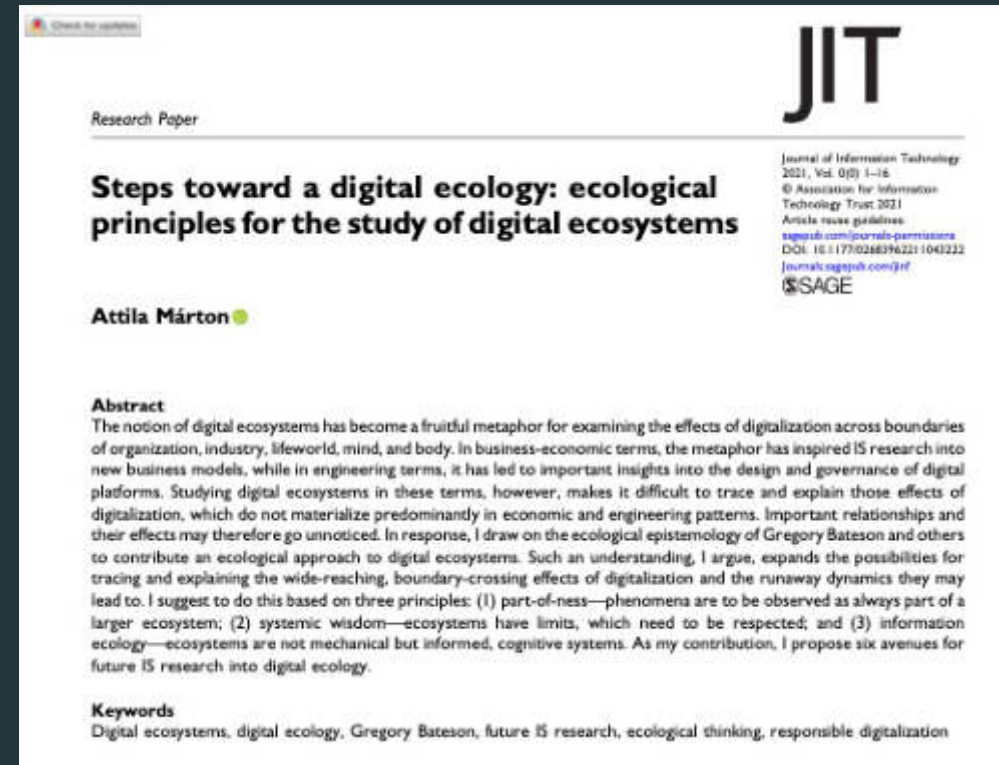
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The currency of the new economy is trust [Read transcript](#)

There's been an explosion of collaborative consumption -- web-powered sharing of cars, apartments, skills. Rachel Botsman explores the currency that makes systems like Airbnb and TaskRabbit work: trust, influence, and what she calls "reputation capital."

An alternative explanation: ecological epistemology and looking beyond 'winners'

- Moving away from the metaphor of 'power' or 'control' or 'force' (see: Harries-Jones, 1996) and towards an *ecological, cybernetic epistemology* (Bateson, 1972, 1979).
- *Digital ecology* (Márton, 2021): digital ecosystems as informed/cognitive, and not mechanical systems. Allows to trace the *dynamics* that the growth of platforms give rise to.



Rooting this paper...

- ... in longitudinal in-depth fieldwork tracing the history of Couchsurfing, a collaborative hospitality platform (conducted 2013-2018 in the EU and the US).
- ... in previous collaborative papers with Attila Márton (CBS) and Mike Zundel (U of Liverpool).



Couchsurfing's successful take-off

- Reviving the ideals of open collaboration
- Riding the wave of social media / Web 2.0.
- Emerging as an early harbinger of what became known as the 'sharing economy'.



<https://www.prweb.com/prfiles/2006/07/11/0000410431/CSscreenshot.jpg>

... and a series of turbulences or near-deaths

- 2006: technological crash and burn-out of the leader. Rebirth thanks to volunteer mobilization.
- 2007: a crash of its 'do-ocratic' governance model. Rebirth as a top-down, formalized non-profit.
- 2011: charitable status denied and near-bankruptcy. Rebirth as a Silicon Valley, VC-funded startup.
- 2015: startup failed. Saved by a private investor.
- 2020: another near—death due to border closures and lockdowns.

Due to the impact of Covid-19, we need your immediate help to keep Couchsurfing alive

[Read more](#)

Monthly contribution 10.99 zł PLN <small>TAX AND FEES INCLUDED</small>	Annual contribution 54.99 zł PLN <small>TAX AND FEES INCLUDED</small> SAVE 58%
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All of us who are members of Couchsurfing believe in something greater than money, possessions, and status. It took over 14 years for the Couchsurfing community to come together. Without your immediate help, this community will be lost forever.

[Pay with Credit Card](#)

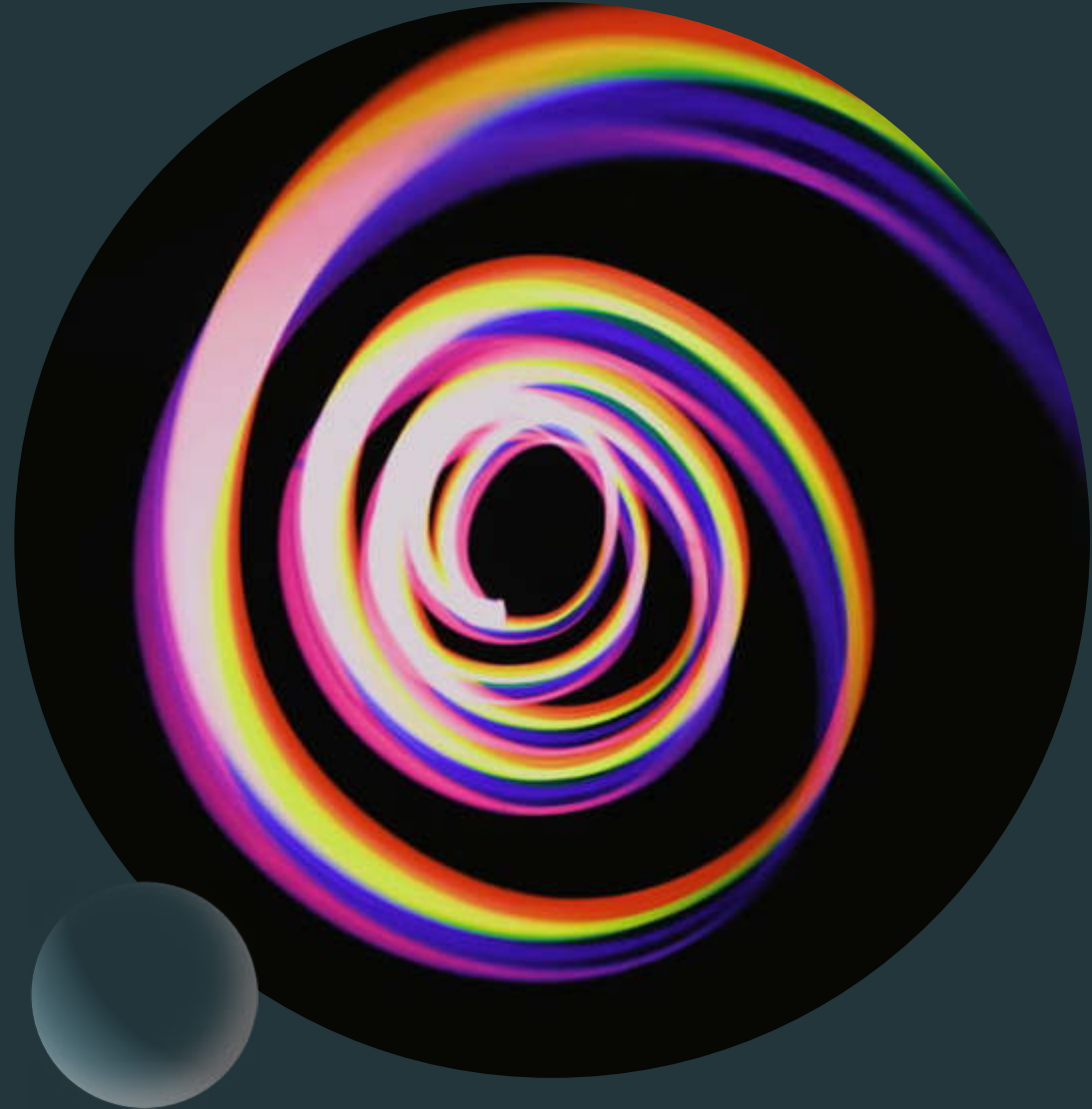
[PayPal](#)

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https://www.couchsurfing.com/contribution?after_sign_in=true

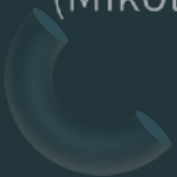
Key insights from the case

- The turbulences as a series of escalating '**problems**' and '**solutions**', an effect of **conscious purpose** (see Bateson 1972, 440-447) – each *solution* gives rise to novel, ever-bigger *problem* which in turn requires ever-more expansive solution (Mikołajewska-Zajac et al. 2022).
- Purposively deployed 'solutions' are rather **quick fixes** and are likely to become '*self-perpetuating and ecologically destructive games without end*' (Ray, 2007, p. 864).



Key insights from the case

- With each adaptation, the platform was losing a portion of its flexibility to adjust – it was becoming more and more **specialized** and **committed** – **dependent** on the chosen solution and less able to cope with the crises in the environment (e.g., COVID).
- Digitalization not only allows for tech fixes to be developed much faster but for **systemic stress** to shift faster and further (Mikołajewska-Zajac et al. 2022).



Broader insights

- Platformization becomes unveiled as a **runaway pattern**:
 - platforms are prone to become locked in a pattern whereby they need to resort to ever more expansive ad-hoc measures to **survive in short-term**,
 - at the same time, they make entire societies **dependent** on their systems (Mikołajewska-Zajac et al. 2022),
 - what is more, platform dominance can only be achieved by trumping the previous leaders (Barwise and Watkins 2018), so they escape forward.
- **Dependence** (e.g., overspecialization) **is lethal to an ecosystem** – because the unit of survival is not a single organism (a platform) but a **flexible organism and its environment** (Bateson 1972, 451).
- The story of Couchsurfing is **indicative of wider, ecological developments**, by which a **loss of flexibility has become the price for escalating growth across the whole digital platform ecosystem**, only to be maintained by massive financial investments. It unveils the erosion of diversity of ideas and organizational forms (Mikołajewska-Zajac and Márton, 2022).

Considering the Web's future

- Considering the **health of the Web** as an ecosystem and the continued diversity of ideas it can maintain seriously to stop erosion and rebuild diversity of organizational forms (Mikołajewska-Zajac and Márton, 2022). In particular (Márton, 2021):
 - Considering erosion of the environment as likely ultimately lethal to digital platforms.
 - Forgetting linear progress. Instead: circularities, death and rebirth as a continuation of life.
 - Embracing ecosystems as patterns of *heterogeneous relationship* – which do not materialise in homogenous (e.g. market) terms.
- *Platform cooperatives – problems and hopes.*



Thank you

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