
Is Networking computing ?

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Abstract

”Network science” is developing as an academic discipline-of-disciplines. It parallels computer science and forms hybrids with research more closely related to computational problems, while the semantic shift from computational to digital is increasingly commonplace and the information technology sector is increasingly preoccupied with big data, grids, clouds. In this context, raising the question ”Is networking computing?” does not seem unfounded, especially as it has been raised since the beginning of the history of networks.

This paper re-examines the questions asked by researchers in the 1960s and 1970s, during the ”first steps” of networks, on their perimeter, their definition, their role. Our initial question is grounded in history – and interrogates historians themselves: are historians of networks computing historians? At the crossroads of several fields, the history of networks invites to reflect upon its specificities, those of its archives; how it adds to the history of computing while owing to it. Finally, the paper addresses – via themes such as openness, information, communication, languages, data, interfaces – the cultural, social, political and juridical roots, beyond the technical and scientific ones, that have shaped networks, to understand how the imaginaires and practices of networking have evolved, in relation (and opposition) to those of computing.

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