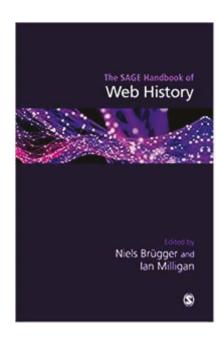REVIEW

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Web archives as a historiographical source

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What is the digital memory we preserve now for future users and their respective research? The preserved artifacts are what allow us to (re)construct or (re)create memory, be it individual, collective, or organizational. What we do today in terms of digital preservation will impact the research sources that will be available and, in a society that produces increasing volumes of information, on multiple platforms, the challenge is constant. This challenge is not only in technological terms, but also in the possibilities of retrospective use of digital content.

In Brazil, some publications in the last decade have brought important reflections on the uses of the digital, available on the internet and the web, as a historiographical source. Authors such as Almeida (2011), Oliveira (2014), Tomasi (2014), Rodrigues (2014), Lucchesi (2014) and Cezarinho (2018) brought to the discussion the possibilities of the internet as a primary source in the historian's craft, the web as research data for studies of the present time, the emergence of new objects for the study of history, the presence of the web in social life, and the impacts of the web in the way of obtaining and publishing knowledge. Among the main forms of digital preservation of the internet, web archiving stands out, which consists of "a process that comprises collecting, storing and making available the World Wide Web's retrospective information for future researchers" (ROCKEMBACH, 2018). In the Brazilian scenario, some works have been contributing to the study of web archives, such as the research conducted by the Web Archive and Digital Preservation Research Center (www.ufrgs.br/nuaweb) and the Brazilian Web Archive platform (www.arquivo.ong.br).

A relevant contribution to web studies retrospectively is the book The SAGE Handbook of Web History (2018), edited and organized by Niels Brugger, professor at the School of Communication and Culture at Aarhus University, who has focused his research and publications on the topics of web historiography, web archiving, and media theory, and Ian Milligan, associate professor of history at the University of Waterloo, where he teaches Canadian and digital history, with previous research and publications directed at the possibilities for historians to use web archives, focusing on the large repositories of cultural information that the Internet Archive and other institutions have preserved since the mid-1990s.

The preface, written by Steve Jones, professor of Communication at UIC (University of Illinois at Chicago) addresses the Web as a parallel world (Counterpart), in which he uses the metaphorical argument of the fictional TV series Counterpart (2017), set in the Berlin of the Cold War period, where the main character discovers a big secret of the organization he worked for, a formula that allows him to pass into a parallel dimension, and therefore has his job threatened. In the plot, some East German scientists have accidentally created a parallel Earth, and there is a waypoint in Berlin that enables people to physically move between two worlds.

For Jones, the importance of understanding Web history lies in the possibilities and consequences that arise from the divergences between the two worlds presented in Counterpart. What happens to the notion of identity in a divided and parallel universe, and the need to maintain a stable enough web to allow for detailed analysis, are issues that arise and are compared in this allegory. The author states that the Web is a strange place for us, the inhabitants of Planet Earth, just like the parallel world in Counterpart.

The 630-page SAGE Handbook of Web History is divided into six parts: the web and historiography; theoretical and methodological reflections; technical and structural dimensions of web history; web platforms; web history and users, some case studies and, finally, discussions about the future of research in the area (the roads ahead).

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These discussions are proposed by different fields of knowledge, from computer science, information science, history, communication and digital humanities, demonstrating multi, inter and transdisciplinary possibilities concerning web archives.

The first part, which deals with the web and historiography, is composed of four chapters, which approach web archives as a historiographical source. Another point it emphasizes is the need to learn about the uses of technology in research, an informational and digital literacy that enables the Humanities and Social Sciences to investigate web archives in different ways. It includes the chapters: Historiography and the Web (Ian Milligan), Understanding the Archived Web as a historical source (Niels Brügger), Periodizing web archiving: biographical, event-based, National traditions and autobiographical (Richard Rogers).

Part II is composed of nine chapters, which deal with theoretical and methodological reflections on the History of the Web. Within the thematic addressed, the chapters start from methodological aspects applied to the History of the Web, based on different intellectual perspectives, until arriving at more technical approaches such as the use of network analysis. In short, this second part presents the challenges of working with Web archives, focusing on discussions of network analysis, quantitative methods and computational approaches. Comprising this part are the chapters: Web History in Context (Valérie Schafer and Benjamin Thierry), Science and Technology Studies Approaches to Web History (Francesca Musiani and Valérie Schafer), Theorizing Web Uses (Ralph Schroeder), Ethical Considerations for Web Archives and Web History Research (Stine Lomborg), Collecting Primary Sources of Web Archives: A Tale of Scarcity and Abundance (Federico Nanni), Network Analysis for Web History (Michael Stevenson and Anat Ben-David), Quantitative Methods for Web History (Anthony Cocciolo), Computational Methods for Web History (Anat Ben-David and Adam Amram), and Visualizing Historical Web Data (Justin Joque).

The technical and structural dimensions of Web history are covered in part III. The seven chapters that make up this section present and discuss the need for researchers to understand how the platforms work, from protocols to the evolution of hyperlinks to the infrastructure used. Thus, the chapters start from the exposure of the technical foundations of the History of the Web, with HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol), to the navigation of users on mobile devices and the different mediations of these users by different platforms of social networks, applications and other software. The titles that make up this part are: Adding the Time Dimension to HTTP (Michael Nelson and Herbert Van de Sompel), Hypertext before the web - or, what the web could have been (Belinda Barnet), A historiography of the hyperlink: Periodizing the web through the changing role of the hyperlink (Anne Helmond), How research shaped and was shaped by the web (Alexander Halavais), Making the Web Meaningful: a History of Web Semantics (Lindsay Poirier), Browsers and browser wars (Marc Weber), Emergence of the Mobile Web (Gerard Goggin).

Web platforms are discussed in the five chapters that make up Part IV. The section consists of papers written by Andy Famiglietti, Matthew Crain, Ian Miligan, Ignacio Siles, Christina Ortner, Philip Sinner, and Tanja Jadin, who employ straightforward historical approaches to explore the different platforms of the Web from the 1990s to the present day. Among the studies, platforms such as Wikipedia, Geocities, and social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook emerge, which are used and help contextualize the case studies that are laid out in the subsequent part.

Part V is, in fact, the densest part of the work and consists of fourteen chapters. After the historiography, theory, methodology, technical and structural dimensions, and platforms are

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discussed in the preceding parts, this section uses the case studies to present the history of the Web and users, with a wide diversity of topics such as Spam (Finn Brunton), Trolls (Michael Nycyk), Online Pornography (Susanna Paasonen), Memes (Jim McGrath), Chinese Web (Gabriele de Seta), First World War (Valérie Beaudouin, Zeynep Pehlivan, and Peter Stirling), and Religion (Peter Webster).

The last part of the book, Part VI, consisting of a single chapter written by Jane Winters, discusses the many ways forward in the field of Web archives. The central issue surrounding the chapter is to verify the current difficulty historians have in engaging with the subject of Web archives. As a final suggestion, the chapter moves towards a new future where studies of Web archives and digital history would address both qualitative and quantitative studies, in order to recover the history of ordinary people.

The union of authors from different fields, while maintaining cohesion around the main theme, constitutes the work as a tour de force in web studies. The book speaks to many fields of knowledge besides historians, such as communication and media studies, and information science. It reinforces Niels Brugger's statements that "the archived web is in many ways fundamentally different from other digital sources" and that, therefore, "a critical approach to the archived web is needed," and Ian Milligan's that "web archives matter. You cannot write most histories of the 1990s or beyond without reference to web archives." The memories preserved in the web archives, a representation of what was once the live web, are the evidence and fragments that can serve as one of the main inputs for the historiographical work of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century period. Moreover, the preservation of today's information can be our contribution to future researchers.

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