

Digital Capitalism and Critical Media Education

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The following abstract was written for a symposium "Media Education and Digital Capitalism" (Chair: Theo Hug, University of Innsbruck). The symposium was to take place at the congress ECER 2020 "Educational Research (Re)connecting Communities" in Glasgow at the end of August 2020 and was approved by the program committee. Unfortunately the congress could not take place due to the Covid-19 pandemic and had to be cancelled by the congress organizers. Regarding the topic of my abstract I refer to the already published papers (Niesyto 2018; 2019). I plan to write a summary of these contributions in English and will make the text available on my website.

Current analyses clarify that forms of digital capitalism (Staab 2019) and surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2018) have produced a new concentration of capital, knowledge and power that has never existed before in history. The quantification of facts is a fundamental and common feature of digital and capitalist structural principles (Niesyto 2019). In view of a comprehensive quantification and measurement of life and society (Mau 2017), questions of meaning and significance beyond quantifying process structures must be posed. Technology-driven future models of social coexistence, which ultimately subordinate the complexity of being human to the precision of algorithmic calculations and unambiguities, must be evaluated very critically. In this situation it is simply a question of whether a plurality of ways of understanding reality and social pathways will continue to exist – or whether narrowing to binary modes of world understanding and associated social models will be forced.

Education and media education cannot abstract themselves from the technological, economic, social and political framework conditions. People's personal development and coexistence in communities and societies are inextricably linked with questions of enabling and limiting social living conditions, structures of economic and social inequality, power and domination relationships, and processes that promote and endanger democracy.

The contribution at the symposium will first show what affinities there are between digital and capitalist structural principles and what significance this has for people's socialization. The second part will outline strategic goals and tasks of a critical media education (Niesyto 2017) in the sense of an "alternative pathway" (Mansell 2018). To this end, networks must be strengthened at European level and important partners in various areas of society must be found.

References

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- Staab, Philipp (2019): Digitaler Kapitalismus. Markt und Herrschaft in der Ökonomie der Unknappheit. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Zuboff, Shoshana (2019): The Age of Surveillance Capitalism. The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power. New York: Hachett Book Group.

Further contributions by Maike Altenrath, Christian Helbig, Sandra Hofhues, Geir Haugsbakk, Theo Hug and Reinhold Madritsch were announced for the symposium and confirmed by the program committee. Rachel Shanks was scheduled as the discussant.

Description of the symposium

The strengthening of a media-critical perspective is particularly necessary when problematic dimensions of conceptualizations and practices of digitization are becoming increasingly clear in the context of economic and political interests. Like data and surveillance capitalism, digital capitalism operates a comprehensive expropriation and exploitation of personal data profiles and functionalizes life worlds and places of education to an

unprecedented extent. The measurability of processes, cost factors, profit rates – in connection with quantitative growth thinking – corresponds closely with numerical representations of data. The analysis of structural affinities between digital and capitalist structural principles is important in order to identify connections between technological, economic, socialisation and socio-cultural-political developments.

- Which economic and social models of the future are associated with different versions of digital capitalism?
- How do the structural principles of digital capitalism influence socialization agents, like parents, schools, media, and peers?
- To what extent are the interests of a digital capitalist economy expressed in educational policy support programs for digitization in pedagogical fields of action (at EU- and country-related levels)? What strategies exist on the part of the IT industry to occupy public educational spaces?
- To what extent do existing social inequalities and educational injustices intensify under the conditions of digital capitalism?
- Which goals and tasks of critical media education are important to strengthen democratic and sustainable development paths in media development, in the use and design of digital media?
- With which strategic partners in different social areas (also in the economy!) should media education cooperate more to support democratic and sustainable development paths in the field of media?

A main challenge which underlines all contributions is a differentiated take on media education in the era of digitization aiming at alternatives to widespread misleading rhetoric of “digital education” and at non-reductionist perspectives beyond techno-centric takes on education with, through and against digital media. As for critical perspectives, a comprehensive edited collection of approaches to media critique in the digital age has been published recently (Niesyto & Moser 2018) including a chapter by Buckingham (2018) that is available in English, too, and that has been further elaborated recently (Buckingham 2019).

The symposium will address selected aspects along the outlined questions from theoretical and empirical perspectives with contributions from Austria, Germany, Norway and Scotland.

References

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