

Media Criticism in Digital Age

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The book is published in German language. For interested readers outside German-speaking countries, authors have written abstracts in English. If you want to contact individual authors: the list of authors also contains the e-mail addresses (see "More information").

Media criticism has always been one of the central topics of media education. The volume offers a broad discussion of conceptual basics and discusses examples of well-founded pedagogical media criticism. Digitalization is connected with new challenges and problem areas such as the commercial exploitation of personal data profiles or the emergence of partially totalitarian power structures in the context of "big data". These problem areas require not only critical reflection, but also the identification of alternative courses of action, e.g. in the "Digital Citizenship" concept.

The volume includes contributions on premises and the historical development of media criticism, analyses current problem areas and presents various concepts of media criticism on the basis of development- and action-oriented, socio-aesthetic, technology-critical, system-theoretical and other approaches. Further articles deal with selected aspects and fields of media criticism such as aesthetic value judgements, cultural hacking, smartphone use, excessive Internet use, cyberfeminism or media criticism in childhood education and in MakerSpace at primary schools.

Abstracts of Articles

The order is based on the table of contents in the book publication.

Social media development and media criticism – theoretical principles and conceptual approaches

Hans-Dieter Kübler

Premises and paradigms of media criticism

Media criticism is to a certain extent the unsystematic, normative counterpart of media analysis, whereby the transitions are fluid. Because without analytical instruments, media criticism will not suffice. Depending on the respective subject field, the media developments and the historical contexts, media criticism has different intentions, goals and forms. It ranges from the mostly arbitrary criticism of the individual work, product or genre to the fundamental, critical analysis of the dominant media system or even – as pars pro toto – up to this conditional and conversely influencing social system. Especially with the ongoing digitization such delimitations are inevitable, but also analytically necessary. In the article, these variants of media criticism are presented and categorized in their function and scope.

Franz Josef Röhl

Public in post-democratic societies

To the mind of Habermas, the public is a homogeneous space of equal subjects who critically weigh arguments and reach consensus. However, the idyll of a non-domination discourse is increasingly proving to be an illusion, as economic and political centers of power are increasingly managing and controlling the communication flows with the help of algorithms and social bots. Technocratic governments determine politics and favor post-

democratic structures. Microtargeting is used to influence voters. In addition, hate speech, shitstorms and hounding destroy the ideal of a democratic public. At the same time, we are experiencing a crisis of journalism. These developments should give rise to an adjustment of media-critical concepts.

Traditional media criticism begins with the reflective subject. It assumes that a cognitive discourse offers the opportunity to change (political) views. But if the change in the living environment and algorithms generated messages whose personalization is not recognized, contribute to the fact that opinions are influenced without the user noticing a manipulation, the media criticism is a major challenge. There is no opportunity anymore to find better arguments in an equal discourse (Habermas), but about uncovering and becoming aware of attitudes. Only if we can understand and comprehend how and why who has come to which attitude, we can develop strategies and action concepts that favor (self-) reflexive processes.

David Buckingham

Going Critical: On the Problems and the Necessity of Media Criticism

Most media educators would probably agree that they are seeking to promote critical thinking about media. But what is 'critical thinking' in this context? How might we distinguish between 'critical' and 'uncritical' thinking? And what is the relationship between critical thinking and other aspects of media education, especially that of creative media production? In this article, I offer some general reflections on these issues by looking back at my personal formation as a media educator. I trace changing ideas about critical thinking that have emerged in media education in the UK since the 1970s, and consider how these ideas reflected the political and cultural context of their times.

Note: the original article is available on David Buckingham's Website: <https://davidbuckingham.net/>

Horst Niesyto

Media Criticism – Directions of Development and Current Challenges

From the point of view of the subject, media criticism refers primarily to the examination of product- or work-related media offerings (e.g. literary criticism, television criticism, film criticism, network criticism), professional questions of quality and media structure, socially and system-critical dimensions (e.g. economic dependencies and concentration processes, technology criticism, data control and political power structures) as well as to the reflection of personal media use in different everyday environments.

The article focuses on media criticism in the context of educational activities. At first, the article outlines some directions of development of educational media criticism in Germany and then addresses various challenges of digitalization, in particular structural aspects of digital capitalism. With reference to the categories of education, reflectivity and criticism, the tasks of media criticism are presented from a value-based, political-cultural and social-aesthetic perspective, to promote forms of a concrete and milieu-sensitive media criticism.

Heinz Moser

Media criticism and Digital Citizenship

Media criticism has already been a central concept of the television age. The teaching of critical aspects concerning media was one of the central goals of media competence in German media education. Digitalization raises anew the question of how media criticism can be defined today. In the USA, the concept of digital citizenship is being discussed at this point, which should help students to use technology "in the right way". This paper builds on that discussion, but also highlights the shortcomings of this concept. In our opinion, digital citizenship does not mean that adults already know everything and students can therefore be fully taught about digital life. Rather, it is about teachers and students in schools trying together to recognize and understand the new trends and developments. The aim is to involve young people as future digital citizens in shaping this emerging culture and to involve them in the associated discourses. It is not primarily about the technology itself, but about how it can be culturally integrated into everyday practice. Only when this moment of participation is part of the concept of digital citizenship it gets the political significance, which will be ascribed to an empowering concept for the digital society.

Thomas Knaus

Technology Criticism and Personal Responsibility

Towards an Augmented Understanding of Media Criticism

Digital technology is the impetus for *media* development: Digital media enable us to interact with our environment – we use them to *create* realities. Socialisation cannot remain immune to *what the media are doing to us*. Conversely, it cannot ignore *what we are doing with digital media*. Due to their advanced *social* function, digital media are developing from being a data interchange interface into a communicative interlocutor. They are becoming the catalyst for formative social and subjective construction processes. Their increasing relevance means

that our criticism should not be limited to the medium itself – the «shell» of technology. Our interaction must penetrate deeper, creating a criticism of technology, media artifacts, informatic processes and algorithms. Only those who know what is happening *behind* the user interface can engage in Media Criticism. A conceptual understanding of technology (“*Computational Thinking*”) is therefore an essential element of any comprehensive Media Literacy.

Media Literacy and Computational Thinking are critical for people’s *autonomy* (Mündigkeit) and their *ability to participate*: It is they that enable people to assume responsibility as *designers of reality*. To promote this kind of Media Literacy, Media Education must exploit further pedagogical fields such as adult education and formal education in schools.

Dieter Spanhel

Critique of media from a pedagogical point of view. Criteria for evaluating the media contexts in which children and adolescents are growing up.

Today it is more and more the children and adolescents themselves who arrange the medial contexts in their everyday lives. This is a new challenge for media education. The main tasks for media education are no longer merely to support young people acquiring media competence, or to protect them against negative effects. The real question now is how media contexts have to be arranged from a pedagogical point of view, so that they can further the developmental and learning processes of the young people. From this perspective critique of the media means a critique of medial settings that define the everyday life of children and adolescents.

This pedagogical perspective of a critique of the media prevents us from criticizing just the media themselves, media contents, media impacts or patterns of communication or medial actions. What is important are rather the relations between the media and the young people under the special conditions of different media contexts. For this a critique of media contexts is required. On this basis, my article presents a concept for a contextual control of the medial action of the young people. This concept is based on criteria for the analysis and reflexion of media contexts and also on principles and guidelines for their pedagogical arrangement.

Gerhard Tulodziecki, Silke Grafe

Media criticism in the light of digitalization and mediatization from an action and development-oriented perspective

This paper will describe and discuss media criticism and media criticism procedures from an action and development-oriented perspective. From this perspective, media criticism appears as an inherent component of media-related actions. As in case of media-related actions, media criticism also requires an external stimulus which is interdependent with respective needs. In its analytic and ethic quality, it depends on the level of knowledge and experience as well as on the level of intellectual and social-moral judgment of the person acting. Against this background, the paper will point out central fields of knowledge and experience and developmental levels of intellectual and social-moral judgment, in view of digitalization and mediatization. As a result, the facilitation of competencies in analyzing and evaluating media requires expanding the level of knowledge and experiences and fostering the development of social-cognitive judgment. Finally, examples will demonstrate how such a facilitation can be achieved by an approach to media analysis which focusses on problems, decisions, design and judgment tasks.

Sonja Ganguin, Uwe Sander

Media Criticism - The Genesis of Media Reflectivity

This paper focuses on media criticism as one aspect of media competency. Media criticism is defined here as the critical perception of media as well as the process of decoding, analyzing, reflecting on and critiquing media, their content, format, genre and development. People’s development within these five dimensions (perceiving, decoding, analyzing, reflecting on and critiquing media) is paramount for their ability to engage in media criticism. This connection between media criticism and a person’s development in these five dimensions can be seen as a heuristic incremental model for the acquisition of the ability of media criticism. The incremental model we have created borrows from developmental psychology’s concept of the evolution of cognitive abilities. The construction of this model allows us to divide a person’s development process of media criticism into three different phases – the acquisition phase, the critical phase and the maturation phase – thus allowing for a better understanding of the development of media criticism.

Selected theoretical aspects and practical fields of media criticism

Niels Brügger

"I like!" aesthetic value judgements as a blind spot in media pedagogical media criticism

The distribution of pictorial memes and other visually-presentative forms of communication in (semi-)public and interpersonal online communication such as Instagram, Snapchat, etc. raises the question to what extent media criticism can productively use aesthetic value judgements. With this question, the article focuses on the peculiar relationship between media pedagogical concepts and aesthetic value judgements as a possible starting point for media criticism. On the one hand, aesthetic aspects are explicitly or at least implicitly addressed in almost every version of media competence, and on the other hand, unfortunately, there is often a less differentiated examination of the question of to what extent aesthetic value judgements can be justified in interpersonal discourse. However, this question is crucial if aesthetic judgements are to be productively integrated into a comprehensive concept of media criticism or media competence and not excluded from a critical discourse as a supposedly purely individual quality of experience.

Petra Missomelius

Criticism as Cultural Hacking. On enabling practices of resistance

Taking the wide variety of critical understandings in the field of media education as a starting point, this article diagnoses either an approach to criticism that tends to be more subject-oriented and thereby conceived as having a stabilizing effect on the system, or on the other hand, an orientation that takes a meta-theoretical, abstract approach, addressing authority and power structures in society. Dissent and resistance, however, are thereby relegated to playing at best a marginal role as dimensions of media education criticism.

The understanding of action-oriented cultural hacking unfolds against this background, an understanding which furthermore can draw on the phenomena of everyday life and pop culture, thus fulfilling the need to include educationally disadvantaged milieus, as well. The elaboration then links the approaches of cultural hacking, that is, seeing culture as a kind of open source and treating it accordingly, with those of media research (key words like data criticism and interface criticism), in order to reach a sustainable type of media-related practices.

Gesine Kulcke

Media Criticism in early childhood education in digital age

The author asks how media critique is being framed in early childhood education. She argues that the way in which media generally becomes a topic in the field is comparable to road safety education: mostly conveying rules. This applies to educational practice as well as to many articles published in the context of media education. When it comes to educational practice it is also still observed that media experiences of children are tabooed. Nevertheless: the digital shift is picked up by some authors and educators in practice making them suggest new approaches in early childhood education. These suggestions strongly concentrate on the idea of teaching children how to program which so far, however, is not contextualized enough, as the author argues: according to her, non-digital experiences are necessary to get an idea of how digital means expand or limit experiences to make a reflective usage and active participation in making media possible.

Björn Maurer, Selina Ingold

Action-oriented media criticism in a MakerSpace at a primary school

Contemporary media criticism – in the sense of critically perceiving, decoding, reflecting, analyzing and judging media (see Ganguin 2004) – requires basic knowledge of digital artifacts, phenomena, systems and situations (see Romeike 2017: 109) that are barely or only partially perceptible behind their opaque surface. Conveyance of this knowledge must take place in the reference horizon of general education and not within the specific professional training of computer scientists. Awareness about the technical sense and meaning structures of the digital – hereinafter referred to as "digital subtexts" – should already be introduced at primary school and gradually developed with the aim of promoting maturity in the course of the educational biography of children and adolescents. In canton Schaffhausen (Switzerland), a MakerSpace is currently being participatively developed and tested in a primary school (grades 1-6) as part of a two-year pilot project. Within the framework of the accompanying research, the question examined, inter alia, will be to what extent the low-threshold and action-oriented Maker approach can provide the basis for reading and writing digital subtexts and, thus, for practising digital media criticism.

Rudolf Kammerl, Lutz Wartberg, Matthias Zieglmeier

Critical perspectives on the extent of adolescent Internet use. A question of generational affiliation?

Communication of adolescents takes place more often and longer via digital media. In the current study, the accordance between the subjective adolescent (APP) and parental problem perception (PPP) of adolescent Internet use was examined. In 609 out of 1095 cases (55.6%), we observed a total accordance between the APP and the PPP. Compared to their children, 406 parents (37.1%) assessed their child's Internet use to be more problematic. Vice versa, only 80 adolescents (7.3%) rated their own Internet use to be more problematic than their parents did. For further statistical analyses, we calculated the difference between PPP and APP. In a cross-sectional linear regression model self-reported adolescent problematic Internet use (APIU) was statistically significant associated with male gender, higher age, single parent, lower social status, a lower family functioning (based on parental as well as adolescent ratings) and the difference between PPP and APP. In a longitudinal regression analysis male gender, lower family functioning (parental and adolescent ratings) and the difference between PPP and APP predicted an APIU one year later. The results can be used for the development of measures for counselling and intervention.

Peter Holzwarth

What do people do with mobile devices, what do mobile devices do with people? Smartphones as an opportunity and a challenge

There is a controversial debate about the effects of mobile devices on people's behaviour and values in our society. Positions vary from pessimism to critical optimism to euphoria. Some forms of media criticism are based on empirical facts others deserve to be criticized themselves for seeking attention and sensation. The contribution suggests to focus on the Dynamic- Transactional Approach in order to avoid biases and balance the two perspectives "What do media do with people?" and "What do people do with media?" Furthermore it is important to reflect both risks and opportunities – a perspective that was offered by Ulrich Beck in his work "Risk Society".

Valentin Dander, Stephan Münte-Goussar

The Media Criticism we are talking about: Media Criticism in Media Education with Foucault and Marx

The authors formulate critical remarks towards established concepts within the media education discourse in German-speaking countries: An imprecise notion of media criticism is blurring necessary differentiations. For instance, an extensive understanding of media criticism as an individual competence risks losing itself within concepts of media competence. Furthermore, it is stated that a dominant notion of the autonomous, self-determined subject needs to face prominent critiques from within subject theories. In trusting in a '1968-framework', media education finds itself in danger of unwillingly supporting "The New Spirit of Capitalism" Boltanski and Chiapello describe in their work.

Followingly, two competing *and* complementary theoretical approaches to those 'disciplinary problems' are presented and, thereafter, commented crosswise: Karl Marx' political economy and Michel Foucault's analyses of power relations. In focusing on material relations of productions, Karl Marx reminds us of important mechanisms in capitalist societies: wage labour, surplus value and profit. Michel Foucault provides us with elaborated concepts to understand, how relations of power operate *within* subjects. Neither does, however, precisely answer the question, how media criticism within media education needs to be put into practice. In writing this text, the authors hope to have effectually started to experiment with new modes of subjectivity.

Further Information about Media Criticism (in Educational Contexts):

see Website <http://medienkritik-lb.de/>