

COMMENTARY

What is to Be Done? The Role of the New and the Old in Media Theory – The Moment for Critical Digital and Social Media Studies

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Debates exist around whether we live in a new Web 2.0 post-industrial era, or whether little has changed in capitalist society. This contribution queries the relationship between new and old, arguing Hegelian dialectics helps explain how change *and* continuity can operate at different levels (Bhaskar, 1993). New and old reappear as categories shaping a field in which Nordenstreng's (2007) distinction between critical and administrative research remains relevant. What is needed is a critical digital and social media studies that draws upon real-life alternatives (such as free software and the digital commons) to neoliberal principles. As Stuart Hall noted (Jhally and Hall, 2012), Cultural Studies' move away from reductionist thinking ended by entirely forgetting the economy and capitalism that had not gone away. Hence, analysis in the UK needs to be informed by the political situation specifically Cameronism and Mayism (see Fuchs, 2016), with its co-opting of populist English nationalism and scapegoating tactics.

Underlying a plurality of crises are influential economic trends: lower wage income, precarious labour, financialisation and the digitalisation of work. These developments – new and old, local and global, in BRICs countries and the West – pose difficult questions for progressive politics and for our field.

Keywords: Neoliberalism; Marxism; Web 2.0; dialectical philosophy; critical theory; Cameronism; capitalism



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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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