Reflections on Todd Wolfson’s book 'Digital Rebellion: The Birth of the Cyber Left'


Abstract

This article presents a review of and reflections on Todd Wolfson’s (2014) book “Digital Rebellion: The Birth of the Cyber Left”. The book criticises the fetishisation of the digital and the neglect of political organisation and the analysis of class and capitalism in recent social movements. I contextualise Wolfson’s work by more broadly discussing the lack of engagement with capitalism, class, Marxist theory and political economy in social movement studies and social movement media studies as well as the naïve and celebratory idealism that results from this orientation and that does not help actual social movements in identifying the problems that their work is confronted with under capitalist conditions.

Acknowledgement: This review has been simultaneously published in tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique’s volume 13 and the International Journal of Communication’s volume 9 using Creative Commons licenses that allow the sharing of articles in journals.

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“Digital Rebellion examines the impact of new media and communication technologies on the spatial, strategic, and organizational fabric of social movements. Todd Wolfson begins with the rise of the Zapatistas in the mid-1990s, and how aspects of the movement...network organizational structure, participatory democratic governance, and the use of communication tools as a binding agent...became essential parts of Indymedia and all Cyber Left organizations. From there he uses oral interviews and other rich ethnographic data to chart the media-based think tanks and experiments that continued t...