Conclusion: Advancing a Dialectical, Humanist, Critical Theory of Communication and Society

This chapter draws overall conclusions from the preceding fourteen chapters of this book. For this purpose, the approach taken in this work is compared to Habermas' theory of communicative action (15.1). Various metaphors of communication are discussed (15.2 & 15.3), and some key results are summarised (15.4).

15.1. Habermas' Dualisms

Habermas' theory of communicative action is a necessary reference and starting point, but not the end point of any critical theory of communication. In the middle of the 1970s, Habermas formulated foundations of the theory of communicative action as a reconstruction of historical materialism. 'But we now have to separate the level of communication from the level of instrumental and strategic action that are combined in societal co-operation'.[1] Habermas argues that for Marx the material synthesis of human activities in society takes place through labour. In contrast, he relates 'the materialist concept of synthesis likewise to the accomplishments of instrumental action and the nexuses of communicative action'.[2] 'On the human level, the reproduction of life is determined culturally by work and interaction'.[3]

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[1] Translation from German: Jürgen Habermas. 1976. *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. p. 160.

[2] Jürgen Habermas. 1971. *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. p. 62.

[3] Ibid., p. 196.

The problem with Habermas' reconstruction of Marx is that is destroys the dialectic by substituting Marx's dialectical ontology and epistemology for the dualisms of system/lifeworld, work/interaction, economy/culture, and instrumental/communicative action. Marx's historical materialism is dialectical. Habermas' theory of communicative action is a non-dialectical, dualistic critical theory. In his *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas characterises his approach explicitly as 'dualism of the media' that 'distinguishes two sorts of media', namely 'on the one hand, steering media, via which systems are differentiated out of the lifeworld; on the other hand, generalized forms of communication, which do not replace reaching agreement in language but merely condense it, and thus remain tied to lifeworld contexts'.[4] Habermas' dualism also becomes evident in his distinction between strategic action and communicative action. He sets up a strict either/or-dualism between the two types of action: 'Rather, social actions can be distinguished according to whether the participants adopt either a success-oriented attitude [strategic action] or one oriented to reaching understanding [communicative action]'.[5]

Christian Marazzi argues that in post-Fordist capitalism, communication has entered the sphere of economic production, which has brought about the 'communicative mode of production'.[6] Habermas' separation of communication and work goes back to Hegel's philosophy. Marazzi writes that Hegel's dualism was influenced by a world of work where in the division of labour 'all activities are silent'.[7] The consequence of this dualism was the separation of instrumental and communicative action in the theories of Hegel and Habermas. 'In the light of what is happening in the 1990s, the insufficiency of Habermas' theory can hardly be denied. […] Now that communication has entered into production, the dichotomy between the instrumental and the communicative sphere has been upended'.[8] Marazzi argues that in communicative capitalism, the rise of neoliberalism has resulted in a crisis of political forms of representation that communicated political interests and demands, which includes a crisis of trade unions and democracy. At the same time, there is the 'proliferation of political self-representational forms' as well as widespread individualism.[9] 'At the peak

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[4] Jürgen Habermas. 1985. *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. p. 390.

[5] Jürgen Habermas. 1985. *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. p. 286.

[6] Christian Marazzi. *Capital and Affects: The Politics of the Language Economy*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e). p. 31.

[7] Ibid., p. 33.

[8] Ibid., pp. 38 & 41.

[9] Ibid., p. 42.

of the "communication society", we are paradoxically witnessing a *crisis of* communication itself'.[10]

Marazzi argues that Habermas' separation of work and communication does not reflect the reality of communicative capitalism where communication plays an important role in the economy. This circumstance is certainly true, but one should add that communication has since the start of capitalism been important in the instrumental sphere of the capitalist economy: Prices and exchange-value are the 'language of commodities';[11] capitalists and mangers communicate capitalist ideology to their employees, politicians, and the public in order to justify exploitation; advertising is the communication of product propaganda; managers communicate instructions to workers; the 20th century saw the rise of the culture industry, communication and culture take on the commodity form; etc. In capitalism, communication has a fundamentally instrumental character. Communicative reason is in capitalism to a large degree subsumed under instrumental reason.

In post-Fordist capitalism, this subsumption has, together with the diffusion of informatisation, been extended to a degree where communication labour and communication technologies have become central factors in the antagonism between the productive forces and the relations of production.

Forms of Social Action

Habermas also visualises this approach (see figure 15.1). For Habermas, strategic action is 'purposive action' that is 'primarily oriented to attaining an end' and is a form of social action.[12] In contrast, communicative action is social action 'oriented to reaching understanding' and 'a process of reaching agreement among speaking and acting subjects'.[13] The dualism that Habermas defines here implies that communication is not purposive, although reaching joint understanding of parts of the world or a joint definition of a situation is a goal in itself. In my approach, communication is a form of teleological positing that aims at (re)producing social relations.
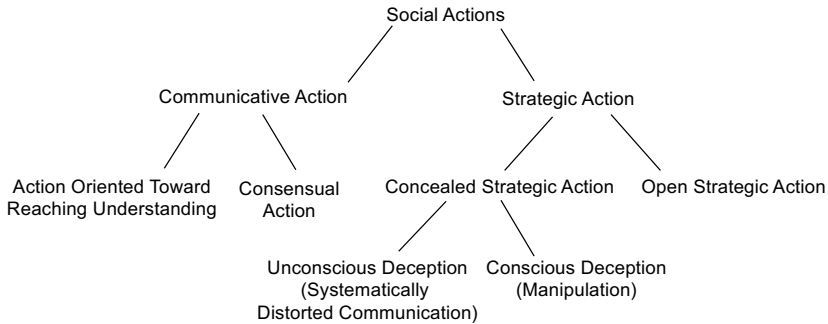
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[10] Ibid., p. 43.
[11] Karl Marx. 1867. *Capital Volume One*. London: Penguin. p. 143.
[12] Ibid., p. 285.
[13] Ibid., pp. 286–287.

Social Actions

Communicative Action   Strategic Action

Action Oriented Toward   Consensual   Concealed Strategic Action   Open Strategic Action
Reaching Understanding   Action

Unconscious Deception   Conscious Deception
(Systematically   (Manipulation)
Distorted Communication)

Figure 15.1: The dualistic logic of Habermas' theory of communicative action.[14]

Three Forms of Rationality

For Habermas, communicative action is neither purposive nor teleological. In an essay written in the middle of the 1990s Habermas identifies three forms of rationality: Epistemic rationality is oriented on knowledge, teleological rationality is oriented on achieving purposes, communicative rationality is oriented on understanding.[15] Strategic action would use language, but wouldn't be communicative, but rather oriented toward consequences.[16] According to Habermas, the three types of rationality interact in discourse, but 'do not for their part appear to have common roots'.[17] This means that Habermas also argues here in a relativistic and dualistic manner because no common ground of the three forms of rationality is identified. He advances a multi-factor analysis of rationality where there are three independent roots of rationality that do not have a common rationality. Knowledge, purposes, and understanding are products of thought, action, and communication. Communication is a form of action. Communication and action are based on thought but have emergent qualities that make them go beyond thought. Thought and communication pursue purposes, namely the production of knowledge and understanding. Thought and communication do not stand outside of what Lukács terms teleological positing, but are specific forms of it. Habermas' separation of teleological rationality

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[14] Based on: Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, p. 333. Jürgen Habermas. 1998. *On the Pragmatics of Communication*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. p. 93, footnote 2.

[15] Jürgen Habermas. 1996/1998. Some Further Clarifications of the Concept of Communicative Rationality. In Jürgen Habermas: *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, 307–342. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

[16] Ibid., p. 326.

[17] Ibid., p. 309.

from epistemic and communicative rationality falls short and does not identify a common ground of human subjectivity. In contrast, the model of teleological rationality in Lukács' ontology sees social production as the common ground of humans and society that aims at achieving particular goals.

Linguistic Communism

For Habermas, communicative action is inherently morally and politically good. Certain parallels to Habermas can be found in the works of representatives of 'linguistic communism'. Robert Merton argues that communism is an 'integral element of the scientific ethos. The substantive findings of science are a product of social collaboration and are assigned to the community. They constitute a common heritage in which the equity of the individual producer is severely limited'.[18] In Fritz Mauthner's works, we find a generalisation of Merton's argument of the communist character of science. Mauthner argues that language and communication have a communist character because they are created and used collectively: 'In language, the ultimate utopia of communism has become reality. Language is like light and the air common property. Like light and air, it is available to almost all humans (only almost all) without charge'.[19] 'Communism has become a reality in the field of language because language is not something to which one can claim ownership'.[20]

It is certainly true that it is difficult or impossible to turn language as an intellectual means of production directly into a commodity. But linguistic and symbolic products and spaces of communication can be treated and sold as commodities. Examples are books, movies, music, newspapers, computers, mobile phones, etc. So, although language and communication are in essence commons, their reality in class societies is that they are embedded into class and power relations. Like Habermas' theory of communicative action, the view that language is in essence communist is in danger of underestimating the capitalist reality of language and communication.

Pierre Bourdieu warns in this context of 'the illusion of linguistic communism' and stresses that 'one must not forget that the relations of communication [...] are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers

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[18] Robert K. Merton. 1973. *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. p. 273.

[19] Translation from German: Fritz Mauthner. 1906. *Die Sprache.* Frankfurt am Main: Literarische Anstalt Rütten & Loening. p. 87.

[20] Translation from German: Fritz Mauthner. 1921. *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache. Erster Band: Zur Sprache und zur Psychologie.* Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger. Dritte Auflage. p. 25.

or their respective groups are actualized'.[21] In capitalist societies, language is shaped by capital and power and does not stand outside of the processes of commodification, exploitation, and domination. In capitalism, essence and existence of communication diverge: The essence of language and communication is that they are common goods. Their reality in capitalism is that besides communication commons there are cultural and communicational commodities and the communication of ideology. The essence of language and communication as common goods of humanity can only become a full reality in a commons-based society.

In a commonist society, power inequalities can be better addressed, overcome, challenged, and communicated, but do not all automatically vanish. An equal distribution of power is an important goal that can only be achieved politically. In commonism, it is easier to achieve equality and freedom than in capitalism, class societies, and dominative societies.

Communicative action in a socialist society is certainly an important means for realising participatory democracy. But in a capitalist society, language and communication are to a certain degree shaped by structures of domination and instrumental reason and so cannot escape their own instrumentalisation as means of ideology and means of production in labour processes organised in class relations. Habermas has a socialist vision of language, but underestimates the ideological and class constraints that communication faces, so that we today find the dominance of class language and class communication. Given that labour in class societies is exploited by capital, a theory that disembeds communication from work and production faces the danger that the resulting dualism implies the idealist assumption that emancipation can to a certain degree be achieved through communication and in language without having to abolish the class structure.

Communication Free From Domination

In the late 1960s, Habermas argued that to make communication and discussion 'free from domination' (*herrschaftsfreie Kommunikation/Diskussion*) would mean '*removing restrictions on communication*' so that '[p]ublic, unrestricted discussion'[22] is possible, which requires 'a decreasing degree of repressiveness', 'a decreasing degree of rigidity' and 'behavioral control' that allows role distance and the application of norms that are 'accessible to reflection.'[23] In the 1971 debate between Habermas and Luhmann, and in his 1972 essay on theories

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[21] Pierre Bourdieu. 1991. *Language & Symbolic* Power. Cambridge: Polity. pp. 43 and 37.

[22] Jürgen Habermas. 1968/1989. Technology and Science as Ideology. In *Toward A Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics*, 81–122. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. p. 118.

[23] Ibid., p. 119.

of truth, Habermas further specifies the conditions of communication free from domination as the ideal speech situation that he sees given when the four validity claims of truth (correspondence of communication to facts), rightness (respect of norms of communication), truthfulness (open and transparent motivations and interests), and understandability (B can understand what A means and vice versa) are met.[24] For Habermas, truth and rightness can be achieved in discourse (these are discursive validity claims that are reached through arguments in a discussion), whereas truthfulness is an action-based, non-discursive validity claim, and understandability a condition of communication.[25]

In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas no longer uses the notion of communication free from domination, but continues to use the term 'ideal speech situation' as a substitute. An ideal speech situation is given when 'the structure of their [participants'] communication […] excludes all force – […] except the force of the better argument'.[26] Habermas also continues to speak of 'conditions for speech free of external and internal constraints'.[27] Habermas tends to drop understandability from the validity claims, and speaks of 'three validity claims'[28] that are enabled by the 'cultural tradition' that permits 'differentiated validity claims'.[29] In volume two of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas characterises the external constraints on communicative action as monetisation and bureaucratisation that colonise the lifeworld.[30]

The Dialectical Alternative: Communication as Teleological Positing

A perspective, such as the one grounded in the book at hand, that sees communication as a form of teleological positing and therefore as a form of production and work that has emergent characteristics, has the advantage over a dualist theory of communicative action that sees the communication of conflict as an aspect of class struggle and class struggle as an aspect of communication in class society. Leaving out aspects of class and labour from the analysis of communication risks advancing an ethics in class society that tries to use 'a procedure

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[24] Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann. 1971. *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie – Was leistet die Systemforschung?* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. Jürgen Habermas. 1972/1984. Wahrheitstheorien. In Jürgen Habermas: *Vorstudien und Ergänzungen zur Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns,* 127–183. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

[25] Habermas, Wahrheitstheorien, pp. 139, 141.

[26] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, p. 25.

[27] Ibid., p. 42.

[28] Ibid., pp. 99, 310.

[29] Ibid., 71.

[30] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason.*

of moral argumentation' to establish consensus between humans and groups who control fundamentally different amounts of property and power.[31] Discourse ethics holds that only 'those norms may claim to be valid that could meet with the consent of all affected in their role as participants in a practical discourse'.[32] The limit of this procedure is reached when dominated classes and oppressed groups agree to and justify exploitation and domination in consensus with ruling groups and the ruling class. The problem of discourse ethics is that it only focuses on ethical consensus and can thereby not conceive of ethics in class society as a form of intellectual ethico-political struggle that unveils ideologies, defines socialist perspectives and challenges instrumental reason. Discourse ethics in a class society has to take on the form of the public critique of domination and exploitation. Critical theory is based on a dialectic of theory and praxis.

The emancipatory dimension and the advantage of Habermas' theory is that he stresses the necessity for and the possibility of overcoming instrumental reason. He sees culture and discourse as determining truth and rightness. Ideology means communication, in which claims are made that do not correspond to reality in order to justify domination. The lack of truth and truthfulness is a matter of ideology. Whether communication is true and truthful is not simply an individual decision, because ideology depends on societal structures, i.e. on class and power structures and practices that shape, but do not absolutely determine individuals', classes' and groups' consciousness. The rightness of communication depends on the broader cultural norms of society, groups, organisations, and institutions. These norms are simultaneously dependent on and relatively independent from society's class structure.

Validity Claims of Communication

With his notion of the colonisation of the lifeworld, Habermas takes adequately into account how commodification (of labour-power, goods and services, including the commodity forms of the commercial media, advertising and capitalist consumer culture) and bureaucracy limit democratic, participatory communication. So, the external constraints of communication are well defined in Habermas' approach. The problem is, however, that he conceives of truth, truthfulness, and rightness as internal validity claims of communication and does not give much attention to understandability. Ideology is the major blind-spot of his approach. Inequalities of education, class status, income, wealth, influence, reputation, and ownership (including media ownership), as well as dominant ideologies, influence humans' capacities for communication and debate, the probability that they will be heard and taken seriously by

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[31] Jürgen Habermas. 1990. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. p. 197.

[32] Ibid., p. 197.

others, and the truth, truthfulness, rightness, and understandability of communication. Although a certain internal degree of individual choice exists in respect to communication's validity claims, there is a strong shaping and conditioning of communication by class structures, governance, state power, bureaucracy, and ideology. Habermas' communicative action is a socialist utopia that requires the creation of economic, political, and cultural commons as its precondition.

Habermas' theory is an important contribution to the critical understanding of communication, but is not sufficient for grounding an emancipatory perspective that is directed against capitalist society. It is not surprising that Habermas evaluates the 1968 student movement as a 'misleading total perspective'.[33] Certain positions that Habermas voiced in respect to Rudi Dutschke and the student movement, such as the claim that agitation replaced the position of discussion in the student movement,[34] resulted in the German Left's heavy criticisms of Habermas.[35] For example, Wolfgang Abendroth, who supervised Habermas' habilitation thesis that was successfully defended in 1961 at the University of Marburg, wrote: 'There is the danger that Habermas' belief that institutional reforms cannot be achieved through struggle but only by convincing those in power, becomes a fetish'.[36] Critical theory's emancipatory analyses have the potential to inform social struggles and protest movements' praxis. And conversely, critical theory draws on and learns from the experiences of such struggles.

Dialectical, Materialist, Humanist Critical Theory of Communication

The book at hand transcends Habermas by having elaborated foundations of a dialectical, materialist, humanist critical theory of communication, where the economic/the non-economic, production/communication, economy/culture, object/subject, labour/ideology, class/domination are dialectical, i.e. identical and non-identical at the same time. Communication does not exist outside of the economy and purposive action, but is a particular form of teleological positing

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[33] Übersetzung aus dem Deutschen: Jürgen Habermas. 1969/1989. The Movement in Germany: A Critical Perspective. In *Toward A Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics*, 31–49. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. p. 32.

[34] Ibid., p. 198.

[35] Oskar Negt, ed. 1968. *Die Linke antwortet Jürgen Habermas*. Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt.

[36] Übersetzung aus dem Deutschen: Wolfgang Abendroth. 1968. Demokratisch-liberale oder revolutionär-sozialistische Kritik? Zum Konflikt zwischen den studentischen Oppositionen und Jürgen Habermas. In *Die Linke antwortet Jürgen Habermas*, edited by Oskar Negt, 131–142. Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt. p. 141.

through which humans (re)produce sociality and society (see chapter 4). In Habermas' theory, communication exists outside of the economy, whereas in the approach taken in this book communication is both the production of communication and communication in production (see chapter 4). Hence, it is economic and non-economic at the same time.

Other than in Habermas' approach, purposive action is not separated from communicative action, but rather instrumental and co-operative, commons-based action are conceived as two forms of action with a purpose (teleological positing/action). The two types of action stand in an antagonistic dialectical relationship that constitutes the difference between class/dominative society and a commonist society. This antagonism translates into antagonisms in the realms of the economy, politics and culture (society's three realms of production). Politics and culture are grounded in the economy because humans produce politics and culture. For example, there are cultural workers who create cultural goods, which means that culture operates in the economy and the economy in culture. At the same time, there are distinct features of both culture and the economy.

Communication does not form, as in Habermas' theory, the emancipatory, critical side of social antagonisms, but is in class societies rather itself antagonistic and shaped by the antagonism between instrumental reason and co-operative, commons-based reason. Society's antagonisms were especially discussed in chapters 4 and 8. Figure 15.2 provides a summary that shows the ethico-onto-epistemological features of the approach taken in this book. There is a clear difference to Habermas' approach that is visualised in figure 15.1.
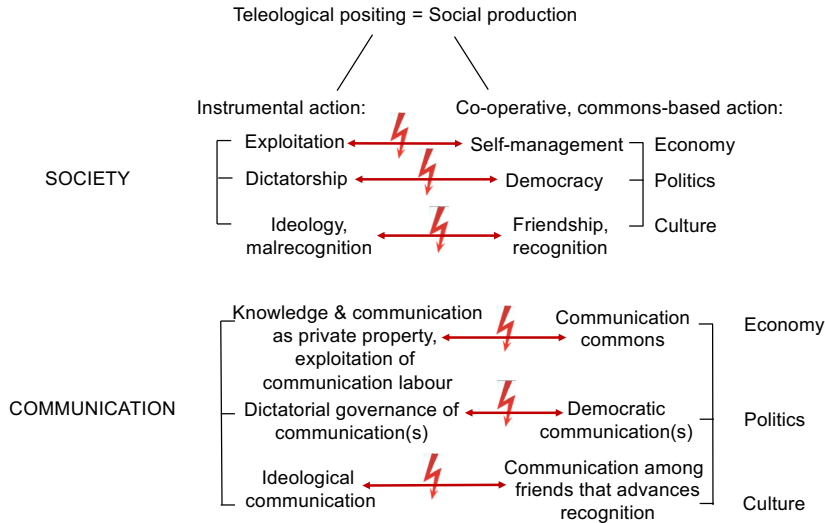
Figure 15.2: The dialectical logic of the critical theory of communication outlined in this book.

To ground a synthesis of society through knowledge and communication, Habermas departs from the framework of Marx's theory and Hegel's dialectical philosophy and integrates aspects of Kant's philosophy, pragmatism, constructivism, and speech act theory, especially the works of George Herbert Mead, Jean Piaget, and John Searle. The approach taken in this book is based on the insight that there is a rich tradition in Marxist theory on which we can build and from which we can dialectically reconstruct certain moments in order to ground foundations of a dialectical, critical theory of communication. My works on communication theory aim to show that the tradition of socialist humanism is especially well suited for such a dialectical reconstruction.

Habermas argues that in the theory of Lukács and, based on him, also in the theories of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse there is 'the lack of a clearly demarcated object domain like the communicative practice of the everyday lifeworld in which rationality structures are embodied and processes of reification can be traced'.[37] Habermas understands his theory as the take up and reformulation of 'the problematic of reification […] in terms of communicative action, on the one hand, and […] the formation of subsystems via steering media, on the other'.[38]

Habermas overlooks that foundations of a Marxist theory of communication can be reconstructed from elements of works by Lukács and other humanist Marxists, so that it is not necessary to resort primarily to bourgeois theories.[39] The lack of engagement with the rich tradition of Marxist theory has contributed to its marginalisation. Important elements for a reconstruction of a critical theory of communication can often be found in the less well-known works

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[37] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, p. 382.

[38] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, p. 399.

[39] See: Georg Lukács. 1984. *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins. 1. Halbband. Georg Lukács Werke Band 13*. Darmstadt: Luchterhand. Georg Lukács. 1986. *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins. 2. Halbband. Georg Lukács Werke Band 13*. Darmstadt: Luchterhand. Georg Lukács. 1963. *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen. 2. Halbband. Georg Lukács Werke, Band 12*. Darmstadt: Luchterhand. pp. 11–192. Zur Diskussion der Relevanz von Lukács für eine kritische Theorie der Kommunikation siehe u.a.: Christian Fuchs. 2016. *Critical Theory of Communication: New Readings of Lukács, Adorno, Marcuse, Honneth and Habermas in the Age of the Internet*. London: University of Westminster Press. Chapter 1: Georg Lukács as a Communications Scholar: Cultural and Digital Labour in the Context of Lukács' *Ontology of Social Being* (pp. 47–73). Christian Fuchs. 2018. Towards A Critical Theory of Communication with Georg Lukács and Lucien Goldmann. *Javnost – The Public* 25 (3): 265–281.

of Marxist humanists, such as Lukács' *Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins*, to which Habermas and other theorists have not given attention.

15.2. Metaphors of Communication

In his book *Communication: A Post-Discipline*, Silvio Waisbord identifies six metaphors of communication that he sees as characteristic of different understandings of communication and different traditions in communication studies:[40]

- communication as technology-enabled connection,
- communication as dialogue,
- communication as expression,
- communication as information,
- communication as persuasion,
- communication as symbolic interaction.

Waisbord argues that scholars in communication studies share a commitment to the study of communication, but disagree on how to understand communication, which is why communication studies is a fragmented and hyper-specialised field. 'Ontological differences explain why communication was born a fragmented field. [...] There is no unified field because there is no coherent and shared vision of communication'.[41] According to Waisbord, the various specialised areas within communication studies draw severally on each of the six understandings of communication.[42]

Silvio Waisbord argues that 'grand theorizing' of communication is 'completely utopian today'[43] because scholars have adapted to exist in their academic niches and do not have an interest in integration; there is no institutional support for such an integration or grand theories: '[t]heoretical bridge-building, a nice sounding endeavour, does not have too many engineers, sponsors, or users', and such endeavours require complex skills.[44]

In neoliberal capitalism, communication studies and academia in general are certainly highly specialised. This does not mean, however, that one should give in to the logic of the instrumentalisation, specialisation, and commodification of research, but rather against all odds build critical alternatives. Philosophy,

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[40] Silvio Waisbord. 2019. *Communication: A Post-Discipline*. Cambridge: Polity. pp. 25–47.

[41] Ibid., pp. 39 & 41.

[42] Ibid., pp. 48–51.

[43] Ibid., p. 73.

[44] Ibid., p. 72.

meta-theories, grand theories, universal theories, and critical theories of communication might not be able to convince everyone and do not have to embrace all perspectives to the same degree. Building critical theories of communication is important, however, because it challenges the predominant instrumental character of communication studies, analyses the larger roles of communication in society, shows how communication stands in the context of domination and power, and enables a connection to activism and social movements that try to struggle for a better society. Struggles for a better society need critical theories, including critical communication theories that can inspire critical perspectives and visions of communication and society that go beyond instrumental reason.

Silvio Waisbord writes that because communication studies emerged at the interstices of multiple disciplines, it 'has been historically less concerned with disciplinary boundaries than the traditional disciplines'.[45] He says that communication studies is a post-discipline that is in principle rather open for trans-disciplinary co-operation. He argues that focusing communication research on 'big, cross-cutting questions', namely global problems such as social inequality, misinformation, climate change, digital dystopias, racism, sexism, etc., has the potential to build bridges within and beyond communication studies and between different branches of communication studies.[46] He in this context stresses that critical studies are a tradition that has focused on such problems.[47] Paraphrasing C. Wright Mills, he calls for a 'communication imagination'[48] that brings together communication scholars 'around big theoretical knots and real-world problems'.[49]

What Waisbord does not say is that the urgent task of scholars focusing on studying global capitalist society's big, global problems cannot and should not simply embrace all types of knowledge and all approaches to the same extent, because some of them are instrumental in the creation, legitimation, and reproduction of these problems. Creating knowledge that contributes to the solution of the world's global problems needs to be organised in projects of critical theories and critical research that create critical knowledge, foster a unity in diversity of critical approaches, and are opposed to instrumental reason and instrumental research, i.e. approaches that are part of the causes of the global problems that threaten the survival of humankind.

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[45] Ibid., p. 130.
[46] Ibid., p. 139.
[47] Ibid., p. 149.
[48] Ibid., p. 150.
[49] Ibid., p. 152.

Klaus Krippendorff discusses six metaphors that are frequently used in communication theories for characterising information and communication:[50]

- communication as container (e.g. input/output- and black box theories of information and communication),
- communication as channel/conduit (e.g. the hypodermic needle model of communication, the two-step flow of communication model),
- communication as transmission (e.g. Shannon and Weaver's mathematical theory of communication),
- communication as control (e.g. behaviourism, strategic communication theories),
- communication as war (e.g. theories of information war, psychological warfare, net wars, cyberwars), and
- communication as dance.

We can add further metaphors:

- communication as gate (e.g. gatekeeper theories of communication) or mirror (e.g. theories of information and communication as reflection),
- communication as machine (e.g. cybernetic theories of communication),
- communication as computer (e.g. the computer metaphor of the brain in cognitive science),
- communication as game (e.g. game theory)
- communication as organism (e.g. radical constructivism)
- communication as individual (e.g. methodological individualism),
- communication as network/plant/rhizome (e.g. Deleuze or theories of the network society),
- communication as theatre/stage (e.g. Goffman's theory of the self and social interaction),
- communication as ritual (e.g. James Carey's model of communication as culture and ritual),
- communication as environment/nature (e.g. media ecology),
- communication as motorways/streets (e.g. 'information superhighway'),
- communication as village/city (e.g. McLuhan's 'global village'),
- communication as wave (e.g. Alvin Toffler's theory of the information society as the third wave of society's development),
- communication as market/exchange (e.g. Hayek's concept of information), etc.

None of these metaphors, however, adequately grasps the dialectical character of communication, the way communication is embedded into the dialectics

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[50] Klaus Krippendorff. 1993/2009. Major Communication Metaphors. In *On Communicating: Otherness, Meaning, and Information*, 48–71. New York: Routledge.

of individual/society, actor/structure, chance/necessity, subject/object, continuity/change, economy/society, etc.

15.3. Towards Communication and Society as Dialectical Dancing

In chapter 3, the metaphors of the flow and the river were introduced to stress the processual and productive character of society and communication. A spontaneous and unchoreographed dance has the character of the flow of a river. 'Ideal conversations are dance-like'.[51] Bertell Ollman uses the dance as a metaphor for the dialectic.[52] He argues that the dialectic process has four steps:

1. Analyse ('one step to the left, followed by two steps to the right, then one to the left')
2. Historicise ('one step backward')
3. Visionise ('two steps forward')
4. Organise! ('one step backward, finish with a jump ["we're now on a higher level"] and repeat steps to "deepen" analysis').[53]

In society, the dialectical dance is not just a metaphor for critical analysis and emancipatory class struggles, but also a metaphor for the essence and ideal of communication. In symmetric, democratic, participatory communication, humans dynamically approach and retreat from each other as in a dance. In the dialectical dance of communication, humans take one step back by critically reflecting on what was communicated and then together jump to a higher level by together envisioning and creating the future, which fosters co-operation, community, the commons, and the public sphere.

The communicative dialectical dance is a recursive symbolic interaction taking place between at least two humans. In the communication process, humans mutually call attention to each other by producing symbols, interpret each other and mutually relate their symbolic actions to each other so that they produce or reproduce social relations, groups, organisations, institutions, society, and sociality. Communication can take place at various spatial levels: with oneself (intrapersonal communication), between two humans (interpersonal communication) or in human groups (group communication) or in organisations (organisational communication) or in local communities (local communication) or at the regional level (regional communication), in a whole society (society-wide communication, mass communication), on the international

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[51] Ibid., p. 61.

[52] Bertell Ollman. 2003. *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method.* Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press. p. 169.

[53] Ibid., p. 169.

level (international communication), or on the global level (global communication). Besides these intra-level forms of communication there are also inter-level forms of communication[54] (for example an individual communicates a message to society at a whole) as well as communication systems such as e-mail or Internet platforms that support various forms of communication (which is why some scholars speak of mass-self-communication).[55] In communication, humans use one or more of their senses (visual communication, auditory/acoustic communication, tactile/haptic communication, olfactory communication, taste-oriented communication).[56] Based on whether or not media technologies are used for mediating the production, distribution, and consumption of information, one can distinguish between various forms of communication technologies (primary, secondary, tertiary, quaternary, and quinary communication technologies, see chapter 6).

Ideal-type communication as dialectical dance can, as this book has shown, only exist in the context of social relations that are free from exploitation and domination. In true friendships, we practise communication and life as dialectical dances. But the dialectical dance is not a good metaphor for social relations shaped by class and domination, where certain groups or individuals try to instrumentalise others by exploiting them, ruling and controlling them, or by spreading ideology that aims at reifying consciousness. The dialectical dance is not a good metaphor for communication in general, because communication is not independent from power structures. The dialectical dance is rather only a good metaphor for communication that takes place in social relations or a society that is classless and without domination. In class and dominative societies, society's and communication processes' dialectics more resemble a dance of robots that are remotely controlled. Remote controls can always fail and run out of battery power, which means that domination is never without alternatives and can always be challenged by political praxis (see chapters 12 & 14). But the point is that in relations of domination, dominative groups or classes try to instrumentalise humans, communication, and society in order to enforce their partial interests.

Whereas a commons-based society is a dialectical dance, capitalism and class societies are more like machines and computers, i.e. a form of instrumental dialectic, in which one side of a dialectical relation tries to impose the logic of instrumental reason on the other side. In class societies, there is, as in all societies, a constant dialectical flow of life, communication, and society, but it takes on the forms of alienated life, alienated communication, and alienated

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[54] Karl Erik Rosengren. 2000. *Communication: An Introduction.* London: Sage. pp. 51–52. See also: Denis McQuail. 2010. *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory.* London: Sage. Sixth edition. p. 18 (figure 1.2).

[55] Manuel Castells. 2013. *Communication Power.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. Second edition.

[56] See: Ruth Finnegan. 2014. *Communicating: The Multiple Modes of Human Communication.* London: Routledge. Second edition.

society, where the few benefit at the expense of the many. In the realm of com-
munication, this means the production of alienated communication and the
communication of alienation in the production and reproduction of society.
Emancipatory struggles aim at a commons-based society, where all benefit. In
a commons-based society, social relations and communication are shaped by
what Erich Fromm characterises as humanist social character (see chapter 4).
Such social and societal relations are not dominated by exploiters, dictators,
and ideologues, but by the dialectical dances and flows of commoners, demo-
crats and friends (see chapter 4). In a socialist society, social and societal rela-
tions take on an ubuntu-character (see chapter 12) so that humans are structur-
ally enabled to treat others and communicate with others not in a machine-like
manner, but humanely, i.e. based on the humanist insight that a human is only
human through other human beings.

Metaphors of communication are not independent from society. They
are metaphors of communication and society. Universal metaphors that claim
to be valid for all contexts and all societies, but either conceive of communica-
tion in merely positive terms (e.g. dialogue, dance) or merely negatively (e.g.
domination, control, surveillance, war), are analytical forms of fetishism: they
fetishise domination by either conceiving of class and dominative societies in
positive terms or by naturalising domination as essential, endless, and without
history. The alternative is that we use certain metaphors for communication
in class society and under conditions of domination (machines, computers,
instruments), and other metaphors for socialist communication (dialectical
dancing). Sociality is a fundamental feature of the human being. It is part of
human essence. As a consequence, communication as dialectical dancing on
the one hand refers to socialism, but on the other hand it points to the essence
from which humans and their communicative relations are alienated in capital-
ist, class society and under the conditions of domination.

That in capitalism it is in the interest of dominant groups to organise society,
humans, and communication like machines and computers does not mean that
face-to-face communication is a sacred form of communication that is superior
to mediated and digital communication. In a commonist society, there is a wide
range of forms of communication. The point is that in such a society, there is
more time and a greater possibility for humans to integrate various forms of
communication and to overcome communication's dominative character.

15.4. Transcending Capitalism, Transcending
Capitalist Communication

This book has outlined some foundations of a critical theory of communica-
tion. Such a theory is critical because it is a critique of capitalism, class, and
domination. It is materialist because it analyses communication and soci-
ety as complexes of social production. It is dialectical because it analyses the
antagonisms we find in society and communication. It is focused on praxis

communication because it wants to help create critical knowledge that contributes to the creation of a commons-based society, a democratic public sphere and communication commons.

The critical theory of communication needs to engage with issues such as the relationship of the economic and the non-economic, the relationship of production and communication, the dialectic of subject and object, communication in the context of capitalism, class, commodification, and alienation, domination, communication technology fetishism, the communication society, political communication in the public sphere, ideology, nationalism, authoritarianism, and global communication.

The critical theory of communication is a negative dialectic in that it is an analytical critique of communication in the context of capitalism and domination. But society's dialectic is a determinate negation, where social struggles have the potential to produce change. The critical theory of communication therefore also needs to engage with communication in the context of social struggles and political protests and the quest and vision for alternative communications that are commons-based or public service.

There is a world beyond capitalism and beyond capitalist communication(s). Humans are social and societal beings capable of praxis. In the last instance, humans either accept their own enslavement and a media system that upholds this enslavement or struggle for democratic communications in a commons-based society.