



# **DIGITAL CAPITALISM**

## **MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY**

### **VOLUME THREE**

**CHRISTIAN FUCHS**



# Digital Capitalism

This third volume in Christian Fuchs's Media, Communication and Society book series illuminates what it means to live in an age of digital capitalism, analysing its various aspects, and engaging with a variety of critical thinkers whose theories and approaches enable a critical understanding of digital capitalism for media and communication.

Each chapter focuses on a particular dimension of digital capitalism or a critical theorist whose work helps us to illuminate how digital capitalism works. Subjects covered include: digital positivism; administrative big data analytics; the role and relations of patriarchy, slavery, and racism in the context of digital labour; digital alienation; the role of social media in the capitalist crisis; the relationship between imperialism and digital labour; alternatives such as trade unions and class struggles in the digital age; platform co-operatives; digital commons; and public service Internet platforms. It also considers specific examples, including the digital labour of Foxconn and Pegatron workers, software engineers at Google, and online freelancers, as well as considering the political economy of targeted-advertising-based Internet platforms such as Facebook, Google, YouTube, and Instagram.

*Digital Capitalism* illuminates how a digital capitalist society's economy, politics, and culture work and interact, making it essential reading for both students and researchers in media, culture, and communication studies, as well as related disciplines.

**Christian Fuchs** is a critical theorist of communication and society. He is co-editor of the journal *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*. He is author of many publications, including the books *Foundations of Critical Theory* (2022), *Communicating COVID-19: Everyday Life, Digital Capitalism, and Conspiracy Theories in Pandemic Times* (2021), *Marxist Humanism and Communication Theory* (2021), *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (3rd edition 2021), *Communication and Capitalism: A Critical Theory* (2020), *Marxism: Karl Marx's Fifteen Key Concepts for Cultural & Communication Studies* (2020), *Nationalism on the Internet: Critical Theory and Ideology in the Age of Social Media and Fake News* (2020), *Rereading Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism* (2019), *Digital Demagogue: Authoritarian Capitalism in the Age of Trump and Twitter* (2016), *Digital Labour and Karl Marx* (2014), and *Internet and Society* (2008).



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Christian Fuchs

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# Chapter Five

## Communication in Everyday (Digital) Life. A Reading of Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* in the Age of Digital Capitalism

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5.3 Communication in Everyday Life

5.4 Everyday Life and Communication in Capitalism

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5.6 Conclusion

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### 5.1 Introduction

Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) was one of the most influential French Marxist intellectuals of the 20th century. He was a Marxist-humanist theorist who was not just a major critical of capitalism, but also a critic of structuralism and Stalinism. He was an interdisciplinary critical theorist who focused on topics social as everyday life, social space, the city, alienation, ideology, dialectical philosophy, society, nationalism, fascism, Karl Marx, Lenin, social movements, the state, modernity, language, the Paris Commune, globalisation, aesthetics, rural life, existentialism etc. Lefebvre published more than 70 books.

*The Production of Space* (*La production de l'espace*) is Lefebvre's (1974/1991) most widely read and cited book (for a discussion of this book's relevance for a critical theory of communication see). *Critique of Everyday Life* (*Critique de la vie quotidienne, CEL*) is a three-volume book in which Lefebvre outlines a critical theory of society and everyday life in capitalism (Lefebvre 1991, 2002, 2008, 2014). Lefebvre saw *CEL* as "his principal contribution to Marxism" (Elden 2004, 110). Lefebvre "is the quintessential critical theorist of everyday life" (Gardiner 2000, 71). *CEL* is a "non-statist Marxism that concretely addresses problems of human existence" (Shields 1999, 17). The first volume (*CEL1*) was published in French in 1947, the second one (*CEL2*) in 1961, the third one (*CEL3*) in 1981. *Everyday Life in the Modern World* is an accompanying volume published in 1968 in French (Lefebvre 1971). Although less read



than *Production of Space*, *CEL* is a very rich dialectical, Marxist and humanist work and a major contribution to 20th-century social theory.

This chapter asks: How can Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* inform a critical theory of communication? How can it inform a critique of digital capitalism?

Section 5.2 focuses on Lefebvre's concept of society. Section 5.3 discusses the role of communication in everyday life. Section 5.4 analyses the role of communication in capitalism. Section 5.5 draws the reader's attention to the communication of ideology. Conclusions are drawn in section 5.6.

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## 5.2 Lefebvre's Concept of Society

### 5.2.1 Practices and Structures

Lefebvre outlines a dialectical concept of structure. Structures are "(relative) stabilities, defined and relatively constant contours, regularities, form which are born and survive, which produce and which reproduce, at the heart of innumerable interactions" (*CEL2*, 162). Structures exist everywhere. They enable and constrain and are the result of the interactions of moments and elements. In society, such interactions are communication flows between humans who stand in social relations to each other.

Lefebvre was a critical of structuralism and structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss, Saussure, Barthes, Althusser, and so forth. The problem of structuralism is that it "proceeds by privileging structure absolutely" and substantifying structure (*CEL2*, 176). It "totalizes structure" (186). Structures' plasticity, negations, and their inner contradictions are marginalised (176). Structuralism "loses touch with historicity", dialectical development, and processes (177). It "reifies actions" and is therefore a form of reification and alienation (177).

Lefebvre sees totality as a dialectical aspect of structure. Immanent in every totality and every process of totalisation is the potential for negation, the "breaking of totality" (*CEL2*, 183). He sees dialectical negation as more fundamental than totality (186). Lefebvre argues that a totality is made up by the dialectical interaction of need, work, and pleasure (189–193). Work satisfies and transforms human needs. The human being is a human of need, a human at work, and a human of pleasure (192). Humans have biological and social needs, transform the world and satisfy their needs through practices, and are beings that strive towards satisfaction and enjoyment so that they lead a pleasurable life.

Lefebvre characterises functionalism as a version of structuralism that reduces everything to a function and cannot think of anything as not having a function. Functionalism “eliminates critical thought” and is a “technocratic ideology” (199). Functionalism is an extreme form of what Horkheimer (1947/2004) characterises as instrumental reason. It is a mode of thinking that suggests that everything is an instrument of something else. Functionalism is an extreme form of what Lukács (1971) terms reified consciousness. It reduces the world to the status of things and instruments. Lefebvre (*CEL2*) writes that everyday life has no function (199), which is why functionalism cannot explain it. Functionalism is an ideology of control that has no place for the unforeseen and the marginal (202). Lefebvre’s critique implies that functionalism is an intellectual form of totalitarianism.

Lefebvre (*CEL2*, 232–244) stresses the importance of practices in everyday life and society. He distinguishes between ideological practices, specific practices related to professions and skills, inventive/creative practices, repetitive practices, political practices, knowledge practices, partial revolutionary practices, and total revolutionary practices. Lefebvre stresses that practices are not just economic production but extend into all realms of society, including politics, culture, and technology. For Lefebvre, practices constitute totality. He therefore says that praxis is the “total field” (276).

### 5.2.2 Base/Superstructure, Material/Non-Material, Economic/Non-Economic

There are formulations in *Critique of Everyday Life* that make it appear like Lefebvre like orthodox Marxism assumes that that the economy forms the material base and politics and culture the non-material superstructure. He speaks of “the economic base (the productive forces) and the apex (the ideological and political superstructures)” (*CEL2*, 34). The everyday is “totality in action, it encompasses the base and the superstructure, as well as the interactions between them” (45).

Lefebvre speaks of “material production” and “non-material” production (236), “economic (material) production” (237). “Praxis encompasses both material production and ‘spiritual’ production” (237). He also writes that services are “non-material” forms of production in realms such as advertising, distribution, education, health, leisure, training, or transportation (236).

But it is also evident that Lefebvre is critical of the base/superstructure-model. He speaks of “the simplified scheme: ‘economic base – political superstructure’” as

“impoverished” thought that “characterizes the Stalinist interpretation of Marxism” (CEL1, 52). This is also why Lefebvre speaks of “so-called” base and superstructure and often refers to both terms with quotation marks. For example, Lefebvre argues that “symbols, culture, representations and ideologies” are “so-called ‘superstructural’ elements” that “react on the ‘base’” (CEL2, 237). He speaks of “ideologies and ‘superstructures’” (236), “‘base’ or ‘foundation’” (10).

For Lefebvre, social practices are the decisive aspect of society and everyday life. Social practices extend into all realms of society. The “superstructures are linked to society as a whole, to social practice as a whole” (CEL1, 57). The logical implication is that the physical production is not simply a base to which culture and politics can be reduced. Culture and politics are material and economic because they are produced and reproduced. There are political, cultural, ideological, intellectual, and so forth workers. In *Volume 3*, Lefebvre argues that the importance of bureaucracy, information production and information technology explodes the Stalinist distinction between base and superstructure:

The traditional Marxist thesis makes the relations of production and productive forces the “base” of the ideological and political superstructures. Today – that is to say, now that the state ensures the administration of society, as opposed to letting social relations, the market and blind forces take their course – this thesis is reductionist and inadequate. (CEL3, 123)

Information is produced. It is consumed. Information technology confirms the outmoded character of the classical Marxist contrast between base and superstructure. Information is not – or not merely – a superstructure, since it is an – exchangeable – product of certain relations of production. What was regarded as superstructural, like space and time, forms part of production, because it is a product that is bought and sold. (CEL3, 144)

Lefebvre advances several important arguments why the orthodox separation of the economy and culture is untenable:

- Computing as convergence technology: Networked computer technologies are convergent means of production, distribution, and consumption of information. Computing transcends the traditional separation between production as economic and consumption as cultural.
- Knowledge work: Information technology is characteristic of the knowledge age, where knowledge work that produces information has become an important

feature in the economy. Knowledge work transcends the boundary between the economy and culture. It produces cultural products within the economy.

- The culture industry: In the culture industry, culture is produced as commodity. Examples are music, films, entertainment, live performances, advertising, sports events, video games, software, magazines, branding, etc. The cultural commodity means the economisation and commodification of culture so that no boundary can be drawn between the economy and culture.

Lefebvre questions the separation of economy/culture and base/superstructure. The economy operates as the production of ideas in culture. Culture operates as knowledge goods and knowledge work in the economy. Culture is material, economic, and non-economic (Williams 1977, Fuchs 2020). For Lefebvre, human beings' practices that constitute everyday life "are the soil" (CEL3, 123) of society. Everyday life is society's foundation<sup>1</sup>. In the book *Dialectical Materialism*, Lefebvre (2009, 73) argues that humans' "practical relations" are their "concrete conditions of existence". Human practices are social and societal and form society's foundation.

Lefebvre, however, assumes that information is "an immaterial product" (CEL3, 56). The separation of intangible products of mental work from matter is part of the orthodox dualism that Lefebvre questions. If the mind and its products and the products of mental work are immaterial, then there must be two substances in the world, matter and spirit. The question what the world is fundamentally made of can be based on a dualist ontology with two substances not be adequately explained. The assumption that there are two substances – the material and the immaterial – cannot explain what the world's ground is and opens up philosophy to spiritualism and esotericism that assume that the world is determined by spiritual forces.

The next section discusses the role of communication in everyday life.

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### 5.3 Communication in Everyday Life

The critique of everyday life analyses how humans live, "how badly they live, or how they do not live at all" (CEL2, 18). It aims at informing the transformation of society and

1 Shmueli (2008) points out the parallels between the works of Raymond Williams and Henri Lefebvre, including the cultural materialist interpretation of society that transcends the orthodox-Marxist base/superstructure-model.

people's lives. It is a praxis that wants to contribute to the establishment of "a decentralized socialism" (130). The critique of everyday life "attacks alienation in all its forms, in culture, ideology, the moral sphere, and in human life beyond culture, beyond ideology, beyond the moral sphere" (63). Lefebvre argues that in phases of fundamental societal change, "everyday life is suspended, shattered or changed" (109). For example, as a result of a general strike against government measures that degrade working conditions, the practices of everyday life such as commuting, shopping, and working come to a halt and alternative messages that are normally not being heard in everyday life are publicly communicated through demonstrations, public gatherings, media presence, and so forth. Everyday life is the "vital element in which the working classes" are active and that is controlled by the bourgeoisie (1971, 39).

Everyday life refers to social practices within the totality of society (*CEL2*, 31), humans' "lived experience" (*CEL1*, 49), everyday relations between humans. The focus on experience and class experience is a parallel between the approaches of Lefebvre and E. P. Thompson (1978). Thompson points out that lived experience involves affects, beliefs, consciousness culture, feelings, ideas, ideology, interests, instincts, law, morals, myth, needs, norms, obligations, science, thought, and values (see Fuchs 2019). Everyday life is an "intermediate and mediating *level*" of society (*CEL2*, 45). It mediates society's dialectics, such as the dialectic of repetition and monotony/creativity, banality/profoundness, need/desire, pleasure/pain, satisfaction/privation, fulfilment/emptiness, work/non-work, possible/impossible, random/certain, achieved/potential, cyclic time/linear time, alienation/disalienation, society/individual, private life/public life, etc. The critique of everyday life studies the "differences, dualities, oppositions and conflicts" that humans face (47).

Lefebvre argues for a multidimensional theory of society that operates with a variety of levels. He identifies three dimensions of everyday life: natural forms of necessity, the economic realm of the appropriation of objects and goods, and the realm of culture (*CEL2*, 62). So Lefebvre sees nature, the economy, and culture as three important realms of everyday life. What is missing is the realm of politics, where humans take collective decisions that are binding for all and take on the forms of rules.

Inspired by Lefebvre, we can identify three levels of society (see Table 5.1): the micro-level of individuals and groups, the meso-level of organisations, and the macro-level of the subsystems of society. Each of these levels has economic, political, and cultural dimensions. The economic, the political, and the cultural are distinct, interacting dimensions of society. Table 5.1 outlines what type of structures we find at society's various levels.

**TABLE 5.1** Levels of society

	Micro-level	Meso-level	Macro-level
<b>Economic structures</b>	Use-values	Economic organisations & institutions	Economic subsystem of society
<b>Political structures</b>	Rules	Political organisations & institutions	Political subsystem of society
<b>Cultural structures</b>	Collective meanings, recognition	Cultural organisations & institutions	Cultural subsystem of society

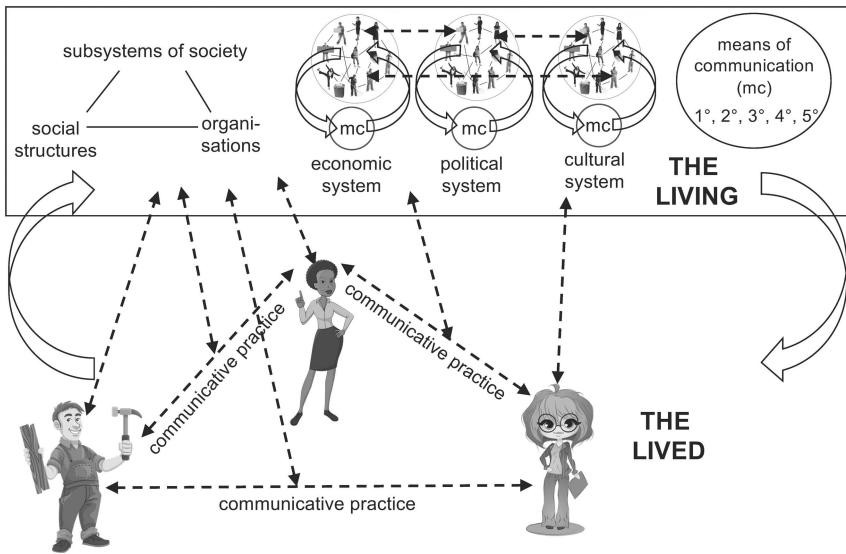
**TABLE 5.2** Lefebvre's distinction between the lived and the living (sources: *CEL2*, 166, 216–218)

The lived ( <i>le vécu</i> )	The living ( <i>le vivre</i> )
Individuals	Groups
Experience	Context, horizon
Practices	Structures
Present	Presence

Lefebvre argues that in society and at all of its levels and in all its dimensions, we find dialectics of social practices and social structures. There is a dialectic of practices and structures in society. Lefebvre's theory of society opposes the one-sidedness of both structuralism that fetishises structures and methodological individualism that fetishises individual thought and behaviour. A core aspect of his concept of everyday life that allows him to ground a dialectical theory of society is the dialectic of the lived and the living.

Lefebvre distinguishes between the lived (*le vécu*) and the living (*le vivre*) as two levels of everyday life (see Table 5.2). Based on Lefebvre, I have constructed a model of everyday life that adds to Lefebvre's theory the role of communication in everyday life as the process that mediates between the lived and the living. Figure 5.1 visualises this model.

The lived is the level of practices and individuals. The living is the level of structures and trans-individuality. At the level of lived reality, humans produce social objects through communicative practices. They do so under the conditions of the living, i.e. structural conditions that enable and constrain human practices, production, and communication. The notion of the communicative practice means that to "speak is to



**FIGURE 5.1** Everyday life and communication

act" (CEL2, 282). Practices are communicative and communication is a human practice. When we communicate, we influence ourselves and others.

The level of living life consists of an interaction of social structures, organisations, and the subsystems of society. All structures, groups, organisations, institutions, systems, and subsystems have economic, political, and cultural dimensions. In many social systems, one of these dimensions is dominant so that we can differentiate between economic, political and cultural structures/organisations/subsystems of society (compare Table 5.1). At the level of lived life, humans relate to each other through communicative practices. These communicative practices are the foundations of the production, reproduction, and differentiation of economic, political, and cultural structures/organisations/subsystems that condition human practices. There is a dialectic of the living and the lived in any society. This is a dialectic of human subjects and social objects.

Lefebvre stresses that in communication there are two subjects but that there is always the presence of the third (CEL2, 150–156). We talk about others and communication takes place in social contexts where others shape our everyday life and everyday communication. Communication also has the potential to change social structures which impacts the everyday life of others. There are parallels between

Lefebvre's focus on the tridimensionality of everyday life and communication and Jean-Paul Sartre's (1960/2004) argument that a human relation is a "ternary relation" (374) where the "unity of a dyad can be *realised* only within a totalisation performed from outside by a third party" (115), by a "human mediator" (106) (see also Fuchs 2021a for an analysis of Sartre's contribution to critical communication theory).

Language is dialectically related to communications. Whereas communication is a process and human practice, language is a structure and means. There is dialectic of means of communication and communicative practices. Lefebvre stresses that language is a "means of action and communication" (*CEL2*, 165), that it mediates the lived/living-dialectic (166), and that it is a social fact that "plays a part in all social facts" (170). Language is "the active element of every social phenomenon. It helps to bring it into being and to fix it" (170). Although language helps to fix the social and society, it is itself not a static, fixed structure but evolves because it is made and changed by humans. "Language is a work, the work of a society" (257). What Lefebvre expresses by saying that language is a work is that it is the historical result of humans' communicative practices and social relations. Humans work in society and thereby also collectively work on the development of language.

There are different forms of language such as written language, spoken language, visual language, abstract/formal languages, and so forth. Language is often a very structural concept devoid of its connection to communication and therefore to human practices and the human being. In contrast, the notion of the means of communication stresses the mediation of structures ("means") and practices ("communication"). Table 5.3 gives an overview of five types of the means of production.

The means of communication are structures that operate at the level of the living. Communicative practices are a dimension of the lived. Seen from the point of view of information and communication, the dialectic of the lived and the living is a dialectic of the means of communication and communicative practices. Communication is a dialectic of means and practices of communication. It involves a double dialectic: Communication's internal dialectic is a dialectic of communicative practices and means of communication. Communication's external dialectic means that communication has a mediating role in society. It mediates the dialectic of society and the individual, the dialectic of structures and individual practices, the dialectic of society's objects and subjects.

In volume two of *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Lefebvre (*CEL2*, 276–314) introduces the notion of the semantic field. My own interpretation and understanding are that



**TABLE 5.3** Five types of the means of communication

	Role of mediation by technology	Examples
<b>Primary communication technologies</b>	Human body and mind, no media technology is used for the production, distribution, reception of information	Theatre, concert, performance, interpersonal communication
<b>Secondary communication technologies</b>	Use of media technology for the production of information	Newspapers, magazines, books, technologically produced arts and culture
<b>Tertiary communication technologies</b>	Use of media technology for the production and consumption of information, not for distribution	CDs, DVDs, tapes, records, Blu-ray disks, hard disks
<b>Quaternary communication technologies</b>	Use of media technology for the production, distribution and consumption of information	TV, radio, film, telephone, Internet
<b>Quinary communication technologies</b>	Digital media prosumption technologies, user-generated content	Internet, social media

semantic field is the space where the dialectic of communicative practices and means of communication takes place. The semantic field has to do with (individual and social) consciousness (296), experience, knowledge, practices (299). It involves signals, signs (representations) such morphemes and the word (verbal and visual sign), language consisting of signs and syntactic and grammatical rules, symbols such as religious symbols (e.g. the cross) that operate at the level of affects, spontaneity and emotions; images, signification, expression, sense. All communication uses images. "The deepest communication of all is achieved through images" (289)

Lefebvre criticises that structural linguistics has shattered "the living (dialectical) unity" of language (*CEL2*, 293). It would reduce the semantic field to the sign. Behaviourism such as Pavlov's theory would reduce the semantic field to signals. Signification is the process of making meaning of a sign. Lefebvre sees it as a fixed and stable process that is attached to the sign. Expression is in contrast a creative process that involves the voice, gestures, and the face and has a certain level of unexpectedness. "Expression is speech. Signification is language as form" (293). Lefebvre says that a dialectical contradiction between signification and expression shapes the semantic field. This contradiction constantly results in the production of sense, the goal, orientation and direction of dialogue. Sense is the sublation of the contradiction between signification and expression.

Lefebvre argues that since the rise of industrialism, signals have invaded everyday life and have tried to programme everyday life (*CEL2*, 300). Lefebvre associates signals with the instrumental reason of quantification and computability. He imagines that cyberneticians could create “a gigantic machine” that processes signals and tries to regulate and control everyday life (300). Lefebvre anticipated discussions about digital surveillance and big data capitalism (see Fuchs 2021b).

The next section discusses everyday life and everyday communication in capitalism.

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## 5.4 Everyday Life and Communication in Capitalism

### 5.4.1 Alienation

Alienation is Marx’s most general category of critique. Whereas for Hegel contradiction is alienation, for Marx alienation is a type of social contradiction (*CEL1*, 70). It involves both exploitation and domination, the economic and the non-economic (see Fuchs 2018). It is not just specific for capitalism but for all dominative and class societies. Lefebvre (*CEL2*, 206–216) provides a definition of alienation: Alienation stops groups from “fully ‘appropriating’ the conditions in which they exist and keep them *below their possibilities*” (209). Alienation dehumanises human (*CEL1*, 180). Lefebvre argues there are many forms of alienation, not just economic alienation (*CEL1*, 52–83; *CEL2*, 206–216) but also, for example, social, political, ideological, or philosophical alienation (*CEL1*, 249). For Lefebvre, alienation is a process and reification a state. Reification is the result of and condition that shapes alienation. Alienation stands in a dialectical relation to disalienation. “The worst alienation is when the alienation itself is non-conscious (or unrecognized)” (*CEL2*, 208). Reification “both defines and disguises all alienations” (209). Lukács (1971) terms unrecognized alienation reified consciousness of the proletariat.

Based on Lefebvre’s insight that there are multiple levels of society and alienation, we can identify three types of alienation: exploitation (economic alienation), domination (political alienation), and ideology (cultural alienation). All three forms have in common that not humans cannot control their conditions of existence that shape their lives. A privileged group with partial interests controls these conditions and derives benefit at the expense of everyday people. Table 5.4 opposes alienated

societies to humanistic societies. It summarises the three types of alienation and relates them to the social character. The social character is a common type of social action and psychological disposition characteristic for a particular social group (Fromm 1965). Alienated societies are class and dominative societies. Humanist societies are non-dominative and post-class societies. Socialism is a humanism. True humanism is socialism.

Table 5.5 shows that alienation is an antagonistic social relation between human groups. Table 5.6 gives an overview of reification practices, alienated structures, co-operation practices, and humanistic structures. There is an antagonism between reification and co-operation and between alienation and humanism.

**TABLE 5.4** The authoritarian and the humanistic character in the economy, politics, and culture

	Form of alienation	Dominant social character in alienated societies	Dominant social character in humanist societies
<b>Economy</b>	Exploitation	The exploiter	The commoner
<b>Politics</b>	Domination	The dictator	The democrat
<b>Culture</b>	Ideology	The ideologue/demagogue	The friend

**TABLE 5.5** Three types of alienation as antagonistic social relations

Realm	Form of alienation	Alienating subjects	Alienated subjects
<b>Economy</b>	Exploitation	Dominant class of exploiters	Exploited class
<b>Politics</b>	Domination	Dictator, dictatorial group	Excluded groups and individuals
<b>Culture</b>	Ideology	Ideologues	Disrespected groups and individuals

**TABLE 5.6** Alienation and disalienation in society

	Reification practices, alienated structures	Co-operation practices, humanistic structures
Economy	Exploitation: private property	Self-management: commons
Politics	Domination: dictatorship	Participation: democracy
Culture	Disrespect: ideology, demagoguery	Love: friendship

## 5.4.2 Accumulation

Lefebvre is not just interested in a general theory of society but has established a dialectical theory that is an interaction of a general social theory and a critical theory of capitalism. Capitalism is not just an economic system but a social formation, a type of society.

Lefebvre (*CEL2*, 315–339) distinguishes between accumulative and non-accumulative aspects of nature and society. The one's key aspect is their growth and increase of quantity, the other's key feature is quality and that non-accumulative systems cannot grow in a quantitative sense. For example, you can improve your moral values qualitatively but one cannot quantitatively increase morality. For Lefebvre, morality, sensitivity, sensory perception, sensuality, spontaneity, art, emotions and affects have a non-accumulative character. He sees a danger in attributing an accumulative character to them. Human spontaneity and creativity would thereby be undermined. He argues that there is a dialectic of accumulative and non-accumulative processes. For example, the brain stores, remembers, and forgets knowledge (331).

For Marx, accumulation is not a general process of society and humankind that consists in growth. Accumulation is rather a logic that is specific for capitalism. Accumulation implies uneven development, inequality, concentration of control and ownership. Accumulation of capital implies labour's non-ownership of capital. Marx (1867) argues that capital entails that "the product belongs to the capitalist and not to the worker" (731), that surplus-value is "the legitimate property of the capitalist" (731), and that the worker has to sell labour-power (731). Capitalism is "divorcing the producer from the means of production" (Marx 1867, 875). Labour is in capitalism "*absolute poverty* [...] as total exclusion of objective wealth" (Marx 1857/58, 296). Inequality is built into the accumulation of capital:

Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalisation and moral degradation at the opposite pole, i.e. on the side of the class that produces its own product as capital. (799)

The "increasing concentration of the social means of production in the hands of individual capitalists [...] grows directly out of accumulation, or rather is identical with it" (Marx 1867, 776). "Accumulation [...] presents itself [...] as increasing concentration of the means of production, and of the command over labour" (Marx 1867, 776–777).

Lefebvre's general sociological use of the term splits off non-ownership, inequality, concentration, and crisis from the concept of accumulation. He sees these phenomena as external to accumulation, whereas for Marx they are immanent to capital

accumulation. Lefebvre's terminology risks fetishising capital accumulation as a natural process of society. For Lefebvre, the problem is accumulation that results as part of class society in inequality. For Marx, inequality is part of the definition of accumulation. There is a difference between growth as general natural and social process and accumulation as logic of increasing quantity that shapes capitalism.

Lefebvre clearly sees that surplus production beyond the realm of necessity exists in all societies that aim at increasing productivity. "A society without surplus product, in which labour allows for nothing more than the survival of its workers, will quickly disappear" (*CEL2*, 320). Scientific-technological progress is always connected to the question of how to create surplus. In capitalism, surplus-value production becomes an end in itself that serves the capitalist class' interests. The capitalist class owns the means of production, surplus-value, capital, profit, commodities, and compels the working class to sell its labour-power as commodity. In all class societies the ruling class owns the surplus product. The capitalist economy is specific in that workers are compelled to sell their labour-power and produce commodities, surplus-value and profit that are owned by the capitalist class. Lefebvre argues that in capitalist society, the accumulation of capital comes along with the accumulation of rationality and knowledge in culture and political action in bureaucracies (327). Lefebvre stresses that in capitalist society, the logic of accumulation extends beyond the economy into society at large.

Uneven development, the atomisation of the individual, and the segregation of individuals into groups with polarised interests in respect to the division of labour, education, influence, and so forth are the consequences of capitalist accumulation. Lefebvre argues that capitalism implies an uneven development of everyday life so that general upheaval benefits the ruling class and creates a "backward sector" where humans are exploited and oppressed (*CEL2*, 316). Lefebvre sees uneven development as a central feature of capitalism. He does, however, not see it, as Marx does, as identical with accumulation (Marx 1867, 776).

From Marx, we can take the insight that the logic of accumulation includes the alienation of workers from the control of the means of production, commodities, capital, surplus-value, and their own lives. From Lefebvre, we can take the insight that in capitalist society, accumulation is both an economic and a non-economic process.

In my own model that is based on these insights, society is the totality of social production processes. We can distinguish between social production in the economy, politics, and culture. In capitalism, we find the accumulation of capital in the economy, the accumulation of decision-power and influence in politics, and the accumulation of

reputation, attention, and respect in culture. The key aspect is not that there is growth, but that there is the attempt of the dominant class and dominant groups to accumulate power at the expense of others who as a consequence have disadvantages. Capitalist society is therefore based on an economic antagonism of exploitation between classes and social antagonisms of domination.

Based on Marx and Lefebvre, we can outline some systematic aspects of capitalist society. Table 5.7 applies Table 5.1 to capitalist society. It shows what forms structures take on the various levels of capitalist society.

Table 5.8 shows how we can make sense of accumulation as general process and in capitalist society. In capitalism, alienation takes on the form of accumulation processes that create classes and inequalities. Capitalism is based on capitalists' accumulation of capital in the economy, bureaucrats' accumulation of decision-power and influence in the political system, and ideologues', influencers', and celebrities' accumulation of reputation, attention, and respect in the cultural system. Accumulation is an antagonistic relation that not just constitutes dominant classes and groups but also subordinated, dominated, and exploited groups such as the working class in the capitalist economy, dominated citizens in the capitalist political system, and ideologically targeted everyday people in capitalism's cultural system.

**TABLE 5.7** Structures in capitalist society

	Micro-level	Meso-level	Macro-level
<b>Economic structures</b>	Commodity, money	Companies, markets	Capitalist economy
<b>Political structures</b>	Laws	Parties, government	The state
<b>Cultural structures</b>	Ideology	Ideology-producing organisations	Ideological system

**TABLE 5.8** Accumulation as general process in capitalist society

Realm of society	Central process in general	Central process in capitalist society	Underlying antagonism in capitalist society
Economy	Production of use-values	Capital accumulation	Capitalists VS. workers
Politics	Production of collective decisions	Accumulation of decision-power and influence	Bureaucrats VS. citizens
Culture	Production of meanings	Accumulation of reputation, attention, respect	Ideologues/influencers/ celebrities VS. everyday people

**TABLE 5.9** Alienation and disalienation/humanism in the context of knowledge and communication

Realm of society	Alienated knowledge and communication	Disalienated/humanistic knowledge and communication
Economic system	Knowledge and communication as private property, commodities, exploitation of knowledge labour, means of communication as private property	Knowledge and communication as commons, co-ownership and co-production in self-managed knowledge-creating companies
Political system	Dictatorial control of knowledge and communication processes	Participatory knowledge and democratic communication, public service media
Cultural system	Ideological knowledge and communication	Socialist humanist knowledge and communication, citizen media

**TABLE 5.10** The role of accumulation in communicative capitalism and digital capitalism

Realm of society	Accumulation in capitalist society in respect to knowledge and communication	Accumulation in digital capitalism
Economy	Accumulation of capital based on knowledge commodities	Accumulation of digital capital based on digital commodities
Politics	Accumulation of decision-power in respect to the control of knowledge and communication	Accumulation of decision-power in respect to the control of digital knowledge and digital networks
Culture	Accumulation of reputation, attention and respect by the spread of ideologies such as individualism, nationalism, racism, etc.	Accumulation of reputation, attention and respect by the spread of ideologies on and of the Internet

Alienation also plays a role in the context of knowledge and communication. In capitalism, communication is “instrument and content” (Lefebvre 1971, 116–117). Lefebvre argues that in capitalism, active groups with active communication practices are replaced by “formal communication, means thus becoming ends and form content”, ideologies (1971, 120), and “emptiness filled with signs” (1971, 135). Table 5.9 gives an overview of alienated and disalienated knowledge and communication. Table 5.10 shows a) the role of capitalist accumulation in respect to knowledge and communication and b) accumulation in digital capitalism<sup>2</sup>.

Accumulation in communicative capitalism and digital capitalism results in particular forms of the social antagonisms characteristic for capitalism. Table 5.11 gives an overview of these antagonisms.

<sup>2</sup> Studies of the Internet that have been influenced by Lefebvre include, for example, Bakardjieva, 2005; Nunes 2006; Poster 2006, part III.

**TABLE 5.11** The antagonisms of communicative capitalism and digital capitalism

Realm of society	Underlying antagonism in capitalist society	Antagonisms in communicative capitalism	Antagonisms in digital capitalism
Economy	Capitalists VS. workers	Knowledge capital VS. knowledge labour	Digital capital VS. digital labour
Politics	Bureaucrats VS. citizens	Knowledge-based dictatorship VS. knowledge-based citizenship	Digital dictators VS. digital citizens
Culture	Ideologues, influencers and celebrities VS. everyday people	Ideologues VS. humans	Digital ideologues VS. digital humans

Reading Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* is an occasion and inspiration for thinking about the role of alienation in capitalism, communicative capitalism, and digital capitalism. In the next section, we will discuss another important dimension of a critical theory of communication, namely, ideology.

### 5.4.3 Digital Capitalism

Especially in *CEL*'s third volume that was published in French in 1981, Lefebvre gives attention to computing. At this time, personal and home computing was on the rise in France. In 1978, Nora and Minc (1980) published a report to the French President titled "The Computerization of Society". It shaped France's information society policy and prepared the introduction of the Minitel system, an early online service comparable to the WWW that used telephone lines, in the early 1980s. Lefebvre explicitly refers to this report in his discussion of "Information Technology and Daily Life" in *CEL*'s third volume (*CEL3*, part 2, chapter 6, 138 & 148/154 [footnote 8]).

Lefebvre argues that the "scientific and technological revolution" (*CEL3*, 9, 24, 84) was one of the factors that transformed the capitalist mode of production. Lefebvre here implicitly refers to Radovan Richta's report *Civilization at the Crossroads. Social and Human Implications of the Scientific and Technological Revolution* (Richta et al. 1969). Richta was a Czech philosopher, who in his report pointed out how computing transforms both capitalism and socialism. He saw on the one hand the deepening of class society as one dimension of computing in society and on the other hand the advancement of potentials for democratic socialism (see Boucas 2020; Fuchs 2020, chapter 7). Lefebvre sees on the one hand the potentials of computing to deepen class contradictions and on the other hand its potential to make "the end of work possible (in



the long run)" (*CEL3*, 91). "Digitally controlled machines, as well as computer and remote control of complex processes, could replace repetitive, dangerous operations" (*CEL3*, 98).

Computers are things whose immense speed of computation exceeds human capacities. This focus on quantification resonates with the interest of the capitalist class to accumulate ever more capital in ever less time and with the bureaucracy to process lots of data about citizens in order to advance the administered society. Scientists and engineers are fascinated by the idea of playing God, for which the computing is an excellent field of research and development. Capitalist media require constant news and spectacles in order to create attention. Computing promises radical changes, which is why the media are interested in new digital technologies. The thing-character, speed, dualistic logic of computing impresses dominant groups, which results in the diffusion of digital ideology in everyday life in digital capitalism. Representatives of such groups "anticipate miracles" (*CEL3*, 143) from digital technologies. Lefebvre speaks of "the information ideology" (146–150) as the "myth of freedom realized by information technology" (91). He questions that computing "will generate its effects *automatically*, since it involves automation" (91). Computer scientists make "optimistic prophecies" (136).

The notion of digital ideology is an update of his notion to 21st-century digital capitalism. Today, such prophecies about computing, the Internet, mobile phones, social media, cloud computing, the Internet of things, industry 4.0, and ever more emergent digital technologies are widespread in daily life. You only need to open a newspaper to find them. I did so on the day when I wrote these lines. One of the first articles I found in the tech section of online news platforms was titled "The World's First 3D-Printed Neighborhood Is Being Built in Mexico for Families Living on \$3 a Day" (Zdanowicz 2019). The piece was published in *CNN Online's* tech section. The author claims that 3D-printing houses is so cheap and fast that the "technology holds promise for affordable housing". It suggests that housing could be created for the homeless. "The technology is there and the application to building homes for those in need brings a lot of hope for the future". The article disregards that building homes not just requires materials but also space that is predominantly privately owned and sold as commodity on financialised housing markets. 3D-printing is itself prone to be subsumed under capital. Those who control 3D-printing technologies can also control put price tags on designs and printers. The article presents 3D-printing as technological fix to the social problems of homelessness and housing crises. It disregards these problems' rootedness in capitalism and class.

Digital ideology conveys the impression that computing with necessity brings about certain changes of society that cannot be undone or stopped. As a consequence, digital ideology with its fetishistic aura of novelty, speed, and pseudo-radicalness distracts attention from class, exploitation, domination, and other social relations. “Information ideology possesses the dubious merit of prophetically heralding the new society: post-industrial, post-capitalist and even post-socialist” (*CEL3*, 147–148). Lefebvre reminds us that despite its aura of novelty the production of information involves “profits for those who are in charge of production” (144). In 2019, there were six information technology and media companies among the world’s largest 20 transnational corporations<sup>3</sup>: Apple (#6), AT&T (#12), Samsung Electronics (#13), Microsoft (#16), Alphabet/Google (#17), Verizon Communication (#20). The digital world is first and foremost digital capitalism.

Lefebvre argues that information and communication have always been central for the organisation of capitalism and markets. Think, for example, about the communication of prices and available products. He says that “for many centuries, information as such did not appear on the market” and that what is “novel about the contemporary world is that there is a world market in information, which positively ‘drives’ the other markets, through advertising, propaganda, the transmission of positive knowledge, and so on” (*CEL3*, 145). The importance of informational and digital capitalism, where information and the digital are commodities, is a relatively recent dimension of capitalism.

Lefebvre says there is a split in society between the expelled such as the unemployed and precarious workers and those who are “well-integrated into circuits and networks focused around so-called ‘high-tech production (nuclear energy, computer science, the arm industry, etc.)” (*CEL3*, 86). In 21st-century digital capitalism, there is on the one hand a split between digital capital and digital labour and on the other hand between a well-positioned digital labour aristocracy and precarious digital workers. Think, for example, on the one side of the software engineer with very high wages working for Google in Silicon Valley and on the other side the call-centre agent or the low-paid hardware assembler working for Foxconn in China. Digital capitalism is a deeply divided class society (see Fuchs 2014). Lefebvre argues that the bourgeoisie has made intellectuals and technicians “partners in its system”, so that “the new middle class and the new bourgeoisie” (*CEL3*, 120) occupy city life and the working class is displaced.

3 Data source: Forbes 2000 List of the World’s Largest Public Companies, year 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/global2000>

Lefebvre reminds us of the antagonistic character of technology in an antagonistic society. The question is if and how information technology is shaped in ways and shaping ways that advance capitalism or socialist self-management, where social groups control their “conditions of existence, of living and surviving” (*CEL3*, 153)

Based on Lefebvre’s *CEL*, the next section deepens the engagement with the notion of ideology

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## 5.5 The Communication of Ideology

There are representations of everyday life that take on the form of culture, knowledge, and ideologies (*CEL2*, 60–61). The critique of everyday life reveals the ideological character of such representations. It studies both the “empirical modality for the organization of human life” and the “representations which disguise this organization” (138). For Lefebvre (*CEL1*), Marxism is “a critical knowledge of everyday life” (148) that tears away “the veil of ideologies” (147), especially it is a critique of individualism, mystifications, mystified consciousness, money, needs, labour, and bourgeois freedom (148–175).

Lukács (1971) argues that “the daily life of bourgeois society” is shaped by “unthinking, mundane reality” (101), where the human being’s existence is “reduced to an isolated particle and fed into an alien system” (90) and where reality “appears to be unmediated” (*Schein der Unmittelbarkeit* [literally: appearance of immediacy], 163). Lefebvre (*CEL1*, 152) argues that fetishism and alienation in capitalism create individualism and private consciousness, individuals who are “deprived of truth” and are “separated from [...] concrete human social reality, deprived of a consciousness of the practical, historical and social whole.

The fetishism of capitalism’s immediacy confronts human beings in everyday life. Everyday life is full of commodities, money, capital, and other things. Class relations and relations of dominations disappear behind the immediacy of things. Capitalist society, exploitation, and domination thereby appear to be normal and natural. Capitalist society makes humans forget their own historicity. The “fetish of the pure objectivity of economic relations obscures the fact that they are really relations between” humans (Lukács 1971, 240). While Merrifield (2006, 150–151) stresses the differences between Lefebvre and Lukács, Gardiner (2000, 79) and Trebitsch (1991, xvii–xix) point out the similarities. Lukács and Lefebvre were both influenced by Hegel’s

dialectical philosophy and Marx's theory of alienation. They are both Hegelian, praxis-oriented Marxist philosophers. Denying the parallels that undoubtedly exist between these two thinkers is a disservice to strengthening Hegelian, humanist Marxism today, an approach to which both Lukács and Lefebvre contributed.

The critique of ideology and fetishism in everyday life is a common feature of the theories of Lefebvre and Lukács. Both established critical analyses of ideology, fetishism, alienation and gave significant attention to praxis and social struggles. Both thinkers have an interest in showing how critique and class struggle can undo fetishistic, reified consciousness and fetishism as such. Lefebvre and Lukács contributed both major insights to the development of Marxist humanism. For Lefebvre, Marxist humanism means to create and struggle for conditions where not simply possession of objects is important but that humans enjoy "the 'richest' relationship of joy or happiness with the 'object' – which can be a thing or a living being or a human being or a social reality" (*CEL1*, 156). Lukács points out that Marxist humanism means the total development of humanity, society, and human potentials, which implies the creation of a socialist democracy:

It is therefore the purpose of socialist democracy to penetrate the totality of human existence and to present its social nature as the product of the activity and participation of all men, stretching from everyday life to the most important question of society. (Lukács 1988, 102)

Lefebvre and Lukács share Marx's understanding of socialism and humanism as "the real *appropriation* of human essence by and for man" (Marx, 1844, 296) so that the human being becomes a total human being that realises its full potentials (Marx, 1844, 299).

For Lefebvre (*CEL2*), ideology is "utilitarian and fetishist practice, which manipulates things" (243). Ideology is empirical consciousness that separates things from "activity and social relations" (243). It takes that which exists for granted and does not recognise its historical character (243). "It champions fetishism as valid consciousness" (243). Ideology is "fetishism in general" (*CEL3*, 53). Ideologies "are made of understanding and interpretation [...] of the world plus a certain amount of illusion, and might bear the name of 'culture'" (1971, 31). Ideology is part of culture. It is a form of culture. It is illusionary culture and the culture of illusion.

Empirical consciousness is Lefebvre's term for what Lukács characterises as reified consciousness. Reified consciousness disregards "contradiction and antagonism"

(Lukács 1971, 10) and the totality. It fetishises “quantifiable ‘things’” (Lukács 1971, 90) such as capital, money, and commodities. Lefebvre stresses that commodity logic is “bound up with the general language of quantification” (*CEL3*, 56) that “quantification has conquered society in its entirety” (131) and that the “qualitative has *virtually* disappeared” (131) in everyday life.

Lukács and Lefebvre are both critics of positivism. They oppose dialectical thought to the positivist ideology. Positivism neglects and denies contradictions and the negative. In digital capitalism, digital positivism has emerged as a new ideology that fetishises big data and computing (Fuchs 2017). In this ideology, the collection of massive amounts of data and computing technology in general are seen and presented as the solutions to economic, political, and cultural problems. Digital positivism abstracts from alienation and the antagonisms of capitalist society.

Especially the second volume of *Critique of Everyday Life* tries to show how everyday life is manipulated by advertising, the capitalist media, and the capitalist press. There are strong parallels between Lefebvre’s critique, Debord’s (1967) critique of the spectacle, Horkheimer and Adorno’s (2002) critique of the culture industry, and Marcuse’s (1964/1991) critique of one-dimensional man (see also Merrifield 2006, 25–26, 30–36; Schmidt 1972). For example, Lefebvre’s insight that the leisure and culture industry create “organized leisure and culture” (*CEL3*, 82) that is homogeneous, fragmented, and hierarchised (*CEL3*, part 1, chapter 8) resonates with Horkheimer and Adorno’s (2002, xi, xii) insight that the culture industry creates an “administered world”. For Lefebvre, socialism in contrast to capitalist everyday life means the strengthening of the right to difference, equality in difference, and unity (*CEL3*, part 1, chapter 8). Taken together, this means he argues for a programme of unity in diversity as opposed to unity without diversity and diversity without unity.

Lefebvre speaks of “the manipulation of the consumer and of his needs by advertising and propaganda” (*CEL2*, 146) and says that new technologies and consumer capitalism have colonised everyday life (11). He extends the notion of alienation from labour to leisure (*CEL1*, 39). He points out that “‘consumer society’ manipulates needs; the masters of production are also the masters of consumption, and they also produce the demands for which and according to which they are supposed to be producing” (*CEL2*, 223). There is not a self-regulating market driven by demand and supply but a capitalist system that the capitalist class consciously controls and manipulates in order to accumulate capital. Capitalist leisure is dominated by images and films that promise to distract and “*compensate* for the difficulties of everyday life” (*CEL1*, 33), especially

those that exist in respect to labour. The culture industry produces illusory reverse images that create a “false world” that presents itself as true and tries to replace “real unhappiness by fictions of happiness” (*CEL1*, 35).

In the age of digital capitalism, a significant share of everyday life time is spent on social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. In 2020, the average Internet user aged between 16 and 64 years spent 6 hours and 43 minutes per day on the Internet, 3 hours and 18 minutes watching television, 2 hours and 24 minutes on social media, 1 hour and 26 minutes listening to music on an online streaming platform, and 1 hour and 10 minutes playing video games (*We Are Social 2020*, 31). In April 2020, the most-watched YouTube video of all times was Luis Fonsi’s music video “Despacito”<sup>4</sup>. Social media is primarily about entertainment, advertising, and commerce. The difference to the traditional culture industry is that users actively search, browse, and click for content that is quickly consumed, is very short, and is processed and distributed at very high speed. Compensation and distraction online take place in a more active manner than in the mass media, with a high volume of produced, distributed, and consumed content that is processed at very high speed; with little time spent on a single cultural unit such as a tweet, a Facebook posting, a YouTube video, or an Instagram image than in the traditional mass media; and with interactive possibilities for user-generated content, likes, and comments.

Lefebvre criticises capitalist television as a form of ideology. Television in capitalism “allows every household to look at the spectacle of the world” is a form of “non-communication”, “non-participation”, and “receptive passivity”; it presents everyday life as “unusual or picturesque and overloading it with meaning” (*CEL2*, 76).

Using highly sophisticated techniques, mass communications bring masterpieces of art and culture to everyone; [...] Modern techniques make taste more sophisticated, raise the level of culture, instruct, educate, and bring an encyclopaedic culture to the people. At the same time, they make their audience passive. They make them infantile. They “present” the world in a particular mode, the mode of spectacle and the gaze, with all the ambiguity we have already noted and which we continue to emphasize: non-participation in a false presence. (223–224)

In his discussion of advertising, Lefebvre argues that in capitalism, everyday time

4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_most-viewed\\_YouTube\\_videos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most-viewed_YouTube_videos), accessed on 29 April 2020.

becomes “both homogeneous and dispersed. Work time falls into line with family-life time and leisure time, if not vice versa” (*CEL2*, 79). There are certain parallels here between Lefebvre and Dallas Smythe’s (1977) argument that in advertising, audiences are workers who produce an audience commodity that advertisers sell to clients. The consumption of advertising takes place in everyday life and during all daytime. Everyday spaces such as the home where leisure time and family-life time take place are the factories where advertising capital exploits audiences as workers who create attention to ads. In the age of Facebook, audience labour has taken on a new form. Facebook, YouTube, and other Internet platforms that are based on targeted ads exploit users’ digital labour that creates online content, attention, data, meta-data, social relations, and attention (Fuchs 2021b). Users’ and audiences’ leisure time is labour time that creates advertising companies’ profits. There is today a general tendency that labour time absorbs leisure time so that humans work long hours from a variety of places, including the home, cafés, public spaces, means of transportation, the Internet, the mobile phone, and so forth. The blurring of the boundaries between labour/leisure, the office/the home, production/consumption, labour/play, public/private, and so forth has resulted from the capitalist colonisation of everyday life so that the logic of profit, accumulation, capital, and labour determines ever more spaces and time of human life.

Lefebvre argues that everyday life is the place where exploitation takes place. He argues that consumer capitalism extends alienation and exploitation from the economy into culture:

According to this theory, daily life replaces the colonies. Incapable of maintaining the old imperialism, searching for new tools of domination, and having decided to bank on the home market, capitalist leaders treat daily life as they once treated the colonized territories: massive trading posts (supermarkets and shopping centres); absolute predominance of exchange over use; dual exploitation of the dominated in their capacity as producers and consumers. (*CEL3*, 26)

Lefebvre’s argument that consumer capitalism means the exploitation of producers and consumers resonates with the contemporary development in digital capitalism that on the capitalist Internet, consumers of information become producers of information who produce online content and social relations. Google and Facebook exploit consumers of the Internet who are, while consuming targeted-ad based online platforms, producers of these companies’ surplus-value.

As examples of how to challenge ideology, Lefebvre (*CEL1*, 10–28) discusses Charlie Chaplin’s humour, the estrangement effect/distancing effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) in



**FIGURE 5.2** An Apple subvertisement, source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/53359511@N00/256232830>, CC-BY licence, created by Brian Fitzgerald

Brecht's epic theatre, and Roger Vailland's writings. These are strategies of making audiences aware of alienation by estranging the estranged aspects of everyday life. Adbusters is an example of dialectical ideology critique from the contemporary age of digital capitalism that Lefebvre would certainly approve of. Adbusters (<https://www.adbusters.org/>) is a collective that criticises capital and consumer culture by radically affirming the logic of advertising and commodity consumption. It criticises commodity culture through the language and use of commodity culture. Examples are subvertisements, critiques of advertisements that take on the format of ads and are spread online. Figure 5.2 shows an example subvertisement. It builds on a popular Apple ad that presents consumers of Apple hardware as hip, modern, and future-oriented. The subvertisement uses the same aesthetic but adds an e-waste pile in order to criticise Apple's complicity in waste production.

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## 5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* can inform a critical, dialectical, humanist theory of communication and society in respect to several



aspects: the relationship of the economy and culture, communication in everyday life, communication in capitalism, and the communication of ideology.

### 5.6.1 The Relationship of the Economy and Culture

Lefebvre argues that the rise of information technology undermines the orthodox and Stalinist assumption that there is an economic base and a cultural and political superstructure. The economy operates as the production of ideas in culture. Culture operates as knowledge goods and knowledge work in the economy. Culture is material, economic, and non-economic. Lefebvre partly uses himself the language of base and superstructures and speaks of the immaterial character of culture, which contradicts his criticism of Marxist orthodoxy.

### 5.6.2 Communication in Everyday Life

Lefebvre is a critic of structuralism, who stresses the importance of practices in society. Everyday life refers to social practices within the totality of society. It is a dialectic of structures and practices, of what Lefebvre terms the living (*le vivre*) and the lived (*le vécu*). Everyday life is an important category for a dialectical theory of society and communication. What we need to add to Lefebvre's theory is the role of communication as the process of the production of sociality that mediates the dialectic of the individual and society, individual practices/thought and social structures, the lived and the living. Lefebvre introduces the notion of the semantic field. The semantic field is the space where the dialectic of communicative practices and means of communication takes place.

### 5.6.3 Communication in Capitalism

Lefebvre stresses the dialectical multidimensionality of society and alienation, which allows us to distinguish between the economic, political, and the cultural as dialectically interacting and interpenetrating dimensions of society. He points out that alienation and accumulation extend beyond the economy into society at large. We can identify three types of alienation: exploitation (economic alienation), domination (political alienation), and ideology (cultural alienation). In capitalism, alienation takes on the form of capital accumulation in the economy, the accumulation of decision-power in the political system, and the accumulation of reputation in the cultural system. It

creates inequalities and therefore exploited and oppressed groups and classes, of which the working class is the largest and most important one. Based on, among others, Lefebvre, Marx, and Lukács, a critical theory of communication can be grounded in a critical theory of alienation and capitalism. There are economic, political, and cultural dimensions of the alienation of communication. In digital capitalism, alienation takes on the economic form of the antagonism between digital labour and digital capital, the political form of the antagonism between digital dictators and digital citizens, and the cultural form of the antagonism between digital ideologues and digital humans.

Lefebvre reminds us of the predominantly capitalist character of digital technologies. In digital capitalism, we find ideology that mystifies information and the digital. Computing has potentials to deepen capitalism and class and to advance socialist self-management. It shapes and is shaped by society.

#### 5.6.4 The Communication of Ideology

For Lefebvre, the critique of everyday life is also a critique of ideology. Lefebvre's concept of empirical consciousness parallels Lukács' notion of reified consciousness. Both are today relevant for the critique of digital positivism. Lefebvre's critique of consumer capitalism shares many features of the works of Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Guy Debord. For Lefebvre, everyday life is a colony of capitalism where uneven development takes place in multiple forms. Lefebvre's insight that consumer capitalism not just exploits workers in the factory and the office but extends exploitation into leisure time and consumption resonates with Dallas Smythe's concept of audience labour and the theory of digital labour that sees users of targeted-ad based Internet platforms as digital workers who are exploited by digital capital.

Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* is an important influence for the foundations of a critical theory of communication in general and a critical theory of communication in and beyond digital capitalism.

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