DIGITAL DEMOCRACY AND THE DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERE

MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETY VOLUME SIX

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Digital Democracy and the Digital Public Sphere

This sixth volume in Christian Fuchs' *Media, Communication and Society* series draws on radical Humanist theory to address questions around the digital public sphere and the challenges and opportunities for digital democracy today.

The book discusses topics such as digital democracy, the digital public sphere, digital alienation, sustainability in digital democracy, journalism and democracy, public service media, the public service Internet, and democratic communications. Fuchs argues for the creation of a public service Internet run by public service media that consists of platforms such as a public service YouTube and Club 2.0, a renewed digital democracy and digital public sphere version of the legendary debate programme formats Club 2 and After Dark.

Overall, the book presents foundations and analyses of digital democracy that are interesting for both students and researchers in media studies, cultural studies, communication studies, political science, sociology, Internet research, information science, as well as related disciplines.

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Digital Democracy and the Digital Public Sphere

Media, Communication and Society
Volume Six

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Part I

Introduction

Chapter One

Democracy, Communicative Democracy, Digital Democracy

1.1 Foundations of Digital Democracy

The book *Digital Democracy and the Digital Public Sphere* asks: What is digital democracy? What are the democratic dimensions of communications and digital communications? What is the digital public sphere?

The book at hand is the sixth volume of a series of books titled *Media, Communication & Society*. The overall aim of *Media, Communication & Society* is to outline the foundations of a critical theory of communication and digital communication in society. It is a multi-volume book series situated on the intersection of communication theory, sociology, and philosophy. The overall questions that *Media, Communication & Society* deals with are: What is the role of communication in society? What is the role of communication in capitalism? What is the role of communication in digital capitalism?

This book presents theoretical and philosophical foundations of digital democracy and the digital public sphere. It engages with the dialectic as philosophical foundation of digital democracy, the Critique of the Political Economy of the Media and Communication as analytical foundation of digital democracy the concepts of alienation, power, praxis communication, the public sphere, and sustainability as dimensions and aspects of the analysis of digital democracy; journalism and democracy; public service media and the public service Internet as important aspects of democracy, democratic communications, digital democracy, and the digital public sphere.

Digital Democracy and the Digital Public Sphere is organised in three parts. Part I (Chapter 1) is an introduction to digital democracy. Part II (Chapters 2–9) discuss various dimensions of the foundations of digital democracy and the digital public sphere. Part III (Chapter 10) draws conclusions. Each chapter is focused on specific questions:

- Chapter 1: What is democracy? What is digital democracy?
- Chapter 2: What is the dialectic?
- Chapter 3: What is the Critique of the Political Economy of the Media and Communication?
- Chapter 4: What is power? How does power look like in the age of digital and social media?
- Chapter 5: How can we make sense of the notion of praxis as part of a critical theory of communication? How did the Yugoslav philosopher Mihailo Marković, a leading member of the Praxis School, conceive of communication?
- Chapter 6: What do sustainability and unsustainability mean in the context of community networks? What advantages do such networks have over conventional forms of Internet access and infrastructure provided by large telecommunications corporations? In addition, what disadvantages do they face at the same time?
- Chapter 7: How did Karl Marx see the role of journalism in the public sphere and democracy?
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- Chapter 9: What are digital democracy and the digital public sphere? What are the main trends in the development of digital media today, what are digital media's democratic possibilities and deficits, and what role can public service media play in strengthening digital democracy and digital public sphere? What legal framework is needed so that public service media can strengthen digital democracy?
- Chapter 10: How can Marx' theory of alienation and Habermas' theory of the structural transformation of the public sphere be combined for advancing the understanding of democracy today?

1.2 What Is Democracy? What Is Communicative Democracy? What Is Digital Democracy?

In order to understand what digital democracy is all about, we need an understanding of what democracy is.

1.2.1 Definitions of Democracy

Let us have a look at some definitions of democracy from academic works.

a) "While the word 'democracy' came into English in the sixteenth century from the French démocratie, its origins are Greek. 'Democracy' is derived from demokratia, the root meanings of which are demos (people) and kratos (rule). Democracy means a form of government in which, in contradistinction to monarchies and aristocracies, the people rule. Democracy entails a political community in which there is some form of political equality among the people. 'Rule by the people' may appear an unambiguous concept, but appearances are deceptive. The history of the idea of democracy is complex and is marked by conflicting conceptions. There is plenty of scope for disagreement" (Held 2006, 1).

b) Democracy "is better thought of as a means of managing power relations so as to minimize domination […] a central task for democracy is to enable people to manage power relations so as to minimize domination […] democracy is about structuring power relations so as to limit domination" (Shapiro 2003, 3, 52).

c) "democracy understood as self-government in a social setting is not a terminus for individually held rights and values; it is their starting place. Autonomy is not the condition of democracy, democracy is the condition of autonomy. Without participating in the common life that defines them and in the decision-making that shapes their social habitat, women and men cannot become individuals. Freedom, justice, equality, and autonomy are all products of common thinking and common living; democracy creates them. […] The key to politics as its own epistemology is, then, the idea of public seeing and public doing. Action in common is the unique province of citizens. Democracy is neither government by the majority nor representative rule: it is citizen self-government" (Barber 2003, xxxv, 211).

d) "for a democratic polity to exist it is necessary for a participatory society to exist, i.e. a society where all political systems have been democratised and socialisation through participation can take place in all areas. The most important area is industry; most individuals spend a great deal of their lifetime at work and the business of the workplace provides an education in the management of collective affairs that it is difficult to parallel elsewhere. The second aspect of the theory of participatory democracy is that spheres such as industry should be seen as political systems in their own right, offering areas of participation additional to the national level. If individuals are to exercise the maximum amount of control over

their own lives and environment then authority structures in these areas must be so organised that they can participate in decision making" (Pateman 1970, 43).

e) "What is essential in a modern democratic theory? As soon as democracy is seen as a kind of society, not merely a mechanism of choosing and authorising governments, the egalitarian principle inherent in democracy requites not only 'one man, one vote' but also 'one man, one equal effective right to live as fully humanly as he may wish'. Democracy is now seen, by those who want it and by those who have it (or are said to have it) and want more of it, as a kind of society – a whole complex of relations between individuals – rather than simply a system of government. So any theory which is to explicate, justify, or prescribe for the maintenance or improvement of, democracy in our time must take the basic criterion of democracy to be that equal effective right of individuals to live as fully as they may wish. This is simply the principle that everyone ought to be able to make the most of himself, or make the best of himself […] democracy as a claim to maximize men's powers in the sense of power as ability to use and develop human capacities" (Macpherson 1973, 51–52).

f) "In monarchy the whole, the people, is subsumed under one of its particular modes of being, the political constitution. In democracy the constitution itself appears only as one determination, that is, the self-determination of the people. In monarchy we have the people of the constitution; in democracy the constitution of the people. Democracy is the solved riddle of all constitutions. Here, not merely implicitly and in essence but existing in reality, the constitution is constantly brought back to its actual basis, the actual human being, the actual people, and established as the people's own work. The constitution appears as what it is, a free product of man. […] Just as it is not religion which creates man but man who creates religion, so it is not the constitution which creates the people but the people which creates the constitution. […] Man does not exist for the law but the law for man – it is a human manifestation; whereas in the other forms of state man is a legal manifestation. That is the fundamental distinction of democracy. […] In democracy the constitution, the law, the state itself, insofar as it is a political constitution, is only the self-determination of the people, and a particular content of the people. Incidentally, it goes without saying that all forms of state have democracy for their truth and that they are therefore untrue insofar as they are not democracy" (Marx 1843, 29, 30, 31).

g) "(a) Processes of [democratic] deliberation take place in argumentative form, that is, through the regulated exchange of information and reasons among parties who

introduce and critically test proposals. (b) Deliberations are inclusive and public. No one may be excluded in principle; all of those who are possibly affected by the decisions have equal chances to enter and take part. (c) Deliberations are free of any external coercion. The participants are sovereign insofar as they are bound only by the presuppositions of communication and rules of argumentation. (d) Deliberations are free of any internal coercion that could detract from the equality of the participants. Each has an equal opportunity to be heard, to introduce topics, to make contributions, to suggest and criticise proposals. The taking of yes/no positions is motivated solely by the unforced force of the better argument. […] (e) Deliberations aim in general at rationally motivated agreement and can in principle be indefinitely continued or resumed at any time. […] (f) Political deliberations extend to any matter that can be regulated in the equal interest of all. This does not imply, however, that topics and subject matters traditionally considered to be 'private' in nature could be a fortiori withdrawn from discussion. In particular, those questions are publicly relevant that concern the unequal distribution of resources on which the actual exercise of rights of communication and participation depends. (g) Political deliberations also include the interpretation of needs and wants and the change of prepolitical attitudes and preferences. Here the consensus-generating force of arguments is by no means based only on a value consensus previously developed in shared traditions and forms of life" (Habermas 1996, 305–306).

h) "At the heart of strong democracy is talk. […] strong democratic talk entails listening no less than speaking; […] The participatory process of self-legislation that characterizes strong democracy attempts to balance adversary politics by nourishing the mutualistic art of listening. […] talk appears as a mediator of affection and affiliation as well as of interest and identity […] It can build community as well as maintain rights and seek consensus as well as resolve conflict. It offers, along with meanings and significations, silences, rituals, symbols, myths, expressions and solicitations, and a hundred other quiet and noisy manifestations of our common humanity. Strong democracy seeks institutions that can give these things a voice – and an ear. […] The functions of talk in the democratic process fall into at least nine major categories. […]

1) The articulation of interests; bargaining and exchange
2) Persuasion
3) Agenda-setting
4) Exploring mutuality

5) Affiliation and affection

6) Maintaining autonomy

7) Witness and self-expression

8) Reformulation and reconceptualisation

9) Community-building as the creation of public interests, common goods, and active citizens"

(Barber 2003, 173–179)

1.2.2 Democracy in General

Understandings of democracy have in common that they conceive of democracy as the self-government of human beings. Democracy is opposed to monarchies (rule of one emperor), oligopolies and aristocracies (rule of the few), and to dictatorships and tyrannies (rule by violence and terror). Democracy is not just a means for minimising domination but also the attempt of minimising the rule by violence.

There is no general agreement on what self-government means and what form it should best take, which is why there is a variety of models of democracy. David Held (2006) discusses nine models of democracy (see also Chapter 9 in this book): classical Athenian democracy, liberal democracy, direct democracy or plebiscitary democracy, competitive elitist democracy, pluralist democracy, legal democracy, participatory democracy, deliberative democracy, democratic autonomy. Democratic autonomy involves constitutional guarantees of fundamental rights, parliamentary election of representatives combined with direct democratic elements, citizens' forums and other deliberative mechanisms, extension of democracy to municipal services and self-managed companies, and transnational democratic institutions (cosmopolitan democracy).

1.2.3 Participatory Democracy

Liberal, pluralist, and competitive models of democracy often limit the very notion of democracy to the process of elections and the political system in a narrow sense. It is much more desirable that decisions in society are enforced by elections than by violence and terror. But democracy does not end at the voting booth. Liberal democracy is a still too limited concept of democracy. My own understanding of democracy combines participatory democracy (see definitions [c], [d], [e], [f]) and deliberative democracy (see definitions [g], [h]). Participatory democracy means that democracy is expanded beyond voting and beyond the narrow understanding of the political system into other realms of

society such as the economy. One of liberal capitalist society's antagonisms is that as citizens humans live in a democracy, but as workers they live in a dictatorship. Participatory democracy argues and struggles for a society where the economy is democratically organised, i.e. worker-controlled, which means democratic management of economic organisations (worker self-management). Participatory democracy also means that there are economic foundations of democracy. Democracy requires space, time, and skills. In a society, where resources are unequally distributed and many lack time and opportunities to engage in politics, an impoverished form of politics where the few rule over the many is the likely outcome. A participatory democracy is a post-scarcity society where necessary labour is minimised by the use of highly productive technology so that all humans have the time and opportunities needed for practicing politics, political debate, and political decision-making.

One implication of a participatory understanding of democracy is that if we want to understand democracy, we need to look at political economy, i.e. the interaction of politics and economy. If we therefore want to understand the communicative and digital dimensions of democracy, we need to understand the Political Economy of Communication and digital technologies. This is the reason why we in this book also have a look at foundational political economy aspects of communicative and digital democracy such as the dialectic (Chapter 2) and the Critique of the Political Economy of Communication (Chapter 3).

1.2.4 Karl Marx: The Paris Commune as Participatory Democracy

For Marx (see definition [f]), democracy is opposed to the monarchy. For him, the first is the self-government and self-determination of humans and the latter a dictatorship that alienates humans politically. For Marx, democracy is the essence and truth of politics. For Marx, only a polity that is democratic is a true state. And socialism, the workers' collective ownership and self-managed governance of the means of production is the essence and truth of the economy. Given that politics and economy are interrelated, socialist democracy and democratic socialism are for Marx society's and political economy's essence and truth.

Marx's understanding of the Paris Commune (which existed from March until May 1871) as the "reabsorption of the State power by society, as its own living forces instead of as forces controlling and subduing it, by the popular masses themselves, forming their own force instead of the organized force of their suppression" (Marx 1871b, 487) is a

reflection of the insight formulated in definition [b] that democracy as such works against and is opposed to violence, tyranny, and terror as means of governance.

What form of democracy did Marx favour? This question is answered in his analysis of the Paris Commune that he analyses in *The Civil War in France* (Marx 1871a, 1871b, 1871c). The Paris Commune was the democratic governance of Paris in the period from 18 March to 28 May 1871 after the end of the Franco-Prussian War. For Marx, the Paris Commune was both self-determination of workers who abolished the private property of the means of production and the democratic governance of the political system via elections.

In line with his earlier writings on democracy and politics, Marx stresses the opposition of the Paris Commune to the monarchy and oligarchy. "It [the Paris Commune] is not political self-government of the country through the means of an oligarchic club and the reading of *The Times* newspaper. It is the people acting for itself by itself" (1871b, 464). Political councillors were elected and politicians and officials were no longer serving a central force such as the emperor, "[p]ublic functions ceased to be the private property of the tools of the Central Government" (1871a, 331). They were appointed by the Commune to which they were responsible and by which they could be recalled (1871a, 331).

> In its most simple conception the Commune meant the preliminary destruction of the old governmental machinery at its central seats, Paris and the other great cities of France, and its superseding by real self-government which, in Paris and the great cities, the social strongholds of the working class, was the government of the working class.
>
> (1871c, 536)

The Commune consisted of elected councillors who together formed an assembly and took political decisions:

> The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, of acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time. […] Public functions ceased to be the private property of the tools of the Central Government. Not only municipal administration, but the whole initiative hitherto exercised by the State was laid into the hands of the Commune
>
> (Marx 1871a, 331)

The idea was to create many local communes that have their local democratic assemblies that are federated in a translocal assembly where decisions are taken on matters of general concern that go beyond the local community and are guided by a constitution:

> The rural communes of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions) of his constituents.
>
> (Marx 1871a, 332)

The Commune was a working-class government that served workers' interests and realised democratic ownership and control of the economy:

> Its true secret was this. It was essentially a working-class government the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of Labour. […] It wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into mere instruments of free and associated labour.
>
> (Marx 1871a, 334, 335)

For Marx, the Commune was a socialist democracy and democratic socialism. The monarchy was abolished and replaced by a democracy with universal franchise, a constitution, elected and translocal assemblies. The Commune was a socialist democracy because the Commune democratically enforced workers' interests. It was democracy in the interest of socialism. It combined elements of representative, participatory, and deliberative democracy. And the Commune was a democratic socialism because it abolished the private ownership of the means of production, extended democracy to the workplace, and put workers in collective control of the means of production. The Paris Commune's element of democratic socialism was a manifestation of participatory democracy, the extension of democracy from politics to the economy.

1.2.5 Deliberative Democracy: Democracy's Communicative Dimension

I am interested in deliberative democracy because deliberation inevitably is a communicative process where humans come together publicly to debate issues that concern

them together and to try to reach a collective decision in a communicative manner. Without discussing the issues that matter and what solutions there might be, democracy cannot exist. This is why the existence of a public sphere is key to any democracy.

Deliberative democracy involves, as we can learn from Barber (definition [h]) and Habermas (definition [g]), everyone's right to speak and to be listened to, rational arguments, the equal access to resources that enable participation in deliberation, the power of speaking and listening. Deliberative democracy requires institutions such as high-quality journalism, public service media, and a public service Internet. These are institutions of the public sphere that support democratic information, democratic communication, and democratic decision-making by publishing information about matters of general concern in society, enabling debate of key political topics, and fostering learning, understanding by participation, social production, community, and creativity (see especially Chapter 9 in this book). *Digital Democracy* gives attention to institutions of the public sphere, especially in Chapters 7, 9, and 10. The public sphere is an important communicative aspect of democracy.

Communicative democracy has to do with communication in the public sphere that advances democracy and the democratic organisation of communication(s). Communicative democracy involves both democratic communication and democratic communications. Digital democracy has to do with digital communication in the public sphere that advances democracy and the democratic organisation of digital communication(s). Democracy requires both democratic processes and democratic institutions. Communication operates both at the level of democratic processes and democratic institutions. Democracy is organised as processes of communication where humans inform themselves, debate, and take collectively binding decisions. And democracy requires institutions of the public sphere that advance democratic information, communication, and co-operation. Digital democracy means on the one hand the practices and processes of democracy that are mediated by digital technologies. And on the other hand, it means a democratic society where democratic information, communication, and participation are supported by digital technologies. The theories of the public sphere, participatory democracy, and deliberative democracy help us to understand democracy, communicative democracy, and digital democracy. The approach taken by the present author is informed by critical theories of society and the Marxist-Humanist approach, which means to stress the political economy of the communicative and digital dimensions of democracy. The political economy of democracy, communicative democracy, and digital democracy requires us to think about and analyse how ownership, class, power, domination, capitalism, social

struggles, and normative questions frame and shape democracy and its digital and communicative aspects. The political and moral quest of Marxist Humanism is the insight that socialist democracy and democratic socialism constitute a society that is adequate to the human being and realises Humanism. Democracy is socialist when it advances the common economic, political and cultural good of all humans. And socialism is democratic when the economy is together with society organised in a democratic manner. The implication for the realm of (digital) communication(s) is that communication as a public process should be organised in manners that advance socialism and democracy and that systems of (digital) communication should not be organised as dictatorships that are controlled and owned by the few but as democratic public systems that are publicly owned and governed by communications workers and citizens in a participatory manner. The public sphere, high-quality journalism, true public service media (that are autonomous from capital and the state), and a public service Internet are important aspects of democracy.

1.3 The Chapters in This Book

Chapter 1: Democracy, Communicative Democracy, Digital Democracy

This chapter gives an overview of the book *Digital Democracy and the Digital Public Sphere*. It also deals with the questions: What is democracy? What is communicative democracy? What is digital democracy?

The chapter stresses the importance of the notions and theories of the public sphere, participatory democracy, and deliberative democracy for a critical and Humanist understanding of democracy, communicative democracy, and digital democracy. The chapter stresses that advancing and understanding democracy requires the connection of politics/economy (political economy), democracy/socialism (socialist democracy, democratic socialism), democracy/communication (democratic communication(s), communicative democracy).

Chapter 2: The Dialectic: Not Just the Absolute Recoil, but the World's Living Fire that Extinguishes and Kindles Itself. Reflections on Slavoj Žižek's Version of Dialectical Philosophy in "Absolute Recoil. Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism".

Slavoj Žižek shows in *Absolute Recoil* (and previous Hegelian works such as *Less than Nothing*) the importance of repeating Hegel's dialectical philosophy in contemporary capitalism. Žižek contributes especially to a reconceptualisation of dialectical logic and

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based on it the dialectic of history. The reflections in this chapter stress that the dialectic is only the absolute recoil, a sublation that posits its own presuppositions, by working as a living fire that extinguishes and kindles itself. I point out that a new foundation of dialectical materialism needs a proper Heraclitusian foundation. I discuss Žižek's version of the dialectic that stresses the absolute recoil and the logic of retroactivity and point out its implications for the concept of history as well as Žižek's own theoretical ambiguities that oscillate between postmodern relativism and mechanical materialism. I argue that Žižek's version of the dialectic should be brought into a dialogue with the dialectical philosophies of the German Marxists Hans Heinz Holz and Herbert Hörz and that Žižek's achievement is that he helps keeping alive the fire of dialectical materialism in the 21st century that is needed for a proper revolutionary theory.

Chapter 3: The Critique of the Political Economy of the Media and Communication

This chapter asks: What is the Critique of the Political Economy of the Media and Communication? It discusses how topical the approach of the Critique of the Political Economy of Media/Communication is today. It analyses the status of this field. At the international level, there is a longer tradition in the Critical Political Economy of Media/Communication, especially in the United Kingdom and North America. Since the start of the new crisis of capitalism in 2008, the interest in Marx's works has generally increased. At the same time, communicative and ideological features of societal changes' unpredictable turbulences have become evident. This contribution introduces some specific approaches. It also discusses aspects of why the complex, multidimensional, open, and dynamic research approach of the critique of capitalism and society that goes back Marx's theory remains relevant today. It stresses that there are many elements in Marx's works that can help us to critically understand communication: critical journalism, limits on the freedom of the press, the analysis of the commodity form, the analysis of labour, exploitation, class, surplus-value, globalisation, crisis, modern technology, the General Intellect, communication, the means of communication, the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, dialectics, ideologies, social struggles, and democratic alternatives.

Chapter 4: Power in the Age of Social Media

There are a lot of claims about social and other media's power today: Some say that we have experienced Twitter and Facebook revolutions. Others claim that social media democratise the economy or bring about a participatory culture. Other observers are more sceptical and stress social media's realities as tools of control. Understanding

social media requires a critical theory of society that uses a dialectical concept of power. A critical theory of society can then act as framework for understanding power in the age of social media. This chapter is a contribution to critically theorising media power in the age of social media. It categorises different notions of power, introduces a dialectical notion of media power discusses the dialectics of social media power, and draws some conclusions about the need for a dialectical and critical theory of the media and society.

Chapter 5: The Praxis School's Marxist Humanism and Mihailo Marković's Theory of Communication

Mihailo Marković (1923–2010) was one of the leading members of the Yugoslav Praxis Group. Among other topics, he worked on the theory of communication and dialectical meaning, which makes his approach relevant for a contemporary critical theory of communication. This chapter asks: How can we make sense of the notion of praxis as part of a critical theory of communication? How did the Yugoslav philosopher Mihailo Marković, a leading member of the Praxis School, conceive of communication?

Marković turned towards Serbian nationalism and became the Vice-President of the Serbian Socialist Party. Given that nationalism is a particular form of ideological communication, an ideological anti-praxis that communicates the principle of nationhood, a critical theory of communication also needs to engage with aspects of ideology and nationalism. This chapter therefore also asks whether there is a nationalist potential in Marković's theory in particular or even in Marxist Humanism in general.

For providing answers to these questions, the chapter revisits Yugoslav praxis philosophy, the concepts of praxis, communication, ideology, and nationalism. It shows the importance of a full Humanism and the pitfalls of truncated Humanism in critical theory in general and the critical theory of communication in particular. Taking into account complete Humanism, the chapter introduces the concept of *praxis communication*.

Chapter 6: Sustainability and Community Networks

Community networks are IP-based computer networks that are operated by a community as a common good. In Europe, the most well-known community networks are Guifi in Catalonia, Freifunk in Berlin, Ninux in Italy, Funkfeuer in Vienna, and the Athens Wireless Metropolitan Network in Greece. This chapter deals with community networks as alternative forms of Internet access and alternative infrastructures and asks: What do sustainability and unsustainability mean in the context of community networks? What advantages do such networks have over conventional forms of Internet access and

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infrastructure provided by large telecommunications corporations? In addition, what disadvantages do they face at the same time? This chapter provides a framework for thinking dialectically about the un/sustainability of community networks. It provides a framework of practical questions that can be asked when assessing power structures in the context of Internet infrastructures and access. It presents an overview of environmental, economic, political, and cultural contradictions that community networks may face as well as a typology of questions that can be asked in order to identify such contradictions.

Chapter 7: Karl Marx, Journalism, and Democracy

This chapter asks: How did Karl Marx see the role of journalism in the public sphere and democracy? It examines Marx's significance for the theory of journalism. Marx was not only a critical journalist himself but also a defender of freedom of the press, which he justified theoretically. Marx anticipated Jürgen Habermas' critical theory of the public sphere. Marx's theoretical concepts of the critique of political economy are still of central importance for a critical theory of journalism today. The applicability of Marx's concepts of the commodity form, labour, and ideology to journalism theory are examined in this chapter.

Chapter 8: Towards a Critical Theory of Communication as Renewal and Update of Marxist Humanism in the Age of Digital Capitalism

This chapter asks: What is the role of communication in a Marxist-Humanist theory of communication that aims at advancing participatory democracy? The chapter's task is to outline some foundations of a critical, Marxist-Humanist theory of communication in the age of digital capitalism. It theorises the role of communication in society, communication and alienation, communication in social struggles, social struggles for democratic communication, the contradictions of digital capitalism, and struggles for Digital Socialist Humanism.

Marxist Humanism is a counter-narrative, counter-theory, and counter-politics to neoliberalism, new authoritarianism, and postmodernism. A critical theory of communication can draw on this intellectual tradition. Communication and work stand in a dialectical relationship. Communication mediates, organises, and is the process of the production of sociality and therefore of the reproduction of society. Society and communication are in class and capitalist societies shaped by the antagonism between instrumental and co-operative reason. Authoritarianism and Humanism are two basic, antagonistic modes of organisation of society and communication. Instrumental reason creates and universalises alienation.

Digital capitalism is a dimension of contemporary society where digital technologies such as the computer, the Internet, the mobile phone, tablets, robots, and AI-driven ("smart") technologies mediate the accumulation of capital, influence, and reputation. A Marxist-Humanist theory of communication aims to inform struggles for a good, commons-based, public Internet in a good, commons-based society that has a vivid, democratic public sphere.

Chapter 9: Digital Democracy, Public Service Media, and the Public Service Internet

This chapter deals with the relationship between digital democracy and public service media. It addresses three questions: What are digital democracy and the digital public sphere? What are the main trends in the development of digital media today, what are digital media's democratic possibilities and deficits, and what role can public service media play in strengthening digital democracy and digital public sphere? What legal framework is needed so that public service media can strengthen digital democracy?

Chapter 10: The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Alienation: Challenges and Opportunities for the Advancement of Digital Democracy

This chapter asks: How can Marx' theory of alienation and Habermas' theory of the structural transformation of the public sphere be combined for advancing the understanding of democracy today?

The chapter builds on Habermas' concept of the public sphere. It relates Habermas' concept to Marx' notion of alienation. A fusion of these two concepts is used for showing that digital capitalism and capitalist social media do not form a public sphere but rather constitute a danger to democracy. In contrast, a public service Internet is a manifestation of the digital public sphere and digital democracy.

Internet platforms such as Facebook and Google, which dominate the social media sector, are among the largest corporations in the world. At the same time, social media have become an integral part of politics and public communication. World politicians like Donald Trump have a total of more than 100 million followers on various Internet platforms and spread propaganda and false reports about these media. The Arab Spring and the various Occupy movements have shown that social media like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are important in social movements. No politician, no party, no NGO, and no social movement can do without profiles on social media today. This raises the question of the connection between social media and the public. This article sheds light on this question.

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Section 2 presents a concept of the public sphere as a concept of critique. Section 3 uses the concept of the public sphere to criticise capitalist Internet platforms. Section 4 deals with the potentials of a public service Internet.

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