



CAPITALISM

SOCIALISM

FOUNDATIONS OF CRITICAL THEORY

**MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND
SOCIETY VOLUME TWO**

CHRISTIAN FUCHS

ROUTLEDGE


Foundations of Critical Theory

Media, Communication and Society
Volume Two

Christian Fuchs

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Critical Theory

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1.3 Overviews of the Chapters in this Book

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1.1 Critical Theory

This book deals with elements of the foundations of critical theory. It asks and investigates the following question: what are important elements of a Marxist-Humanist critical theory of society?

The book at hand is the second volume of a series of books titled “Communication & Society”. The overall aim of *Communication & Society* is to outline foundations of a critical theory of communication and digital communication in society. It is a multi-volume theory social theory book series situated on the intersection of communication theory, sociology, and philosophy. The overall questions that “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?

Answers are given by engaging with some key thinkers and key topics of critical theory. The thinkers the present author engages with in this book include.

Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, David Harvey, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, C.L.R. James, Adolph L. Reed Jr., and Cornel West. The topics that are addressed include elements of critical theory (Chapters 2, 4, 5, 10), the dialectic (Chapters 3, 8), class struggles (Chapter 3), alienation (Chapter 6), formal and real subsumption (Chapter 6), primitive accumulation (Chapter 6), ideology (Chapter 9), racial capitalism (Chapters 8, 9), and culture (Chapter 9).

The engagement with the mentioned thinkers and topics has contributed to the present author’s development of a Marxist-Humanist theory of communication and

society (Fuchs 2020a). This book together with the other volumes in the series of volumes together titled *Communication and Society* allows the reader to follow aspects of how the present author has arrived at his own critical theory of society as expressed in his major works such as *Communication and Capitalism. A Critical Theory* (Fuchs 2020a) and *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (Fuchs 2021b, 2017, 2014) through engagement with key thinkers and key topics in critical theory and further development of critical theory by dialectical sublation (*Aufhebung*) of other critical theory approaches.

There are a number of key elements of a Marxist-Humanist version of critical theory (Fuchs 2021a):

- **The human being**

Marxist Humanism is a humanism that stresses the importance of human interests, human needs, human practices, and social production in society. It builds on Marx's (1844) *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*.

- **The dialectic**

Marxist Humanism builds on and uses dialectical philosophy as a means for critically understanding society. It is influenced by Hegel's dialectical philosophy, Marx's development of the dialectic into a critical theory of capitalism and society, and the tradition of Hegelian Marxism.

- **Praxis and class struggle**

Marxist Humanism builds on Marx's insight that humans "make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx 1852, 103). In societies shaped by class and alienation, humans are exploited and oppressed by the ruling class. They can only achieve a better society through making their own history in the form of class struggles for a classless society. Praxis is class struggle for Democratic Socialism.

- **Alienation**

Alienation is a key category in Marx's works and Marxist-Humanist thought. Alienation means conditions under which humans do not control, which means own, shape, govern and define, the systems that shape their everyday lives. The exploitation of humans in class relations is the key to understanding alienation and the economic form of alienation. But alienation also takes on the form of domination in the political system, where one group

oppresses other groups, and the form of ideology in the cultural system (Fuchs 2020a). These forms of alienation interact. Capitalism, patriarchy, and racism are three types of power relations that each combine economic alienation, political alienation, and cultural alienation (Fuchs 2021a). In contemporary society, capitalism, patriarchy, and racism interact in capitalist society (Fuchs 2021a).

- **The critique of ideology**

Marxist Humanism is also a critique of ideology. Ideology is the process of ideologue's construction and dissemination and reproduction of false knowledge that makes society appear different from what it is truly like in order to try to naturalise, justify, defend, and legitimate exploitation and alienation and to try to convince exploited and oppressed groups to accept and not question alienation and to accept the status quo. Ideology is the attempt to produce and reproduce alienated and reified consciousness (see Fuchs 2020b, Chapter 9; Fuchs 2020a, Chapters 9 and 10).

- **Democratic Socialism and Socialist Democracy**

Marxist Humanism is a type of humanism. It understands humanism as the ethico-political stress on the importance of creating conditions in society that allow humans and society to realise their full potentials. For Marxist Humanism, humanism is socialism and socialism is a humanism. Socialism denotes a society of the commons where all humans benefit. Socialism is a realisation of the economic, political, and cultural commons: all humans live in wealth (economic commons), have democratic participation rights (political commons), and are respected (cultural commons). Democratic Socialism sees socialism as inherently humanist and democratic. It is anti-fascist, anti-Stalinist, and anti-capitalist. It is critical of the anti-democratic potentials and realities of these types of systems. Marxist Humanism doesn't limit the understanding of democracy to the political system, but argues for the extension of democracy to society at large, including the economy. Marxist/Socialist Humanism stresses the democratic need for the collective self-management of the economy and society. It understands democracy as participatory democracy.

Each chapter in the book at hand contributes to the foundations of critical theory. Many of the essays compiled in this work have been previously published. It is therefore a collection of the present author's recent contributions to the development of a critical theory of society. It engages with a particular aspect of such a theory that allows us to

gain new insights into elements of a Marxist-Humanist critical theory of society. Each chapter deals with one particular question:

- Chapter 2 asks: what is critical theory? It reconstructs the history and elements of critical theory;
- Chapter 3 asks: how relevant are Friedrich Engels's works today? It interprets Engels' works as contributions to Socialist Humanism;
- Chapter 4 asks: what can we learn from Marx's centenary in 1918? It reflects on the cultural forms through which Marx's centenary was reflected in 1918, including press articles, essays, speeches, rallies, demonstrations, music, and banners;
- Chapter 5 asks: how should one should best write biographies about Marx? It engages with Seven-Eric Liedman's Marx-biography *A World to Win: The Life and Works of Karl Marx* and compares it to the Marx-biographies written by Jonathan Sperber (*Karl Marx: A 19th-Century Life*) and Gareth Stedman-Jones (*Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion*);
- Chapter 6 asks: how relevant are Marx's works for the critical analysis of society today? It gives an answer by engaging with a four-part debate between David Harvey and Michael Hardt/Antonio Negri on the relevance of Marx today on the occasion of Marx's 200th anniversary in 2018. This debate focused on Marx's categories of alienation, formal and real subsumption, and primitive accumulation. The chapter discusses the essence of these categories and their relations;
- Chapter 7 asks: what is the relationship of the notion of sustainability to critical theory? The chapter argues that although sustainability has a strongly ideological character, a critical theory of society should not simply discard this notion, but aim to sublimate it. Some foundations of a way to integrate sustainability into a critical theory of society are presented;
- Chapter 8 asks: how relevant is C.L.R. James's dialectical philosophy today?
- It discusses key aspects of James's philosophy and relates them to moments of contemporary society such as Donald Trump, fascism and racism today, digital capitalism, digital ideology, and Black Lives Matter;
- Chapter 9 asks: how can Cornel West's works inform a contemporary Marxist-Humanist theory of society? Taking West's works as a starting point, what are key elements of a Marxist-Humanist theory of society?
- Chapter 10 asks: how did Rosa Luxemburg assess Karl Marx's works and how relevant is her interpretation of Marx today?

1.2 Critical Theorists

Readers in this book will have different pre-knowledge. Some will be familiar with single thinkers the work presents, others with several or almost all. I want to give a brief overview of who the main thinkers you encounter in this book are and why they matter.

Karl Marx (1818–1883) was a philosopher, economist, sociologist, journalist, and revolutionary socialist. In 1999, he won a BBC online poll that determined the millennium’s “greatest thinker” (BBC 1999). His key works include *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (together with Friedrich Engels), *Grundrisse*, and the three volumes of *Capital*.

Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) was Marx’s closest comrade, collaborator, and friend. He co-wrote *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* together with Marx, funded and supported Marx’s works, edited volumes two and three of *Capital*, and made original contributions to critical social theory with works such as *The Condition of the Working Class in England* and *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) was a Marxist theorist, revolutionary socialist, economist, philosopher, and anti-war activist. She was one of the most important and influential thinkers and activists influenced by Marx and Engels in the 20th century. She saw the First World War as the result of and manifestation of imperialist capitalism and opposed the war as a project of competing nationalism where workers who should unite internationally to fight against capital kill each other. Luxemburg’s most important works are *Social Reform or Revolution?*; *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*; *The Accumulation of Capital*, *The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis of German Social Democracy*, *The Russian Revolution*, and *Introduction to Political Economy*.

Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) and Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969) were philosophers and sociologists who are widely credited as the founders of what is often called Frankfurt School critical theory. Their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is a classical work in critical theory that grounds foundations of the critique of ideology. Horkheimer and Adorno were dialectical philosophers who developed a particular version of the dialectic known as negative dialectic, which is also the name of one of Adorno’s most widely read books. Horkheimer and Adorno contributed to the development of a critical theory of the authoritarian personality and explained how fascism and fascist consciousness work.

Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) was the third major thinker in the first generation of the Frankfurt School. He was a philosopher and political theorist who contributed to the development of Marxist-Humanist philosophy and the critique of ideology. He was influenced by Hegel, Marx, and Freud. His major books are *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, *An Essay on Liberation*, and *Counterrevolution and Revolt*.

Jürgen Habermas (born in 1929) is a philosopher and sociologist who is by many seen as the major representative of the Frankfurt School's second generation. He has worked out a critical theory of the public sphere and a critical theory of communication. His major books are *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, and *This Too a History of Philosophy*.

David Harvey (born in 1935) is an economic geographer and economic and social theorist who has developed a particular version of Marxist-Humanist theory that focuses on issues such as space in capitalism, globalisation, imperialism, neoliberalism, and social struggles. Among Harvey's major books are *The Limits to Capital*, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, *The New Imperialism*, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, *A Companion to Marx's Capital*, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism*, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*, and *Marx, Capital and the Madness of Economic Reason*.

Michael Hardt (born in 1960) is a political philosopher and literary theorist. Antonio Negri (born in 1933) is a political philosopher. Together, Hardt and Negri wrote *Empire*, which has by some been characterised as a communist manifesto for the 21st century and has influenced many left-wing activists and debates. Hardt and Negri followed up *Empire* with a sequence of related books, namely *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, *Commonwealth*, *Declaration*, and *Assembly*.

Cyril Lionel Robert James (1901–1989) was a socialist theorist, activist, novelist, and journalist. He contributed to the development of Hegelian-Marxist Humanism. As socialist activist, James was engaged in anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles. Among his best-known works are *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, *Beyond A Boundary, American Civilization; Mariners, Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In*;

Notes on Dialectics, A History of Pan-African Revolt, State Capitalism and World Revolution; and World Revolution, 1917–1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International.

Adolph L. Reed Jr. (born in 1947) is a political scientist and Marxist public intellectual. His work focuses on American and Afro-American politics, political thought, urban politics, and political development. He is known as a sharp commentator on political issues from a Marxist perspective, including US politics and left-wing politics. He stresses the importance of class politics and the need to situate racism and identity in the context of class and capitalism. Reed was a supporter of Bernie Sanders in the 2016 and 2020 US presidential primaries. He was involved in founding the United States Labor Party in 1996. His books include *W.E.B. Dubois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line*, *Class Notes: Posing as Politics and Other Thoughts on the American Scene*, *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era*, and *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon: The Crisis of Purpose in Afro-American Politics*. He edited the collected volumes *Renewing Black Intellectual History: The Ideological and Material Foundations of African American Thought* (together with Kenneth W. Warren), *Without Justice for All: The New Liberalism and the Retreat from Racial Equality*, and *Race, Politics, and Culture: Critical Essays on the Radicalism of the 1960s*.

Cornel West (born in 1953) is a philosopher and one of the leading critical intellectuals today. He is an organic intellectual who has been highly visible in the public sphere through public interventions such as the support of the Bernie Sanders campaign, Black Lives Matter, and the Occupy movement. His work has been influenced by, has fused and has contributed to the development of anti-racist theory, Black Liberation Theology, Marxist theory, pragmatism, and existentialism. Among West's main works are *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, *Prophetic Fragments*, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought*, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America*, and *Race Matters*.

Critical Theory develops through the dialectics of theory that aim at critically understanding changes of society. Theoretical debates, controversies, and encounters are part of the dialectics of theory. In Chapter 1, we encountered several of these debates that have shaped critical theory in the 21st century. The present author does not necessarily agree with the different sides of these debates, but finds such encounters relevant as points that help clarifying what questions critical theory needs to ask today. In these debates, as presented in this book, we encounter Luc

Boltanski, Klaus Dörre, Nancy Fraser, Axel Honneth, Rahel Jaeggi, Stephan Lessenich, and Hartmut Rosa. The present author has benefited from reading these debates, but does not share particular positions or approaches advanced by the authors who contributed to them.

Luc Boltanski (born in 1940) is a sociologist who has developed an approach he terms the pragmatic sociology of critique that studies how humans experience and resist injustices. Among Boltanski's major works are the books *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (together with Ève Chiapello), *On Justification: The Economies of Worth* (together with Laurent Thévenot), *On Critique: A Sociology of Emancipation*, *Enrichment: A Critique of Commodities* (together with Arnaud Esquerre), *The Making of a Class. Cadres in French Society*, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*; *Love and Justice as Competences - Three Essays on the Sociology of Action*; *Mysteries and Conspiracies - Detective Stories, Spy Novels and the Making of Modern Societies*.

Klaus Dörre (born in 1957) is a sociologist and critical theorist who studies the contemporary economy and society. He has in this context coined the notion of *Landnahme* (capture/grabbing/seizure/appropriation/subsumption of territory). He is author of books such as *In der Warteschlange: Arbeiter*innen und die radikale Rechte* (*In the Queue: Workers and the Radical Right*), *Kampf um Beteiligung. Arbeit, Partizipation und industrielle Beziehungen im flexiblen Kapitalismus* (*Struggle for Participation. Labour, Participation and Industrial Relations in Flexible Capitalism*), *Sociology, Capitalism, Critique* (together with Stephan Lessenich and Hartmut Rosa), or *Was stimmt nicht mit der Demokratie? Eine Debatte* (*What's Wrong With Democracy? A Debate*; together with Nancy Fraser, Stephan Lessenich, and Hartmut Rosa).

Nancy Fraser (born in 1947) is a philosopher who has contributed to the development of critical theory by combining feminism and anti-capitalism. Among her major works are *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*, *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (together with Axel Honneth), *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World*, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (together with Cinzia Arruz and Tithi Bhattacharya), and *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory* (together with Rahel Jaeggi).

Axel Honneth (born in 1949) is a philosopher who was the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research's director between 2001 and 2018. He is a major representative of the third generation of the Frankfurt School. Among his major works are *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, *The Fragmented World of the Social*, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (together with Nancy Fraser), *Reification: A Recognition-Theoretical View*, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom: Hegel's Social Theory*, *The I in We: Studies in the Theory of Recognition*, *Freedom's Right*, and *The Idea of Socialism*.

Rahel Jaeggi (born in 1967) is a philosopher and critical theorist who has contributed to the analysis of alienation, capitalism, and forms of life. Among her works are the books *Alienation*, *Critique of Forms of Life*, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory* (together with Nancy Fraser). She also edited collected volumes such as *Nach Marx: Philosophie, Kritik, Praxis* (*After Marx: Philosophy, Critique, Praxis*; together with Daniel Loick), *Karl Marx: Perspektiven der Gesellschaftskritik* (*Karl Marx: Perspectives for the Critique of Society*; together with Daniel Loick), *Sozialphilosophie und Kritik* (*Social Philosophy and Critique*; together with Rainer Forst, Martin Hartmann, Martin Saar), *Was ist Kritik?* (*What is Critique?*; together with Tilo Wesche).

Stephan Lessenich (born in 1965) is a sociologist who has contributed to critical theory based on the notion of activation. Among his works are the books *Living Well at Others' Expense: The Hidden Costs of Western Prosperity*, *Sociology, Capitalism, Critique* (together with Klaus Dörre and Hartmut Rosa), *Claus Offe and the Critical Theory of the State* (together with Jens Borchert), *Grenzen der Demokratie. Teilhabe als Verteilungsproblem* (*Limits of Democracy*), *Die Neuerfindung des Sozialen. Der Sozialstaat im flexiblen Kapitalismus* (*The Reinvention of the Social. The Welfare State in Flexible Capitalism*), *Dynamischer Immobilismus. Kontinuität und Wandel im deutschen Sozialmodell* (*Dynamic Immobilism. Continuity and Change of the German Social Model*), and *Was stimmt nicht mit der Demokratie? Eine Debatte* (*What's Wrong With Democracy? A Debate*; together with Klaus Dörre, Nancy Fraser, and Hartmut Rosa).

Hartmut Rosa (born in 1965) is a sociologist who has developed a theory of acceleration and resonance as contribution to critical theory. His major works

include *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, *High-Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power, and Modernity*; *Alienation & Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality*; *The Uncontrollability of the World; Sociology, Capitalism, Critique* (together with Klaus Dörre and Stephan Lessenich); *Was stimmt nicht mit der Demokratie? Eine Debatte (What's Wrong With Democracy? A Debate)*; together with Klaus Dörre, Nancy Fraser, and Stephan Lessenich).

1.3 Overviews of the Chapters in this Book

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the book's goal and presents an overview of its structure and its single chapters. It points out key features of the Marxist-Humanist approach to critical theory, introduces critical theorists who the reader encounters in this book, and provides an overview of the chapters in this work.

Chapter 2: What is Critical Theory?

This chapter discusses critical theory and why it matters. Its substance is the analysis and questioning of power structures in order to overcome them and create a better society. It is inherently connected to Karl Marx's works, the works of the Frankfurt School and the Critical Political Economy of Media and Communication. Critical theory is dialectical, ethical, a philosophy of praxis, and a critique of domination, exploitation, domination, and capitalism.

The chapter also discusses how critical theory matters as foundation of a critical theory and critique of the political economy of communication, culture, information, and the media.

Chapter 3: Friedrich Engels Today

This chapter introduces Engels's life and works in the context of his 200th birthday in 2020. It shows that Engels class-struggle oriented theory can and should inform 21st-century social science. Based on a reading of Engels's works, the article discusses how to think of scientific socialism as critical social science today,

updates Engels's *Condition of the Working Class in England*, and analyses the social murder of workers in the COVID-19 crisis. The chapter argues that Engels should be seen as a socialist humanist who stressed the important role of class struggles in society.

Chapter 4: Marx's Centenary (1918) in the Light of the Media and Socialist Thought

This chapter takes a historical view on Marx's 200th anniversary that we celebrated in 2018: it analyses how Marx's centenary (5 May 1918) was reflected in the media and socialist thought. 1918 not just marked Marx's 100th anniversary but was also the year in which the First World War ended. It was the year that saw the immediate aftermath of the Russian Revolution and the start of the Russian Civil War, the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; the formation of the Weimar Republic, Austria's First Republic, the Czech Republic, the Hungarian Republic, the Second Polish Republic; the founding of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), and the independence of Iceland from Denmark. The cultural forms, in which Marx's centenary was reflected in 1918, included press articles, essays, speeches, rallies, demonstrations, music, and banners. The communists as well as left-wing socialists of the day saw themselves in the tradition of Marx, whereas revisionist social democrats based their politics on a criticism or revised reading of Marx. This difference resulted in different readings of Marx.

Chapter 5: Reflections on Sven-Eric Liedman's Marx-Biography *A World to Win: The Life and Works of Karl Marx*

This chapter discusses the English translation of Sven-Eric Liedman's Marx-biography *A World to Win: The Life and Works of Karl Marx* that was published in 2018. It presents reflections on Liedman's book and asks how one should best write biographically about Marx. The chapter compares Liedman's biography to the Marx-biographies written by Jonathan Sperber (*Karl Marx: A 19th-Century Life*) and Gareth Stedman-Jones (*Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion*). A biography is a way of repeating a person's life, works, and age in a process of reconstruction and retelling. The question that arises is how to write a biography as a dialectical text.

Chapter 6: Universal Alienation, Formal and Real Subsumption of Society Under Capital, Ongoing Primitive Accumulation by Dispossession: Reflections on the Marx@200-Debate Between David Harvey and Michael Hardt/Toni Negri

This chapter presents reflections on a four-part debate between David Harvey and Michael Hardt/Toni Negri on the question of how relevant Marx is today. This debate was published in the journal *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* on the occasion of Marx's 200th anniversary (Hardt and Negri 2018a; Harvey 2018a; Hardt and Negri 2018b; Harvey 2018b).

My reflection contextualises the debate by a) discussing the origin and genesis of Marx's concepts of alienation, formal/real subsumption, and primitive accumulation and b) situating the arguments in earlier works by Harvey, Hardt, and Negri. This chapter points out differences as well as the strong commonalities between the works of Michael Hardt/Toni Negri and David Harvey. It discusses how the categories of universal alienation, formal/real subsumption of society under capital, original/ongoing primitive accumulation of capital are related. Harvey and Hardt/Negri show that Marx's theory and politics are alive 200 years after his birth and will haunt capitalism as long as it exists. The chapter concludes by arguing that Harvey's concept of anti-value and the autonomous notion of self-valorisation point towards democratic, commons-based alternatives to capitalism.

Chapter 7: Critical Social Theory and Sustainable Development: The Role of Class, Capitalism and Domination in a Dialectical Analysis of Un/Sustainability

It is still a relatively open question if and how sustainability fits into a critical theory of society. This chapter's aim is to contribute to the critical social theory foundations of sustainability and to reflect on the links between capitalism, class, and sustainability. Sustainability has not been a very popular concept in sociological theory. One of the reasons may be that sociology has a strongly critical tradition focusing on the analysis and critique of power structures in modern society. It is therefore often sceptical of ideas coming from the policy world that are susceptible to have an administrative character. The chapter argues that although sustainability has a strongly ideological character, a critical theory of society should not simply discard this notion, but aim to sublimate it. Some foundations of a way to integrate sustainability into a critical theory of society are presented.

Chapter 8: The Relevance of C.L.R. James's Dialectical, Marxist-Humanist Philosophy in the Age of Donald Trump, Black Lives Matter, and Digital Capitalism

This chapter asks: how relevant is C.L.R. James's dialectical philosophy today?

It discusses key aspects of James's philosophy and relates them to moments of contemporary society such as Donald Trump, fascism and racism today, digital capitalism, digital ideology, and Black Lives Matter.

Section 1.2 discusses James's concept of the dialectic and its focus on mediation and mediated communication. Section 1.3 analyses negative dialectics in the age of Donald Trump. Section 1.4 discusses ideology in the age of digital capitalism. Section 1.5's focus is on racism in the age of Black Lives Matter. Section 1.6 presents some conclusions.

Of particular relevance for critical analysis today are James's concepts of the dialectic as mediation, his negative dialectics of capitalism and barbarism, his focus on truth and the critique of ideology, and his analysis of the dialectic of capitalism and racism. In the age of racial, authoritarian, digital capitalism, C.L.R. James's dialectical, Marxist-Humanist philosophy remains an important inspiration for the critical analysis of capitalism and for struggles against barbarism and for socialism.

Chapter 9: Cornel West and Marxist Humanism

Humanity has experienced an explosion of anti-humanism in the form of authoritarian capitalism, postmodern filter bubbles, and global problems. Marxist/Socialist Humanism is the proper answer to the deep crisis of humanity. In this context, this chapter asks: how can Cornel West's works inform a contemporary Marxist-Humanist theory of society? Taking West's works as a starting point, what are key elements of a Marxist-Humanist theory of society?

Cornel West is one of the leading critical intellectuals today. He is an organic intellectual who has been highly visible in the public sphere through public interventions such as the support of the Bernie Sanders campaign, Black Lives Matter, and the Occupy movement. His work has been influenced by, has fused and has contributed to the development of anti-racist theory, Black Liberation Theology, Marxist theory, pragmatism, and existentialism.

This chapter especially focuses on West's understanding of humanism and culture. It shows how his works and praxis can inform the reinvigoration of Marxist Humanism in the age of authoritarian capitalism as a socialist response. West's thoughts can and should also inform the analysis of alienation, exploitation, domination, culture, the public sphere, the critique of ideology, and popular culture.

Chapter 10: Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Marx

Marx died on 14 March 1883. Exactly 20 years later, on 14 March 1903, Rosa Luxemburg's reflections on Karl Marx were published in German in *Vorwärts*, the newspaper of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. This chapter publishes an English translation of Luxemburg's essay on the occasion of Marx's bicentenary. Christian Fuchs reflects on the relationship of Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg by asking how we can make sense of Rosa Luxemburg's reading of Marx in 2018.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

This chapter draws some conclusions from the single chapters presented in the books. It points out important elements of a critical theory of society.

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