



MARXIST HUMANISM AND COMMUNICATION THEORY

**MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND
SOCIETY VOLUME ONE**

CHRISTIAN FUCHS



Marxist Humanism and Communication Theory

This book outlines and contributes to the foundations of Marxist-humanist communication theory. It analyses the role of communication in capitalist society.

Engaging with the works of critical thinkers such as Erich Fromm, E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, Henri Lefebvre, Georg Lukács, Lucien Goldmann, Günther Anders, M. N. Roy, Angela Davis, C. L. R. James, Rosa Luxemburg, Eve Mitchell, and Cedric J. Robinson, the book provides readings of works that inform our understanding of how to critically theorise communication in society. The topics covered include the relationship of capitalism, racism, and patriarchy; communication and alienation; the base/superstructure-problem; the question of how one should best define communication; the political economy of communication; ideology critique; the connection of communication and struggles for alternatives.

Written for a broad audience of students and scholars interested in contemporary critical theory, this book will be useful for courses in media and communication studies, cultural studies, Internet research, sociology, philosophy, political science, and economics.

This is the first of five Media, Communication and Society volumes, each one outlining a particular aspect of the foundations of a critical theory of communication in society.

Christian Fuchs is a critical theorist of media, communication and society. He is co-editor of the journal *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*. He is author of many publications, including the books *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), *Internet and Society* (2008).



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Contents

Figures	vii
Tables	ix
Acknowledgements	xi
1 Introduction	1
2 Erich Fromm and the critical theory of communication	19
3 Revisiting the Althusser/E. P. Thompson-controversy: Towards a Marxist theory of communication	49
4 Raymond Williams's communicative materialism	79
5 Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space and the critical theory of communication	103
6 Towards a critical theory of communication with Georg Lukács and Lucien Goldmann	129
7 Günther Anders's critical theory of technology	151
8 Jean-Paul Sartre as social theorist of communication. A theoretical engagement with "Critique of Dialectical Reason"	177
9 M. N. Roy, socialist humanism, and the critical analysis of communication	205
10 Capitalism, racism, patriarchy	241
11 Conclusion	279
Index	291

Chapter Eight

Jean-Paul Sartre as social theorist of communication. A theoretical engagement with “Critique of Dialectical Reason”

- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Language and communication in society
- 8.3 Communication in capitalism
- 8.4 Ideology and reification
- 8.5 Conclusion
- Literature

8.1 Introduction

Jean-Paul Sartre was a public intellectual who made use of modern media for public and political interventions. As a writer, the theatre and the newspaper were beside the book the media of his preferred use. He also appeared on radio and television but was much more sceptical of these media types (Scriven 1993). Sartre did not just make use of the media to communicate publicly but also contributed to theorising communication. This chapter focuses on his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (*CDR*). It asks: How can Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason* inform a critical theory of communication?

CDR is a two-volume book that in its English edition has a total of 1,304 pages. The French original of volume 1 was published in 1960, volume 2 posthumously in 1985 after Sartre’s death in 1980. *In Search for a Method* (*SM*) is an accompanying text published as a separate book. This total of around 1,500 pages shows Sartre at the height of his dialectical, Marxist phase of development.

In her Sartre-biography, Annie Cohen-Solal (2005) argues that the work of Sartre on his major philosophical books always reflected political experiences. Between 1950 and 1956, Sartre was particularly close to the French Communist Party (PCF). This period started at the beginning of the Korean War. After the Soviet military clampdown of the Hungarian revolution, Sartre strongly criticised the PCF and argued that communism needed to be de-Stalinised (see Cohen-Solal 2005, 329; Sartre 1968). For Sartre, a period “of general reassessment” followed after 1956 and he embarked on “the

production of a theoretical work" (Cohen-Solal 2005, 375), the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

In his foreword to the 2004 English edition of *CDR*'s first volume (*CDR1*), Frederic Jameson remarks that *Critique of Dialectical Reason* has not achieved the attention it deserves. James argues that this circumstance has to do with the popularity of (post-) structuralism, the unfinished character of the book, and especially its "notorious stylistic difficulty" (xiii) and "occasional unreadability" (xiv). *CDR* is "difficult to penetrate even by Sartre's standards of complexity" (Cox 2008, 52). When mentioning Sartre, poststructuralists such as Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, and Deleuze focused on stressing "they were *not* like Sartre" (Churchill and Reynolds 2014, 218). Poststructuralism has not just degraded Hegel and Marx, but also Sartre.

There is the relatively widespread assumption that Sartre wrote *CDA* under the influence of drugs and that it is, therefore, a weird book. Often, this claim keeps individuals from reading *CDA*. In reality, it might just be an excuse of having to avoid the difficulty and intellectual dialectic of torture and pleasure experienced when reading *CDA*. It is an intelligent strategy and an excuse for not having to take serious *CDA*. It is true that Sartre was taking large amounts of the amphetamines Corydrane and Orthédrine while writing *CDA*. This stimulant was unlike opiates and cannabis. It helped Sartre to think and write fast and focus lots of time to his work. Sartre said that it helped him to adapt the speed of and time committed to writing to his speed of thinking (De Beauvoir 1984, 174, 318–319, 328). But the pills did not alter or manipulate his state of mind, which is why the assumption that *CDA* is a silly, unserious, drug-infused book is a prejudice used by people as an excuse for not reading, engaging with, discussing, and writing about the book.

Although Sartre in the *Critique* makes an important contribution to theorising communication, this work has been by and large ignored in communication theory. Sartre is hardly mentioned both in the *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory* (Littlejohn and Foss 2009) and *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy* (Jensen and Craig 2016). Discussions of Sartre in the context of communication theory tend to focus on *Being and Nothingness* or Sartre's relation to Merleau-Ponty. *CDR* as Sartre's opus magnum has thus far remained rather undiscovered in communication theory. There are interesting exceptions, such as Peck (2002, 2006), who argues that Sartre can help media and cultural theory to avoid separations of culture and the economy and to overcome the gap between Political Economy of Communication and Cultural Studies. The lack of attention given to *CDR* certainly has

to do with the difficulty of the book's style and language, which has resulted in the circumstance that hardly anyone has read it in the field of media and communication studies. On the one hand, it looks like scholars are intellectually too lazy to invest the time and patience needed to read Sartre's *Critique*. On the other hand, many seem to see Sartre's dialectic as irrelevant and too complicated. This lack of engagement with Sartre in communication theory is, however, a weakness because Sartre's book can be an important inspiration for a critical, dialectical theory of communication. This chapter is a contribution to the illumination of the role of communication in Sartre's Marxist theory works.

Also, within Sartre scholarship, only a little attention has been given to communication. In the English *Sartre Dictionary* (Cox 2008), there are no entries for language and communication. In the French *Dictionnaire Sartre* (Noudelmann and Philippe 2004), there is no entry for "communication" and a three-page entry for "langue" (Tamassia 2004). The latter dictionary item's main message is that "Sartre never wrote a systematic linguistic theory nor did he develop a true philosophy of language" and that Sartre's interest in culture was primarily "focused on literary language" (Tamassia 2004, 274, translation from French). The few published works on Sartre and language have indeed largely focused on Sartre and literature and in his early philosophical works (see e.g., Anderson 1996; Busch 1999, chapter 4; Berendzen 2006; Busch 2010; Clarke 1999; Hung 2015; Leak 2008; Rae 2009). Although there are important exceptions that acknowledge the importance of language in *CDR* (e.g., Anderson 2002), the widely dominating view is that Sartre, including the Sartre of *CDR*, "has no explicit philosophy of language" and communication (Flynn 1997, 228).

It is evident that there has thus far not been much interest in Sartre as a contributor to a critical, dialectic theory of communication. In Sartre's works on dialectical Marxist theory, there are widely overlooked elements that can inform such a theory. The goal of this chapter is to analyse Sartre's understanding of communication and language in *CDR* and to discuss the book's relevance to the critical analysis of media, communication and society.

Whereas Sartre's earlier works such as *Being and Nothingness* were by Marxist critics seen as "idealistic mystification" (Marcuse 1948, 330) and as reducing "human phenomena to one level", the level of individual consciousness (Lukács 1949, 261), *Critique of Dialectical Reason* marked a profound change, namely Sartre's turn towards humanist Marxism (Spencer 2017, 127). Sartre shifted "his focus from consciousness to *praxis* (roughly, purposive human activity in its socioeconomic field)" (Flynn 2014, 331).

From “the first page of volume one to the last page of volume two, the *Critique* is self-consciously bound up with the fate of Marxism” (Aronson 2010, 274). Earlier critics such as Lukács (1984, 395, translation from German) therefore expressed “greatest respect” for “Sartre’s turn to Marxism”¹. *Critique of Dialectical Reason* promises to be one of the theoretical works that contain widely disregarded elements that can inform the establishment of a critical, dialectical, Marxist-humanist theory of communication.

Critique of Dialectical Reason is a work of social ontology (Flynn 2014, 335) and therefore has, as will be repeatedly pointed out in this chapter, parallels to Lukács’ forgotten opus magnum *Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins* (*Ontology of Societal Being*) (see Fuchs 2016, chapter 2). Bernard-Henri Lévy (2003, 436) remarks that Sartre’s *Critique* “is reminiscent of the Marxism of Lukács” because both Lukács and the late Sartre were Hegelian Marxists.

Section 2 discusses Sartre’s analysis of language and communication in society. Section 3 focuses on how Sartre can inform our understanding of communication in capitalism. Section 4 gives attention to Sartre’s analysis of ideology. Some conclusions are presented in Section 5

8.2 Language and communication in society

The Sartre of *Search for a Method* (*SM*) and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (*CDR*) wanted to combine Marxism and existentialism in order to provide an analysis of the mediation of society and the individual (Flynn 2014, 326). The task was to “reconquer man within Marxism” (*SM*, 83). The fusion of existentialism and Marxism that Sartre has in mind in these books seek the human “where he is, at his work, in his home, in the street” (*SM*, 28).

Critique of Dialectical Reason is a dialectical, humanist, critical theory of society and capitalism. Sartre starts by working out the foundations of a practice-oriented social theory. “We repeat with Marxism: there are only men and real relations between men” (*SM*, 76). For Sartre, the group mediates between the individual and society. Group relations form “a screen between the individual and the general interests of his class”

1 Although there are strong parallels between Sartre’s *CDA* and Lukács’ *Ontology of Societal Being* and *History and Class Consciousness*, Sartre seems to have never forgiven Lukács for the latter’s initial critique. In the talk “Marxism and Existentialism” that he gave in 1961, one year after the publication of *CDA1*, Sartre (2016, 5–10) criticises Lukács as idealist objectivist who reduces human subjects to “‘carriers’ of economic relations” and “obliterates all subjectivity” (5).

(*SM*, 67). For Sartre, it is important to analyse how “collective objects” are grounded in “the concrete activity of individuals” (*SM*, 77).

Praxis

Praxis is one of the key concepts of Sartre’s dialectic. He writes that “the dialectic is the rationality of *praxis*” (*CDR1*, 39). There is a “complex play of *praxis* and totalisation” (*CDR1*, 39). Praxis exists because humans want and need and desire to satisfy their needs that arise from the lack of something (*CDR1*, 79–88). Praxis “makes the environment into a totality” (*CDR1*, 85). Praxis is “directly revealed *by its end*”, which means that there are efforts “in accordance with present givens in light of the future objective” (*CDR1*, 549). Praxis is the “dialectical organisation of means with a view to satisfying need” (*CDR1*, 736). For Sartre, transcendence as the process of going beyond current conditions towards the future, synthetic unity, totalisation, and dialectical reason are important features of praxis (*CDR2*, 385). Praxis “as a transcendence (and preservation) of *hexis*, creates totalization – as an ever open, never finished, spirality of temporalization” (*CDR2*, 347). Praxis goes beyond an inert, stable condition (*hexis*) and transforms it dialectically by at the same time going beyond and preserving the old condition in a new condition. This process is open. Therefore, any praxis as change is a change of society taking place in time (and space) as dialectical spirals. In Hegel’s language, we can say that any social condition has contradictions, which means there is a negative condition. Change in society means praxis brings about the negation of the negation, which involves determinate negation that posits a new sublated (*aufgehoben*) condition that preserves and eliminates the old condition and lifts it up to a new level where we can find emergent qualities.

Marx, Gramsci, and the Yugoslav Praxis School use the notion of praxis different from Sartre. What Sartre terms “praxis” is for them “practice”. They see praxis as a practice that reproduces or aims at creating a commons-based society. For Gramsci, praxis aims at “absolute humanism” (Gramsci 1971, 417). Marx’s (1845a, 1845b) first, second, third, and eighth theses on Feuerbach stress the revolutionary character of praxis. Marx defines praxis as “revolutionary” and “practical-critical” activity (Marx, 1845b, 3). Praxis is a political practice that aims at creating a “*free community of free personalities*” (Petrović 1967, 133). These terminological differences do not imply fundamental disagreements on the level of the content of theory between Sartre and other philosophers of praxis.

The dialectic of structures and practices

Louis Althusser characterises Sartre's Marxist approach as "historicist humanism" that "takes the form of an exaltation of human freedom" (Althusser and Balibar 1970/2009, 158). Althusser overlooks the dialectic of structures/system/social field (the practico-inert) and practices (praxis) in Sartre's *Critique*, which allows him to attack Sartre incorrectly as a humanist idealist. Like Marx, Sartre bases his theory on a dialectic of structuration and practices. In society, there is a dialectic of practices and structures/systems, products and production. "A product of his product, fashioned by his work and by the social conditions of production, man *at the same time* exists in the milieu of his products and furnishes the substance of the 'collectives' which consume him" (*SM*, 79). The human being is "*at once* the product of his own product and a historical agent" (*SM*, 87). Sartre refers in this context to the well-known passage about the dialectic of humans making history and circumstances that shape and condition them from Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* (*CDR1*, 35) and Engels' letter to Borgius from 25 January 1894 (*SM*, 31). For Sartre, there is a dialectic of structures and practices in society. He sees the dialectic as constituting and constituted by humans: "man must be controlled by the dialectic in so far as he *creates* it, and *create* it in so far as he is controlled by it" (*CDR1*, 36). The human being is "at once both the product of his own product and a historical agent" (*SM*, 87).

In the context of the analysis of the dialectic in society, Sartre speaks of the "dialectic of the subjective and the objective" as "the joint necessity of 'the internalization of the external' and 'the externalization of the internal'" (*SM*, 97; an almost similar formulation can be found in *CDR1*, 71). Praxis is for Sartre the internalisation of the practico-inert structures and the creation and reproduction of these structures in work processes that externalise and objectify human energy and thoughts in products and structures. The group is the level where the dialectic of subjectivity and objectivity, the individual and society, is organised through practices. Sartre does here not mention the role of communication. Elsewhere he argues that the human is "externalizing himself in the materiality of language" (*SM*, 113). Social production is the practice that externalises human ideas and energy which result in products. In his earlier works from the late 1940s, Sartre already conceived of communication as practice: "Communication does not exist – it must be brought about" (Sartre 1992, 9).

Work and communication

Humans are characterised by praxis as the capacity of and the project to go "beyond a situation" that defines them (*SM*, 91) and the capacity of "transcending the given

toward the field of possibles" (93) so that the negative conditioning by structures opens up the possibility for creating that "what *has not yet been*" (92). Humans transcend the situation they find themselves in "by means of work and action" (*SM*, 99). "What makes this undertaking 'existentialist' is its emphasis on the project of the labourer" (Flynn 2014, 331). Work is for Sartre the key form of praxis. He stresses: "The essential discovery of Marxism is that labour, as a historical reality and as the utilisation of particular tools in an already determined social and material situation, is the real foundation of the organisation of social relations" (*CDR1*, 152, footnote 35).

Work is, as both Sartre and Lukács (1984 1986) stress, the model of social production. There are strong parallels between Sartre's (*CDR1*, 90) formulation that work is "the original *praxis*" and Lukács' (1978, 46) argument that work is the "model for all social practice". Both Lukács (1984 1986) and Sartre (*CDR1*) see work as purposeful action where humans achieve goals with defined means. Lukács speaks in this context of teleological positing, Sartre of a means/end-relation (*CDR1*, 90).

Humans produce products in social relations and also produce and reproduce the social relations they are part of. Communication is the process of the production of human sociality and social relations (Fuchs 2020). It is the process that guides social production. There is a dialectic of work and communication (Fuchs 2020): Humans communicate in production. Work has a communicative character. And communication is productive in that it creates and reproduces social relations and produces an understanding of the world. Communication is a work process. At the level of practices (or what Sartre calls "praxis"), there is a dialectic of communication and work that organises social production (Fuchs 2020).

Mediation and communication

Sartre argues that human relations are not just dyadic relations but always ternary relations where a "human mediator" acting as "third party" links "two individuals who are ignorant of each other" and actualise "the reciprocity of their relation" (*CDR1*, 106). The "unity of a dyad can be *realised* only within a totalisation performed from outside by a third party" (*CDR1*, 115). A group is for Sartre not a "binary relation" but a "ternary relation" (*CDR1*, 374).

If we think of a party where two people who do not know each other meet and become lifelong friends, it becomes evident how humans mediate other human beings' communication. Human mediation is less evident in situations such as when two friends

communicate on Facebook or face-to-face at home. The private home, the family, etc. are social systems and collective human actors that influence and shape everyday human communication and are shaped by social systems and structures. Facebook is not simply an Internet platform or communication technology, but a for-profit company that is founded on class relations between owners and digital workers (Fuchs, 2021). Media and communication technologies are techno-social systems grounded in social relations and human action. Sartre stresses the importance of concrete human beings who shape social systems, techno-social systems, subsystems of society, and society as a totality. All of these social realms shape besides single individuals (who act as communicators and human mediators) the communication process.

The communication process can potentially result in emergent sociality, which means that humans who communicate create a new social form (such as a friendship, a community, an organisation, etc.) that plays a role in society and thereby feeds back on society and creates impacts in society. Figure 8.1 visualises these aspects of the communication process based on Sartre. The model indicates that humans, social systems, techno-social systems (such as communication technologies), subsystems of society (such as the economy, the political system, culture), and society as a totality are forms of sociality that act as mediators of communication.

The filled arrows indicate a necessary relationship, while the striped arrows symbolise a potential relationship. Any human needs to communicate in order to live in society. And any communication needs a form of social mediation. These are aspects of society's necessities and human needs. But not any communication results in emergent sociality and impacts on society. Emergent sociality is a potential but not a necessary feature of communication.

Sartre argues that the human relationship involves one side "being an object" for other humans and the one side's "subjectivity getting its objective reality through them as the interiorisation of my human objectivity" (*CDR1*, 105). In any social relation, humans sensually perceive each other mutually by processes such as hearing, seeing, speaking, bodily movements, touching, feeling, smelling, and tasting. One side becomes an object of perception of the other side and actively perceives the other side. And on the side of the other actor, the same process takes place in a mutual and reciprocate manner so that each involved individual is subject and object of perception and communication. The mutual symbolic interaction between humans in the social process is the communication process. In *CDR*, Sartre does not term this process communication but rather speaks of praxis as "the dialectic as the development of living

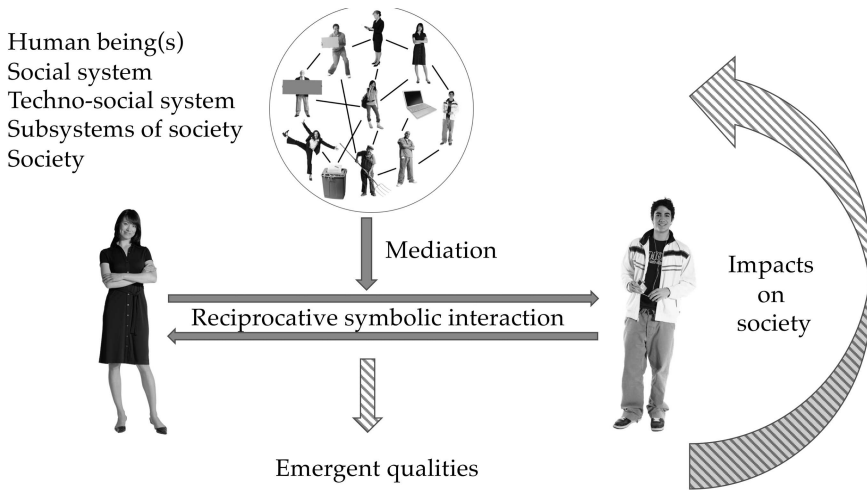


FIGURE 8.1 A model of the communication process based on Sartre's critical theory of dialectical reason

action" that is not an "*a priori* communication engineered by a kind of Great Telephone Operator" (*CDR1*, 106). But Sartre's terminology is here somehow ambivalent because he also speaks of the "practical mediation" that enables "them to communicate" (*CDR1*, 104), which affirms the category of communication. Sartre wants to foreground the role of humans in social relations and is careful not to overstress the role of communication technologies. He stresses the human and social character of technologies. Communication technologies are not simply tools, media, or machines. They are techno-social systems. Communication is a human and social process, so by using the term communication one does not automatically create a technological determinist concept of the social.

The practico-inert and language

The practico-inert is an important category in Sartre's theory. "In his *Critique*, as just mentioned, Sartre reserves an ontological place for structure and structuralist studies in the domain of the 'practico-inert' and the analytic reasoning that it supports" (Flynn 2006, 116). Structures and systems are an objectification of past practices. That's why Sartre calls them the practico-inert. He also speaks of worked matter in order to signify that social structures are the results of human work. They are inertia emerging from social practices. By the practico-inert, Sartre means "the sedimented prior praxes that

both limit and facilitate present praxes the way natural language limits and facilitates speech acts" (Flynn 2006, 112).

Sartre situates language in the realm of the practico-inert. "Ontologically, language belongs to the category of 'being-for-others' in *Being and Nothingness* and to the domain of the 'practico-inert' in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. [...] Language, on this account, is a basic technique for appropriating the world rather than the means of constituting it, as poststructuralists would insist" (Flynn 2006, 111). Language is a structure that enables, conditions, and constrains communicative practices. We can say that there is a dialectic of language and communication, the structural and the practice aspect of information in society.

Language and communication make their first important appearance in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* in section 2.1 of book I in Volume 1. Book I's second chapter, to which the section in question belongs to, discusses human relations as mediation. Sartre stresses the role of words and language in communication. Words "carry the projects of the Other into me and they carry my own projects into the Other" (*CDR1*, 98). "Language might well be studied on the same lines as money: as a circulating, inert materiality, which unifies dispersal; in fact this is partly what philology does. Words live off the death of men, they come together through men; whenever I form a sentence its meaning escapes from me, is stolen from me; meanings are changed for everyone by each speaker and each day; the meanings of the very words in my mouth are changed by others." (*CDR1*, 98). "'Human relations' are in fact inter-individual structures whose common bond is language and which actually exist at every moment of History" (*CDR1*, 99).

For Sartre, language is a system and totality where we find a dialectic of words as moments and the language system as a totality: "every word is the whole language" (*SM*, 172; see also Sartre 1974/2008, 51–52). "There can be no doubt that language is in one sense an inert totality. But this materiality is also a constantly developing organic totalisation. Nor can there be any doubt that speech separates as much as it unifies; or that it reflects the cleavages, the stratifications and the inertias of the group; or that dialogues are partly dialogues of the deaf" (*CDR1*, 98). Language as a structure is a medium that acts as a tool: "language is a *tool* as soon as I speak or listen to someone else" (Sartre 1963/2012, 276). The "totality of language as a set of internal relations between objective senses is given, for and to everyone; words are simply specifications expressed against the background of language; the sentence is an actual

totalisation where every word defines itself in relation to the others, to the context and to the entire language, as an integral part of a whole" (*CDR1*, 99).

Language is a totality that lives through practice: "language contains every word and every word is to be understood in terms of language as a whole; it contains the whole of language and reaffirms it. But this fundamental totality can only be praxis itself in so far as it is directly expressed to others; language as the practical relation of one man to another is praxis, and praxis is always language (whether truthful or deceptive) because it cannot take place without signifying itself" (*CDR1*, 99). Using "a word is praxis, since it tends to create a group. For the word tends simultaneously to mediate and create reciprocities. [...] communication is effected not through the word, but by reference to the word: at once as an institution, as a direct relation to the context, and as a serialized third party" (*CDR2*, 426).

The word is an "institution, an inertia", a "tool", by which "I make myself inert and act upon the inert" (*CDR2*, 426). "I make myself inert by speaking, but in order to awaken inertia the other" (*CDR2*, 426). The word is "utilized *in a praxis* [...]; it awakens the inert in the other, inasmuch as this inert may be the beginning of a praxis: *order*" (*CDR2*, 426). When Sartre says that language is praxis and praxis is language, what he means is that the communication process is a productive practice that produces and reproduces a group, that is sociality. Sartre does not explicitly say so, but the implication of this conceptualisation is that communication is a form of work.

For Sartre, language and communication are not immaterial, but part of human materiality. "Of course, language is materiality, action is effort" (*CDR1*, 429). "But language cannot have come to man, since it presupposes itself: for an individual to discover his isolation, his alienation, for him to suffer from silence or, for that matter, to become integrated into some collective undertaking, his relation to others, as manifested in and by the materiality of language, must constitute him in his own reality" (*CDR1*, 99). The same understanding can be found in Raymond Williams' cultural materialism and Lukács' ontology. Williams (1989, 206) conceives of "cultural practice as from the beginning social and material". Lukács (1986, 169, translation from German) argues that language is an organ, medium, and complex that enables the reproduction of society, the "preservation of the species within a constant change of all subjective and objective moments of reproduction".

Sartre worked out a dialectical social theory that allows us to not only conceive of the social and society as a dialectic of subject and object as well as praxis and the

practico-inert but also to ground a dialectical understanding of communication and language. There is a dialectic of communication and language as part of the dialectic of subject and object, praxis and the practico-inert.

Language not just mediates social relations, but the ensemble of social relations that humans are part of also shapes their language and the use of language and words. For example, members of a certain socio-economic class develop in a certain region develop a particular accent and give particular emphasis to certain words in their language-use. Sartre argues that language is shaped by human beings' "*insertion in the world*" (Sartre 1974/2008, 274) and "*being-in-the-world*" (Sartre 1974/2008, 275). Language is a "materiality which mediates between men to the extent that men are mediator between its different aspects (a materiality that I have elsewhere called practico-inert)" (Sartre 1974/2008, 271). Sartre here refers back to *CDA* and argues that language can only act as a medium of social relations because social relations and structures, the practico-inert, is a medium that shapes language and language-use. There is an interaction, a dialectic, of language and society.

A critical theory does not stop at the level of society in general. It also has to analyse capitalism as a concrete social formation. The next section, therefore, discusses the relevance of Sartre's approach for the analysis of language and communication in capitalism.

8.3 Communication in capitalism

Direct and indirect communication

The development of "particular systems of ideas" stands in the context of the development of the productive forces and the relations of production (*SM*, 112). In class society, culture, language and communication therefore often have an antagonistic character. "Thus the general categories of the culture, the particular systems, and the language which expresses them are already the objectification of a class, the reflection of conflicts, latent or declared, and the particular manifestation of alienation" (*SM*, 113).

For Sartre (*CDR1*), there are two major forms of mediation. The first one is the series. It is characterised by instrumentality, impersonality, domination, imitation, separation, isolation, massification, and interchangeability (*CDR1*, 256–269). Reciprocity, freedom, co-operation, fraternity, community, synthesis, and union characterise the second form of mediation – the fused group (*CDR1*, 345–404). In the case of a series, the practico-inert dominates and mediates praxis, whereas it is the other way around in the case of

a fused group. In a fused group, individuals become “common individuals” because of fraternity, which is the obligation “to help one another in general” or in the context of a task or action (*CDR1*, 437).

Sartre distinguishes between direct social relations that are based on presence “permitting the immediate establishment of relations of reciprocity between two individuals, given the society’s techniques and tools” (*CDR1*, 270) and indirect gatherings defined by absence so that humans cannot talk to each other (*CDR1*, 270–276). Sartre here draws a distinction between reciprocal communication on the one hand that can take place face-to-face or in a mediated manner (e.g. telephone, Internet) and one-way mass communication on the other hand. Interpreting Sartre, we can distinguish between direct and indirect social relations. Both can take on the form of a series and a reciprocating form (see Table 8.1).

Sartre discusses the radio audience as an example for a series with indirect communication and absence: “the mere fact of *listening to the radio*, that is to say, of listening to a particular broadcast at a particular time, establishes a serial relation of *absence* between the different listeners. In this way, the practico-inert object not only produces a unity of individuals outside themselves in inorganic matter, but also determines them in separation and, in so far as they are separate, ensures *their communication through alterity* (and the same applies to all ‘mass media’)” (*CDR1*, 271). The “radio listeners [...] constitute a *series* in that they are listening to the common voice which constitutes each of them in his identity as an *Other*” (*CDR1*, 276).

Communication and power

Sartre points out that communication stands in the context of power. When “I listen to a broadcast, the relation between the broadcaster and myself is not a human one: in effect, I am passive in relation to what is being said, to the political commentary on the news, etc. This passivity, in an activity which develops on every level and over many years, can to some extent be resisted: I can write, protest, approve, congratulate,

TABLE 8.1 Examples of two Sartrean forms of direct and indirect social relations

	Direct social relation	Indirect social relation
Series	Individuals waiting at a bus stop	Audience listening to a radio broadcast
Reciprocative group	Friends meeting and chatting in a bar	Friends chatting via e-mail, individuals discussing via an e-mail list

threaten, etc. But it must be noted at once that these activities will carry weight only if a majority (or a considerable minority) of listeners who do not know me do likewise. So that, in this case, reciprocity is a gathering with one voice" (*CDR1*, 271).

Sartre characterises an indirect serial relation that is based on absence, such as a radio broadcast, as "a reifying relation in which the voice is given as *praxis* and constitutes the listener as the object of *praxis*" (*CDR1*, 272). One can switch off an "ideological broadcast", but this is merely an individual negation that does not negate the speaker's voice (*CDR1*, 272). It is impossible that one directly responds. One cannot convince, "*one by one*, the listeners all of whom it [the radio broadcast] exhorts in the common isolation which I create for all of them as their inert bond" (*CDR1*, 273).

Sartre does not like techno-determinists such as Marshal McLuhan, Martin Heidegger, or Friedrich Kittler assume that the technological features of the means of communication determine these technologies' use and effects in society. But he points out that one-way communication technologies such as the radio, the television, and the newspaper can be appropriated and centralised by capitalists and/or governments and/or cultural hegemony in order to centralise communication power. "Moreover, radio stations represent the point of view of the government or the special interests of a group of capitalists; so the listeners' activities (about programmes or about the opinions that are expressed) are unlikely to have any effect" (*CDR1*, 271).

Sartre argues that centralised communication is a form of alienation: the "negation of direct reciprocity is centralisation, as the necessity that two given sub-groups whose practices are complementary should go through 'the departments' or 'the Council' in order to adapt their actions reciprocally. The alienation of indirect reciprocity is that mediation is itself a modifying action on this reciprocity" (*CDR1*, 614).

For Sartre, public speaking is different from broadcasting and mediated communication: "Thus the public speaker really does address us, in that both individual reciprocity (*I* shout out my approval or my criticism) and collective reciprocity (we applaud him or shout our disapproval at him) are perfectly conceivable. All listeners to the public speaker are "in a position to contradict or even insult him" (*CDR1*, 272).

Democratic and capitalist communication

Sartre distinguishes between democratic and capitalist forms of television:

- 1.) Democratic television/communications means “total distribution and popular culture” where “production is intensified for culture. An interior practico-inert” (*CDR2*, 440).
- 2.) Television “in a capitalist society” is “an organ of restricted distribution of non-vulgarized bourgeois culture” (*CDR2*, 440). “But mass production creates the mass media. So class and government propaganda cannot ignore these. Production thus creates a practico-inert: TV as a talking machine, and this talking machine demands its own *voice* in the present situation of capital. And its voice is governmental, and a class ideology. It demands its own voice, and its institutionalization. It is the machine that demands its own unity. On this basis: either the State directly, or interchangeable private sets (competition barely differentiates them). There are accidents, of course: most of the directors harassed by McCarthyism worked in TV” (*CDR2*, 440). “On this basis, there is TV thought, TV behaviour, etc., which belong to the practico-inert. It is simultaneously other-direction and senseless discourse” (*CDR2*, 441).

It is, of course, possible to organise a communication system such as a radio or television station in a non-capitalist manner. The profit imperative can be dropped. Workers and audience members can co-own and co-govern the station. There can be formats that allow stronger audience participation. Also, public service media are an example of non-capitalist organisation forms of radio and televisions.

Sartre focuses much more on the analysis of the capitalist and alienated character of communication than on democratic and appropriated forms of communication. But his critique points towards what Williams (1976) calls democratic communications, means of communication that are for-public-benefit instead of for-private-profit, “means of participation and of common discussion” (134), and foundations of a cultural democracy” that combines public-service media, cultural co-operatives, and local media.

German critical theorists such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, Bert Brecht, and Hans Magnus Enzensberger are just like Sartre concerned about questions of the mass media’s communication power. Brecht (1932/2000, 42) argued that the radio could be “the finest possible communication apparatus [...] if it understood how to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a network instead of isolating him”. Building on Brecht, Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1982, 62) distinguishes between emancipatory and repressive media use. Sartre, Brecht, and Enzensberger share the

critique of centralised programme-production and distribution where there is “[o]ne transmitter, many receivers” (Enzensberger 1982, 62).

YouTube is not participatory culture, but serial communication

The question that arises from all of these approaches, including Sartre’s, is if we automatically see the emancipation and democratisation of communication when it becomes possible that each receiver/consumer of information can transmit and produce information. The Internet and social media platforms pose such potentials for information prosumption (productive consumption). Thinkers such as Henry Jenkins (2008) therefore argue that the Internet advances participatory culture. But did capitalist Internet platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, really bring about a democratisation of culture and communication? Table 8.2 shows a list of the ten most-watched YouTube videos of all time.

YouTube’s attention economy shows that making everyone a potential speaker does within a capitalist society not automatically bring about a democratic culture. Giving users the opportunity to comment, like, and repost content is a capitalist strategy of social media corporations that try to fix users’ attention for long times on the platform in order to present targeted ads to them. “Participatory culture” has a capitalist purpose, namely the sale of targeted ads and the sale of commodities in general. Entertainment provided by for-profit media companies dominates YouTube. Eight of the ten most-watched videos on YouTube are music songs whose copyright is owned by one of the big-three music corporations Sony, Universal, and Warner. Attention power is asymmetrically distributed on YouTube and other social media platforms. Everyone can speak and produce, but not everyone is heard and seen. The everyday user is mostly invisible and unheard. Corporations, celebrities, and politicians are in contrast much more seen and heard than ordinary users on social media. YouTube uses targeted ads in order to yield profit. Corporate social media are first and foremost advertising platforms and capitalist ventures. A major use of social media is that capitalist corporations use social media for promoting their commodities via advertisements and publishing content.

Capitalist social media allow users to produce content and to talk to each other. But they remain forms of communication and information shape by what Sartre terms a series because the instrumental reason of capital and commodification shapes these

TABLE 8.2 The most viewed YouTube videos of all times (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most-viewed_YouTube_videos, accessed on 16 February 2020)

Rank	Title	Type	Owner	Views
1	Luis Fonsi – Despacito	Music	Universal Music (Vivendi)	6.6 billion
2	Ed Sheeran – Shape of You	Music	Warner Music	4.6 billion
3	Pinkfong Kids’ Songs & Stories – Baby Shark Dance	Children’s music	SmartStudy (Samsung Publishing)	4.6 billion
4	Wiz Khalifa – See You Again	Music	Warner Music	4.4 billion
5	Masha and the Bear – Recipe for Disaster	Children’s entertainment	Animaccord Animation Studio	4.2 billion
6	Mark Ronson – Uptown Funk	Music	Sony Music	3.8 billion
7	Psy – Gangnam Style	Music	YG Entertainment (distributed by Universal)	3.5 billion
8	Justin Bieber – Sorry	Music	Universal Music (Vivendi)	3.3 billion
9	Maroon 5 – Sugar	Music	Universal Music (Vivendi)	3.1 billion
10	Katy Perry – Roar	Music	Universal Music (Vivendi)	3.0 billion

platforms’ logic. In addition, the individualism that aims at fostering capitalist consumerism (the purchase of commodities) is built into these platforms’ technological structures. YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. afford that users have individual profiles, where they accumulate followers and likes. On the capitalist Internet, capitalism’s economic logic translates at the cultural level into the accumulation of online reputation. Corporate social media are part of the cultural logic of digital capitalism. Facebook and Google control the majority of digital advertising revenue, which shows that there are duopolistic structures in this industry.

Enzensberger argues that for the creation of democratic communications “the elimination of capitalistic property relationships is a necessary but by no means sufficient condition” (Enzensberger 1982, 54–55). If users owned YouTube/Google, a democratic attention economy wouldn’t be the automatic result. The capitalist logic of accumulation needs to be abolished in society at large and be replaced by the logic of the commons and the community in order to advance a democratic culture and economy. Platform co-operatives and public service Internet platforms are examples of non-capitalist organisation forms of digital media (Fuchs 2021). Platform co-operatives are Internet platforms that are owned and governed by a community of users and workers. Public service Internet platforms are platforms operated by public service media

organisations for advancing public values such as democracy, education, political and cultural participation, and the public sphere. An alternative Internet is possible.

Sartre's distinction between the series and the group allows us to distinguish between different forms of the media. Instrumental reason rules capitalism. Capitalism instrumentalizes human labour and also our forms of communication in order to accumulate capital, political power, and cultural hegemony. Capitalism is not just a political and an economic system, but also an ideological formation that aims at instrumentalising human consciousness in the interest of the ruling capitalist class interest. The next section focuses on Sartre's concept of ideology.

8.4 Ideology and reification

Alienation and reification

Sartre argues that in capitalism, alienation is the result of the conflict between productive forces and relations of production (*SM*, 13–14) and “irreducible to an idea” (*SM*, 14). He writes that oppression, including racism, colonialism, slavery and any tyranny, consists “in treating the Other as an *animal*” (*CDR1*, 110) or “*like a dog*” (*CDR1*, 111). In alienation, the human being “subordinates the human to what is Other than” the human, which results in “the hatred” of the human being (*CDR1*, 181). For Sartre, reification is not “[a] metamorphosis of the individual into a thing” (*CDR1*, 176), but has to do with mechanical rigidity, alien laws, atomisation of the group so that it becomes a mechanical system (*ibid.*). Sartre argues that bourgeois humanism is an ideology that “identifies the bourgeois with man in opposition to the *other-species*, to the anti-human, the worker” (*CDR1*, 752). Also, racism is a bourgeois (anti-)humanism that defines the racialised group as the anti-human opposite of the human (752).

In respect to the working class, alienation means for Sartre that the worker is “a product of capitalism” and “works for wages and produces goods which are taken from him and uses industrial machinery which belongs to individuals or to private groups” in order to “produce [...] an expansion of capital” (*CDR1*, 309). An exploited class is “a totalised series of series” (*CDR1*, 309). The working class is characterised by the non-ownership of the conditions of production, including machines and other means of production (*CDR1*, 679). Workers are exchangeable. If they do not politically organise themselves, they are atoms and cogs in a socio-economic machine. They are non-owners. The property they produce is separate from them. For capitalism to work, there is a series of workers in every capitalist company. And the totality of all series is the

working class. Class struggle means that the series is negated into a “*wholly active* class, all of whose members are integrated into a single *praxis*” (*CDR1*, 317). In socialism, “man will be his own product instead of the ‘product of his product’” (*CDR1*, 320). For Sartre, the existence of classes has to do with scarcity (*CDR2*, 14), including the scarcity of time, means, knowledge (9).

Ideology

Sartre’s approach to ideology is comparable to the one that Georg Lukács’ (1971) takes in his famous book *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács speaks of reification in general and the reification of consciousness. Also, Sartre sees reification operating at the level of human practices (exploitation, oppression) and consciousness (ideology).

In *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre does not give an explicit definition of ideology. But he argues that ideology is “imposed on the exploited class by the exploiting class by means of propaganda” (*CDR1*, 673). Sartre argues that the dominant class strives to use the media system for “diffusing its own ideology (i.e. the practical justification of its praxis)” (*CDR2*, 439). There is a parallel of Sartre here to Lukács’ concept of ideology. Lukács stresses that “the emergence and diffusion of ideologies appears as the general characteristic of class societies” (Lukács 1984, 405, translation from German). For Sartre, alienation in class society also takes on the form of alienated language: “Many words, detached from objects, are adrift”, humans “have a feeling that language does not quite belong to them” (Sartre 1963/2012, 276). Alternative speaking and an alternative language mean “a community which has forged a language of its own against the bourgeois tongue” (Sartre 1963/2012, 285).

Sartre (1974/2008) argues that ideology affirms (234) and is a weapon of the ruling class (235), masks and hides (251), and that emancipatory movements along with class society want to “abolish all ideology” (266). In *CDR2*, Sartre speaks of ideology as “false consciousness, that is as praxis that does not recognize itself” (*CDR2*, 294). There are parallels to Lukács’ (1971) notions of reified consciousness and false consciousness, by which he, in general, refers to consciousness that “by-passes the essence of the evolution of society and fails to pinpoint it and express it adequately” (50) and in capitalism to consciousness that veils “the nature of bourgeois society” and is a form a deception aimed at ensuring the subordinated classes’ consciousness remains “amorphous” (66).

Sartre’s critique of ideology operates along multiple dimensions. We will discuss some

example dimensions: analytical reason, advertising and consumer capitalism, racism, and Stalinism.

Analytical reason

Sartre opposes dialectical reason to *analytical reason*. The latter naturalises society and reduces “human relations to the functional relations of quantitative variables” (*CDR1*, 712). It is also atomistic (*CDR1*, 65), positivist (802), and guided by the logic of the natural sciences (827). This results in the claim that “[t]his is how things are” and that they cannot be changed, which is an “empirical irrationality” (712). Sartre sees in the assumption of a dialectic of nature a form of analytical reason. Sartre’s critique of analytical reason as an ideology is parallel to Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique of instrumental reason and Lukács’ critique of reified consciousness.

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) argue that in capitalism, instrumental reason means that there are “instruments of power – language, weapons, and finally machines” (29). In capitalism, such instruments of power are, for example, the capitalist economy, positivism, the capitalist machinery, ideology, and the culture industry. “Reason serves as a universal tool for the fabrication of all other tools [...] Reason’s old ambition to be purely an instrument of purposes has finally been fulfilled” (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 23). Lukács (1971) criticises the logic of quantification as an aspect of capitalism’s fetishist structure. It is part of the “nature of capitalism to” reduce “the phenomena to their purely quantitative essence, to their expression in numbers and numerical relations” (Lukács 1971, 6). Already Marx stressed the connection of capitalism and instrumental reason: “Time is everything, man is nothing; he is, at the most, time’s carcase. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything; hour for hour, day for day” (Marx, 1847, 127). There are parallels of Sartre’s critique of analytical reasons to Marx, Lukács, and Horkheimer/Adorno. All of them oppose instrumental reason to dialectical reason.

Computational social science and big data analytics as analytical reason

In digital capitalism, computational social science and big data analytics have developed as new approaches that transform academia and science. The focus is on the collection and quantitative analysis of very large datasets from various sources such as the Internet or digitisation projects. “[B]ig data analytics strives to provide insight to

enable business decisions from vast amounts of data which are often ambiguous, incomplete, conditional and inconclusive" (Ghavami 2020, 14). Paraphrasing Sartre, we can say that big data analytics reduces "human relations to the functional relations of quantitative variables" (*CDR1*, 712). Big data analytics cannot understand the qualitative features of social life, such as experience, ethics, motivations, fears, desires, morals, norms, etc. Big data analytics is a new form of positivism, digital positivism that constitutes, as Sartre says, an "empirical irrationality" (*CDR1*, 712).

Advertising and consumer capitalism

Sartre argues that propaganda "is the manipulation of series and of the masses as such" (*CDR1*, 642). He discusses *advertising* as an example of manipulated seriality. It is a form of mediation that creates an illusion (644). A group of experts becomes "a definite power" (645) that tries to create "alienated evaluations" (646), to turn individuals into "the instruments of well-organised collectives", which creates "total alienation" (649) and "a false totality" (650). These are general features of all ideology. It is specific for advertising that it tries to control consumption and distribution of commodities and to make consumers "adapt their budgets" to capitalist interests (651). Advertising is one of the "techniques of other-direction" (651).

Advertising tries to direct the interests of humans to commodities and thereby into the direction of corporations. Capitalist logic comes to define human action. Advertising on the Internet is targeted and personalised. It is based on and enabled by big data collection and algorithm-driven big data analytics. In digital advertising, big data's digital positivism is a new technique of other-direction that directs a user's attention towards personalised ads and thereby towards corporations that sell commodities in order to accumulate capital. In digital capitalism, advertising's other-directedness turns from mass-direction of ads towards personalised targeting. What remains the same is that consumers' and workers' interests are by (targeted) ads directed towards another, foreign interest, namely capitalist interest.

Advertising is a general feature of consumer capitalism. Sartre writes that the emergence of the culture industry, including entertainment and sports, stands in the context of the second industrial revolution (*CDR2*, 42). He argues that competitive sports, such as boxing, in class society has an ideological role. Sports produces and reproduces competition "in all its nakedness as the concrete event that a popular audience approves and supports" (*CDR2*, 47).

Racism

Sartre argues that the colonial system requires *racism* as “Other-Thought” in order to advance “super-exploitation” (*CDR1*, 714). In his preface to Frantz Fanon’s book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre (1963a) argues that colonisers use all means necessary to subdue the humans who live in the colonies. The colonisers dehumanise the colonised in order to be able to destroy, dominate, and exploit them. Physical violence is one method they use, cultural control another one:

Our soldiers overseas, rejecting the universalism of the mother country, apply the ‘*numerus clausus*’ to the human race: since none may enslave, rob, or kill his fellow man without committing a crime, they lay down the principle that the native is not one of our fellow men. [...] the order is given to reduce the inhabitants of the annexed country to the level of superior monkeys in order to justify the settler’s treatment of them as beasts of burden. Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men at arm’s length; it seeks to dehumanize them. Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs and to destroy their culture without giving them ours.

(Sartre 1963a, 15)

Stalinism

Sartre saw *Stalinism* as “absolute idealism” (*SM*, 23) that was based on a “separation of theory and practice” (*SM*, 22). It was “blind to events” (*SM*, 126). The action was guided by ideology made in party offices and not an experience of reality. The Communist Party leaders “feared that the free process of truth, with all the discussions and all the conflicts which it involves, would break the unity of combat; they reserved for themselves the right to define the line and to interpret the event” (*SM*, 22). They disregarded that “[c]oncrete thought must be born from *praxis* and must turn back upon it in order to clarify it” (*SM*, 22). The result was the “terrorist practice” of liquidating particularity and the “physical liquidation” of “particular people” (*SM*, 28).

Stalin was an “iron-fisted opportunist” (*CDR2*, 101) who advanced the ideology of “socialism in one country”, whereby communist universalism and internationalism was destroyed (*CDR2*, 95–117). Stalin privileged “the singular over the universal and the national over the international” and presented him as the incarnation of the singular

(*CDR2*, 213). Stalin defined the Soviet system and thereby himself as the essence of socialism. As a consequence, he saw it as the primary task of non-Soviet communism to defend the Soviet system and thereby Stalin as the essence of socialism. Stalin turned socialism into an ideology and into particularism. Socialism was defined as one country and one person in that country. The ideological consequence was that any “opposition would be defined as treason” (*CDR2*, 103). When Soviet shoulders shot at the rebelling Hungarian workers in 1956, pro-Soviet communists justified the killing and wounding of thousands based on the faith that the Soviet Union was socialist and that any critique of it was pro-capitalist and therefore in their view needed to be stopped by violence (Sartre 1968, 18). Sartre saw the 1956 Hungarian Revolution as an aspect of de-Stalinisation (Sartre 1968, 93) and the Soviet intervention as the triumph of neo-Stalinism (111).

Sartre stresses that the problem of low productivity reinforced Stalin’s dictatorship and terror in agriculture and the problem of trying to transform an agricultural into an industrial society and the contradictions industrialisation and urbanisation created (*CDR2*, 118–183). The economic situation did not leave time for the transformation process, so the collectivisation of agriculture was conducted by force. Sartre argues that collectivisation and development could have been achieved without violence and that the decisive factor was Stalin’s ideology to “subordinate man to the construction of machines (i.e. subordinate men to worked materiality)” (*CDR2*, 206). Stalin dehumanised humans and thought of them as things and cogs in a machine that can be smashed and replaced.

The analytical reason, advertising/consumer culture, racism, and Stalinism have in common that they are ideologies that try to manipulate the consciousness of everyday people in the interest of dominant economic and political groups. These example ideologies share with all ideologies their class nature and that they try to manipulate the public and the ideas of the public’s members in such manners that the members of the public accept, adopt, practice, and support the logic of quantification (analytical reason), capitalist consumerism (advertising, entertainment), and terror (racism/fascism, Stalinism, nationalism). Sartre stresses that ideology denies certain humans their humanity in order to justify their domination. Ideology can only start ceasing to exist in “a socialism of abundance” (Sartre 1993, 171).

8.5 Conclusion

Sartre has been overlooked as a contributor to communication theory. His *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (*CDR*) shows Sartre at the height of his Marxist phase. A critical

theory of communication can draw on ideas from *CDR*. Communication is the human process of the production of sociality. *CDR* is a Marxist-humanist theoretical approach. Sartre's dialectical, Marxian humanism can inform the development of a critical, dialectical, humanist theory of communication.

We can summarise the main insights of this chapter:

- For Sartre, society and the social are based on a dialectic of practices (praxis) and structures (the practico-inert). Unlike Marx, Gramsci and the Praxis School, Sartre does not use the term praxis for emancipatory political action, but he shares with these thinkers the stress on human action in society.
- At the level of information, the dialectic of the practico-inert and praxis is for Sartre a dialectic of language and communication.
- Just like for Lukács, work is also for Sartre the model of human action. Based on Sartre and Lukács, we can argue that there is a dialectic of work and communication. Communication is based on work because it is productive. It is the process of the production of sociality. And work is communicative because it has a social character.
- Sartre stresses that social relations and therefore also the communication process are not binary but ternary relations where a third party mediates the relation between humans. We can add that this third party can be a human being, a group, a social system, a techno-social system, a subsystem of society, or society as a whole.
- Sartre distinguishes between the series and the group as two major forms of social relation. The first is characterised by instrumentality and separation, the second one by co-operation and community.
- In the realm of communication, Sartre gives examples for serial forms of communication and relates this form to capitalist power relations and authoritarian political power. Although he gives much more attention to capitalist than to democratic communication, the political implication of Sartre's approach is the demand to turn capitalist means of communication into what Raymond Williams terms democratic communications.
- Internet platforms enable consumers of information to become producers of information. But the emergence of social media and user-generated content platforms has not democratised the Internet and culture but created new monopolies (Facebook, Google, etc.), structures of asymmetric online attention,

voice, and visibility, as well as online individualism. Capitalist Internet platforms are not democratic communications but what Sartre characterises as series.

- Just like Lukács, Sartre sees reification and alienation operating at the level of human practices (exploitation, oppression) and consciousness (ideology).
- Although there is no explicit definition and theory of ideology in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre provides foundations of a critical concept of ideology. He stresses that ideology aims at a society that dehumanises humans. Example ideologies that he discusses include analytical reason, advertising, racism, and Stalinism. Struggles for socialism are for Sartre also struggles against an ideology and for a dialectical reason.

We live in times where we experience the extension and intensification of anti-humanism. There are new forms of nationalism, right-wing authoritarianism, and fascism that deny certain groups their humanity. Posthumanism, poststructuralism, theories of the Anthropocene, “New Materialism”, Actor Network Theory, Deep Ecology, computational social science, big data analytics, etc. are intellectual and ideological projects that decentre the importance of human practice and praxis and of the human being in society. A revival of Marxist and socialist humanism is needed today in order to show that such attacks serve a political and economic purpose in the restructuring of capitalist society. The works of Marxist-humanist thinkers such as the Sartre of *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Theodor W. Adorno, Günther Anders, Kevin Anderson, Simone de Beauvoir, Ernst Bloch, Angela Davis, Raya Dunayevskaya, Zillah Eisenstein, Barbara Epstein, Frantz Fanon, Erich Fromm, Lucien Goldmann, André Gorz, David Harvey, Max Horkheimer, C. L. R. James, Karl Korsch, Karel Kosík, Henri Lefebvre, Georg Lukács, Herbert Marcuse, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Bertell Ollmann, the Praxis Group in Yugoslavia, Sheila Rowbotham, M. N. Roy, Edward Said, Jean-Paul Sartre, Adam Schaff, Kate Soper, E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, etc. can and should inform such a project of intellectual renewal. Given that we live in a type of capitalism, where networked communication plays an important role, we need to critically understand what communication is and what its role is in capitalism. The update of Marxist-humanist theory and politics therefore also needs to be an update of critical communication theory. The works of thinkers such as Sartre can inform the development of a critical, dialectical, humanist theory of communication.

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