

# Communication & Society: A Critical Political Economy Perspective

Horst Holzer

*Translated from German into English by Christopher John Müller*

**Abstract:** This paper presents the English translations of one of Horst Holzer's works on communication and society. Holzer elaborates foundations of a critical sociology of communication(s) that studies the relationship of communication and society based on a critical political economy. He shows that such an approach relates communication and production, communication and capitalism; communication, ideology and fetishism; and situates communication in the context of social struggles for alternatives to capitalist social forms. The paper is followed by a postface in which Christian Fuchs contemplates why Holzer's approach has been largely "forgotten" in the German social sciences and media and communication studies, in turn stressing the continued relevance of Holzer's theory today.

**Keywords:** Horst Holzer, Communication, Society, Theory, Marx, Marxism, Critique of Political Economy

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## 1. Foundations of Marxist Communication Studies

Historical materialism, to be understood as a theoretically and empirically oriented approach to scientific work that emerges from a societal-practice, is governed by principles that are based on the following insight: The way in which human beings secure their means of existence at a given level of societal development, and the arrangements they make required to secure this existence, forms the material substrate of any given organisation of societal life. Here, it should be noted

that the actual life-process [Lebensprozess], the point of departure and primary process to be analysed, is not a mere theoretical assumption [Denkannahme]. The minimal requirement of scientific thought is that this point of departure is adopted. Those who contests that thinking, too, depends on food, should try to disprove this materialist thesis – which, from an idealist perspective, is also but a 'theoretical assumption' – using themselves as a subject. They would become the laughing stock of all humanity (Haug 1973, 562).

When seen as the point of departure (and target) of scientific work and as the basis of the concrete formation of all aspects and relations of societal life, the actual life-process actualises itself as a specific mode of production, which always exists as a

historically-specific entity formed by productive forces and relations of production. The mode of production – the connection between the form and quality of the societal production of the goods and services required to secure a living – is the foundation upon which all human abilities develop.

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. (Marx 1859, 263).

This makes ‘labour’ the decisive category of historical-materialist research. To be more accurate: human labour in its *societally determined form*; labour as a comprehensive process of what is in every case a concrete historical manifestation of the societal and individual mode of existence of people (Sandkühler 1972, 982-83). For the history of human labour, “the history of *industry* and the established *objective* existence of industry are the *open book of man’s essential powers*, the perceptibly existing human *psychology*” (Marx 1844, 302). This means that for historical-materialist research “[I]ndividuals producing in society – hence socially determined individual production” (Marx 1857/58, 5) – has to be the point of departure and this has also shaped historical materialism’s *conception of society*. Society, in this sense, is defined as a

specific, historically concrete system of societal relations that is shaped by principles and that humans enter. The foundational component of these societal relations is the economic system, that is, the system of the relations of production, which, in turn, corresponds to a specific developmental stage of productive forces (Eichhorn et al. 1969, 145).

The category “economic formation of society” is thus the basic concept of historical materialist research. What reveals itself in this category, and this – it must be emphatically stressed: not merely in a truncated economic sense – is that *societal production* is the decisive aspect of the totality of production, distribution, exchange and consumption. Further, as such it acts as the material basis of the formation of society as a whole. As employed here, the phrase “the economic formation of society” thus means two things at once: “the shape the core [*Kerngestalt*] of a real, developing societal system has assumed” and the “abstract image of this core as the basic notion critical theory employs when it addresses this real system” (Ritsert 1973, 35). This *idea of the core* (“core” is here to be understood as a “*concept*”) emerges from interpretations that concern 1. constitutive principles; 2. the possible developments; and 3. the prospects for an active transformation of the organization of societal life, both in general and in the specific. Ultimately, the core, the “economic formation of society”, is captured in the analysis of a given form of production. Because of this, the concept of a core provides the focal point by means of which all aspects of the referential connections that are to be theoretically established and empirically corroborated become apparent.

Thus, the core-concept “economic formation of society” allows all aspects of “a rich totality of determinations and relations” (Marx 1857/58, 100), which are at work in the real formation of the social, to be traced back onto the true *core structure* of the

*specific form of production* in question.

The notion of a core, which the category “economic formation of society” entails, allows society to be analysed as an *integral system* [*ganzheitliches System*], in its elements and structure, and with regards to the principles shaping its structure and its development. In this manner, one can recognise that society is a unified, albeit contradictory, organisation of human life with an identifiable stage of development. Society emerges as an organisation that envelops all forms and sectors of human activity by means of the reciprocal interactions that unify it and by means of the prevalent mode of production that defines it. Thus, society is to be understood as “the systematic totality of practical societal relationships that individuals enter into amongst themselves in a historically concrete process of production and life-process” (Eichhorn et al. 1969, 189).

These societal relations, which initially enter the analysis as a “historical bloc” (Gramsci), can be understood, on the one hand, as *material relations* (which are for the most parts identical with the relations of production) or, on the other hand, as *ideological relations*. Because they determine and provide the foundational relations, the relations of production and class relations must be the primary relations, which are the necessary result of a specific stage in the development of the productive forces. On this basis, one can speak of society in a scientifically grounded manner, in categories belonging to a theory of the economic formation of society. This means: society is a *material system*, in terms of general system-theory [*allgemeine Systemtheorie*]. Accordingly, the historical-materialist conception of society must include both aspects the term ‘system’ entails: the active components (the individuals, who mobilise their productive forces and create multiple societal relations), and also, the *structure* of the system (the totality of the underlying relations that takes shape and which humans enter into between and with one another). What emerges from this foundational, materialist idea, is, that „the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life” (Engels 1882–89, xv). This, however, does not mean that “the economic position is the *cause* and that it *alone* is *active* while everything else is mere passive effect, but rather that there is reciprocal action based, *in the final analysis*, on economic necessity which invariably prevails” (Engels 1894, 265).

This reiterates again, how historical materialism relates societal relations as a whole back to the relations of production, which, in turn, are grounded in a specific level of development of productive forces – these deductions make the real dialectic movement of history visible. On the one hand, history is in this sense perceived as an *objectively-determined process with objective principles* – a process that takes shape in the emergence, growth and transformation of the (economic) societal-formations that are established in the context of the reciprocal interaction between the conditions of production and the productive forces. On the other hand, history is also perceived as a process that entails objective principles that only establish themselves in the form conveyed by what humans *do in practice* – be it in the form of a more or less primordial, interaction [*Stoffwechsel*] between the human and nature, in which the human and nature as such, and consequently their societal quality, are defined, or be it in the form of a conscious class struggle and a methodologically propelled social revolution.

With regards to the image historical-materialist research has of itself, especially as a social science, and also in its relationship to its object, it must thus see its point of departure in *materially active humans* – in their material life-process, the “production of ideas” (Marx and Engels 1846, 36) and the genesis and development of the “ideo-

logical reflexes and echoes” (Ibid.) belonging to this life-process. It must deduce its findings from this process itself and explain it in doing so.

Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., that is, real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness [*das Bewusstsein*] can never be anything else than conscious being [*das bewusste Sein*], and the being of men is their actual life-process. (Ibid.)

Because it is not a linear, one-dimensional causal relation that is being propagated here, it must again be reiterated that the aim is the exposition of a connection between material and ideal production. This connection consists of a process of *mutual constitution*. This process of constitution combines two elements in a dialectic structure. 1. The fact that the interaction between the human and nature is “an eternal natural necessity which mediates ...life itself” (Marx 1867, 133); 2. the other element is described in Marx’s example of the builder:

what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realizes [*verwirklicht*] his own purpose in those materials. And this is a purpose he is conscious of, it determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it. (Ibid., 284)

With the ability of human beings to *mentally anticipate* [*ideelle Antizipation*] the result of labour – an ability which took shape in the course of the “hominization of the ape” (Engels) – the human labour-process obtains a specific dimension of *consciousness* (the human labour-process is here understood to be an *interaction between human and nature* that is undertaken *co-operatively and based on a division of labour*). The human ability to consciously plan the labour process and its outcome makes it possible that the conditions of the material production of human existence, which are found in nature, can be transformed into *artificially produced* [*gemachte*] conditions. Such a transformation, in turn, is only possible in the form of a *societal* process – a process in which the *form of society* that emerges and develops is shaped by the amalgamation [*Verschränkung*] of the human engagement with nature and the way in which humans interact amongst themselves. In this way, the human power of consciousness, and the corresponding mental anticipation of the course and outcome of production, allows the species ‘human’ to societally organize the production of its material existence because this leads to the *cumulative acquisition of societal experience*. This, in turn, is the precondition for the further, potentially unlimited, acquisition and utilization of the possibilities provided by nature [*in der Natur angelegte Möglichkeiten*]. The ability to societally organize the interaction between ‘the human and nature’ on account of the accumulation of societal experience, can thus be seen to provide a more *precise classification* of the human power of consciousness and the mental anticipation of the course and outcome of production. In order to speak of the human power of consciousness and mental anticipation in a more precise manner still, one needs to emphasize that: it is necessarily the case, that in its concrete struc-

ture, all knowledge about the interaction between ‘the human and nature’ can only develop in a mediated fashion, and this to the degree in which the possibilities provided by nature have become conscious as attributes that contribute to the determination of the aim toward which the process of interaction unfolds. One can thus state: 1. as an always already societal process of production and re-production of the material conditions of human life, the interaction between ‘the human and nature’ evidently depends on the scope and quality of the *knowledge* about possibilities provided nature; such knowledge is potentially unlimited, for it is not attained individually, but by society. It is equally evident that the scope and quality of the knowledge about the possibilities for the societal organisation of human life that nature provides depend on the scope and level of planning in which the power of consciousness is actualised in the form of *concrete knowledge* in the course of the interaction between ‘the human and nature’. The power of consciousness, and the ideal anticipation of the natural world they are distinct from, gives humans

a relative degree of independence. But this does not mean that humans can step outside of this connection to nature. Their ‘independence’, rather, exclusively consists in the ability to remodel the given natural world in line with human needs. This, in turn, is only possible if humans take account of this relationship whilst remodelling nature by adhering to the laws that organise nature. If the ideal anticipation of the result of labour is to stand up to the demands of reality – if the theoretical dimension of the labour process is to correspond to its practical dimension – then the work of establishing the connection between the human and nature, must, as a final consequence, contribute to the conscious design of the form the interaction with nature takes (Hoffmann 1974/1975. 3).

The relationship between labour and knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] addressed here – more specifically, the problem of the concrete consciousness that unfolds in the course of the development of the process of interaction between ‘the human and nature’ – can be summed up into an *ambivalent thesis*: on the one hand, the constitution of concrete consciousness cannot be assigned a *dynamic of generation of its own* that necessarily governs the development of consciousness; on the other hand, it cannot be ruled out that, in the course of human history, this constitution of concrete consciousness is subjected to an *external dynamic*, a dynamic which then determines the way this consciousness develops. This can happen because the growing sum of cumulative societal experience at some point leads to a *qualitative leap* in the way concrete consciousness unfolds; or because a point at which the *dynamisation* and *systematisation* of the societal process of experience become inevitable is reached prior to this, because experiences acquired by chance no longer suffice to make use of the possibilities provided by nature in the production of human life. The second point, especially, leads to the following plausible insight about human history: “if, in its main tendencies, the societal process in its entirety is not informed by a form of knowledge and by a praxis governed by knowledge that matches the concrete level of its historical development, this ultimately leads to the unavoidable stagnation and decay of human societal life (Holzkamp 1973, 170). If one follows this thesis to reconstruct the development of labour and knowledge as interrelated societal processes across history, one can demonstrate that *the isolation of facts* and the isolated observation of specific facts and problems are initially the only available means to attain relatively *reliable knowledge* about nature as humans encounter it. Further, the

isolation of facts is also the only means by which this knowledge can be communicated between subjects and made available to society. Thus, concrete consciousness is *limited by* the specific, because the actual way in which 'the human and nature' relate to one another can only be represented in a disjointed, particularistic manner. This limitation of concrete consciousness can be recognised the very moment the labour process itself, and especially its *societal nature*, become the object of conscious examination once a certain stage in the development of the *productive force of human labour* is reached. With an examination of this kind – but especially with the realisation that labour is itself merely another form in which the connection between the human and nature finds expression – a foundation for concrete consciousness of this *connection* itself is established: it allows for societal experience that pertains to single observational facts, but which can be converted – albeit in a methodological-systematic manner – into *scientific knowledge* that attempts to classify the single phenomenon through the *reconstruction* of the underlying *connection* (Sandkühler 1973, XLII ff.). Admittedly, when the means to acquire scientific knowledge are obtained, its necessity is of course not yet established. But in practice, the isolating, particularizing treatment of facts and problems given in experience become an obstruction the moment the *societally produced labour process that has developed* no longer allows for the disjointed accumulation of societal experience: when the societal quality of the labour process itself – in its theoretical dimension and practical efficiency – presses for the reconstruction of the correlation between single phenomena. At first, 'reconstructing the correlation' means *reconstructing the transitions* that link single phenomena into a potentially contradictory whole.

Dialectical theory establishes connections between what appears to be separate in intuition [*zwischen unmittelbar Getrenntem*] and it seeks to trace the real connections where, as a consequence, this trace has been erased. The object of dialectics is not the interior life of humans, but the internal correlation of the world in its motion. A theory is dialectical when it studies this correlation in a particular example and aims to generalise the findings (Haug 1973, 563).

If this reconstruction of the correlation between single phenomena is not to end up as a mere list of single particles of knowledge, then what is common to all single phenomena must act as the focal point both of such reconstructive activity and the nevertheless indispensable epistemological examination of the single phenomenon. This means: because *societally produced labour* is at the heart of human life and because it has been recognised as the variable that supports the connection between 'the human and nature' in all its consequences, the system of societally produced labour can and must act as the *basis* for the acquisition of methodical knowledge about the possibilities governing the development of societal life, possibilities that nature provides and which are developed in the course of human history.

With this, the *core methodological requirement* of materialist research, especially as it is practiced in the social sciences, has been established: the requirement, namely, that scientific knowledge in the strict sense – using the example of sociological research – distinguishes itself in that single observational facts pertaining to a given formation of society are understood by means of their correlation to their *structural conditions*. This requirement has profound implications for epistemology and social theory. First, one must note

that (the reconstruction of societal correlations – H. H.) is a theoretical system that aims at the conceptual, theoretical representation of reality, namely, of society in its entirety and of society as a system. The theoretical system mirrors the inner structure of the real system of society, the systematic connection of its elements ... Every empirical study invariably deals with a section, an instance, an aspect of the entire society [*Gesamtgesellschaft*]. It is impossible to conduct an empirical study of the entire society in a single study. This is the case, because the empirical reality of society as a system is reproduced as a 'theoretical system', as a conceptual-totality, as a product of thought. Already the circumstance that the empirical manifestation of society does not disclose the inner structure of the systematization that must be worked out by means of abstraction makes it impossible to account for society by empirical means (Hahn 1968, 87).

To respond to the question of what this abstraction (which is in fact a *concretion*) entails, and to show more clearly how the *scientific reconstruction* of an (economic) formation of society is conducted, it is necessary to define the *methodology* of materialist social science and materialist sociology in greater detail. Three points with considerable implications for the methodology of materialist research are to be discussed:

1. The demand that societal phenomena are related to the historically concrete formation of the relations of production and that they are related to the *core economic structure* to which these phenomena need to be seen to belong.
2. The demand that the determinants specific to the formation of given societal phenomena are established and deduced from these phenomena. The focal point of the analysis is here the directly or indirectly *mediated* connection between societal phenomena and the system of societally produced labour.
3. The demand that societal phenomena are to be exposed in their correlation to the foundational laws of a given societal correlation in a way that can lead to the sensible, methodical development of a societal praxis that is guided by scientific knowledge.

The following example can serve to illustrate the analytic-method of materialist research:

It seems to be correct to begin with the real and the concrete, with the real precondition, thus to begin, in economics, with e.g. the population, which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production. However, on closer examination this proves false. The population is an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed. These classes in turn are an empty phrase if I am not familiar with the elements on which they rest. E.g. wage labour, capital, etc. These latter in turn presuppose exchange, division of labour, prices, etc. For example, capital is nothing without wage labour, without value, money, price etc. Thus, if I were to begin with the population, this would be a chaotic conception [*Vorstellung*] of the whole, and I would then, by means of further determination, move analytically towards ever more simple concepts [*Begriff*], from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions until I had arrived at the simplest determinations. From there the journey would have to be retraced until I had finally arrived at the population

again, but this time not as the chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations. (Marx 1857/58, 100)

The methodology by means of which social scientific knowledge can be attained thus entails attention to ‘actual’, given phenomena and breaking these phenomena down into their main determinants in order to establish the internal relation of these determinants. This means, it entails developing *abstractions* and exposing how the components of these abstractions can sublimate specific *manifestations* of these abstractions in order to theoretically reconstruct the general validity of these abstractions and present what is ‘concretely’ given as a *structured totality of determinations and relations*. “The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. [...] [T]he method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is [...] the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind.” (Marx 1857/58, 101). One must thus distinguish between that which *really exists* as the given precondition the subject of the epistemological process must draw on, and the elaboration of the *concrete totality* of that which really exists in the form of “a totality of thoughts, concrete in thought” (Ibid.). Returning to the earlier example, this means that insight [*Erkenntnis*] gained from social science cannot arrive at a point at which single abstract determinants [*Bestimmungen*] are isolated through the analysis of an actually existing, and in a non-materialistic sense, ‘concrete’ population, for these abstractions to become the basis for increasingly porous abstractions. By means of continually relating these abstractions back to the “given, concrete, living whole” (Ibid.) this totality, rather, must be conceived as being concrete in the mind, as a totality in thought, because of these determinants. Taking the historical quality, the actual historical genesis of what exists into account, the methodology outlined here is also defined as a *logical-historical* or *structural-genetic* procedure. By exposing that the steps in the historical development of this real existence are part of a *pragmatically-necessary process*, this procedure seeks to establish the rank, meaning and effect of the issue being analysed within the reconstructed *system* of a societal formation (Holzkamp 1974, 33ff.).

The methodology of materialist research, which literally asks for the ‘*development of an object*’ [*Gegenstands-Entwicklung*] has been recapitulated as follows by means of the example of the critique of the political economy of bourgeois [*bürgerlich*] society:

materialist research develops its object by first breaking things down into ... what is logically speaking elementary, into what is most basic [*das Einfachste*], which is, genetically speaking, also the first element. Through this analysis, it exposes the rules – because these are pragmatically necessary – by means of which this most basic element develops into complex [*zusammengesetzte*, i.e. composite] forms. Materialist research is the successive progression from what is initially simple to the complex, from the abstract-and-general to the concrete-and-specific. When abstracted from all specific forms, the commodity form of the product of labour and labour in the form of value-producing-labour remain as the universal, basic forms of bourgeois society. What the critique of the political economy thus manages to achieve, by gradually progressing from the basic to the most complex, is a gapless extrapolation of all forms of value. From the commodity, it arrives at the labour that produces the commodity, then it turns to the simplest forms of value to develop the formal properties of money and capital. From the capital-form it arrives at the universal and ab-

stract form of capitalist labour in the form of commodity production. By its essence, this is a form of labour that produces surplus value, because the accumulation of value is the sole end toward which the capitalist employs waged labourers. From this still entirely abstract but foundational form of labour as the production of surplus value (which is common to all concrete manifestations of capitalist labour), the critique then progresses genetically until it reaches phenomena we know from our everyday reality, phenomena that fit into the empirical categories that our society lives in (Haug 1974, 186).

Because one *has comprehended* this reality in terms of the societal-structure holding it together and the historical becoming of this structure in order to arrive at everyday reality in this way, one can say that the reproduction of what really exists in thought provides a *mirror-image* of this reality; a mirror image that is to be understood as a reconstruction, in thought, of the intrinsic, constitutive, necessary universal internal and external determinants, relations and developments. Thus, this mirror image can precisely not be understood to represent a flat likeness of what really exists.

It is obvious that this mode of representation cannot be accused of attempting the same thing as photography. For

basically, dialectical materialism's theory of representation [*Wiederspiegelungstheorie*] applies the deterministic principle in its dialectic-materialist mode (whereby external causes are seen to work through the internal preconditions) to the epistemological process. Every process is determined by external, objective conditions, which are refracted by the constitutive laws shaping a given internal process. This also holds for the epistemological process...Thought is determined by its object, but the object does not determine thought directly, but by means of mediation through the activity thinking consists of (analysis, synthesis, abstraction and generalisation). This activity refashions [*umformen*] sensual data, which do not expose the essential characteristics of the object in their pure form, and leads to the reestablishment of the object in thought (Rubinstein 1968, 37).

The emphatic reiteration of the following point will further clarify this line of argument. The *constitution of the objects and subjects* that are to yield scientific knowledge, and the constitution of scientific cognitive activity itself, are bound to the *socially organised interaction between 'the human and nature'* and are bound to the development of the correlation of labour and knowledge in a historical process.

We all act and think within a world that is materially determined. But all assertions about this material configuration of nature [*Naturzusammenhang*], which also forms the basis of history, are contingent on a historical process of constitution in which humans attempt to release themselves from this natural configuration. I cannot imagine a form of knowledge that is not mediated by objects that were made by humans. A materialist dialectic, and the knowledge based on this dialectic, cannot abstract from these objects that are determined by the constitutive-interrelation [*Konstitutionszusammenhang*] of social praxis, as little as it can abstract from the material character of the world (Negt 1969, 127-128).

The thesis of the *materiality of the world* does not imply, therefore, that the historical character of knowledge is questioned, or that knowledge is not seen as contingent on

the societal context [*Zusammenhang*], which is in equal measures constitutive of the human appropriation of nature and the ideal reconstruction and practical manipulation of natural and societal processes. Quite the opposite: only the *amalgamation* of the thesis of the *materiality of the world* with the theoretically constituted argument outlining *the societal genesis and determination of human knowledge* clarifies the axiom that “[t]he standpoint of life, of practice, should be first and fundamental in the theory of knowledge” (Lenin 1972, 161). This – as opposed to any positivistic-representational conception of representation – can only mean that when pursuing historical-materialist lines of argument, one must always be aware of the *societally conditioned* relations of humans to nature, of the *historical* process of the transformation of nature by humans, and the *historical* character of knowledge and of scientific categories, concepts and terms, the terms ‘nature’ and ‘matter’ included.

As a form of matter as it exists for humans, nature is no longer merely matter ‘as such’, but matter ‘for us’. It is always an element of the interaction with nature that takes the form of individual-societal labour. It only makes sense to speak of matter in terms of nature for humans as beings that reproduce themselves through labour. The categories of the knowledge of nature are functions of historical, societal labour on and in nature; they are historical and societal categories, which do not belong to ‘nature itself’ (Sandkühler 1972, 986).

This must have repercussions for the *truth-claims* of materialist science: scientific knowledge in terms of historical materialism is not *objectively true* because a given, non-subjective substance [*Materie*] appears in the form of true assertions and is fixed in a static, unchangeable image that stands apart from the constitutive societal context; objective truth, rather, consists in the fact that, *for us*, this non-subjective substance is only ever given through *a societal process of constitution* – this means, it is only ever given in the medium of language and action, argumentation and communication. In a medium, therefore, that is itself not an objective image of rigidly operative laws, but one that must assume a socially determined form. This is true for *knowledge of nature* as much as it is true for the *knowledge of society*. In both cases, it is inevitable that:

truth cannot [...] be established by means of a theory that presumes truth to reside in an ontological given. It can only be established by means of a theory that responds to the demand to substantiate its claim within the medium in which truth is important not only as an epistemological, but also a vital interest: in the medium of language, action and praxis (Leist 1973, 607).

The discussion up to here can be summed up in the following propositions; propositions, which cannot be adequately assessed without the detailed elucidation that was provided above:

1. Societal life only exists as the totality of societal relations which individuals enter and are part of. The structure of these relations turns societal life into a *societal-formation* and it gives the interaction between ‘the human and nature’ a *societal form*.
2. Within the totality of societal relations, the relations of production – and in these the shape the *economic core* assumes – function as the determinants shaping the process of formation; the contradictory *unity* [*Einheit*] of societal formations emerges from the dialectic of the relations of production and the productive forces

that underpin it, a dialectic which itself continuously produces the elements that propel it on.

3. By their very nature, individual subjects of a societal formation and observable facts relating to it are embodiments of the *ensemble* of societal relations. In this sense, they are specific representatives of the given societal formation.
4. As *integral* parts of the ensemble of societal relations, the individual subjects of this societal formation and the observable facts relating to it are linked by *constitutive, pragmatically necessary connections*. These, in turn, are based on the central patterns of development and motion of a given economic societal formation and its core [*Kerngestalt*].

Within the framework thus established, ‘*societal communication*’ becomes an essential aspect of historical materialist research because it represents a system of underlying societal principles [*Gesetzmässigkeiten*] that not only have important organising functions for the formation of society in its entirety and in its parts, but also have *constitutive functions*. Two reciprocally related aspects of ‘societal communication’, which are *bound together dialectically*, must be analysed here: on the one hand, the role it plays in the process of *mastering nature* by means of human cooperation needs to be analysed; on the other hand, the role it plays in the process of *societal and interpersonal debate and communication*. Both processes need to be viewed as special sides of the constitutive-correlation of society that develops historically. This means, that the societal labour process as the primary sector of societal life and the genesis, quality and function of communication are functionally and genetically inter-related. This has the following implications for a materialist analysis of societal communication:

the communication of individuals can only be explained from within societal relations, if these individuals are 1. presented as social beings or as ensembles of social circumstances and 2. if these circumstances are grasped as social qualities, traits and determinations of individuals, qualities that are the mere result of the socially conducted engagement [*Auseinandersetzung*] with nature (Eichhorn et al. 1969, 247).

More precisely: because phenomena pertaining to communication in a sense represent *sociality* as such, they are shaped both by *immediate determinations* of a societal labour process that assumes a given form and by determinants that – in some form – have an *intermediate* relationship to this labour process. In order to develop the problematic, the following sections thus examine this interrelation in order to explain the dialectical composition [*Verschränkung*] of its general and specific aspects.

## 2. Communication and Society in Capitalism

In order to expose the key elements of materialistic research in communication, this chapter will open with a discussion of the connection between *labour, knowledge and communication* by means of an argument comprised of *comprehensible abstractions*. In a next step, the section asks what *concrete forms* the analysis of *capitalistic commodity production* such an abstract determination of communication leads to.

## 2.1. Work, Knowledge, Communication

The societal appropriation of the possibilities provided by nature is the precondition of the processes of reproduction and development that shape societal life as a whole. Because of this, the instruments that are used and developed during the interaction between humans and are the original and foundational *information media*. Further, as the various natural things have different meaning and importance for the existence and evolution of societal relations, they must be fixed in *linguistic expressions* to become reproducible in the mind and communicative.

(Language) develops out of the material satisfaction of needs and the necessity of societal communication; primarily, however, and this is closely related to this, it develops out of labour. Linguistic relations characterise empirical experiential-data pertaining to production; what satisfies a need leaves an imprint on the brain and receives a name later on. Linguistic classifications necessarily correspond to a certain level of the production process. Language is a medium that helps facilitate [*ein Hilfsmittel*] the material reproduction of life (Erckenbrecht 1973, 146-147).

This means that all natural objects that are enveloped by human praxis attain a specific societal significance and turn into communicative signs, which go on to form the objective foundations of the process of communication. During this transformation – and this is the decisive problem ‘*communication-theory*’ isolates – these mediating signs are themselves mediated in a specific manner. The problem is to be located here, because it is in this dialectical amalgamation of labour, knowledge and communication that the interaction between ‘humans and nature’ becomes visible as an action that has a communicative and co-operative quality. It is in the performance of this action that humans emerge as societal beings, whose progressive societalisation leads to – and shapes – the appropriation of nature (Leithäuser 1965, 148-149).

Human objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*], as it takes shape in an engagement with nature, is always already mediated by an intersubjective objectivity, by the engagement of humans with humans: speaking and thinking are societal activities. As such, they are the mark of objective relations in which human subjects no longer apprehend one another as nature but as intentionally acting beings. It is through this apprehension that they posit themselves as societal beings (Leist 1973, 590).

The perspective materialistic research opens on communication *hinges* on the constitutive role communication plays in the formation and development of *sociality* (communication is here of course also bound up with labour- and epistemological processes). “We must bear in mind [...] that man's relation to himself only becomes for him *objective* and *actual* through his relation to the other man” (Marx 1844, 278).

To allow for a better comprehension of this *key element* of a materialistic definition of communication, the genesis and function of communication in the context of *socially organised material life* will be described in detail. The question if, and in what form, communicative activities can also be detected in the realm of non-human organisms must be our point of departure, and the role of these activities in sustaining the life of these organisms must be established. The following three pointers can provide a general answer: 1. The realm of non-human organisms is marked by the formation of specific corporeal systems – in higher animals also psycho-corporeal

*systems* – that are to ensure that these organisms attain an appropriate, i.e., *life-sustaining orientation* in the environment they inhabit. 2. These so-called *receptor-systems*, primarily enable the formation of *reciprocal relations between organisms*, and as such these relations are *communicative*. 3. These communicative activities contribute to the *orientation* of organisms, and orientation is an activity that serves to increase their *survival chances*. The survival chance of a given organism does not only increase because of a *general* correlation between the organism and demands its environment places upon its orientation; the chance also and especially increases because of a specific correspondence between this organism and the specific *communicative-demands* its environment places upon it. This means, in summary:

the sensual organs do not merely comprise of some chance properties that, amongst many other things, also allow them to apprehend other organisms. Rather, the evolution of sensual organs in the course of natural history is from the very outset directed toward the adequate communicative reception of other organisms (Holzkamp 1973, 77-78).

In contrast to development of non-human organisms in natural history, which exclusively pertains to *survival* in a *certain environment*, the societal-historical motion of humans is founded in *societally organized labour*.

Societal work is a human activity that creates objects [*vergegenständlichende Arbeit*], an activity, during which the environment is changed in response to human interests and needs through a planned intervention. These interests and needs evolve ever further in the course of the societal development that is effected by labour. The process of exteriorisation the human undertakes through labour that creates objects also entails the internalisation of the objects that result from societal labour, an internalisation that unfolds by means of individual appropriation of these objects. This intersection of reification and appropriation which leads to the historical preservation, transmission and cumulative valorisation of societal experience is the basis of societal-historical progress (Ibid., 105).

As already indicated above, the defining aspect of this societal process of labour is the *anticipation* of the result of labour *in thought* and that the production and use of tools respond to this anticipated outcome. Put otherwise: in the *relationship* between *aim* (outcome) and *means* (tool) that the process of societal labour *necessarily* entails, the use of an object as a tool is not a mere product of the *current* use to which the tool is being put – as is the case in the highest animal species – above all, it relates tool *production* to a *potential, generalised* use (not bound to a given situation). Viewed historically, this means that during the transition from the highest forms of animal organisms – the pongids – to the hominids via the subhuman hominids, *the production of tools for a more general use* prevails over tool use that is merely bound to a given situation. With this, the character [*Natur*] of the subhuman hominids develops into the societal character of human beings. As the ‘human’ level of the societal production of tools is reached, the world of humans for the most part consists of *products of human labour*, of products, in which specific generalised aims, possible uses and *use-values* have assumed the form of an object.

As manifest elements of the world [*Welttatbestände*], use-values in the form of objects distinguish themselves from other given entities on the basis that here general human aims attain an object based sensual form. Thus, *use-values* in the form of objects are 'meaningful' for human orientation because the 'meaning' they embody is realised by human labour (Holzkamp 1973, 118).

In this sense, the societal labour process that turns human needs and abilities into 'meaningful' objects and the tangible product of labour that emerges through the establishment of a connection between *the factual meaning of objects* [*sachliche Gegenstandsbedeutungen*] are the distinguishing marks of 'human' life. The recognition of this dimension of meaning inherent to the process and outcome of labour, is thus the decisive aspect of *human orientation*. As a process that primarily entails the senses, it involves the appropriate perception of the meaning of objects that are present to the senses. Such perception of object-related meaning – or, more precisely, of objectively-meaningful elements of the world [*Welttatbeständen*] – is thus one of the necessary pre-conditions for the existence of the material production and reproduction of societal life. This has the following two implications: on the one hand, it gestures toward the ability to *conceive of generality*, i.e., of the general use-value that assumes objective form in the labour process, a use-value that is not bound to a specific situation; on the other hand, this means that single object-related meanings – which take shape as the societal process of production develops and the general aims that determine it become entwined – condense into *structures-of-meaning*. The second point, especially, forcefully raises a point, which was left aside whilst the problematic of the *factual* meaning of objects was being introduced, namely: *the connection between factual and personal meanings of objects*; or, when seen on the level of epistemological and communication-processes: the relation between the perception of objects in the narrow sense and *interpersonal perception and cognition* [*interpersonale Wahrnehmung*].

This reiterates, as already outlined, that the process of societal labour comprises of two elements: the interaction with nature, which, in turn, is always already mediated by the *relations* that humans form amongst each other. It is this mediation by interpersonal relationships within which (in the narrow and broad sense) production unfolds that establishes the meanings of objects as societal meanings, whilst simultaneously embedding them into the context of *personal* meanings that designate subjects and can be perceived in objects. This context is primarily established because societal labour takes place as *collaboration*, as *co-operation*, as a communal production of *use values in the form of objects* [*Gebrauchswert-Vergegenständlichungen*]. The thesis that societal labour forms the basis of any form of organisation of societal life can thus be further specified: *the actual and potential structures of co-operation that turn into objects (as a product of labour)* are the vehicle by means of which the material historical process unfolds. As such, these structures of co-operation are the *rudimentary-form* of the relations of production that connect working humans to each other in their relation to nature and thus form the constitutive- (and communicative-) connection between the human and nature and also the interaction between the two.

The development of hominids and the degree to which it enters the 'human' stage, and, correspondingly, the degree to which the environment is shaped by the products of labour that creates objects (which includes the perceptual recognition of the meanings these objects have attained) also makes the activities and associated constitutions of other human beings objectively meaning-

ful. That is to say, the activities of other human beings form a polar, indissoluble, real connection to the meaning of objects: Once the meaning of things makes it possible to perceive that the products of labour embody general human aims that are to be realised through human activity (aims that respond to the objective requirements necessary to sustain a given form of societal life), then the personal meaning things attain allow one to recognise that the other person is determined by the general aims that are objectified or need to be objectified in order to sustain societal life (this determination happens by means of activities that are related to the generation and use of products of labour and the dispositions these activities give rise to). (Holzkamp 1973, 141).

*Interpersonal relation* – i.e., perception, communication, activity – is thus from the outset not merely a relation between two human beings, it rather represents a *general societal relation*, in which the factual and personal meanings of things form a *referential-context* that connects humans and things, things and humans, relations between humans and relations between things, relations between things and relations between humans. Put concisely and succinctly, this means nothing other than: humans *produce communicatively* and *communicate productively* and thereby they create the unity of their relation to nature and to each other (Kästle 1972, 129).

This, in turn, means that the process of productive-cooperative sustainment is necessarily contingent on *the development and emergence of symbolic-linguistic modes of interpretation and communication*; although, viewed historically, the symbolic-linguistic only develops in the course of the expansion and differentiation labour processes that produce objects (in the stage of *communicative-orientation* it only exists its germinal state in the personal and factual meanings of objects). This has special relevance, because the formation of a symbolic-linguistic dimension definitely elevates human communication to a *qualitatively new* level in comparison to the communication of subhuman hominids. For it is only with the possibility to represent reality in systems of symbols and linguistic-symbols that an intrinsic *obstacle* affecting human interaction and the *communicative-orientation* with the aid of personal and factual meanings of objects is *generally and systematically* cleared: the need for the object carrying meaning to be *present to the senses*. No such obstacle exists in symbolic communication. Its defining trait is that it allows for communication about things and humans even if these are absent. This kind of communication is an absolute *precondition* for the development of *increasingly-expansive formations* of societal production that are *stable over time*. What makes this, especially, a precondition is that it is only with the emergence of symbolic communication that the generalising and generalised conception of the properties of the external world appropriated during the labour process is fully secured, as is the systematic expansion of the human experience of reality in thought. Linguistic-symbolic communication, which must also (*and only*) be seen as the result and pre-condition of productive-cooperative sustainment, thus *has the function of organising societal labour on the basis of deliberate knowledge*. *In so doing, it also establishes the degree of sociality in the production of human life that is necessary and possible on a specific level of the material historical process*.

## 2.2. The Blindness of Commodity Production

The material historical process, observed in its (ever changing) societally *given form*, can be described on three *levels* that constitute it essentially.

Relations of personal dependence (entirely spontaneous at the outset) are the first social forms, in which human productive capacity develops only to a slight extent and at isolated points. Personal independence founded on *objective* [sachlicher] dependence is the second great form, in which a system of general social metabolism, of universal relations, of all-round needs and universal capacities is formed for the first time. Free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals and on their subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth, is the third stage. (Marx 1857/58, 158).

It is the aim of this section to portray and analyse the second level of societal development mentioned above – the level of *capitalistic commodity production*.

It is the defining feature of the societal form of *commodity production* – and it is the *basic* and not yet the capitalistic form of commodity production that is being discussed here – that the *exchange of goods* acts as the mediator of production and consumption. “That something was produced does not suffice, individual consumption relies on exchange, that is to say, only exchange can establish the physiological interaction between the human and nature proper” (Haug 1974, 107). In commodity production, which is a *necessary* but not the sufficient pre-condition for the formation of a capitalistic society, use-values are neither produced in a *deliberately organized* cooperative division of labour nor are they *methodologically* distributed following evident criteria. The commodities produced, rather, are the result of *private-labour that is independently conducted*. It is only through *the exchange* on the market that these commodities become part of a visible societal context.

Objects of utility become commodities only because they are the products of the labour of private individuals who work independently of each other. The sum total of the labour of all these private individuals forms the aggregate labour of society. Since the producers do not come into social contact until they exchange the products of their labour, the specific social characteristics of their private labours appear only within this exchange. In other words, the labour of the private individual manifests itself as an element of the total labour of society only through the relations which the act of exchange establishes between the products, and, through their mediation, between the producers. (Marx 1867, 165)

As the societally decisive *form of intercourse* shaping commodity production, the process of exchange demands the *general quantitative comparability* of the goods that are to be traded, a comparability that cannot be achieved with objectified use values, because these cannot be equated to one another in an *abstract-quantitative* manner. It is the *exchange value*, rather, the value of goods on the market, that provides the measure by which goods are equated. This value is qualified by the average amount of labour it takes to produce a given commodity within a society. As such, it represents an *abstract-quantitative* variable that dissolves the distinction between an empty, concrete activity and its concrete result. Once it finds recourse to this variable, exchange assumes a definite form: the value form, a form that is not only a commodity form, but also a form of praxis, the form in which a society that produces privately and on the basis of the division of labour undertakes its societal interaction.

[I]n a society that produces a) by means of a societal division of labour and b) privately and without a plan, products necessarily assume the commodity form. Consequently, the life of every individual belonging to such a society is mediated doubly by the following processes: human interaction with nature is based on a division of labour (that is to say, they assimilate natural-matter in accordance to specific human needs); they then exchange the result of this amongst each other (because production may have been based on a division of labour, but a division without a plan or societal appropriation and distribution). This society thus conducts social interaction with the result that every member of this society can to some extent command over all the means required to sustain life, over all provisions, and each member can practice its individual consumptive interaction with nature. One can thus say that the value-form [...] is not just some pragmatic form, but the basic economic form by means of which humans of a given societal formation establish their societal cohesion and, by doing so, facilitate their interaction with nature (Haug 1974, 160-161).

In fully formed *societies based on exchange*, this societal exchange of material neither happens directly nor mediated by a succession of goods that act as a kind of quasi-money, exchange is mediated by means of a *shared [allgemein]* third element: *money*. With money – which is to be understood as a logical historical consequence of the developed society based on exchange and the contradiction between use-value and exchange-value – the exchange function, which enables the quantification and comparison of everything and anything thus enabling *universal exchange*, takes on a life of its own.

Money necessarily crystallizes out of the process of exchange, in which different products of labour are in fact equated with each other, and thus converted into commodities. The historical broadening and deepening of the phenomenon of exchange develops the opposition between use-value and value which is latent in the nature of the commodity. The need to give an external expression to this opposition for the purposes of commercial intercourse produces the drive towards an independent form of value, which finds neither rest nor peace until an independent form has been achieved by the differentiation of commodities into commodities and money. (Marx 1867, 181)

It is not money that makes commodities commensurable. Quite the opposite: only because commodities are comparable by their very nature – as objectified results of human labour, as *congealed labour time* as such – it is also possible to represent them in a unit of value that is common to all. This makes money a *necessary expression* of the unit of value that is intrinsic to commodities: labour time. It is only with the full establishment of exchange facilitated by money that the societal determination of commodity producing labour is posited as a totality of societal labour [*gesellschaftliche Gesamtarbeit*]. “Labour on the basis of exchange values presupposes, precisely, that neither the labour of the individual nor his product are directly general; that the product attains this form only by passing through an objective mediation, by means of a form of money distinct from itself” (Marx 1857/58, 172).

In a society that produces privately and on the basis of the division of labour and in which commodities are distributed neither in a planned manner nor following the collective will of those who are part of production, but instead following the quasi natural

law of the market, the exchange value commodities assume appear to be *tangible traits* and the unit by which they are exchanged appears to be an intrinsic quality of the commodities themselves.

If commodities could speak, they would say this: our use-value may interest men, but it does not belong to us as objects. What does belong to us as objects, however, is our value. Our own intercourse as commodities proves it. We relate to each other merely as exchange-values. (Marx 1867, 176-177).

But this *illusory* concreteness of the exchange value does not actually manifest itself in the natural form of commodities [*Naturalform der Waren*], and it cannot do so, because exchange value is *actually a societal relation that is factually integrated by material objects*. But the illusory concreteness of the exchange value that seems manifest in objects successfully suggest that it is the exchange value that determines the exchange and movement of commodities. As such, this illusory concreteness creates the impression that societal processes are detached from the subjects that maintain it and it creates the *illusion that the societal relations mediating exchange are relations between things*. This illusory concreteness is addressed by the concept of *commodity fetishism*.

Whence, then, arises the enigmatic character of the product of labour, as soon as it assumes the form of a commodity? Clearly, it arises from this form itself. The equality of the kinds of human labour takes on a physical form in the equal objectivity of the products of labour as values; the measure of the expenditure of human labour-power by its duration takes on the form of the magnitude of the value of the products of labour; and finally the relationships between the producers, within which the social characteristics of their labours are manifested, take on the form of a social relation between the products of labour. The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. [...] It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. (Marx 1867, 164-165)

Under such conditions, the production and distribution of products seems to happen autonomously and independently of the aims of individuals; societal motion seems to assert itself '*behind the back*' of the producers and takes place as if it were an unswayable force that could be equated to *natural law*.

It has already been established, that the abstract, objectified [*versachlicht*] basic societal condition of commodity exchange is most apparent in the phenomenon of money – money is the purest manifestation of commodity fetishism. The mystery of *money-fetishism* is thus not only the most starkly visible, but also the most blinding manifestation of the mystery of commodity fetishism. In money, the *real sociality* of the producers that provides the basis of societal production and distribution process appears in the form of a *bare abstraction*.

Money [...] directly and simultaneously becomes the *real community* [*Gemeinwesen*], since it is the general substance of survival for all, and at the same time the social product of all. But as we have seen, in money the community [*Gemeinwesen*] is at the same time a mere abstraction, a mere external, accidental thing for the individual, and at the same time merely a means for his satisfaction as an isolated individual. (Marx 1857/58, 225-226).

Commodity production, as noted above, is a necessary but not sufficient trait of *capitalist mode of production*.

Capitalist production is not merely the production of commodities, it is, by its very essence, the production of surplus-value. The worker produces not for himself, but for capital. It is no longer sufficient, therefore, for him simply to produce. He must produce surplus-value. (Marx 1867, 664).

Money here no longer merely features as the universal medium of exchange, but as '*capital*' that seems to be the source of societal motion by becoming a '*value that valorises itself*' [*sich selbst verwertender Wert*].

The relation between the value preposited to production and the value which results from it [...] constitutes the all-embracing and decisive factor in the whole process of capitalist production. [...] [I]n capital the independent existence of value is raised to a higher power than in money. (Marx 1861-3, 318).

Because value takes on a life of its own, and because *the surplus value created* by the wage labourer, who is its direct producer and the actual productive force, is swallowed up by this process, the productive force of labour in society now appears as if it were intrinsic to capital. Because in capitalistic society the productive force of society is based on the buying and selling of *labour power as a commodity*, the worker is here tied into the factual relations of commodities.

[T]he sale and purchase of *labour-power* [...] displays to us the capitalist and the worker only as the buyer and seller of commodities. What distinguishes the worker from the vendors of other commodities is only the specific nature, the specific use-value, of the commodity he sells. But the particular use-value of a commodity does not affect the economic form of the transaction; it does not alter the fact that the purchaser represents money, and the vendor a commodity. (Marx 1863-5, 1002).

The commodity labour power may thus occupy a special position in terms of its *use-value* – it is the only commodity that *produces value*; but in terms of its *exchange-value*, labour power is basically commensurate with all other commodities and can be *abstractly quantified by money*. Wage labourers must offer themselves as commodities on the labour market. The capitalist is interested in the use-value of labour power, in its ability to generate value and surplus value, whereas the wage labourers selling their labour power can only demand the *exchange-value* of this commodity: they are refunded the costs the *(re-)production of their labour power* incurs. By selling their labour power to the capitalist, wage labourers necessarily admit that, from a theoretical perspective focused on prices, the price their labour power can achieve as commodity is aligned to the costs of the *(re)production of their labour power*; it is not aligned to the value of the commodity their labour helps produce. Thus, to ensure

that capital actually creates value, the value of this commodity must always be greater than the value of the price paid for the labour power that produces it. In the course of this exchange, labourers must cede such a degree of autonomy toward their own labour that one can say that “capitalists use labourers toward their own ends” (Holzkamp 1973, 208). Alongside the development of capitalism from manufacture to industrial production and the separation of physical and intellectual labour, which becomes a concrete material reality and trait of capital in machinery and the organisation of the factory, this *subsumption of the worker* by the process of turning capital into value becomes *all-encompassing*.

Every kind of capitalist production, in so far as it is not only a labour process but also capital's process of valorization, has this in common, but it is not the worker who employs the conditions of his work, but rather the reverse, the conditions of work employ the worker. However, it is only with the coming of machinery that this inversion first acquires a technical and palpable reality. Owing to its conversion into an automaton, the instrument of labour confronts the worker during the labour process in the shape of capital, dead labour, which dominates and soaks up living labour-power. The separation of the intellectual faculties of the production process from manual labour, and the transformation of those faculties into powers exercised by capital over labour, is, as we have already shown, finally completed by large-scale industry erected on the foundation of machinery. The special skill of each individual machine-operator, who has now been deprived of all significance, vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity in the face of the science, the gigantic natural forces, and the mass of social labour embodied in the system of machinery (Marx 1867, 548-549).

The full extent to which labourers are subordinate to capital by selling their labour power can only be recognized if *cooperation* is taken into account. The extent to which *major capitalist industry* establishes itself, and the multifaceted interdependencies generated by *machines as means of labour* this generates, determines how cooperation, as the most basic trait of any societal organisation of life, shapes society as a whole. With the emergence of a machine-mediated structure of cooperation, and the rapid growth of productive power that is bound to this, capital attains a particular power to control labour: if the *command of capital* over labour initially presents itself as a *formal subsumption* of the wage labourer – wage labourers do not work for themselves but for the capitalist and thus under the capitalist's command – then the cooperation of many wage labourers turns this formal subsumption by the command of capital into *the absolute condition* of the production process. And this results in *the real* subsumption of labour by capital. “That a capitalist should command in the field of production is now as indispensable as that a general should command on the field of battle” (Marx 1967, 448).

What matters here is that cooperation, in the form it attains in capitalism, is not the product of a consciously planned, collective activity of those who directly cooperate – in fact, the wage labourers are necessarily excluded from any theoretical and practical agency in this cooperation. For cooperation, in the form it attains in capitalism, is a mere *effect of capital* and is simultaneously also means *that one is applied by capital*; the division of labour that connects wage labourers is imposed from the outside, it is mediated by *capital*. Wage labourers may be part of direct cooperative relation-

ships on diverse levels – from detailed activities and sub-operations all the way up to comprehensive structures of cooperation.

But, because of the wage labourers' exclusion from the actual planning of the productive process, a 'third' element and 'common cause' that could mediate the free cooperation of those who actually produce is missing; a common cause, by means of which every individual contribution attains a tangible meaning with a social dimension. Thus, workers are not only personally detached and in the dark about the societal role they perform, but they are also isolated from every other worker (Holzkamp 1973, 210).

Because capitalistic conditions necessarily lead to the *exclusion of wage labourers* from the conscious and collaborative planning of their cooperative activities, the contribution these labourers factually make to the sustainment and flourishing of society cannot be the conscious aim that motivates their labour. This only leaves the *wage* as the *subjective aim* that the individual can attribute to their and the *individual consumption* this enables.

[T]he product of his activity is not the object of his activity. What he produces for himself is not the silk that he weaves, not the gold that he draws from the mine, not the palace that he builds. What he produces for himself is *wages*, and silk, gold, palace resolve themselves for him into a definite quantity of the means of subsistence [...] The twelve hours' labour, on the other hand, has no meaning for him as weaving, spinning, drilling, etc., but as earnings, which bring him to the table, to the public house, into bed. (Marx and Engels 1849, 202-203)

This reiterates again that in societal labour in the form it takes under capitalistic conditions, the specifically 'human' *unity of collaborative societal production as an activity guided by knowledge and individual consumption can only be realised* in a disjointed and contradictory manner. It is realised as a process in which those who support and maintain the connection [between production and consumption] necessarily remain *blind* toward this, until the *wage and commodity fetish* that regulates this connection is broken in thought and action. The *nascent state* of such knowledge and action is the realisation that under conditions created by capitalist modes of production societal cohesion is only ever retroactively established, established behind the back of those who are immediately involved in producing it and who experience production as a blind, mechanical necessity, as an alien, tangible power, but that despite this, this cohesion is nevertheless the solely achieved because of their *own activities* (Haug 1974, 164).

To sum up:

The very necessity of first transforming individual products or activities into *exchange value*, into *money*, so that they obtain and demonstrate their social *power* in this *objective [sachlichen]* form, proves two things: 1. That individuals now produce only for society and in society; 2. that production is not directly social, is not 'the offspring of association', which distributes labour internally. Individuals are subsumed under social production; social production exists outside them as their fate; but social production is not subsumed under individuals, manageable by them as their common wealth. (Marx 1857/58, 158)

Under the conditions of capitalistic modes of production (and the antagonism between wage labour and capital this entails), this circumstance, which applies to commodity production in general, takes on a specific form that reveals itself in an *exemplary manner in the situation wage labourers find themselves in:*

In the professional realm, the part of life in which wage labourer makes an objectively useful and valuable contribution to society with his or her work, the wage labourer does not belong to him or herself, but is subject to the command of the capitalist. As a consequence, what the wage labourer produces cannot be the personal aim of his or her activity. Outside of work, the part of life in which the wage labourer seemingly belongs to him or herself, the wage labourer cannot perform socially meaningful activities. He or she can... only commandeer their own individual consumption. The actual 'human' unity between collaborative societal production and individual consumption has thus been severed by force...In the time the wage labourer spends as a 'professional', he or she cannot be 'a private individual', because the wage labourer does not belong to him or herself. In the time the wage labourer is a private individual, when the back is turned on professional matters that have no personal meaning, life's possibilities can necessarily only be sought to be realised outside of the productive activity – and, as a matter of course, the demands toward life can never be satisfied in the societal lack of perspective a 'private' existence affords (Holzkamp 1973, 249).

The profound consequences of capitalistic sociality are at first not only hidden from the wage labourer's consciousness (until this condition can be recognized and changed on the basis of scientific knowledge), the *fetish-character of commodity and wage* that the capitalist mode of production establishes also tends to counteract any attempt to examine the laws governing this mode of production. Through the fetish-character of commodity and wage, *things assume a personal and tangible meaning* and this context makes it exceptionally difficult to theoretically and pragmatically see through the societal system to reach its nerve: *the production of surplus value*. This is especially difficult for those who *are immediately involved in producing this surplus value* (in a certain sense this includes everyone), for those who are *themselves commodities* as workers and are thus immediately exposed to the consequences of the existence of commodities and commodity fetishism.

The manifestation of this fetish-character of wage and commodities in the tangible and personal meaning of objects, that shape the knowledge and action of the immediate producers can be specifically described by means of a few requirements that act as a *basic qualification for participation in capitalist sociality*. The qualifications consist of 1. a specific *consciousness for price and value*; 2. a specific *ideology of ownership and property*; 3. a specific *attitude toward achievement, competition and merit*; 4. *sympathy* as a specific criterion that regulates interpersonal relationships; 5. a specific *interpretation* of the connection (or rather assumed opposition) *between privacy and sociality*.

1. Under the conditions a capitalistic mode of production creates, the consciousness of the immediate producers sees in the *factual meaning of things commodities and traits of commodities*. Because the societal nature of value and price cannot be perceived, they are taken to be immediate *natural properties* that objects are invested with, properties which belong to the material properties of these objects,

and which even appear to have a special significance in relation to the objects other natural properties. The pure form of the *reification of the value* of commodities, a process through which value appears to be a trait of commodities that has a tangible quality, manifests itself in *money*. The money form is the abstract embodiment of an undefined number of completely incompatible possibilities of exchanging objects of utility. This has the following consequence: because it almost exclusively operates on the basis of knowledge and insight that is established and oriented by the senses and because it remains transfixed by a narrow awareness of facts and ‘details’, average everyday consciousness [*Alltagsbewusstsein*] *does not apprehend* the intrinsic *discrepancy between the use value and the exchange value* of commodities and the societal relation that this discrepancy establishes and reflects. Unscientific everyday consciousness that is not illuminated by knowledge can only apprehends this *societal relation as a relation of things*.

2. The form of consciousness that emerges from the fetish-character of commodity and money inevitably sees the *value* things ‘*have*’ and *command* (as measured in money and thus by an external attribute) as a *quasi-natural* property and as a *personal meaning* that belongs to subjects in reality. This property appears as the decisive variable that colours personal *perception* and is also *the* regulator of interpersonal relationships and social hierarchy. Money again exemplifies this especially well:

That which is for me through the medium of *money* – that for which I can pay (i.e., which money can buy) – that am *I myself*, the possessor of the money. The extent of the power of money is the extent of my power. Money’s properties are my – the possessor’s – properties and essential powers. Thus, what I *am* and *am capable of* is by no means determined by my individuality. [...] I, according to my individual characteristics, am *lame*, but money furnishes me with twenty-four feet. [...] Do not I, who thanks to money am capable of *all* that the human heart longs for, possess all human capacities? [...] If *money* is the bond binding me to *human* life, binding society to me, connecting me with nature and man, is not money the bond of all *bonds*? Can it not dissolve and bind all ties? Is it not, therefore, also the universal *agent of separation*? It is the coin that really separates as well as the real binding agent – the [...] chemical power of society. (Marx 1844, 324).

3. Because, viewed from the dominant position arising from the valorisation of capital [*kapitalverwertend*], the individual labour that is expended is not measured by its ability to create *use-value*, but by its ability *translate abstract-human labour into concrete value and surplus value*; this ability to create value must have a special significance amidst the basic qualities that are required to participate in capitalistic society that were mentioned above. This finds expression, on the one hand, in the fact that capitalistic labour processes and qualifications are formally *geared towards performance*, notwithstanding the concrete use of what is to be performed, and, on the other hand, in *competitive behaviour* that is bent on ‘getting ahead’ in an individualistic-utilitarian manner, in a mechanism, therefore, that is essentially maintained by the belief that *performance* (expenditure of labour) and *remuneration* (wage) are *in a balance*. The implications of the category ‘*wage*’ explain why this belief can prevail, a belief which maintains the ideology of ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ in capitalism: as outlined earlier, the capitalist compensates the worker for the *value of their labour-power by refunding the costs incurred by the acquisi-*

*tion of the 'means necessary to sustain a living'* – (and the hours of the day the worker needs to expend for this are the required working hours). However, by paying a wage, the capitalist buys the right to use the labour of the worker longer than the time it takes for this labour to reproduce its own value. The capitalist buys the right to demand the *surplus labour* that is the foundation of *surplus value*. The capitalist pays for the *labour-power*, but not for the '*labour*' itself. This, as outlined above, has far-reaching consequences:

On the surface of bourgeois society the worker's wage appears as the price of labour, as a certain quantity of money that is paid for a certain quantity of labour. Thus people speak of the value of labour, and call its expression in money its necessary or natural price. (Marx 1867, 675)

The wage-form thus extinguishes every trace of the division of the working day into necessary labour and surplus labour, into paid labour and unpaid labour. All labour appears as paid labour. [...] We must therefore understand the decisive importance of the transformation of value and price of labour-power into the form of wages, or into the value and price of labour itself. All the notions of justice held by both the worker and the capitalist, all the mystifications of the capitalist mode of production, all capitalism's illusions about freedom, all the apologetic tricks of vulgar economics, have as their basis the form of appearance discussed above, which makes the actual relation invisible, and indeed presents to the eye the precise opposite of that relation. (Marx 1867, 680)

4. Because the worker selling 'labour power' as a commodity is, by definition, cut off from the societal planning and conscious control of production and distribution, the domain of work cannot be experienced as meaningful in itself, but merely as the sphere in which the financial *prerequisites for individual consumption* are obtained, for *consumption* that happens privately and not as part of one's professional life. In this way, the private realm attains the suggestive power of being a sphere that lies beyond the criteria of 'performance' and 'remuneration', a sphere in which that which is '*truly human*' takes shape and can be shared together with others on the basis of *purely personal likes and dislikes*. This real illusion leads, as a direct consequence, to the *ideology* of the indissoluble opposition between the heteronomy of subjects in the *industrial world of work*, which is primarily a consequence of technology, and the autonomy of private life that enables self-determination and free association of subjects.

Whereas the individual worker, forced to bring the 'performance' from which 'remuneration' seems to stem, stands in an isolating relationship of competition to other workers, who are a potential threat to the individual's employment and subsistence, the modes of communication and interaction that prevail in private life are focused on togetherness...In private life, the primacy of the competitive element does not apply, but the connection people share on account of a socially useful task...is also missing. Private togetherness may have a tendency to combat isolation and thus includes certain elements of societal cooperation, but it cannot actualise this cooperation because of the wedge between the non-professional realm and societal production (Holzkamp 1973, 250).

5. The account of privacy that has been provided – and the fixation of private life on putatively purely personal, ‘purely human’ qualities – has the (necessarily futile) aspiration of finding satisfaction with one’s own existence through the seemingly *unmediated interrelation of isolated subjects*. Because they seem and must seem to be distinct from the *material, professional activities of these subjects*, these ‘purely human’ relationships can only be regulated by one empty criterion: *sympathy*. The criterion sympathy here represents a binding agent between subjects that view themselves as *private-individuals*. It is a criterion that merely relates to factually arbitrary, external, personal characteristics that change with fashion and as such, it can only give rise to *circular, self-referential relationships bereft of perspective*.

Under the conditions of the capitalistic mode of production, humans who work are only left with “two alternative life-situations: 1. meaningless societal production that is controlled by others under the command of capital and 2. separation from a socially useful activity, reduction of human life to individual consumption as part of a circular ‘private’ existence without wider perspective” (Holzkamp 1973, 261). If this is indeed the conclusions to be drawn from these brief reflections, then one must empathically state that this only describes one side of the context formed by the personal meaning and the meaning of objects that shape communication and interaction on the basis of an at best sporadically enlightened everyday consciousness. But even on this level of thought and practice the second side enters again and again – the *dimension* of personal meaning and the meaning of objects that is related to the *work-process and relevant to cooperation*, the dimension that in equal measures the point of departure for scientific knowledge about societal development and the emergence of a consciously organised, collaboratively planned societal praxis. It is nevertheless the case that under capitalistic conditions the fetish-character of commodity and money is the decisive determinant of the average consciousness outlined above, precisely as the *societally speaking average and ordinary* form of consciousness. It is the consciousness of “abstract personhood” (Sève 1973, 360), in which the relationship between the general-human medium of societalisation and the medium of commodity-exchange has been inverted (in terms of the relationship of *communication and sociability*): “The exchange of private property (which includes the commodity ‘labour-power’ – H.H.) is seen to be the ‘natural’ form of societal communication” (Kästle 1972, 133).

One of the consequences of this, is that the commodity itself attains a *communicative character*.

the commodity has linguistic-traits in a multiple sense: a) it expresses an equation with other products and work and thus acts as a synonym and practically establishes equivalence; b) it has a hieroglyphic, fetishlike dimension that makes commodities appear as autonomously acting things (this paradoxical reality finds expression in linguistic paradoxes); c) it has an onomasiological dimension (the price acts as the name of the commodity) (Erckenbrecht 1973, 149).

This inversion of the relation between communication in the form of commodity exchange and societal communication as such has a second consequence: Both the communicative-orientation by means of personal meaning and the meanings of things and the linguistic-symbolic communication that unfolds attain a *commodity*

*character* themselves, one that is scarcely recognised and which emerges because of special commodities – the capitalistic media. A third consequence that results from communication that is shaped by capitalism is that the communicative character of commodities and the commodity character of communication act as the basis for an *illusory synthesis of society as a whole*. This synthesis is illusory because it does not result from a consciously and collectively organised interaction with nature, but is merely an expression of a mode of production, in which the *societalisation* of working subjects only ever happens retroactively [*nachträglich*], only after work has been done, so to speak. And in line with this, it is experienced as a *quasi-natural, fateful destiny*, and not as an *artificial* [*gemachter*] and thus *changeable* social reality [*Sozialzusammenhang*].

### 2.3 The Principle of Capitalistic Societalisation

Capitalistic commodity production, and the societal conditions emerging from this, primarily and necessarily establishes itself by means of a mode of production that relies on private labour as part of a division of labour, and in which the private character is only *visibly* part of a societal context by means of commodity exchange. This *form of societalisation* is determined by private work that is undertaken independently; the societal context that necessarily prevails without the conscious control of those who produce it

is expressed in *exchange value*, by means of which alone each individual's own activity or his product becomes an activity and a product for him [...] The social character of activity, as well as the social form of the product, and the share of individuals in production here appear as something alien and objective, confronting the individuals, not as their relation to one another, but as their subordination to relations which subsist independently of them and which arise out of collisions between mutually indifferent individuals. [...] [T]heir mutual interconnection [...] here appears as something alien to them, autonomous, as a thing. (Marx 1857/58, 157)

Because individuals are [on the one hand]

not subsumed under any naturally evolved community and, on the other, are not consciously communal individuals subsuming the community under themselves, this community must also exist as an independent, external, casual thing [ein ... Sachliches] with respect to them as independent subjects. That is precisely the condition for their simultaneously being in some social connection as independent private persons. (Marx 1858, 468)

This has two *consequences*: to the producers, the connection [*Zusammenhang*] between their private work [*Privatarbeiten*] must appear to be a *thing* (money), and the common element of society must take on a *specific shape*. In this manner, *exchange value* in the form of money mediates the societal unity of production; at the same time, the conditions required for commodity production, which lie beyond the narrow horizon of the privately working subjects, are tried to be maintained by an *authority that is extrinsic* to the individual interests of producers. “This fixation of social activity, this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into a material power above us, growing out of our, control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calcu-

lations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now.” (Marx and Engels 1846, 47-48)

In fully established capitalistic commodity production, a further condition to the production of exchange takes shape, namely, the *antagonism of wage labour and capital*, exploitation and the production of surplus value. This means that the exchange of commodities (and this includes the commodity ‘labour’), the exchange of *equal* values, of equivalents, mediates the production and appropriation of surplus value only on the *surface* of society.

The exchange of equivalents, the original operation with which we started, is now turned round in such a way that there is only an apparent exchange, since, firstly, the capital which is exchanged for labour-power is itself merely a portion of the product of the labour of others which has been appropriated without an equivalent; and, secondly, this capital must not only be replaced by its producer, the worker, but replaced together with an added surplus. The relation of exchange between capitalist and labourer becomes a mere semblance belonging only to the process of circulation, it becomes a mere form, which is alien to the content of the transaction itself, and merely mystifies it. The constant sale and purchase of labour-power is the form; the content is the constant appropriation by the capitalist, without equivalent, of a portion of the labour of others which has already been objectified, and his repeated exchange of this labour for a greater quantity of the living labour of others. (Marx 1867, 729-730).

On this basis of this illusory, and *necessarily* illusory exchange of equivalence, capitalistic societal formation perpetually confirms and renews itself, for it is propelled by the *effect of the law of value*, which decrees that only equivalents, only equal commodity values can be exchanged. The *laws* governing commodity production and exchange create societal cohesion; regulated by the law of value, the production process that valorises capital continuously renews its own societal preconditions behind the back of the producers.

It is not just the objective conditions of the process of production that appear as its result. The same thing is true also of its specific social character. The social relations and therefore the social position of the agents of production in relation to each other, i.e. the relations of production, are themselves produced: they are also the constantly renewed result of the process. (Marx 1863-5, 1065).

This process seems to create so little friction that an external intervention scarcely seems necessary. But how is this reconciled with the necessary *doubling* of the capitalistic societal formation into *society and state* that was mentioned above? And how is this reconciled with the necessary *formal atomisation* of the state as a control- and administrative-apparatus that is divorced from the societal context?

The following circumstance provides that answer to these questions: in capitalism, the preservation of societal cohesion is no longer bound to the repressive force of religious and other ideologies and is also no longer bound to immediate personal relationships of dependency and subjection. Once the societal process as a whole is mediated by the circulation of commodities, and by the freedom of the wage labourers to sell their own labour and by the freedom of capitalists to appropriate surplus

value, this has the following inevitable consequence: forms of direct force and structures of personal dependence are purged *from* the economic process. Instead, the 'monopoly over physical violence' is yielded to another societal authority, one that is *distinct from* this economic process. The principal purpose of this authority – i.e., *the state* – is to guarantee, as *formal civil rights*, the intrinsic recognition of the principles that are necessary to mediate the intercourse of commodity-owners. These principles are 'equality' (all subjects exchange and as such they are related to one another in the same way) and 'freedom' (all subjects see themselves as property-owners who relinquish their property only out of their free will). As general conditions of the capitalistic societal process, the guarantee of 'freedom' and 'equality' thus means two things:

1. The creation of the material preconditions of production (the general 'infrastructure'), which is not produced by the movement of private capital that is motivated by narrow-minded interest in profit.
2. Intervention in the process of the reproduction of capital when this is 'impaired'. Intervention can take the form of action against individual capitalists or against workers (guarantee of the civil rule of law) or it can be prompted by intrinsic contradictions in the trajectory of reproduction itself (economic regulation, subsidies, and so forth) (Hirsch 1974, CXLV-CXLVI).

In other words: the state, as a societal reality, is the sphere in which the *formal and political* cohesion of capitalistic society is instituted, a cohesion established *materially* – by means of conscious planning, organisation and control of the development of productive forces – and which cannot be achieved if societalisation happens under the unconscious-anarchic dictate of capital.

The 'common interest' the institutionalisation of the state represents, consists in the guarantee of this formal cohesion...The key feature of this 'common interest' is that it develops on the foundation of a system of private interests that are relieved of any social allegiances. This formal generality [*Allgemeinheit*] and obligation is the necessary manifestation of the private nature of social aims and the non-obligation toward these aims that shape these interests. Societal needs must take the shape of an established interest in order to become the object of formal generality; they must thus be non-binding in societal terms, in order to become politically and legally binding. They must thus have the attribute of being 'moveable' across societal modes of interaction and it is by means of this that formal societal cohesion is created (Preuß 1975, 106).

Because the relationship of the capitalistic economy to the capitalistic state can evidently only be discussed by taking the relationship of the state to the societally predominant *forms of societal intercourse* (and this means: *communication and interaction*) into account, this problem will be discussed in more detail now.

*Forms of societal intercourse* here denote the specific interpersonal relationships and institutional arrangements in which the members of society are exposed to the dominant *principle of societalisation*. Capitalism's principle of societalisation consists in the *subsumption of living labour by capital's imperative to extract value*. Subjects, however, do not seek direct recourse to this principle, but via specific, *indirect* (and thus especially also 'communicative') actions, performances and contexts of actions – thus, via *forms of societal intercourse*. *Capitalistic forms of societal intercourse* are

rooted in the detachment of the immediate producers from the societal life-context. This is detached in the sense that it is only through *private actions and interests* that the immediate producers can consciously integrate themselves into this societal context:

integration into the system of societal labour takes place in the interest of being paid; integration into the sphere of consumption takes place in the interest of relaxation and in compensation for the sociality they are deprived of in the sphere of production; integration into the sphere of commodity interaction takes place with the aim of ... satisfying their own (isolated, particular – H.H.) interests (Preuß 1975, 54).

The forms of *exchange* in which subjects pursue their private interests non-violently and in mutual recognition, and by means of which they are meant to create societal cohesion, are the societally predominant forms of societal intercourse. These forms of exchange assume the *freedom* and *equality* of subjects, for they assume that individuals do not engage in this form of societal intercourse by exchanging their own *individual* properties and *concrete* necessities of life, but as subjects who exchange *equivalents*, that is equivalent commodities (which also includes the commodity 'labour').

Indeed, in so far as the commodity or labour is conceived of only as exchange value, and the relation in which the various commodities are brought into connection with one another is conceived as the exchange of these exchange values with one another, as their equation, then the individuals, the subjects between whom this process goes on, are simply and only conceived of as exchangers. As far as the formal character is concerned, there is absolutely no distinction between them, and this is the economic character, the aspect in which they stand towards one another in the exchange relation (Marx 1857/58, 241).

However, these forms of societal intercourse in the shape of exchange in a sense only represent the *necessary* condition for the functioning of capitalistic societalisation. The sufficient condition is established when *formal* and usually *compulsory* limitations are imposed on actions shaped by private interests. The way in which subjects are included in the establishment of regulative rules (and in the implementation of ways of enforcing these rules) ties subjects into a ruling administrative organisation [*Herrschaftsorganisation*] that is particular to capitalistic societalisation. These possibilities to be involved are *the civic liberties and rights of participation* that are underpinned by the principle of *legality* that is extended to the actions of the state.

Capitalistic forms of societal intercourse have a *universal* character; nobody is excluded from participating in them. The sole criterion for participation is that participants are *legal subjects*. This is one side of the legal basis these forms of societal intercourse. The other side can be found in the assumption that subjects *have command over* societal conditions by means of these forms of societal intercourse. "In the forms of societal intercourse in which everybody can freely and equally dispose of themselves and their assets, the subject has power over the condition of their own life and becomes the ruler of the societal process together with the other subjects" (Preuß 1975, 56). So much for the ideology. But in practice, these forms of societal intercourse (which are based on freedom and equality and the liberation of subjects

by means of exchange) give rise to the *decoupling of the structure of production and the structure of needs*. As they emerge, the productive forces of society are decoupled from the best possible way of satisfying the needs of all members of society and go their separate ways.

It is only the decoupling of production and the satisfaction of needs that results from commodity production that enables a relatively autonomous emergence of structures of production on the one side and structures of needs on the other. The development of the structure of production, which happens in the interest of extracting value from capital, here potentially clashes with the emergence of structures of need in an economic (turnover) and societal sense (certain needs are only insufficiently satisfied) (Neuendorff 1973, 111-112).

These forms of societal intercourse here provide the contexts that bring together the imperatives of the capitalistic process of production and the needs, especially the needs of the immediate produces – but this does *not* happen because these forms of societal intercourse bring production and needs into a reciprocal constitutive-context [*Konstitutionszusammenhang*]. Rather, these forms of societal intercourse forces

individuals to repress the perspective of a societal cohesion constituted by their needs in order to turn them into free individuals who are facilitators of a process of living, which they cannot control or comprehend. The contradiction between an assumed stake in society and the individuals' actual instrumentalisation of self (through the non-conscious subjection to the capitalistic principle of societalisation – H.H.) characterises the twofold nature of these forms of societal intercourse. Its universalising character is inextricably bound to its latent repressive function (Preuß 1975, 57).

The guarantee of the forms of societal intercourse the state extends entails both these elements. It serves to facilitate the *casual articulation of private interests* and serves as a cage that enforces the *self-instrumentalisation of subjects*. Both functions of state action here result from the demand that *relationships of exchange* and those who exchange are established and protected as *legal relationships* and *legal subjects*. But because this legal relationship can only be the formal-legal frame for the satisfaction of societal and individual needs by means of *commodity production and consumption*, and because this mode of production can only function by means of an *abstraction* of concrete aims and needs of legal subjects, the guarantee with which the state underwrites the forms of societal intercourse implies:

an enforced guarantee of a sphere of abstract universality, because it alone guarantees that societal labour is a system of private labour and does not become emancipated as conscious societal labour ...The historical particularity of this system of political rule is that it is precisely this abstract 'common interest' that enacts bourgeois class rule (Preuß 1975, 65).

For state action does not *directly* relate to *class rule*, the antagonism of wage labour and capital that capitalistic modes of production posits, this class rule is rather facilitated by the guarantee (and thus also identification with) these *forms of societal intercourse*. But also this indirect relation of state action to the capitalistic principle of societalisation (the subsumption of living labour by capital) has the consequence that the following must also be included in the formal-legal guarantee of capitalistic forms

of societal intercourse: the state needs to respond to severe shortcomings in these forms of societal intercourse, and this response is not only ever abstract, but rather often amounts to *concrete-ideological* and predominantly *material* action.

Even though capitalistic commodity production is governed by the anarchy of private interests, it nevertheless develops “universally binding patterns” (Negt and Kluge 1993, 4) in the shape the forms of societal intercourse take. It must be emphasised again that this *general-obligation* [*Allgemeinverbindlichkeit*] does not result from everyone pursuing private interests and actualising common interest thereby, but from the fact that private interests always already have a *societal* character. “The real point is not that each individual's pursuit of his private interest promotes the totality of private interests, the general interest. [...] The point is rather that private interest is itself already a socially determined interest, which can be achieved only within the conditions laid down by society and with the means provided by society; hence it is bound to the reproduction of these conditions and means. It is the interest of private persons; but its content, as well as the form and means of its realization, is given by societal conditions independent of all.” (Marx 1857/58, 156)

And it is because of this that the patterns of general obligation, societal intercourse and the articulation and organisation of *societal experience* and experience with society are interpreted as and mistaken to be “products of the collective will, as if the actual relationships, which have only been acquired retroactively, were based upon this will” (Negt and Kluge 1993, 4).

The restriction of societal intercourse between subjects (especially the aspects of *communication* and *societalisation* this entails) that results from the need to *retroactively adapt* to societal circumstances, which subjects cannot experience and develop as a planned and consciously created togetherness, has two implications. It reveals 1. that the unification of a capitalistic society *objectively does not* require a broader societal communication. “Competition and the law determining value create a centripetal tendency that holds the societal totality together, even if it isolates individuals” (Ibid., 133). 2. Through the permanent contradiction between the *sociality* of subjects (even if this is only ever retroactively established) and the limitedness of their *private existence*, it produces a fundamental *need* [*Bedürfnis*] for a *substantial, societal, ‘interactive’, ‘communicative’ connection*. As was already implied above, such desire especially emerges amongst the *immediate producers*. These find themselves in extreme isolation, not only a factual isolation because of their detachment from the possibility to consciously and collectively plan and establish the societal process of life, but also an isolation that results from the specific *temporal structures* capitalistic production and organisation entail.

Advanced capitalist commodity production knows only *one* concept of time: this determines the abstractly quantifying measure for the production of value and surplus value as an aggregate of units of time. Socially necessary time, which the manufacture of a product requires; overtime, which is done within a specific period; leisure time as the residual part of the day, which, however, is marked by behavior carried over from the domain of production – all of these concepts of time have equal status. This concept is derived from the working day familiar to every worker, [...] This time, which tears apart and fragments the real context of living, is experienced as ‘life,’ as second nature. This is probably the only level on which a worker can directly experience the inversions linked with commodity fetishism: the experience of his life as a mere succession of units of time capable of being valorized by capital, along with a

residue that cannot be valorized, or only with difficulty (Negt and Kluge 1993, 18-19).

These situational and equally temporal aspects of experience that sink into the consciousness of the immediate producers – to whatever extent – generate the need for *societal synthesis*; a need that cannot be *substantially* satisfied under the conditions of capitalistic modes of production and existence. But to prevent that the forms of societal intercourse this mode of production and existence burst apart, an *illusory synthesis* [*scheinhafte Synthese*] of society must be offered in response to this need. A response which effectively builds on the repercussions of the *familial societalisation* and *alienated labour* that are typical of capitalism has to “manufacture the appearance of a collective will, of a meaningful context that embraces the entire world, along with the illusion of participation on the part of all members of society. It is *one* of the foundations of societal discipline. Without it, neither the established order nor the protective block of inhibiting procedures could be sustained” (Negt and Kluge 1993, 56).

How and why the creation of an illusory synthesis of this kind is also and must especially be undertaken as part of the ‘*communicative*’ actions of the state will be discussed in what follows.

The discussion that follows, which will focus on a special stage in the emergence of capitalism, the current stage, and will focus on a *special* manifestation of societal communication must have the following two starting points. 1. It must build on the fact that the relationship of *economy and state* that constitutes capitalistic modes of production results from the necessity of a *state guarantee for forms of societal interaction* (and this means formal and legal, ideological and material measures to protect these forms of societal interaction). 2. It must build on the fact that these forms of societal intercourse that are guaranteed by the state must arrest the immediate producers (‘labour’ as commodity) in its *detachment* from the possibility of a deliberate and cooperatively planned and organised development of society and it must allow for an illusory satisfaction of the desire for *overarching societal synthesis* [*gesamtgesellschaftliche Synthese*].

In relation to the overarching problematic one must therefore establish how the relation of capitalistic economy and the capitalistic state finds expression in a *specific* stage of the historical emergence of capitalistic modes of production and a *specific* form of societal communication. One must also establish how this form of communication relates to the ones that actually ‘*create*’ the material process of living, and do so in capitalism also, even though capitalism for the most part forces these forms of communication to take place ‘*unconsciously*’.

### 3. Are there Alternatives to Capitalist Communications?

The analysis of communication provided so far has a major shortcoming, especially with regards to the ambition of being an experiential study [*erfahrungswissenschaftlich*]. This shortcoming results from the fact that the form and function of television and the connection of this to the conditions in which communication takes place and the demands viewers place on communication could not be developed in a sufficiently differentiated manner, neither with regards of the television programme nor the audience. At present, the research analysing the content of television and the audience that is required to develop a differentiated treatment does not exist. As such, the analysis advanced here must be understood as a (hopefully) theoretically

grounded, empirically oriented approximation to the actual societal problematic. This, in turn, has some consequences for the reflections on the politics and practices of communication that are discussed in this section. These are only partially substantiated by scientific research and must therefore be presented as conclusions that are for the most part provisional. But before these conclusions are presented, a central point of the analysis conducted so far will be revisited.

An objection could be raised against the line of argument that has been presented, namely, that it creates the impression, despite asseverations to the contrary, that the function of television and the audience's need to communicate, both of which are grounded in the societal structure, have a kind of pre-established harmony. Although the analysis sought to prevent this impression, it is worth to emphatically repeat again that the form, content and function of television and the communicative needs the audience places on its use value are as *contradictory* as the societal relations from which they originate and emerge. This also means that growing *awareness* of the contradictory nature of this relationship – and alongside this, growing *insight* into the nature of one's own needs and the way television deals with these needs – determines the audience's 'level of resistance' [*Widerborstigkeit*] and the 'manipulative power' of the medium. The contradictory *way in which* emancipatory and compensatory aspects *coincide* in the structure of the audience's needs and interests, a contradiction rooted in the class specific conditions of the audience's life, can only truly give rise to a liberating *praxis* of communication if viewers are capable of initiating "a production of experience in dealing with one's own needs" (Negt and Kluge 1993, 124) "a process of producing experience that is rooted in an engagement with their own needs" (Ibid., 216) and, in doing so, begin to *break through* the capitalistic determination of their way of life [*Lebenspraxis*]. In the television sector, this "process of producing experience that is rooted in an engagement with their own needs" must be aimed at the continual establishment of forms of communication (that help viewers to reflect on their interests and articulate their needs). To ensure that these forms of communication can be institutionalised and attain societal weight politically, it is absolutely essential that this process of production is not merely anchored within organised televisual communication but *outside* of it, that is, in the struggle for a societal life in which the material processes shaping it are determined by its immediate producers (in the broadest possible sense). Only after these decisive conditions are met, do viewers have the possibility to expose the actual anti-capitalistic *cores* that the needs and specific use values that shape their interaction with television contain. And it is through an examination of the objective and subjective constituents of their own consciousness and their own practice that viewers can *expand* their consciousness of this process by means of creative *class solidarity*, one that is directed against capitalist and monopolistic-capitalist modes of production and appropriation.

In what follows, an *alternative* to the dominant mode of televisual communication will be considered, but such a discussion cannot be focused on a *praxis* of communication, but must rather concentrate on articulating goals for a communication politics [*kommunikationspolitischen Programmatik*]. Such a cautious approach is not only adopted because such alternative television praxis has not yet been studied scientifically and only exists in a *rudimentary state* (for instance, in the form of local communication work relating to specific parts of town and conducted with the help of VCR systems). Caution with regards to such communication-praxis (as broadly or narrowly it has been established) is primarily rooted in the following circumstance: the attempt to find and organise alternatives can only be evaluated in relation to a conception of a communicative-*practice* that is founded in social theory; a conception – in the form

of a political *programme* – that thematises an alternative television praxis as part of the concrete and deliberate negation of the dominant public sphere and its manifestations and mechanisms.

Because such a programme still needs to be developed, the following reflections seek to achieve a shift in attention, specifically,

onto two crucial points: 1. Onto a new stage in capital's ability to extract value. With the aid of production-related-public-spheres [*Produktionsöffentlichkeiten*] (e.g. multimedia), this new stage circumvents traditional forms of the market-public, which at most subjected isolated human needs, interests and ideas to secondary exploitation, but which largely left the production process of labour untouched. This new stage now takes whole contexts of life as the raw material for the extraction of value. 2. Onto the formation of a proletarian public as a counter-public, which develops beneath but not in abstract negation of the middle-class public (Negt and Kluge 1974, 23-24).

The last point – i.e., that the *abstract* negation of the so called middle class public must be avoided – can only be achieved, if what was just described as the proletarian counter-public and the constitution of this public is *systematically* linked up with political practical work and with the dominant media (in the present case this means the broadcasting institutions). For here, as well as the context of society as a whole, it is true that:

[...] within bourgeois society, the society that rests on *exchange value*, there arise relations of circulation as well as of production which are so many mines to explode it. [...] [I]f we did not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic. (Marx 1857/58, 159)

The arguments presented in what follows aim to make a contribution to the “problem of linking up”, and in doing so they seek to assist the emergence of a televisual practice conducted by the workers and in the service of the workers in two senses: 1. Building on an analysis of televisual communication processes and organisations that take shape in the conditions of fully established capitalist modes of production, they seek to expose the necessity of a *fundamental* change in the dominant televisual praxis. It also seeks to translate the recognition of this necessity into *suggestions* for practical political work on and within the medium ‘television’. 2. The following discussions seek to contribute to the *further development* of an alternative televisual praxis through an engagement with the current form of the (televisual) public and its mechanisms. But the current form is *not* understood to be a pre-stage that could lead to an ‘improvement’ of this form and its mechanisms, but as a part of the connection that is concretely determined by the real-societal struggle for the assertion of the needs and interests that, with the support of working masses and their organisation, are the sole means by which societal progress can be forced and based upon (Kreimeier 1974, 218-219).

Televisual communication in the context of capitalistic mode of production and state monopoly: this means an indirect, and – at times – direct *subsumption* of a medium of societal communication by the *principle* of state-backed capitalist extraction of value. This, in turn, means: *capitalisation* facilitated by the state, or at least, the

adoption and re-orientation of the crucial needs for communication, articulation and reflection belonging to those who enable societal life with the work of their hands and minds to ensure that these needs conform to capital. This *separation* of the workers – the immediate producers – from the articulation and corresponding satisfaction of their communicative needs, a separation enforced by the reign of capital and organised by the state, reflects the class segregation in capitalistic society: it is a consequence of the *wedge* that is inevitably *driven* between the workers, especially the working classes in the narrower sense, and the possibility of developing a form of societal life that corresponds to *their* needs. Thus, it is precisely here, in *the principle of societalisation*, that a socio-political struggle for the institution and organisation of televisual communication must see its point of departure. Today this point must no longer merely be seen as a possible point of departure, but as the *necessary* point of departure from which to consciously

develop a plan for a form of societal production that can abolish the class based distinction of manual and intellectual labour, and, in doing so, to ensure that the common interest prevails over the finite interests of capital. This would lead to the possibility for a full expression of human personality in its corresponding level of societal development across all “levels” of society (Holzkamp 1973, 287).

The development and emergence of an individual and collective *emancipatory movement* [*Emanzipationsbewegung*] is the prerequisite of the *long-term* aim proposed here – to arrive at a situation in which the immediate producers consciously and collectively plan, organise and establish a form of societal production and societal life in general. Organised as a process of pragmatic *and* communicative appropriation of societal reality, this movement needs to create the conditions in which this long-term aim can be achieved. With the qualification of societal communication thus provided – it is a means by which the *world* is materially and symbolically appropriated, and in response to the need – especially of the immediate producers – of having to fight for this medium against the formative power and quality of a capitalistic ‘bourgeois’ public, the following, by now almost proverbial *principle for a politics of communication* has been deduced, especially in the context of broadcasting:

[R]adio must be transformed from a distribution apparatus into a communications apparatus. The radio could be the finest possible communications apparatus in public life, a vast system of channels. That is, it could be so, 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. Following this principle the radio should step out of the supply business and organize its listeners as suppliers. [...] Should you consider this Utopian, then I ask you to reflect on the reasons why it is Utopian. (Brecht 2000/1932, 42-43).

The development of ever newer possibilities for communication underlines that this is, technologically speaking, not a utopian demand; but that it must appear like a utopian demand in a socio-*political* sense is clear from the present analysis. At present, both the technological feasibility of organising anticapitalistic forms of communication and the socio-political difficulties that arise whilst attempting this can be vividly illustrated by means of the emergence of so called *cable-television*: on the one hand, the *technology* of cable-television opens the possibility that television networks could

break out of their (state-run capitalistic) 'supply status'; on the other hand, the *practical implementation* of cable television is threatening to lead to an at least partial perfection of the dominant way in which a public is produced (Thomas 1975, 6 ff.; Meißner 1975 12 ff.; Flottau 1975, 21 ff.).

Although it is already today being treated with some resignation and the motto: "if the thing goes wrong, democracy will have lost a battle" (Thomas 11), the issue of cable television is (once again) emphatically raising the question about *alternatives* to the currently prevailing way of organising communication in general (and televisual communication in particular). Initially, the following *general* reflections should be at the centre of finding a response to this question:

1. It is only by means of a successive '*de-capitalisation*' of networks that the change in the television sector that is suggested here can take place – a change that would see the working class, the class, which enables societal life in the first place, determine the possibilities of communication, articulation and reflection that this sector represents. Such a development, however, can neither be equated to a *voluntary cut* through the Gordian knot, nor can it happen in isolation from an *overarching* struggle against capitalism and against the form of *subjectivity* capitalism creates in the working classes.
2. The development that is gestured toward here is *successive*; it is an attempt to organise a *progressive* praxis of communication *within* networks that are shaped by capitalism. It seeks to organise an *emancipatory* praxis of communication that attains a *relative* distance to the direct influence of the capitalistic state and capitalistic economy, so it can then progress into a *revolutionary* praxis of communication. It is only during this phase that the working masses, in collaboration with those who produce communication, are in a position to appropriate the specific intellectual and technological productive forces that shape the production of communication (Weißenborn 168-169).
3. The transformation of the predominant model of televisual communication in this manner in the interest of the working class, must take both the conditions of *programme-production* and *reception* of television programmes into account. On the one side, it must refer to the contradiction that exists between the (quasi-)state mediated *dimension of exchange value* and the *effect of capitalistic bureaucratisation* that shape the production of television, and, on the other side, it must refer to the anti-capitalistic needs of the audience that form the kernel of both individual and collective emancipation.
4. Because of the extent to which the economy and the state are entwined in a fully established form of capitalism, one of the requirements to effect a change in the predominant model of communication is *spontaneous* action. By means of such actions, groups of viewers and producers of communication, preferably working together, and building on the everyday experience gained at work or during free time, must attempt to articulate the needs that can act as a basis for the development of a *practical* critique of the televisual production of the public and the overall life-context (Prokop II). In addition to this, the transformation of the currently prevalent televisual practice depends on *systematically organised* communicative interventions that centre on these spontaneous actions. These interventions must be oriented by the overarching struggle for the organisation of societal life by its immediate producers and are to be embedded in the sector of societal labour and reproduction (i.e. the 'leisure' industry) as activities of communication-*politics* and communication-*pedagogy*.

5. Because of this, the transformation of the current televisual practice must *simultaneously* be approached on the level of (primarily) anti-capitalistic 'citizen-initiatives' [*Bürgerinitiativen*] and also through trade union action and party political discussions. It must be noted that the initiatives, actions and discussions will attain an anticapitalistic or even progressive character capable of overcoming and bursting TV-communication in its capitalistic form when these see themselves, as a matter of principle, in opposition to the dominant 'bourgeois' public sphere and its forms and mechanisms.

Without the development of a proletarian public (the 'public' that is forced into existence by its immediate producers – H.H.) the manifestations of resistance that take shape also...serve to consolidate the system. If they do not advance the formation of proletarian experience, they absorb the substance of this experience. If this experience is not organised by the formation of a proletarian public, it generates the raw material that is appropriated by capital in a perpetually new processes (Negt and Kluge 1974, 71).

The points concerning the politics of communication that have been presented above are informed by this thesis. One needs to bear in mind, however, that the previous reflections deem it *pivotal* to recognise that the development and widening of a so called proletarian public is to be approached as a problem rooted in communication practices [*ein kommunikationspraktisches Problem*]. The proletarian public must here be taken into account both in its inherent *separation from* the forms and mechanisms of the established public, but also in its inevitable *correlation* to these forms and mechanisms. The upcoming problems can only be tackled if one takes this '*connection-through-separation*' [*Trennzusammenhang*] (Haug) between proletarians and the capitalistic public into account *to constitute* discussion about the politics of communication (and an anticapitalistic praxis of communication). It is only after this that 1. an appropriate estimate of the (manifest and latent, organised as well as spontaneous) anticapitalistic public that has *already been established* should be made; 2. building on this estimate, a targeted, concrete negation of the dominate forms and mechanisms of societal communication should be adopted, a negation that unfolds through the expansion of the institutional and organisational *pre-conditions* for the establishment of an anticapitalistic public; and 3. the gradual *foundation* of a growing anticapitalistic public within institutional settings, a public that is a conscious, practical expression of the *life-context* of its immediate producers.

The overarching conclusions to be drawn from the argument so far: The fight for the anticapitalistic transformation of televisual communication can and must also be developed *within* this particular sector – but this struggle can only be *decided* where the nerve of capitalist system can be struck: in the dispute over the organisation of material production. This, in turn, means that the actions and campaigns that are calling for this transformation *within* the networks must be brought into a relation with the *wider societal* push for a situation in which societal life is shaped by its immediate producers. What makes this the vital precondition, is that the majority of the viewing public will only become an active part of discussions about the *practices of communication*, if it feels that it can actually *determine* and *have a say* in the everyday reality of work and living conditions. The need to combine the transformation of (televisual) communication with the struggle of all workers against their economic and political dependence has the following consequences for those who produce communication (the journalists, technicians and administrators): they must become organised, and

this means, initially, *in trade unions*, and, in addition to this, they must join the anti-capitalistic movement of *all workers* that is to be established.

With regards to the earlier distinction between a progressive, emancipatory praxis of communication and a revolutionary one, and in view of the current social-political situation in the German Federal Republic, this means that important political organisations for the emergence of a *progressive* and *emancipatory* politics and praxis of communication are: the trade unions that make up the *DGB* (German Trade Union Confederation) as a whole, but within these, especially the Union of German Journalists (*DJU*), which belongs to the Print and Paper union, and the Union of Broadcasting, Television and Film (*RFFU*); Specific fractions of the SPD and FDP, especially the members of the Young-Socialists and Young-Democrats, must also be added here. The *DKP* (German Communist Party) must develop this progressive and emancipatory politics and praxis of communication further from a revolutionary perspective, as this party conducts a consistent anticapitalistic labour and employment policy, and as such, a politics that is consistently in the interest of the immediate producers.

Within these trade-union and party political organisations (and also in the 'nascent-forms' of such organisations) it must be the job of those who produce communication, especially the journalists, to clarify and assert that *their* interests are in solidarity with those whose physical and intellectual labour sustains the existence of societal life in the first place, and in the service of those, for whom the means of communications ought to exist (to facilitate the participation in and emergence of societal life). These organisations should especially conceive of communication *projects* and *strategies* for the politics of communication and realise these. These activities, which are preferably to be based on science, should *only* connect to the suggested and forced interests of the workers in order to stimulate and support the hidden desire for solidarity, cooperation and self-determination that these contain.

Translated into *specific* political demands related to communication, demands, which are to be taken up by the organisations named above and, to various degrees, by pressure groups of *various* intensities, accentuation and perspectives that take shape spontaneously in confrontations with the dominant forms of televisual communication:

1. The television sector must be controlled by representatives and organisations of the *working* population by means of effective rule over practical, technical, financial and staff matters. As a necessary prerequisite, the current organisational structure of networks must be *fundamentally* questioned. As part of this, the composition and competency of the *governing bodies* are to be reviewed and the *staff council* must equally be the focus of the dispute about the form and quality of in-house cooperation. The demand that at least 50 per cent of the members of the governing bodies (administrative- and broadcasting boards and *commissions*) should be from trade union organisations and employee organisations of major corporations could provide a first impulse in this direction.
2. The question about the form and quality of *in-house co-operation* must be raised in connection to the relationship between journalists, technicians and administrators, but must equally be applied to the relationship these groups have to the governing and administrative boards of the broadcasting houses and the directorship (and the commissions this entails). The organisation of *self-governing work-collectives* amongst those who produce communication could provide some first pointers for answers to these questions. This could lead to the establishment of a

committee in charge of programming and production that is carried by these collectives. As part of this, one ought to also confront the multifaceted entanglements with the capitalistic economy that currently exist, the entanglements with advertising corporations are an obvious example in this respect.

3. Because of the federal principle of the ARD [the state funded German Broadcasting House], and to ensure that matters concerning the organisational structure of the in-house cooperation within broadcasting organisations can be raised in an adequate manner and pragmatically processed, *advisory committees* are to be established at county level. These are to comprise of elected representatives of the working public and organisations belonging to it, and they must have the *right to pass bills*. These committees also ought to be responsible for the *coordination* of activities and campaigns that are to varying degrees '*unorganised*', and thus work under challenging material conditions.
4. As they unfold, the listed activities must always refer to attempts to develop an *anticapitalistic* televisual praxis that is *external* to the prevailing forms and mechanisms of communication. This praxis can be found 1. in contexts relating to socialist attempts to agitate in the context of elections, strikes, job cuts or pay negotiations; 2. in the context of targeted *local work in cities* with the use of video recorders; 3. or in the context of educational courses and seminars offered by trade unions and others. These activities must hereby not be viewed as efforts that must still be properly 'channelled'; instead, it *must* be understood that these activities represent important opportunities to actually make the discussion of a medium of communication that creates *abstract sociality concrete* by means of a content specific experience, an experience gained in the (communicative) engagement with the practical everyday needs of humans.

There is no need to go into the provisional and sketchy character of the short outline of a politics of communication provided here in any detail. The current state of the scientific and political engagement with this matter only allows for such fragmented articulation of the problematic. But in conclusion, the *central reference points* of both the scientific analysis and the political consequences deduced from this will be reiterated. What then, where the overarching concerns?

1. The argument sought to demonstrate that the television viewers, who (for the most part) belong to the class of the immediate producers of societal life, are the *co-producers* of 'television' as a medium. They are, however, 'unconscious' producers, because the *conscious* and *cooperative* organisation of communication by the *subjects* of this communication is not possible under capitalistic conditions.
2. The argument sought to demonstrate that in the course of the *practical* engagement with the organisational and material qualities of the medium, the viewers, the working population as a whole, must grasp, what this medium is as a form-specific, machinelike *expression* of the dominant societal conditions. They must also grasp why and how it acts upon and through the class specific needs of its 'unconscious' but *actual* producers, needs that arise from the structure of society.
3. The argument sought to demonstrate that the current form of televisual communication is an *integral* component of the overarching power relation. This power relation may not remain unaffected by the (*necessary*) theoretical and practical problematisation of one of the communicative pillars that support it, but it can only be transformed in *substance* under one condition. To be transformed, the decisive *principle* which organises the material process of society – the illusory self-

validation value attains when it takes the form of capital – must be *made inoperative*, and with this, the subjection of living labour that this principle entails.

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## Postface: Horst Holzer's "Communication & Society: A Critical Political Economy Perspective"

Christian Fuchs

Horst Holzer (1935-2000) contributed to establishing foundations of a Marxist theory of communication in the German-speaking world. He was the main representative of the approach of the critique of the political economy of media and communication in Germany. This approach has been "forgotten" in the German social sciences and German media and communication studies.

This "forgetfulness" has structural reasons: The study of media and communication has in the German speaking world been particularly conservative and positivist. It is ironic that in the land of Habermas, critical media and communication studies has only existed on the fringes of the academic landscape. Habermas himself also did not hold a communication studies professorship, but was a full professor of philosophy and sociology at the University of Frankfurt. Someone like Holzer, who much clearer than Habermas stood in the tradition of Karl Marx's works, faced difficulties in this exceedingly conservative environment. Holzer was a member of the German Communist Party (DKP) and one of the first victims of the professional ban against communists. The appointment committee ranked Holzer first for a professorship of aesthetics and communication at the University of Bremen in 1971. The regional government denied his appointment, which triggered the introduction of the Germany-wide introduction of the professional ban against DKP members in 1972. Although Holzer was highly qualified and prolific, as well as an excellent theorist and researcher, he never obtained a full professorship and was denied tenure at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. In the country where Marx was born and where Horkheimer and Adorno made the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research world-famous, anti-Marxist repression, ideology and biases have structurally constrained the development of Marxist communication studies.

Despite these structural constraints, Horst Holzer has created an impressive oeuvre that studies communication in capitalism (see Fuchs 2017b for a more detailed discussion). The discrimination of Marxists can and should not be forgotten. At the same time, the best we can do today is to renew the tradition of Marxian communication studies. As part of this endeavour, *tripleC* has in 2017 published the English translation of an article by Holzer under the title "The Forgotten Marxist Theory of Communication & Society" (Holzer 2017). We continue in this manner by presenting another key work by Horst Holzer that we have here published under the title "Communication & Society: A Critical Political Economy Perspective".

Christopher John Müller, who has made an excellent contribution to making forgotten approaches in the critical theory of technology and communication known by translating works of Günter Anders into English (see Müller 2016 and Anders 2017/1958; see also Fuchs 2017a for an introduction to Anders), has conducted the translation of this work by Holzer from German into English. Denise Rose Hansen has provided excellent editorial support for preparing the texts for translation in organising its bibliography and referencing.

The presented article consists of three chapters from Horst Holzer's 1975 book "Theorie des Fernsehens" (*Theory of Television*). Holzer's book is much more than a theory of television: It provides foundations of a Marxist theory of communication and

society. Marxists analyse society as a totality that is based on the dialectic of human practices and social structures and dialectics of society's various moments. When studying a semiotic phenomenon such as television, radio, the Internet, social media, newspapers, culture, literature, jokes, satire, etc., Marxists therefore take an approach that analyses culture and communication in the context of society and its contradictions, dynamics and struggles. Holzer's approach is in this respect comparable to that of Raymond Williams, whose books *Television* (Williams 2003/1974) and *Marxism and Literature* (Williams 2009/1977) are not simply books about specific forms of information and communication but also theoretical engagements with communication and culture in capitalism.

In the present work, Holzer makes clear that a historical-materialist analysis of communication situates communication in the context of the actual life-process, the mode of production, material relations, working conditions, human practices, political conditions, culture and ideologies.

A particularly important issue in this context is the question of how to think of the relationship between communication and work. Four different approaches exist for solving this question (see Fuchs 2016, Chapter 6). Economic reductionism assumes that communication and culture form a superstructure that, in the last instance, is determined by an economic base that includes work organisation and labour practices. Cultural reductionism (which e.g. can be found in many postmodern approaches) inverts the base-superstructure model and sees culture and the world of signs as society's base. It reduces the explanation of the economy to the semiotic realm. Dualist approaches (such as Habermas' theory of communicative action) view communication and work as two separate and independent realms of society. The problem of these three approaches is that they underestimate the simultaneous inter-relatedness and relative autonomy of society's moments.

The fourth approach stands in the tradition of Hegelian Marxism's dialectical philosophy. Holzer's analysis belongs to this fourth type of tradition. In dialectical philosophy, the world is dynamic, relational and contradictory. One entity can only exist in-itself (being-for-itself) by being related to another entity (being-for-another). Two related forms of existence are different and identical at the same time, which constitutes a contradiction, out of which potentials for development and differentiation emerge. For Holzer, production is the essential feature of humans and society. There is a dialectic of work and production, in which "humans *produce communicatively* and *communicate productively*". Work and production are both human production processes that presuppose and require each other and are specific forms of production. Communication is the process in which humans produce and reproduce social relations, social structures, social systems, institutions, society as a whole, and therefore sociality as such. Humans communicate based on a dialectic of structures and practices, in which communication is the mediating process. Work is not an isolated but a social activity and relation. Work therefore requires communication for its organisation. Holzer's dialectical approach to communication and work is comparable to those of Georg Lukács, Raymond Williams, and Lucien Goldmann (see Fuchs 2016, Chapter 2; Fuchs 2017c; Fuchs 2018).

Holzer makes clear in the work at hand that a Marxist theory of communication situates and analyses communication in the context of capitalism, i.e. structures and practices of capital accumulation, class relations, the exploitation of labour, domination, state power, ideology. He stresses the importance of commodity fetishism in Marxian analysis. Fetishism results in ideologies such as price consciousness, performance, competition, merit, and the appearance of the private sphere as autono-

mous from alienation and as shaped by interpersonal sympathy. Commodity fetishism as constitutive principle of capitalism also creates “the communicative character of commodities and the commodity character of communication” that form the “basis for an *illusory synthesis of society as a whole*.” A synthesis, that “is illusory because it does not result from an a consciously and collectively organised interaction with nature, but is merely an expression of a mode of production, in which the *societalisation* of working subjects only ever happens retroactively [*nachträglich*], only after work has been done, so to speak” (Holzer 2018, 384). So in capitalism, we find a dialectic of fetishism and ideological communication.

A Marxist approach also identifies and strives to inform social struggles for alternatives. Holzer shows that a Marxist theory of communication in this context takes on the role of analysing potentials for alternatives to capitalist communications. Holzer situates alternative media in the context of class and social struggles. Based on Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1993), he argues for the alternative use of television in order to constitute a proletarian public sphere. Based on Bertolt Brecht (2000/1932), he argues for television to be turned into a communications system in which viewers become producers. The goal would be the “*de-capitalisation*” of communications. Holzer stresses that it is decisive that alternative media are embedded into the praxis of progressive movements, unions and parties. Holzer’s insights are guided by Marx’s (1842, 175) categorical communication imperative that the “*primary freedom of the press lies in not being a trade*”.

Horst Holzer’s approach remains highly topical today. He shows that a critical sociology of communication analyses communication in society, communication in capitalism, potential pathways and struggles towards alternative, non-capitalist forms of communication. 43 years after the publication of the work, capitalist communication is dominated by corporations such as Apple (the world’s 9th largest transnational corporation in 2017), AT&T (#11), Samsung Electronics (#15), Verizon Communications (#18), Microsoft (#19), China Mobile (#21), Alphabet/Google (#24), Comcast (#31), Nippon Telegraph & Telephone (#37), Softbank (#38), IBM (#43), Intel (#54), Cisco Systems (#58), Walt Disney (#67), Oracle (#70), Deutsche Telekom (#77), Amazon (#83), Hon Hai Precision (#98), Telefónica (#110), Facebook (#119) (data sources: Forbes 2000 List of the World’s Biggest Public Companies for the year 2017). These global corporations operate in the areas of media technology hardware, computer software, the Internet, telecommunications, semiconductors, and digital/communication services. Specifically, they operate in the capital accumulation realms of computer hardware (Apple), semiconductors (Samsung Electronics, Intel), software (Microsoft, Oracle), communications equipment (Cisco), telecommunications (AT&T, Verizon Communications, China Mobile, Nippon Telegraph & Telephone, Softbank, Deutsche Telekom, Telefónica), electronics assemblage (Hon Hai Precision), digital and online services (Alphabet/Google, IBM, Amazon, Facebook), broadcasting (Comcast, Walt Disney).

20 out of the world’s 120 largest transnational corporations (16.7%) operate in the communications sector, which shows that capitalism to a significant degree is communicative capitalism, digital capitalism, and at the same time also finance capitalism, hyper-industrial capitalism, mobility capitalism, etc. Diverse forms of the exploitation of labour and the production and dissemination of ideology operate in and through diverse communications industries. The task of Marxist communication studies today is to analyse how digital and communicative capitalism works, what role it plays in capitalism as totality, what its contradictions look like, how they are experienced, and how struggles for alternative communications and alternative communi-

cations themselves operate. Horst Holzer's works remain an important inspiration for this task.

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## About the Authors

### *Horst Holzer*

Horst Holzer (1935-2000) was a German sociologist and communication theorist. He contributed to the formation and development of the critique of the political economy of media and communication in the German-speaking world. Holzer used Marxist theory for the analysis of the relationship between capitalism and communication. Given his pioneering intellectual role in the development of the critique of the political economy of communication in the German-speaking world, it is not an understatement to say that Horst Holzer is Germany's Dallas Smythe. Holzer lived and worked in Munich and published twenty German books. The focus of Holzer's writings was in general on communication theory, the sociology of communication, as well as on capitalism and communication. In particular, his books were about the ideology and political economy of magazines, newspapers, radio and television; public sphere theory, sociological theories, children and television, and surveillance.

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