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Abstract
This paper asks how Henri Lefebvre's humanist Marxism can contribute to the foundations of a critical theory of communication. It does so by reflecting on the role of communication in Lefebvre's books *The Production of Space* and *The Critique of Everyday Life*. Lefebvre's humanist Marxist stress on the role of human production in society is the aspect of his theory that can be most fruitfully integrated into a critical theory of communication. There are also striking parallels between Lefebvre and Raymond Williams' cultural materialism. Lefebvre also anticipated discussions of the commodification of the communicative commons.

Keywords: Henri Lefebvre, critical theory of communication, political economy, production of space, critical theory, Marxist theory, humanist Marxism

1. Introduction

This paper asks: How can Henri Lefebvre's humanist Marxism contribute to the foundations of a critical theory of communication?

Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) was a French Marxist theorist. He published 72 books (Elden, 2004, p. 4) on topics such as social space, Karl Marx, dialectical materialism, modernity, metaphilosophy, everyday life, structuralism, existentialism, urban politics, state theory, globalisation, and social struggles. He held professorships at the Universities of Strasbourg (1961-1965) and Paris X-Nanterre (1965-1973), among other positions. Some see him as philosopher, while others regard him as urban theorist, geographer, sociologist, political scientist, or historian. But, there "is only one category he would have accepted – Marxist – and all that this implies; that is, being a philosopher, sociologist, historian and foremost, politically *engagé" (*Elden & Lebas, 2003, p. xii*).*

The *Production of Space* is Lefebvre's best known and most widely read work. It was first published in French in 1974. He was both a critic of structuralism (especially Louis Althusser's version) and existentialism (especially Jean-Paul Sartre's approach). He joined the Parti communiste français (PCF) in 1928. Because of his critique of Stalinism, the PCF excluded him in 1958. Lefebvre can be considered the most important French representative of Marxist humanism. Stuart Elden (2004, p. 19) characterises Lefebvre together with Althusser and Sartre as the 20th century's central French Marxist and as a "polymath in the range of topics he discussed" (p. 4).

The majority of his works remains untranslated into English (Brenner & Elden, 2009, p. 2), which has certainly limited their reception. The critical theorist Stanley Aronowitz (2015, p. 133) argues that because of Lefebvre's radical

transdisciplinarity and the large influence of Althusserian structuralism that opposes Hegelian Marxism and Marxist humanism, for "decades Marxists, sociologists and others in the social sciences and philosophy ignored him." Also Lefebvre's works on globalisation and the state have largely been ignored (Brenner & Elden, 2009, p. 2). Lefebvre was much more than a critical theorist of space. This excess of Lefebvre always relates to space, while simultaneously transcending it. This paper contributes to the discovery of an alternative Lefebvre by asking how his works can contribute to the foundations of a critical theory of communication. It does so by reflecting on the role of communication in *The Production of Space* and *The Critique of Everyday Life*. I do not claim that Lefebvre was a communication scholar. But given that he as humanist Marxist gave attention to human's social and productive role on society, his theory may be one of the traditions within Marxism that we can take as an interesting starting point for thinking about a Marxist theory of communication.

The essay first gives a brief overview of some aspects of Marxist communication theory and its status today (section 2). It then presents an overview of Lefebvre's work (section 3) in order to introduce those interested in communication theory to his main body of works. Third, a Lefebvre's work is discussed and situated in the context of critical communication theory (section 4).

2. The History and Contemporary Status of Marxist Communication Theory

Critical communication studies' history goes back to the works of Marx and Engels. Their notion of ideology and Marx's concept of fetishism have played a role in foundations of ideology critique of mediated communication. Marx, for example, stressed the material character of communication, analyzed the role of technology – including communication technologies that he referred to as the "means of communication" – in capitalism in a dialectical manner, and anticipated the emergence of informational and digital capitalism with his analysis of the general intellect (see Fuchs, 2016b for a detailed analysis). Although Marx dialectically combined a structural analysis of capitalism with an analysis of the role of praxis, agency, and social struggles, in the history of Marxian-inspired social theory approaches emerged that are either structuralist in character (structural Marxism) or agency-based (workerism, class-struggle oriented Marxism). A third type tries to dialectically integrate structure and agency approaches.

Georg Lukács (1923/1971) tried to based on Marx combine the two approaches in his major work *History and Class Consciousness*. He stressed both aspects of class struggle and ideology as reification and reified consciousness. Recently it has been stressed that Lukács also made direct contributions to the study of language, semiotics and communication, especially in his last books (Fuchs 2016a, 2018c). Antonio Gramsci's (1971) philosophy of praxis was established at the time of Lukács' early works. His concepts of culture, organic intellectuals and hegemony have in communication theory had major influence on scholars such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall.

Lukács' notion of reification had direct influence on the development of the

Frankfurt School's notion of instrumental reason (Horkheimer, 2004). In respect to culture and communication, the concept of instrumental reason has been applied to Horkheimer and Adorno's (2002) critique of the culture industry and Marcuse's (1964) analysis of one-dimensional man that includes a critique of one-dimensional language and one-dimensional media. Horkheimer and Adorno took a more structuralist approach that was grounded in Marx's notion of exchange-value and focused on the analysis of the negative impacts of the universalisation of exchange-value on society and culture. Marcuse shared this approach, but tried to dialectically mediate it with an analysis of the role of social struggles in establishing potential alternatives to capitalism and the logic of exchange-value and the structural limits that activism faces in capitalist society.

Jürgen Habermas took the Frankfurt School's work into a new direction. He applied the notion of instrumental reason and its Lukácsian foundations to the analysis of economic and political systems that colonise the lifeworld and argued that communication was a missing element in the works of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse. Habermas certainly is the most influential critical communication theorist today. However, the Marxian origins of his works, as present in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas, 1991), were later lost and turned into a dualist critique that separates communication and domination (Fuchs, 2016a). Habermas conceives of communication as dominationless and thereby separates it in a dualist manner from structures of domination and exploitation, whereby Marx's original stress on the dialectical character of communication and technology as ambivalent forces in capitalism have been lost. Most communication scholars will today agree that Habermas is a critical communication theorist, but only a very small number will characterise him as a Marxist theorist.

Marxian analysis has also had influence on cultural studies. Stuart Hall (1980) has distinguished between the culturalist and the structuralist paradigm of cultural studies. The first is represented by the humanist Marxist works of Raymond Williams and Edward P. Thompson. The second came about by the influences that Louis Althusser's structural Marxism and the post-Marxist approach of Ernesto Laclau and Chantalle Mouffe had on the study of culture. Stuart Hall is himself a representative of the structuralist paradigm. He focused his analyses on structures of encoding, decoding, articulation and representation.

The approaches of E.P. Thompson (1963) and Raymond Williams (1977) can be characterised as humanist because they start from human experiences and human consciousness that are situated in class relations. But these are not purely agency-based approaches that fetishise the individual and social struggles. Rather, Williams and Thompson base their analysis of society and culture on a dialectic of structure and agency, as evidenced for example by Williams' concept of the structure of feelings and Thompson's notion of class experience that both operate at the two mediated levels of individual consciousness and collective consciousness as represented by organizations and institutions.

Marxist theory has a 175-year long history and has advanced a complex

multitude of approaches, categories and focuses.[1] In light of the prominence of the New Left and social movements in the aftermath of the 1968 rebellions, Marx and Marxian-inspired theory played a major role in the social sciences and humanities and in universities around the world. The rise of neoliberalism, postmodernism, and the collapse of the Soviet Union weakened the influence of Marx in the social sciences and humanities since the 1990s. But at the same time, class inequalities and the economy's crisis-proneness increased progressively, which exploded into the 2008 world economic crisis and political crises. Ever since, there has been a large growth of the academic and political interest in Marx, culminating in "Marx-year 2018" on the occasion of Marx's bi-centenary. Since 2008, there has also been a significant increase of interest in and engagement with Marx and Marxian approaches in media and communication studies. The new interest in Marx and Marxian-inspired communication research has resulted in a significant number of books, articles, special issues, reading groups, workshops, and conferences.

Since the start of the new millennium, autonomist Marxism, especially Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's books *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), *Commonwealth* (2009), and *Assembly* (2017), formed the Marxist approach that has most influenced discussions of communication. Hardt and Negri have stressed the emergence of a cognitive capitalism that has recomposed the working class so that a dominance of immaterial/knowledge labor has emerged as well as new forms of the expropriation of the commons (including the cultural and digital commons) together with new potentials for the appropriation of digital machines for progressive purposes.

In the context of the increased interest in Marxist communication research and theory, Henri Lefebvre's approach offers a distinct opportunity for communication theory. His approach allows us to a) re-think the relationship of humanism and structuralism as well as of agency and structure, b) think about the relationship of space and communication, and c) reflect on the role of information and communication technologies in capitalism.

Lefebvre's approach shares the Marxist humanist perspective and the criticism of structuralism, functionalism and Althusserianism with the approaches of E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, Georg Lukács, and other humanist Marxists. Engaging with Lefebvre is therefore part of a larger project that combines humanism and Marxism for theorizing communication (Fuchs, 2018b, 2018c, 2017a, 2016a) and aims at renewing humanist Marxism in order to challenge authoritarian capitalism (Alderson & Spencer, 2017; Fuchs, 2018a).

3. Henri Lefebvre's Theory

The task of this section is to introduce the readers to aspects of Lefebvre's works that matter for communication theory. There are three aspects in Lefebvre's work that are relevant for a critical theory of communication. They will be discussed subsequently in the following three sub-sections:
a) Humanism and structuralism

[1] 1843 can be taken as a decisive year that marks the beginning of Marxian theory because in this year Marx wrote and published the first works that are today still widely read and cited, including the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* that includes the famous introduction, where Marx characterises religion and ideology in general as "*opium* of the people" (Marx 1843, 175).

b) The social production of space
c) Information and communication technologies in capitalism

3.1. Humanism and Structuralism

Lefebvre argues in his book *Dialectical Materialism* (first published in 1940) that like Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, the dialectical-materialist analysis of society must start with *humans producing in society*. He takes a humanist Marxist perspective that focuses on creativity, activity, praxis, Hegelian dialectics, human essence, alienation, and the total human. In another place, he adds the importance of human needs to these concepts (Lefebvre, 1982, pp. 39-42). Lefebvre stresses that the "problem of man […] is central for dialectical materialism" (Lefebvre, 2009, p. 94). He argues that Marx's later economic analyses were "integrated with humanism" (p. 89) At that time, Stalinism showed a "deep mistrust" of "Marx's early writings" (p. 1) because they could be read as an anti-Stalinist Marxism. Lefebvre's 1940 book can be read as a Marxist critique of Stalin.

Lefebvre (1982, pp. 18-19) opposes the orthodox Marxist interpretation that Marx applied universal dialectical laws to the development of society and capitalism. He argues that Marx is not a sociologist, economist, historian, anthropologist, philosopher, etc., but all of that and more. And he ascertains that "*Marx is not a sociologist, but there is a sociology in Marx*" (Lefebvre, 1982, p. 22). Generalising this thought, we can say: Marx is not a sociologist, economist, philosopher, political scientist, historian, anthropologist, etc., but there is a sociology, economics, philosophy, politics, history, anthropology, etc. in Marx.

As a Marxist humanist, Lefebvre has been very critical of structuralist theories. Structuralism is a functional reductionism that "gives a privileged status to one concept" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 106), namely to structures over agency. Lefebvre was particularly opposed to Louis Althusser's structural Marxism. He argued that Althusser's approach is a "withdrawal into scientism" (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 38), reducing Marxism to an epistemology that "sideline[s] practice and its problems," is a "fetishistic philosophy of 'pure' knowledge," and results in the "elimination of the dialectic" (p. 40).

The Production of Space contains numerous references to language's role in space. This is especially because Lefebvre was a critic of structuralist linguistics, a tradition founded by Ferdinand de Saussure and followed by authors such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva. Lefebvre (1991, p. 5) criticises that in structural linguistics, "the philosophico-epistemological notion of space is fetishized and the mental realm comes to envelop the social and physical ones." Authors in this field would presuppose "an identity between mental space (the space of the philosophers and epistemologists) and real space" (p. 6).

Lefebvre criticises reductionist approaches:

> "In its most extreme form, reductionism entails the reduction of time to space, the reduction of use value to exchange value, the reduction of objects to signs, and the reduction of 'reality' to the semiosphere; it also

> means that the movement of the dialectic is reduced to a logic, and social space to a purely formal mental space" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 296).

He also criticises in this context structural linguistics' reducationism: "Man does not live by words alone" (p. 35); "The systematic study of language, and/or the study of language as a system, have eliminated the 'subject' in every sense of the term" (p. 61). Lefebvre warns that one should not overestimate the social and political roles of language: "The Word has never saved the world and it never will" (p. 134).

In Lefebvre's view, structural linguistics subsume space, society and everything under language. He, on the other hand, argues that space subsumes language. Space is material and humans in its production also produce a code and language of space. Lefebvre criticises viewing "the spoken and written word" as "(social) practice" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 28). For him, language does not precede space, but the production of space follows the production of a language and code (pp. 16-18). Lefebvre argues that a theory of space should be a unitary theory that sees a unity between the fields of the physical, the mental and the social (p. 11). This unity would be constituted by the fact that all spaces are produced.

Lefebvre (1991) sees space as a means of production and therefore as part of society's base. Space "is at once a precondition and a result of social superstructures" (p. 85). He distinguishes between mode of production on the bottom and "the state and the superstructures of society" (p. 85) at the top. Space is located as a means of production in the economy and interacts with the "superstructures." For Lefebvre, there are various levels of society: "The forces of production and their component elements (nature, labour, technology, knowledge); structures (property relations); superstructures (institutions and the state itself)" (p. 85). Social space "underpins the reproduction of production relations and property relations" and

> "is equivalent, practically speaking, to a set of institutional and ideological superstructures that are not presented for what they are (and in this capacity social space comes complete with symbolisms and systems of meaning – sometimes an overload of meaning)" (p. 349).

The spatial code "is a superstructure, which is not true of the town itself, its space" (p. 47).

3.2. The Social Production of Space

Lefebvre (1991, pp. 299, 346) argues that a new political economy should be a critique of the political economy of space and its production. He wants to advance a Marxist approach that does not stress products (structural Marxism), but production (p. 26). Like Marx, he starts the analysis of society from humans who "as social beings are said to produce their own life, their own consciousness, their own world" (p. 68). In production, humans would mobilize spatial elements, including resources (materials) and tools (matériel) in a rational manner so that they organize "a sequence of actions with a certain 'objective' (i.e. the object to be produced) in view" (p. 71). Lefebvre's key idea in *The Production of Space* is that humans not only produce social

relations and use-values, but in doing so also produce social space. In more general terms, extending beyond social space to all physical spaces, one can say that “each living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space” (p. 170). In society, humans produce social spaces. There is a dialectic of social relations and space: “Social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space. *Their underpinning is spatial*” (p. 404).

Social space contains the social relations of reproduction (personal and sexual relations, family, reproduction of labor power) and the relations of

production (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 32). Space is not a thing (p. 73) and not a container (p. 94). It is a product and a means of production (p. 85). Human beings "*have* a space and […] *are* in this space" (p. 294). Space "is neither subject nor object" (p. 92). It is a "social reality," and "a set of relations and forms" (p. 116). It subsumes products and their interrelations (p. 73). There is a dialectic of social space and human action: "Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others" (73). Space is part of a dialectic of production: "Space is at once result and cause, product and producer" (p. 142). Social space is "always, and simultaneously, both a *field of action* […] and a *basis of action*" (p. 191). Social space interrelates "everything that is produced either by nature or by society" – "living beings, things, objects, works, signs and symbols" (p. 101).

Let us briefly focus on Lefebvre's concept of the boundary of social space. Because of its form, a space is circumscribed (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 181). A social space has physical borders and conceptual boundaries that are socially produced, but always interpenetrates and superimposes other spaces (p. 86). Humans "demarcate, beacon or sign […] space, leaving traces that are both symbolic and practical" (p. 192). How are boundaries communicated? Space can be marked physically or by discourse and signs so that it becomes a symbol (p. 141). On the one hand, it can be nature that "communicates" the physical boundary of a space to us. A habitable valley bounded by mountains into all directions has natural borders. The valley cannot easily be extended physically because the mountains border it. Only if something such as an earthquake or rockfall changes the mountain and the valley's geography can such natural boundaries change. Humans in society can intentionally produce signs to make objects symbolize and take on specific meanings that are culturally created, stored, disseminated, and communicated. The border of a nation state is physically marked by blockages of the national territory controlled by organs of the state, with the monopoly of violence. It is discursively marked by a distinction between citizens and non-citizens, communicated in the form of passports that grant access to, and provide certain rights within, a national territory.

The passport is a socially produced sign, a symbol of political power that constitutes an inside and an outside of the nation state. The physical borders of the nation state are the historical results of wars and political struggles. The nation state's physical borders are politically and socially defined and produced. A particular natural territory is bounded by political conventions. The nation's physical boundaries are signified and communicated by border crossings, territorial maps, world maps, etc. Both the natural and informational boundaries of the nation state are political conventions defined by those in power. Both the physical border and the passport are symbols that communicate closure of the national territory.

Lefebvre distinguishes three levels of social space that are shown in table 1. I have gathered characterisations of these spaces scattered across *The Production of Space*. These are collected in the table. Lefebvre distinguishes between perceived social practices, conceived representations of space, and lived spaces of representation. He argues that a "dialectical relationship […] exists within the triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived" (Lefebvre,

1991, p. 39). Everyday life forms representational spaces (p. 116).

	Spatial Practice	**Representations of Space**	**Representational Space**
Subjects	Members of society, family, working class	Experts, scientists, planners, architects, technocrats, social engineers	Inhabitants and users who passively experience space
Objects	Outside world, Locations, spatial sets, urban transport routes and networks, places that relate the local and the global, trivialised spaces of everyday life, desirable and undesirable spaces	Knowledge, signs, codes, images, theory, ideology, plans, power, maps, transportation and communications systems, abstract space (commodities, private property, commercial centers, money, banks, markets, spaces of labor),	Social life, art, culture, images, symbols, systems of non-verbal symbols and signs, images, memories
Activities	Perceiving, daily routines, reproduction of social relations, production	Conceiving, calculation, representation, construction	Living, everyday life and activities

Table 1: Lefebvre's three levels of social space, based on information from: Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 32-33, 38-43, 362, 50, 116, 233, 288

Lefebvre (1991) distinguishes between dominated and appropriated space (pp. 164-167). A dominated space is "a master's project" (p. 165). In capitalism, the nation state (a bounded territory controlled by the monopoly of violence and enabling national markets and a power balance between classes and class fractions, see Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 111-112, 280-281) forms political space. The unity of the workplace (the space of work and production), the city (urban space), markets and centers of commerce and consumption (spaces of consumption, leisure and entertainment) forms economic space. The nation state and capitalist space are the capitalist forms of dominated space, spaces dominated by state power and the power of capital. The nation state and capitalist spaces are instrumental spaces (pp. 281, 306).

Lefebvre argues that capitalism is based on an antagonism between conceived, planned space that is organized as abstract space, and the lived spaces of everyday life. He writes that this as a result of this antagonism, "lived experience is crushed" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 51). Abstract space is the organization of abstract labour (p. 49) and exchange (p. 57). It is "the space of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism" (p. 57) and "the location and source of abstractions" (p. 348) – the abstractions created by abstract labor, money,

commodities and capital (p. 348). The nation state institutes abstract space (p. 285). It is a relation between things that renders objects' social nature invisible (p. 49). It is a space of calculation and quantification (p. 49). Time in capitalism serves "to measure space" – "the time appropriate to the production of exchangeable goods, to their transport, delivery and sale, to payment and to the placing of capital" (p. 278). Lefebvre introduces the notion of dominant spaces: "The dominant form of space, that of the centres of wealth and power, endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates (i.e. peripheral spaces)" (49). And he ascertains that human beings make spaces by living in them: "The user's space is lived – not represented (or conceived). When compared with the abstract space of the experts (architects, urbanists, planners), the space of the everyday activities of users is a concrete one, which is to say, subjective" (p. 362). It is a "space of 'subjects' rather than of calculations" (p. 362). Abstract space is based on a logic that fragments and cuts up space (p. 89). It results in a creation of sectors, subsystems, and partial logics (p. 311). In capitalism, social space is the milieu of accumulation (p. 129). Abstract space is a "medium of *exchange*" (p. 307). The commodity is organized in abstract spaces: "The commodity is a *thing*: it is *in space*, and occupies a location" (p. 341).

Commodities are produced, exchanged, and consumed, which results in special spaces for their production, exchange and consumption. The notion of abstract space clarifies why Lefebvre distinguishes between lived and conceived space. He wants to point out that conceived space entails the possibility of a dominant group organizing and instrumentalizing social space in its interest to achieve advantages at the expense of other groups.

Alfred Sohn-Rethel (1978) points out that abstract thought is the equivalent to the exchange abstraction in the world of knowledge. Class societies divide mental and physical labor in a division of labor. The consequence is mechanistic, quantifying, mathematical logic. For Sohn-Rethel, the "unity of mental and manual work" (p. 181) is a precondition of socialism. Lefebvre applies the critique of abstract thought to the critique of space and argues that abstraction in class societies not just produces abstract thought, but also abstract space along with it. Conceptual space is a particular form of social space, in which human experts produce planning information that guides the organization of space. They also live this conception in everyday work practices and relations. So, conceived space is a subdomain of lived space. Conceived space does not necessarily take on dominant and dominated forms. In a socialist society, conceived space is appropriated by human interest in such a way that the information that plans space benefits not dominant class, but all those living in a space. There is also the possibility of participatory design and planning so that citizens are integrated into the planning of the spaces they live in.

Marx (1867, p. 165) understands commodity fetishism as the form of appearance, in which "the definite social relation between men themselves" is presented as "a relation between things". The commodity appears as natural, unsocial and out of history. Commodity fetishism makes it difficult to imagine alternatives to capitalism. Marx's project was the "unmasking of things in order to reveal (social) relationships" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 81). He writes: "Fetishism is

both a mode of existence of the social reality, an actual mode of consciousness and human life, and an appearance or illusion of human activity" (Lefebvre, 2009, p. 81). Lefebvre is interested in a critique of the spatial dimension of fetishism. Abstract space hides what it contains with the help of "fantasy images, symbols which appear to arise from 'something else'" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 311). In capitalism, through what Guy Debord describes as the society of the spectacle, "the visual gains the upper hand over the other senses" (p. 286).

Abstract space is contradictory space (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 306). Lefebvre identifies contradictions between dominant space vs dominated space; instrumental space vs differential, appropriated space; abstract, conceived space vs lived space; and center vs periphery. For Lefebvre, the principal contradiction that subsumes the one between center and periphery is the one between globalising space and fragmented space:

> "Where then is the principal contradiction to be found? Between the capacity to conceive of and treat space on a global (or worldwide) scale on the one hand, and its fragmentation by a multiplicity of procedures or processes, all fragmentary themselves, on the other. Taking the broadest possible view, we find mathematics, logic and strategy, which make it possible to represent instrumental space, with its homogeneous – or better, homogenizing – character. This fetishized space, elevated to the rank of mental space by epistemology, implies and embodies an ideology – that of the primacy of abstract unity. Not that this makes fragmentation any less 'operational'. It is reinforced not only by administrative subdivision, not only by scientific and technical specialization, but also – indeed most of all – by the retail selling of space (in lots)." (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 355)

Capitalism has a tendency to globalize the economy in order to make use of strategic spatial advantages (resources, price of labor-power, political climate, etc.) for accumulation. At the same time, it creates ever more specialized instrumental spaces. Capitalism fragments space and interconnects the fragments at the regional, national, international, and global levels. This contradiction would be the spatial expression of what Marx (1867) terms the contradiction between productive forces and relations of production (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 357): The development of the means of production allows the production of spaces. In capitalism, dominant interests shape social spaces and instrumentalize them as means of control, power and capital accumulation. Social spaces are via the logic of capitalism turned into abstract, dominated, instrumental spaces.

Lefebvre analyzes a capitalist spatial contradiction between the center and the periphery. He also sees abstract space as imperialist in character, as the logic of the commodity is expansive and tries to "occupy all space" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 219). The result is an imperialist center-periphery geography:

> "In the so-called underdeveloped countries, plundered, exploited, 'protected' in a multitude of ways (economic, social, political, cultural, scientific), the obstacles in the way of growth and development become

> increasingly daunting. Meanwhile, the advanced countries use the more backward as a source of labour and as a resource for use values (energies, raw materials, qualitatively superior spaces for leisure activities)" (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 346-347).

The "centre continues effectively to concentrate wealth, means of action, knowledge, information and 'culture'. In short, everything" (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 332-333).

3.3. Information and Communication Technologies in Capitalism

In the third part of the *Critique of Everyday Life* that was published in French in 1981, Lefebvre dedicates one remarkable section to "Information Technology and Daily Life" (Lefebvre, 2014, pp. 808-825). He warns that we, via the rise of the computer, are facing the danger that capitalism's abstract logic of commodification is extended to the realms of information and communication.

Information would always have played a role in capitalist markets and exchange, but "for many centuries, information as such did not appear on the market" (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 817). Lefebvre characterises informational capitalism: "What is novel about the contemporary world is that there is a world market in information, which positively 'drives' the other markets, through advertising, propaganda, the transmission of positive knowledge, and so on." (p. 817). Information technology faces the "danger of being administratively and institutionally controlled either by the national state, or by transnational forces" (p. 819).

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre stresses the importance of land for a Marxist theory of space. Marxism would have advanced a binary model of class oppositions between capital and labor (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 323-325) and forgotten the importance of land in capitalism. In contemporary capitalism, land would play a crucial role through the commodification of "underground and above-ground resources – of the space of the entire planet" (p. 324). He distinguishes between markets in land and works: "There are two markets whose conquest represents the ultimate triumph of the commodity and money: the market in *land* (a precapitalist form of property) and the market in *works* (which, as 'non-products', log remained extra- capitalist)" (p. 342). Here Lefebvre points out that the commodification of land and culture/information signifies commodification becoming ultimate.

In *Information Technology and Daily Life*, there is a comparable passage about the commodification of information: "Is not information, the supreme commodity, also the ultimate commodity? Does it not complete the great cycle of the commodity, its extraordinary expansion – in short, the realization of the world of commodities in that of the mode of production, in the global?" (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 817). Information technology "perfects and completes the world of commodities" (p. 818).

4. Lefebvre and Communication Theory

Based on the overview of some of Lefebvre's works in section 3, we can next

discuss its relevance for theorizing communication. In doing so, we will follow the same structure and sequence of topics as used in section 3.

4.1. Humanism and Structuralism

Lefebvre reminds us that society is neither pure structure nor pure practice, but a dialectic of social structures and human practices. In respect to communication this means that communication is neither linguistic structures nor individual speech acts, but a dynamic, complex production process the creates and re-creates semiotic and social structures as well as individual consciousness and actions.

Today, Manuel Castells is considered as one of the major figures in communication studies. He did however not start as a communication theorist, but as an urban theorist who was heavily influenced by Althusser's structural Marxism. Castells (1977) elaborated a structuralist approach of space and the urban that is explicitly directed against Lefebvre. Castells argues that "Lefebvrian humanism" assumes that "society creates space" and that space and society are "the ever-original work of that freedom of creation that is the attribute of Man, and the spontaneous expression of his desire" (p. 92). He claims that Lefebvre assumes the "spontaneism of social action and the dependence of space upon it" (p. 92). Castells argues that to start with the human being means a voluntarist theory that ignores any influence and structural conditioning of action. Heoverlooks that to start social theory with the human *who produces society* implies that the human is the social being. With the human, the social – and therefore also social relations and social structures – is immediately posited. Lefebvre shows that one cannot think about the human without the dialectic of structures and agency.

Castells takes an Althusserian approach, in which the "relation between society and space" is "a function of the specific organization of modes of production that coexist historically (with a predominance of one over the others) in a concrete social formation, and of the internal structure of each of these modes of production" (Castells, 1977, p. 64). In contrast to Lefebvre, Castells reduces the structure/agency-dialectic to structures and sees "space as an expression of the social structure" (p. 126).

Although Lefebvre elaborates a fairly dialectical theory, *The Production of Space* is not free from functionalist formulations, in which not humans, but structures or things, act. Lefebvre writes for example: "[E]very society […] produces a space, its own space" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 31); the "ancient city had its own spatial practice" (p. 31); "Representational space is alive: it speaks" (p. 42); "Peasant houses and villages speak" (p. 165). Space is not a subject that acts. Rather humans are the subjects who speak to each other within, conditioned by and through producing social space. To be fair, one must say that such problematic formulations are the exception from the rule in Lefebvre's works that overall strives to conceive of social space and society as a dialectic of structure and agency.

Marx's understanding of the materialist character of society is that humans are "living human individuals" who "*produce* their means of subsistence" and thereby "their material life" and "a definite mode of life" (Marx & Engels, 1998,

p. 37). Humans in their social production of life produce and reproduce sociality itself, which includes language as a means of communicative production and social relations. In communication, humans create and maintain social relations by making use of language. Communication takes place in, and creates, social space.

Lefebvre's approach poses the question what kind of space consciousness is. If one assumes that consciousness is not simply individual, but necessarily social, then this implies that language is not simply a mental space. Any language that is not concretely lived is non-existent. Language is a communicative means of production that humans use in the communication process for creating and reproducing social relations. Communication is the concrete process that connects social space and mental space, society and the individual. Raymond Williams (2005, pp. 50-63) in this context points towards the material character of communication by stressing that means of communication are means of production. Languages are "forms of social production" that make use of the human body's resources, whereas other means of communication use "non-human material" (Williams, 2005, p. 55; see also Williams, 1981, pp. 87-90). Because of his scepticism of structural linguistics, Lefebvre somewhat underestimates the material character of language and communication.

Classical Marxist approaches have separated base and superstructure, the economy and culture, work and discourse, labor and ideology. This separation does not hold because of two arguments:
1) The material unity of society is, as Lefebvre also stresses, that humans produce and reproduce their sociality. Just like cars, roads, houses, shops, factories, railways, and cities are products of human activities, words, texts, songs, culture and ideologies are also human products. The difference is that culture can be simultaneously consumed by an endless number of humans, whereas a train can only carry a limited number of people.
2) In the 21st century, culture and communication have become an important industry that employs a significant number of people and produces cultural commodities. It can therefore not stand outside the economy. As an example, 8.8% of UK jobs in 2014 were located in the cultural economy (advertising, marketing, architecture, crafts, design, IT, film and broadcasting, museums, libraries, music, arts, publishing) (DCMS 2015). In London, the share was even larger at 16.4%.

In this context, Williams argues that "[c]ultural work and activity are not […] a superstructure […] because cultural tradition and practice are […] among the basic processes of the [societal] formation itself" (Williams, 1977, p. 111). He uses the term "cultural materialism" to signify a position that foregrounds the materiality of culture: "Cultural materialism is the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their production" (Williams, 1983, p. 201). Cultural materialism argues that consciousness and its products are "parts of the human material social process" (Williams, 1977, p. 59). Ideas are created in the human brain and always require some physical medium that they are associated with. Matter is a process-substance of the world. Natural matter is the object of the natural production process, through which nature produces and organizes itself as *causa sui*. Social matter is the object of human subjects in society

and the process of its production. There are qualitative differences between natural and social matter. In society, both interact in a dialectical manner when humans appropriate and transform nature.

For Lefebvre, the dialectic of society is one between subjects and objects that is mediated by activities of social production. This dialectic produces and is conditioned by social space in the form of spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation (see table 1).

4.2. The Social Production of Space

We can learn from Lefebvre that humans produce and reproduce social relations whenever they relate to each other mutually and so make meaning of each other and the social world. A social system is a social relation between a specific number of humans that is regularised in space and time. It does not exist ephemerally, but has some continuity. All social systems have an economy, a political structure of governance and a culture. However, for every specific system one of these dimensions is dominant. So for example, a workplace is an economic social system, but also has certain political rules of behavior and a specific work culture. All social systems are dialectics of practices and specific structures (use-values, rules, and collective meanings). Structures are the properties that make social systems durable, enable and constrain the continuity of practices within social systems, and are produced and reproduced by these practices. Institutions are large-scale social systems that play a key role in society. Both social systems and institutions are more enduring features of a society, but institutions have key relevance in society and can contain many social systems within them. Examples include the parliamentary system, the legal system, the market system, the education system, the health care system, etc. A social space is a bounded combination of social relations, structures, practices, social systems, and institutions. Every social system has its space and is element of larger spaces. When Lefebvre says that by producing social relations, humans produce social space, it is important to add to that insight that there are various levels of social organization that humans re-create in everyday life, including structures, social systems and institutions. We could say that space is a bounded collection of many subjects, objects, and their relations.

Figure 1 visualises the dialectic of humans – social relations – social space.

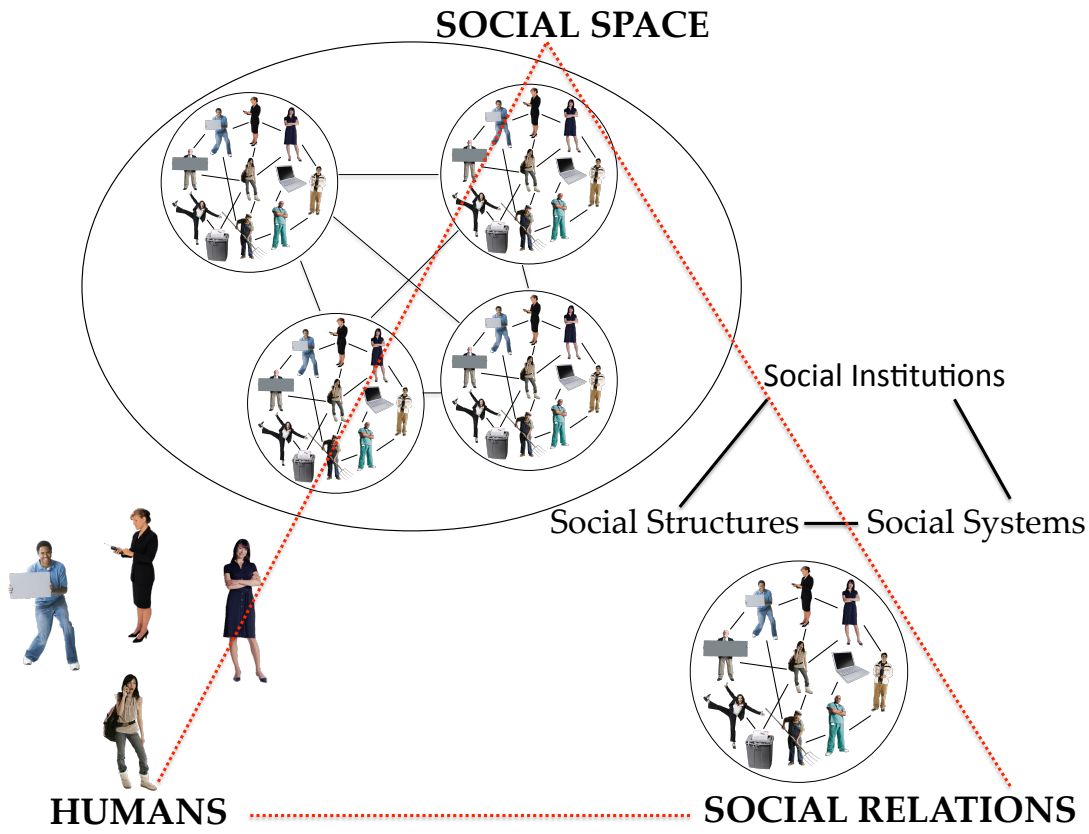

Figure 1: The dialectic of humans – social relations – social space

Humans produce social relations that are bounded, related and organized in social spaces. In the production of social relations, they produce and reproduce social structures that enable and constrain the practices in social systems. Specific social systems form society's key institutions. Humans produce and reproduce social relations, social structures, social systems, institutions, and social spaces that in a dialectical manner condition (enable and constrain) human practices and are the medium and outcome of such practices.

The dialectic of humans and social space, as visualized in figure 1, is immanent in Lefebvre's approach. He does not fully elaborate what the role of communication is in social production, which requires that we extend and amend Lefebvre's approach: Social systems, institutions, and social space have a more continuous and enduring existence in society. This means that they do not necessarily break down if one or more particular individuals is no longer a member and so ceases to act in a particular social role. Another individual may substitute the one who left. So if in a software engineering company a Java programmer leaves, another may be employed who possesses the same skills. Social systems, institutions, and spaces are real abstractions from individual existence. But given their more abstract character, how can they exist? They require being lived by a specific number of individuals, who socially relate to each other in everyday life. *Communication* is the process in which structures, social systems, institutions and social spaces are lived and thereby reproduced by humans in a concrete manner in everyday life. They do so by making use of particular communicative means of production (verbal and non-verbal codes/languages, information, and communication technologies) that enable the production and

reproduction of the social: Humans produce social relations by making meaning of each other and thereby reproduce the structures, systems, institutions, and spaces that enable and constrain their communication. Communication is the way in which humans live and produce social relations that, in turn, constitute structures, systems, institutions, and spaces.

Lefebvre speaks of a dialectic of perceiving, conceiving, and living. How exactly are these processes related? All social life is a unity of mentally perceiving the physical and social world; mentally conceiving this world in particular cognitive ways as thoughts; and living the world in social relations in which humans communicatively produce themselves, use-values, collective decisions, rules, morals, norms, collective meanings, etc. Perceiving and conceiving are mental and informational activities. They are social and material practices that are part of living and producing a society. Perceiving is the mental conception of the lived physical and social world, the cognitive production of nature and society. Conceiving is a particular form of perceiving; a creative way of living the world by producing information about it. And living the world means perceiving, conceiving and producing society.

Given that there is no easy way to separate these processes, Lefebvre's model results in the description of thoughts (the perceived) and information (the conceived) as non-social. Perceiving, conceiving and living are all social practices, which makes it difficult to call one level of social space "spatial practices". This implies that the other two levels are not forms of practice. The three levels are ordered, nested and overlapping. Spatial practice is conceptually the most unclear and least utilised level: "[S]patial practices mediate between the conceived and the lived, […] spatial practices keep representations of space and representational space together, yet apart" (Merrifield, 2000, p. 175).

All objects in society take on certain appearances. Their form and content represent meanings that are given to them by discourses in society and ideologies in heteronomous societies. Via objects, those who control them communicate meanings indirectly to those who consume, use or encounter these objects. Lefebvre (1991) says in this context that there is a "language of things and products" (p. 80). So language is not just a code that enables the direct symbolic encounter between humans – also the form and content of structures and things can function as symbols and convey meanings to us; meanings that specific humans or groups encode into them via symbolic production.

In this context, Marx (1867, p. 143) characterises value as the "language of commodities." The price you pay for a commodity (the money-form of value) is a symbol that not solely communicates how cheap or expensive it is, but also tells you something about the amount of labor that has gone into the product. Furthermore, it allows you to distinguish and compare commodities in an abstract way. The structural language of objects is not necessarily dominative, but can take on a dominative form:

> The "language of things is as useful for lying as it is for telling the truth. Things lie, and when, having become commodities, they lie in order to conceal their origin, namely social labour, they tend to set themselves

up as absolutes" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 81).

There are also political and ideological forms of fetishism in which specific institutions or ideas (e.g. the nation, war, racism) are presented as natural properties of society, although they only represent particular power relations and interests. Fetishism is a particular form of communication in class societies in which the social becomes reified and reduced to the status of a thing. This reification is communicated as natural property of society. When things symbolize something, it appears to us as though they communicate. But actually, they only exist and are able to function as symbols because human social labor produces them within social relations, and is contained in them. Through commodities and markets, the owners, who are the sellers of these goods, speak to us and attempt to persuade us to buy. Via the thing-character of commodities, they conceal the origin of the goods: the exploitation of labor and class relations. Commodity fetishism empties commodities of meanings, which creates a void that can then be filled by advertising. It propagates and communicates commodity ideologies to convince us that we should consume, and that commodities create magic betterments of our lives. Commodity fetishism makes it impossible for us to see and communicate with the immediate producers, and obscures the fact that producers who organize in the division of labor speak with each other. Indeed, it takes a political organization for them to come together, formulate and communicate political demands.

Lefebvre's analysis shows clear parallels to world systems theory. The first part of Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974) multi-volume book *Modern World System* was just like Lefebvre's book *The Production of Space* published in 1974. Wallerstein (1974) characterises the "capitalist world-economy" as "built on a worldwide division of labor in which various zones of this economy (that which we have termed the core, the semiperiphery, and the periphery)" are assigned "specific economic roles" (p. 162).

In the global space of the capitalist world system, the international division of labor takes on a fetishistic form so that workers who produce different parts of a commodity in different places are not aware of each other, cannot communicate with each other, and cannot politically organize. In digital capitalism, we find an international division of digital labor at the heart of the production of digital media, in which African slaves, Chinese assemblers, highly stressed and highly paid software engineers, precarious online freelancers, unpaid digital user workers, etc. constitute the collective digital worker (Fuchs, 2014, 2015, 2016c).

4.3. Information and Communication Technologies in Capitalism

Lefebvre's section on "Information Technology and Daily Life" in *Critique of Everyday Life* bears strong parallels to Raymond Williams' cultural materialism as Lefebvre argues that the production of information renders the distinction between base and superstructure superfluous:

> "Information is produced. It is consumed. Information technology confirms the outmoded character of the classical Marxist contrast base and superstructure. Information is not – or not merely – a superstructure, since it is an – exchangeable – product of certain

> relations of production. What was regarded as superstructural, like space and time, forms part of production, because it is a product that is bought and sold" (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 816).

Such a cultural materialism, as can both be found in Williams and Lefebvre, matter today. For example, Edward Snowden's revelations of the existence of a surveillance-industrial complex, in which secret services such as the NSA co-operate with private security companies and communications corporations such as Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Yahoo!, Skype, Apple, etc., shows that today the two dangers Lefebvre identified have joined forces and resulted in the combined corporate and state control of personal data.

The commodification of information is another important theme in "Information Technology and Daily Life." Nature and communication are both common goods that all humans require in order to survive. Every human needs a place to live and to communicate in order to survive. You can survive without a car because it is likely that you can use other means of transport for travelling from point A to B. But you cannot survive without access to land, food and water – basic natural resources – and without the communicative interaction with other humans. The difference between land and information is that the fruits of the land are used up in consumption, and only a limited number of people can live on the land. Information, on the other hand, does not deplete. Information can be used by an unlimited number of people at the same time. By arguing that land and information as commodities signify a new stage in the development of commodification, Lefebvre anticipated discussions about the commodification of the commons, as discussed in general theories of the commons as well as in Marxist theories of the commons (see: Hardt & Negri, 2009; Hess & Ostrom, 2007). So one here can certainly find parallels between Lefebvre and autonomist Marxism.

Information faces a contradiction between commodification and commonification. The movement of information becoming a commons undercuts the commodification of information. Examples are creative commons, file-sharing platforms, open access publishing, open wireless communities, free software, Wikipedia, etc. In this context, Yochai Benkler (2016) speaks of commons-based peer production in the digital media age. But open and gratis access knowledge communities do not necessarily undermine commodification. A range of capital accumulation models providing gratis access to knowledge, networking, software and online services has emerged, but they commodify user data and user activities. Google and Facebook are the best examples (Fuchs, 2017b). Communication and digital communication are contested realms in which we find complex dialectics of the commodity and the commons.

5. Conclusion

Lefebvre stresses that the production of space also produces a code and language and sees communication and culture as secondary superstructures. Means of communication are (just like social space) means of production through which humans produce social relations and therefore also social space. The aspect of Lefebvre's theory that can be most fruitfully integrated into a critical theory of communication is his Marxist humanist stress on the

role of human production in society. Humans produce social relations and thereby a dialectic of human action and the production of social space. Communication is the concrete dialectical mediation of the individual and society. It is the process in which humans produce social relations, structures, systems, institutions, and social spaces that enable and constrain human action. Lefebvre's concept of abstract space is a spatial dimension of abstract labor and the commodity fetishism. Fetishism and the logic of abstract space create the impression that things communicate and act, ultimately hiding the social character of capitalism and domination. *Information Technology and Daily Life* bears striking parallels to Raymond Williams' cultural materialism and contains an anticipation of the discussions of the commodification of the communicative commons.

Humanist Marxism is not just dialectical in character; it is also a class struggle-Marxism that aims at thinking and realising alternatives to capitalism and domination. Lefebvre therefore stresses that only class struggle can challenge the capitalist domination of space. It can generate differences and re-appropriate spaces. In this context, Lefebvre (1991) speaks of differential space and counter-space as being alternative. These are communal and shared spaces based on "the collective management of space" (p. 103). Differential space foregrounds quality of life over quantity (p. 381) and use-value over exchange-value (p. 410).

Given the commodification of information and information technology, dialectical Marxism seeks to identify potential alternatives in the realm of information technology. Lefebvre asks in this context: "Is not technologizing the social and political, as opposed to socializing and politicizing technology, a choice and a decision?" (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 821). And he continues:

> "The relations of self-managed units, enterprises or territories, are already in conflict with the market and the state. These conflictual relations interfere with the relations of these units to information technology. Will self-management be realized and actualized by acquiring a content and meaning in information technology? Or will technological and political pressures reduce self-management to a sham? That is the question" (Lefebvre, 2014, p.824).

In the age of digital media, Lefebvre's work reminds us that digital capitalism creates spaces of alienation and that a humane digital society requires a self-managed and socialized Internet and digital media landscape.

In times when humanity is under strong threat by anti-humane forces such as far-right movements, nationalism, authoritarianism and potential new fascisms, engaging with the tradition of humanist Marxism that Lefebvre belongs to enables reflections on the causes and consequences of society's problems and how social struggles for alternatives can intervene. Communication is a foundational aspect of such practices.

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