Communication and Struggles for Alternatives

This chapter deals with the question of how communication matters in struggles for a commons-based society. First, the notion of praxis communication is introduced (section 14.1). Second, the chapter discusses the role of alternative media as critical media in social struggles (14.2). Questions of class struggles, communication in class struggles, and struggles for alternative communications deliberately form the conclusion to this book. Given that the many problems outlined in this book result from our capitalist world and capitalist communications, the point is to change the system, which can only be achieved through social struggles. Praxis, class struggles, and social struggles are critical political economy's practical implications.

14.1. Praxis Communication

Praxis

How humans react to forms of domination (including exploitation) is not programmed. Some endure violence and oppression because they fear consciously or unconsciously that they may lose something. But resistance can emerge over time or rapidly. Humans neither automatically endure nor automatically always resist domination. Humans' existential fears and needs can be instrumentalised so that they accept domination. Social struggles of dominated groups always imply risk-taking and uncertainty. When a large enough number of the oppressed take such risks and engage in collective organisation, then resistance to domination comes about. The formation of a collective dimension of consciousness is part of such organisation processes.

In organising politically, humans communicate in order to define goals, identities, and strategies that help them in transformative processes. Political

consciousness has the potential to be progressive, but is not automatically progressive. A better society is a possible, but not a certain result of social struggles. Only when objective contradictions trigger the collective political organisation of protests and movements that aim at progressive changes is there a chance for the establishment of a better society.

Critical theory's differentiation between practice and praxis was introduced by Karl Marx. Marx writes in his 'Theses on Feuerbach': '#3 […] The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary praxis. […] #8 All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human praxis and in the comprehension of this praxis'.[1]

For Marx, human beings are practical because they transform society through practices. By praxis, Marx refers to a certain form of practice. Praxis refers to political practices whose goal is a human-centred society. Praxis-oriented humans see such a society as a political need of human beings and try to demystify ideologies that aim at hindering the establishment of such a society. Praxis includes class struggles that aim at abolishing exploitation and domination. Antonio Gramsci argues that the philosophy of praxis critically questions common sense.[2] Praxis wants to establish an 'absolute humanism'.[3] For Gramsci and Marx, praxis is the critical political form of human practice. Praxis is related to socialism and wants to establish a '*free community of free personalities*'.[4]

Marxist humanism combines socialism and humanism. It is based on the insight that critique and praxis 'grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself', '*man is the highest being for man*'.[5] Praxis is based on the insight that a good society means a good life for all. Based on this insight Marx articulated the '*categorical imperative to overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being'.[6]

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[1] Karl Marx. 1845. Theses on Feuerbach. In *MECW Volume 5* (pp. 3–5), pp. 3 & 5. In the English translation of the 3rd and 8th Feuerbach-theses, the term 'practice' instead of the term 'praxis' was used. In the quotation I have rendered the term as 'praxis' following Marx's own usage in the German original.

[2] Antonio Gramsci. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers. p. 330.

[3] Ibid., p. 417.

[4] Gajo Petrović. 1967. *Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century*. Garden City, NY: Anchor. p. 133.

[5] Karl Marx. 1844. Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction. In *MECW Volume 3* (pp. 175–187). p. 182.

[6] Ibid., p. 182.

Praxis Communication

For Jean-Paul Sartre, praxis is purposeful human action. He therefore argues that 'language as the practical relation of one man to another is praxis, and praxis is always language'.[7] This means that, for Sartre, language and communication are always praxis and there is no significant difference between practice and praxis. For Sartre, communication is always already praxis and does not become praxis through socialist politics. In comparison to Marx, Sartre depoliticises the concept of praxis. If all communication were praxis, then the term praxis communication would be tautological. In contrast to Sartre, the approach taken in the book at hand differentiates between practice and praxis and between communication as practice and praxis communication.

Praxis communication is a particular form of human practice that has an ethico-political character. *Praxis communication* is always *communicative practice*. But only a subset of *communicative practices* is *praxis communication*. Communication is not automatically good. It is not automatically a means to question domination. Communication is a practice through which humans create and reproduce social relations. They do so by using symbols and interacting symbolically. In communication, humans make meaning of each other's behaviour and utterances. But this mutual referencing does not imply that the participants in a conversation necessarily agree or understand each other. Social struggles and political action can transform communicative practice into praxis communication. Praxis communication takes place within democratic-socialist organisations, groups or structures, or aims at the establishment of such humanist structures. *Praxis communication* is not about society as it is, but about how we can achieve an actual, true society that corresponds to human needs and develops all human potentials so that all benefit.

Activists use communication technologies such as the Internet to challenge exploitation and domination. Alternative online news media such as Democracy Now! or Alternet and digital commons projects such as Wikipedia or Creative Commons question the capitalist character of digital media. Besides such alternative civil society Internet projects there are also potentials for the development of public service Internet platforms. Civil society and public service Internet platforms challenge the corporate Internet giants. They want to create a commons-based, non-commercial, non-profit Internet.

Neither technology nor individual people can radically transform communications so that capitalist communication are transcended and replaced by communication commons. Such a change requires critical individuals who organise politically and engage in class struggles about the character of communications

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[7] Jean-Paul Sartre. 1960/2004. *Critique of Dialectical Reason. Volume One: Theory of Practical Ensembles.* London: Verso. p. 99.

and society. A commons-based society and commons-based technologies can only be achieved by human praxis.

Class struggles in capitalism are a conflict between capital and labour that is expressed in particular practices. It is labour's objective interest to sublate the conflict between the opposing interests of capital and labour so that a classless society emerges, whereas it is the objective interest of capital to uphold the class conflict. There are mechanisms such as lay-offs, rationalisation, strikes, outsourcing, wage negotiations, etc. that do not sublate, but mediate the class conflict. The mediation of the class antagonism only temporarily settles the conflict either more in the interest of labour or of capital. But given that the interests of capital and labour are polar opposites, the class conflict cannot be overcome by mediation. In contrast, the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the class conflict creates a new whole that eliminates class structures, lifts the individuals to a new existence in a class society, and thereby constitutes a qualitative difference.

Figure 14.1 presents a model that situates the role that communication and communication technologies play in protests and struggles in a broad context.

Protests are based on the structure of society, especially society's economic, political, and cultural contradictions. These contradictions result from particular forms of domination that bring about societal problems. As a consequence, there are phases when societies enter crises. A crisis is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the emergence of protests. There are economic, political, and cultural/ideological crises. If such crises interact and converge, then a
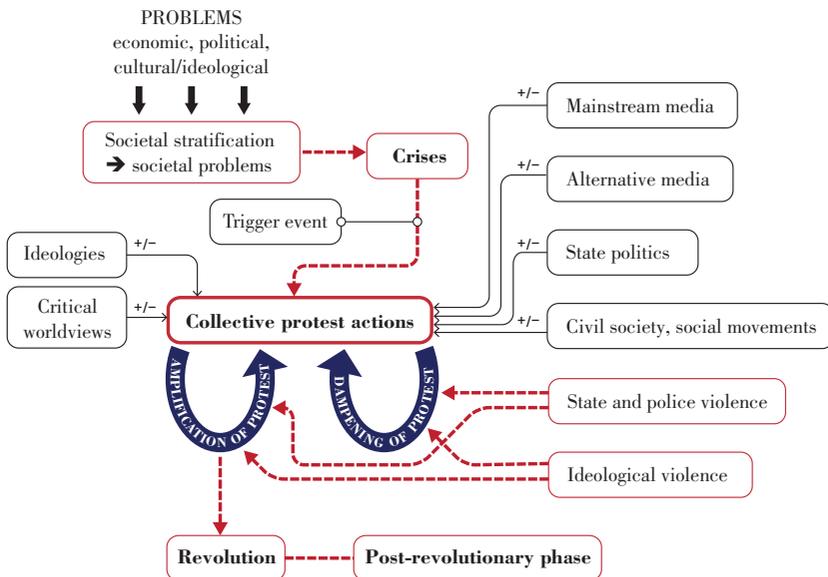
Figure 14.1: A model of praxis communication in social struggles.

crisis of society as a whole emerges. For protests to emerge, there must be public recognition of the existence of society's problems, and a significant number of people need to be convinced that these problems can no longer to tolerated and that society needs to be changed. Protests and social movements often emerge from trigger events. Examples are the emergence of the US civil rights movement after the arrest of Rosa Parks, the emergence of the 2011 Tunisian protests after Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation following harassment by public officials, the triggering of the 2011 Egyptian revolution by the police's killing of Khaled Mohamed Saeed, or the emergence of the 2013 Gezi protests after police violence against the occupiers of Taksim Square in Istanbul.

It is precisely in such situations that emotions such as anger, class hatred, socialist love, and hope play a role in the potential transition from crises to protests. Subjective perceptions and emotions are, however, not the only factor, because protests are conditioned and influenced by politics, the media and culture/ideology. The way state politics, mainstream media and ideology, on the one hand, and oppositional politics, social movements, alternative media and alternative worldviews, on the other, connect to human subjects, directly influences the conditions of protests. These factors can have rather amplifying, rather neutral, or rather dampening effects on protests. So, for example, racist media coverage can advance racist stereotypes and/or the insight that the right-wing media and class society are racist in themselves. In an antagonistic society such as capitalism, the means of communication have an antagonistic character. They have antagonistic impacts and effects, which means they can have multiple effects at once and in general either intensify or diminish protest or not have much effect at all on the level of protest.

There can also be antagonisms and power struggles between various media, such as between capitalist media and non-commercial media. But the media is certainly not the only domain of society that shapes protests. There are also other aspects of the economy, politics, and ideology/culture that shape and influence the conditions under which protests emerge and develop, or do not emerge. Multiple dimensions of society influence protests. Given this complexity, it cannot be calculated whether and when protests will develop. When protests emerge, the various factors and dimensions of society continue to have (often contradictory) influences on protests. And protests can also influence other domains of society. To what degree there are positive, negative, or neutral influences is not pre-determined. In antagonistic society, the state, too, often reacts to protests with police action. State violence and ideological violence (e.g. the scapegoating of protesters in tabloid media) directed against protesters influence protests in ways that are not determined. These influences can bring about the intensification or the dampening of protests, or can have no significant consequences at all.

Under certain conditions, protest can intensify in a spiral so that the movements, occupations, and demonstrations become larger and larger. The result

can, but does not have to be, a revolution. Revolution means a fundamental change of society so that the economy, politics, and culture are reconstituted and renewed. Revolutions always have post-revolutionary phases in which society needs to be reconstructed. The legacy of old conflicts and the old society can in this context pose challenges.

Communication technology in an antagonistic society, in which the class conflict and other conflicts between dominant and dominated groups matter, is likely to have a contradictory character: It does not necessarily and automatically support/amplify or dampen/limit rebellions, but rather poses contradictory potentials that stand in contradiction with influences of the state, ideology and capitalism.

The next section focuses on alternative media as critical media.

14.2. Alternative Media as Critical Media

A Model of Communication

Figure 14.2 visualises a model of the communication process.

There is a dialectic of structures and practices of communication. They produce each other mutually. The media system is a dynamic system, in which human subjects' communicative practices and communication structures stand in a productive, dialectical, mutually constitutive relationship.

In the media system, we find journalists and other media producers as subjects who make use of particular structures and technologies in order to create content
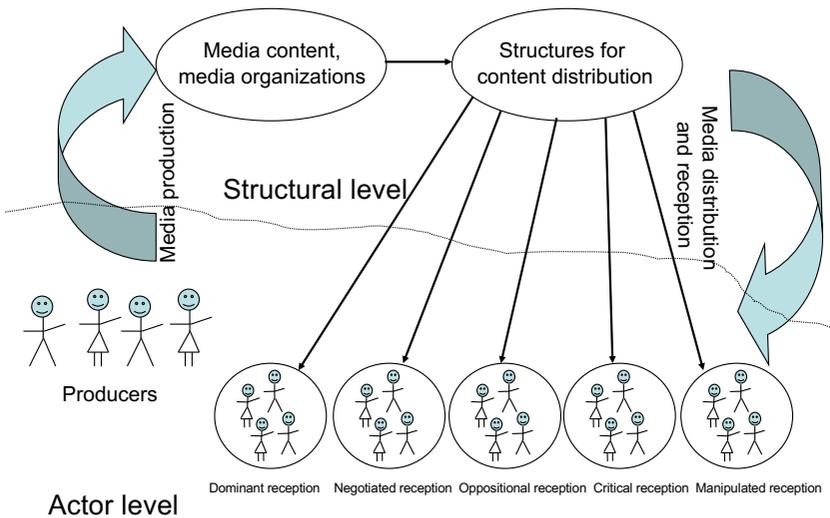

Figure 14.2: The communication process.

directed at a broad public. They want to shape the consciousness of the members of the public by informing them. Particular media contents have a more or less artistic and aesthetic, news or entertainment character. Created content needs to be organised, stored, and distributed, for which special structures and technologies are needed. Users and audiences receive and interpret distributed content.

The production, distribution, and reception of content are dialectically connected. Without reception, there is no need for further production. Produced content is not effective if it is not received and interpreted. Produced content needs distribution and reception. Reception is not just the consumption of information, but also produces meanings. Reception is consumption and production. Recipients interpret content in the context of their everyday life. What meanings they give to objects depends on their historically conditioned social contexts and experiences. Meanings are social and historical. Under different circumstances, it is likely that an object will be interpreted in different ways. Producers encode certain meanings into content. But there is no guarantee that the recipients will decode the text in the manner intended by the producers. But at the same time, decoding is not arbitrary, because there are power dynamics that influence meaning-making. Different interpretations of content can co-exist and contradict each other. There is neither a necessary convergence nor a necessary divergence of encoded and decoded meanings. Power dynamics can result in recipients reproducing hegemonic meanings. There are different forms of reception: hegemony, opposition, mixed meanings, critical reception, and manipulated reception (see chapter 5, section 5.5). There can be overlaps between first three and the latter two types of reception.

Media and communication systems are not just social systems, they are social systems that reach a wider public and are therefore part of communication processes in the public sphere. Therefore, the notion of the public sphere is important for a social theory of the media in general (see chapter 8) and therefore also for a social theory of alternative media. For their operation, media systems and organisations need producers, recipients, organisation structures, distribution structures, and contents. The communication process of the media is based on the dialectic of structures and actors.

For Stuart Hall, there are hegemonic, oppositional, and negotiated (mixed) interpretations of texts.[8] In order to avoid a relativistic approach, one must assume that there is a degree of objectivity in the communication process. An example: If anti-fascism is the dominant ideology and a message is encoded based on the dominant worldview, then fascism must be characterised as oppositional. Hall's distinction between dominant, oppositional, and negotiated

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[8] Stuart Hall. 1973. *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse. Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Stencilled Occasional Papers #5.* Birmingham: University of Birmingham.

meanings is too restrictive and relativistic. Hence the notion of critical reception/consciousness is added in figure 14.2.

A critical interpretation or meaning is an insight that enables the individual to put domination and exploitation into question and to develop models of society that focus on advancing benefits for all. A co-operative society is the true and essential form of society and human existence. Manipulation tries to advance interpretations that are a form of false consciousness, i.e. that do not put into question exploitation and domination, but rather foster and legitimate class structures and structures of domination in general. Critical and manipulated decoding/interpretation/consciousness are particular forms of consciousness.

The model shown in figure 14.2 has a structural level and an actor level. These two levels interact. Information workers are located on the actor level. They produce content that is publicly communicated. Actors involved in the communication process include journalists, other media workers, and audiences. Media structures include, for example, institutions, products, and technologies used for the production, distribution, and reception of content. Production is the basis for distribution and reception. Distribution and reception in turn are the foundation of further production. In the media system there is a dialectical, dynamic process, where actors and structures interact with each other.

Alternative Media, Critical Media

Alternative media are media that challenge the dominant capitalist forms of media production, media structures, content, distribution, and reception. Table 14.1 is based on figure 14.1. It gives a comparative overview of potential characteristics of alternative media. Not all of these characteristics are necessarily qualities of or conditions for the existence of alternative media. The model shows an ideal-type with a maximum number of characteristics. The central aspects are media producers, recipients, and practices of producers and recipients on the actor level; products, organisations, and distribution structures on the structural level.

In antagonistic societies, we find antagonistic media that at the same time have potentials to advance emancipation and domination. In capitalism, the media always to a certain degree have a repressive character: They sell commodities and distribute ideologies. But the media also have potentials for alternative organisational forms and the distribution of critical content. Such potentials often remain marginal. They do not automatically come into existence, because alternative media face structural inequalities in the capitalist media system. Only social struggles can improve the structural conditions that can help realise such potentials of alternative media. Media and communication are embedded in society's totality and therefore also within social struggles.

Table 14.1: Potential dimensions of traditional and critical media.

Dimension	Capitalist Media	Alternative Media
Media production	**Elite media producers:** journalists and other media producers as a professional wage-labour class that is confronted with corporate and political pressures, media production is conditioned by power	**Citizens' media producers:** independence of media production from corporate and political influences and pressures, true journalistic freedom, ordinary citizens as journalists and media producers, citizen-controlled journalism, individuals or groups that are affected by certain problems become journalists/producers or at least the positive subject of reports, journalistic practice as part of protest movement praxis, consumers as producers (prosumers), active audiences
Media product structures	**Ideological Form and Content:** content is strictly defined by what is considered as popular and sellable. The drive for profit can result in a lack of quality, complexity, and sophistication (as e.g. the case in Yellow Journalism that simplifies reality and is focused on singular examples, emotionalism, and sensationalism). Content takes on an ideological form either by the manipulative reporting of reality or by reporting stories as important that aren't really important for society at large. In any case, such content aims to distract the recipients from confrontation with actual societal problems and their causes.	**Critical Form and Content:** oppositional content that provides alternatives to dominant perspectives that reflect the rule of capital, patriarchy, racism, sexism, nationalism, etc. Such content expresses oppositional standpoints that question all forms of heteronomy and domination. Forms of counter-information and counter-hegemony include the voices of the excluded, oppressed, dominated, enslaved, estranged, exploited
One goal is to give voices to the voiceless and media power to the powerless, as well as to overcome filtering and censorship of information by corporate information monopolies, state monopolies, or cultural monopolies in public information and communication.
There are forms of presentation that are not one-dimensional, but that make demands of the recipients and challenge them in order to advance their imagination and complex, critical thinking (e.g. Brecht's concept of dialectical form in epic theatre, radical discontinuities that shock people).

Table 14.1: *(Continued).*

Dimension	Capitalist Media	Alternative Media
Organisational Media structures	**Hierarchical media organisations:** organisational media structures: Capitalist media corporations that aim primarily at making profit, financed by selling content to audiences and/or by advertisements. There is private ownership of media corporations and there are hierarchical structures with a clear power differential that creates influential decision-making actors and less influential roles as well as a division of labour within media organisations.	**Grassroots media organisations:** there is collective ownership and inclusive decision-making by those who work in the organisation, symmetric power distribution and economic self-management. There is a focus on non-commercial, non-profit media that are not financed by advertisements or commodity sale, but by donations, public funding, private resources, or no cost strategies. The division of labour is sublated: the roles of authors, designers, publishers, printers and distributors overlap.
Distribution structures	**Marketing and public relations:** high-tech distribution, marketing and public relations departments, specialists and strategies, sales departments, advertisements, distribution contracting.	**Alternative distribution:** technologies that allow easy and cheap reproduction, strategies like anti-copyright, free access (open access), or open content allow content to be freely shared, copied, distributed or changed. Furthermore, there are alternative distributors or alternative institutions (e.g. alternative book stores or libraries) that focus on the distribution of alternative titles.
Reception practices	**Manipulated reception:** content is interpreted in ways that contribute to false consciousness	**Critical reception:** content is interpreted in ways that allow the recipients to question domination

Table 14.2: Potential dimensions of traditional and critical media.

Dimension	Capitalist Media	Alternative Media
Media Production	Elite media producers	Citizens' media producers
Media product structures	Ideological form and content	Critical form and content
Organisational media Structures	Hierarchical media organisations, commodity form	Grassroots media organisations with collective ownership
Distribution structures	Marketing and public relations	Alternative distribution
Reception practices	Manipulated reception	Critical reception

Table 14.3: Characteristics of alternative and capitalist media.

		Capitalist media	Ideal alternative media	
Media Structure	**Economic form of media products**	Media product as commodity	Non-commercial media product, non-profit	
	Content of media products	Ideological content	Critical content	
Media Actors	**Consumers**	Many consumers	Critical consumers	Critical prosumers
	Producers	Few producers	Critical producers	

We need to decentre the media, which means that technological determinism and a neglect of the influence of society on the media should be avoided.

Alternative media question the capitalist organisation of media production, organisation, content, distribution, reception and structures. Table 14.2 provides a summary of the model outlined in table 14.1. Table 14.3 provides another version, where the dimensions are ordered a bit differently.

In elite media production, there are journalists and other media producers who are wage-workers. They face pressures from corporations and political organisations. Power shapes and influences media production. Professional media workers also have their own professional ethics and often compete for the accumulation of status. In citizen media, the producers are independent from the power of corporations and political organisations. Everyday citizens can become media producers. Citizens and workers control the media organisations. Those affected by society's problems are present in media reports and content. And they themselves can act as media producers. Alternative media are also often part of social movements. In alternative media, consumers are producers of the media.

Traditional media often produce and disseminate ideology. The published content is mostly shaped by sales perspectives. Commercial media's profit orientation can result in oversimplified, low quality and one-dimensional content. So, for example, tabloid media often simplify reality and use sensationalism. Media content is ideological if it distorts reality or focuses on issues that are presented as important, but distract attention from the focus on problems that are truly relevant for society.

Critical media's content and form are critical. Its content challenges domination, exploitation, capitalism, patriarchy, ideology, racism, sexism, nationalism, etc. Such critical counter-hegemonic information expresses the voices of those who are alienated, exploited, oppressed, enslaved, or excluded. Critical media give voice to the voiceless. They provide communication power for the powerless. They aim at overcoming the censorship and filtering of communication brought about by information monopolies controlled by corporations, the state or cultural organisations. Critical media question one-dimensional forms of

presentation. They use forms that enhance complex thought and imagination. An example is Brecht's dialectical, epic theatre.

Capitalist media yield profit by selling access, advertising, content, or technologies as commodities and exploiting communication labour. Such media corporations are privately owned and have a division of responsibilities and labour so that some take all the important decisions and others merely execute labour based on these decisions.

Grassroots media are organisational alternatives to capitalist and hierarchical media. Such organisations are collectively owned; they operate by participatory decision-making, which means that those working in the organisation take collective decisions. Such organisations are forms of economic self-management, where power is more symmetrically distributed. Grassroots media are not-for-profit and often do not sell advertisements or other commodities, but rely on donations, public funding, private resources, low-cost-strategies or no-cost-strategies. There is no rigid division of labour in grassroots organisations; the roles workers have overlap.

Traditional media use marketing, public relations, advertising, branding and high-tech in the process of distribution. Alternative media are open to different strategies, including low-tech and DIY technologies, open access and open content, anti-copyright, free access, etc. There are also alternative distributors that focus on the distribution of critical media. Examples are radical publishers and alternative book stores.

In the reception of information, critical and manipulated reception are two of the ways in which audiences interpret content. Manipulated reception means forms of interpretation that help to create or reproduce false consciousness. In contrast, critical reception means that content is interpreted in ways that make audiences question exploitation and domination. An interpretation of form or content is critical if the audiences are empowered to develop ideas about how to foster a co-operative society.

The models shown in tables 14.1, 14.2, and 14.3 describe ideal-type alternative media. Under ideal conditions, all of the dimensions of alternative media can be realised, including self-managed organisations, and widely available and widely consumed critical content that is critically interpreted and brings about change in society, including animating citizens to become alternative media producers. Ideal-type alternative media work best under conditions that provide citizens with the resources, time, and skills needed for them to participate in the public sphere. If critical media flourish under such conditions, then the division between media production and media consumption disappears. Grassroots media then become the standard form of media. Such conditions cannot be created within a capitalist society, but rather require the creation of a society of co-operation and the commons that is governed in the form of a participatory democracy.

Prefigurative politics assumes that alternatives to capitalism can already be established within capitalism. Prefigurative politics also believes that within

a capitalist framework, alternatives can operate relatively autonomously from capitalist structures. Alternative media, however, often face the problem of resource precarity and voluntary, self-exploitative, precarious labour. This type of media should therefore not be idealised. Self-managed organisations are not always politically progressive. It is perfectly possible for self-managed media to advance fascist or other repressive contents. A communication system must at least have critical content or critical form in order to be an alternative medium. In cases where audiences critically interpret repressive content published in traditional media, one cannot speak of alternative media, only of alternative reception. Certain parts of mainstream media can at times have critical content. The minimum condition for defining a medium as critical is that it is a critical product. But of course, it is desirable that as many dimensions of alternative media as possible can be realised. In capitalism, it is, however, difficult to reach all of these desirable aspects of alternative media. If one rigidly focuses on all dimensions, then one assumes that an alternative society can already be created within capitalism without abolishing structures of exploitation and inequalities. Citizen journalism, self-managed organisation, alternative distribution channels, and critical reception practices are desirable, but not necessary, features of alternative media. Critical content and critical form (= critical media products) constitute alternative media's necessary features. Alternative media are critical media.

Types of Critical Media

By using the method of advancing from the abstract to the concrete, we can identify subtypes of critical media. We will now introduce a typology that presents different forms of critical media (see table 14.4). The typology is based on the following questions: (1) what parts of the body are predominantly used in media production and reception; (2) is communication synchronous or asynchronous; (3) does communication take place spatially over a distance, or in the presence of the other communicators.

Given that critical form and critical content are decisive for the alternative character of the media, one cannot argue that all community-produced, non-commercial, 'free', independent, self-managed, self-organised, etc. media are alternative, although many of them are because they feature critical content. They are more likely to be critical than conventional media, but they are not automatically critical.

The key feature on which the typology is built is the notion of critical products that have critical content and critical form. Alternative media, like critical media, are critical products, which means that they have critical form and/or critical content. There can be critical form without critical content and vice versa. Critical form and critical content can also occur together. In artworks such as films, music, concerts, literature, theatre, visual arts or digital arts, form

Table 14.4: A typology of alternative media.

Communication	Production	Reception	Formats	Time	Space	Alternative media	Examples
Print/visual communication	Brain, hands	Brain, eyes	Newspaper, journal, books, pamphlets, leaflet, comics, satirical prints, flyers, visual art, graffiti, dress, textiles, pins, buttons, stickers, murals, etc.	Asynchronous	Distance	Alternative press, critical art	*Jacobin, Mother Jones, Oz, Bay Guardian, The Nation, Le Monde Diplomatique, New Statesman, Fifth Estate, Class War;* Duane Hanson, Joseph Beuys
Audio communication	Brain, mouth	Brain, ears	Radio, telephone	Synchronous	Distance	Free radio, independent radio, community radio, pirate radio	Pacifica Radio Network, KPFA Berkeley, KPFK Los Angeles, KPFT Houston, WBAI New York, WPFW Washington DC, National Federation of Community Broadcasters, Grassroots Radio Coalition
Audio communication	Brain, mouth, body	Brain, ears	Face-to-face communication, Conversation, talks, lectures, singing songs	Synchronous	Presence	Radical singing, protest singing	'Oh, freedom' (abolitionism), 'We Shall Overcome',
Audio communication	Brain, mouth, body	Brain, ears, body	Concerts, choir, dancing	Synchronous	Presence	Alternative music concerts, protest song concerts	Alternative music, recorded protest songs

Type	Producer	Receiver	Medium	Time	Space	Form	Examples
Audio communication	Brain, mouth, body	Brain, ears, body	Sound recordings (records, music cassettes, CD, MP3, etc)	Asynchronous	Distance	Alternative music, recorded protest songs	Mogwai, Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Billy Bragg, Robert Wyatt, 'The Preacher and the Slave' (Joe Hill, socialist), 'Bombtrack' (Rage against the Machine, social justice), 'Sound of Da Police' (KRS-One, anti-racism), 'Kill the Poor' (Dead Kennedys)
Audio-visual communication	Brain, mouth, body	Brain, eyes, ears	Theatre, performance, happening	Synchronous	Presence	Critical theatre	Youth International Theatre (guerrilla-theatre), Brecht's epic theatre
Audio-visual communication	Brain, mouth, body	Brain, eyes, ears	Film, video	Asynchronous	Distance	Critical television, independent cinema, underground film, avant-garde film, amateur videos	*Democracy Now!*, *Crash* (Paul Haggis, 2004); films by Jean-Luc Godard, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Andy Warhol
Audio-visual communication	Brain, mouth, body	Brain, eyes, ears	Live television	Synchronous	Distance	Public access television	Manhattan Neighborhood Network
Multimedia, computer, Internet communication	Brain, hands, mouth, body	Brain, eyes, ears	Digital text, digital audio, digital video, real time text/audio/video chat, online radio, online TV, wikis, blogs, Internet art, etc	Synchronous or asynchronous	Distance	Alternative online media	Novara Media, Young Turks, The Canary, Another Angry Voice, Indymedia, Alternet

is of particular relevance. Art exists through is aesthetic appearance. It is critical if it is non-identical with society and strengthens imagination. Its content is therefore not directly critical. Art's critique lives through its form and art's non-identity with society. But there is of course also critical political art that not only works at the level of form, but also at the level of content that is directly critical of domination and exploitation.

14.3. Summary and Conclusions

We can summarise this chapter's main conclusions:

- There is no pre-defined role of communication technologies in social struggles. Because capitalism is an antagonistic society, communication technologies often have an antagonistic role in this society.
- There are potentials for alternative media as critical media to challenge the capitalist organisation of the communication system. Providing access to critical forms and critical content is one of the foundations for critical debate, critical engagement, and critical consciousness.
- Critical media and the use of communications as tools of emancipatory struggles are forms of praxis communication.
- Alternative media face certain structural limits in capitalist society. The history of alternative media is a history of resource precarity and voluntary, self-exploitative labour. Alternative media therefore need to be complemented by public service media as alternatives to capitalist media. Alternative media require public sources of funding in order to be able to constitute a strong counter-public sphere.
- In capitalism, the class struggle is not only between capital and labour, but in the realm of communication also between capitalist media on the one side and commons-based, alternative, critical, and public media on the other side.
- Strengthening critical media must be part of any progressive political agenda.