

4 Critical Studies of Contemporary Informational Capitalism

The Perspective of Emerging Scholars

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

As six young scholars from Europe and North America, we first met each other as a group of PhD students at a conference in Uppsala, Sweden, called “Critique, Democracy, and Philosophy in 21st Century Information Society. Towards Critical Theories of Social Media” (see <http://www.icts-and-society.net/events/uppsala2012/>). For us it was a new and inspiring experience to have discussions with other emerging critical scholars in an international context and to discover that co-operation through joint projects can be an appropriate answer to feelings of isolation and marginalisation.

The kind of criticism which unites us and that we want to promote does not contend itself with merely an academic critique of categories, but instead focuses on the material critique of society. We thus agree with Adorno who, in his confrontation with Popper (known as the Positivism Dispute in German sociology), argued that “the critical path is not merely formal but also material. If its concepts are to be true, critical sociology is, according to its own idea, necessarily also a critique of society” (Adorno 1962/1976, 114). This orientation situates our approach within a tradition of Marxian-inspired thinking.

Karl Marx’s notion of critique is essentially humanist, it is based on the insight that “man is the highest essence for man”, and it leads to the “categoric imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence” (Marx 1844/1975a, 182). Marxist critique is directed against all forms of domination and oppression, which should not only be theoretically criticised but practically abolished. Influenced by Marx’s approach, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Max Horkheimer made an important contribution to further conceptualizing this notion of critique: Critical thinking is characterised by dialectical reasoning that rejects one-dimensional logic and conceives of social phenomena as complex and dynamic. It considers social relations that lie behind mere appearances and analyses social phenomena in the context of

societal totality. It is characterised by a humanist orientation, an interest in human emancipation and the desire to create a society without domination and oppression in which all human beings can live a self-determined life. It perceives social structures and phenomena as historically specific results of human practice and therefore as changeable (Marcuse 1937/1989; Horkheimer 1937/2002; Adorno 1962/1976).

This chapter is a first outcome of our cooperation and reflects our subjective experiences and basic views as emerging scholars. In what follows, we first want to point to the value and the importance of a critical approach to informational capitalism (Section 4.2.). We then identify principal challenges for critical thinking in today's higher education sector in Section 4.3. and in Section 4.4. we describe struggles against this situation and point to prospects that arise therein.

4.2 WHY IS CRITICAL THINKING IMPORTANT TODAY?

We live in a period of communicative and informational abundance. Never has it been easier to connect with friends, family or colleagues half a world away. Never has it been easier to find and participate in communities of affinity. It is perhaps the very richness and conveniences of our online lives however that obscures our simultaneous embeddedness in asymmetrical infrastructures of control and exploitative economies of accumulation.

But what do we mean by 'exploitation' in such a world? Exploitation presupposes that humans have to be alienated from the means of material and immaterial production by other humans. Exploitation is then, under capitalism, the legitimate appropriation of the fruits of human activities at the expense of their genuine producers (Marx 1867/1976, 729f). Informational capitalism still depends on the exploitation of double-free labourers who are free from personal dependence, but also free in terms of lacking the means of life production and therefore forced to sell their labour power (Marx 1867/1976, 270–272). The consequence of exploitation is ever widening social inequality.¹ Not only have asymmetries with the rise of the Internet remained, they have often been exacerbated and the gap between *the haves and have-nots* has subsequently widened (Bellamy Foster and McChesney 2011).

Informational capitalism's technological materials and infrastructure—natural resources like silicon, computer hardware, software and so on—are predominantly produced in traditional "sweat and blood" exploitative conditions in developing countries such as China and India as well as in Africa. Without these forms of labour no genuine knowledge work could exist. Frequently this fact is neglected by those who speak of today's knowledge economy. However we are starkly reminded of this when the biggest IT suppliers recurrently gain public attention and contempt for super-exploiting their employees,² or when we hear of, or experience ourselves, precarious

working conditions in the media, education and service sectors. Nick Dyer-Witheford (2001) therefore suggests an integrative focus on “material”, “immiserate”, and “immaterial” labour and their exploitation by capital on a global scale.

These are clearly phenomenologically distinct forms of exploitation, but the point is that capital has retained traditional forms of exploitation while finding new ways to valorise knowledge and information. From supermarket loyalty programs to Facebook posts we increasingly leave behind digital footprints that are packaged and sold as commodities, and used to further rationalise production. Indeed, the basic principle of web 2.0 is the massive provision and storage of personal(ly) (identifiable) data that can be systematically evaluated, marketed and used for targeted advertising. With the help of legal instruments such as privacy policies, Facebook, for example, has the right to store, analyse, and sell personal data of their users to third parties for targeted advertising in order to accumulate profit.³

These developments necessitate re-evaluation of some of the most central debates within media and communication studies: for instance, the cultural studies vs. political economy battles of the 1990s (Grossberg 1995; Garnham 1995). In the early years of the twenty-first century, just as the smoke had settled on this infamous debate, the emergence of interactive “web 2.0” and participatory “new media” appeared at first glance to signal that proponents of “the active audience” had won the day. In line with popular discourse, academic scholarship became almost giddy in its celebration of the libratory, creative, and participatory dimensions of the digital transformation, with reception and consequently consumption assuming pole position within the communicative process.

In recent years this celebration has been interrupted by the realisation that perhaps there was another side to this story. Data mining through “interactive” practices associated with “web 2.0” has first and foremost caused widespread concern about personal privacy. However, several scholars (Andrejevic 2007; Fuchs 2012) have argued that interactivity should not only be understood through the “invasion of privacy” perspective. As Mark Andrejevic (2011, 615) puts it “the goal is to craft an interactive mediascape that triples as entertainment, advertising and probe.” Indeed, the active audience is also active for capital. Intensive monitoring and surveillance means that consumption, whatever else it may also be, is at its core about production.

Within critical scholarship these new means of accumulation have been theorised with the help of concepts that, while often dating back to the pre-Internet period, have a renewed relevance today. Examples include theoretical concepts such as the general intellect (Marx 1939/1973), the exploitation of the commons (De Angelis 2007; Linebaugh 2008; Hardt and Negri 2009), the ongoing primitive accumulation of capital (Harvey 2003; Perelman 2000), the “housewifization” of labour (Mies et al. 1988), the social factory (Tronti 1972; Negri 1984), immaterial labour

(Lazzarato 1996; Negri 1992), the cybertariat (Huws 2003), audience commodity (Smythe 1977; Jhally and Livant 1986), and the panopticon (Foucault 1977), to name only a few.

One shouldn't get the impression that these new means of accumulation emerge uncontested. They certainly do not. Contradictions and antagonisms between the haves and the have-nots shape contemporary society. Such areas of contradiction and struggle in the media and communication system include: the enforcement of intellectual property rights vs. the possibility of collective knowledge resources and a shared and accessible culture; the promotion of destructive and conformist ideologies through commercial media vs. media that act as critical public watchdogs; environmental destruction through short-lived and toxic IT products that end up as dangerous eWaste vs. the prospect of sustainable ICTs; exploited and precarious labour as opposed to self-determined knowledge work.

Therefore struggles and contradictions are fought on behalf of (new) media but (new) media are also themselves embattled. The Internet is able to support both the commons and the commodification of the commons. New media are tools for exerting power, domination, and counter-power. Based on a Marxian dialectical perspective it is possible to grasp these contradictions that arise between the emancipatory potentials of new media, which entail a logic of the commons, and processes of commodification and enclosure that capture the commons and integrate them into the logic of capital.

Critical and Marxian-inspired media and information studies strive for the development of theoretical and empirical research methods in order to focus on the analysis of media, information, and communication in the context of asymmetrical power relations, resource control, and social struggles between the "Gesamtarbeiter" (collective worker) and capital. Critical media and communication studies want to overcome domination, exploitation, alienation, and the commodification of the commons in order to establish political processes and social transformations towards a participatory, democratic, and commons-based information society.

One of the main characteristics of critical political economy is praxis, through which this approach tries to transform the actually-existing social structures and processes, thus achieving the aforementioned goals. It therefore attempts to forego the usual dichotomy between theory and political practice. A radical interpretation of the world, after all, does not yet necessarily lead to actual social changes. Praxis was an important element of several philosophies, including those of Aristotle and Plato, but regained its importance with Marx and some Marxist interpretations in the twentieth century (most noticeably Gramsci and the Yugoslav "Praxis School"). The nucleus of this approach was perhaps most succinctly presented in the eleventh *Thesis on Feuerbach*, where Marx (1845/1976, 5) famously wrote that "philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it". Critical thinking both in and outside academia

can however lead to actual social changes if it breaks into wider society and materialises itself in social struggles. As Marx (1844/1975a, 182, 187) forcefully pointed out:

The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates *ad hominem*, and it demonstrates *ad hominem* as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself. [. . .] As philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapons in philosophy.

4.3 CHALLENGES FOR CRITICAL SCHOLARS

As young scholars in the field of media and communication studies we are witnessing the unfolding of a contradiction between the importance and explanatory value of critical, Marxian-inspired research on the one hand, and the reduction of spaces for critical thinking within academia on the other hand. In what follows we would like to reflect on this tension and refer to our own experiences in struggling against the neoliberal orientation of universities. Supporting these struggles means supporting the need for spaces for future generations of scholars in media and communication studies to learn from Karl Marx as a theorist of contemporary informational capitalism.

Capitalism works to decouple reflection and action, brain and hand. Privileged scholars were traditionally set free in a double sense. They were free from economic pressure, free to pursue individual self-development but also relatively free from contact with those material processes that maintained social inequalities in a class-based society. Such privileged scholars are often ideologists as they are detached from material practices. Critical young scholars must be critical about the persistence of these conditions that separate theory from praxis, they should strive to learn from other forms of knowledge that do not follow the specific rules of academia, and they can't be satisfied with merely reaching a privileged position. They do not consider knowledge as a power-neutral value per se, instead they are concerned with how knowledge production and their own activity as intellectuals can contribute to abolishing societal power and structures of domination.

In the 1960s, when student protest movements joined other new social movements, the education-for-all demand was an attempt to erode the privileged social position of the few. In the following decades though, the critique of these privileges was simultaneously sublated and inverted within

the neoliberal project of restructuring the educational sector. This neoliberal reform agenda is for instance manifest in the EU goal to become the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world (the Lisbon Strategy). It also can be seen in the current focus on so-called “smart growth” (Europe 2020 strategy). Education and knowledge production is becoming completely subsumed under the goal of economic growth and capitalist profit orientation. The traditional idea of the privileged free-floating scholar, newer processes induced by neoliberalism, and post-fordist modes of production are all establishing the framework that critical scholars must deal with today.

At the same time we can observe budget cuts in the realm of public education throughout North America and in many EU member states. These states, on the one hand, explicitly call for private sector funding of research and education, which opens doors for corporations to more directly influence research questions and programmes. On the other hand, the principle of competition has been implemented in the educational sector. Far from a productive competition over the best ideas, this is instead a material competition that is oriented around quantitative measurability. It generates great pressure to publish academic outcomes in highly ranked journals, while marginalizing the critical analysis of society. Such changes in the mode of academic production were prompted by changed relations of production. A downsizing of democratic organisational structures within universities and other research institutions has been enacted. Decision-making structures have been personalised and reorganised from the top to the bottom. For instance, it is now extremely hard for critical scholars to build coalitions amongst themselves or with students when it comes to influencing appointments or study programmes.

Neoliberalism can be understood as the one-dimensional making of education. The privileged position of the scholar is eroded within this process. Educational labour, along with information, knowledge, and affective work, has become a crucial part of the post-fordist capitalist economy, collapsing former boundaries between “the brain” and “the hand” (Virno 2004). Knowledge production has tended to move from the superstructure to the base. This is a very similar process to what happened to (now fully industrialised) communicative and cultural production in the twentieth century. Raymond Williams (2005, chap. 2) famously observed three decades ago how the means of communication were being transformed into means of production (cf. Garnham 1979; Smythe 1981).

Similarly, pressures of the capitalist market and competition started to colonise the realm of knowledge production at the level of university education. Of course knowledge production and research was already (ab)used during the Cold War, when the United States lavishly financed research and development in communications technology through military investments, while also crucially influencing the shift toward the “information society” (H. Schiller 1969; D. Schiller 2007). However commodification in

the realm of education is today even more all-encompassing, directly influencing the curricula of courses and study programmes.

The contemporary university is facing what can be called a “double crisis”. The debut issue of the *EduFactory Journal* laid out this problem clearly: “On the one hand, this involves an acceleration of the crisis specific to the university, the inevitable result of its outdated disciplinary divisions and eroded epistemological status. On the other hand, it is the crisis of post-fordist conditions of labour and value, many of which are circuited through the university” (Edu-Factory Collective 2010, 4f). This situation is tremendously challenging.

The challenge is heightened by the normalisation of precarious jobs and temporary contracts in North American and European universities. The simple reality of a perpetually expendable labour force of PhD students, post-docs, and sessional instructors serves as the most effective disciplinary tool available to university administrators. It is difficult to expect young scholars to challenge dominant views when they do so without the security that tenure provides. For example, some of us tried to organise the non-professorial teaching and research staff as part of the Austrian student protests “unibrennt” in Salzburg that also fought for the provision of sustainable funding and against precarious working conditions in the education sector. However we were not successful. It was difficult to motivate university teachers to see similarities between their interests and the demands of students. The students’ claims were seen by many teachers as potentially creating additional work that might prevent them from being successful in their struggle against precarity.

In this context we can see that teaching is being de-qualified and loaded onto precarious education workers. De-qualification implies a division between research and teaching, which has become ever more common. Generally, and unjustly, teaching does not count much when the career potential of young scholars is evaluated.

Besides the mentioned structural problems that critical young scholars are facing, they also remain dependent on existing spaces for their critical thinking. These spaces must actively be created by those critical scholars that have already gained resources, job security and reputation. In Germany and Austria there is currently no institutionalisation of Marxian-inspired critical theory within the field of communication, media and Internet studies. Although there is interest in critical theories among students and independent researchers, the fact is that two entire generations of German-speaking scholars do not engage with Marxist critical theory. On the contrary they support a hostile climate towards radical critical thinking by denouncing it as old-fashioned and outdated. They thereby completely neglect arguments for its pressing relevance, as presented in this volume. Emerging scholars from German-speaking countries are consequently forced to leave these regions and settle where better opportunities are provided or, alternatively, must focus on non-academic fields of activity, such as working for NGOs or political parties.

For critical young scholars it is particularly challenging to find a suitable way between the necessity to meet formal qualification requirements in order to get a job, and their desire to follow emancipatory goals that a critical analysis of society demands. For instance, to what extent is it meaningful to publish as much as possible instead of concentrating on real in-depth analysis? Or how meaningful is it to focus efforts on getting published in highly ranked commercial category A journals that are part of an exploitative knowledge industry, instead of giving full public access to one's work by publishing in alternative, non-commercial open-access journals? Critical young scholars must in these and other situations find a balance between adapting to a problematic educational and research system, and their will to transform this system.

4.4 STRUGGLES AND PROSPECTS FOR FOSTERING CRITICAL THINKING

In the previous section we tried to show how capitalism is increasingly encroaching upon research and teaching. Political economic pressures force the university to produce practically and technically exploitable knowledge. From a critical perspective the problem is not that scholarship is expected to be practically useful, but that it is expected to be practically useful for capital.

Of course, the university has never existed in isolation from society: societal developments have always shaped the university and the knowledge produced and taught at university has always had an impact on society. Marx stressed that above all, academic work necessarily is a social activity: "Even as I am active *scientifically*, etc.—an activity which I can seldom perform in direct community with others—I am *socially* active because I am active as a *man*. Not only is the material of my activity—such as the language in which the thinker is active—given to me as a social product, but my *own* existence *is* social activity; what I make from myself, I make of myself for society, conscious of myself as a social being" (1844/1975b, 298).

Rather than seeing the university as separated from society, critical scholarship wants to be connected to emancipatory political praxis. Marx emphasised that his work not only sought to theoretically criticise domination and oppression, but to abolish them. He argued that connected to political struggles "criticism is no passion of the head, it is the head of passion" (1844/1975a, 177).

As critical scholars we see it as our task to promote critical thinking and progressive change within academia and society in general. A first, and very defensive goal, is to keep alive the humanist idea that education is more than a business: it is a weapon for social emancipation. This may demand alliances with those scholars and political actors who bewail the fall of their privileged scholarly status.

Even if the dominant tendency today is the integration of the university into the logic of capital, there are still spaces in which critical thinking can arise and be fostered. The deterioration of work and study conditions at university might, for example, trigger critical reflection. In Section 4.3 we stressed that many young scholars are confronted with high teaching loads, which reduces their available time for reflection and research. However, teaching at the same time provides an opportunity to foster critical thinking. Not only scholars, but also students are experiencing pressures resulting from neoliberal education policy. Undergraduate students in many countries pay higher tuition rates every year while receiving fewer opportunities to actually learn from tenured professors. Most of them have little awareness of this reality until they are well into their degree. Those of us who have taught as sessional instructors have often been approached by students asking for reference letters for graduate school applications. When told that it would be better for them to ask a professor, they often reply that they don't know any professors.

While this is no doubt a sorry state of affairs, it also presents new opportunities for education. Instead of perpetuating the romantic image of the "life of the mind", we must seize the chance to connect the knowledge labour that we do to the jobs that many of our students will take upon graduation. For instance, many of our students have dreams of working in arts/culture/media sectors. In North America and Europe, it is impossible to even consider applying for such a job without having done one or more internships first. This is, for the most part, simply accepted as "paying one's dues". "This generation doesn't even look at it as exploitation" explains a member of Intern Labor Rights, a group that grew out of Occupy Wall Street:

I don't know how a bunch of smart, highly educated, willing workers can walk into an office or onto a film set or into a gallery, contribute all that intelligence, energy, and enthusiasm to an organization [and its] bottom line, and then think they didn't have anything to contribute because they [haven't] already worked in the industry for five years [...] This whole idea that their contribution doesn't mean anything yet, has no value, they've completely internalized [it]. It's horrifying to watch. (Cohen et al. 2012)

The "creative class" has clearly learned how to capitalise on the passions, idealism and dreams of the generation behind them. As depressing as this may be, it once again points to the relevance and urgency of bringing Marx into the classroom. Encouraging students to talk about their individual experiences with internships is a perfect way to introduce a number of core Marxian concepts, such as value, ideology, exploitation, or "free labour".

Connecting to the experiences students are having while studying to get a degree is only one way to encourage critical thinking. It is also possible, and

necessary, to try to connect to wider social struggles and protests. Today's students are often dismissed as politically apathetic and career-obsessed. However there are numerous examples around the world that demonstrate just how flimsy this generalisation is.

On October 22, 2009, a group of students squatted the assembly hall of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna in order to resist the restructuring of study programs according to the Bologna Declaration. This was the start of a wave of student protests in Austria that became known as the "unibrennt" movement and that continued throughout the fall of 2009. Between October 22 and October 29, lecture halls at the Universities of Vienna, Graz, Linz, Salzburg, Klagenfurt and Innsbruck were squatted. For several weeks, hundreds of students continued to occupy spaces and lecture halls at universities and used them for organising demonstrations, protest flash mobs, lectures, discussions and concerts as well as for reflecting on society, education and capitalism. The protests were directed against access restrictions to study programmes, tuition fees, the reduction of university education to professional training, undemocratic decision-making, the commodification of higher education and precarious working conditions at universities. On December 21, 2009, the police, by order of the vice-chancellor, cleared the largest squatted lecture hall at the University of Vienna.

As a moment of rupture the student protest was successful in initiating a public debate and critical reflection on the role of education in society. By occupying lecture halls, students not only created awareness about these issues, but furthermore re-appropriated parts of the university and created alternative spaces, characterised by democratic-decision making, critical thinking and debate. One important outcome of the protests at the University of Salzburg, for example, was that the university provided the necessary funds for a student-organised lecture series. Students from the University of Salzburg could attend the lecture series as part of their elective course modules. Throughout the 2010 summer term eleven invited speakers gave talks, which subsequently appeared in a collected volume (Sandoval et al. 2011). The lecture series inspired critical reflection about the role of the university in society, contemporary education policy as well as the role of student activism. A decisive question seemed to be how it would be possible to translate occasional protest waves into long term transformative movements that expanded spaces for critical thinking and critical scholarship.

At the University of Salzburg's department of communication studies, the struggle to strengthen the structural foundations for critical scholarship was in the end unsuccessful. In fact, the student protests coincided with the elimination of critical scholarship from the department. In fall 2009 a professor who was an exponent of a critical political economy approach retired and his chair was rededicated. At the same time the contract of another critically-minded professor was not extended and all members of his research group, who had temporary contracts, left the University of

Salzburg together with him. For critical young scholars the loss of these two professors ended all chances of receiving support or starting an academic career at the University of Salzburg. By fall 2010—one year after the student protests—critical Marxist thinking no longer existed in Salzburg’s department of communication studies.

One limitation of the Austrian protest movement was that it failed to make connections beyond the university. Other student protests have been more successful in establishing alliances with wider social movements.

The Canadian province of Quebec saw one of the largest mass mobilisations of students over the first half of 2012. Dubbed “the Maple Spring”, the uprising was stoked by opposition to the provincial government’s proposal to raise tuition rates by CAD 325 per year over five years. When the government passed an emergency law that attempted to control the growing demonstrations Quebec’s society joined forces with the students. Between 400,000 and 500,000 people marched through the streets of Montreal on May 22, 2012, transforming what had started as a student-led protest into what has been called “the largest act of civil disobedience in Canadian History”.⁴ The movement was able to expand because student protestors were able to effectively link their struggle to other struggles that resonated with the wider citizenry. One student participant told the Montreal daily *La Presse*, “We are fighting against the tuition hike, but we’re also fighting against the Northern Plan (a proposal by the Quebec government to expand natural resource exploitation in the vast, north of the province) and against this corrupt government [. . .] We have succeeded in opening up a debate over the future of Quebec society. This is already a victory.”⁵

In the end, the uprising succeeded in not only blocking the proposed tuition increases but it also helped force the ruling party from power in the provincial elections a few months later.

In Slovenia students have also played a large role in several recent protests. For example, Occupy Slovenia was initiated mostly by students and the younger generations who saw no bright prospects for the future. The first noticeable upsurge of political movements since the start of the global economic crisis started at the end of 2011. A multitude of several thousand people that organised itself through the Internet joined the 15-October (15O) global protests in Ljubljana. These global protests were inspired by the Arab Spring, the Greek protests, the Occupy movement, and especially the Spanish “Indignados” movement that started on May 15, 2011, (the 15M Movement). All of these movements fought for a redistribution of wealth and a different, more participatory form of democracy. The 15O protesters in Ljubljana decided to occupy the square in front of the Ljubljana Stock exchange. The protesters erased the “R” in *Borza* (Ljubljana Stock exchange) and renamed it *Boj_Za!* (meaning “a struggle for”). For several months Occupy Slovenia organised daily assemblies, where participants practiced “democracy of direct action”, set up several workshops, and throughout the occupation stressed that “no one represents us” (Razsa

and Kurnik 2012). A month later the *Mi Smo Univerza* movement (“We are the University”) declared an occupation of the Faculty of Arts (a part of the University of Ljubljana). A sit-in started on November 22 and MSU organised several lectures, demanding education and scholarships for everyone, coupled with the democratisation of universities and curricula that encompass critique of the prevailing neoliberal order.

These were only the early signs of awakened political activism in Slovenia. A new wave of protests was set loose at the end of 2012 in Maribor, where an uprising began against corrupt political elites. The *Gotofje* movement (“He is finished”, referring to the mayor of Maribor who later stepped down) then spread to other cities across Slovenia, most noticeably to Ljubljana, where several “all-Slovenian uprisings” against political and economic elites still continue into 2013. They involve all generations, including young students whose future prospects are the most difficult. In many cases the debates that started on the streets spread to the university in the form of lectures and seminars about the existing social situation.

The (student) protests in Austria, Canada and Slovenia are just some examples of the current wave of social activism that includes the wider Occupy movement, the Indignados movement in Spain and the social uprisings in Greece. Where possible, critical scholars should introduce their analyses into societal movements and social movements into the classroom. In this way both scholarly analyses and the movement may mutually benefit from emerging discussions. Protests have the potential to put certain topics on the public agenda. The Occupy movement was successful in initiating a debate about issues of class by pointing to the injustices of the capitalist system, which creates a minority of winners and a majority (99 per cent) of losers. Dissatisfaction and heightened public awareness of social problems such as inequality, domination, exploitation, environmental destruction, poverty, corporate irresponsibility, etc. may inspire critical reflection about capitalism both within and outside the university. This awareness may also provide renewed legitimacy to Marxian inspired theories and research.

The conference at Uppsala University that led to this book is a prime example of the renewed interest in Marxism and critical research in media and communication studies. Talks at this conference critically dealt with topics such as communication labour, surveillance, digital culture, commodification, exploitation, alienation and ideology in informational capitalism, alternatives, commons, the role of the Internet for protests and revolutions, etc. What seemed particularly promising was the strong presence of young scholars. Similarly a special issue published by *tripleC* (<http://www.triple-c.at>) in 2012 collected twenty-eight papers that give a rich account of Marxian-inspired theory and research, truly indicating that “Marx is Back” in media and communication studies.⁶ The Uppsala conference, as well as *tripleC*’s special issue, illustrate that there certainly is the potential for building international networks among emerging as well as more established critical scholars in this field.

As young scholars, it is certainly difficult to maintain a critical stance in face of all the challenges discussed in this chapter. But for inspiration it may help to remember what another critical scholar once wrote in his youth:

[. . .] what we have to accomplish at this time is all the more clear: *relentless criticism of all existing conditions*, relentless in the sense that the criticism is not afraid of its findings and just as little afraid of the conflict with the powers that be. (Marx 1843/1967, 212)

NOTES

1. Global wealth distribution is such that Oxfam recently claimed that the world's richest one hundred people earned enough last year to end extreme poverty for the world's poorest people four times over (Oxfam 2013).
2. The European project makeITfair for example published numerous reports that document the existence of unacceptable working conditions in the supply chain of media hardware companies, "makeITfair," accessed February 14, 2013, http://makeitfair.org/en?set_language=en.
3. Facebook's annual profit was US\$1 billion in 2011, Facebook SEC-Filings, "Form 8-k, 2012," accessed February 14, 2013, <http://pdf.secdatabase.com/700/0001193125-12-316895.pdf>. This number is comparable with the entire national budget of a small country like Slovenia.
4. Staff, 2012, "Biggest Act of Civil Disobedience in Canadian History" *Common Dreams*, May 23, accessed February 14, 2013, <https://www.common-dreams.org/headline/2012/05/23-5>.
5. Roger Annis, 2012, "Government Repression of Quebec Student Movement Sparks Massive Protests," *Global Research*, May 28, accessed February 14, 2013, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/government-repression-of-quebec-student-movement-sparks-massive-protests/31079>.
6. Critical conferences and journals such as *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*. *Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society*; *Javnost—The Public, Political Economy of Communication* (the journal of IAMCR's political economy section); *Democratic Communiqué*; and *Fast Capitalism* are essential for providing a platform for critical scholars in media and communication studies to network and exchange ideas.

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