

“Means of Communication as Means of Production” Revisited

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Abstract: This paper seeks to examine the claim made by Raymond Williams that the means of communication are a means of production. While agreeing with the central claim by Williams, the paper argues that the model which Williams' represents this claim with is insufficiently realized. By looking at the work of Marx and Althusser in relation to this claim, we suggest a new conceptual tool to actualize Williams' claims.

Keywords: Raymond Williams, Means of Communication, Internet, Means of Production, Marx, Althusser

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1. Introduction

In this essay I wish to explore Raymond Williams' assertion that the means of communication can be identified as a means of production. I seek to do this in the context of a critical enquiry of Williams' paper *Means of Communication as a Means of Production* (2005[1978]). It will be my thesis that Williams work opens up new possibilities in *new communications* theory. However I contend that despite opening up these possibilities, Williams' own theory is unable to develop these possibilities to their ultimate conclusion and we must turn towards Althusser's structural Marxism to assist in such development. The essay itself will be structured in three main sections. In the first section I'll outline Marx's definition of the means of production and how he viewed the means of communication as a form of the relations of production. I will also discuss Marx's base-superstructure and what defining the means of communication as the relations of production does for this understanding of society. In the second section I'll outline Raymond Williams' argument for identifying the means of communication as a means of production, drawing on the vast literature provided by Williams over his career, I'll argue that while Williams offers an interesting proposition, his argument is based on a definition of terms like 'production', which reduce their capability to express what the explicit means of production are. I'll argue that while Williams' wants to insist that production is beyond that of just 'commodity production', the use of communications now is one in which the information provided by the means of communication is treated like a commodity. In the last section, I want to examine how elements of Althusser's philosophy can produce the theoretical intervention necessary to examine the the internet as a means of communication identified as 'means of production' which produces 'information as a commodity'. The aim of this paper is twofold. To develop a foundation for the continued analysis of the means of communication such as the Internet, in the vein of Marxist theory and, to attempt to overcome the criticisms of structuralism that are contained in Raymond Williams' work.

2. Karl Marx and the Means of Production

In 1857, Marx wrote one of his more enduring pieces of work. The *Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Marx 1859/1994) is for many within Marxist theory the Rosetta stone, by which all work by Marx and Engels produced after this time are understood. However it is one significant passage within this document, which has received substantial exegetical focus. Marx writes that

“In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a give stage in the

development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social formation is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of old society. Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since close examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation” (Marx 1994, 211).

The passage itself is rich with information that can help guide our understanding of the *means of production*. From the idea that “the totality of relations of production constitute the economic structure of society...on which arises a legal and political superstructure” (Marx 1990, 211), which briefly outlines the base-superstructure edifice which has become a central component, and heavily debated aspect of the Marxian tradition, to the idea that “at a certain stage of development; the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production” (ibid.), we can begin to formulate how Marx constructed the *means of production*. Necessarily it is these two important segments from the passage of the preface that concern us in this paper. If Raymond Williams’ proposal that the means of communication are a means of production then this would necessitate a rethinking of society’s structure, or would it? In order to understand the problem, we need to first be able to understand the elements that are used in constructing the problem. The main elements, as we see in the title of Williams essay, are: 1.) The means of communication and 2.) the means of production. We may argue that the title of the essay *Means of Communication as a Means of Production* identifies the means of production as a larger category than the means of communication, that the means of communication become just a subcategory of the means of production. Seem in this way it is then necessary, that if we are to identify the means of communication as a means of production, to come to an understanding of what the means of production are.

In Marx, the means of production refers to two elements of production that when entered into a labour process becomes a unified productive force. We can understand then, according to the account of *historical materialism* that is outlined in the passage above that these elements, the instruments of labour and the raw materials are then an aspect, in their development, of the conflict that arises between the productive forces and the relative production. As such they play a role in defining the social structure. It is then required that we explore these categories further. For Marx “an instrument of labour, is a thing, or a complex of things, which the worker interposes between himself and the object of his labour and which serves as a conductor, directing his activity onto that object” (Marx 1990, 285). While there is debate surrounding the actual means of production and what can and cannot be understood by them, G.A. Cohen (2000) argues that such things as strength, skills, knowledge, and intelligence are not an aspect of either raw materials or instruments of labour but that they are in effect a means of the labour process. The ambiguity of terms such as *means of production* and *instruments of labour* allow for discrepancies in how one describes such elements of the productive process. It seems then that what an instrument of labour is, according to

such a definition, is an instrument such as a hammer, or even a factory, anything which focuses activity on an object of labour. Despite the broadness of such a concept, it become even broader when we take into account Marx's assertion that "we may include among the instruments of labour...all the objective conditions necessary for carrying on the labour process" (Marx 1990, 286).

We can, I believe, infer then that included in the instruments of labour are the raw materials and objects of labour. We must also be careful about the conflation of the raw materials with the objects of labour. While all raw materials are objects of labour, it cannot be said that all objects of labour are raw materials. In Marx's sense raw materials are only to be understood as raw materials if they have already passed through the labour process (Marx 1990). We may say then that a plank of wood is a raw material, while a tree standing in the forest is a natural resource. The difference between them is that the plank of wood has been worked on already by instruments of labour to turn it into such a product. According to what I've said above, the instruments of labour can be understood as the totality of the means of production. This is because for Marx any form, which provides the objective conditions for carrying out labour, is an instrument of labour. Seeing as such that the object of labour is needed for labour to take place, we can infer then that an object of labour is an instrument of labour, which is worked on by other instruments of labour to produce a product for consumption. We may perhaps say then that, the means of production are nothing more than the instruments of labour. Considering that the productive forces are the unity between the labour process and the means of production, it is the attribution of 'work' to the instruments of labour that unifies them as productive forces.

2.1. Marx and the Means of Communication as a Means of Production

How does this pertain to our discussion that the means of communication are a means of production? If we are to interpret the means of production as an instrument of labour which is a necessary condition of the labour process, then we must provide evidence that the means of communication are an instrument of labour and that the means of communication as a means of production provide a necessary condition for the labour process.

In *Capital* Vol 1, in the section entitled *Machinery and Large Scale Production*, Marx discusses the relation of the means of production and the means of Communication. He writes briefly that "the revolution in the modes of production of industry and agriculture made necessary a revolution in the general conditions of the social processes of production", these "social processes of production" are what Marx calls the "means of communication" and the "means of transportation" (Marx 1990, 506). When Marx was writing, these forms of *social processes of production* could be seen actualized in the telegraph and railroad systems. However, Marx does not often speak of the "means of communication" apart from the times he speaks of the means of transportation. In fact it is difficult, at least in the work of *Capital*, to evaluate any discernible differences between what Marx calls the means of communication and the means of transportation. This is given strength by comments that Marx makes in Vol. II of *Capital* in asserting the non-commodificatory aspects of the communication industry "for moving commodities and people and the transmission of mere information" (Marx 1992 134). If we follow Marx, can we not then ascertain, from the Preface to *The Contribution of a Critique of Political Economy* that the means of communication are a form of relations of production for Marx? By the relations of production we may understand the totality of the social relationships that promote production and reproduction of the means of life. We see this in the Preface where Marx writes that "in the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production" (Marx 1994, 211).

In the sense that we attribute the means of communication as relations of production we refer to the social relations of production, thus understood as the socio-economic relations that constitute the social structure of society. What we see here is the necessary foundations between the material productive forces (instruments of labour + labour) and the social relations of production (the means of communication and transportation). It is easy to recognize the means of communication as relations of production in exactly the way Marx has set it out. What we see in Vol 2. of *Capital* is another type of distancing, in which the communications industry is signalled out as an important branch of industry, along with the transport industry, "in which the product of the production process is not a new objective product" (Marx 1992 134). For Marx, both the transport industry and the communications industry do not produce new products, but only "displace people and things" (Marx 1992 135). It is well documented in *Capital*, as shown above, that for Marx the means of communi-

cation were closer in structure and process to the means of transportation than they were to the means of production, and even developed in the same way when revolutionized (Marx 1990, 506). What is remarkable and in need of further discussion is that in the revolution of the means of transportation and the means of communication they become fetters upon the large-industry manufacturers (which we may understand as productive forces). According to Marx, at a stage in the development of the material forces of production the social relations of production block (or fetter) any further development. At this stage, social revolution takes place which revolutionizes the relations of production allowing for further development of the productive forces. Of course if Marx argues that the means of communication are a relation of production, then at some stage we must confront a contradiction between what Marx says about the means of communication and what Raymond Williams says. In the next sections I will look at Raymond Williams' Cultural Materialism as a proposal of society's structure against Marx's historical materialism and argue that it is the emphasis on culture rather than the economic in Williams' works that allows him to identify the means of communication as a means of production.

But we must recognize a difference between the tangible nature of goods and the intangible nature of "communication". At one level, there exists a form of communication between the producers and the suppliers; at another level between workers and managers. There is also a level of communication that exists between the consumer and the producer. We must then recognize a distinction between *mass communication* and *localized communication*. The distinction between *mass* and *localized* is never made in Marx's work; the type of communication that is discussed in the work of Marx is ultimately related to that of mass communication. This is communication that appears on a grand scale in the productive process. We can say that *localized communication* is a sub-domain of *mass communication*. Without the effects of *localized communication*, or the manager telling the workers what to do, then there would be no effective *mass communication* or the dispersal of information from the workers as producers of a certain product, to various other groups including suppliers and consumers.

3. Williams on Base and Superstructure

In the exposition of Williams' discussion on the base and superstructure, we find the focus is on specific keywords that formulate the discourse. We are confronted in Williams work with a detailed discussion of *production*, *determination*, *base* and *superstructure*. It is Williams's position that the base and superstructural construction of society originally formulated by Marx has been misconstrued by thinkers throughout the generations due in part to a misunderstanding of Marx's use of particular forms of language. It was an aspect of Williams's method to study the language of individual thinkers rather than the abstractions that they posed (Eldridge and Eldridge 1994). As he writes in *Marxism and Literature* (1977): "In the transition of Marx to Marxism, and then in the development of expository and didactic formulations, the words used in the original arguments were projected...as if they were precise concepts, and...as if they were terms for observable 'areas' of social life" (Williams 1977, 77). For Williams, the description that Marx posed of the base and superstructure edifice is no more than an analogy (Williams 1993), a linguistic expression of the structure of society which does not adequately portray society, it merely provides a simplified variation of what society is actually like. For Williams, the letter to J. Bloch written by Engels in 1890 provides grounds which lessen the usefulness of the formula of the base-superstructure that Marx used (Williams, 1993). Of the formula provided by Marx, Williams turns to a passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* to show that Marx asserted rationalism to the superstructure which Williams's states increased the complexity of the formula. He writes of this that "recognition of complexity is the first control in any valid attempt at a Marxist theory of culture. The second control...is an understanding of the formula of structure and superstructure" (Williams 1993). In the letter that Engels writes to Bloch, Engels argues that any statement which reduces the social structure to the determined effect of the economic base has misconstrued what Marx and himself meant and that any such reduction becomes "meaningless, abstract and absurd..." (Engels 1890). Engels writes further that "the economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure...also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form" (Engels 1890, 475). Building from this, Williams argues that Engels provides the complexity of the social structure, which is needed in the development of a Marxist theory of culture and shows Marx's formula to be just an analogy, in reality the structure is less absolute and less clear. Williams does not fully follow Engels approach, chastising him for failing to escape

the formulaic approach in terms of levels. Williams argues that Engels' model falls into the same problem as Marx's. He writes that "Engels does not so much revise the enclosed categories...as reiterate the categories and instance certain exceptions, indirectnesses, and irregularities which obscure their otherwise regular relation" (Williams 1977, 80). We can argue from this point that Williams is determined to move away from any Marxian theory of culture that privileges the economic base over the superstructure. For Williams, "Marx...had correctly stressed the connection between culture and the economy, but had badly mistaken the nature of that connection. Culture and communication were to be understood as primary and not secondary components of the social totality, constitutive and not reflective in the maintenance and development of the social order" (Higgins 1994, 110)

Williams' objection to the base and superstructure analogy of Marxian theory is summed up in this passage which appeared in *Marxism and Literature*. He writes: "The social and political order which maintains a capitalist market, like the social struggles which created it, is necessarily a material production. From castles and palaces and churches to prisons and workhouses and schools; from weapons of war to a controlled press: any ruling class, in variable ways though always materially, produces a social and political order. These are never superstructural activities. They are necessary material production within an apparently self-subsistent mode of production can alone be carried on" (Williams 1977, 93). Of course, it is only logical to conceive of castles, palaces, churches and prisons as material production, despite their "superstructural activities", but we can immediately perceive a deficiency in Williams' argument. While it may be true that the "superstructure" has in the past been seen to be nothing more than a immaterial form of consciousness. This is a rejected claim in contemporary Marxian theory. As Terry Eagleton has pointed out: "there is a strong implication through...Williams' work that to label a phenomenon 'superstructural' is somehow to assign it a lesser degree of effective reality than an element of material production" (Eagleton 1989, 168). It may be perhaps that Williams, like Althusser, had in mind a Hegelian form of causality which expressed the idea that all phenomena of the social totality may be reduced to a particular form of essence. But unlike Althusser, who showed that Marx had moved past the Hegelian influence of his past, Williams' contends that the base-superstructure of the late Marx was still heavily invested in this form of effective causality. In Eagleton's mind all Williams' has done thus far is to re-invent the wheel. His criticism of an outdated model of the base and superstructure is more ritualistic than useful in any theoretical sense (Eagleton 1989). Williams' *Marxism and Literature*, like Althusser's *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* can be seen as "a return to the complex unity of Marx's original insight into the 'indissoluble unity' of the 'whole social process'" (Higgins 1994, 114) It is "the overcoming of the dichotomy between 'society' and 'nature'" (Williams 1977, 19) For Williams instead of the economy as the central concept of society, he has argued that it is culture at the centre "of modern thought and practice" (Williams 1977, 11). The term *culture* thus become a central concern of Williams, evidenced by his attempt to formulate a *Cultural Materialism* (See Williams 1977, 1993) and a *Sociology of Culture* (See Williams 1981). For Williams, "Marx...had correctly stressed the connection between culture and the economy, but had badly mistaken the nature of that connection" (Higgins 1994, 110). It was not that culture was a secondary attribute aligned with the superstructural elements such as the politico-legal, as some Orthodox Marxists were fond of saying, but that "culture and communication were to be understood as primary...components of the social totality" (Higgins 1994, 110). Cultural Materialism is the position that *Culture* should be recognized as both a social and material productive process and practice which identifies "the arts" as social uses of material means of production (Williams 1980). Following on from the German Romanticism of Herder and Coleridge, Williams sort to establish culture "as separate from and yet superior to both economics and politics" (Milner 1994, 45). Is this culturalism, however, not just simply a form of determinism, which privileges culture over economy? A reverse of the formulation of the Orthodox Marxists that Williams criticizes? Not necessarily. Though it appears as such, *determinism* in Williams is a quite specific meaning different from that which he seeks to criticize. The notion of *determination* plays a large role in Williams' work: "no problem in Marxist cultural theory is more difficult than that of 'determination'", he writes in a section of *Marxism and Literature* entirely dedicated to this keyword. He seeks to define determination, not as a "predicted, prefigured, controlled content", but moreso as content which sets the limits and exerts pressure (Williams 2005, 34). This is in keeping with his dislike of the technological determinism that he feels is present in the orthodox Marxist presentation. Once again we must point out a similarity that Williams shares with Louis Althusser. Both thinkers, rather than see determination as a process of control, saw it as a setting of limits. Both to some extent follow the Engelsian description

of determination laid out in the letter to Bloch which we discussed above. Williams criticizes what he calls *abstract objectivity* in which the determining process is independent of men's will in the absolute sense that they cannot control it. This is the basis for the position of economism that was widespread in the 2nd International, furthermore Williams thinks this position as a philosophical and political doctrine is worthless (Williams 1977). Economism is rejected by Williams, but despite his words to the contrary, determinism still plays a role in his work. Williams asserts the primacy of culture within the societal structure, culture is no longer superstructural but becomes a basic process along with other determining elements such as the economy and politics. In order to escape from the *cultural determinism* that may be levelled at such a position as Williams, he connects his work with that of Antonio Gramsci, specifically the concept of hegemony. Hegemony in this sense refers to notions of dominance and subordination. This is to say that the dominant element of the societal structure does not "rule" over the other elements, as one might be persuaded to say in the sense of Orthodox Marxism, but that the dominant element necessitates the needs and wants of other elements of society and in those other elements recognizes its own needs and wants. In this sense, for Williams, the cultural, political and economic elements of the societal structure work co-operatively in the construction of society.

Under Williams model, due to his own neglected way "material" is used in describing the "base" and "superstructure", the means of communication cannot properly be identified as a means of production. If we were to accept Williams model, then the use of *production* would be broadly defined to such an extent that the Marxian notion of *production in general* would become colloquially used to be defined as any type of *production*. Without a determining base, even one that "in the last instance" is never actually realized. Society becomes an open category, always being redefined. Instead in the following section, I will argue that the means of communication can be adequately identified as a means of production by applying the structural-Marxist formulation of society that was devised by Louis Althusser.

4. Althusser and the Means of Communication as a Means of Production

Unlike Williams, Althusser strongly recommends the model first proposed by Marx in the 1859 *Preface*. However, Althusser also takes into account the reaction by Engels, formulated in a letter to Bloch, to the point that the economy is the primary determinant of the social structure. Louis Althusser's reading of Marx overcomes the determination and economism that Williams also tried to overcome, but the benefit of Althusser's reading is that he does not fall into a deterministic mode of relying on culture as Williams did. Like Williams, Althusser's starting point is the importance of complexity in the Marxian social structure and Engels' letter to Bloch. For Althusser there is still the importance of the base-superstructure edifice, but in following Engels, Althusser argues for the *relative autonomy* of the superstructural elements, of which the economy only determines in the last instance. Now at a glance this determination in the last instance seems to present an extrapolated version of Marx's determinism. However for Althusser, the type of determinism involved is one of setting limits. This is to say that the economy, in the last instance, determines the elements of the social whole that dominates in the social formation. This is not a fixed absolute, as Williams may contend, the dominant element "varies according to the overdetermination of the contradictions and their unseen development" (Althusser and Balibar 2009, 357). We are interested in two points that arise from this firstly, the differences between *determination in the last instance* and *structures in dominance* and secondly, the role of *overdetermination*. Williams' criticized the notion of *overdetermination* as being a "repetition of the basic error of 'economism' which is that it still relies on the economy as a primary determinant within the social structure (Williams 1977). However before we get to deep into a discussion about *overdetermination*, we must discuss the difference between "*determination in the last instance*" and *domination*. The category of *determination in the last instance* first becomes known in the letter between Engels and Bloch that we have referred to throughout this paper. Engels writes that "there is an interaction of all...elements in which, amid all the endless host of accidents (hat is, of things and events whose inner interconnection is so remote or so impossible of proof that we can regard it as non-existent, as negligible), the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary" (Engels 1890). This is to say that where a causal connection cannot be found in regards to the elements of the social structure, it is the economic base, which asserts itself as the determining force. Althusser takes up Engels notion and expands it in regards to the structural reading of Marx's social structure. One of the expansions that Althusser added to this form of determination is that the *last instance* is never actually realized (Al-

thusser 2005). What Althusser is trying to do is apply an applicable form of causal relation instead of the two past forms of causal relation (i.e. mechanical and effective) which he sees as containing flaws. For Althusser, structural forces are at work within social formations. Contained within these social formations are elements of the social structure which interrelate with one another to determine the effect that the social formation has. This is understood in that the effects of the social structure are determined not by something that lies outside the social structure but by the elements of the social structure itself (Althusser 2009). What Williams and the Orthodox Marxists had in common was that they conceived of the base structure (whatever it may contain) as a separate entity from the superstructure. Althusser remedied this by arguing that the base and superstructure were elements of the same structure and that it was the interrelationship between these elements that explained the social structure.

How does Althusser's structural theory succeed in identifying the means of communication as a means of production, where Williams's theory failed? In Williams' theory, as we have shown already, his problem was that he had presupposed that the superstructural was combined of immaterial content that as such, in arguing for the materiality of the superstructure, attempted to show that the elements of the superstructure were just as much an aspect of material production as was economic production. However, no one would disagree that the elements of the superstructure are material and that they themselves produce things. In Althusser's famous essay *Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus* (1990), he argues for the materiality of ideology, which makes up the elements of the superstructure. For Althusser, "an ideology always exists in an apparatus" (Althusser 1990, 112) and he claims that ideology has a material existence. For Althusser, the notion of material exists in different modalities, which are all rooted in physical existence. So while ideology may not be "material" in the sense that Williams' palaces are material, they still nonetheless exist in a specific material modality. So while we may maintain that *ideology* as an imaginary relation to reality doesn't have material existence, Althusser wants to argue that the realization of these beliefs in action and practices confirm their materiality. We have certain relations to the real that require us to partake in certain practices within the material ideological apparatus. These practices can then be confirmed as the material existence of our ideological beliefs. In this sense the superstructure pertains to be a material structure. The practices of the social, legal and political ideologies are to be seen as the material existence of these ideologies. In Williams' case he argues that the means of communication can be understood as a means of production because of the sense in which "material" is used. But as I have just shown, there is no need to change the keyword of "material" if we just apply a structuralist thinking to the problem.

5. E.P. Thompson's Critique of Althusserian Marxism

Having given an overview of Althusser's position, I'll now attend to a critique of Althusser's Marxism by E.P. Thompson (1978). Thompson's critique, as polemical as it was "moving from irony to caricature....to mere abuse" (Thompson 1978, 130) attributing Althusser's Marxism to a neo-Stalinism does provide good insights and has provided influential. Although Gregory Elliot has stated that Thompson's critique has less to do with Althusser and more to do with Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst (Elliot, 2009). Nevertheless we shall outline one particular criticism provided by Thompson in an attempt to overcome it. For E.P. Thompson, Althusser and his Marxian methodology are unable to provide answers to questions about Culture (Communications) because the structuralism that Althusser endorses departs from Marx's historical method he writes that "Althusser (and his progeny) find themselves unable to handle, except in the most abstract and theoretic way, questions of value, culture – and political theory" due to in part the "structuralism of stasis" that departs from Marx's own historical method (Thompson 1978, 197). He further argues that Althusser's conceptual universe does not provide the adequate tools for the explanation of change. According to Thompson, Althusser' structuralism does not allow for transformations; historically or socially. "Structure, like a whale, opens up its jaws and swallows process up...process survives unhappily in the structure's stomach" (Thompson 1978, 283). This is to say that while processes may take place within the structure of society as elaborated by Althusser, they don't actually change the structure itself which remains a constant. However Althusser's structuralism is far from a static monolith as Thompson would like to suggest. The explanation of the structure, in Althusser's structural causality does not exist in a form of static. The relationship between the irreducibility of the base and the superstructure does not allow for the stasis that Thompson sees, it is the overdetermination of processes within the structure which Althusser saw, and by introducing concepts such as 'determina-

tion in the last instance and structures in dominance, he avoided the structures collapse into relativism. Anderson (1980) shows that Thompson's reading of Althusser does not show that Althusser put forward a definition of "the object of history" which unveils a dynamic structure: "For Althusser does attempt a more substantive definition of the object of history: a historical fact is one 'which causes a mutation in the existing structural relations'....Thompson has overlooked what is the hinge of the definition he is attacking, the term 'mutation'. Althusser's formula puts an impeccable emphasis on *change*, rather than on stability as Thompson imagines it to do" (Anderson 1980, 14).

Althusser's structuralism is based upon the notions of *Overdetermination*, *determination in the last instance* and *Structures in dominance*. It is these notions which provide the dynamism within Althusser's system which is at odds with Thompson's allegations. For Althusser, as we showed above, the determination he speaks of one which exerts pressure on the particular elements, setting the limits by which the 'structure in dominance' is able to function. This Thompson misreads in Althusser and would very much agree with him, as he himself states that 'Williams and I have been insisting for years of defining "determine" in its senses of "setting limits" and "exerting pressures" (Thompson 1978, 351). *Structures in Dominance* are not permanently fixed but vary according to the overdetermined contradiction (Althusser 2009). If it is true, as we believe it is, that Althusser's structuralism is one of dynamism and not one of stasis as Thompson believes, then we may also argue that Althusser's conceptual universe does provide us with the conceptual tools to judge and analyse change and further more allow us to grasp questions related to culture.

The contestation between Althusser and Thompson lies in the heated debate between that of structure and human agency. The debate is that of the primacy of structure or agency in the development of human behaviour. We know from Marx that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (Simon 1994, 211). For Marx it is the structure of the superstructure (ideology) that determines the consciousness of human behaviour. Althusser follows this presenting humanism as an ideology which manifests itself in the interpellation of the individual as a subject by the ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1990). In contrast to this Thompson argues that while social structure may have an effect on human behaviour, its effect is weak "for any living generation, in any 'now', the way in which they 'handle' experience defies prediction and escapes from any narrow definition of determination" (Thompson 1978, 363).

The debate between structure and agency is far too large to cover adequately in this paper. But let us try and think what we have already said back to the main argument of the piece. The internet, it cannot be denied, as proved to be a major cultural change in Western society. As such, human behaviour has itself changed in order to cope with such change. One is now always connected to the internet; the checking of emails is a daily (or even twice daily) occurrence. Contra Thompson, Structures of society do determine our behaviour, but I agree with Thompson to the extent that I do not think Structure is the only determinate of human behaviour. Given Althusser's structural causality as a dynamic structure, I do not think that it is claimable that structure determines every aspect of human behaviour. In many respects the debate between structure and agency is also a debate of nature or nurture.

6. The Internet as a Means of Communication and a Means of Production

The technological advancement of media and communications has been astounding since the publication of Raymond Williams' paper. In this last section, I want to argue that the means of communication that we have available to us via the Internet, such as Facebook and Google, are in fact a type of means of production, though not in the way that Williams would probably suggest. In Marx, the means of production are the unity between the tools of production and the materials of production. The tools of production are, or can be defined as things, which an agent will use on the materials of production in order to formulate a specific item of interest. In an economic situation, this item of interest, known as a commodity, would then be sold in the marketplace for a value. However, the type of process we have described does not only take place within an economic framework. Let us take as an example: the production of this paper you are now reading. The author is provided with two things: 1. The tools of production, by which we mean, in this case, conceptual tools such as Marx's theory of capital and Althusser's structural Marxism, the PC used to write the paper on, the books poured through in order to understand the fundamental components of each thinkers arguments and so on and so forth. 2. The materials of production, or the work of Raymond Williams. The author then uses his material and conceptual tools to develop the material of production

into a product, or the paper that now sits before you. Essentially, the author is not driven primarily by the capitalist commodity production, which Raymond Williams argued dominates society, of course we may argue that a reason to be published is in order to secure a position at an academic institution, but this is only a subset of reasons which play into the whole publishing culture of academia. This type of production is not only limited to the production of knowledge, which happens in academia, and the production of commodities that happens in the economy, but can also be applied to the idea of the means of communication that we have available to us via the Internet. Let me give an example of how the types of means of communication described above act as a means of production. In the use of Facebook, the user will gain access to this Internet forum by use of a computer, mobile phone or any sort of electronic device, which has access to the Internet. We have thus identified two forms of tools of production: 1) An electronic device linked to the Internet and 2) The Internet itself. Our task now is to identify the materials used in production. In this case the materials provided to be used by the tools of production are the voluntarily submitted information. Whether it is everything about you, including your hobbies, your likes and dislikes etc, or just a simply name and email address, what you provide Facebook with is raw materials, which are then used to produce a finished product, i.e. your Internet profile. I must admit that the use of the term "production" is broad in this sense, but I do not think that this denigrates that such Internet forums as "Facebook" can be identified as a means of production.

The internet as a means of communication is also a fast growing means of production. Following Alvin Toffler (1980) and Christian Fuchs (2012), I want to use the notion of a prosumer in the development of this idea. Prosumer, as the name suggests is a neologism of "producer" and "consumer". The Internet as a means of communication and a means of production has seen the growth of the prosumers. Fuchs (2012) has argued that while users of the Internet have seen to the growth of the commodity market of the internet based on their user activity, they have also recognized as content producers that "there is user-generated content, the users engage in permanent creative activity, communication, community building and content production" (Fuchs 2012, 43). As a means of production, the Internet, or in particular, web-based companies such as Google, Facebook and Youtube are able to take the raw material of information that is provided to them by the user and use that information to create new products, whether that be new online games designed to have the user invest time and money or simply a new addition to their integral system which gets such companies more users. We have briefly confronted the question of the Internet both as a means of communication and as a means of production, but can the Internet be a means of communication as a means of production.

We can also distinguish between the social means of production and the economic means of production. As Jacob Torfing has written: "Mass media are...engaged in the production of the fabric of everyday life as they organize our leisure time, shape our social behaviour and provide the material out of which our very identities are constructed in terms of class, race, nationality, sexuality and distinctions between 'us' and 'them'" (Torfing 1999, 210). In terms of social "means of production", sites like Facebook and the search engine Google are said by Eli Pariser to have formulated algorithms so that what you view on your specific page is informed by your interests and has even gone so far as to suggest that ideological viewpoints dissimilar to your own are filtered from your immediate view, what he called "filter-bubbles" (Pariser 2011). I call this a social "means of production" because the product generated by this algorithm working on your personal information generates an identify of yourself viewed by the world. In the same way we can understand the means of communication as an economic means of production, in which your personal information is used by advertisers of certain products to appeal to you. One needs simply to look at the front-page of their Facebook profile to be bombarded with advertisements that "you may like" according to Facebook. Fuchs (2012) has discussed this in relation to the advertising cookie *DoubleClick*. Purchased by Google in 2007, *DoubleClick* "collects and networks data about usage behaviour on various websites and sells this data" (Fuchs 2012, 46). This information allows companies to then target you with personalized advertising messages.

7. Smythe: Blindspots, Audience Commodity and the Means of Production

The role of advertising, both in the economic and cultural milieu of the capitalist mode of production was heavily analysed by Dallas Smythe. Smythe (1977) argued that when it came to mass media and communications, an inability to present "the economic and political significance of mass communication systems" presented a blindspot in "Marxist theory in the European and Atlantic basin

cultures” (Smythe 1977, 1). As we mentioned above Google employs tactics of data mining in order to target the consumer of Google’s product with advertisements that are produced in line with the consumer’s interests. For Smythe, such advertisements are an aspect of the economic function of capital (Smythe 1977, 1981) In answering the question of what the form of the commodity of mass-produced, advertiser-supported communications are (Smythe 1977) the audience. According to Smythe, the advertisements that appear on television, Radio and (in our case) the internet are bought from the communicative industry in an attempt to build particular audiences of their specific product. Traditionally it was thought that advertisers bought space from the communications industry in order to advertise their products. It was understood that space was the commodity. (Meehan 1993) However if the commodity of advertisers and communications was space then space would be equal value no matter where the advertisers placed their advertisement. However this is not the case. The value of certain spaces of advertisement (i.e. Billboards, Television ads, Radio ads, Internet ads) is higher according to the space in which the advertisement occupies. In terms of the internet, A website with a high-traffic yield is capable of charging more for advertising than a website with a low-traffic yield. This presents us with the fact that while space is an aspect of the commodity that advertisers purchase, it is not the whole aspect. Smythe argues that what the advertiser is purchasing is the “services of the audiences with predictable specifications who will pay attention in predictable numbers and at particular times” (Smythe 1977, 4). This can be seen in respect to television and internet advertisement. For example, if I am watching a particular television show, advertisers who product may correspond to that particular show will press for that advertising space (i.e. A Cartoon show usually have advertisements about the toys of characters presented in the show). For Smythe, the audience becomes the commodity in the communicative industry as it is bought and produced, and sold, in various ways.

How can we understand this further in terms of the means of communication as a means of production? I showed in the previous section that the internet has seen the growth of the productive consumer; this is to say that while we as users of the internet consume its products, we also have the ability to generate products for the internet. An obvious case in this is the ability to join and create your own Facebook page. Why is this product? In creating your own Facebook page, regardless of what it is about, you use the means of production (i.e. information, computers, internet access) to produce something that others will use. It is these types of pages which generate much interest in Facebook and contributes much to its survival as one the largest social networking site. In introducing the work of Dallas Smythe, we also introduce a new level to the means of communication as a means of production. In this sense we can see the means of communication (Television, Radio, Internet etc) as producing audiences through advertising. We may then seek to understand the means of communication as a means of production at the structural level, in which the level, which has been elaborated by Smythe, helps inform, the level of prosumers.

8. Conclusion

The Internet challenges the conception of industrial production that Marxist theory has been most comfortable with. It may be suggest that in our time, Marx’s conception of the productive forces and relations of production may be better used to understand the productive processes of television, telecommunications and newspapers. But the Internet is not only a combination of these three processes, but expands upon them in new directions in terms of cognition, communication, cooperation, production, circulation, distribution, consumption. As a “virtual world”, its capacity to participate with a materialist theory of production is still in need of much discussion and theorizing. The introduction of concepts such as *prosumers* may only account for a tiny amount of the projects that need to be actualized in relation to a Marxian theory of the Internet. Perhaps in a similar vein to *prosumers*, a concept of *promunication* (productive communication) needs to be thought out.

The way forward in developing a theory in which one can properly address the issues raised by the communicative array of the internet is by submitting it towards a structural Marxist interpretation of society. While the economy is an element which is involved in the development of the internet, not only as a productive force but also as a politico-legal and cultural element, it is far from being a determining factor. I have discussed above the difference between *determination in the last instance*, an instance that never comes, and *domination*. This is the type of relation which occurs daily, hourly, minutely on the Internet. In respect to Williams, we may say that the dominating force of the Internet is culture. The vast majority of interactions between people are social interactions; whether they are via an online game, a dating website, or just friends communication for free using

various types of freeware and software. But this is not to say that culture is a determining element of the internet. In the tradition of the structural Marxists, the Internet is overdetermined, but each interaction that takes place on the Internet is dominated by a different element, whether that be political, legal, economic or cultural. This cannot however be the final word on the subject, nor will it. What I have tried to provide in the paper above is a foundation for further development of the idea that the Internet as a means of communication can be identified as means of production.

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