

# The Dialectics of Communicative and Immanent Critique in Cultural Studies

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**Abstract:** In cultural studies and cultural research, the importance of being critical is often stressed, but it is more rare to scrutinise how such critique is and can be performed. This text discusses different modes of critique, in three main steps. First, a brief review of the history and signifying layers of the concept of critique itself leads up to a late modern communicative concept of critique, linked to the contested relation between critique and tradition, and based on how Paul Ricoeur has interpreted ideology critique and the hermeneutics of suspicion. This communicative mode is contrasted to critical approaches that strive to radically dissociate themselves from others. Second, it is argued that the most powerful sources of critique are to be sought in the inner contradictions of the targeted spheres of social reality rather than applied from the outside. Such immanent – as opposed to transcendent – critique, has been formulated and exercised by Karl Marx, Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, among others. The third section sums up the spiral moves of cultural studies as informed by critical hermeneutics: dialectical critique based on communicative and immanent critique must be on the move, never frozen, and may temporarily and locally explore radical and transcendent modes of critique, in ways that have been discussed by Donna Haraway.

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**At the** first national Swedish conference of cultural studies, organised at Linköping University in Norrköping by the Advanced Cultural Studies Institute of Sweden (AC SIS) in 2005, discourse analyst Marianne Winther Jørgensen (2007) raised an intricate question on the critical dimensions of cultural studies. She showed that while cultural researchers often in principle argue for the value of critique as a general policy orientation, there is a lack of explicit reflection on what critique might actually mean and imply in the field of cultural studies. Scholars want to be critical but rarely clarify just what that might mean. There are good reasons for changing this, by reflecting on what cultural research can and should criticise, and how such a critique should be developed.

As a contribution in that direction, this text offers a reflection in three steps on the dialectical movement of critique. First, it investigates the history and main *modes* of critique; then two main *sources* of critical force are compared; while the concluding section sums up the dialectical *movement* of critique.

## 1. Modes of Critique: Communicative Critique

The concept of critique has accumulated spheres of meaning through the phases of modernity.<sup>1</sup> I will here briefly mention its historically evolving five main modes: negative, aesthetic, philosophical, social and communicative. The term “critique” was spread in Europe from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, first denoting a more general *fault-finding*, a negative

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<sup>1</sup> The conceptual history is based on Williams 1976/1988, 84-86, and various other encyclopaedic sources.

objection to something. When it is discussed whether someone is “critical” or not, this is the sense of critique commonly implied.

However, the term soon came to denote evaluative commentaries on literary or artistic works – a usage that survives in literary (art, music, theatre or film) criticism. Both these aspects have a normative element, but this latter *aesthetic* critique is not limited to making negative objections but can also make positive evaluations of an artwork.

In the eighteenth century, Kant and others generalised this aesthetic concept of critique so that it came to signify any detailed analytical judgement based on an ability of distinction, differentiation and discrimination. This linked back to the classical Greek meaning of the term, where *kritikos* had to do with judging and thus determining by distinguishing right from wrong. This *philosophical* concept of critique moves towards a cognitive-rational moment of analytical distinction, linked to concepts like theory, contemplation and speculation, which all originally had to do with seeing, in a metaphorical transposition towards mental scrutinising – a conscious and systematic search for knowledge.

The combined negative, aesthetic and philosophical clouds of meaning received a more accentuated political colouring with the 1930s’ Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, resulting in a full-blown fourth mode of emancipatory or *social* critique. From Kant and other Enlightenment thinkers onwards, such social critique developed in a series of steps, including not least Hegel, Feuerbach and of course Karl Marx’s critique of the political economy, which Frankfurt Critical Theory refined in a cultural direction. Systematic social critics used their sharp judgement to attack unworthy living conditions and unjust power relations. Marx applied a double critique: a problematisation of dominant forms of understanding and ideological representations that hide or legitimise injustice, suffering and oppression, but also an attack on those social relations that enable and necessitate such ideas. Social critique wants to make the world a better place, not just objecting to it, interpreting it or analysing its foundations.

In the 1960s, Jürgen Habermas (1968/1987) distinguished between three knowledge interests: (a) a technical, instrumental, strategic or administrative interest in goal-rational management of society; (b) a practical or communicative interest in interpreting and understanding cultural phenomena; and (c) an emancipatory or critical interest in radical social change. I find it still important to distinguish the first from the other two, since we need to defend academic practices of interpretation and critique from being colonised by usefulness demands from state bureaucracies and market interests.

However, the separation of communicative and critical knowledge interests has become increasingly more problematic. The hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1973/1981) summarised the debate between Habermas and Gadamer on the relation of ideology critique to the hermeneutics of tradition. Whereas Gadamer rehabilitated the connected concepts of prejudice, authority and tradition, Habermas instead talked about interests, ideology and the need for critical emancipation from repressive prejudices, authorities and traditions. Ricoeur formulated a mediating position of “critical hermeneutics”, arguing that critique and understanding in fact presuppose each other, and that the two positions should be asked to recognise each other. Marx, Freud and Nietzsche stood for a “hermeneutic of suspicion” that is also a form of interpretation, though against the grain in relation to the meaning intended by the author of a text.<sup>2</sup> For a critique to hit its target, it must first understand it, in an act of interpretation. In the other direction, any act of understanding discloses inner contradictions that open up for critical approaches. Also, each critical thought links to and is fuelled by a heritage of previous critiques: radical ideas take part in a tradition of emancipation and revolution which gives them force and momentum. The knowledge interests of interpretation and emancipation thus are partners in a mutual dialectic rather than forming separate camps. There is no effective critique without understanding, and no understanding that does not also open up for critique.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of “hermeneutics of suspicion” was launched in Ricoeur 1965/1970; see also Kristensson Ugglå 2009.

This awareness indicates a need for yet another perspective on critique. Traditional modes of critique are linked to a mentality or mode of thinking that takes distance and delimits its own position towards others who have not yet seen the light. From the negative to the social, much critique is *radical* in the sense that it goes down to the roots (Latin *radix*) and breaks new ground by getting rid of all traditional ideas about the world. This is a typical modern attitude, as modernity is filled by attempts to start from afresh and lay a new and more pure foundation, often by discarding what has recently happened and seek a more solid ground in something more original, archaic or natural. In his *Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin (1982/1999, 4, 10 and 544) repeatedly defined the modern in terms of a combination of the newest with the archaic, and an almost disgusted distancing from the recent past. That is how fashion trends work, but so do modern, reductionist radicalisms when constructing intellectual systems that shut all others out by hunting down weaknesses in established modes of understanding and suggesting ground-breaking alternatives.

I will here not offer any comprehensive list of such radicalist thinkers, from two reasons. First, even though I use a language that seems to point at certain specific individuals, this is to be read more as a personification of a position and attitude that almost every critical theorist tends to adapt at least at some point of development. More than a set of individuals, radicalism is a tempting position for anybody who strives to take distance towards something in society or social theory. Second, while some thinkers do have more reductionist traits than others, this is usually much more common among their epigones. Most truly influential and important critical theorists have at least in certain phases been much more open-minded. It would therefore be misleading to stick this label onto any particular theorists, even if the reader may easily think of some particularly striking such names. In two previous articles (Fornäs 2000 and 2012a) I found such traits in Michel Foucault's early texts as well as in Friedrich Kittler, Bruno Latour and Lawrence Grossberg, but one may equally well find examples in other camps.<sup>3</sup>

Radicalism is thus a temptation hard to resist for the critically minded: avoiding all compromises with those contaminated old ideas and constructing a completely new basis. If cultural studies should be as critical as possible, it seems reasonable to be radical, to go totally against the existing order, aesthetically evaluating it, going philosophically to its very foundations and engaging in social programmes of emancipation. Such radicals contribute valuable destructive work that enhances reflexivity and opens up alternative paths forward.

However, there is also need for another kind of critic: communicators who are willing to take on the task of building bridges. Since the 1960s, a fifth kind of critique has grown in importance – combining traits from negative fault-finding, aesthetic evaluation, philosophical systematisation and social emancipation, not making them obsolete but deliberately adding a communicative twist. Late modern challenges are more complex and heterogeneous than ever before. Power relations of domination, oppression and exploitation crisscross along several intersecting dimensions, forcing critical interventions to navigate between different axes of opposition, focusing for instance on either class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or generation. No single critical theory or movement seems able on its own to balance such aspects and form a coherent counter-position. Instead, dialogues and struggles between different critical are needed to meet these contemporary challenges. The current situation therefore demands a species of critics who are *communicative*: resisting the temptation of totalisation, breeding a capacity to hold ambivalences, staying open to the dynamics of the world by organising polyphonic heterologies rather than building fixed, unifying homologies (Fornäs 1995, 114–115).

Communicative critique does not replace the previous modes, for instance the social critique of Marx or the Frankfurt School, but instead sharpens them by consciously counteracting the radical-reductionist temptation to build an isolated fortress. Actually, all these older social critics were themselves to a crucial extent communicative, by developing their critical arguments in dialogue with other positions, and making use of key elements from their predecessors. What is now asked for is a more conscious acknowledgement of such communi-

<sup>3</sup> See Peck 2006 for a relevant critique of Grossberg and Foucault.

cative modes of criticism. It combines elements from various contexts, including Ricoeur's critical hermeneutics as well as Habermas' later efforts in the same dialogical direction, but also – in different ways – both Raymond Williams' and Stuart Hall's way of developing cultural studies through critical combinations of a range of social and cultural theories. It works by hybridising montage or bricolage, rather than by revolutionary gestures of abandonment and rupture. Such hybridising combinators are useful counterbalances to the social critics whose radicalisms otherwise easily deteriorate into sectarian purism. Étienne Balibar (2004, 235) has argued that “the political function of intellectuals” is precisely to “continuously broaden the horizon of their translating capacities”, their capacity for “translating languages and cultures in all directions”, and thus for being “border lines themselves”. Relating and interpreting, stretching out to others, is a condition for survival and a deep-seated desire. The will to communicate testifies to a lack or a gap in the subject of the self. It is not only in everyday life but also in cultural studies that we never make do: we need *others*.

This insight is particularly well developed in feminist theory. Its encounters and negotiations with sexuality and queer theory, postcolonial theories of race and ethnicity, and research on class, age and generation have resulted in a complex understanding of intersectional identity formation in which precisely this kind of communicative thinking is exercised, by gender studies scholars such as Nina Lykke (2010). From a different starting point in Habermas' theory of communicative action, Nancy Fraser (2008) and Iris Marion Young (1997) have likewise (in partly divergent ways) worked to combine different levels of politics and to develop communicative models of ethics and democracy that do not exclude difference, conflict and critique.

A key theorist who consistently underscores the communicative dimensions of critique is Donna Haraway (1988/1991, 191), who stresses “the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge” in formulations that are closer to Ricoeur's than is mostly acknowledged. “‘Critical’ means evaluative, public, multiactor, multiagenda, oriented to equality and heterogeneous well-being” (Haraway 1997, 95). Haraway (1997, 267) argues for a critical “queering” that undoes the border “between the technical and the political”, so as to “make situated knowledges possible in order to be able to make consequential claims about the world and on each other”, rooted in a “desire for justice and democratically crafted and lived well-being”. Her concept of the cyborg was developed as a means of such critical approach to science as deeply embedded in the social and political world, and when talking of “the reality effect of ‘virtual reality’” she also opens for a symbolic or cultural dimension of this critique (Haraway 1997, 270). It is in this sense that she describes humans as cyborgs: “The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation” (Haraway 1985/1991, 150). Haraway's (1988/1991, 196) socialist feminism combines interpretation and critique in a mode of communicative translation, where all knowledges are “ruled by partial sight and limited voice”.

Theoretical renewal in interdisciplinary fields functions in similar ways as in society at large: by small steps of reconfiguration that open up for unexpected insights. Social as well as aesthetic movements bring change by recombining existing elements rather than by inventing anything from nil (Williams, 1981). Dick Hebdige (1979) borrowed the concept of bricolage from Claude Lévi-Strauss to understand how youth styles such as punk reshuffled inherited elements and created new meanings by simply juxtaposing them. In a similar manner, trans- and interdisciplinary research explores borderlands between established fields of knowledge, making history by communicative recontextualisation and remediation, answering to the complex challenges of late modern societies by forging of links between what was cultivated in mutual isolation.<sup>4</sup> Semiotician Yuri Lotman (1990, 45 and 137) and many others more generally see creative thinking as based on analogy and the “co-joining objects and concepts”, rather than inventing them from thin air: “Innovation comes about when the principles of one genre are restructured according to the laws of another”. Jacques Derrida's deconstruction is also relevant here. One may finally add that critique in the communicative

<sup>4</sup> Interdisciplinarity in late modern universities is championed by Nowotny et al. 2001 and Ekström and Sörlin 2012, 63.

mode suits cultural research particularly well, since culture as signifying practice is based on communication, inviting cultural studies to make use of similar communicative resources as the ones studied.

## 2. Sources of Critique: Immanent Critique

A general will to interact and exchange ideas with others is however not fully enough for a cultural researcher who strives to be critical, since it can easily turn into harmless eclecticism. It is important to specify in which way such communicative reasoning is critical and not only friendly. Here, another temptation occurs. In order to qualify as critical, it can seem useful to transcend the given and distinguish oneself from the others who are trapped in the dominant illusions, in order to see things from the outside, in the service of fundamental change and emancipatory transformation.

If social reality was a monolithic and self-reproducing machinery of power, it could indeed only be resisted from its outside: by those who in some mysterious way managed to step out of the system and attack it from a distance. But this is luckily not the case. Instead, capitalist modernity is a deeply divided condition, and the most effective critique of it fetches its strength from its inner, rather than its outside. This is underlined in an inspiring tradition of *immanent* critique, with roots back to Hegel and Marx.<sup>5</sup>

Karl Marx consistently insisted that social change must be based in capitalism itself. In a letter of 1843, he advocated a radical but undogmatic ‘ruthless criticism of all that exists’, not “raising any dogmatic banner”:

*[W]e do not confront the world in a doctrinaire way with a new principle: Here is the truth, kneel down before it! We develop new principles for the world out of the world's own principles. [...] The reform of consciousness consists only in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in awakening it out of its dream about itself, in explaining to it the meaning of its own actions. [...] Hence, our motto must be: reform of consciousness not through dogmas, but by analysing the mystical consciousness that is unintelligible to itself, whether it manifests itself in a religious or a political form. It will then become evident that the world has long dreamed of possessing something of which it has only to be conscious in order to possess it in reality. It will become evident that it is not a question of drawing a great mental dividing line between past and future, but of realising the thoughts of the past. (Marx 1843/1982)*

Marx here seems to support precisely what Ricoeur argued against Habermas, in that critique and interpretation here fuse into one single mode of interpretive critique. This was not just a youthful, romantic notion. In *Grundrisse* a decade later, he argued for realising the immanent potentials of history rather than drawing a fundamental line of difference between the past and the future: If societal transformations were to succeed they must build on existing embryos: “if we did not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic” (Marx 1858/1993, 159). And again in the commentary on the Paris Commune 1871: The working class has “no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant” (Marx 1871/1986, 335).

Walter Benjamin (1982/1999, 13) was similarly against rigid dogmas and described the emergence of consciousness as a dialectical waking from a bad dream: “The realization of dream elements, in the course of waking up, is the paradigm of dialectical thinking”. A similar idea of the potentiality of the present was developed by Ernst Bloch (1959/1995).

Not least Theodor W. Adorno (1955/1981, 27, 31 and 33) in his “Cultural Criticism and Society” spoke in a similar manner for a dialectical or “immanent criticism”, which “measures culture against culture’s own ideal”, while the “transcendent attack on culture regularly speaks the language of false escape”; this “transcendent critique of ideology is obsolete”.

<sup>5</sup> On immanent critique, see Antonio 1981; Buchwalter 1991; Jameson 2009; Sabia 2010; Azmanova 2012; Fornäs 2013a, 300–302; Fornäs 2014.

While the transcendent critique raises an external ideal image against the prevailing social and cultural conditions, dialectical immanent criticism instead makes conscious the inner contradictions, conflicts, tensions and ambivalences in for instance media culture. One may wonder whether Benjamin and Habermas have perhaps lived up to this ambition better than Adorno himself, who often let his intended dialectics of Enlightenment deteriorate into a rather linear decay story. In some of his texts, Adorno (1955/1991, 92) simultaneously seemed to contradict himself by jumping to a transcendentalist position: “The total effect of the culture industry is one of anti-enlightenment” that transforms enlightenment into “mass deception” – if that is true, immanent cultural critique has also resigned and deteriorated into obsolete forms of external ideology critique.

Michel Foucault understood himself as being far from any Hegelian Marxist – quite the contrary, he took a clear distance to both dialectics and hermeneutics.<sup>6</sup> However, even though he did not intend to identify progressing inner contradictions in history, his power critique had more immanent than transcendent traits. He for instance emphasised that “power is exercised from innumerable points” and is “immanent” in other relationships rather than exterior to them: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault 1976/1990, 104–105). Irrespective of all the immense differences in how his critique develops, at least in this single respect, Foucault’s critique was also immanent.

Again, feminist theorists have productively taken up similar ideas and sharpened them further. For instance, Albenaz Azmanova (2012, 145) has proposed a feminist agenda based on “‘immanent critique’ of the key structural dynamics of contemporary capitalism”. Judith Butler (1994/1997, 1) also works “in the interstices of the relation between queer theory and feminism (as well as other contemporary critical discourses)” and insists on “continuing the important intellectual tradition of immanent critique”. In their mutual dialogue on redistribution and recognition, Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth (2003, 207, 244 and 264) in different ways both argue for an anchoring of emancipatory transformation or transcendence in the real social processes of immanence.

Finally, positioning herself as “socialist-feminist” doing “antiracist feminist multicultural studies” in the critical theory tradition from Marx to the Frankfurt school, Donna Haraway (1978/1991, 23) underlines the contradiction of human existence as possessing the means of human liberation while continuing to live in relations of domination and scarcity: “The critical tradition insists that we analyse relations of dominance in consciousness as well as material interests” and “play seriously” with the ambiguity of the contemporary world. This would also imply an immanent critique, focusing on inner contradictions in the capitalist social world as the basis for all emancipatory theory and practice.

What might immanence mean in the practice of doing cultural research? It might for instance underpin an effort to look for inner contradictions also in those cultural phenomena that at first seem most monolithic: for instance to search for cracks *within* the capitalist market rather than just regarding it as total evil in contrast to the arts or subaltern movements or wherever utopian alternatives are sought for; to trace contradictions *within* religious traditions and not only between them; or likewise to scrutinise tensions *within* aesthetic styles etc. Partly similar to Derrida’s deconstruction, it means not to permanently contrast good and evil camps against each other, but rather look for how each sphere or position in society and culture reproduces germs that erode it from within, and look for emancipatory as well as oppressive elements deep in the various fields and spheres of economic, political, social and cultural practice today. This is no easy task, as it is always tempting to take sides and stay loyal with friends, but by daring to be a pain in the ass and pointing at ambivalences both in oneself and in others, the immanent critic helps putting things in motion.

Adorno describes the opposite of immanent critique as transcendent critique. Such position views the modern world as a closed totality that has to be revolutionised by a grand rupture that once and for all bids farewell to all earlier forms of understanding and initiates

<sup>6</sup> On structuralist and poststructuralist anti-hermeneutics, see Fornäs 2000, 45–65; 2012a, 490–518; and 2012b, 54–59.

something radically new and different. There is a big temptation in such a position too. Transcendent critique appears to bring something genuinely new, in line with contemporary fashion, news and other media logics in which there is always a craving for something completely different and outside of the past and present.

However, from the immanent perspective, such destruction of heritage may dangerously erase valuable seeds of emancipation in history, and conceal the important bridges that connect contemporary critiques with previous ones. Transcendentalism is also inefficient, since critique only sharpens by basing itself on the counter-movements within the existing world. It is crucial to develop a sense for opposition and conflict, and late modern critique can in fact counteract reductionist radicalism by focusing precisely on ambivalences and contradictions – by being immanent rather than transcendent.

### 3. Moves of Critique: Dialectical Critique

Communicative and immanent critique does not exclude all transcendence. It does not even exclude any kind of radicalism, but rather integrates it into a dialogical process with other positions. Julia Kristeva, Jean Laplanche, Paul Ricoeur, Stuart Hall and others have thematised human subjectivity as being always a subject-in-process, never finished. Something similar may be said about *critique-in-process*. Immanent critique must strive for *some* kind of transgression, since otherwise the established order would just be reproduced and perpetuated. But this transgression fetches neither its motivation nor its force from external ideals that are dogmatically applied and contrasted with the current state of affairs, but rather from a reworking of the tensions and contradictions that propel and challenge this ruling order from within itself.

This may appear to place the critic in an impossible dead-end, a paradoxical situation without escape. Can there really at all exist some kind of radical communicativity or transgressive immanence? This is precisely what is suggested by thinking of critique as *dialectical*: putting its contradictions and tensions in movement, rather than freezing them to a standstill. Instead of analysing the current social order as a closed and self-reproducing circuit of power, a communicative and immanent critique can search for the internal contradictions in historical and contemporary capitalist practices, thereby identifying transformative elements that can in the future potentially disrupt the prevailing order and open up for emancipatory changes.

If culture is defined as signifying practice, then interpretation – whether of cultural texts as well as of social practices – forms the core of cultural studies. This work of interpretation always has a critical moment, not only when explicitly done in the spirit of the hermeneutics of suspicion, reading texts against the grain, against the intentions of their authors, and thus by opposition contradicting their preferred meanings. There is also already a critical moment built into any interpretive move that takes a closer look at a text in order to understand it better, checks how it is constructed, and thereby distances itself from its initial pre-understanding. By getting in closer touch with the materiality of the text and the formal relations between its elements, the interpreter allows the text and the reading subject to interact and work on each other. This relates to how Benjamin (1982/1999, 447) contrasted trace to aura: “The trace is appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The aura is appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us.”

Interpretations may be critical in different directions. They may distance themselves from the authorial intentions or the structures of feeling that were dominant at the moment of textual production. But they may also go against previous interpretations, perhaps even by claiming to return to some original and more authentic meaning. The critical impetus may also turn different ways: for instance by undermining taken-for-granted stereotypes or power structures related to either class, gender, ethnicity or age, or any combination of these or other intersectionally intertwined identity orders, while perhaps neglecting others, and therefore inviting new interpretations aiming for ‘correcting’ or filling out such lacunae. Each interpretation can always be contradicted by another one that claims to be richer and more to the

point. Paul Ricoeur talks about open-ended *conflicts of interpretation* through history. This extends the famous hermeneutic circle that moves incessantly between parts and wholes into a complex spiral movement that oscillates between poles such as text and context, object and subject, production and reception, and combines this pendulum movement with a forward direction in which traditions accumulate and fuel renewal.

There is here again a temptation in being non-dialectic: to long for stability, consistency and formal stringency, to not always nomadically be on the move, but instead stay fixed on steady ground and build a durable fortress around one's convictions. Instead, dialectical critique acknowledges this open-ended cultural process and willingly enters it to contribute the critical moves it has to offer in any specific site and time.

Walter Benjamin (1982/1999, 10) related *ambiguity* to dialectics in a beautiful formulation: "Ambiguity is the manifest imaging of dialectic, the law of dialectics at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image, therefore, dream image." Ambiguity and ambivalence may not necessarily be a fault, a lack of clarity or determinacy. They can instead be a way of imagining dialectics, as such ambivalences carry a potential to be again put into motion and thus make the world change.

Benjamin's own work is (like that of Marx) a magnificent example of such dialectical writing, never applying an abstract ideal from the outside but instead reflecting on his own fascination in those social and cultural aspects of capitalist modernity that he interprets, consistently digging up tensions and contradictions within them. Cultural researchers can follow a similar path by not harnessing themselves in fixed positions and instead engaging in reflexive movements that put not only others but also the self at risk. This is a key element of ethnography, which demands the researcher to actively participate in a social and cultural field for such a long time and so intensely that one's own subjectivity is deeply affected. But it is also an element of textual interpretation when it goes closely enough into the studied texts.

What dialectical critique opposes is any kind of static critique that once and for all fixes its targets as well as its own position. It can therefore allow itself to move between moments of radical-transcendent and communicative-immanent critique, in a spiral movement related to that between understanding and explanation within the hermeneutic spiral. Its basis is in the communicative and immanent stance, but it can also make local and temporary radical transgressions that are then again in the next step reintegrated in larger communicative processes of dialogue and hybridising bricolage. This clearly links to Donna Haraway's theory of situated knowledge.<sup>7</sup> It may also remind of the concept of strategic essentialism once suggested by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, referring to how people may temporarily define themselves in "essentialist" ways, for strategic reasons in emancipatory struggles, while remaining fully aware that such constructions (e.g. of "women" or ethnic groups) are in fact discursive constructions. The point is that within a dialectical framework, the basis in a communicative and immanent mode of critique allows for local and temporary uses also of radical and transcendent moves, as long as these are never generalised or permanently frozen and reified.

#### 4. Conclusion

First, I have discussed the history and signifying layers of the concept itself, through a series of modes of critique that lead up to what I suggest is a late modern need for a *communicative* concept of critique. This included a discussion of the ambivalent relation between critique and tradition, based on how Paul Ricoeur has interpreted ideology critique and the hermeneutics of suspicion. Second, I discussed two main sources of critical force and argued for the value of *immanent* critique, leaning on ideas from Marx, Adorno and Benjamin. The third section finally summed up the *dialectical* spiral moves of cultural studies as informed by critical hermeneutics.

Critique thus takes on many shapes and forms in cultural studies. Marianne Winther Jørgensen calls for more of explicit thematisation of what is critical in cultural research today. She suspects that one cause for the surprising lack of such reflection may be the difficulty to avoid the twin dangers of both ideology critique and poststructuralist critique, where the for-

<sup>7</sup> Haraway 1988/1991.



mer is often accused of believing to possess the only truth and excluding all other voices, while the second is deemed to be politically ineffective.<sup>8</sup> This double problematisation paralyzes researchers who feel caught between two impasses: either too monologic and uncommunicative or too diffuse and uncritical.

More critique is certainly needed in cultural research, in the two directions outlined by Marx's critique of political economy: against the reality and practice of capitalism itself and against its ideological justification by political economists that systematise the distorted self-understandings that the everyday capitalist relations give rise to. Academic research today needs critical scrutiny of paradigms for knowledge production, as well as of power relations in society at large. Class critique, feminist critique and postcolonial critique all contribute to this double task.

As there are different dimensions of dominance and power, there must also be corresponding dimensions of critique. The economic power relations of capitalism are critically scrutinised by economy critique of commodification and marketisation. The administrative power relations of the modern state system demands political critique of bureaucratisation and coercion. Thirdly, the social and cultural relations of dominance in the lifeworlds of everyday practices of communication and interaction also call for critical interpretation and intervention. Nancy Fraser's (2003 and 2008) model of "perspectival dualism" offers a useful model for such non-reductive understanding.

Radical and transcendent critique is thus not sufficient. Critique can and should more often be communicative, immanent and dialectical. Such a position may offer one way out of the Jørgensen's dilemma. At the same time, it makes it harder to decide whether she was right or not. Communicative and immanent forms of critique may not in the same way as their radical or transcendent siblings obviously appear to be critical. If someone interprets a cultural phenomenon and uncovers its inner contradictions and ambiguities, without taking a strong anti-position towards it, s/he may seem to be uncritical, when in fact offering the strongest possible grounds for critique, by exposing the dialectical core structure of that phenomenon. This is true of much recent cultural research, for instance in feminist gender and queer studies, postcolonial ethnicity and migration research or studies of social media uses. There may surely in cultural studies field be a problematic lack of explicit reflection and discussion on what criticality implies, but there is certainly a lot of relevant critical work done in the communicative and immanent mode.

Cultural studies should thus continue to strive for being critical. But rather than fixating a counter-position, it is better to dialectically combine communication and immanence, to be incessantly in motion – not in circles, nor in a straight line, but spiralling sideways, diagonally through time and space, always ready for translation and open to follow traces of contradictions in all possible directions.

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