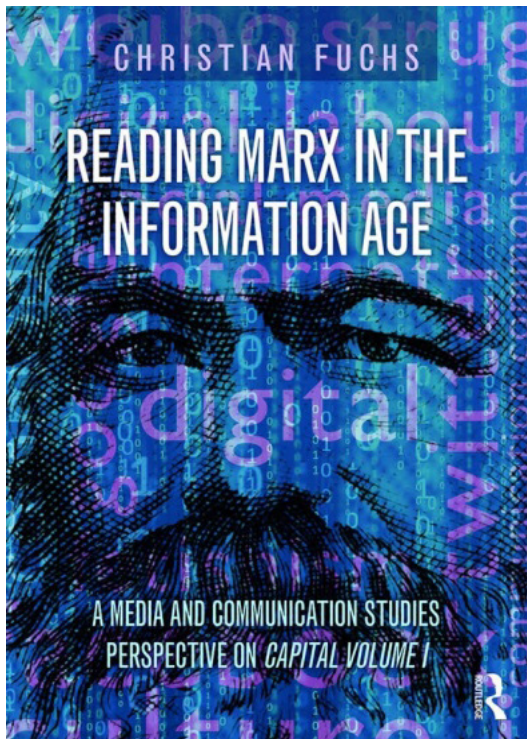


Information Society through Marxian Looking Glass

Book Review

Reading Marx in the Information Age: A Media and Communication Studies Perspective on Capital, Volume 1; by Christian Fuchs, Routledge, 2016, xiii + 401 pages, ISBN 9781138948563 (paperback).



An agrarian or agricultural society is one relying for its subsistence on the cultivation of crops using plows and animals. The first agrarian societies arose approximately 5,000 to 6,000 years ago in Mesopotamia and Egypt while slightly later in China and India. Change in agrarian practices occurred first in England in the 18th century, with the industrial revolution, and then subsequently later spread to the rest of Europe, Asia, and the United States. This society was characterized by limited production and hence limited division of labour and limited variation in social classes. The dominance of Parochialism specifically marked agrarian societies. Very few people had the

opportunity to see or hear beyond their own village. In contrast, industrial societies grew with the help of faster means of communication, having more information at hand about the world, allowing knowledge transfer and cultural diffusion between them. Parochialism was a feature of agrarian society, while universalism is the feature of the industrial and post-industrial information society. Adam Smith^[1] analysed agricultural economy in his masterpiece *The Wealth of Nations*. The analysis recognized the ideal agricultural economy as one of perfect liberty. Smith observed two government-imposed constraints that contradicted perfect liberty and injured agricultural economy. It was on the sale of land and the free movement of labour.^[2]

The agrarian society was succeeded by the industrial society that refers to a society driven using technology to enable mass production, supporting a large population with a high capacity for a division of labour. Industrial society is characterized using external energy sources, such as fossil fuels, to increase the rate and scale of production. Excess labour is moved into the factories where mechanization is utilized to further increase efficiency. As populations grow, and mechanization is further refined, often to the level of automation, many workers shift to expanding service industries. Industrial society makes urbanization desirable, in part so that workers can be closer to centres of production, and the service industry can provide labour to workers and those that benefit financially from them, in exchange for a piece of production profits with which they can buy goods. If an ancient Greek or Roman would have been just as comfortable in Europe in 1700 because daily life was not much different, agriculture and technology were not much changed in 2000+ years, while the Industrial Revolution changed human life drastically. More was created in the last 250+ years than in the previous 2500+ years of known human history.^[3,4]

Karl Marx (born in 1818) was a Prussian-born philosopher, economist, sociologist, journalist, and revolutionary socialist. Born in a middle-class family, he later studied political economy and Hegelian philosophy. He spent much of his life in London, England, where he continued to develop his thought in collaboration with German thinker Friedrich Engels and published various works, the

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most well-known being the 1848 pamphlet *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx's theories about society, economics, and politics, collectively known as Marxism, assert that human societies develop through class struggle. The capitalism reflects the conflict between the ruling classes, i.e., the bourgeoisie, who control the means of production and working classes, i.e., the proletariat, who enable these means by selling their labour for wages. *Das Kapital*, the classic text by Karl Marx, is a foundational theoretical text of communist philosophy, economics, and politics. Marx revealed the economic patterns underpinning the capitalist mode of production, in contrast to classical political economists such as Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill *et al.* The time of birth of Marxian thought was profoundly influenced by the impact of the industrial revolution in Europe and the subsequent advent of industrial society. The Marxian context was totally philosophized on the framework of industrial society.

The succession of industrial society was post-industrial society, which is a concept in economics describing when the service sector produces more wealth than the industrial or manufacturing sector in some countries. The concept was popularized by Daniel Bell,^[5] and is closely related to similar concepts such as information society, knowledge economy, post-industrial economy, liquid modernity, and network society. The knowledge becomes a valued form of capital here and producing ideas is the main way to grow the economy. Thus, the concept of capital, for the first time in history has been found changed from materialistic form to intellectual form, i.e., information and knowledge are regarded as capital. A new phase of society was gradually stepped in after 1990s, popularly known as the information society, where the creation, distribution, diffusion, uses, integration and manipulation of information is a significant economic, political, and cultural activity. The information society aims to gain competitive advantage internationally, through using information technology (IT) creatively and productively. The knowledge economy is its economic counterpart, whereby wealth is created through the economic exploitation of understanding. People who have the means to partake in this form of society are sometimes called digital citizens. Another term in this context, "Knowledge society" was first used by Peter Druker in 1969 as a fancy neologism. The word later acquired significant meanings. The term "information society" is derived from Manuel Castell's usage of "information age" in 1990. Peter Druker remarked, "Every few hundred years in Western History there occurs a sharp transformation. The growth of information networks is one of the major causes for the inception of the knowledge society. Information is a knowledge-generating tool, and it is in many cases a commodity, i.e., bought or sold, whereas knowledge belongs of right to any reasonable mind. Knowledge societies are about capabilities to identify, produce, process, transform,

disseminate and use the information to build and apply knowledge for human development.

Renowned Marxist scholar and critical media theorist Christian Fuchs kept Marxian thought under the looking glasses of information society and knowledge society. It is the very interesting study to re-assess Marxian context in the framework of knowledge society from industrial, societal contexts. The new concept, digital labour is evolved as a set of ideas focusing on exploring the high levels of cognitive and cultural labour associated with the replacement of jobs in the increasingly automated industrial sector, into globalized production systems embedded in high-technology, and into a knowledge economy. Digital labour describes a series of activities within capitalist modes of production not traditionally viewed as work, like participation in social media websites. This book provides a thorough, chapter-by-chapter introduction to *Capital Volume 1* that helps to understand Karl Marx's most milestone work in the information age. This book explores Marx's key concepts through the lens of media and communication studies via contemporary phenomena like the Internet, digital labour, social media, the media industries, and digital class struggles. Large numbers of contemporary examples are cited to highlight the continued importance of Marx and his work in a time when media companies like Amazon, Google, and Facebook play an increasingly important role in global capitalism. Discussion questions and exercises at the end of each chapter help readers to further realize Marx's work in a modern-day context.

The author dissected the facets of Marxian thought in the context of all possible digital societal components. In the Introduction, a brief overview of Marxism and digital society are provided. The Part I discusses on *Commodities and Money*. The Part II, entitled "The Transformation of Money into Capital" discussed on capitalism, surplus value, slavery *et al.* The Part III entitled "The Production of Absolute Surplus-Value" assessed role of information in the production process. The necessary aspects of surplus value, working days, surplus labour are all discussed. The Part IV, i.e., "The Production of Relative Surplus-Value," deals with relative surplus-value, co-operation, the division of labour and manufacture, etc. Part V deals with the production of absolute and relative surplus-value. Part VI deals with different features of wages (time wage, piece wage, etc.) The wage is described as transformed labour power. Part VII entitled "The Process of Accumulation of Capital" discussed on the composition of capital, centralization of capital, surplus population, industrial reserved army, lumpen proletariat, etc. The Part VIII dealt on primitive accumulation. There are two Appendices at the end entitled "Thomas Piketty's Book "Capital in the Twenty-First Century," Karl Marx, and the Political Economy of the Internet" and "Knowledge, Technology, and the General Intellect in the Grundrisse and its Fragment on Machines."

This masterpiece work will be helpful to reassess Marxian thought in knowledge society under a globalized digital environment. The basic concepts of Marxian thought, i.e., dialectics, capitalism, commodification, surplus value/exploitation/alienation/class, globalization, ideology, class struggle, commons, public sphere, communism, etc. will remain if capitalism will be alive. Marx's masterpiece, "Capital Volume 1" is most discussed and debated work. There are repeated claims about the wrong analysis of Marxian philosophy, but the continued relevance of Marx's book is still found. The capitalism may be cosmetically changed in newer looks over time with the societal evolution, while the heart or core remains unchanged if capitalism remains. This book provides a platform for research on Marxian thought in the digital knowledge society. The author thus asserted most appropriately, "Marx is alive as long as capitalism is alive."

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