

Critique of Capitalism and the Organization of Production

Summary „The New Spirit of Capitalism“ (2007) inspired a vital discussion on the role of critique in capitalism. I want to add three points to this discussion: 1. If a critique is paralyzed by transformations of capitalism depends on its ability to draw upon a positive vision of a just social order. 2. Artistic critique has not only inspired new organizational forms in contemporary capitalism, its influence can also be shown in cooperatives. Cooperatives combine ideals associated with a social, as well as an artistic critique. Comparing ways of organizing work in cooperatives with new organizational forms like project-based firms should be beneficial for better understanding the dynamics and conflicts of artistic and social critique. 3. To realize a good life for all, artistic and social critique have to be complemented with a growth critique. A critique of growth on the other hand, points to ways of organizing production cooperatively.

Capitalism and Critique „The New Spirit of Capitalism“ (2007) inspired a vital discussion inside the realms of critical sociology on the role of critique in capitalism (Boltanski 2012, Celikates 2009, Dörre, Lessenich and Rosa 2009, Dörre et al. 2012, Henning 2013, Jaeggi und Wesche 2009, Potthast 2001). For Boltanski and Chiapello, a spirit of capitalism is „the ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism“ (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007:8). The main idea in „The New Spirit of Capitalism“ is about the constitutive relationship between a spirit of capitalism and critiques on capitalism: Capitalism needs external sources to ensure its justification, as well as the commitment of people. Capitalism can secure support through partially incorporating the claims and values of its critiques. The enemies of capitalism, with their critique, therefore provide capitalism with the moral foundations that it lacks. Boltanski and Chiapello distinguish two forms of critique on capitalism: Artistic critique, which emphasizes „an ideal of liberation and/or of individual autonomy, singularity and authenticity“ (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005:176) and social critique, which is concerned with „inequalities, misery, exploitation and the selfishness of a world that stimulates individualism rather than solidarity“ (ib.). Since the 1980ies, a new spirit of capitalism emerged in reaction to the artistic critique. In reference to the concept of justification regime which has been developed in „On Justification“ (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006), Boltanski and Chiapello argue, that the new spirit of capitalism is based on a new justification regime, the „project-oriented cité“. This justification regime reflects the renewal of work organization in contemporary capitalism: It values activity, adaptability and flexibility and rejects hierarchies, as well as impersonal work- relationships. Whenever a new spirit of capitalism emerges, the critique of capitalism faces a crucial problem: The arrangements of capitalism have transformed and „faced with new arrangements whose emergence was not anticipated, and of which it is difficult to say whether they are more or less favourable to wage-earners than the earlier social mechanisms, critique finds itself disarmed for a time“ (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007:29). What are then the implications of the „success“ of the artistic critique for the role and function of critique in contemporary capitalism? It has been argued, that the artistic critique has been paralyzed in post-industrial capitalism, since values associated with the artistic critique, like claims for less hierarchical, self-organized production, autonomy, flexibility, informal and personal relationships in the workplace etc. are now the main determinants of productivity (Honneth 2002, Van Dyk 2009). Others call for a combination of the social and artistic critique (Henning 2013, Lessenich 2009).

I want to add three points to this discussion:

Critique of Capitalism and the Organization of Production

The relationship between critique and justification regimes Justification regimes constitute a legitimate social order based on a principle of justice. The justifications regimes that are described in „On Justification“ are related to classical political philosophies. Critiques, as described in „On Justification“ are always referring to one of this justification regimes. Therefore, critique is never just a defensive reaction, but rests on an alternative, positive and consistent notion of a just social order. In „The new spirit of capitalism“ however, the social and artistic critique seem to be primarily defensive reactions to capitalism. The project-oriented cité is not a justification regime that has been established by proponents of an artistic critique, but one that reflects the reactions of people who profit from a capitalist system. The project-oriented cité can thus not be a genuine answer to an artistic critique. Therefore I would argue, that it is not correct to treat the project-oriented polis like the other justification regimes that have been developed in „On Justification“. An artistic critique that can not utilize a coherent vision of a just social order, necessarily has to be vulnerable, if it is confronted with a new form of capitalism in which some of its claims are fulfilled. Two important questions arise here: Is there an alternative justification regime that originated together with, or inspired the artistic critique? And if not, is it possible to design an alternative justification regime, one that resembles the critique more adequately than the project-oriented cité? I do not have an answer to this question, but I suggest an answer might be found in the history of the critique on capitalism and especially in the intellectual traditions of anarchism and utopian socialism.

Social and artistic critique and different ways of organizing work For an adequate vision of a „good life“, social and artistic critique have to be combined, they complement each other in a meaningful way. But I agree with Boltanski and Chiapello when they argue that social and artistic critique draw upon different ideological and emotional sources that are not directly compatible (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007:38). However, for the *économie des conventions* (Diaz-Bone 2011), a strand of french pragmatic sociology for which „On Justification“ is a central theoretical work, social reality is always composed of compromises between different justification regimes. Organizations in particular are seen as a „compromising device between several modes of coordination which engage different repertoires of evaluation“ (Thévenot 2001:405). Organizations are therefore a good starting point for understanding dynamics between different critiques. I propose that the dynamic between social and artistic critique can be analyzed by studying how cooperatives organize work. The idea of an ideal work organization in the project-oriented cité bears a striking resemblance to the ideal of a collectivist-democratic organization. Collectivist-democratic producer organizations have a long history, dating back to the cooperative movement in the 19th century in the UK. Cooperatives intellectual traditions are rooted in anarchism, utopian socialism and the labor movement. In Germany there has been a wave of formations of cooperative in the 1970ies that was closely related to social movements. Cooperatives share a critique of capitalist modes of production, appreciation for equal participation of all members, as well as concerns for the well-being of their members (Botz et al. 1977, Gubitzer 1989, Notz 2011, Rothschild and Whitt 1986). In Cooperatives one can find traces of the social, as well as the artistic critique. I propose to analyse and compare how cooperatives organize work with the organization of work in project-based firms, network-firms and other new organizational forms that emerged in contemporary capitalism will help to figure out how to precisely articulate a diffuse unease with the new ways of organizing work in contemporary capitalism and to develop a better understanding of what we want and what we

Critique of Capitalism and the Organization of Production

do not want in the organization of work.

The good life, growth critique and the organization of production To reach the goal of a good life for all, the social and the artistic critique alone are insufficient. They have to be completed by a critique of growth. Growth critique is more than a defensive reaction to the destruction of natural resources, it also leads to a refinement of anti-capitalist visions of a good life for all. After all, what is artistic critique without growth critique? A sure road to burn-out. What is social critique without growth critique? If it does not take the limits of growth into account it might lead to a system which destroys all natural resources in the (not so) long run. Furthermore, social critique has to be combined with growth critique because this points to capitalist competition, a mechanism that leads to exploitation which is also the main driver for growth. Degrowth is not possible in a system that is based on the competition of private producers, therefore a necessary step toward a transition to a degrowth economy is based on the participative and deliberative organization of production. Combining social, artistic and growth critique thus leads to a need for better understanding cooperative ways of organizing work.

Literatur

- Boltanski, Luc (2010). *Soziologie und Sozialkritik: Frankfurter Adorno-Vorlesungen 2008*. Suhrkamp Berlin.
- Boltanski, Luc und Eve Chiapello (2005). "The new spirit of capitalism". In: *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 18.3, 161–188.
- (2007). *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. London, New York: Verso Books.
- Boltanski, Luc und Laurent Thévenot (2006). *On justification: Economies of worth*. Princeton University Press.
- Botz, Gerhard, Gerfried Brandstetter und Michael Pollak (1977). *Im Schatten der Arbeiterbewegung: zur Geschichte des Anarchismus in Österreich u. Deutschland*. Bd. 6. Europa-Verlag.
- Celikates, Robin (2009). "Kritik als soziale Praxis". In: *Gesellschaftliche Selbstverständigung und kritische Theorie*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus.
- Diaz-Bone, Rainer (2011). *Soziologie der Konventionen*. Frankfurt / New York: Campus Verlag.
- Dörre, Klaus, Stephan Lessenich und Hartmut Rosa (2009). *Soziologie, Kapitalismus, Kritik*. Suhrkamp Eine Debatte, Frankfurt am Main.
- Gubitzer, Luise (1989). *Geschichte der Selbstverwaltung*. AG-SPAK-Publ.
- Henning, Christoph. "Entfremdung lebt: Zur Rettung der Künstlerkritik". In: *DFG Kolleg Postwachstumsgesellschaften Working Paper 03/2013*.
- Honneth, Axel (2002). *Befreiung aus der Muendigkeit: Paradoxien des gegenwaertigen Kapitalismus*. Bd. 1. Campus Verlag.

Critique of Capitalism and the Organization of Production

Jaeggi, Rahel und Tilo Wesche (2009). *Was ist Kritik?* Suhrkamp Frankfurt am Main.

Notz, Gisela (2010). *Theorien alternativen Wirtschaftens: Fenster in eine andere Welt.* Schmetterling Stuttgart.

Rothschild, Joyce und J. Allen Whitt (1989). *The cooperative workplace: Potentials and dilemmas of organisational democracy and participation.* Cambridge University Press.

Thévenot, Laurent (2001). "Organized Complexity Conventions of Coordination and the Composition of Economic Arrangements". In: *European Journal of Social Theory* 4.4, 405–425.