

# AZIMUTH

*Philosophical Coordinates in Modern and Contemporary Age*

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VIII (2020), nr. 16

## **Critical Theory Today An Old Paradigm for New Challenges?**

## **La teoria critica oggi Un vecchio paradigma per nuove sfide?**

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## ABSTRACTS

VERA KING, PSYCHE AND SOCIETY IN CRITICAL THEORY AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL RESEARCH. WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HORKHEIMER/ADORNO AND BOURDIEU

The article examines the significance of a carefully considered inclusion of things psychic in sociological theory and research, with special reference to the critical theories of the ‘Frankfurt School’ and Bourdieu. The question of how the relations between psyche and society can be conceptualized is a central issue in sociology, albeit one that has frequently occasioned oversimplified responses. The author argues that for sociological inquiry the analysis of the interplay between the societal and psychic factors operative in the actions, motives, and construal patterns of social agents is in various respects enlightening, if not indispensable. Psychoanalytic perspectives promise a sophisticated approach to the investigation of the complex psychic dimensions involved in actions pursued by individuals in society.

FERDINAND SUTTERLÜTY, RECONSTRUCTIVE CRITIQUE: A DEMONSTRATION ECOMPASSING TWO AREAS OF RESEARCH

This contribution aims to show the importance of empirical research for a reconstructive social critique. “Reconstruction” can, it is argued, assume very different meanings in different areas of social research and may accordingly call for a variety of methodical and theoretical operations. There hence exists a broad spectrum of what it might mean to use social reality as the source from which critique takes its measure. The present contribution demonstrates this with reference to two areas of research, namely the waves of riotous upheavals in European cities and the application of the guiding principle of child welfare in German family law. In conclusion, it considers the scope of a social critique that is reconstructive not only in name, but is also empirically founded.

KATIA GENEL, ON SOME ‘PATHOLOGIES’ OF DEMOCRACY: AUTHORITARIANISM, PREJUDICE, POPULISM. TOWARDS A CRITICAL THEORY OF DEMOCRACY?

This article aims to interrogate the way in which the study of the ‘pathologies’ of democracy can lead to the development of a theory of democracy, or rather, of two different models for a critical theory of democracy. This is done by studying two examples: authoritarianism and prejudice, as analysed by Adorno and Horkheimer, and nationalist tendencies, as discussed by Honneth. Particular attention is devoted to the language in which these political evils are analysed (as social ills and pathologies) by the first generation of the Frankfurt School and recently by Honneth, thereby sketching out two ways of analysing anti-democratic tendencies. Our aim is twofold: First, to show that the political question is not absent from the writing of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, as it is often described, and moreover, that their engagement with this question indeed leads to a theory of democracy. Second, it is an attempt to develop, with the aid of Adorno and Horkheimer as well as Honneth, an analysis of the phenomena that we now call populism, from the perspective of a critical theory of democracy.

## CLAUDIA LEEB, THE RIGHT EXTREMIST IDENTITARIAN MOVEMENT IN EUROPE: A CRITICAL THEORY ANALYSIS

In this article I draw on Theodor W. Adorno's psychoanalytically inspired writings on fascist agitators and their followers and the emergence of a new extremist right in Europe to expose psychologically oriented techniques a leader of the right extremist Identitarian Movement in Europe, Martin Sellner, uses to capture new followers. Such techniques offer the prospective followers irrational gratifications and a release of their feelings of failure and frustration of not being able to live up to capitalist values, and thereby distract them from the leader's destructive aims.

## FRIEDER VOGELMANN, CRITICAL THEORY AND POLITICAL EPISTEMOLOGY. SIX THESES ON UNTRUTH IN POLITICS

The rise of untruth in politics has mostly been met by a stout defense of a robust notion of truth and an equally robust notion of the sciences. Yet all too often, this answer sacrifices the results of critically examinations of actual practices in the sciences and humanities. This article outlines a response for critical theories that enables them to defend truth and objectivity against organized climate change denialists or political propagandists without embracing a naïve positivism about 'the scientific method' or objectivity.

## JAN-PHILIPP KRUSE, REASON, RELIGION AND THE CRISIS OF SOCIAL SEMANTICS. HABERMAS' PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AS A GUARDRAIL FOR DERAILING MODERNITY

It has seldom been noticed that not only does Habermas' work on religion give an interesting perspective on a possibly surprising matter, but also complements the systematic apparatus of the Theory of Communicative Action. The approach can be described as a kind of theoretical reactualization while at the same time introducing revisionary traits. It is this tension that gives Habermas' philosophy of religion greatest relevance beyond philosophical debates on religion. At the same time, it has a certain vagueness to it, which is most clearly expressed when asking whether the contributions of religion to the public discourse should be seen as a supplement or as a substantial addition to secular reason. According to Habermas, the problem isn't reason losing its ability to give reasons nor them suddenly being incomprehensible. What is much more worrying is that justifications have lost some of their persuasiveness: there is a crisis of normative commitment (*Verbindlichkeit*), and thus especially a crisis of social semantics. While a narrow (domain-specific) conception of reason will tend to conceive difficulties with semantics as some sort of input problem, a broader, enriched understanding of reason may classify these as a proprietary crisis.

## RODRIGO DUARTE, CULTURE INDUSTRY ONCE AGAIN RECONSIDERED. ADORNO'S CRITIQUE AND THEREAFTER

Adorno's critique of the culture industry, whose beginning occurred in the decade of 1940' in the book – written together with Max Horkheimer – *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is displayed throughout his entire philosophical career and responded to the distinct moments of development of the mass culture itself, from the predominance of movies and radio at its starting point to the subsequent appearing and growing of the commercial television system. Since after Adorno's death the technological as well as the geopolitical situation have strongly changed, inheritors of Adorno's

critique of the culture industry have the task to re-evaluate continuously its adequacy to the always renewed situation of the contemporary capitalism – since the beginning of the nineties not only monopoly oriented but also globalizes. This article intends to be a contribution to the mentioned evaluation.

#### CARL CASSEGÅRD, IS DIALECTICS APPLICABLE TO NATURE? THE “LUKÁCS PROBLEM” AND THE CRITICAL THEORY OF NATURE

The article argues for the fruitfulness of a critical theory of nature, understood as an approach criticizing the reified forms regulating capitalist society’s interaction with nature. This approach is based on what I call critical materialism, which I distinguish from causal and practical materialism. To demonstrate the strength of this approach, I turn to the criticism – voiced by e.g. John Bellamy Foster – that critical theory operates with a conception of dialectics that is inapplicable to nature (the so-called “Lukács problem”). According to this criticism, the rejection of Engels’ objectivistic dialectics of nature left the Frankfurt School with a subject-centered dialectics undermining the idea of a possible dereification of nature and handing over the study of nature to positivism. In this article I show how Frankfurt School critical theory possesses the theoretical resources for overcoming this problem. In particular, I point to Adorno’s idea of constellations as crucial in rebutting Foster’s criticism and suggesting how the Lukács problem might be solved.

#### EMMANUEL RENAULT, SUFFERING AT WORK AS EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL PROBLEM

This paper deals with epistemological and political controversies about suffering at work, with a special focus on debates about suicide at work. These controversies and debates shed an interesting light on the variety of methodological options critical sociology can choose, as well as on the specificities of critical sociology, by contrast with un-critical sociology. These controversies also show that political philosophy and critical theory should take more seriously the cognitive dimensions of ordinary practices of social critique. In a first step, this paper describes the meanings and functions of the concept of suffering at work. In a second step, it analyzes scientific critiques, epistemological critiques and political critiques of this concept. And in a third step, it analyses the ways in which a critical theory of suffering at work can intervene in some debates raised by suicides at work.

#### GONÇALO MARCELO, TASKS FOR A CRITICAL THEORY OF DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE

This paper addresses the current challenges to European democracies. It argues for the need to devise a critical theory of democracy in Europe and spells out some of the tasks it must bring to fruition. In a first section, a methodological issue is addressed, as it is argued that this specific strand of critical theory must be hermeneutical, in order to address actually existing societies and aim to understand the motives of social actors themselves. Then, it makes a diagnosis on the current state of affairs of the challenges facing democracy in Europe, from the social problems caused by decades of neoliberalism to the current authoritarian menaces. Against that backdrop, it puts forward seven tasks at the levels of theory, and political and social arrangements that are needed in order to be up to these challenges and renew European democracies.

#### JEAN-BAPTISTE VUILLEROD, RELIRE ADORNO ET HORKHEIMER APRES AXEL HONNETH? L’ACTUALITE DE LA THEORIE CRITIQUE FRANCFORTOISE

This article aims to discuss Honneth's theory of recognition from its first formulation in *The Struggle for Recognition* to its last reorganization in *Freedom's Right*. Trying to understand the evolution of Honneth's work, we emphasize the substitution of a universal anthropology by a theory of institution and we point out the philosophy of historical progress in Honneth's thought. After questioning the limits of such a philosophy of progress to think some contemporary issues (postcolonial issues, ecological problems), we propose to come back to the first generation of the Frankfurt School and in particular to Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to correct this limits.

#### EMMANUEL CHARREAU, RECONNAISSANCE, CONFLIT ET SERVITUDE: PERSPECTIVES LEFORTIENNES SUR LA THÉORIE DE LA RECONNAISSANCE

In this article, we would like to adress some problems regarding Axel Honneth's theory of recognition through a reappraisal of the political philosophy of Claude Lefort. While those authors differ in many ways, they share a common interest for the entanglement of domination and recognition that makes political struggles possible and fruitful. However, we will argue that, contrary to Honneth, Lefort's reading of Machiavelli and La Boétie allowed him to build a theory of recognition grounded in an infinite conflict that can never fully eliminate the threat of voluntary servitude.

#### FELIPE TORRES, EINDIMENSIONALITÄT ZWISCHEN HOMOGENITÄT UND HETEROGENITÄT. MARCUSE UND BATAILLE

The question of unity and difference is at the base of this writing. Through an analysis of the main postulates of Herbert Marcuse and Georges Bataille regarding unidimensionality and homogeneity respectively, the text proposes to understand the agglutinating tendencies of modern society both as a result of totalizing projects (Marcuse), as well as, more deeply, an operation of the understanding itself (Bataille). This is analyzed in the light of the passage from a society of rigid advanced capitalism in the times when Marcuse's and Bataille's texts were written, to a flexible and financialized capitalism. In the latter, one-dimensional postulates are challenged at first sight due to a greater presence of pluralistic discourses, liberal democracy and lifestyles, while from a second look this can be seen as an incomplete promise that is structured on the basis of an undisputed economic framework.