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On the consistency of Axel Honneth's critical theory: Methodology, critique, and current struggles for recognition.

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Introduction

Drawing upon the tradition of the Frankfurt School critical social theory, over the decades Axel Honneth (2009a) has been developing one of the most fully-structured paradigms of recognition in the field of social philosophy, whose methodology he accurately reconstructs. *In the first part of the paper*, I will examine Honneth's recognition paradigm insofar as it enables him to renovate this methodological framework. My examination has *the specific objective to support a twofold hypothesis*. On the one hand, I aim to outline a defense of Honneth's consistent methodology against growing criticisms – especially, but not exclusively, related to recent appraisal of *Freedom's Right* – which tend to see depletion of critical insights in the recent developments of his theory as compared with the results obtained in his early works¹. Unlike these critics, I contend that Honneth's work is (methodologically) compatible with the Frankfurt school's tradition and retains (and to a certain extent extends) its critical insights

¹ See the recent special issue of *Critical Horizons* dedicated to *Freedom's Right*, especially Freyenhagen (2015) and Schaub (2015).

(Deranty 2009, pp. 449-456). On the other hand, I aim to propose a critical appraisal of interpretations of Honneth's theory that, while more sympathetic towards it (or at least toward a specific period of its development), attempts to indicate the ways in which he could have strengthened his critique of contemporary society. For example, it has been pointed out that he could have integrated into his theory material interactions beyond interpersonal recognition (e.g., by fully engaging with the work of Merleau-Ponty [Deranty 2009, pp. 471-474]), or developed more nuanced reflections on the multifaced, ambivalent and constitutive role of power in human relations (Petherbridge 2013). Here, my objective is not to contradict these approaches, but rather to highlight the incompatibility between strengthening critique in these directions and Honneth's concept of recognition insofar as it constitutes a basis for updating the methodology of the positive version² of the Frankfurt school critical theory.

Arguing that the theory of recognition shows great consistency and advances in critical potential over the years does not mean that critical social theory should not investigate other ways to identify more radical and audacious forms of critique. What I wish to underline, however, is that we can deal with the inherent deficiencies that the Frankfurt school's model of critical theory shows when updated through the concept of recognition either by accepting its intrinsic limitations (as Honneth does), and progressively developing it as a critical tool as far as possible with application of this methodology to recognition, or by refusing them, thus possibly foregoing the project of updating the Frankfurt school model of critique through the concept of recognition.

Analysis of Axel Honneth's thought up to present time will eventually end up by highlighting an issue related to the concrete forms that the struggle for recognition has taken on over the last fifteen-twenty years. *In the second part of the paper*, I aim to enquire to what

² By "positive version", I mean that which does not abandon pursuit of effective "emancipatory" practices within current society, as opposed to the Adornian version.

extent Honneth's theory of recognition is still able today to identify current social practices which can in principle realize the normative content of recognition. I will examine the possibility that current "praxis" is offering some resistance to being interpreted from the angle of a robust, widespread, and long-standing struggle for recognition. Discussion of this aspect will then prompt the further question as to whether or not today's transformation in the nature of social struggle may weaken one of the methodological grounds of the theory of recognition (and of the left-Hegelians including the Frankfurt school), namely the relation between theory and ongoing "emancipatory" practices.

I. Honneth's critical theory project.

A. Critique and methodology.

The last few years have seen increasing analyses and interpretations of Axel Honneth's critical social theory, both from the viewpoint of the methodology, focusing on his endeavor to ground the Frankfurt school critical social theory upon new bases, and from a more sociological perspective, focusing on a critical appraisal of his examination of contemporary social life (Honneth 2014). Not only the recent special issue in *Critical horizons* which I cited in the introduction, but also some of the richest monographies on Axel Honneth analyze his philosophical journey in terms of a loss of critical potential. Both Danielle Petherbridge and Jean-Philippe Deranty argue, for example, that the earliest works of Honneth, whether *Social Action and Human Nature* or *The Critique of Power*, contained elements for a radical critique of the present that have since been lost. Had Honneth kept in higher consideration the "material" dimension of interaction examined in the book written with Joas in 1980, he would have radicalized his critique and escaped the reduction of the phenomenologically rich dimension of interaction to the single concept of recognition (Deranty, 2005, 2007, 2009). Had Honneth attributed more importance to the Foucauldian account of power instead of turning to

Hegel, he would not have run the risk of presenting recognition as a mainly positive, domineering-free concept, which is ultimately unable to identify the constitutive and ambivalent nature of power (Petherbridge 2013, Allen 2010)³. The recent developments of Honneth's paradigm of recognition makes things even worse. A static vision of society has come to substitute the former analysis, in which the struggle for recognition was the center of Honneth's theory of social evolution: today, Honneth's account makes it impossible to conceive of a radical change of society. Thus, *Freedom's Right* (2014) marks a further regression with regard to the middle period of Honneth's theoretical development (that is, the period around the elaboration of *The Struggle for Recognition*) (Frayenhagen 2015, Schaub 2015).

All these criticisms have the merit to highlight important issues, and weaknesses, of Axel Honneth's theory from the perspective of a wide-ranging, radical, and nuanced critical social theory, and deserve further development. However, I will argue that critique of Honneth's theory of recognition should be disconnected from the idea that his philosophical journey implies a steady decline of critical insights⁴. In other words, we can enquire whether or not Honneth could have increased the critical potential of his theory of recognition *even further* (i.e. more than he already had), and if so, *how* he could have done this. But we cannot, in my view, criticize Honneth's theory for progressive loss of critical insights. To be sure, this hypothesis will only prove true if we examine Honneth's theory *from within* the perspective delineated by the methodological approach of the Frankfurt school, as he reconstructed it (2007c, 2009a)⁵, and if we take recognition to be the concept through which he successfully grounded critical theory on a new basis. In this regard, what I am contending is that the kind

³ For a critique, see Angella (2017)

⁴ See also (Deranty 2009, pp. 449-456), who, while contending that Honneth should have developed a fuller concept of interaction (some aspects of which he could have drawn from his early works), acknowledges that his (relatively) recent focus on psychological and psychoanalytical issues enriched Honneth's theory with deeper critical insights.

⁵ For a critique, see Freundlieb (2000)

of criticisms at issue here open up perspectives that tend to be incompatible with this project. Of course, this is not necessarily a tragedy. Yet I believe it is worth enquiring into the limits of the project, and seeing whether (and how far) we can enhance critique within these limits.

But why is it that the criticisms outlined above tend to be at odds with Honneth's methodological framework? As Deranty (2009, pp. 44-45) pointed out, Honneth's concept of recognition needs to have the same multidimensional function that the concept of labor had in Marx. It needs to be able to explain: 1) The reproduction of society through cooperation, 2) The way in which human beings gain cognitive (and emotional) access to reality, and 3) The learning process through which people become aware of relations of domination and can thus react against them. The reason why Honneth has to detail these three dimensions of the reproduction of the human existence through the sole concept of recognition (and not, for instance, by using two concepts, as Habermas did by separating instrumental from communicative rationality), is "simple" (Deranty 2009, p. 44). Indeed, only

Such a synthesis allows the theorist to connect through an intimate link the critical analysis of society and the theory of emancipation. In other words, this is the only way to develop a conceptual framework with which one will also be able to conduct a valid immanent critique. Following Marx, therefore, Honneth sees clearly, right at the beginning, that a critical theory of society must be based on a categorical "monism". This principle is fundamental for a reason that is obvious in the Marxist context: it ensures the unity of theory and practice, or negatively, it makes sure that theory will not sever its links with social reality and with its aims towards emancipation (Deranty 2009, p. 44).

It is because the theory of recognition has to deal with the ambitious objective of conflating these three-fold critical dimensions into a single concept (recognition), that Honneth needs to exclude interactions that cannot be reduced to recognition from the first-level, strong normative critique of the present. Thus, "material interactions" (Deranty 2005, 2007), interaction with the environment ("external nature"), intrapsychic interactions (Whitebook 2001, 2003), and power relations (Petherbridge 2013, Allen 2010, 2016, Owen 2010) are taken

into account in Honneth's theory only insofar as they can be reformulated in terms of recognition.

Many critics of the theory of recognition (including those I cited, and indeed myself) have attempted to point out the shortcomings of this kind of approach, and endeavored to develop a more radical critique by giving more room to the interactions and forms of power that are not reducible to Honneth's concept of recognition. However, the methodological and normative consequences of this endeavor deserve further attention in my view. "Expansion of recognition into interaction" (Deranty 2009, p. 476) and focus on the ambivalent and constitutive forms of power run the risk of jeopardizing the project of grounding anew the Frankfurt school model of critical theory through the concept of recognition. If relating the theory to a clearly identifiable, ongoing "emancipatory praxis" is one of the main premises of the Frankfurt school critical social theory, and if immanent critique of every social sphere (contra Habermas, for example) is essential (Honneth 2007c, 2009a), then reduction to a methodological "monism" is paramount to the theory, and integration of interactions that are not compatible with it should be avoided.

If we accept this starting point (which of course can be contested), then there are two ways out of this quandary. Either one may attempt to deepen analysis of society *within* the framework deriving from the concept of recognition, as Honneth has never ceased to do, from *The Critique of Power* to this very day (and this means working on integrating other critical dimensions by reducing them to recognition), or one may attempt to work towards a grounding concept that could take the place of recognition in conflating those three, constitutive dimensions of critique.

In the remaining sections (B, C, D and E) of this part of the paper (I), I will briefly examine Honneth's philosophical journey so far traversed⁶. This examination – which implies

⁶ For book-length studies on its evolution over the years, beside the above-mentioned work by Deranty (2009) and

the methodology outlined above – *is made with the precise intention of supporting the above-mentioned hypothesis*, namely the progressive strengthening of the critical insights of Honneth's theory within the framework of the positive version of the Frankfurt school methodology.

B. Theory and Praxis.

With some simplifications, we can assert that the Frankfurt school critical theory is based upon establishment of a strict relation between theory and social reality, to the extent that the latter contains a rational *potential*, i.e. the potential to immanently transcend the current obstructions to the possibility of an ever more realized and meaningful life (Honneth 2009a). However, Honneth has only come to interpret the relation between theory and praxis through a social theory of rationality relatively recently. At the outset, he (2007c) was skeptical about the possibility of achieving this with his concept of recognition. Let us begin by briefly outlining the early steps of his theory (section B), before going on to its most recent developments (sections C, D and E).

The Critique of Power is a detailed critique of the first and the second generation of the Frankfurt school. Honneth agrees with Habermas (1987, pp. 106-130, 1981: vol. 1, pp. 338-402; Honneth ([1985] 1991, chap. 1-3) in contending that the first generation failed to find a layer of social practices where individuals participate in the formation of the social norms orienting interaction, because it explained both emancipation and domination using a single, undifferentiated concept of (instrumental) rationality. On the contrary, only if we have a sufficiently differentiated concept of rationality can we correctly analyze complex contemporary societies. However, Habermas' solution, splitting rationality into two spheres (*System* and *Lifeworld*), ends up by making of social evolution something that *mainly* occurs

Petherbridge (2013), see the more recent monography of Zurn (2015)

anonymously (1981, vol. 2, chap. 6), i.e. without the active, conscious, and conflictual participation of the subjects involved (Honneth [1985] 1991, chap. 7-9).

Thus, in both cases (first and second generation: Adorno and Habermas), although for different reasons (the absence of a sociological theory of action in Adorno and the absence of mediation of the struggle between social groups in Habermas), critical theory ends up by losing critical potential: on the one hand, it loses the possibility to identify a new “emancipatory” praxis, while, on the other hand, it loses the possibility of connecting the new praxis (communicative action) to contemporary social struggles.

Honneth’s solution to this twofold issue is to relate the development of the norms orienting social reproduction to social conflict. In this way, besides identifying a new connection with social practice, Honneth makes sure that no sphere of social action in modernity lacks a firm normative ground: by participating in the reproduction of their society through conflictual activities, subjects give their autonomous (i.e. not ideologically determined) consent to the social norms guiding their action. Honneth’s idea is that only by doing so can they legitimately protest whenever these norms are disrespected. As we now know, Honneth fulfilled this project in his habilitation thesis, *The Struggle for Recognition*. (Conflict for) recognition is the concept he has chosen in order to explain the process of individualization through which subjects both learn shared social norms – the norms providing the conditions for their “self-actualization” and for the reproduction of society – and can react against their misuse once these norms are disrespected.

Now, if we compare this outcome with the tradition of the Frankfurt school critical theory (Adorno and Habermas), we may reasonably go on to argue that Honneth’s theory represents a reinforcement of its critical potential. Certainly, the theory of recognition cannot equal the rich phenomenology of domination provided by Adorno’s dialectic, which needs to go so far as to make itself the object of its own critique (Horkheimer-Adorno 2007; Adorno

1973), nor, for now (in 1992), is it able to provide the wide-ranging, nuanced theory of social evolution (and rationality) provided by Habermas (1981). However, by making conflict the center of his theory, Honneth succeeded both in making the individual (despite his/her almost complete intersubjectivization) the pivot of social evolution, and in providing an immanent critique of the entire spectrum of society (i.e. by overcoming the split between instrumental and communicative rationality). If Adorno's theory lacks an identifiable social and collective "praxis" and Habermas' theory provides one by (to some extent) disregarding the individual's active, conflictual, and conscious participation in social progress, Honneth's concept of recognition identifies this "emancipatory praxis" by giving voice to the individuals where they are more vulnerable: in their social, moral and even physical constitution (1992, chap. 6).

C. The theory of social rationality.

The Struggle for Recognition relates theory to the immanent praxis of recognition, but it does not frame this relation within a theory of social rationality. It is only after this work that Honneth progressively comes up with the idea of doing so. In disagreement with the aspects of criticism that I mentioned at the beginning of the paper, I contend that this step in Honneth's *theoretical* journey does not imply a depletion of critical insights, but rather an increase thereof. This is the thesis I wish to support by analyzing the development of Honneth's theory after the 1992 book (1995) (section C, D and E), before going on to the next part of the paper (II), where I will discuss the issue regarding current transformation in social practices of recognition.

As we have seen, Honneth (2009a pp. 32-33) agrees with Habermas in maintaining that the idea of a differentiated rationality is imperative today. However, with Habermas' theory we lose the possibility to conceive of progress in social rationality *and* social conflict at the same time. Honneth (1991) aims to prove that the former originates in the latter. This is why he reduces the theory of rationality to a single concept, namely recognition, which makes conflict

the core of social progress.

But, what is the connection between recognition and rationality? Before addressing this issue, we need to understand how Honneth achieves the indispensable differentiation using a single concept of rationality. He achieves this differentiation by casting light upon the multiple “facets” of recognition. By integrating body-related dimensions into his theory, Honneth (1999, 2001, 2008) elaborates a richer concept of recognition. The main idea is that the kind of secondary recognition he (1995) describes in terms of Love, Rights and Solidarity is based on an “elementary” and “primordial” form of interaction (2008), which is to be seen as constituting the substrate of the human ability to internalize social norms⁷. From the beginning of its life, the baby experiences states of symbiosis with its attachment figure. Honneth (2012) interprets these states as the *very* basis of every interaction of recognition. Strictly speaking, we cannot have a relationship of recognition, because the ego boundaries of both subjectivities (attachment figure and baby) are lost (the baby’s ego has yet to be formed, the attachment figure’s ego is temporarily lost, for he or she fully projects him- or herself into the care of the baby). Nevertheless, Honneth argues that any further relation of recognition is based on this first period of symbiosis. More precisely, it is based on a successful growing out from this symbiotic phase (as Winnicott [1971] conceives it).

Honneth (2002) is seeking a remedy to the markedly cognitive approach he inherited through his use of G. H. Mead (1934) to explain the process of individualization through socialization that was essential to the development of his project (Honneth [1992] 1995, chap. 4). However, in doing so he maintains a continuity with the previous theoretical development. He superimposes Mead’s theory on Winnicott’s. According to Honneth, both authors hold that the socialization of the baby’s psyche depends on the interiorization of the behavior of the other

⁷ This “elementary” concept of recognition has come in for criticism by several authors. For a critique by an author who is sympathetic towards Honneth’s theory, see Deranty (2009, pp. 460-65).

and begins with the interaction with the people surrounding the baby. But Winnicott offers the German philosopher (1999) the opportunity to add an important factor. This process of socialization requires an *affective attachment* to unfold. Successfully overcoming the initial symbiosis – and so coming to a correct balance between mutual dependency and autonomy – is the prerequisite of a mature affective interaction.

Honneth supports these speculations on the initial formation of the baby's identity with studies on childhood development. Referring to Hobson and Tomasello's research, he argues that without any affective interaction with the attachment figure – in Honneth's terms, without affective recognition of the other – cognitive access to external reality would be precluded. Furthermore, the need for affective interaction is not only genetic (the essential precondition for child development), but also conceptual (the essential precondition for every cognitive act). Without previously recognizing the other from an emotional and affective point of view, i.e. without being emotionally involved in interaction with the other, we would not be able truly to understand his or her behavior and cognitive access to his or her demands would be foreclosed to us (2008, chap. 3).

To summarize, this kind of primordial, affective recognition is for Honneth the very basis of our life: it is crucial in maintaining a normal social life (2008, p. 42). Now, how can all this help us to understand the concept of recognition from the perspective of a theory of rationality? In recognizing each other on this basic level, correctly socialized subjects are able immediately to seize the values that others are spontaneously expressing in their bodily gestures. These values are in fact the sedimentation of relations of recognition assimilated through interactive learning processes. Insofar as these learning processes underpin subject identity formation and social reproduction – allowing individuals to reproduce their society and to pursue autonomy and self-determination – the *values of recognition* constitute the variegated substrate of social rationality.

These values are genetically revealed for the first time through the experience of a broken symbiosis. In Honneth's interpretation, the attachment figure is able to enter into a symbiotic phase because he or she spontaneously (non-reflexively) recognizes the baby as a human being deserving love; the baby's first smile denotes recognition of the attachment figure as the person who can satisfy the baby's desires. Furthermore, this smile denotes that the baby (pre-reflexively) recognizes itself as the being bearing the values deserving love and consideration (Honneth 2001). This is the first stage of a learning process where the baby, thanks to the affective attachment (recognition) with family and friends, assimilates the values (i.e. the expressions of crystallized relations of recognition) immanently contained and spontaneously expressed in the social world. Every aspect of these immanent values is a facet of social rationality. The social practices and institutions *in* and *through* which people actively form their own identity give expression to this rationality. These practices and institutions are rational because they *potentially* meet people's expectations, for, as Honneth had stressed two decades before in his *The Critique of Power*, people positively participate in the formation of the norms guiding their actions, trying to form them in a way that could satisfy their needs.

Thus, the unrealized aspect of social rationality is not intrinsic to social cooperation. Rather, it is the result of distortion of a form of social cooperation that would be more rational if we could reduce the mis-developments and "pathologies" of recognition. As a critical social theory, Honneth's aims to produce socio-philosophical models for analyzing these mis-developments. Social "invisibility" (intentional disrespect of other's values), recognition ideologies (empty forms of recognition, used to increase domination), processes of reification (unintentional forgetfulness of the substrata underpinning all cognitive knowledge), social regressions (for example, falling back into authoritarian regimes interpreted as distorted pursuit of the state of lost symbiosis) – Honneth (2001, 2007d, 2008, 2009b) would not have been able to develop these models of "social pathology" if he had not introduced an "elementary" concept

of recognition which open up the possibility of internalizing culturally specific values.

From this point of view, the integration of body-related and psychological dimensions in Honneth theory constitutes reinforcement of the potentialities of the concept of recognition. Not only do these developments of the theory not entail depletion of critical insight, but the recent re-elaboration of the notion of recognition in terms of social rationality is also the new basis on which Honneth develops a theory of justice founded on reconstruction of the normative content of modern democratic life. Again, in this further elaboration of Honneth's theory we can identify a further step toward enhancement of its critical potential.

D. *The theory of justice*

We may interpret the various phases of Honneth's theory of recognition as progressive articulation and deepening of the insight he delineates in his *The Critique of Power*. The action of individuals is guided by normative orientations *pre-theoretically* rooted in social practice. Following the development of this first premise, the theory of justice Honneth proposes in his latest interpretation of Hegel does not rely on a constructivist methodology. In their social life, subjects *implicitly* endow themselves with the norms steering their action; from the outset, society forms a network of institutionalized ethical relations, and any normative improvement comes from the immanent development of these relations. If the theorist wants to establish what the just norms are, she or he does not have to *externally* justify which of them should be implemented (whatever the justification might be from a methodological point of view). Rather she or he should reconstruct the rational norms already guiding subjects' behavior. These norms form the institutions (i.e. the well-established substrate of social practices of recognition) of society.

“Normative reconstruction” of shared norms is the methodological core of Honneth's

theory of justice⁸. To identify real progress and avoid arbitrary ethical assumptions, this methodology requires a teleological approach. What is just is that which allows individuals to *increase, implement and fulfill* what they take as a “good life” within the already justified – but open to interpretation – institutional framework of our society⁹. Since Honneth wrote *The Struggle for Recognition*, however, the form of the good life, previously defined as positive relationship with oneself in the spheres of love, rights and solidarity, has been further developed. It is now the idea of individual freedom (in terms of self-determination) (2014, pp. 18, 64). Justice is historically and methodologically related to the present interpretations of what individual freedom means for subjects. In his normative reconstruction, Honneth finds three interpretations of individual freedom that play an essential role in the individual’s self-determination: negative (or legal) freedom, reflexive (or moral) freedom, and social freedom (2014, pp. 21-62). Negative freedom ensures individuals are “entitled to act in accordance with their own” egoistic and narcissistic preferences, “provided that they do not violate the right of their fellow citizens to do the same” (2014, p. 29). Reflexive freedom requires rational reflection on what intentions and goals individuals should realize. It allows individuals to achieve a form of autonomy through either a rational self-legislation or a rational articulation of their own desires. Finally, social freedom realizes individual freedom in a cooperative manner. Yet only social freedom, according to Honneth, presupposes its own institution – i.e. the implicit relations of recognition – as an essential and inherent component of its realization.

It follows that the relation between these concepts of freedom is asymmetrical. Although self-determination needs both legal and moral freedom to be possible, they are a mere

⁸ Honneth (2002, chap 3, 2014, pp. 1-67). For debate on Honneth’s methodological *reconstructivism*, see Rutger Claassen (2013, 2014) and Honneth (2013).

⁹ See Honneth (2014, pp. 5, 59, 63-65). Honneth (2009b, 2014, 2015) responds to the criticism regarding teleology and its associated relativism by constructing an account of historical progress. The danger of lack of criticism due to this approach is discussed, on the methodological level, in his theory of justice (2014, pp. 7-8). For a recent defense of the notion of a “surplus of validity”, which is essential for justifying Honneth’s “normative reconstruction” and explaining why social progress is possible from an immanent point of view, see Koch-Honneth (2014). For a critique, see Allen (2016)

derivative mode of freedom (not immanent) and find their ground in the shared substrate of recognition, which forms the institution of social freedom and from which they detach (or withdraw) in order to develop (2014, pp. 65-71, 95-113, 123-124):

In principle, the institutions of legal and moral freedom in the developed societies of the West secure for each individual the right, enforced by the state or granted intersubjectively, to reject social obligations and attachments as soon as they prove irreconcilable with their own legitimate interests or moral beliefs. (...) The institution of legal freedom should give individuals the chance, regulated by the rule of law, to suspend ethical decisions for a certain period of time in order to assess what it is they desire; the institution of moral freedom grants them the opportunity to reject certain demands on the basis of justifiable reasons. (...) Both types of freedom feed off a social life-praxis that not only precedes them, but provides the basis for their right to exist in the first place: Only because we have already entered into everyday obligations and have already developed social attachments or find ourselves in particular communities do we need the legal or moral freedom to detach from the associated demands or to examine them reflexively (2014, p. 123).

In Honneth's theory, recognition allows individuals to cooperate in realizing their freedom: they complementarily recognize each other as authors of their self-determination; they comprehend one another as indispensable both for realizing their aims and, at the same time, for reproducing society. As noted in the previous section, what ensures this self-comprehension of the individuals is the affectively-based learning process of individualization through socialization, in which individuals learn rational social values. Legal and moral freedom presuppose the same substrate of recognition (we could say, of rationality) which is the very essence of social freedom. Whereas social freedom grows and becomes effective *within* this substrate, legal and moral freedom need to partially and temporarily withdraw from it in order to develop in an undistorted manner. In this case, which must be distinguished from their pathological development, legal and moral freedom not only have a positive potential (allowing individuals, for instance, to follow their narcissistic desires or articulate their goals regardless of the demanding exigencies of social norms of recognition), but also have a

“dynamic”, “transgressive” or “emancipatory” potential with regard to social freedom. Legal freedom allows us to test social practices of recognition in light of what our narcissistic impulses are, while moral freedom allows us to test social norms in light of our discursive or introspective reflection upon the universability of our goals (2014, pp. 61, 98-99).

In this regard, a just social order is one that gives all subjects “equal support in their striving for individual freedom” (2014, p. 64). Institutionalized social practices are just in that they promote and strengthen the harmonic development of the three institutions of freedom: legal, moral and social. However, these practices may possibly foster pathological behavior when they turn out to be one-sided and closed to one another and with regard to the affectively-based substrate of recognition. In this case, justice risks becoming abstract, unilateral and reified. Pathologies and mis-developments of freedom distort the demand for justice. Demanding justice within the reified development of the institutions of freedom could aggravate pathologies and mis-developments by entailing a drift away from the substrate of recognition with failure rightly to grasp the normative content of social interaction. A deficit of social rationality might thus emerge preventing individuals from fulfilling their shared aims.

From this perspective, Honneth’s critical social theory aims to cast light upon the different ways in which the realization of rationality inherent to recognition is being distorted. *Freedom’s Rights* enriches the paradigm of the “democratic ethical life” that once appeared in the guise of a formal anthropology (Honneth 1995). The methodological framework of the Frankfurt school critical social theory that Honneth reconstructs in *A Social Pathology of Reason* still underlies his theory. We have a learning process (realized through recognition) enabling social and material reproduction. This process is rational insofar as, in ensuring this reproduction, it gives individuals the instruments to fulfill their (shared) objectives (self-determination). But power relations in society make it difficult for this to come about. Subjects suffer as a result, and strive for full realization of the rationality embodied in social practices.

This striving may see a deeper articulation of rationality emerging, determining social progress.

Despite some significant incongruences¹⁰, Honneth's thought shows a basic continuity. The theoretical guidelines first outlined in *The Critique of Power* have been positively developed and enhanced for over thirty years along the lines of the Frankfurt School critical theory. The result is a model of critical theory which, far from being increasingly uncritical, provides us with a wide-ranging analysis of contemporary Western society. If the aim of a critical social theory (2007a) is to provide models for analyzing "social pathologies", then the interpretation of the theory of recognition as a theory of rationality opens the way to a far more differentiated and articulated analysis of the present. Of course, this does not mean that Honneth's "radical theory of democracy" (Lysaker 2017) is exempt from limitations and problems. One of these is related to what appears to be a change in the nature of current struggles for recognition. Before addressing this point, however, I will briefly focus on yet another one of the more recent works of Honneth, *The Idea of Socialism*.

E. The Idea of Socialism

The aim of this recent work is to revive the idea of socialism in a time in which it clearly has lost its motivating force. To do so, Honneth proceeds through three steps: first, he reconstructs from the beginning what he considers the proper aims of socialism (its normative horizon), secondly, he endeavors to show what are the flaws that have prevented socialism from fulfilling them, and finally, he indicates how the idea of socialism should be corrected to revive it today.

1) Honneth (2017, pp. 6-8) traces back the origin of socialism to the ideals of liberty,

¹⁰ It is not entirely clear, for example, how the hypothesis of a broken symbiosis, interpreted in terms of recognition, fits in with the thesis of the "moral experience" of disrespect presented in *The Struggle for Recognition*. See Honneth (2002, pp. 504, 518). A second, essential incongruence emerges when Honneth (2014) substitutes the "early weak anthropology" with "historical reconstruction" (Claassen 2014, pp. 79-80), for this introduces in his theory an "unresolved oscillation" between two different "forms of normative justification" (Zurn 2015, 207). As we have seen, however, this does not mean that Honneth has abandoned "the notion of recognition", which, rather, becomes the very basis for the development of social freedom (Zurn 2015, pp. 10-11, 162-163).

equality and fraternity of the French Revolution. According to Honneth, socialism emerged from the failure of European society to fully realize in practice these ideals, due to the synchronic development of capitalism and the subsequent primacy of private interest. This primacy then led to a narrow interpretation of freedom (liberty) as merely legal and egoistic, thereby making it incompatible with fraternity and equality (2017, pp. 8-26). Unsurprisingly, in interpreting the origin of socialism Honneth places freedom at the center: the aim of socialism should be for him the extension of freedom beyond its legal and individualistic understanding (2017, p. 11 sq.), so as to make it compatible with them. Only “social freedom” as the freedom reached through political cooperation can achieve this aim.

2) What are the reasons of the failure to realize social freedom, i.e. the normative horizon of socialism? One of the main reasons is the restriction of the application of the idea of social freedom to the economy, and the subsequent undervaluation of political democracy (Honneth 2017 pp. 25-26, 76-77, and chapter 2). Socialism has been unable to *correctly* grasp the functional differentiation of society into different spheres of action, that is, the spheres of personal relationships, the market economy, and the democratic will-formation that Honneth reconstructed in *Freedom's Right*. Therefore, it remained attached to the idea of the self-destruction of capitalism (capitalism has in itself the seeds of its own destruction), that it was to be carried out by a specific social class (the proletariat) which was supposed to bear “within itself the seed of the new society”, (2017, p. 106). Revolution would have then replaced the (capitalist) market with a “centrally planned economy” (2017, p. 56), which would have made political democracy utterly unnecessary (2017, pp. 74-75, 76-77), cooperation between workers being considered enough to determine social integration and satisfy the needs of everyone (2017, pp. 34-36, 78-79).

3) What's left of the idea of socialism, today? The ideal of social freedom as a form of “free cooperation” (a form of living one-for-the-other), the normative potential of which is

inherent to pre-theoretical, pre-institutionalized social practices. What are the corrections to be made to revive socialism today, that is, to achieve its aim under current social and political circumstances (Honneth 2017, chapters 3 and 4)? In tracing back to the economy (relations of production) the development of personal relationships and of the democratic will-formation, socialism has considered the functional differentiation of society as an empirical fact (imposed on subjects) instead of a normative task to accomplish (2017, pp. 80-81). To correct this trend, socialism should take a step back toward a higher degree of abstraction. Instead of going on pursuing the hope for social transformation into the demands of a single social class (the workers), it should pay more attention to the functional differentiation of society and take into account the normative demands of all the actors involved in social reproduction according to their respective roles within the three spheres of freedom (2017, pp. 94-99).

Thus, the task of socialism is to replace its “economic fundamentalism” (Honneth 2017, p. 77) with the “notion of independent spheres of action which obey independent norms”, (2017, p. 87), to “discover the potential for freedom” inherent “in personal relations, the economy and democratic will-formation”, (2017, p. 91), and finally to make clear how these spheres of action will interact with one another by proposing a future-oriented project which is also able to motivate people to try out its viability (2017, pp. 73-74, 90). To provide an idea of what kind of interaction develops between autonomous, teleologically-oriented spheres of action Honneth refers to the metaphor of the “living organism”: while operating autonomously, these spheres are interdependent and interact as do the different organs of a living being, all of them contributing to its overall well-being and development (2017, pp. 90-93). Unlike living organisms, however, the teleologically-oriented development of society (the “organism”) is not the result of a predetermined “internal structure”. On the contrary, individuals involve themselves in the conflictual realization of social freedom through recognition-led struggles reflexively steered by a public sphere, in which “all participants take part as freely as possible”,

(2017, pp. 94-96).

More clearly than in previous works, Honneth is widening the scope of what we should understand with “praxis” and further differentiating its internal articulation to include a wider range of social actors and roles, (i.e. not only the demands of disadvantaged social groups but also those of every social actor in her/his multiple roles). The place in society containing a latent “emancipatory” potential ceases to be identified with a specific social group or with a single social movement, and the sphere of “democratic action” (the public sphere) clearly acquires a primacy: it is only one among other functionally differentiated social spheres, but the one which is able to “reflexively” steer the “overall social reproduction”, for it is the only place “in which problems from every corner of social life can be articulated for all ears and be presented as a task to be solved in cooperation” (2017, p. 97). Of course, all this does not mean that critical theory and socialism have foregone their aim of cooperating with the disadvantaged to represent their normative demands within the public sphere, and to operate to make it ever more open to these demands (2017, pp. 104-105). On the contrary, acting as “advocate” for those who legitimately struggle for inclusion “in social communication” remains one of their essential tasks (2017, p. 66). Likewise, a renovated socialism should have the task to underline in the public sphere the “convergence” of disparate problems, so as to make it easier to understand them as a common challenge, thus mobilizing “citizens for collective action” (2017, p. 103).

If what I have been arguing is true, then Honneth’s theory has not only – as we have seen in previous chapters – enhanced critical insights with regard to its ability to analyze “social pathologies”, but also achieved a greater internal differentiation which makes it better able to take account of a broader variety of normative demands. Yet despite the consistency of Honneth’s theory, which I endeavored to illustrate throughout this paper, its recent revision seems partly to hinge on “today’s changed consciousness of conflict” (2017, p. 106). Therefore,

analysis of how the nature of normatively-led struggles has changed in recent years becomes paramount. After all, the concept of struggle as “emancipatory praxis” is pivotal in Honneth’s theory.

II. Return to the relation between theory and “praxis”.

F. Is the struggle for recognition subsiding?

Honneth’s theory of social evolution is based upon the idea that individuals are (capable of becoming) aware of shared societal ends – that is, of the same ends that make it possible for them to realize individual freedom. These ends become more evident for individual consciousness precisely when they are being disrespected or inhibited (i.e. on experiencing injustice) (Honneth 1995, chap. 6). When the inhibition of the possibilities of self-determination is perceived as unjust, it may entail the cognitive and affective elements individuals need in order to react since, according to Honneth, they cannot bear to lose their autonomy and their ability to act. If the suitable “cultural-political environment”, that is, the fertile ground providing “the means of articulation of a social movement” is present (Honneth 1995, pp. 138-139), then cooperation may function as the medium through which the normative content of the injustice may become clearer to those who are enduring it, while finding a way to be shared and publicly expressed. The “moral” (Honneth 2007b) reaction – struggle for recognition or for freedom – of cooperating individuals constitutes the dynamic element of social-normative progress (i.e. reduction of the gap between *Faktizität* and *Geltung* [2014, p. 128], implementation of a “normative surplus”, individualization and social inclusion).

Now, to what extent are pathologies and misdevelopments of legal, moral, and social freedom elements that individuals experience as restriction of that self-determination on the strength of which they can both acquire consciousness of the normative content of their inhibited action and motivate a collective response? Are there sufficiently robust limits to the

societal systemic tendency to make it hard for individuals to interpret correctly the normative scope and content of the diverse spheres of freedom and practice (e.g. 2014, pp. 91-92)? How wide is the scope for individuals to participate actively in the realization of their freedom beyond pathologies and mis-developments? Is the current empirical, social, and political context able to provide a suitable basis to enhance cooperation and collective action? These questions are not otiose, since the normatively based participation in social evolution (implicit consensus with regard to social ends, awareness of these ends when inhibited, and collective reaction to their inhibition) constitutes the normative justification of Honneth's theory. If this kind of participation – as it is grasped through the concept of recognition – falls off, then Honneth's theory may become a less suitable model of critical theory.

The years in which Honneth conceived and matured the theory of recognition were characterized by well-structured social struggles (Zurn 2016, p. 2). This is reflected in the theoretical argumentation of his work published in 1992, *The Struggle for recognition*, where struggle is defined precisely with regard to its social, cooperative and collective dimension: “Social struggle *must* be understood” as “a practical process in which individual experiences of disrespect are read as typical for *an entire group*, and *in such a way that they can motivate collective demands* for expanded relations of recognition”. Indeed, “*Only if the means of articulation of a social movement are available can the experience of disrespect become a source of motivation* for acts of political resistance” (1995, pp. 162, 139 *emphases added*).

According to Honneth (2014, pp. 247-253, 325-326), current conflicts for recognition seem to be increasingly individualized, engaged in only by individuals in their day-to-day mutual interactions. This is identified in *Freedom's Right* as a major problem. What is changing in this work – as compared with the previous works – is neither the central idea of the individual as capable of becoming conscious of social injustice and able to distinguish normatively between different spheres of practice (2014, p. 127), nor the importance attributed to

“collective” social movements in prompting social progress, or even only in recovering from current regressions (e.g. 2014, pp. 253), but rather confidence in the emergence of the cooperation needed to organize them *in present times* (2014, p. 247).

Let us dispel all doubts regarding the above observations. How is it that Honneth, while claiming that recognition has not lost its socializing and transgressive nature, argues that there is the tendency – above all in “the sphere of social labor” – “to articulate moral discontent in a purely private manner and to resort only to non-verbal forms of resistance”, (2014, p. 252, 2017, pp. 1-5)? Is it true, as Honneth claims, that “the crisis we’re having today in western capitalist societies” does not lead “to higher forms or higher degrees of social protest” (Marcelo 2013, p. 212), and that recognition fails to lead to the “collective movements” that once animated the social arena? And if it is, how can recognition still claim to bear in itself an *effective* “intramundane transcendence”?

A glance back at the public discontent and social protests of the last fifteen-twenty years should suffice to reject Honneth’s thesis. Take, to give just a few examples (looking no further than the West), the protest against the neo-liberal policies and the financialization of the markets (e.g. “Los indignados” in Spain and “Occupy Wall Street” in the US), the various forms of protest accompanying the current project of the European Union (from the Greek strikes to *Brexit*), and riots such as those in Paris’s banlieue in 2005. Can we in any reasonable way maintain that we are facing a “privatization of resistance” and an “absence of public outrage” (Honneth 2014, p. 247)? These kinds of protest attest to the reaction to the offense against a sense of justice that, if interpreted through the category of recognition, seems to contradict Honneth’s own recent theses.

Exhaustive analysis of the current protest movements is clearly beyond the scope of this paper, and would merit specific research. However, at first sight, it seems that these forms of reaction to injustice do not generate the kind of long-standing solidarity that would allow for

efficient and constructive sharing of individual experiences of injustice. Not, that is, in such a way as to succeed in triggering conflictual, democratic processes able to *steadily oppose*, through “organized struggles” (Honneth 2014, p. 253), the causes of what is legitimately felt to be unjust. In fact, these protests seem to fall within the scope of what contemporary studies on political collective action call “contentious politics” (McAdam et al 2004). Contentious politics embrace all the collective forms of action (e.g. “riots”, “rebellions”, “protests”, “strike waves”, “revolutions”) occurring when “ordinary people” – that is, people “who lack regular access to representative institutions” – “join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities, and opponents” (Tarrow 2011, pp. 4-8). These forms of collective action, which are political insofar as they are able to trigger political change, form the ground for the formation of social movements. But social movements appear only when there are “sequences of contentious politics based on underlying social networks, on resonant collective action frames, and on the capacity to maintain sustained challenges against powerful opponents (Tarrow 2011, p. 7).

It is only by sustaining collective action against antagonists that a contentious episode becomes a social movement. Common purposes, collective identities, and identifiable challenges help movements to do this; but unless they can maintain their challenge, movements will evaporate into the kind of individualistic resentment that James Scott calls “resistance” [1985], will harden into intellectual or religious sects, or their members will defect from activism into isolation. Sustaining collective action in interaction with powerful opponents marks the social movement off from the earlier forms of contention that preceded it in history and accompany it today (Tarrow 2011, p. 12).

In this sense, “an isolated incident of contention – for instance, a riot or a mob” – is not a social movement (p. 11). Although these kinds of isolated “contentious politics” can be and sometimes really are effective in producing political changes, it is only through transformation into social movements that they can have a better chance of standing up to “powerful opponents”.

Now, without generalizing a phenomenon which is complex, highly variegated and in

continuous (trans)formation, I think we can reasonably argue that most of the contentious politics in today's western societies fall short of becoming *robust* social movements, at least if compared with the social movements of the 60s, 70s, and 80s (e.g. workers' movements, civil rights' movements). After an initial surge, most of these protests seem inexorably to lose cohesion and disappear or find their influence on the social arena dwindling. If this is indeed the case, then Honneth is right in contending that contemporary society is undergoing a process of "depoliticization" (Marcelo 2013, pp. 212-213) – insofar as depoliticization may be taken to designate a decline in the kind of solidarity and cooperative participation that is able to maintain long-standing, well-organized, and collective opposition to what is felt as unjust, and that is thus also able to bring about more effective social and political changes.

One of the main causes of this kind of "depoliticization" is a lack of normative orientation (Honneth 2017, pp. 1-5). The opacity of the processes of social-economic reproduction of current societies makes it difficult for subjects to understand them. Therefore, subjects have a reified consciousness of these processes: for them, they are so complex that they cannot be *intentionally* changed (2017, p. 3). Reification is to be related here to "cultural factors": as discontent grows, individuals are ever more devoid of the "political patterns of interpretation which show that what appears inevitable is in fact anything but" (2017, pp. 4-5). Thus, while having "a clear sense of what they do not want, they have no halfway clear conception of the goal to which the change they desire should ultimately lead". The inability even to "imagine", let alone map out, a society that could further realize their shared aims leads eventually to the privatization of their experiences of injustice (2017, pp. 1-3).

G. Is the concept of a struggle for recognition a suitable tool for criticism today?

Let us now distinguish – with reference to Honneth's theory of recognition – three forms of struggle. If what I have been arguing is basically sound, only the second and the third are still

shaping social evolution, while the first one is currently losing momentum.

1) Wide-ranging, long-standing, and well-organized struggles for freedom that – based on solid ties of solidarity, shared experience of injustice, and cooperation – succeed in establishing a conflictual dynamic which may lead to a more inclusive, just and open society. In my reconstruction, this is the idea of struggle which served as a sociological basis for the theoretical elaboration of *The Struggle for Recognition*.

2) Forms of collective struggle that are indeed able to take aim at the current social “malaise”, but cannot achieve the adequate structure or gain the support needed to establish a more robust social and political dynamic. These “contentious” actions, which seem to be the currently most widespread forms of collective protest, are often doomed to a more or less temporary surge, and do not seem able to produce the long-standing, more incisive movements of the first kind of struggle. In fact, they could be seen as complementing the “privatization of the resistance” and the “political disenchantment” that Honneth (2014, p. 247, 326) identified in contemporary society: if the means for a real politicization of the experience of injustice – which would allow for the channeling of temporary contentious politics into productive social movements – are currently unavailable, then individuals are driven to retreat from the public sphere and privatize their suffering (i.e. to “defect from activism into isolation” as Tarrow stated [p. 12]).

3) The third form of struggle can be situated between segmented – but public and collective – contentious politics and sheer privatization of the experience of injustice (i.e. “silent’ and often individualized strategies of evasion”, such as those developing in today’s labor market [Honneth 2014, p. 247]). Here I am referring to intersubjective, “small, everyday

forms of struggle”, which “slowly” change “the way we understand the principles of recognition, the way we understand ourselves”, and help “to make our societies normatively better” (Marcelo 2013, p. 217) without giving rise to broader “political resistance” – neither in the form of well-organized social struggles, nor in the form of more ephemeral contentious politics.

Although the first form of struggle is subsiding today – and despite the increase of “silent” forms of “evasion” – the centrality of recognition and of its conflicts in forming, sharing and transforming social norms is in no way affected as it would be, for example, on the basis of the argument – which I do not examine in this paper – that recognition is not the normative ground of social reproduction, or on producing empirical evidence that the absence of long-standing collective struggles is directly linked to social forms of compensation that end up by neutralizing the normative potential of recognition. Intersubjective, conflict-oriented practices of recognition are still thought to be the ultimate basis of social reproduction. Without long-standing and well-structured social movements – which could possibly emerge only by sharing the normative content of recognition (or freedom) within the public sphere in a way that succeeds in motivating a larger public to democratic participation – this content would simply develop in an individualized, more elusive form, through daily intersubjective struggles and sporadic collective conflicts. In this regard, individuals are still conceptualized by Honneth, as thirty years earlier (1991, 2007b), as the center of social evolution.

Yet from the viewpoint of a more radical critical social theory the problem remains, for the abatement of long-standing and robust collective struggles coincides with the decline in the incisiveness of the participation of those “who lack regular access to representative institutions” (Tarrow 2011, p. 8). It is true that Honneth has never thought of the struggle for recognition as something *intrinsically and immediately* related to organized social movements.

On the contrary, from the outset he refers mainly to the “largely individualized struggles” ([1981] 2007b, p. 93) of those members of disadvantaged social groups for whom it is difficult to publicly elaborate the moral content of their experience of injustice (disrespect). The aim of Honneth is precisely to take into account the potential for change of those moral experiences that have not yet found expression within politically articulated “social movements” (Fraser-Honneth 2003, p. 117). However, the central question here concerns the analysis of that which obstructs the transition from this kind of individualized struggle to cooperative struggles. If we bear in mind the above-cited passages of *The struggle for recognition* in which Honneth underlined that only “social movements” are able to motivate action, then it becomes evident how essential well-organized collective struggles grounded on cooperation and solidarity are for a form of social development that seeks to include the viewpoints of those disadvantaged social groups.

Given this background, which once again shows social praxis *partially* falling off, would it not be more fruitful to turn to other critical social theories – Foucauldian, for example – or develop approaches coming closer to the first generation of critical theorists (particularly Adorno, where the experience of injustice did not need to relate to large cooperative praxis), thus leaving room for more radical critique of the present? Indeed, as I remarked in outlining what at the beginning of the paper (Part I, section A) appeared to be a methodological dilemma, in order to develop the ambitious theory that I examined, Honneth needs to refrain from going into deeper analysis of the variety of empirical experience (Zurn 2005, pp. 91-92), from elaborating a more conflict-oriented model of critical theory (Bertram and Celikates 2013, Whitebook 1995), and from proposing a phenomenologically richer account of power relations (Allen 2010, Owen 2010, Petherbridge 2013) both in and beyond the Western paradigm of modernity (Allen 2015, 2016). Had he not refrained from doing so – i.e. had he integrated into his theory dimensions that are not reducible to *his* concept of recognition – his project of

making recognition the ground of his interesting variant of the Frankfurt school model of critical social theory would have failed.

Concluding remarks.

Leaving detailed answer to this quandary to further developments, in the limited space left for concluding remarks I will summarize the main aims of this paper:

1) I outlined a defense of Honneth's critical social theory against criticisms. With examination of Honneth's philosophical journey from *The Critique of Power* to *The Idea of Socialism* I was able to contest the thesis of a depletion of critical insights in his theory of recognition up to today. On the one hand, by consistently grounding theory on a normatively based social conflict, Honneth has been able to provide an *immanent* critique of present times, which over the years has become increasingly nuanced. On the other hand, the introduction of an emotionally and psychologically based notion of recognition (after the *The Struggle for Recognition*) enabled him to provide a variety of models for the analysis of social pathologies, elaboration of which would not have been possible within the theoretical framework of the 1992 book (1995).

2) I endeavored to highlight the methodology with which Honneth elaborated his theory of recognition. I argued that, in order to fulfill the project of updating the Frankfurt school's model of critical theory by anchoring theory to an effective social rationality, Honneth needed to ground it on a single concept (recognition). The "monistic" core of Honneth's theory (Deranty 2009, p. 44) accepts inclusion of interactions other than recognition only if they can eventually be reduced to recognition as their *ultimate and positive ground*¹¹. Without reduction,

¹¹ See, for example, the way Honneth integrates intrapsychic interactions within his theory of recognition in "Postmodern Identity and Object-Relations Theory" (1999) by attributing them with a strong intersubjective structure. An interesting proposal for avoiding completely positive (Axel Honneth) or completely negative (Judith

we can continue using recognition as a critical tool, and we can even enhance its critical potential by coordinating it with other kinds of interaction (e.g. more nuanced power relations and material interactions), but this would compromise the project of using it to renovate the methodology of the Frankfurt school critical social theory – at least in the form in which Honneth (2009a) reconstructed it. Any choice as to whether or not to forge ahead with this model of critical theory should be made by weighing up the pro and cons with regard to its practical aims.

3) Although one of the objectives of this paper was to defend Honneth's theory against criticisms, I also endeavored to identify what might prove to be a threat to it by pointing out a transformation in current struggles. Today's struggles seem unable to become large-scale, long-standing social movements: they either develop through everyday interpersonal conflicts or through more isolated collective protests. If we take it that the process of individualization through socialization (as Honneth has it) is still based on practices of recognition, and that on this basis interpersonal and episodic collective struggles for freedom still support social evolution, then the normative justification of the theory of recognition – which requires reconstruction of the pre-theoretical, normative participation in this evolution – does not seem to be *immediately* endangered¹². However, it may be held that depoliticization (i.e. the lack of active participation in the public sphere and the absence of the conditions for the emergence of long-standing social movements) could possibly foster further development of "silent" forms of "evasion", thus actually reducing participation not only in such movements, but also in everyday intersubjective struggles. In such a case, the decline of individuals' active participation in the kind of normatively based social evolution that Honneth reconstructed in *Freedom's Right* would clearly indicate the need for his theory to be reinforced with, at least,

Butler) accounts of recognition can be found in Bertram-Celikates (2013); From a psychological viewpoint, see the criticisms by Whitebook (2001, 2003). For Honneth's rejoinder, see Honneth (2012).

¹² Misgivings in this regard are expressed by Zurn (2015, pp. 195-200)

1) a deeper analysis of the “social pathologies” that thwart the formation of robust struggles under current social, economic, and political circumstances, and 2) a comparative study of conflicting interpretations of the normative ground of Western society (Zurn 2015, p. 199), in order to verify whether the decline of social struggles on a larger scale does not in fact denote progressive transformation into Western society’s normative self-understanding¹³, but simply a regression, slowdown or temporary deviation in the realization of the modern idea of social freedom.

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¹³ A transformation that might imply the need to interpret what Honneth identified as misdevelopment or pathology of freedom as in fact the achievement of “alternative teleologies”, which could, for example, see in today’s developments of the market economy the realization of a libertarian or neoliberal conception thereof (and not a “pathology”). See Zurn (2015, pp. 196-197, 199). However, for Zurn such a comparative study would not be sufficient to ground the normative validity of Honneth’s reconstruction: a diagnosis of the normative development of society “cannot be settled by historical facts alone” (p. 200), but “needs some kind of trans-contextual universal standard” (p. 199).

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