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## New Directions in Frankfurt Critical Theory for Critical Urban Theory

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Critical contributions to social theory basically embrace a critical focus on modern social relations with predominant attention to the productive and destructive forces in capitalist societies. As such they comprise various disciplines of the social sciences and differing schools of thought that aim at normative progress, political justice, and human freedom. Critical *urban* theory focuses on socioeconomic inequality and spatial relations that allow for the simultaneity of social conflicts and uneven geographical developments. With such a focus, human geography, urban sociology, and urban anthropology often circle around the work of Karl Marx (e.g. David Harvey, Neil Smith) and Henri Lefebvre (e.g. Christian Schmid, Neil Brenner), who has been labelled a ‘Marx for our time’ (Gottdiener, 1993). Beyond Marxist approaches this involves post-structural and postmodern thought (e.g. Edward Soja, Nigel Thrift, Ash Amin, AbdouMaliq Simone), feminist (e.g. Doreen Massey, Linda McDowell), post-colonial (e.g. Jennifer Robinson, Ruth Gilmore), and anarchist analysis (e.g. Simon Springer).

Given a variety of critical approaches to urban theory in this chapter, I discuss contemporary Frankfurt critical theory, a project that Neil Brenner (2009) has only begun. In his discussion of the early work of Frankfurt scholars, Brenner is clear that only a few urban scholars engage with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, where only Lefebvre provides a bridge (Aronowitz, 2015; Charnock, 2018). While limited engagement seems due to the negativist – or pessimist – social analysis of the first generation (i.e. Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno), in this chapter I draw attention to the latest Frankfurt protagonists – after Habermas – who have substantiated Frankfurt lines of reasoning along a *critical theory of justice*.

Focusing on new theoretical directions for critical *urban* theory I will thus build upon the seminal contributions by Neil Brenner (2009) and Ugo Rossi (2019) and extend Brenner's discussion of the first and second generations with respect to the third and fourth generations of the Frankfurt School. Deepening the urban discussion for the *philosophical anthropology* of Axel Honneth (1995, 2009, 2014) and Rahel Jaeggi (2014, 2018), I touch upon the *inner nature* of social inter/action that allows for a sharper analysis of self-realisation, community formation, and the social production of *second nature*, that is, social space. At the core of my discussion I will focus on the political-philosophical exchange between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth (2003), which distinguishes questions of distributive injustice and a positive formulation for justice that rests on the philosophy of recognition. The latter focus is central to the Frankfurt School today, where contemporary protagonists provide a fresh look on fundamental concepts for normative justice that can be found in Hegel and the young Marx, namely, the notion of *alienation* and *struggles for recognition*.

Making sense of Hegel and Marx for the Frankfurt School it is characteristic to employ social philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and social psychology for critical analysis of powerful social relations, subjective notions of human suffering and historical struggles for emancipatory social change. Stressing the Hegelian notion of social struggles in history and the Marxist emphasis on human agency in the making of history the Frankfurt School therefore emphasises negative and positive freedom – *freedom from* alienation and *freedom for* human emancipation – to be central for a critique of capitalist social relations.

The category of *alienation* has been pivotal to the early Frankfurt School (Fromm, 1969; Lukacs, 1968 [1922]) and latest generation (Allen and Mendieta, 2018; Jaeggi, 2014). Although alienation was crucial to the young Marx and Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*, the explanatory power of the concept nevertheless faded over time. Frankfurt scholar Rahel Jaeggi (2014) has revitalised the category for contemporary critical theory and also stimulated urban theory as the latest publications of David Harvey (2014, 2018) and Madden and Marcuse (2016) show. Recognition relations, on the other hand, have yet to unfold their explanatory power as analytical category for a critical *and* urban theory of justice, which is part of the *Moral Geography* of David M. Smith (1994, 2000a) and my own work.

Taking up the question of justice as struggles for recognition, in short, I will highlight the relevance of *philosophical anthropology* for social conflict and historical progress: sharpening our understanding of social recognition relations to be central for self-realisation, community formation, and a meaningful life in cities. The major question for justice can be re/formulated as simple as *who cares?* Who cares for what, whom, when, *where*, and why? Thanks to Covid-19 Caring Geographies are back on the scholarly radar (Springer, 2020) giving weight to recognition of fundamental social goods nobody can do without: i.e. health, housing, mobility, solidarity and community. Emphasising conflicts over (alienated) meaning and normative progress in global history, I will arrive at an agonist understanding of social conflict and social change that finds the Marxist search for one grand solution in the waiting room of history (Harvey, 2017; Springer, 2014). Focusing on Honneth's (1995) moral grammar of social conflict and Jaeggi's (2014, 2018) critique of alienation and forms of life – that do not engage with paternalist critique or assume perfect harmony at

the end of conflict – for progress in critical *urban* theory, I link recognition theory to spatial practice and Lefebvre (1991): speaking of a recognition-led production of space that comes with implications for resignation, resistance, relocation (Buchholz, 2016). Highlighting spatial relations of social struggles I therefore closely link Frankfurt critical theory to urban theory: pointing at multiple struggles and simultaneous conflict in cities that target a meaningful life and a place in this world to call home.

For such a task I proceed in four steps. First, I revisit the initial moment for Frankfurt critical theory that highlights the Hegelian roots of the young Marx, that is, the distinction between the early humanist philosopher and the later economic critic of *Capital*. Aiming to differentiate negative and positive formulations of in/justice, second, I recall the concept of alienation to be central for a critique of capitalist social relations. Applying competing concepts of justice to the politics of housing – where housing distribution is simultaneously justified on egalitarian or competitive grounds, that is, as common good and social right, on the one hand, and economic achievement or prestigious investment, on the other – I confront a meaningful theoretical category with meaningless urban practices. Aiming at normative justice in cities, third, I touch upon the Fraser/Honneth debate and briefly outline the philosophy of recognition. Deepening the urban discussion for the inter-subjective moment of social recognition relations, fourth, I apply critical theoretical implications to urban studies: sharpening our understanding for the limits of self-realisation in communities of shared values on shared space. While socialist ideas for social justice have lost their innocence in history I conclude with left-wing melancholy, and hope in fundamental hope.

### FRANKFURT CRITICAL THEORY AND THE YOUNG MARX

To begin with, in a nutshell, for Frankfurt School critical theory we can basically speak of four generations, where prominent figures involve (i) Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, (ii) Jürgen Habermas and Claus Offe, (iii) Axel Honneth and Hauke Brunkhorst, and (iv) Rainer Forst and Rahel Jaeggi. Connecting social philosophy to social psychology, Frankfurt scholars do not follow one line of thought, but a school of thought that largely rests on Hegel, Marx, and Freud (Wiggershaus, 1994). To understand the development of the Frankfurt School and the turn of Habermas (Deranty, 2009) it is inevitable to acknowledge the Hegelian roots of Marx and see the protagonists of each generation as members of their time – and space – as Joel Anderson (2011, 45–46) points out.

The original Frankfurt School generation came of age in the struggle to understand the non-revolutionary consciousness of the majority of German workers (despite their ‘objectively revolutionary’ situation), and then faced, as mature theorists, National Socialism’s crimes against humanity. The second generation came of age in the face of (revelations of) Nazi atrocities, and participated in the transformations around 1968 as mature theorists. The third generation came of age during the upheavals of the late sixties and the new social movements of the seventies, and faced as mature theorists the fall of the Berlin Wall, the resurgence of European nationalism, and the acceleration of globalisation.

The fourth generation, then, takes up the complexity of social conflict and historical change, that is, the co-existence of multiple forms of life and simultaneous conflicts that struggle with various forms of alienation and normative justification.

In his foundational essay on critical theory Max Horkheimer (2002 [1937]) distinguishes *traditional and critical theory* and argues for academic commitment to tackle powerful ideologies and historical struggles for human emancipation. If a theoretical procedure does not take a normative standpoint, he argues, 'what can it be but an aimless intellectual game, half conceptual poetry, half impotent expression of states of mind' (ibid.: 209)?

With such an agenda, Horkheimer and his colleagues in Frankfurt respond to the dominant positivism in academia at the time and *the dialectic of enlightenment* (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2003) when witnessing the rise of fascism. Aiming to make sense of historical progress and regression, for the first generation of Frankfurt critical theorists the election of National Socialists in Germany in 1933, despite the assumed achievements of enlightened thought, not only threatened their very lives – as Jews in Germany – but has shaken the philosophical substance of human progress, rationality, and reason to the core. Reflecting on yet another period of barbarism in history did not provide for optimism or idealism but urged them to focus on *critique* as primacy of science and *damaged life* (see Adorno, 2005 [1951]).

From the foundational period we can take at least two things to be relevant for critical theory, that is, the role of human agency in history, with respect to the *academy* and *society*. For the former this implies social commitment of academics to reflect on their standpoint in society as 'no one can turn himself into a different subject than what he is at this historical moment' (Horkheimer, 2002 [1937]: 240). For the latter, it draws attention to Marx's insight that history is human-made, which highlights conflict, social struggles, and 'the idea of a future society as a community of free man, which is possible through technical means already at hand' (ibid.: 217). With such a minimum standard of hope for *emancipation* Horkheimer has set the standard for critical theorists that domination and oppression can be overcome.

Differentiating the late Marx of *Capital* and the humanist philosopher, the early Frankfurt School has been eager to stress the value of Marx's (1969) *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* –written in 1844 – and his relationship to philosophy and Hegel. As Erich Fromm (1969) notes, the young Marx was a materialist in ontology, who had a deep-seated anthropological interest in the essence *and* existence of human kind.

Marx – like Hegel – looks at an object in its movement, in its becoming, and not as a static 'object', which can be explained by discovering the physical 'cause' of it. In contrast to Hegel, Marx studies man and history by beginning with the real man and the economic and social conditions under which he must live, and not primarily with his ideas. Marx was as far from bourgeois materialism as he was from Hegel's idealism – hence he could rightly say that his philosophy is neither idealism nor materialism but a synthesis: humanism. (Fromm, 1969: 10)

The Marxist philosophy can hardly be seen as a homogenous but heterogeneous field of critical analysis: emphasising historical, material, political, economic,

or cultural critiques of existing social relations. At the core of the controversy the question of *structure* and *agency* divides lines of critique and authors, as the example of Manuel Castells shows, who first relied on Althusser's mechanical materialism and later turned to social networks (see Katznelson, 2004). The young Marx's interest clearly was to make theory fruitful for practice – and the other way around – when setting out to free Hegelian philosophy from idealist abstraction (see Lukacs, 1968 [1922]).

In light of industrial capitalism and a pauperising working class it is important to note that Marx himself never explicitly used the moral vocabulary of injustice or justice. Marx rather chose dialectical thought and *immanent critique*, which does not judge miserable social conditions from an outer moral standpoint but criticises given contradictions from within (Stahl, 2013). The young Marx would rather employ irony and write sentences as follows:

[D]espite its worldly appearance and pleasure seeking appearance, it [political economy] is a truly moral science, the most moral of all sciences. Its principal thesis is the renunciation of life and of human needs. The less you eat, drink, buy books, go to the theatre or to balls, or to the public house, and the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc. the more you will be able to save and the greater will become your treasure which neither moth nor rust will corrupt – your capital. (Marx, 1969: 144)

### INJUSTICE AS ALIENATION

Instead of in/justice Marx's central critique of capitalist social relations targets economic, political, social, and self-*alienation* which humans need to be free from (see Fromm, 1969; Lefebvre, 2014 [1947]). Marx's understanding of alienation derives from Hegel, who Marx did not wish to label as a 'dead dog' as various so-called Marxists tend to do (Lukacs, 1968 [1922]). His materialised reading of Hegelian alienation therefore serves as the central point of his revolutionary critique of capitalism. In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* from 1844 the young Marx writes:

Alienation is apparent not only in the fact that *my* means of life belong to *someone else*, that *my* desires are the unattainable possession of *someone else*, but that everything is *something different* from itself, that my activity is *something else*, and finally (and that is also the case for the capitalist) that *an inhuman power* rules over everything. (Marx, 1969: 151, emphasis in original)

Marx's point therefore addresses a bizarre situation of social development that runs counter to any idea of human freedom and self-realisation. 'For Marx, alienation in the process of work, from the product of work and from circumstances, is inseparably connected with alienation from oneself, from one's fellow man and from nature' (Fromm, 1969: 53). Hence, he looked at 'socialism as the *condition* of human freedom and creativity, not as in itself constituting the goal of man's life' (ibid.: 61).

The young Marx's understanding of alienation not only strongly influenced the Frankfurt School, but also Lefebvre (2014 [1947]), who reports on idealist allergies of the time and who – just like Marx – aimed at overcoming philosophy's distance to everyday struggles but not to give up on philosophy. Although Marx's later focus on *Capital* has admittedly shifted his attention to political economy, Marx never relativised the fundamental role that alienation plays in his critique of capitalist social relations (Fromm, 1969). Here, Neil Brenner (2009) reminds us of 'Marx's famous claim in Volume 3 of *Capital* that all science would be superfluous if there were no distinction between reality and appearance'. The current revival of attention is due to a new debate for an adequate understanding of social conflict, normative justice, recognition, and freedom, which is pushed forward by the third and fourth generations of the Frankfurt School (see Honneth, 1995; Jaeggi, 2014). What is at stake here, in other words, is the strength and weakness of philosophy – along with political practice – when searching for a singular critical framework that embraces multiple actors and simultaneous conflict. For urban studies, such multiple and simultaneous conflict crucially involves the struggle for decent housing where commodification paves the way for alienation and effectively distorts the picture of a common social good beyond recognition.

For Adorno and Horkheimer or Herbert Marcuse the very existence of the *alienation* phenomenon seemed rather self-evident. As such the concept was at risk of essentialism and escaped the framework of useful philosophical explanation. In light of 'essentialist dangers' in his foreword to Rahel Jaeggi's (2014) book, *Alienation*, Axel Honneth appreciates her effort to revitalise this crucial category for a critical perspective on alienated forms of life 'not because they violate principles of justice but because they conflict with the conditions of willing and of executing what we will. In such reactions to the conditions of our social world we inevitably find ourselves falling back on the concept of alienation'.

In her book, Frankfurt School scholar and Berlin philosophy professor, Rahel Jaeggi (2014), reaches out towards Rousseau, who conceived of alienation as a *mis-match* between the ontological *nature* of things and human beings and the reality of *social life* to arrive at Hegel and the young Marx. Jaeggi's reading takes up early and contemporary efforts of the Frankfurt School when analysing social conflict with respect to suffering subjects and the relation-to-self. Addressing power and powerlessness in social life, Jaeggi's argument on alienation points to meaning and meaninglessness, self-determination, and the loss of self-control. Since individuals always need to be able to relate to themselves and the world surrounding them – to know what they talk about (i.e. communication) and what they are doing – alienation centrally involves the transformation of meaning, what Jaeggi (2014) calls, the *relation of relationlessness*.

As a normative and descriptive term, alienation involves somewhat of a dilemma for the essence of morality, justice, and truth. It involves a solid ethical concept that allows for objective and subjective interpretation of social constellations in history and geography. 'Only if one presupposes a logically, ontologically or historically *prior relation* is it possible to understand alienation as the loss of a relation' (Jaeggi, 2014: 25). At the core of the question one must assume a definition of the good life that is in conflict with competing notions of what is considered good; which calls for *justification*, and which is Rainer Forst's (2014) project, to whom I come back later in the chapter.

For an urban discourse, Henri Lefebvre (2014 [1947]) strengthened the concept in his *Critique of Everyday Life* when he emphasised the ambiguity between objectification and subjectivity in everyday life (see Charnock, 2018; Goonewardena, 2008). More recently, David Madden and Peter Marcuse (2016: 58) have employed Jaeggi's work on alienation and projected it to the commodification of housing and gentrification struggles in cities. Instead of a humanist perspective on a fundamental social good that nobody can do without, an alienated commodity perspective on housing would address the social good as economic good, as liberal achievement, privilege, or financial investment. 'If something is alienable', Madden and Marcuse (2016) point out, 'it is exchangeable. It can be bought and sold. Alienation is thus the precondition of all private property' (ibid.: 56). Residential alienation, therefore, matches traditional characteristics to a place called home and crucially transforms fundamental norms that divorce use and exchange value (i.e. security, shelter, stability, and comfort). The concept of alienation, in short, provides the crucial category for competing meanings on what housing is about: i.e. fundamental good and social right vs. economic privilege and financial achievement. Both logics appeal to normative ideas of justice that are in explicit conflict with one another (see Buchholz, 2016).

Madden's and Marcuse's recent interest in alienation as analytical category for critical urban research is also shared by David Harvey (2014, 2018). In *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*, Harvey (2014) identifies three major threats to the future of capitalism: ecological degradation, endless capital accumulation, and *universal alienation*. Debating Michael Hardt and Toni Negri on the relevance of Marx today, Harvey (2018) demonstrates further interest in the concept when explicitly picking up Jaeggi's question:

[I]s it possible to avail ourselves of the critical import of the concept of alienation without relying on the certainty of a final harmony or reconciliation, on the idea of a fully transparent individual, or on the illusion of having oneself and the world completely at one's disposal or command? (Jaeggi, 2014: 32, cited in Harvey, 2018: 425)

In contrast to Jaeggi, however, Harvey argues more economic with Marx's *Grundrisse*.

In the *Grundrisse*, the universality of alienation arises out of the historical tendency within capital to create the world market, to establish its social (class) and metabolic relations everywhere and to inscribe certain identifiable laws of motion into human history under the rule of the coercive laws of competition ... The problem from the *Grundrisse* onwards into *Capital* then becomes to identify the laws of motion of capital and of value and to understand how these laws govern the conditions of daily life and labour for the mass of the working population. The political project is to liberate ourselves, in thought as well as in political and economic practices, from the constraints imposed by these laws of value and of motion. Alienation is not confined to labour.

(Harvey, 2018: 426)

For Jaeggi's philosophy it is of crucial importance that she is well aware of the objective-subjective dimension of alienation that simultaneously aim to get a hold of the good. Against essentialist or metaphysical presuppositions Jaeggi clearly seeks

distance from moral superiority, that is, perfectionist or paternalistic arguments – what is good for others. Jaeggi therefore does not assume harmony at the end of conflict but continuous struggle, which leads to more than one form of the good life. Mediating between unsatisfying alternatives, Jaeggi (2014: 32) highlights the potential of the concept, which would lie ‘not in the possibility of providing a robustly substantial ethical theory but being able to criticize the content of forms of life’. *Critique on Forms of Life*, in fact, is Jaeggi’s (2018) latest book, which links to conflict, alienation, and recognition relations: connecting to the legacy of Frankfurt critical theory (Allen and Mendieta, 2018) and Axel Honneth’s (1995, 2009, 2014) project, which I discuss below. Recalling Jaeggi’s question that David Harvey engages with, she answers:

The unalienated life would then no longer be one that is reconciled; it would no longer be the happy life, perhaps not even the good life. Instead, not being alienated would refer to a certain way of *carrying out* one’s own life and a certain way of *appropriating oneself* – that is, a way of *establishing relations* to oneself and to the relationships in which one lives (relationships that condition or shape who one is). (Jaeggi, 2014: 33; emphasis in original)

Pointing to the normative pitfalls of a meaningful life, Jaeggi’s perspective thus draws attention to the local, social context of recognition relations, political awareness, and democratic participation – at moments and places – to be able to relate to *our own environment* that likely is the *property of others*.

To be clear, David Harvey’s (2018) engagement with ‘universal alienation’ and philosophers other than Marx is remarkable and rare. In *Social Justice and the City*, for example, Harvey (2009 [1973]) mentions alienation only anecdotal. Harvey has been criticised as a *rock in a hard place* (Thrift, 2006) for his unchanging perspective on capital and class relations. ‘Harvey is no crude materialist, of course’, Thrift states (2006: 225), but a member of his time, that is, a US radical scholar, who has not substantially changed his theoretical argument on class struggle and social justice since the 1970s (see Castree and Gregory, 2006; Springer, 2014, 2017). In light of Harvey’s renewed interest in alienation as a meaningful theoretical category to meaningless social practice, Thrift’s critique of Harvey is somewhat shaken, which is timely. In his treatment Harvey crucially points to economic and social alienation and addresses the damage that political alienation does to democratic procedures. Engaging with the humanist Marx and his philosophical manuscripts of 1844 definitely contributes to the greater picture.

While re/emerging debate on alienation opens up a complexity perspective on multiple meaning and simultaneous conflict in social space, for the *just city* discourse of the early twenty-first century the concept of alienation has played a marginal role, if any. Largely occupied with David Harvey, a number of books have come out that take up the *Right to the City* (Lefebvre 1996 [1968]), *Recapturing Democracy* (Purcell, 2008), *Searching for the Just City* (Marcuse et al., 2009), *Cities for People, Not for Profit* (Brenner et al., 2012), and *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Soja, 2010). The *just city* discourse, therefore, rather sought common ground for social struggles when taking up several seminal thinkers that range from Marx, Lefebvre, Foucault, and Gramsci to the more liberal formulations of John Rawls.

In her book *The Just City* Susan Fainstein (2010), for example, searches for more equity, diversity, and democracy. Instead of equality, Fainstein favours the more liberal notion of equity, following Rawls, where justice implies *fairness*. Fainstein is clear about her reformist approach when advocating the *more just city*: ‘To the objection that a humane capitalism is an oxymoron, I have no answer’ (Fainstein, 2010: 6). Edward Soja (2010), by contrast, criticises Rawls’s ‘fundamentally aspatial and ahistorical notion of justice’ (Soja, 2010: 76), which would only seek to negotiate static forms of social inequality and their unfair outcomes, rather than to address the global structural processes that produce them. Soja, in the footsteps of Marx and Lefebvre, then highlights the role of human agency in history that is crucial to social change. ‘Human geographies are not merely external containers, given and immutable. Their changeability is crucial’ (Soja, 2010: 104).

One author who is largely overlooked in the *just city* discourse is British geographer David M. Smith. Against the zeitgeist of critical geography Smith’s (1994, 2000a) interest was not so much directed to injustice, but justice when engaging with moral philosophy and what he coined *moral geography*.

The Marxism which Harvey was about to embrace, and which was to captivate much of the discipline’s avant-garde, had little interest in the specification of social justice, so blatant was the injustice of capitalism taken to be, and so evident the superiority of socialism. (Smith, 2000b: 1150)

To be sure, Smith has certainly welcomed the work of his Marxist colleagues. His interest, however, was to make an argument for social justice that connects to philosophical anthropology and self-realisation in cities. Stressing common human needs – while respecting differences – Smith’s moral geography conceptualises how a social order is manifest in space, *where people seek a place in this world: to call home*. With Habermas and Hegel’s notion of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), Smith explicitly refers to interpersonal relations that rely on mutual recognition in order to get a closer grip on local community formation and a supra-local idea of solidarity when he states: ‘We should not be prepared to do to *distant* others what we would not do to ourselves and our own kind’ (Smith, 1994: 294; emphasis added). Smith is clear about the tension between philosophy’s tendency to universalism and geography’s relativism, but holds that both disciplines enrich one another. Smith therefore anticipates the recognition paradigm when embracing the inter-subjective moment of self-realisation with Habermas, but Smith is not aware of Honneth yet.

## JUSTICE AND STRUGGLES FOR RECOGNITION

As indicated before, readers can assume lively discussion within social theory on how to treat Marx and Hegel for an idea of social conflict and normative justice (see Jaeggi and Loick, 2014), the seminal debate *Redistribution or Recognition* between Fraser and Honneth (2003) illuminates this decisively. In this political-philosophical exchange, Hegelian scholar Axel Honneth invites Marxist theorist Nancy Fraser to an ontological discussion of social conflict that is capable of

explaining why we are, who we are, what we do, and what we want from life. Such recognition one finds in others, as the Hegelian formula goes, to be at home in the other. With such an ontological interest Honneth follows Habermas's turn in Frankfurt critical theory that is centred on the nature of human activity and social interaction (Deranty, 2009). Unlike his predecessor, however, Honneth comes with a different set of tools for his social philosophy: viewing communication rather as a means not as an end. Honneth (1995) therefore follows Habermas's epistemological interest in intersubjectivity but reframes his line of thought with an early category from Rousseau and Hegel: *The Struggle for Recognition*. With such a turn Honneth (2009) reconnects Frankfurt critical theory to its original interest in social conflict and *Pathologies of Reason*, when providing a robust foundation for communicative practices – to know what we are talking about – setting Habermas 'back on his feet' (Fraser and Honneth 2003: 242).

As Heidegren (2002) notes, Honneth has started from a neo-Marxist perspective on social struggles and explored the relationship of *Social Action and Human Nature* (Honneth and Joas, 1988) from there. He then asked for the 'unchanging preconditions of human changeableness' (ibid.: 7) and critical self-reflection of the social sciences to defend a 'meaningful notion of historical progress' (ibid.: 11). Turning to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the social psychology of George H. Mead in his *Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth (1995, 92) states:

The reproduction of social life is governed by the imperative of mutual recognition, because one can develop a practical relation-to-self only when one has learned to view oneself, from the normative perspective of one's partners in interaction, as their social addressee.

With such a focus Honneth touches on foundational aspects for self-formation. Self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem always require the other to care and recognise one's personality in the sphere of social esteem (solidarity), legal respect (equal rights), and emotional care (love relationships).

Conceptualising self-realisation intersubjectively, that is, as a social process, Honneth therefore shakes the liberal notion of an *atomistic self*, where individuals are assumed to take care of themselves individually: what social life would usually disqualify as egocentric, self-righteous, narcissist, or ignorant (see Taylor, 1994). In light of conflict, disrespect, and social suffering, Honneth conceptualises the victim's perspective and explains engagement in protest and resistance with the restoration of individual self-confidence. While the first generation of the Frankfurt School has rather *described* the sphere of social suffering and social struggle Honneth has *conceptualised* it (Deranty, 2009). Confronted with power relations Honneth (2007) is well aware of powerful social hierarchies and hegemonic achievements: explaining instrumental *recognition as ideology* that can disappear at any moment. With such a self-critical framework for self-realisation that is true for two people and any *community of value* (i.e. family, friends and any other social constellation of shared values), he regards the question of distribution as a conflict of a second order that follows from recognition or disrespect in the first place.

Such an understanding is in line with Iris Marion Young's (1990) *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, where she argues that 'Theorists of justice have good reason

for abstracting from particular circumstances of social life that give rise to concrete claims to justice' (ibid.: 4). Distributive injustices may contribute to or result from forms of oppression, exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence, but 'all involve social structures and relations beyond distribution' (ibid.: 9). Young (2007) explicitly comments on the recognition paradigm, where 'the self is never in possession of itself, but rather depends on the esteem of others' (ibid.: 189), where 'society is a hall of mirrors for man' (ibid.: 190) and where 'Honneth makes relations of love and care constitutive for his conception of justice' (ibid.: 193).

Political theorist Nancy Fraser, on the other hand, does not share Honneth's interest in philosophical anthropology, social psychology, and normative reconstruction of social conflicts in human history that relegate re/distributive struggles to a second order (see Fraser and Honneth, 2003). Fraser straightforwardly points to existing inequalities, social hierarchies, and political struggles with class, race, and gender, which she aims to overcome rather sooner than later. In favour of a deontological approach to critical theory and *participatory parity* of material and immaterial arguments, Fraser prioritises materialist redistribution claims to counter postmodern thought that tends to confuse cultural claims for difference with social and economic inequality. Reducing recognition theory to postmodern identity politics, however, she runs the risk of advocating a political theory that divorces economy from culture (see Lukacs, 1968 [1922]; Young, 2007).

For critical theorist Rainer Forst (2014) the debate presents the two most advanced attempts to construct a comprehensive *critical theory of justice*, where Fraser's analysis of the political economy aims to overcome inequality and exploitation, while Honneth's reading of social life rests on impoverishment and alienation. 'In fact, one could say that representatives of the first tradition [Fraser] already start from a more "alienated" social-ontological view than those of the second [Honneth]' (Forst, 2014: 110). Forst's perspective on a proper framework for critical thinking is especially interesting, since he comes with an own proposal that goes back to Kant. Focusing on the process of *justification* for Forst (2014) Fraser's redistribution claim – in the name of participatory parity – is not the goal of justice, but its means. But Honneth's central reference point on mutual recognition for Forst also relies on reciprocal justification in the first place. 'Hence a critical theory of (in)justice has to be above all a critique of existing relations of justification' (ibid.: 120).

For Honneth (2011), on the other hand, 'mutual recognition always precedes discourse, and the mutual ascription of normative capacities [*Statuseinräumung*] always precedes justification'. The dispute on a proper theoretical framework for justice therefore shows disagreement with regard to process and outcome but also coherence within the Frankfurt School. In light of normativity and 'The Politics of Recognition' (Taylor, 1994), the philosophy of recognition is indeed in need of social sciences (i.e. sociology, anthropology, and geography) to *qualify* recognition relations in everyday struggles, where social recognition is mobilized, organised, and instrumentalised for various political purposes.

To be sure, the above debate can be understood as mutually beneficial if taken together. With a keen eye on the differing epistemological interest and theory traditions that Fraser and Honneth apply to the question of justice, their controversy captures the core of relevant questions for a critical theory of justice. In some sense,

one could simply ask *why* it is important to critically look at social and economic re/production, re/distribution, politics and culture? This is because people seek social mobility and a meaningful life, a satisfactory socioeconomic status, a political voice, and cultural identity in order to relate to who they are and who they want to be as human beings.

[I]n Honneth's eyes the lack of a substantive ideal of recognized life in the three spheres of love, equal rights, and social esteem makes a theory of justice empty and formal, doomed to forget what justice is really about: the good life. (Forst, 2014: 112)

### PROGRESS IN CRITICAL AND URBAN THEORY

Sharpening the contours of justice with respect to alienation and recognition relations, I will now focus on (i) progress in critical *and* urban theory, (ii) the relation-to-self and self-realisation in communities, and (iii) bring Honneth in conversation with Lefebvre, where spatial relations impact the quality of social conflict significantly (i.e. relocation). For the last task I link the *inner nature* of recognition theory (Taylor, 1994) to the social production of a *second nature*, that is, social space (Smith, 2008). I will do so with respect to the limits of chance, choice, and the freedom of movement. Instead of justice my overall argument will focus on normative progress, social freedom, and ethical relations that contemporary Frankfurt contributions address with recognition relations and the *relation of relationlessness*. Such insights do not imply a new, but sharper framework for critical urban analysis: deeply rooted in the relation-to-self and human agency in the making of history.

While recognition theory is lively discussed in social philosophy and social theory on a global scale (cf. Petherbridge, 2011; Schmidt am Busch and Zurn, 2010; Van den Brink and Owen, 2007), today a new generation of Frankfurt scholars is underway to further advance or challenge its heritage. As indicated, this would comprise Rahel Jaeggi's work on *Alienation* (2014) and *Critique of Forms of Life* (2018) as well as Rainer Forst's focus on *Toleration in Conflict* (2013), *Justification and Critique* (2014), and *Normativity and Power* (2017). With his neo-Kantian approach to practical reason Forst's work is recognised by Amy Allen (2016) to make a difference to the largely Hegelian oeuvre of Habermas and Honneth. Amy Allen is the general editor of *New Directions in Critical Theory* at Columbia University Press, who strongly relies on Frankfurt critical theory, but also contests implicit normative foundations. In *The End of Progress*, for example, Allen (2016) confronts Habermas and Honneth with implicit faith in European progress in their philosophy of modernity and history, while aiming to decolonize the Frankfurt School. In fact, the Weberian telos of *modernity* – as reference point for critical theory – is also shaken by others (see Deranty and Dunstall, 2017).

Searching for historical progress and alternatives to capitalist urbanisation, similar debate took place in human geography. Here, Simon Springer (2014, 2017) has challenged the primacy of Marxist critique in radical geography and confronted David Harvey's analysis to be stuck in the waiting room of history. Arguing for two theoretical routes to socialism, Springer (2014) relies on anarchist theory and criticises Harvey's work to be rather static and totalising: overemphasising the role of the state, while neglecting the role of decentralised ideas of the good and everyday

practices of self-organisation. With a strong focus on social change *here and now*, Springer (2014) advocates an *agonist* perspective on conflict that is aware of multiple conflicts, which can hardly be solved centrally for good. Springer explicitly follows Lefebvre and Debord when embracing a situationist framework and the revolutionary practices of the everyday (*ibid.*: 260).

Distancing himself from Althusser's mechanical Marxism while acknowledging multiple conflicts and *many Marxisms* in his response to Springer (2014), Harvey (2017) continues his search for a grand historical situation and revolutionary constellation. Although welcoming anarchist contributions to radical geography, Harvey (2017) recalls his argument in *Rebel Cities* where decentralisation and autonomy would serve as 'vehicles for producing greater inequality'. He therefore defends the Marxist primacy in radical geography and the 'critical role' that the state has to play for revolutionary movements in need of infrastructure. Pointing to 'enough examples of the progressive uses of state power for emancipatory ends (for example, in Latin America in recent years)', he does not see any good reason to give up on 'the state as a terrain of engagement and struggle for progressive forces of a left-wing persuasion' (*ibid.*).

Instead of speculating about a historical constellation and global master plan, however, Harvey would have done good to carve out his own historical and geographical understanding of capitalist social relations: producing and reproducing crisis, not solving immanent conflict, but shifting it temporarily and permanently through space. That is the *spatial fix* for which Harvey has become famous (Jessop, 2006). Neglecting the power of his own argument, Lefebvre's (2014 [1947]) emphasis on the ambiguity of everyday life and the young Marx's (1969) insights into (self-)alienated social practices, where 'reason is at home in unreason', Harvey holds on to his vision and finds himself in the waiting room of history.

To be sure, whatever perspective is taken, the above debate provides readers with another grand example for a recognition-theoretical perspective on conflict and the limits to progress, where Springer is asked to listen, but 'Harvey is not really offering the same courtesy in return' (Springer, 2017: 280). The debate thus reveals the irreconcilability of normative reference points – and desirable standards – that is also characteristic to the debate between Fraser and Honneth (2003). All four protagonists do not accept the opponent's standpoint as equally relevant, while insisting on the primacy of their own position. Such a picture on conflict and controversial debate, in short, does not only stress the fundamental role of *inter-subjective* struggle and the scale of progress, it also links to the relevance of *intra-subjective* relations, which speaks through the speaker (i.e. Hegel, Marx, Proudhon); highlighting the normativity of recognition relations and the productivity of agonist conflict for progress here and now.

Acknowledging dialectical limits to social progress for critical *urban* theory the role of spatial relations is crucial to normative notions of the good life at places: *who cares* for what, whom, when, *where*, and why? Relational notions to normative progress in history that is not one history but many (Massey, 2005) can be seen as a grand invitation to critical urban scholars analysing conflict. Considering a variety of socio-spatial realities, David M. Smith, for example, has argued that relational and relativist spatial explanations benefit our understanding of conflict in theory and practice. Aiming at a closer connection of philosophy, history, and geography,

Smith connects to Habermas's notion of *system versus lifeworld* and Walzer (1994) who engages with the difference space and place make, that is, a 'distinction between a "thin", minimalist or universal morality, captured by such grand values as justice and truth, and a thick, particular or local morality' (Smith, 1998: 11). Such a perspective stresses the social and spatial *scale* of historical progress (Keil and Mahon, 2010) and links to the relative autonomy of rebellious cities.

To get a hold of the good life for critical *urban* theory, only few urban scholars have explicitly taken on the challenge of outlining *the good city* for an urban discourse. While Ash Amin's (2006) approach consists of a negative reconstruction of 'polluted, unhealthy, tiring, overwhelming, confusing, alienating' (ibid.: 1011) global cities that are in need of repair, relatedness, rights, and re-enchantment, John Friedmann (2000) has engaged with a positive reconstruction of a good city *in defence of utopian thinking*. Here, Friedmann (2000: 468) advocates a 'solid material base' founded on common social goods such as adequate education, housing, healthcare, etc., but goes beyond materialist claims for distributive justice. Similar to Honneth (1995), Friedmann (2000) highlights autonomy, equality, achievement, and solidarity along with a passionate commitment to human flourishing, political rights, democratic procedures, and equal chances when aiming for universal emancipation (ibid.: 464). In this line, Friedmann comes close to Honneth's (2014) idea of social freedom and Lefebvre's emphasis on differential space, which can be best experienced in diverse cities.

Searching for the good life in cities – and the scale of progress – therefore involves an idea of self-realisation in communities, which highlights the sphere of *membership for justice* and questions of inclusion and exclusion (Walzer, 1983; Young, 1990). Membership is not a new category to critical urban research, of course, as community formation is central to human geography, urban sociology, and urban anthropology. While the largest community imaginable would rest on our membership in humanity, we are members of our time and space, which involves citizenship, local patriotism, or where to belong. Regarding the social construction of *communities of value* (Honneth, 1995) or *communities of character* (Walzer, 1983), Benedict Anderson has made a case for nationalism and identity formation, which leads him to speak of *imagined communities* (Anderson, 2006). In her book, *Community as Urban Practice*, Talja Blokland (2017) likewise points to imagined communities and difficulties of theorising the essence of community life that largely relies on urban culture and permanent change. Instead of assuming harmony at the end of conflict, she concludes: 'Whether we like it or not, cities change even when they appear unchangeable; they undergo transformations even if we don't feel that the transformations are ours'.

Analysing social change, planetary capitalist urbanisation (Brenner and Schmid, 2015), propertied citizenship, and property-led displacement (i.e. gentrification), a recognition-theoretical lens implies a close focus on the changing composition of urban community members, who likely share a different set of normative values which they consider good. The conflictive question for shared identity and community formation therefore is 'who we are, "where we come from"' (Taylor, 1994: 33). Regarding competitive or egalitarian arguments for political justice, for the liberal achievement principle, for example, the relation-to-self would simply imply *self*-achievement

and *self-use* as relevant categories for social esteem between old and new community members, while an *alienated* investment perspective on commodified housing and *inherited* wealth distorts the ethical picture and the justice of *earned* deserts. Looking at limited self-achievement and the accumulation of inherited wealth such a relationship is highly problematic, of course (Piketty, 2014). As Purcell (2008: 88) has noted, however, property rights are ‘claims not trumps’: shot through with moral expectations in their use and *self-use*, so ideological property rights do not convince so easy (see Heins, 2008, 2009).

The struggle for a meaningful life therefore involves struggles over meaning and representation, where homes can be *conceived* of as liberal privilege, achievement, investment, and private property, on the one hand, while simultaneously being *perceived* as a social right and fundamental good that nobody can do without. Connecting recognition theory to spatial practice and the *Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1991) stresses the role of normative representation and the simultaneous inter-relationship of three moments (i.e. perceived, conceived, lived) that come together to produce social space. For such a relational picture conflict is likely, since subjective perception and *spatial practice* is not unlikely to deviate from plans by architects, politicians, and owners, who are interested in *representations of space*; which is contrasted by the lived experience of inhabitants in everyday life: appropriating *representational spaces* (see Lefebvre, 1991: 33–42). Questions of meaningful representation are crucial to self-realisation and one’s performance in history – justifying rights to place, space, and the city – while the question still is: *Who cares?* ‘[P]olitical forces which are in fact social forces’, as Lefebvre (1996 [1968]: 163) puts it:

They exist or not. They manifest and express themselves or not. They speak or do not speak. It is up to them to indicate social needs, to influence existing institutions, to open the horizon and lay claims to a future which will be their oeuvre. If the inhabitants of various categories and strata allow themselves to be manoeuvred and manipulated, displaced anywhere under the pretext of social mobility, if they accept the conditions of an exploitation more refined and extensive than before, too bad for them.

With Lefebvre (1991, 1996, [2014]) and a relational concept of social space we can thus conceptualise urban conflicts over meaningful representation, where ‘the specific quality of urban space arises from the simultaneous presence of very different worlds and value systems, of ethnic, cultural, and social groups, activities and knowledge’ (Schmid, 2012: 48). With Lefebvre we can also conceptualise an *online experience*, where new technology and social media extend the options and/or transcend an *urban experience*, but certainly rely on social recognition relations in social space. Without recognition relations, the social production of social space would remain rather formal or abstract. Aiming at representation, human agency, and self-realisation in social space, recognition theory therefore crucially informs the Lefebvrian philosophy, which makes me speak of a *recognition-led production of space*.

Interested in the explicit relationship between Frankfurt critical theory and spatial practice, similar to the Lefebvrian (social) production of (social) space, in my own work I have put the *local* in brackets and speak of (local) struggles for (local) recognition, which, if unsatisfactory, imply three options: (i) *resignation*, which is denied

recognition that is painful and results in (passive) suffering, marginalisation, or isolation – lowering one's expectations of the good life at a specific place but remain in place; (ii) *resistance*, which is restoring one's self-confidence by (actively) engaging in protest activism and social movements; and (iii) *relocation*, which is to avoid the intensification of struggle in one place and struggle for the good life elsewhere. Possibilities of relocation primarily respond to the *energy* to struggle (i.e. commitment to values and place), chances for resistance, and the quality of resignation at a certain moment and place. Relocation further responds to education and imagination (i.e. the good life elsewhere) and fundamentally requires the *freedom of movement* and other resources (i.e. purchase power, citizenship, solidarity), which are limited (Buchholz, 2016).

Focusing on the local quality of struggle – or intensity of conflict – next to qualitative recognition, resignation, and resistance the im/possibility of relocation makes a decisive difference for social conflicts to develop. Here, the nation-state finds itself historically and territorially trapped (see Agnew, 2010; Elden, 2010) when associating its state territory with a container that restricts the freedom of choice and freedom of movement for its citizens. For contemporary critical *urban* theory, therefore, it is inevitable to realise that social relations are mediated through social space and a mix of qualitative recognition and/or resignation as well as possibilities for resistance and relocation. David Harvey's (2001) spatial fix is crucial here. Without the very notion of *voluntary versus forced relocation* – and the spatial condition of un/free of movement – we cannot understand the ever changing urban community composition and (i) dynamic movements in cities (i.e. property-led housing careers and displacement from gentrified neighbourhoods), (ii) the competition between cities, and (iii) the global history of political, economic, and social migration. Political philosophy has only recently begun to theorise im/possibilities of free movement (Carens, 2013; Cassee, 2016; Miller, 2016), while the challenge for critical urban analysis implies to qualify the spatial dynamics of social conflict: i.e. the legitimacy of social movements in place and migration movements between places and spaces.

Given the limits of free movement (i.e. political borders/orders, citizenship, purchase power) a great deal of future urban research is needed to better understand the *quality of resignation*: i.e. to disconnect or lower expectations of a desirable life, but remain in place. Here, the power of solidarity networks (friends, family, and other communities of value) comes into play, where subjects would compensate for the legal limits of economic or political recognition with social recognition (i.e. solidarity): engaging in *subversive* activism and *informal* or *illegal* practices. While such a focus has implications for the legitimacy of a legal framework a resignation perspective further implies a moral disengagement that must not lead to public activism, collective protest, or resistance. It must also not imply physical withdrawal – or territorial relocation – but involve the sphere of moral double standards and modern cynicism (Vice, 2011), which I address with *moral relocation* (Buchholz, 2016).

While cynical disengagement from moral discourse can lead to a serious legitimisation crisis for democratic states (Habermas, 1973), Scott's (1985) notion of *pragmatic resignation* highlights everyday struggles and ethical relations, where a desirable life is far away; just like the physical possibility of relocation. In other words, the territorial relevance of local disrespect is crucial to (miserable) urban

experiences in daily life, to what extent individuals may suffer (i.e. losing energy) and/or substitute the lack of satisfactory urban experiences with an online experience or imagination: i.e. to relocate one's consciousness with the help of technology, literature, music, drugs, or God. For critical urban theory in the Frankfurt tradition (Brenner, 2009; Charnock, 2018) it would thus be crucial to link social struggles to spatial relations and the relation-to-self, where self-control and the loss thereof play a crucial role, while physical and moral relocation complete the picture of agonist conflict and continuous struggle for a meaningful life.

## CONCLUSION

Summing up, my main argument for a critical *and* urban theory of justice involves renewed attention to the Hegelian Marxism of the Frankfurt School in order to focus on the limits of self-realisation in communities of shared values on shared space. Acknowledging multiple conflict and normative notions to justice, with regard to freedom *from* alienation and freedom *for* self-realisation, for critical *urban* theory it is inevitable to recognise what difference place and space make for the *quality* of conflict, social progress, and social change. For the theory–practice relationship this therefore implies a close analysis of change in everyday community life, where the ethical process of justification is ever more important for normative progress, while justice is just some relational outcome.

For desirable progress, contemporary critical theorists clearly seek distance to teleological progress in history, moral superiority, and paternalist critique. Relying on immanent critique, contemporary Frankfurt protagonists do not envision harmony at the end of conflict but continuous struggles for social freedom and ethical life (Honneth, 1995, 2014), tackling the various forms of alienation with relationality and critique to forms of life (Jaeggi, 2014, 2018). Self-critical reflection goes so far that critical theory's immanent notion of *human emancipation* was recently the subject of a conference – hosted by Rahel Jaeggi in Berlin 2018 – where the concept was contested. In light of colonial critique Wendy Brown, for example, abandoned the concept altogether. On a similar note, Christoph Menke warned about inherent idealism and pointed to the *dialectics of emancipation*, where emancipatory progress would shift existing power relations but does not overcome them; which calls for a relational picture of conflict and progress that is informed by historical and geographical relativism, normative preferences, and a socio-geographical standpoint. Instead of engaging with leftist populism – as advocated by Nancy Fraser or Chantal Mouffe – Alex Demirovic concluded that it may be wise to opt for education.

The global picture today indeed does not provide for too much optimism but *Left-wing Melancholia* (Traverso, 2016), which requires time to come to terms with reality, and the damage done to socialist utopias. For critical theorists there is nevertheless hope in *fundamental hope* that can escape the pathologies of instrumental reason (see Blöser and Stahl, 2017), while much more work needs to be done to qualify historical and present (local) struggles for (local) recognition. In any case, critical urban scholarship would require a decentred recognition perspective on normative progress, communities of shared values on shared space, and a social idea

of freedom that accounts for inclusive spatial relations: involving chances, choice, and the freedom of movement. Spatial relations do not only allow for the simultaneity of multiple conflicts to take place, they moreover allow for possibilities of movement and, constant comparison of ideals, and local experiences to impact contemporary urban struggles and historical progress, which is certainly unfinished.

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