



# Meaning-Adequacy and Social Critique: Toward a Phenomenological Critical Theory

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## Abstract

In the present paper, I analyze the complex relationship of tension between Critical Theory and phenomenology from a sociological-theoretical perspective. I start from two theses. The first one is that one of the primary reasons for the antagonism between these two paradigms lies in their ideal-typically opposed assessments of the role of ‘meaning-adequacy’ in social research. The second one is that in recent years, there has been a strong rapprochement of Critical Theory with (social) phenomenology. This shift, fundamentally embodied in Hartmut Rosa’s work, can be understood as the culminating point of a progressive turn towards meaning-adequacy within the Frankfurt School. In order to unfold these two theses, I will proceed in three steps. First (1), I will present the main outlines of the relationship of tension between the two traditions from both a historico-intellectual and a systematic perspective. Second (2), I will focus on the contemporary readings of the Schutzian notion of ‘meaning-adequacy’ and discuss their value for better understanding the historical opposition between the two paradigms, as well as their recent rapprochement. Third (3), I will sketch the key features of Rosa’s sociology of world-relations, understood as a phenomenological Critical Theory that shows a strong commitment to a radicalized version of the meaning-adequacy postulate.

**Keywords** Phenomenological critical theory · Hartmut Rosa · Alfred Schutz · Meaning-adequacy · Phenomenological sociology

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In the field of philosophy, Frankfurt School Critical Theory and phenomenology have commonly been regarded as antagonistic paradigms. Not even recent efforts to trace historico-intellectual intersections and systematic affinities between them (see Immanen, 2020; Ferencz-Flatz, 2023) seem capable of dispelling this established view. Just like oil and water, these two key theoretical traditions of the twentieth century are usually considered radically incompatible (Procyshyn, 2020: 670). Between Frankfurt and Freiburg, the cities genetically associated with the intellectual movements founded by Horkheimer and Husserl, respectively, there seems to be an insurmountable gulf that no dialogue whatsoever is able to overcome (Dallmayr, 1976: 367).

This widespread view is not a *post facto* invention of the exegetes but has its origin in positions actually held by prominent advocates of both traditions. The hypothesis of an unsurmountable inter-paradigmatic conflict is primarily supported by Critical Theorists' corrosive criticisms of classical phenomenology. I am referring especially, but not only, to Adorno's critiques of both Husserl and Heidegger in writings such as *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie* (Adorno, 1990), *Negative Dialektik* (Adorno, 1973), and *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* (Adorno, 1973).<sup>2</sup>

However, this view finds also justification in scattered critical remarks made by phenomenologists against the Frankfurtians.<sup>3</sup> A famous statement by Gurwitsch is often quoted in this connection: "in Frankfurt philosophy only exists on the side; in the foreground stands the demasking sociology of those who have seen through everything" (in Schutz & Gurwitsch, 1989: 257). Fred Dallmayr (1976) is thus correct in claiming that the reluctance between the Freiburg and Frankfurt Schools is and always has been mutual. An "atmosphere charged with suspicion and mutual recrimination" has historically characterized their relationship (367).

As is well known – and this will be the focus of the present paper – both traditions are not merely philosophical but have also made significant contributions to sociology. Critical Theory was originally conceived by Horkheimer (2009) as an interdisciplinary project, where philosophical reflection was to be complemented by empirical social research (see Honneth, 1999: 26–28). Throughout the Frankfurt School's history, this strong link with sociology has been maintained and even further expanded (see Institut für Sozialforschung 1958; Habermas, 1981; Honneth,

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<sup>2</sup> Importantly, beyond the overt destructive criticisms of phenomenology by the classical Frankfurt School, a *subterranean current* of implicit rapprochement to phenomenological leitmotifs can also be identified in first-generation Critical Theory, especially in the works of Adorno (see Ferencz-Flatz, 2023: 7–16) and Marcuse (see Feenberg, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> The idea of an inter-paradigmatic conflict between phenomenology and Critical Theory holds more true for German-speaking than for French-speaking phenomenology. Although neither Sartre nor Merleau-Ponty entered into direct dialogue with the Frankfurtians, their attempts to combine Western Marxism with existential phenomenology (see Poster, 1980: 109–161) share many insights with classical Critical Theory.

1999: 177–203; Rosa, 2016), to the point that Critical Theory is today characterized as a distinct tradition and approach within the multi-paradigmatic field of sociology (see Gertenbach & Rosa, 2009). For its part, phenomenology has its specific sociological version, known as “phenomenological sociology” (Belvedere, 2022; Eberle, 2021) or “phenomenology-based sociology” (Eberle & Schnettler, 2019), which dates back to the work of Schutz (1981) and includes Luckmann (2007) and Psathas (1973) among its main figures.

Not surprisingly, the tension between Critical Theory and phenomenology in the field of philosophy also extends to that of sociology (see, e.g., Luckmann, 2010: 363; Habermas, 1981: 223–226; Gros, 2020). However, the specifically *sociological* dimension of this strained relationship has not been thoroughly explored, as is the case with its philosophical mode of manifestation. In this paper, I aim to fill this lacuna by addressing the complex relation between both paradigms from a decidedly *sociological-theoretical* perspective. I believe that systematically reflecting on this relationship of tension is crucial for assessing the prospects of contemporary efforts to establish a dialogue between both paradigms in the field of sociological research, most prominently Hartmut Rosa’s (2016) ‘sociology of world-relations,’ which can be characterized as an attempt to develop a “phenomenological Critical Theory” (see Gros, 2019).

In what follows, I want to defend two theses. The first one (a) is that one of the primary grounds for the sociological antagonism between classical, i.e., first-generation, Frankfurt School and phenomenology-based sociology lies in their *ideal-typically*<sup>4</sup> opposed assessments of the role of ‘meaning-adequacy’ [*Sinnadäquanz*] in social research. Inspired by Thomas Eberle’s (see 2014: 21, 23) reading of Schutz, I consider a ‘meaning-adequate’ account of social reality to be one that grasps appropriately the concrete meaning orientations of everyday social actors. Schematically speaking, while the whole project of phenomenology-based sociology is motivated by a radicalization of the meaning-adequacy postulate (see Eberle, 2014: 21; Eberle & Srubar, 2010: 19), classical Critical Theorists very often do not dedicate much effort to an adequate reconstruction of the lay agent’s viewpoint.<sup>5</sup> Instead, following the classical project of ‘ideology critique,’ they frequently end up explaining it away as an epiphenomenal form of “societally necessary false consciousness” (Adorno, 2003: 115; see Honneth, 1999: 32; Celikates, 2009: 20). As I shall show, a good way to theoretically articulate these two different analytical attitudes toward *doxa* is by resorting to Paul Ricœur’s (1970: 27f.) well-known distinction between ‘hermeneutics of restoration of meaning’ and ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’.

<sup>4</sup> I consider this opposition as *ideal-typical* in Weber’s classical sense of the term. Especially in the first section of this paper, I construct ideal types of both phenomenology-based sociology and Critical Theory as sociological paradigms by means of a “one-side accentuation” (Weber, 1997: 90) of some of their most crucial features.

<sup>5</sup> Adorno’s qualitative, “micrological” analyses (Adorno, 2016: 200) and his quasi-phenomenological method of social “physiognomics” are an important exception in this regard (see Adorno, 2008: 41–133; Ferencz-Flatz, 2023: 7–14). These approaches, however, coexist ambivalently in his work with the “functional reductionism” (Honneth 1999: 36) prevalent in the first-generation Frankfurt School.

My second thesis (b) is that in recent years, there has been a strong rapprochement of Critical Theory with phenomenology fundamentally embodied in Rosa's (2016) program of a sociology of world-relations [SWR], which can be understood as the culminating point of a progressive *turn towards 'meaning-adequacy'* within the Frankfurt School.<sup>6</sup> This shift, both theoretically and normatively motivated, officially began with Habermas's (1981, 1985) engagement with different perspectives from the 'interpretive paradigm,' such as hermeneutics, Wittgensteinian language philosophy, symbolic interactionism, and *partially* phenomenology. And it was decisively deepened by Honneth's (1994) 'quasi-phenomenological' reflections on the pre-scientific experiences of injustice and disrespect. However, and this is my main point here, only in Rosa's work, there is an exhaustive attempt to develop a full-fledged *phenomenological* Critical Theory capable of fulfilling the meaning-adequacy postulate in its radicalized form.

In order to achieve the proposed aim and unfold the two theses just stated, I will proceed in three steps. First (1), I will present the main outlines of the relationship of tension between classical Critical Theory of Society and phenomenology-based sociology from both a historico-intellectual and a systematic perspective. Second (2), I will focus on the contemporary readings of the Schutzian notion of 'meaning-adequacy' and discuss their value for better understanding the historical opposition between the two paradigms, as well as their recent rapprochement. Third (3), I will sketch the key features of Hartmut Rosa's SWR, understood as a phenomenological Critical Theory that shows a strong commitment to a radicalized version of the meaning-adequacy postulate.

## **Sketch of a Rivalry: The Relationship of Tension Between Phenomenology-Based Sociology and Critical Theory**

### **Historico-intellectual and Systematic Discrepancies**

A good starting point for the analysis of the strained relationship between phenomenology-based sociology and classical Critical Theory is to give the floor to some of the protagonists. That is, to review, at least partially, the way(s) in which the advocates of each tradition perceive the approach of the other. This is not an easy task because the statements of 'social phenomenologists' regarding the first-generation Frankfurt School are as rare as those of the latter about the former. In what follows, I will first present the critical perspectives on 'Frankfurtian' sociology from two prominent phenomenology-oriented sociologists, Thomas Luckmann and Hans-Georg Soeffner. And secondly, I will briefly examine Adorno's criticism of Weberian 'interpretive sociology' [*verstehende Soziologie*], the sociological tradition

<sup>6</sup> Conversely, from the phenomenological camp, there has also been a recent rapprochement with "critical theories" – in lowercase and plural –, evident in the current "Critical Phenomenology" movement in the US (see Weiss, Murphy & Salamon 2020). However, in this paper, I will only address *Critical Theory's* rapprochement to phenomenology.

within which phenomenology-based sociology has positioned itself since its inception (see Schutz, 1981; Luckmann, 2007: 278). This – admittedly incomplete – (1) *historico-intellectual* reconstruction will serve as the basis for (2) elucidating some of the main *systematic* disagreements between both traditions.

(1) In a 2010 interview, the central figure of phenomenology-based sociology in Germany, Thomas Luckmann (2010: 363), claims that he had never read a single line by Horkheimer and had only studied one work by Adorno, namely, *The Authoritarian Personality*. Strictly following the Weberian principle of ‘value-freedom’ [*Wertfreiheit*], Luckmann criticizes the collective research presented in that book, deeming it “methodologically questionable” due to its “ideologically preconceived” nature. As he argues, “ideologists are not good scientists. There are no liberation scientists. There are liberation ideologies and political actions” (2010: 366).

This negative assessment of Critical Theory is shared by Hans-Georg Soeffner, the most prominent successor of Luckmann in Germany and founding father of the “Hermeneutical Sociology of Knowledge” [*Hermeneutische Wissenssoziologie*]. In a 2004 interview, he pejoratively characterizes Critical Theory as an “ideology-critical conspiracy theory” that operates with a Plato-like “two-world-theory”. According to Soeffner, the Frankfurt School considers the phenomenal life-world, as it appears to lay agents, as nothing but a “context of deception” [*Verblendungs-szusammenhang*] fabricated by “obscure powers” lying behind the visible surface. In contrast to this metaphysical-sounding view, “Berger and Luckmann were interested in dissolving the theory of deception and the two-world theory connected with it. Behind the phenomena and competing reality constructions, there is not actually something hidden” (Soeffner in Reichertz, 2004).

In the works of the first-generation Frankfurt school, there are only a few scattered and marginal references to phenomenology-based sociology (see Horkheimer, 1968: 141; Adorno, 2017: 91f.). However, in Adorno’s writings, one finds strong objections to the Weberian program of an ‘interpretive sociology’,<sup>7</sup> which are particularly relevant in this connection. If these objections are combined with his criticisms of Husserl’s, Heidegger’s, and Scheler’s phenomenologies (see, e.g., Adorno, 1973, 1990), it is reasonable to speculate that he would be highly critical of the Schutzian-Luckmannian approach, despite the fact that he occasionally praises some aspects of it (see Adorno, 2017: 91).

Adorno’s objections to Weberian interpretive sociology are manifold. Here, it suffices to name four of the most important ones. First, Adorno emphatically rejects the principle of ‘value-freedom’. Whether it wants it or not, “sociological neutrality” ends up being functional to the reproduction of the *status quo*, as it uncritically duplicates and thus “repeats the act[s] of social violence” inherent to capitalist

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that Adorno (see 2016), as a true *dialectical* thinker, also recognizes the one-sided ‘moments of truth’ of qualitative methods and interpretive sociology. However, at least in his sociological writings, this overly critical assessment of Weber’s hermeneutic methodological individualism prevails (see Adorno, 2003).

society (Adorno, 2003: 383). Second, he objects that Weber offered only an empiricist “collection of facts” and “did not possess a theory of society [*Gesellschaftstheorie*] at all”. Arguing from a dialectical perspective, Adorno considers that operating with a “conception of society as a totality” is necessary for making those facts truly intelligible (Adorno, 2022: 134f.; see 2003: 467).

Third, Adorno (2022: 7) makes it clear that he does “not share the specific conception of sociology” classically presented by Weber (1984) in the *Soziologische Grundbegriffe*. On the one hand, Adorno states that “our understanding of society cannot be reduced to the meaningful and purposive-rational action of individual subjects” (Adorno, 2022: 70). On the other, he counteracts Weber’s emphasis on the ““understandability”” of social reality with Durkheim’s anti-hermeneutic and quasi-naturalistic ““*chosisme*””. Although in a mystified way – Durkheim is not aware of the historical genesis of social reification and tends to hypostatize it – this view would do better justice to the “unintelligibility and impenetrability of social facts” under capitalism (Adorno, 2022: 64, 70, 88f.).

Finally, one of his strongest arguments against the Weberian approach is that the dehumanizing and standardizing effects of the ‘totally administered society’ [*total verwaltete Gesellschaft*] on subjectivity have rendered interpretive sociology and its humanistic, *geisteswissenschaftlichen* premises anachronistic. In advanced capitalism, there is no subjective meaning to be understood because people have been “brought down to the ‘reaction mode of amphibia,’ as forced consumers of mass media and other regimented pleasures”. This is why naturalistic-positivist methods such as the opinion poll seem to be better suited than interpretive ones when it comes to studying subjective behavior. In Adorno’s own words, “the substrate of understanding [*Verstehen*], the unitary and meaningful human behavior, is already substituted in the subjects themselves by mere reacting” (Adorno, 2003: 202).

(2) Against this historico-intellectual background, it is possible to formulate, in an *ideal-typical* and thus deliberately simplifying manner, a set of *systematic* differences between both paradigms. Interestingly, these differences cut across some of the main antinomies that historically organize sociological-theoretical thought: ‘normative neutrality’ vs. ‘normative partisanship’ (see, e.g., Beck, 1974) social-ontological ‘holism’ vs. ‘individualism’ or ‘intersubjectivism’ (see, for instance, Udehn, 2002), and ‘understanding’ vs. ‘non-understanding’ methodological approaches (see, e.g., Bühl, 1972).

*Axiologically* speaking, phenomenology-based sociology tends to endorse value-freedom,<sup>8</sup> while Critical Theory operates as a ‘partisan’ science promoting an “emancipatory interest” (Habermas 2020: 155). In *social ontology*, the Frankfurtians defend a holistic position, whereas social phenomenologists seem to be closer to an intersubjectivistic one (Gros, 2022). The former asserts the objective existence of capitalist society as a “total formation of social life” (Rosa, 2012: 273; Institut für

<sup>8</sup> One can, however, identify *implicit* moments of social critique in Schutzian phenomenology (Gros, 2020).

Sozialforschung 1958: 22f.) that governs life-worldly action ‘from above,’ as it were; the latter traces objective social structures back to their infinitesimal “construction” in (inter)subjective everyday agency (Luckmann, 2008: 33).<sup>9</sup> Finally, in *methodological* terms, phenomenology-oriented sociologists favor an understanding-interpretive approach to doxic experience and action, while classical Critical Theorists usually disregard hermeneutics, at least in the classical Diltheyan-Weberian sense (Honneth, 2014: 248).<sup>10</sup> Instead, they tend to opt for an ‘ideology critique’ approach, which very often ends up in ‘functionalist’ or ‘reductionist,’ macro-sociological explanations of micro-social happenings (Honneth, 1999: 36; 2014: 96f.).

### **Hermeneutics of Suspicion vs. Hermeneutics of Meaning Restoration. Or Ideology Critique vs. Meaning-Adequate Reconstruction**

My focus here is mainly on the *methodological* dimension of the rivalry between both schools. However, I believe that methodology-related matters in sociology are closely linked to – and partly derive from – axiological and social-ontological ones. In a sense, one could say: ‘Tell me your social ontology and your normative stance, and I will tell you how you proceed methodologically’. As mentioned above, I believe that one of the primary reasons for the antagonism between these two paradigms lies in their opposed assessment of the significance of ‘meaning-adequacy’ in social research methodology. More precisely, while phenomenology-based sociology operates as a meaning-adequate reconstruction of life-world experience and agency (see Luckmann, 2007: 278), first-generation Critical Theory very often proceeds as a classical ‘ideology critique,’ with meaning-adequacy playing, at best, a secondary role (see Marcuse, 2007: 13; Adorno, 2003: 460).

A good way to theoretically articulate these two different analytical-methodological attitudes toward *doxa* and the life-world is by resorting to an influential distinction classically established by Paul Ricœur in the 1960s. I am referring to that between “hermeneutics of suspicion” and “hermeneutics of restoration of meaning” (Ricœur, 1970: 27f.). Arguably, while Critical Theorists align themselves with the former ‘style’ of interpretation, social phenomenologists embrace the latter.

(1) Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud can be regarded as the “masters” of the hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricœur, 1970: 32). Despite their undeniable theoretical differences, the three authors share a common starting point: they conceive of immediate pre-scientific consciousness as a form of “false consciousness” (Ricœur, 1970: 33). In other words, the masters of suspicion systematically distrust the veracity of life-world experience and knowledge. Their core belief is that “consciousness is not what it thinks it is,” as it tends to be self-mystified by a veil of “illusions” and “lies” (Ricœur, 1970: 27, 32).

<sup>9</sup> Importantly, recent efforts have shown that the phenomenological tradition also offers valuable insights into the macro-structures of social life (Gros, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that specifically Adorno (2014: 126–128) assigns hermeneutics a key role in his work. However, his notion of “interpretation” [*Deutung*] is very different from that of the Diltheyan-Weberian tradition.

Beginning from this premise, this school of hermeneutics defines the task of interpretation as one of “demystification” or “reduction of the illusions of consciousness” (Ricœur, 1970: 32, 34). Demystification operates here as a “method of deciphering” (Ricœur, 1970: 34). Rather than being taken at face value, the contents of doxic consciousness are decoded as symptoms of the invisible “reality of things,” which can only manifest itself phenomenally in a disguised or encrypted form (Ricœur, 1970: 33). More precisely, deciphering is regarded by Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche as an attempt of reversing the “‘unconscious’ work of ciphering” automatically done by reality itself (Ricœur, 1970: 34). From this, it follows that hermeneutics of suspicion works with a “two-world-theory” (see Soeffner in Reichertz, 2004), as it were, that involves a strong differentiation between “the patent and the latent”. The “shown” tends to be treated as nothing but a deceptive appearance of the “hidden” essence (Ricœur, 1970: 33f).

This rather abstract characterization of suspicion hermeneutics becomes clearer when illustrated with the works of its three main representatives. Nietzsche deciphers values as symptoms of the ‘will of power’; Freud decodes neurotic symptoms and dreams as veiled expressions of the ‘unconscious’; and Marx, the founder of the ‘ideology critique’ project, understands ideological consciousness as a disguised manifestation of the economic structure of society. The latter exemplifies this approach to hermeneutics most effectively when he states: “Just as one cannot judge what an individual is by what he thinks himself to be, so one cannot judge [...] an epoch [...] from its consciousness, but must rather judge this consciousness from the contradictions of material life” (Marx in Marx & Engels, 1961: 8).

It is fair to say that the first generation of the Frankfurt School – and partially also Habermas (see 1981: 223, 553) – conceive of interpretation along the lines of the hermeneutics of suspicion. Not coincidentally, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse’s ideology critique of twentieth-century capitalist culture is mainly inspired by the three masters of suspicion. As is well known, the productive combination of Marx and Freud is one of the distinguishing features of the classical project of Critical Theory, as devised in the 1930s by Horkheimer (Jay, 1996: 86). And Nietzsche’s genealogical method constitutes perhaps the most important influence in Adorno and Horkheimer’s late turn to the critique of instrumental reason in writings like *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Jay, 1996: 259). The following passage from Adorno serves to illustrate the prevalence of the *ethos* of suspicion in the Frankfurt tradition:

Just as philosophy mistrusted the deceit of appearances and sought after interpretation, so the more smoothly the façade of society presents itself, the more profoundly does theory *mistrust* it. Theory seeks to give a name to what secretly holds the machinery together (Adorno in Adorno et al., 1981: 68; my emphasis).

Paradoxically, the hermeneutics of suspicion on which ideology critique relies is usually considered “anti-hermeneutical” (Celikates, 2006: 21). In part, this is so because hermeneutics tends to be identified *in toto* with the rival school of interpretation, namely, the ‘hermeneutics of meaning restoration’. Tracing back to Dilthey and Weber, among others, this tradition focuses on *Fremdverstehen*, that is, on achieving an *empathetic* ‘understanding’ of the *immanent* meaning of subjective and



objective phenomena (see Jung, 2001: 20). If one defines interpretation in this sense, it can be said that the classical Frankfurt School, in its eagerness to debunk immediate consciousness, very often “ends up not understanding” its research objects “at all” (Celikates, 2006: 21, 5).

This is especially true concerning the “marxist-functionalist” approach, which, according to Honneth (1999: 32), informs a great part of the societal theoretical production of Adorno (see 2003: 354–373), Horkheimer (see 1981), and Marcuse (see 2007). Instead of adequately reconstructing the immanent meaning structure of psychological and cultural phenomena, this approach explains them away as mere ideological products; that is, as “functional element[s]” that contribute to the smooth “reproduction” of capitalist society as a system of total domination (Honneth, 1999: 32). In this sense, the classic Frankfurt School seems to use a methodological strategy generally considered at odds with that of interpretive sociology, namely, “reductionistic” (see Bühl, 1972: 10) or, more precisely, ‘functional explanation’.

The “functionalist reductionism” of the Frankfurt School (Honneth, 1999: 37) becomes especially evident in Horkheimer and Adorno’s criticism of the products of the “culture industry” and their effects on everyday subjectivity (Adorno, 2003: 474–476). However, especially in Adorno, this way of understanding ideology critique coexists with another, more hermeneutical one, centered on the ideas of immanent critique and ‘interpretation’ [*Deutung*] (see Honneth, 2005a). Here, the hermeneutics of suspicion truly operates interpretatively, albeit in a very different sense than the Diltheyan-Weberian approach (see Adorno, 2014: 125–129, 137–139).<sup>11</sup>

(2) According to Ricœur (1970: 28), the “radical opposite” of the hermeneutics of suspicion is that aiming at “restoration of meaning”. In his view, phenomenological research is the paradigmatic representative of this style of interpretation (Ricœur, 1970: 28).<sup>12</sup> However, one can easily encompass the whole “interpretive paradigm” in the social sciences (Keller, 2012) under this label, which, not coincidentally, is often characterized as “reconstructive” (Bohnsack, 1999: 15; Hitzler, 2005). As is well known, this paradigm includes approaches such as symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, phenomenology-based sociology, and different forms of social-scientific hermeneutics.

The hermeneutics of meaning restoration is based on a premise that is contrary to that from which suspicion hermeneutics begins. Instead of automatically discrediting *doxa* as “false consciousness,” it views it as a “manifestation” of a true “message” which deserves to be heard and comprehended in its own terms (Ricœur, 1970, 27). Accordingly, this style of interpretation operates with an attitude of “confidence” or “faith” completely at odds with the systematic distrust typical of the suspicion school (Ricœur, 1970: 28, 30). Its purpose is not the “demystification” of

<sup>11</sup> In this connection, one should also mention Adorno’s (2016) interest in qualitative analysis.

<sup>12</sup> In a sense, Heidegger’s (2006) Analytic of *Dasein*, with its mistrust regarding everyday life as an ‘inauthentic’ fall into the dictatorship of ‘*das Man*,’ has important affinities with the hermeneutics of suspicion. According to Srubar (2007: 36), this is the reason why Heideggerian phenomenology does not play a major role in the tradition of phenomenology-based sociology.

immediate consciousness via deciphering procedures but the “understanding” and truthful “restoration” of its original meaning (Ricœur, 1970: 27–30).

More precisely, restoration hermeneutics is characterized by a stance of “care or concern” for its object that goes hand in hand with a tireless “willingness to listen” (Ricœur, 1970: 28). As Ricœur suggests, this listening attitude is paradigmatically reflected in phenomenology’s struggle against explanatory reductionism in its various forms – psychologism, historicism, sociologism, naturalism, etc. – when it comes to analyzing immediate consciousness. Generally speaking, reductionistic approaches aim to explain phenomenal experience by reducing it to something else – its alleged “causes (psychological, social, etc.),” “genesis” (individual, historical, etc.), or “function (affective, ideological, etc.)” (Ricœur, 1970: 28). This way of proceeding inevitably leads to disregarding the lived experience and meaning being studied – the *explanandum* –, as it solely focuses on its explanatory factors – the *explanans*. For this reason, restoration hermeneutics chooses descriptive and/or understanding strategies over explanatory ones.

As mentioned, the theoretical and methodological approaches encompassed within the interpretive paradigm in the social sciences are typically aligned with this second school of hermeneutics. This alignment is particularly evident in the field of German-speaking sociology, where the notion of ‘reconstruction,’ a clear synonym for restoration, is frequently employed to define the specificity of interpretive social research (see Rosenthal, 2018: 50f.; Luckmann, 2008: 35; Bohnsack, 1999; Hitzler, 2005; Strübing, 2018). In some cases, such as in Ralf Bohnsack’s (1999) work, the terms ‘interpretive’ and ‘reconstructive’ research are even used interchangeably. Similarly, authors like Ronald Hitzler (2005) argue that the “overarching concern of interpretive sociology” is the “reconstruction of meaning”. And Jörg Strübing (2018: 3) claims that “reconstructing” the “meaning attributions and situation definitions of the actors” constitutes the main “accomplishment” of the “qualitative-interpretive research process”.

Not coincidentally, the use of the notion of ‘reconstruction’ in this context is primarily inspired by the work of Alfred Schutz, even though not all the mentioned authors subscribe to the paradigm of phenomenology-based sociology (see Bohnsack, 2017: 15; Hitzler, 2005; Rosenthal, 2018: 36). The concepts developed by interpretive social research, it is argued, should be *re-constructive* in nature, as they involve “constructions of constructions” (Bohnsack, 2017: 15). More precisely, these conceptual constructions are “constructs of the second degree,” which aim to capture and articulate *adequately* the “first level constructs” made by everyday social actors in the life-world (Schutz, 1962: 5f., 64).

For Schutz, the research object of the social sciences is ontologically different from that of the natural sciences, and this has important methodological implications (Schutz, 1962: 5f.; see Bohnsack, 1999: 28). In contrast to natural reality, which “does not ‘mean’ anything to the molecules, atoms, and electrons therein,” the social world does possess a specific “meaning and relevance structure” for the human beings who inhabit and act within it (Schutz, 1962: 5f.). Doxic experience is shaped to its core by “common-sense constructs” of meaning, such as typifications, idealizations, abstractions, and appresentations of different kinds that

play a crucial role in structuring, guiding, and motivating everyday social agency (Schutz, 1962: 6; see Bohnsack, 1999: 25).

Every empirical science, in one way or another, must be able to conceptually do justice to the nature of its research object to understand and/or explain it. If common-sense interpretations are a constitutive and crucial component of the very ontology of social reality, then social research should be able to grasp these meaning structures conceptually. According to Schutz (see 1962: 5f., 43), this is why social-scientific constructs must be “consistent with,” or *adequate to*, the first-order constructs of the everyday life-world. Mainly inspired by Weber (see 1984), Schutz (1962: 22) and his followers argue that this can only be achieved by utilizing “particular methodological devices,” which can be characterized as *hermeneutic-reconstructive* (see Luckmann, 1989: 28). As Luckmann puts it, sociology’s aim is the “empirical scientific reconstruction of historical human constructions of reality” (Luckmann, 2008: 35).

## The Two Meanings of Meaning-Adequacy: Intellectual and Practical Adequacy

### The Relevance of the Meaning-Adequacy Postulate

The notion of “meaning-adequacy,” originally coined by Weber (1984: 28f.) and further developed by Schutz (1962: 44) and some of his followers (Eberle, 2014; Wilson, 2021), is especially useful to understand the difference between these two modes of hermeneutics and, consequently, that between the (social-)phenomenological and critical theoretical approaches to the social world. While the guiding ideal of restorative hermeneutics is the *meaning-adequate reconstruction* of life-world experience and knowledge, suspicion hermeneutics aims at a *demystifying critique* of doxic ‘false consciousness’. I argue that the recent rapprochement of Critical Theory with the interpretive paradigm in general and phenomenology in particular can be regarded as a *turn towards meaning-adequacy*. As I shall show, novel readings of Schutz’s meaning-adequacy postulate, such as those of Eberle and Wilson, can be helpful to better understand both the historical opposition and the contemporary convergences between both paradigms.

### Meaning-Adequacy in Alfred Schutz’s Work

Schutz (see 1981: 330–334; 1962: 44) takes up the concept of “meaning-adequacy” from Weber’s work but modifies it drastically in his attempt to offer a phenomenological foundation for interpretive sociology (Eberle, 2014: 18–21; 1999).<sup>13</sup> As Schutz argues in his mature work, the principle of “adequacy,” along with the principles of “logical consistency” and “subjective interpretation,” is one of the three

<sup>13</sup> For an in-depth historico-intellectual reconstruction of the role of the postulate of meaning-adequacy in Weber’s and Schutz’s works, see Eberle (2014; 1999).

main postulates that hermeneutic reconstructions of social reality must follow to be truly scientific (Schutz, 1962: 43f.). Not coincidentally, the postulate of meaning-adequacy seems to be the one that has received the most attention in the secondary literature on Schutzian phenomenology (see Gallacher, 1983; Eberle, 1999; Wilson, 2021). According to experts like Eberle and Ilja Srubar (2010: 19; see also Eberle, 2014: 15), this principle constitutes the “key postulate” of Schutz’s social-scientific methodology, a reading that I share.

Eberle (2014: 17–21; 1999: 71) has extensively demonstrated that Schutz’s definition of the adequacy postulate is both subject to change and characterized by vagueness and ambiguity. The principle is formulated in different ways throughout Schutzian work, and its precise meaning remains somewhat unclear. However, its definitive, classical, and arguably most influential formulation is found in “Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action,” from 1953:

Each term in a scientific model of human action must be constructed in such a way that a human act performed within the life-world by an individual actor in the way indicated by the typical construct would be understandable for the actor himself as well as for his fellow-men in terms of common-sense interpretation of everyday life. Compliance with this postulate warrants the consistency of the constructs of the social scientist with the constructs of common-sense experience of the social reality (Schutz, 1962: 44).

### Thomas Eberle and H.T. Wilson: Two Interpretations of Meaning-Adequacy

In recent years, two noteworthy interpretations of the meaning-adequacy postulate have surfaced, each marked by its capacity to operationalize it for the purpose of concrete empirical research. I am referring to the interpretations put forth by Eberle (1999, 2014) and Wilson (2004, 2021: 313–315). The former defends an *intellectual* account of adequacy that emphasizes the role of phenomenological life-world analysis as a fundamental, proto-theoretical framework for sociology (Eberle, 2014: 21). The latter, in turn, argues for a *practical* conception of adequacy, which centers on the validation of social research through a dialogue with the social actors under investigation (Wilson, 2021: 484f.).<sup>14</sup> While I find Eberle’s interpretation more aligned with Schutz’s own position, it is crucial to acknowledge that Wilson’s perspective also offers important and valuable insights, which are particularly relevant in the field of Critical Theory.

Arguably, these interpretations are based on two different readings of Schutz’s classical formulation of the adequacy postulate. Because of its vagueness and ambiguity, this definition opens the door for two distinct ways of conceptualizing adequacy. More precisely, I argue that Schutz’s definition can be dissected into two distinct parts – (1) and (2). As I will demonstrate, Wilson’s focus on *practical or ethical adequacy* highlights the first part, whereas Eberle’s emphasis on *intellectual*

<sup>14</sup> I take up this distinction, albeit in a modified form, from Wilson (2021: 479).

or *conceptual adequacy* tends to stress the importance of the second part. The highlighted passages in the Schutzian formulation illustrate these two different views:

- (1) Each term in a scientific model of human action must be constructed in such a way that a human act performed within the life-world by an individual actor in the way indicated by the typical construct *would be understandable* for the actor himself as well as for his fellow-men in terms of common-sense interpretation of everyday life (Schutz, 1962: 44; my emphasis).
- (2) Compliance with this postulate warrants the *consistency of the constructs of the social scientist with the constructs of common-sense experience of the social reality* (Schutz, 1962: 44; my emphasis).

### Thomas Eberle: Life-World Phenomenology as a Warrant for Intellectual Adequacy

Throughout all his work, Eberle (2014: 9, 15) has repeatedly stressed the crucial role of the meaning-adequacy postulate in Schutzian phenomenology. “The postulate of adequacy,” he writes in a collaborative text with Srubar, “is the key postulate in Schutz’s methodological work” (Eberle & Srubar, 2010: 19). However, Eberle (2014: 21) does not merely engage in the exegesis of Schutz. He also attempts to develop a “radicalized version of the postulate of adequacy,” which, in his view, could serve as a “*quality criterion of qualitative social research*” (Eberle, 2014: 23).

When presenting the principle of meaning-adequacy in Schutz’s work, Eberle always stresses the second part – (2) – of the Schutzian classical formulation over the first one – (1). This sometimes results in an inversion of the definition’s original order. In a passage where he briefly outlines Schutz’s methodological postulates, one reads: “The constructs of the social scientist *have to be consistent with the constructs of common-sense experience of social reality* [(2)], i.e., they have to be understandable to an actor and must be able to explain an action appropriately [(1)]” (Eberle, 2014: 14; my emphasis; see also 1999: 71).

To a great extent, this emphasis on the second part of the classical postulate’s formulation is due to the vagueness of the first part. As Eberle (2014: 23) argues, Schutz’s use of the “subjunctive” sets a very weak and ultimately unclear criterion for the achievement of meaning-adequacy in social research. If one focuses solely on the first part of the definition, a social-scientific reconstruction can already be considered adequate if it “*would be understandable* for the actor himself” (Schutz, 1962: 44; see Eberle, 1999: 109; 2014: 23). The problem lies not only in the fuzziness of the idea of ‘understandability for the actor’ – what precisely does it entail? – but also in the fact that the *empirical accuracy* of second-degree constructs seems to remain secondary. They could be ‘understandable’ for everyday agents without being *factually* true, that is, without grasping the *real* meaning orientations of individuals (see Eberle, 1999: 109).

Against this background, Eberle (2014: 23) defends a “more restrictive” or “radicalized” version of the adequacy postulate, which appears to draw from the

classical philosophical idea of truth as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*. According to this account, the criterion of ‘understandability to common-sense’ is not sufficient to warrant meaning-adequacy. The latter is only attained when there is *actual* “consistency” (Schutz, 1962: 44) between empirical social reality and the intellectual concepts used to apprehend it.

In other words, for second-degree constructs to be truly adequate, they “*must correspond conceptually*” to first-degree constructs (Eberle, 2014: 23; my emphasis). This implies that social-scientific descriptions, explanations, and theories should be “*empirically correct*,” that is, able to “appropriately” capture the “factual subjective meaning” of everyday actors (Eberle, 2014: 21). If one follows this approach, the subjective viewpoint or first-person perspective of everyday agents becomes the “*ultimate reference point* for social-scientific analyses” (Eberle, 2014: 21).

Importantly, this ‘radicalized’ account of adequacy is inspired by a specific reading of Schutz, one that emphasizes the overall spirit of his work rather than his explicit statements about meaning-adequacy. According to Eberle (2014: 23), a careful analysis of Schutzian thought reveals that the postulate of adequacy “means more for Schutz than just the requirement that the scientific constructs be *understandable* to common sense”. The Swiss scholar arrives at this conclusion by examining Schutz’s lifelong opposition to rationalistic, behavioristic, and normativist social theories, which systematically neglect, conceal, or even distort the real meaning orientations of everyday social actors. This critical opposition would be pointless if Schutz did not *implicitly* operate with a radicalized account of meaning-adequacy as described above (Eberle, 2014: 23).

In this connection, Eberle (2014: 23; Eberle & Srubar, 2010: 20, 25) emphasizes the importance of Schutz’s criticisms of Parsons’ and Mises’ action theories for the development of his own methodological approach centered around meaning-adequacy. Both authors fail to appropriately grasp the meaning-structure of everyday social life and instead “supersede” it with “inadequate scheme[s] of interpretation” (Eberle, 2009: 514). In other words, the abstract logic of social-scientific models ends up substituting for and obscuring the concrete experiential-meaningful texture of the life-world. Against these *inadequate* positions, Schutz (2011: 34) argues that “safeguarding the subjective point of view is the only, but sufficient, guarantee that social reality will not be replaced by a fictional non-existing world constructed by some scientific observer”.

With this in mind, we come to the core thesis of Eberle’s reading of Schutz, namely, that the Viennese thinker’s commitment to the meaning-adequacy postulate in this radical form is crucial for understanding his lifelong intellectual project: *the phenomenological foundation of interpretive sociology* (see Eberle, 2014: 21; 1999: 105; Eberle & Srubar, 2010: 19). According to this reading, Schutz turns to phenomenology to clarify the ambiguities inherent in Weber’s central concepts of “subjective meaning” and “understanding,” precisely as a means of ensuring the conceptual adequacy of interpretive social research (see Eberle, 1999: 105f.). In order to appropriately grasp the first-degree constructs of everyday life, it is first necessary to understand and conceptualize the general mechanisms by which meaning is constituted in the life-world, a task that can only be accomplished *phenomenologically*. With its unsurpassed ability to echo the meaningful texture of lived experience – so

the argument goes – phenomenology is the best possible warrant of meaning-adequacy in social research. Schutz’s *phenomenological life-world analysis* enables the elucidation of the fundamental subjective and intersubjective structures involved in the constitution of meaning in pre-scientific life, thereby providing a “fruitful frame of reference for assessing the adequacy of scientific constructs” (Eberle, 2014: 21; see 1999: 105). Against this background, it is easy to understand why Schutz (1962: 59) asserts that the phenomenological “exploration of the general principles according to which man in daily life organizes his experiences [...] is the first task of the methodology of the social sciences” (see Eberle & Srubar, 2010: 9).

Importantly, Eberle’s interpretation of the role of phenomenological life-world analysis in Schutz’s social-scientific methodology is partially inspired by Luckmann (see Luckmann, 2008; Gros, 2021).<sup>15</sup> According to the Luckmannian reading, Schutz does not see phenomenology as a qualitative method for empirical data recollection or interpretation, but rather as an eminently *social-theoretical* endeavor (Gros, 2021). Phenomenological analysis offers a “constitution theory of the life-world” (Eberle & Srubar, 2010: 23) that describes the invariant or “*formal* basic structures of meaning constitution” (Eberle, 1999: 75), thereby serving as a proto-theoretical foundation for interpretive social research. Now, while Luckmann characterizes Schutzian life-world analysis as a “proto-sociology,” Eberle prefers depicting it as a “proto-hermeneutics” (Eberle, 2014: 25) or a general “theory of understanding” (Eberle, 1999: 105), encompassing proto-sociology but extending beyond it.

### H.T. Wilson: Practical Adequacy and the Aim of an Ethico-politically Responsible Social Science

In a recent paper entitled “‘Adequacy’ as a Goal in Social Research Practice,” H.T. Wilson (2021: 479) introduces a distinction between two ways of approaching adequacy in the social sciences, namely, that between “intellectual” and “practical” adequacy. This conceptual differentiation is very useful, not only to clarify the ambiguities contained in Schutz’s adequacy postulate but also to understand the differences between Wilson’s and Eberle’s readings of it.

Echoing the classical conception of truth as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, Eberle defends an eminently *intellectual* account of meaning-adequacy with a focus on warranting the veracity of social-scientific knowledge. In contrast, Wilson’s approach to adequacy is more *practically* driven than intellectually oriented, and this in two closely related senses. First, its primary aim is not scientific or theoretical but *ethico-political*: it does not primarily seek to ensure the truthfulness of social research but, rather, to promote its “humanization” (Wilson, 2021: 475, 478). Second, it argues that this can only be achieved by a “practical activation” of the adequacy postulate, which involves a “dialogue” between social scientists and lay actors prior to the publication of the research results. In this process, the latter should be able to “*understand*” and

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted, however, that Eberle (2021) is also critical of key aspects of Luckmann’s position.

subsequently “*accept*” – or not – the accuracy of the interpretations, analyses, and descriptions that the former have produced about them (Wilson, 2021: 474, 479, 486).

Unlike Eberle, Wilson (2021: 477) emphasizes the first part (1) of Schutz’s classical definition of adequacy over the second part (2). He omits speaking of ‘consistency’ and stresses instead the importance of the ‘understandability’ and ‘reasonability’ of social-scientific models for everyday actors. This is evidenced by the Schutzian passage he selects to illustrate his position:

Each term used in a scientific system referring to human action must be so constructed that a human act performed within the life-world by an individual actor in the way indicated by the typical construction would be reasonable and understandable *for the actor himself* [...] What makes it possible for a social science to refer to events in the life-world [at all] is the fact that the interpretation of any human act by the social scientist *might* be the same as that by the actor or his partner (Schutz, 1964: 85; Wilson’s emphasis).

While Eberle discards the criterion of ‘understandability for the actors’ because of its vagueness and weakness, Wilson places it at the center of his proposal. In his view, Schutz’s usage of the ‘subjunctive’ in the definition of the postulate is not a shortcoming but a merit. The use of ‘would’ and ‘might’ when talking about social-scientific adequacy reflects the “contingent nature” of the agreement between common-sense constructs and social-scientific reconstructions. Qualitative researchers should not simply assume that their ideal–typical models of social reality accurately grasp the meaning-orientations of the respondents but must confirm this by means of a “dialogue” of “mutual understanding and enlightenment” with them (Wilson, 2021: 474, 477).

More precisely, Wilson articulates his proposal of a “practical implementation” of the adequacy postulate through a series of protocols. Research subjects must be guaranteed the “right to be informed” about the social-scientific descriptions, explanations, and interpretations of their life. Accordingly, social researchers have the difficult task of ‘translating’ their findings into common-sense language, as it were. Most importantly, once they have understood the research results, respondents have to be granted the “opportunity to disagree” with them before the formal publication of the research. A dialogue between both parties should be established, wherein everyday actors should have the right to produce “counter descriptions”. The latter should be reflected in the research publication, even if they disagree with the position of the researchers (Wilson, 2021: 484–486).

Wilson’s practical account of adequacy starts from the thesis that qualitative research is not an ethically neutral means of investigating social reality, but rather a “*form of social interaction in its own right*” between researchers and their respondents. Accordingly, just like any other intersubjective relationship, it must fulfil fundamental moral norms. For Wilson, abiding by these norms when conducting social research is particularly imperative, given that the latter has become a “central arbiter and interpreter” in contemporary societies, determining the structure and decision-making of a whole range of social institutions (Wilson, 2021: 475). To put it in Kantian terms, which align well with Wilson’s proposal, social researchers are obliged to recognize and respect the cognitive ‘dignity’ of research subjects, i.e., both their



rationality and capability to interpret and define their situation autonomously. Sociologists should not paternalistically assume the “superiority” of their second-degree concepts, but rather submit them to the rational scrutiny of the lay actors under study (Wilson, 2014: 474).

## The Sociology of World-Relations as a Phenomenological Critical Theory

### The Turn towards Meaning-Adequacy in Contemporary Critical Theory

In the last decades, there has been a growing rapprochement of Frankfurt School Critical Theory with the interpretive paradigm in general and (social) phenomenology in particular. This theoretical shift can be regarded as a *turn towards meaning-adequacy*, which goes hand in hand with a progressive move *from the hermeneutics of suspicion to the hermeneutics of meaning restoration*. Arguably, an important indicator of this structural transformation in contemporary critical-theoretical thought is the use of the method of ‘normative reconstruction’ by Habermas (2001: 413) and Honneth (2003a: 334) as a means for founding the standard of social critique (see Schaub, 2015). Schematically speaking, the turn towards meaning-adequacy begins with Habermas, is deepened by Honneth, and reaches its peak in the recent work of Rosa.

The role of Habermas was pivotal in introducing Schutzian phenomenology and other traditions from the interpretive paradigm, such as symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and Wittgensteinian language games analysis, in the German-speaking social sciences. His 1967 book *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften* played a key role in this connection (Habermas, 1985: 89–331). In Habermas’ most influential work, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, from 1981, there is also a productive theoretical dialogue with these and other interpretive-hermeneutic perspectives. In this context, the Husserlian-Schutzian concept of the “life-world,” albeit in a linguistic-philosophically transformed version, becomes established as one of the core notions of his theoretical approach (Habermas, 1981: 192). It is important to note, however, that Habermas always maintained a critical distance from (social) phenomenology. This is evident in his critique of the “limitations of the philosophy of consciousness” in Husserl (Habermas, 1989: 35) and his criticism of Schutzian phenomenology as a form of “hermeneutical idealism” (Habermas, 1981: 226).

Honneth (1994) follows Habermas’s communicative-pragmatic turn in Critical Theory in its most fundamental aspects. However, he opposes to the latter’s excessive linguisticist emphasis and attempts to rehabilitate the sphere of pre-predicative experience. In contrast to his mentor, Honneth (for instance 2003b: 10–28) shows great phenomenological sensibility, especially devoted to offering a detailed description of lived experiences of recognition and disrespect within the *Lebenswelt*. This leads him to engage in a productive conversation with descriptive-interpretive approaches to the micro(socio)logical study of intersubjectivity like those of Mead and Sartre (see Honneth, 2003b: 71–106). Honneth also shows a marked interest in the phenomenological tradition in general, discussing at length the works of key

phenomenologists like Heidegger (see Honneth, 2005b: 19–46) and Merleau-Ponty (Honneth, 1999: 134–144). In this connection, it is worth mentioning that, in 1992, he even gave a seminar together with Luckmann at the University of Konstanz entitled “Zur Phänomenologie und Soziologie der Moral”.<sup>16</sup>

My argument is that there are two main reasons for this progressive turn to meaning-adequacy in contemporary critical-theoretical thought. On the one hand, the shift from suspicion to adequate meaning restoration is *normatively* motivated. Since the 1980s, both within and outside the Critical Theory tradition, “external” social criticism has entered into a crisis. By this, I mean a mode of critique that operates with normative criteria imposed by the critic upon the criticized life-world *from the outside*. These normative criteria may include universalistic ideas of justice or conceptions of the ‘true’ essence of human beings, which – allegedly – are “discovered” or “constructed” philosophically (see Jaeggi & Celikates, 2017: 113). The paternalism or “epistemological and ethical authoritarianism” (Cooke, 2005: 396) implied in this form of critique has become unacceptable in our times. Instead, different modes of “internalist” critique that proceed *more democratically* are favored; that is, critique modes which derive their normative standards from the participant perspective of social actors – specifically, from their unrealized ideals, experiences of suffering, or pre-theoretical critiques. Like other critical thinkers outside the Frankfurt tradition, Habermas (1981), Honneth (1994), and Rosa (2016) acknowledge that these internalist normative standards can only be achieved through a hermeneutics of *adequate* meaning restoration (see Boltanski, 2010: 38–82; Walzer, 1987).

In turn, the second reason for this structural transformation is of *social-ontological* nature. Since the “cultural turn” in the social sciences, which began in the 1970s, it is clear that the social world constitutes a *meaningfully structured reality*, which constitutively depends, in its texture and intelligibility, on the practical interpretations and experiences of lay agents (Reckwitz, 2002; see Habermas, 1985: 89–331). If the hope is to provide a truly exhaustive analysis of society or even a full-blown theory of it, then it becomes necessary to offer an *adequate* reconstruction of the immanent meaning structure of the life-world.

### **Phenomenology and Meaning-Adequacy at the Service of Social Critique: Hartmut Rosa’s Phenomenological Critical Theory**

My argument is that the structural transformation in contemporary Critical Theory just described reaches its highest point in Rosa’s work. Rosa resorts to resources from the interpretive paradigm in general and phenomenology in particular for similar theoretical reasons as Habermas and Honneth but seems to go way beyond them. Radicalizing what I call the turn towards meaning-adequacy in critical theoretical thought, he gives phenomenological analysis a much more prominent role than his immediate predecessors did. In a sense compatible – but different – to that promoted

<sup>16</sup> I owe this information to Ken Takakusa, Craig Browne, and Jochen Dreher.

by Eberle (2014: 21), Rosa seems to perceive phenomenological analysis as the most robust guarantee of meaning-adequacy in critical social research.

The program of a critical “sociology of world-relations” (SWR), recently articulated in *Resonanz* and other writings (Rosa, 2016, 2019a), can justifiably be characterized as a *phenomenological Critical Theory* (Gros, 2019). This research program brings together fundamental insights from Frankfurt Critical Theory and motifs from the phenomenological tradition with the aim of subjecting life-world experience and agency in contemporary societies to an immanent normative critique. Whereas Honneth, Habermas, Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse, and Fromm count as Rosa’s most important critical-theoretical influences (see Rosa, 2019a, 2019b: 14f.; 2012: 270), the phenomenologists and phenomenology-inspired thinkers who have influenced him the most are Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Plessner, Blumenberg, Taylor, and Waldenfels (see Rosa, 2016: 61–70).

In my view, SWR includes the two analytically distinguishable – but generally intertwined – moments that every critical social theory contains, namely, (1) a *normative-critical* dimension and a (2) *descriptive-explanatory* one. On the one hand (1), critical theories operate with *normative* theoretical assumptions and/or arguments to justify their critical assessment of society.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand (2), they employ social- and societal-theoretical reasoning to *describe* and *explain* the societal *status quo*. For in order to rightfully criticize society, one must possess an adequate knowledge of its nature and workings. Specifically, SWR (1) offers an immanent social critique of ethical nature (Rosa, 2012: 270), “*the critique of the conditions of resonance*” (Rosa, 2016: 57), which (2) is based on a societal-theoretical account of the (late) modern social formation as an “*acceleration society*” (Rosa, 2016: 376, my emphasis).

The thesis I want to defend in what follows is that SWR can be understood as a phenomenological Critical Theory, as it draws heavily on phenomenological insights at both the *normative-critical* and *descriptive-explanatory* levels. Moving beyond Rosa’s letter, I argue that the motivation for his *turn to phenomenology* can be described as a perceived need for a *radicalization of the meaning-adequacy* of critical theoretical research. In this regard, his use of phenomenological analysis is, in some respects, similar to that proposed by phenomenology-based sociology in Eberle’s interpretation. Interestingly, however, SWR combines this *intellectual* understanding of meaning-adequacy à la Eberle with a *practical* or *ethico-political* one similar to that defended by Wilson.

### **The Normative-Critical Dimension: A Phenomenology-Based Critique of the Conditions of Resonance**

In line with Honneth, Rosa (2012: 270) understands Critical Theory as a particular tradition within “social philosophy,” a theoretical discipline concerned with the diagnosis and normative critique of “social pathologies” in modern social

<sup>17</sup> On the distinction between the two moments or dimensions of critical theories, see, e.g., Boltanski (2010: 26, 35f.).

formations. More precisely, the social criticism exercised by the Frankfurt School would be *ethical* in nature, as it focuses primarily on the question of the “good life,” rather than on (distributive) justice (Rosa, 2016: 37f.; 2012: 288). In this perspective, modern social formations prove to be worthy of critique because their practices and institutions are not capable of ensuring a “flourishing life” for their members. Instead, they systematically produce pathological world-relations characterized by “suffering,” or, more precisely, “alienation” (Rosa, 2016: 14).

Also following Honneth (2000: 50–52), Rosa assumes that Critical Theory cannot avoid operating with a “normative standard,” be it implicit or explicit. Just as the physician cannot diagnose illness without a conception of health, the Critical Theorist cannot identify social pathologies without an ethical criterion defining what constitutes a ‘flourishing’ or ‘good’ social life. Importantly, Rosa agrees with Honneth that the ethical-normative standards used by Critical Theory must always be somehow *immanent* to the social reality in each case criticized (Rosa, 2012: 272).

In the Honnethian perspective, Frankfurt Critical Theory proceeds from the left-Hegelian conviction that social criticism can only be justified if the ethical standard on which it is based has an “objective hold” in the criticized “pre-scientific praxis” (see Honneth, 1994: 80, 82). If Critical Theory wants to be “the intellectual side” (Horkheimer in Honneth, 1994: 80) of actual processes of social emancipation, then it has to connect to a “*moment of immanent, inner-worldly transcendence*,” that is, to everyday experiences and practices that potentially point to overcoming or subverting the pathological *status quo* (Honneth, 1994: 79). This is precisely why the *normative reconstruction* of transgressive moments immanent to everyday life, such as experiences of suffering or unfulfilled expectations, constitutes a crucial task of critical theoretical analysis. To be sure, this task can only be accomplished through the use of interpretive approaches committed to hermeneutics of adequate meaning reconstruction (see Rosa, 2012: 272f.; Honneth, 2003a: 334).

Following the “criterion of an ‘inner-worldly transcendence,’” Rosa (2012: 272) argues that the normative-ethical standard of critique should not be brought to bear on social reality *from the outside*. Rather, it “must always be anchored in the everyday and life experience of social actors,” namely, in their pre-theoretical world-relations. More precisely, in Rosa’s view, the ethical standard of Critical Theory should be linked to two moments of inner-worldly transcendence, namely, a *negative* and a *positive* one. While the former consists in the actors’ experiences of social suffering, which can be understood as an intuitive sensitivity to social pathologies, the latter amounts to their everyday sense of what constitutes a “good” or “flourishing” life. As we will see, in SWR, the *phenomenologically gained* concepts of ‘alienation’ and ‘resonance,’ respectively, are ciphers for these two modes of experience and practice.

Unlike Honneth, however, Rosa justifies his preference for immanent critique not so much with left-Hegelian arguments but with recourse to insights from post-metaphysical thought, communitarianism, and the interpretative social sciences. As he argues, in the twenty-first century, a critique form based on normative standards ‘constructed’ or ‘discovered’ by the critic herself, completely external to lay actors’ experiences and self-interpretations, cannot be justified, neither theoretically nor normatively (Rosa, 2012: 271). In this respect, Rosa (in Reckwitz & Rosa, 2021:

294) resolutely opposes the paternalistic ‘know-it-all’ attitude typical of classical Critical Theorists, who aim to “enlighten people”.

In my view, it is mainly this account of immanent social critique that leads Rosa to radicalize Honneth’s method of normative reconstruction by resorting to theoretical-methodological resources from phenomenology. Picking up on a fundamental motif in the phenomenological tradition, he distances himself from the overly *prescriptive* attitude of earlier versions of Critical Theory toward life-world experience and argues instead for a more *descriptive* approach to social critique. “My initial question,” he says, “is not normative but descriptive: what is actually happening?” (Rosa in Reckwitz & Rosa, 2021: 293). Against the knee-jerk tendency of many critical theorists to condemn the life-world all too quickly as ‘false’ or ‘ideological’ without first adequately understanding it, Rosa (in Reckwitz & Rosa, 2021: 293) strives to describe in phenomenological terms the “first-person perspective” of lay actors, namely, their world-relations, “as seriously as possible”. The emphasis on meaning-adequacy and the shift from hermeneutics of suspicion to hermeneutics of meaning restauration become very evident here.

For Rosa, phenomenological description constitutes the most suitable method for tracing the moments of inner-worldly transcendence anchored in everyday experience, which should serve as the starting point for social criticism. Taking the lived experiences of “alienation” and “resonance” as a basis seems to be the only way of developing a non-paternalistic critique of society. “What are the subjects’ hopes and longings directed towards? What do they experience as flourishing? What do they experience as failed? Only the answers to such questions provide starting points for critique” (Rosa in Reckwitz & Rosa, 2021: 293).

According to SWR, *resonant* world-relations constitute the standard of the “good life,” while *alienated* world-relations are the social pathology *par excellence*. Generally speaking, whereas in the former the life-world, or a segment of it, appears as “a ‘responding’ Thou,” in the latter, it confronts the subject as something “mute, cold and indifferent – or even hostile” (Rosa, 2012: 8, 10, 272). In this sense, Rosa’s Critical Theory can be characterized as a “*critique of the conditions of resonance*” in (late) modernity, or, more precisely, as a phenomenology-based critique of those societal conditions that undermine the conformation of resonant world-relations, thereby leading to alienation (Rosa, 2016: 56; my emphasis).<sup>18</sup>

### **To What Extent is SWR phenomenological (and Meaning-Adequate) in its normative dimension?**

Phenomenology plays a pivotal role in SWR’s normative dimension. Indeed, it could be argued that the concepts of ‘resonance’ and ‘alienation’ are mainly *phenomenologically* obtained. Although in a rather intuitive, i.e., not systematic and methodologically reflected manner, Rosa (see 2019a: 192f.) seems to apply the phenomenological method much like classical phenomenologists do; namely, as a reflective

<sup>18</sup> For a more extensive presentation of the notions of resonance and alienation, see Gros (2019).

analysis aimed at carving out *transhistorically* and *transculturally invariant* structures of life-world experience. Similar to the way in which Husserl (see 1950) works out the ‘eidetic’ structures of memory, fantasy, or image-consciousness, SWR resorts to attentive self-reflection and description to elucidate the morphological features of resonant and alienated world-relations, understood as *universal* modes of human being-in-the-world. Very much in line with the Husserlian ‘eidetic’ method, Rosa (in Reckwitz & Rosa, 2021: 295) considers that the “crucial point of phenomenology” is to “subtract from concrete experiences what is in each case individual and specific, and thereby to expose their generalizable structures”. Although for normative aims, this use of phenomenological analysis as a proto-sociological tool is akin to that promoted by Eberle for ensuring the conceptual meaning-adequacy of sociological research.

Importantly, however, Rosa’s version of ‘eidetic’ analysis is more strongly *dialogic* than that of classical phenomenology, exacerbating – without knowing it or explicitly seeking it – a motive already present in Husserl (see 1950: 47). In this view, phenomenological analysis cannot be carried out by the sociologist of world-relations monologically, in a purely introspective way, but should proceed in a constant dialogue with the perspective of everyday social actors. This is consistent with both SWR’s non-paternalistic approach to social critique and the account of resonance as an essentially interactive-responsive phenomenon. The sociologist of world-relations only offers preliminary descriptions of the structural features of resonance, which have to be accepted as plausible or corrected by the lay agents: “Does this description also fit your experience? Does it seem right to you? Can it be described differently or better? Do you have other experiences, observations or interpretations?” (Rosa, 2019b: 193). Without much effort, this democratization of the phenomenological method, as it were, can be interpreted as an endorsement of a *practical* understanding of the meaning-adequacy postulate similar to that promoted by H. T. Wilson.

### **The Descriptive-Explanatory Dimension: A Phenomenologically Informed Theory of Society**

Rosa (2012: 273) underscores repeatedly that, at the *descriptive-explanatory* level, Frankfurt School Critical Theory is characterized by a marked macro-sociological sensitivity. Since its inception in the 1930s, *Kritische Theorie* has operated with a holistic ‘theory of society’ [*Gesellschaftstheorie*], providing a comprehensive theoretical account of modern capitalist society as a “total formation of social life” governed by “uniform structural laws,” such as the capitalist exchange principle (Rosa, 2012: 273; see also Institut für Sozialforschung 1958: 22f.). In this regard, the critical theoretical approach stands in sharp contrast to a range of contemporary perspectives in the social sciences, most notably, (neo-)liberal, methodological individualist, poststructuralist, postcolonialist, and deconstructionist approaches. For different reasons, these perspectives reject the idea of the modern capitalist social formation as an “integrated whole,” consequently losing sight of the overall social processes of

a systemic-structural nature through which all particular social phenomena in (late) modernity are mediated (Rosa, 2012: 273).

As is well known, Rosa has been working on a comprehensive theory of (late) modern society since *Beschleunigung*, his acclaimed book on social acceleration (Rosa, 2005). In the spirit of the ‘Weberian Marxism’ of the classical Frankfurt School, which goes back to Georg Lukács’s thought, acceleration theory posits that capitalism, not merely as an economic mode of production but as an overarching socio-cultural life form, constitutes the “most fateful power of our modern life” (Weber in Rosa, 2012: 14). According to Rosa (2016: 671–690), modern and *a fortiori* late modern social formations are *acceleration societies*. Their primary characteristic is “dynamic stabilization,” meaning they can solely maintain and reproduce their “institutional *status quo*” in the mode of “escalation,” i.e., by constantly growing, innovating, and accelerating (Rosa in Reckwitz & Rosa, 2021: 81). This nature-like “compulsion to increase” can be understood as what Weber classically calls the ‘iron cage’ or “shell as hard as steel [*stahlhartes Gehäuse*] of our present” (Rosa, 2020: 26).

Although SWR emphasizes the weight of the nature-like macro-structural laws governing (late) social formations, it would be incorrect to categorize it as a purely structuralist or even objectivist sociological approach. In line with the Frankfurt School tradition (see Honneth, 1999: 32), Rosa considers that the nature and workings of modern societies can only be appropriately understood if their constitutive *cultural* and *psychological-motivational* dimensions are taken into account (Rosa, 2020: 22). However, unlike the first generation of Critical Theory, Rosa does not primarily rely on psychoanalysis when analyzing the subjective-cultural aspects of social reality. Instead, he turns to a *phenomenologically* inspired approach, the “world-relations theory” or “sociology of world-relations” (Rosa, 2012: 104f.), which can be understood as an alternative form of phenomenology-based sociology to that developed by Schutz and his followers.

More precisely, Rosa bases his theory of society on a dualistic social ontology that combines theoretical motifs from Margaret Archer (1995) and Habermas (1981). According to this approach, societal formations consist of two “categorically distinct component[s]” that are closely linked but “partially autonomous”: “structure” and “culture” (Rosa in Reckwitz & Rosa, 2021: 172–175). While social structure constitutes a quasi-objective “institutional system” that guarantees the “material reproduction” of society, culture is defined as a socio-historically determined “world-relation” that motivates social actors to act in accordance with the institutional *status quo* in the form of an *ethos* (Rosa in Reckwitz & Rosa, 2021: 181f.). For Rosa, because of their ontological differences, these two components of social reality should be approached from two different analytical angles in terms of a “perspective dualism” (Rosa in Reckwitz & Rosa, 2021: 171). The logic of reproduction of the institutional structure must be investigated “*from the outside*” or “*from the perspective of the third person*,” that is, with methods similar to those of the natural sciences like those used in physics to observe the movements of the planets (Rosa, 2020: 21). In contrast, the study of cultural-subjective world-relations is only possible “*from the inside*,” by means of a “*phenomenological-culturalist*” world-relations analysis (Rosa, 2021; unpublished manuscript) that aims to hermeneutically reconstruct the *first-person perspective* of actors.

In (late) modernity, the so-called “program of range-extension” constitutes the cultural-motivational correlate of the structural principle of dynamic stabilization; that is, the ‘world-relation’ necessary for the reproduction of dynamic stabilization (Rosa, 2020: 11). This program might be defined as the “conviction,” deeply anchored in the affective, bodily, and cognitive-evaluative being-in-the-world of (late) modern subjects, that what matters in life is to extend one’s *world-reach* [*Weltreichweite*] ever further by means of the “cognitive, technical, economic, and political *making available* [*Verfügbarmachung*] of world and life” (Rosa in Reckwitz & Rosa, 2021: 195). Without delving into details here, it should be noted that Rosa’s sociological-phenomenological analysis of (late) modern world-relations leads to a critical “diagnosis of alienation” inspired by the classical Frankfurt School (Rosa, 2020: 30). In a nutshell, the program of range extension systematically causes not resonance but a becoming foreign and mute of the world – or more precisely: a “world-relation of relationlessness” [*Weltbeziehung der Beziehungslosigkeit*] (Rosa, 2020: 30f.).

As mentioned earlier, SWR can be regarded as an alternative phenomenology-based sociology to the Schutzian-Luckmannian approach. Arguing from the perspective of a *social-theoretically informed, post-metaphysical, embodied, and embedded phenomenology*, which draws on the works of Merleau-Ponty, Taylor, and Waldenfels, among others, Rosa (2012: 7f.; 2016: 54–57) defines “world-relation” as a thoroughly socio-culturally shaped mode of subjective “being-in-the-world” or “*being-placed-in-the-world*” [*in-die-Welt-gestellt-sein*]. Importantly, a world-relation does not merely constitute a “mentality” or even a “worldview,” i.e., a system of (explicit) ideas and beliefs. Rather, it is something far more fundamental, namely, an “*existential sensibility*” (Rosa, 2012: 54). Although the subjective world-relation includes reflective, “cognitive,” and “evaluative” aspects – the so-called “cognitive-evaluative maps” – its main core consists of pre-reflective “bodily, emotional, sensual, and existential” moments (Rosa, 2012: 11).

According to SWR, there are significant differences not only between the world-relations of different societies and cultures, but also between those of different groups within the same society, such as genders, generations, and social classes (Rosa, 2012: 377f.; 2016: 54f.). This explains why Rosa understands his theoretical program not as a *philosophy* but as a *sociology* of world relations. In contrast to purely philosophical approaches such as Husserl’s phenomenology, SWR does not place the main emphasis on the “generalizable, universalizable or even transcendental (and not infrequently: pre-social)” properties of human world relations, but on the analysis of precisely those socio-cultural differences, especially, on the study of the specificity of the (late) modern way of being-in-the-world (Rosa, 2016: 70). However, and this is crucial, this sociological investigation takes place against the background of a general analytics of the a priori “basic elements of human world-relations,” which is similar to that of the traditional representatives of phenomenology (Rosa, 2016: 82).



## To what extent is SWR Phenomenological (and Meaning-Adequate) in its Descriptive-Explanatory Dimension?

From what has been said, it follows that phenomenology plays a key role, not only in the normative but also in the descriptive-explanatory dimension of SWR. To be sure, following “perspective dualism,” Rosa considers that an *exclusively* phenomenological approach to the theory of society is untenable. For the objective or institutional-structural aspect of societal reality can solely be analyzed in its full length if a third-person, i.e., structural or systemic, perspective is incorporated (Rosa in Reckwitz & Rosa, 2021: 285). In this sense, Rosa’s societal theoretical analysis can be characterized as *partially* phenomenological.

But how exactly is phenomenology employed in the *descriptive* dimension of SWR? Arguably, in this regard, Rosa utilizes phenomenological reflection in two analytically distinguishable ways. On the one hand (a), in a manner similar to classical phenomenology and phenomenology-based sociology as understood by Eberle, namely, as a descriptive eidetics of world-relations that functions as a social-theoretical foundation for ensuring the meaning-adequacy of social research. And, on the other (b), as a ‘middle- or limited-range phenomenology’ (see Gros, 2023) of the specific world-relations prevailing in acceleration societies. In this latter sense, SWR operates as a *historically situated* phenomenological sociology of (late) modern world-relations.

(a) Despite his sociologically motivated distancing from classical a priori ‘philosophy’ (Rosa, 2016: 70), Rosa seems to apply the phenomenological method in a manner akin to traditional phenomenologists, namely, as a reflective analysis of the transhistorically and cross-culturally invariant structures of life-world experience. Similar to the way in which Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, or Heidegger describe the eidetic morphological properties of corporeality, temporality, or spatiality, SWR offers an exhaustive phenomenological analysis of what Rosa calls the “basic elements of human world-relations” (Rosa, 2016: 83). Generally speaking, he speaks of three basic “phenomenal dimensions of our world-relationship”: *corporeal-embodied*, *emotional-affective*, and *cognitive-evaluative* aspects (Rosa, 2012: 378, 380; 2016: 83–246).

However, analogous to the Schutzian phenomenological life-world theory – albeit without drawing on it directly – Rosas’s eidetic analytics of the ‘basic elements of world-relations’ is not conceived as an end in itself but, rather, as a basic conceptual apparatus for the ‘proto-theoretical’ foundation of an interpretive sociology of world-relations that can be empirically implemented. More precisely, much like Schutz’s and Luckmann’s phenomenological ‘protosociology,’ SWR’s eidetics of world-relations operates as a “social theory” [*Sozialtheorie*] in today’s usual sense of the word; that is, as a “basic vocabulary” of sensitizing concepts that serves as a general conceptual framework (Reckwitz in Reckwitz & Rosa, 2021: 54) with the help of which empirically concrete world-relations can be grasped in a *meaning-adequate* way.

(b) On the other hand, in *Resonanz* and other recent writings, one also finds a ‘limited-range’ phenomenology of (late) modern culture. This “phenomenologically-culturalistically oriented analysis” (Rosa, 2021. Unpublished manuscript),

which relies on the basic conceptual vocabulary offered by the ‘proto-sociological’ eidetics of world-relations, can be characterized as a *sociology* of world-relations in the narrow sense of the term (see Rosa, 2016: 518). Far from claiming universality as classical eidetic phenomenology does, this more modest kind of phenomenological inquiry aims to carve out, *in a meaning-adequate way*, the structural features of the world-relations prevalent in contemporary acceleration societies. Put differently, it is concerned with the reflective description of the historically specific morphology of our (late) modern being-in-the-world.

In this sense, SWR operates in a sense akin to Carlos Belvedere’s (2022) account of “phenomenological sociology” as an empirical science devoted to the study of the ‘natural attitude’ of specific social groups. For example, Rosa describes, in an empirically-informed manner, how the societal imperatives to optimize and increase, which prevail both in institutional spheres like art, politics, and the economy and in the private sphere, are experienced by late modern subjects as alienating (Rosa, 2019a: 27f.). In this connection, it is important to note that, in line with the *practical* understanding of meaning-adequacy proposed by Wilson, Rosa (in Rosa & Reckwitz 2021) understands his ‘limited-range’ phenomenology of (late) modernity as nothing but an *interpretive offer* that should be confirmed or rejected in a constant dialogue with everyday social actors.

## Final Words: The Open Question of Ideology

As I have shown, Rosa’s program of a phenomenological Critical Theory succeeds in overcoming a number of descriptive and normative difficulties faced by classical Critical Theory, which gave meaning-adequacy, at best, a secondary role. However, the project of SWR brings problems of its own. To round off this paper, I would like to draw attention to a theoretical problem that necessarily arises when social criticism takes sides exclusively for meaning reconstruction, renouncing completely the hermeneutics of suspicion. This issue, which I am dealing with in forthcoming works, is the problem of ‘ideology’.

Defined in a minimal sense, ideologies are mechanisms through which meaning becomes functional to the underpinning and smooth reproduction of unjust and/or alienating social orders. More precisely, ideological constructs achieve this effect by operating as ‘false consciousness,’ distorting or veiling the perception of the sociopolitical order. Social actors subjected to ideology misjudge social reality and/or their own interests and necessities within it, unwittingly contributing to the perpetuation of social suffering and injustice (see Jaeggi & Celikates, 2017: 102–105).

Since the end of the twentieth century, the notion of ideology has faced a fierce critique in philosophy and the social sciences, and not without good reasons (see, e.g., Ricœur, 1998). Against this backdrop, it has been almost entirely relinquished within Frankfurt School Critical Theory, starting with Habermas. The reasons for this abandonment are both normative and epistemological in nature. In our democratic times, the intellectual elitism involved in the idea that lay actors systematically misjudge their life-world and, therefore, should be ‘enlightened’ by Critical Theorists sounds normatively unacceptable. Epistemologically, in a post-metaphysical

era as the present one, it also seems untenable to assert that there is a ‘true’ essence of social reality that can be only worked out by philosophical or social-scientific means (Jaeggi & Celikates, 2017: 106f.).

However, I think that completely abandoning hermeneutics of suspicion often leads to errors symmetrical to those incurred by classical ideology critique. Normatively speaking, if *Ideologiekritik* can lead to paternalism, a Critical Theory that relies too heavily on hermeneutics of meaning restoration could result in *unreflective populism*. Accepting *doxa* uncritically, or even romanticizing it, could be politically dangerous, as social actors sometimes think, act, and feel against their own interests and the common good. Think of the recent growth of far-right movements in both the Global North and the Global South. In epistemological terms, it is also risky to deny the ability of philosophy and the social sciences to give accounts of social reality that are more comprehensive, rigorous, and well-founded than those of common sense, especially in the face of the current rise of ‘post-truth’ and ‘fake news’. For these and similar reasons, there are current attempts to rehabilitate the notion of ideology in Critical Theory, at least in the minimal sense suggested above (Jaeggi & Celikates, 2017: 106f.).

This consideration raises a challenge to a phenomenological Critical Theory like that developed by Rosa, especially in its *normative* dimension. In a similar vein to Honneth’s recognition theory, Rosa (2016: 336, 749) argues for a “normative monism” according to which “resonance,” as it is immediately experienced by everyday subjects, constitutes the unique normative criterion of social critique. However, if one takes the challenge of ideology seriously, then it must be admitted that what is subjectively felt like “resonance” by social actors is *not necessarily* something that aligns with their (common) interests but can go against them. This problem, the “ambivalence” of resonance, as it were, and its potential of operating as ideology (Jaeggi & Celikates, 2017: 69–74), has been identified by some of Rosa’s critics, especially with respect to the resonant feelings experienced in (neo)-Nazi rallies (see Reckwitz in Reckwitz & Rosa, 2021: 297f.). Honneth (2010) himself considered the need to revise normative monism in the face of the possibility of “recognition as ideology”. I think Rosa’s phenomenological Critical Theory should be confronted with the same task.

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