PRINCIPLES OF RECONSTRUCTIVE SOCIAL THEORY

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ABSTRACT

Once again, we are going through "dark times." The current juncture is critical. For those who associate themselves with critical social theory, broadly understood, there are two options: hypercritique or reconstruction. Either one darkens the picture, uses all possible theories at hand (Adorno, Bourdieu, Foucault, Luhmann) to sketch out a general theory of domination and "closes the system." Or, alternatively, with the hope of the desperate, one looks for a way out and aligns various theories that propose an alternative vision of the world. This is the task of reconstruction. Drawing on critical realism (Bhaskar), critical theory (Habermas), and antiutilitarian social theory (Caillé), this chapter outlines some principles of reconstructive social theory. Following the distinction between metatheory, social theory, and sociological theory, it explores the epistemological, normative, and existential foundations of reconstructive theory; proposes an articulation between culture and agency as an alternative to the agency-structure debate; and indicates some promising signs that configure a future ontology of the present.

Keywords: Social theory; critical theory; reconstruction; culture; agency; social change

Once again, we are going through dark times. Social and political theorists are at a loss and do not really know how to analyze the current conjuncture. They face a typical "Minerva-problem": As long as the historical processes they

1   analyze are in flux, the present cannot be properly described. They know a cycle
    has come to its end but otherwise they tend to mask their analytical failure with
3   political bravura. Our grand theories of late modernity, post-Fordism and post-
    industrialism are only valid until 2007. Not that they are wrong, but the analy-
5   ses of Wallerstein, Habermas, Giddens, Beck, Bauman, Castells, Boltanski, and
    others have to be updated, if not reformulated altogether. They were designed
7   to make sense of the after effects of the crisis of the Fordist regime of accumu-
    lation that marked the end of the second modernity. They analyze the flexibili-
9   zation of the market and then extrapolate to culture and media, consumption
    and identity, state and patriarchy, political parties and social movements, to
11 conclude that everything that was solid and secure has now been outsourced
    and fragmented. By the late 1970s, in a book that was itself a symptom of the
13 breakdown of the emancipatory philosophies of history and the dissipation of
    utopian energies, Jean-Francois Lyotard proclaimed the advent of postmoder-
15 nity. "Simplified to the extreme, we consider postmodern the incredulity
    towards grand narratives" (Lyotard, 1979, p. 7). With hindsight, we can now
17 understand that postmodernism was a swansong of the West and that the cri-
    tique of science and the cracking of the cultural code of modernity were only
19 the opening phase of a protracted process of global systemic breakdown. This
    time the shift is "for real." It is not just the culture of modernity that is frag-
21 menting and diffracting. The very structures of the global system are being
    undone in real time. What we are witnessing is a systemic failure, to be followed
23 by a protracted phase transition, comparable perhaps to the one from feudal-
    ism to capitalism.
25   To underscore the challenges and the risks, I propose to call the current con-
    juncture "the second postmodernity." The years 2001, 2007, and 2016 are the
27 epochal markers of our times. Each of these dates is emblematic of a crisis.
    Together, they indicate a megacrisis with no end in sight. Chaos may spread
29 from the center to the periphery or from the periphery to the center. The geo-
    political situation may get further out of hand. Nothing can be excluded, not
31 even the worst. Think about what went wrong in the UK and the USA and
    what could further go wrong in China, the Middle East, or Europe. Nothing
33 guarantees that the weakening of autocratic regimes (in China, Russia, or
    Venezuela) will usher in democratic ones or that democratic ones will not be
35 transformed from into autocratic regimes (USA, Brazil, and India). We are wit-
    nessing a legitimation crisis at a global level, with the reverberations spreading
37 from the economic and political subsystems to all spheres of social, cultural,
    and personal life. The ecological, military, technological, economic, political,
39 cultural, and personal risks of the world society are so daunting that the very
    survival of the human species is at stake.
41   A systemic take on the intersectionality of vulnerabilities, with each subsys-
    tem adding its woes to all the other ones, indicates the limits of hypercomplex-
43 ity. There comes a point where dissipative structures cannot cope. When they
    are too far from equilibrium, they break down. The newly minted discourse

1   about the anthropocene is a premonitory pointer that in the medium term the
    world may well continue "without us" (Danowski & Viveiros de Castro, 2014).
3   Whether humanity will rise up to the challenges or regress to a stationary state
    of civilization full of strife, conflict, and pathologies remains open. Perhaps we
5   should think through the deplorable life conditions of the slums of the Global
    South to get a glimpse of the coming anarchy in which scarcity, crime, overpop-
7   ulation, pollution, and disease are rapidly destroying the social fabric of our
    planet (Kaplan, 1994). In the meantime, we are simply stuck. We can neither
9   go back nor can we move forward. "The old is dying & the new cannot be
    born. In this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms"
11 (Gramsci, 1971, p. 276).

    Against this somber background, I want to propose a move from hypercri-
13 tique to reconstruction. Precisely because the current conjuncture looks rather
    bleak and it's difficult to see "the rose in the cross of the present" (Hegel, 1971, AU:1
15 p. 35), I want to change tack and explore (with the hope of the desperate) a
    way out of the present. While the chapter as a whole outlines the basic princi-
17 ples of a reconstructive social theory that is indebted to critical realism, critical
    theory, and the antiutilitarian movement in the social sciences, the argument is
19 deployed in systematic fashion. Following the distinction between metatheory,
    social theory, and sociological theory, it explores the philosophical foundations
21 of reconstructive theory; proposes an articulation between culture and agency
    as an alternative to the agency-structure debate; and indicates some promising
23 signs that configure a future ontology of the present.

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27 ## WHAT IS RECONSTRUCTIVE SOCIAL THEORY?

29 In Europe, I belong to three theoretical clubs: the "Habermasian family" in
    Germany, critical realism in the UK, and the antiutilitarian movement in the
31 social sciences (MAUSS) in France. Standing in the tradition of critical theory
    (Frankfurt School for Jürgen Habermas, the British New Left for Roy Bhaskar,
33 and *Socialisme et barbarie* for Alain Caillé), all three share a reconstructive
    intent and replace the grand gesture of catastrophism with a well-tempered opti-
35 mism that wants to encourage practical social change. In reaction to the totaliz-
    ing claims of a hypercritique that had become the symptom of its own diagnosis,
37 each of them had to break with the discourse of revolution and counterrevolu-
    tion to open up other vistas beyond the instrumental−strategic−utilitarian
39 nexus of action, alienation, and reification. Each of them knew that to open the
    system, they had to devise an alternative to rational choice and retrieve an
41 emphasis on intersubjectivity, interaction, and alterity. Habermas (1981) did it
    by means of a simple distinction between interaction and labor, strategic and
43 communicative action, life-world and system. Bhaskar (1989) had to go back to
    Aristotle to supplement Marxist structuralism with a humanist transformative

1   praxeology, while Alain Caillé (2000) plumbed the intricacies of reciprocity and
    giving in Mauss's *Essay on the gift*, extending the generosity from the small
3   worlds of family, friends, and neighbors to the politics of civil society. Instead of
    a catastrophic approach to the ontology of the present, to avoid the dead end of
5   their predecessors, all three explored the possibilities of radical reformism. It
    is remarkable that they displaced the attention from aesthetics to ethics and
7   politics. Rationalizing hermeneutics, Habermas systematically worked out
    Gadamer's dialogism into a discourse ethics and a theory of deliberative politics.
9   Toward the end of his life, Bhaskar explicitly invoked eudemonia and openly
    talked about human flourishing, not only at the individual but also at the collec-
11 tive level − "the flourishing of each being a precondition for the flourishing of
    all" (Bhaskar, 1994, pp. 264, 294−297) − while Caillé invited his friends to com-   `AU:2`
13 pose a Convivialist Manifesto and release a Declaration of Interdependence
    (Caillé et al., 2013).
15   Inspired by the work of Habermas, Bhaskar, and Caillé, I conceive of recon-
    struction as a successor and an alternative to hypercritique. Reconstruction is
17 the opposite of deconstruction (a euphemism for Heidegger's *Destruktion* of
    inherited meanings). Or, better, to the extent that it incorporates critique and
19 deconstruction, it overcomes the negativity of dialectics in a positive synthesis
    that prepares for the worst but hopes for the best. Like Romain Rolland, who
21 was closer to Tagore, Ramakrishna, and Vivekananda than he was to Freud
    and Gramsci, it subdues violence to generosity and corrects the pessimism of
23 the intellect with the optimism of the will.
        The difference between deconstruction and reconstruction is one of purpose.
25 The emphasis is not on removing the rubble and clearing the ground.
    Reconstruction is neither creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) nor *cum nihilo*
27 (without constraints). It is not foundation but re-creation of the old through its
    re-orientation to something new. It is an attempt to reorganize the existing
29 structures into a new building and to give it a new function, a new purpose,
    and a new end.
31   The end is human flourishing. The theories that interest me are those that
    share the purpose of eudemonia and are concerned with humanist ethics and
33 democratic politics. The selection of theories is always a bit arbitrary. It is
    determined as much by scholarship as by personal factors. However, to the
35 extent that the selection follows some well-established metatheoretical criteria
    of theory construction, which I will expose in a moment, it is closer to "intellec-
37 tual craftsmanship" (Mills, 1959, pp. 213−248).
        I know of least three books by three exemplary intellectuals that carry recon-
39 struction on their cover, exemplify its spirit and specify its tasks. In *Zur
    Rekonstruktion des historischen Materialismus*, Jürgen Habermas (1976, p. 9)
41 analyzes Marxism with a critical-reconstructive intent. He "takes it apart and
    puts it back together" in a different way so that it "attains the goals it has set
43 for itself." By injecting a good deal of philosophical idealism and developmen-
    tal sociology into historical materialism, he reworked it as a form of

developmental historical idealism that learns from its experiences and its failures, redirecting it toward the future so that it can realize its potential. In his *Reconstruction of Philosophy*, John Dewey (1920), the eternal optimist, also reformulated the antinomies of inherited philosophy and proposed pragmatism as a progressive theoretical and practical solution to all conceptual problems. The solution is not to be found in the State but in the joint participation in the associations that make up society and that make the full contribution of all its members possible. Both Habermas and Dewey knew that social and cultural change also has an existential dimension. In *Man and Society in the Age of Reconstruction* (1940), Karl Mannheim puts the democratic planning for freedom on the public agenda. Concerned with the rise of authoritarianism in his native Germany, exiled in London, he investigated the prospects for the construction of free interdependent individuals in democratic societies through education. "It is only by remaking man himself that the reconstruction of society is possible" (Mannheim, 1940, p. 15). To reconstruct the social sciences, society, and the individuals all at once, inaugurating an epoch of generalized morphogenesis is the horizon of reconstructive social theory.

To overcome the reigning negativism, one has not only to reform social theories and practices but also oneself. The focus on malfunctioning and distress has to be supplemented with an investigation of the conditions of possibility of happiness and flourishing. This is the message of humanist positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Although I am not calling for a positive sociology (and certainly not for a positivist one!), I share the disillusionment of clinical practitioners and academic psychologists with the almost exclusive attention to failure and to the concomitant neglect of individual fulfillment and the thriving of the community. Just like psychology, sociology should not just study social pathologies, damaged lives, and crises. As Nigel Thrift (2008, p. 3) says, "There are too many theories, all of them seemingly speaking on behalf of those whose lives have been damaged by the official structures of power." Sociology is not so much a branch of medicine that dispenses diagnosis as a propaedeutic that explores alternative ways of living and being together in the world. In order not to be misunderstood, let me, however, underscore that reconstruction presupposes reification and alienation; to overcome it, however, it also focuses on resistance, reliance, and change at all levels. It is an exodus from reification − not an attempt to deny structural domination but an attempt to overcome it by focusing on the common practices that challenge it and are already constructing another world. As a variation of Habermas's "emancipatory interest," the reconstructive interest of humanity does not negate reification but it unmasks and understands it as an alienated sedimentation of collective action. As a transformative ontology of social practices, it calls for a reflexive reactivation of the energies that have crystallized into second nature. If it slightly exaggerates the possibilities of change at all levels, it is only because it is aware that the forces of destruction have the upper hand.

1   METATHEORY: THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

3   In the preface to my *Philosophical History of German Sociology* (Vandenberghe, 2009), I developed a framework for the integrated analysis of
5   metatheory, social theory, and sociological theory. I now want to retrieve that framework and, based on some recent work with Alain Caillé (Caillé &
7   Vandenberghe, 2016), I want to outline briefly what reconstruction implies in each of the theoretical subdivisions.

9   Metatheory is philosophy for social scientists who (like myself) do not know their canon. Placing itself at the intersection of philosophy and sociology
11   (within sociology, but investigating its philosophy and making it explicit), it proposes an inquiry into the philosophical foundations of the social sciences. In
13   accordance with the classical divisions of philosophy, it scrutinizes the ontology, epistemology, methodology, normativity, and anthropology of sociology.
15   The underlying idea is that those presuppositions do not vary randomly. One can map them out. Together they form a system. I suggested that, ultimately,
17   everything depends on the philosophical anthropology one proclaims. As in an old-fashioned transcendental deduction, the vision of the human being (for-
19   merly known as "Man") one adheres to predetermines all one's other options. I still subscribe to that analysis, but to further simplify it and make it more
21   pungent, I would now divide the philosophical spectrum into three classes (onto-epistemological, normative, and existential) and tie the reconstructive
23   impetus to some determinate choices within each.

25   In the onto-epistemological class, one finds the premises that define the conditions of possible knowledge. Here as elsewhere, it is the nature of the object
27   of knowledge that determines and prescribes the knowledge of the object (and not the other way round). Ontology undergirds epistemology and directs meta-
29   methodology. The first determinate choice in the philosophy of science concerns the issue of naturalism. Reconstruction implies the radical rejection of
31   any positivist philosophy of science. With its rigorous critique of positivism and its demonstration that positivism does not even hold in the natural
33   sciences, critical realism is superior to any other competing philosophy in my opinion (Vandenberghe, 2014). It incorporates all preceding critiques of natu-
35   ralism (from Weber's neo-Kantian and Popper's neo-positivist derogation to Winch's neo-Wittgensteinian and Habermas's neo-Marxist) and is, therefore,
37   the grand finale of the *Postivismusstreit*.

          The social sciences are human sciences, however, and to make them
39   human, I consider it essential to consider phenomenological hermeneutics as their natural-cultural foundation. Although hermeneutics clinches the impos-
41   sibility of naturalism, it is compatible in my opinion with critical realism. Even more, it represents its idealist counterpart, and it is only together that
43   critical realism and hermeneutics offer solid foundations for the social sciences.

1   Reconstructive social sciences are not only militantly antipositivist, they are also antiutilitarian in principle. The struggle here is against all forms of rational
3 choice (strategic action, game theory, etc.) – not only in theory but also in practice and in society. If critical realism is the preferred option for onto-
5 epistemological inquiries, the second generation of critical theory (Albrecht Wellmer, Karl-Otto Apel, but above all Jürgen Habermas) occupies a similar
7 position concerning normative issues. The gap between critical realism and critical theory can be closed through the "linguistic turn" in hermeneutics,
9 phenomenology, and pragmatism. All these approaches share a principled anti-utilitarian stand and an insistence on symbolism and world disclosure. They
11 move away from the individual to intersubjective communication and propose a consequent dislocation from interests to norms, ideals, and principles.
13   Although I am willing to concede that one can do better in ethics than discourse ethics, one can hardly do worse. With its strong defense of universalism,
15 Habermas has defined the *minima moralia* of the modern age and determined the lower limit beyond which one cannot fall. The defense of human rights, citi-
17 zenship, and justice is the *sine qua non* of a decent society. No doubt, one can and should defend stronger options, like virtue ethics and the ethics of care, but
19 in pluralist societies, one cannot impose one's personal and communal choices on one´s fellows. Eudemonia is the end I said earlier, but from a normative
21 point of view, one can only secure the social preconditions that make the pursuit of the good life of all and each one possible (Honneth, 1992). As indivi-
23 duals and as communities, we may subscribe to "comprehensive doctrines" but we cannot impose our *maxima moralia* on others. That would be tantamount
25 to paternalism.
    Having granted Habermas (and by implication also John Rawls) the last
27 word on morality, I should, however, immediately qualify my position and insist that I do not conceive of discourse ethics in narrow rationalist terms.
29 Discourse ethics is more than a formal procedure for the universalization of our maxims of conduct; it is, rather, a formalization and rationalization of a
31 dialogical ethics one finds in philosophical hermeneutics. What we have is not a procedure but a lived process for testing our convictions in dialogue with
33 others, the others being the addressees that allow us, like friends, to understand our limits and overcome our own narrowness. Through the dialogical inter-
35 change of positions, we welcome the other in our thought and in our heart and, thereby, we enlarge our perspective so that no one is excluded.
37   Underneath the onto-epistemological and the normative classes, I have now opened an existential story. It more or less corresponds to a normative philo-
39 sophical anthropology, with the notable difference that the vision of the *anthropos* is no longer a generic one but a personal one. My existentialism is humanist
41 and personalist, much more in tune with the *Existenzphilosophie* of Karl Jaspers (1932) and Paul Ricoeur (1990) than with the heroic despair of   AU:3
43 Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus. Not only do I fully subscribe to a positive anthropology one finds in Habermas, Bhaskar, and Mauss, I also seek to

contribute to its realization in daily life. The vision of the human being as *homo simbolicus reciprocans* that I espouse is a normative one − it corresponds to the full development of human capabilities of each and every one. It coincides at the limit with full human flourishing − the good life of each as a precondition for the full development of all in a convivialist society.

As a guiding principle of human development (*Bildung*), existential reconstruction presupposes and projects a humane world of fragile, interdependent, and responsive human beings who are mutually concerned and responsible for each other. It is not just a lofty theory of the human, however, but it is also a daily reflexive practice. It is an ethics, for sure, but to the extent that it is lived, it is also an *ethos*. It involves politics as well, but more in the sense of constructing the *polis* one wants to live in, with and for others, than of manning the barricades and continue the struggle, though at times − for instance, when there's a *coup* (like in Brazil or Turkey) or when the extreme right is in power (like in the USA or India) − this is also necessary.

Rather than spelling out my vision of the human − at the risk of appearing both highly ingenuous and vulnerable − let me just say that I find my inspiration in postsecular humanism and convivialism. I worked for years at the University for Humanistics (www.uvh.nl), a small experimental university in the Netherlands that forms humanist counselors as normative professionals. Humanistics is a normative and empirical applied human science that seeks to investigate and further existential process of meaning-giving and to contribute to the humanization of society. Together with friends and colleagues in Europe, I am also active in the convivialist movement (Caillé et al., 2013). The convivialist questions: How can we live together with our differences without massacring each other? How can we transform our differences into synergies and our vulnerabilities in forces? How can we maintain hope in times of transition and find the energy to explore meaningful social alternatives in the midst of misery and despair? These questions are too important to be left to cynics and deserve a positive answer.

SOCIAL THEORY: AGENCY, CULTURE, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The determinate choices one makes in the metatheoretical domain have implications for the social theory one erects on it. It is obvious that the ontological choices we made, the normative anthropology we elected, and the existential-convivialist questions we raised will affect our conception of social action, social institutions, and social transitions. Following Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knöbl (2004, pp. 37−38), I conceive of social theory as a systematic attempt to give a coherent answer to three central questions that each social science has to ponder: "What are the nature and types of social action?" "How is the social

order possible?" and "What determines social change?" It is understood that the answers one gives to the respective questions have to be integrated into a general theory of society. That is easier said than done. The general theories of Habermas, Bourdieu, Luhmann, or Latour show that it takes a lifetime to work out the ins and outs of a systematic theory. In the absence of such a unified theory, I will now sketch out some directives for a reconstructive social theory. The main directive consists in an appeal to move away from the agency-structure template. Far too much ink has been spilled on that issue (e.g. O'Donnell, 2010). To move away from the scholastic exercise, I propose three integrated displacements: (1) from action to interaction, (2) from structure to culture, and (3) from order to social change.

(1) The first displacement is a logical consequence of the linguistic turn in phi-losophy and its substitution of a philosophy of the subject by a philosophy of communication (Habermas, 1985). The turn to language sidesteps the issue of solipsism that has plagued the philosophy of consciousness for so long, as can be felt in all 1,800 pages of Husserl's (1973) painstaking analy-ses of the phenomenology of intersubjectivity. In the social sciences, the turn to language and communication is an invitation to return to the ques-tion of social action, while avoiding at once the allure of Weber's methodo-logical individualism. The individual is not an atom but always already caught up in intersubjective relations that its very existence presupposes (no parents: no children). Human beings do not spring up from the ground as mushrooms after the rain. In the same way as positivism justifies a deficient mode of knowledge of the world (*vorhanden* rather than *zuhanden*, as Heidegger would say, instrumental rather than pragmatic, as Dewey would phrase it), methodological individualism naturalizes a deficient mode of being in the world. The two are connected by the same instrumental-strate-gic attitude to the world (the natural *Umwelt* and the social *Mitwelt*).

By privileging the attitude of the objectivating relationship, which Buber calls the intentional "I-It relationship" and which he opposes to the inten-tional "I-Thou relationship" (Buber, 1973), methodological individualism becomes ontological: it neglects the dialogical principle and methodically de-socializes the relations with others to leave an unencumbered and disaffected individual, alone, embattled and in conflict with the others. The intentional relation between I and Thou is ontologically prior to the individual. The indi-vidual only appears as an individual when it sets itself apart from and against other individuals. Unlike the individual, the person appears in and through relations with others. These relations are always mediated by the Spirit, by which I obviously do not mean God (He himself is also mediated by the Spirit) but the whole symbolic array of language, culture, and institutions.

The opening to the other has been at the forefront of recent develop-ments in post-Habermasian moral philosophy. I am thinking here mainly about virtue ethics, the ethics of care, the theory of recognition and similar

1   developments within post-structuralism and feminist theory that emphasize
    dialogue, sympathy, and deep intersubjectivity. Typically, they conceive of
3   moral sentiments as a motivational precondition of communicative engage-
    ments. These philosophies of intersubjectivity can easily be recaptured and
5   developed by a "Habermaussian" theory of communication and giving,
    whereby giving is the opening act of the cycle of reciprocity that inaugu-
7   rates the interaction between persons and groups, while communication is
    the symbolically mediated mode of interaction that directs reciprocity by
9   giving it meaning and direction. Within communicative, pragmatic, and
    ethnomethodological sociology, communication intervenes as the medium
11 that allows *ego* and *alter* to coordinate their action in a common plan.
    Through further communication between persons and groups, interactions
13 are integrated in ever-wider circles of cooperation. This is how society
    comes into existence. While deep intersubjectivity connects the theory of
15 interaction to moral philosophy, interaction between individuals and coop-
    eration between groups connect it to convivialist politics. As the relation
17 between the micro and macro-levels of society is thereby at least indicated,
    we can now proceed to the analysis relation between agency and order.
19 (2) Reconstructive social theory does not focus on agency and structure.
    Instead, it foregrounds the relation between agency and culture and ana-
21 lyzes the problem of order from the point of view of its possible transfor-
    mation. Unlike structuralist, poststructuralist, and postcolonial accounts of
23 culture that conceive of the latter as a form of "symbolic violence"
    (Bourdieu, 1977), the hermeneutic analysis of culture does not privilege the
25 relation between discourse and power, invariably understood as intersec-
    tional domination that excludes the expression of marginalized identities in
27 language. Conceiving of culture as a symbolic way of world-making and
    self-disclosure, it foregrounds instead the relations between culture and
29 power, whereby the latter is no longer only understood as repressive (or
    "productive" in the Foucauldian sense) but also as a transformative capac-
31 ity of individuals, groups, and collectives that self-consciously reflect on the
    normative principles of their constitution as a cooperative circle of net-
33 works, relations, and interactions within society.
        As a reservoir of cognitive, normative, and expressive forms that disclose
35 the world as a meaningful one and provide the actors with symbolic repre-
    sentations of reality on which they draw when they act and which allow
37 them to coordinate their action and act together, culture is the living media-
    tor between society and its members. As the totality of symbolic representa-
39 tions of reality that make intentional and meaningful action possible,
    culture is at the same time something that exists "outside" and "inside" of
41 the individuals. It is both objective and subjective, medium and result,
    Spirit and Soul. Culture is the Spirit that connects the Souls and integrates
43 them in a common universe. It is also what motivates them to act in a cer-
    tain way. Ethics is also part of culture. Although traditional ethics can be

1   conservative and reproductive, I like to think of principles, norms, and
    values as the premises of a generalized morphogenesis. Ethics encourages
3   axiological engagement. It holds up ideals to the person and to the collec-
    tive, summoning their self-transformation. *Pace* Clifford Geertz, the actor   AU:8
5   is not a Spiderman caught in the webs he has spun himself; the Spider-
    woman is also a webmaker who not only identifies with culture but is also
7   capable of distancing herself from it. A reflexive self is a precondition for
    social and cultural change. When social development is such that the ideals
9   can no longer be realized in the current conjuncture, reflexivity becomes
    critical. As the identification with an ideal community grows − an ideal
11   community that counterfactually coincides with Apel's "unlimited commu-
    nity of communication" (Apel, 1973, p. 376) − the dis-identification with
13   and self-removal from the existent community also increases. When the dis-
    enchantment is shared, the cultural preconditions of social change are satis-
15   fied. Generalized morphogenesis ensues when personal, cultural, and social
    changes occur at the same time and reinforce each other.
17 (3) In accordance with reconstructive principles, the transfer of attention from
    power$_2$ to power$_1$ relations, from "generalized master-slave" relations to
19   "communicative relations of self-transformation" (Bhaskar, 1994, p. 402),
    does not deny the existence of domination, reification, and alienation.
21   Rather, it analyzes the latter dialectically from the point of view of its possi-
    ble transformation by individual and collective actors who consciously
23   strive to change society, culture, and themselves. With Alain Touraine
    (1973), who conceives of historical, social, cultural, and personal move-
25   ments as transformative modalities of the self-production of society, we can
    thus analyse the symbolically mediated constitution of persons, groups, and
27   society not only from the standpoint of order but also from its transforma-
    tion. While functionalist theories conceive of social order as an end in itself,
29   conflict theories consider it as a problem, not in the Parsonian sense as
    something that needs to be solved but rather as something that needs to be
31   overcome. A transformative theory of society investigates structure, culture,
    and practices as relations and processes that are in flux and that can be
33   changed through active human intervention. The focus on the analytical
    elements that make up and produce society presupposes a dynamic view of
35   the totality. In the absence of philosophy of history, this view is dynamic,
    though not dialectical in the strong sense. We've lost the belief the history
37   points to happy end, but we haven't lost hope (as yet).

39

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY: THE ONTOLOGY OF
41 ## THE PRESENT

43 Social theory is interdisciplinary and concerns itself with an investigation of the
central problems of the social sciences. Sociological theory is more directly tied

to the discipline of sociology and can be considered a scientific attempt to "grasp one's time in concepts" (Hegel). As a diagnostic ontology of the present, sociological theory is a kind of psychoanalysis on a grand scale. "Who are we?" "What's wrong with us?" and "What can we do?" When one feels sick, depressed, and finds it hard to cope, one goes to see a shrink. When societies are in transition, insecure, and full of pathologies, the sociologist is called in for a diagnosis (*Zeitdiagnosis*) of their morbid symptoms. As I have indicated before, the condition of the second postmodernity is dire: the planet is dying; humanity is sick of itself; the world system is overcomplex and close to collapse; economics and politics are reaching the end of a cycle; global legitimation and motivation crises are affecting the life world. Precisely when catastrophe looms and the horizon seems blocked for another decade, it is important to revert the perspective and explore possibilities of reconstruction from the bottom up.

The sociologist offers not only critique and diagnosis. S/he also proposes a therapy, a propaedeutic, and a pedagogy to eudemonia. S/he not only analyses the social pathologies (alienation and reification; rationalization and disenchantment; anomie and loneliness) and psychopathologies (depression, panic attack, suicide) of over complex postindustrial, hypertechnological, and supercapitalist societies but also needs to indicate what is functioning and what can be changed. Once again, Marcel Mauss indicates the right perspective: "The day when some sociologists, together with some political theorists, smitten by the future, will arrive at firmness in the diagnosis, fortitude in the therapeutics, the propaedeutic and, above all, in the pedagogy, the cause of sociology will be won" (Mauss, 1968, p. 78).   AU:4

To conclude this chapter, I will now sketch out a path of societal reconstruction that starts with existential crises and leads, via the workplace, to the advent of the convivial society. It is as much an ideal type of development as a type of ideal development that is already taking place in personal life, the work sphere, and civil society. Commons, communes, new forms of professionalism, and metareflexive selves already exist. They are increasingly interconnected. The task of a reconstructive social theory is to underscore their potential relevance, while that of empirical research is to show their real importance as agents of the morphogenetic society. Transformative practices and transformative theory are interrelated, not in the old Leninist sense that theory prescribes practices and proscribes deviations from the script but rather because of a common "structure of sensibility" that allows for mutual learning between practitioners and theorists. The reconstruction of theory and the reconstitution of society share the same end but not the same means. Theory, methodology, and practice are interrelated, though this is not the place to show how theoretical practice and active observation intersect.

I will thematize the path forward under three headings: (1) metareflexivity, (2) normative professionalism, and (3) post-capitalism.

1   (1) *Metareflexivity*: "The only thing we can change right here and right now is ourselves," as Bhaskar (2002, p. xxxvi) said. As we cannot change the social   AU:5

3   structures overnight, however hard we try, let us see if we can change our reaction to them and let us work on ourselves. That is not easy either. We

5   are all too often stuck in repetitions, idiosyncratic habits, and inertias. Sometimes it takes an existential crisis to change. Nothing guarantees that

7   the crisis, which may be caused by relational break ups, conflicts at work, death among friends and family, will be overcome. "Situations at the limit"

9   (Jaspers, 1932, vol. 2, pp. 201−254) that we cannot change or transcend without transcending ourselves are existential threats. Persons may fail and

11   fracture, others will rigidify and mortify themselves; others still may attempt suicide, wreak havoc through violence or disappear in a haze of

13   alcohol of drugs. The fracturing of the self may also be the moment of no return and reconstruction. The existential questions "Who am I?," "What

15   do I really care about?," and "What do I want to do with my life?" may trigger a process of intense "metareflexivity" (Archer, 2003). This is the

17   case when the person revaluates all her former life choices and tries desperately to live the life she dreams of: resigning from work, going back to uni-

19   versity, coming out of the closet, opening an eco-lodge in the countryside, go on a humanitarian mission, doing whatever allows her to do what she

21   thinks she ought to do to live in accordance with her ultimate beliefs and values. We have all met metareflexive idealists who are not afraid of losing

23   their comfort. Whether they are looking for the truth or living in the truth, they are engaged in an authentic struggle for self-realization with and for, if

25   necessary also against the others.

  (2) *Normative professionalism*: Those people who are driven by ideas and

27   ideals, principles, beliefs, and love do not necessarily drop out of society. What they do with their life has implications for social life. Even when they

29   don't join social movements, create NGOs, or work as volunteers with the homeless, by changing themselves, they potentially change society too.

31   With a sense of finitude and a vocation, they may bring a new spirit to their family life, to their friendships and, let us emphasize it, also to the work

33   sphere. By working conscientiously − "being good by doing good" (Aristotle) − they can become an active source of transformation. It is all

35   good and well to join social movements, but as I have learned from Habermas, the best place to change the system is from within the system. By

37   becoming a "normative professional" − a good teacher, policewoman, fireman, nurse, lawyer, or whatever − and upholding in practice the beliefs and

39   values one cherishes, refusing to do what goes against one's conscience, speaking out if necessary against corruption, combating institutional pathol-

41   ogies, etc., but always with a focus on truth, one can actually be in the system, without being of the system. By doing what one has to do − "working

43   well with and for the others in responsible organisations" (Kunneman, 2010, p. 334) − one is already reconstructing society. It is not just by smashing

windows and thrashing the police that one is a revolutionary. By working metareflexively at oneself and with the others, being decent, and working well, one is already setting an example and contributing to the humanization of the world.

(3) *Postcapitalism*: Whether they work in public or in private organizations, social professionals who consider work as a service, money as a means and power as a medium for the realization of common values and the common good are at the forefront of social change. When the ethics of professional communities will be joined to the politics of civil society, we can expect that social, cultural, and personal change will ensue in genuine morphogenesis. Many prosocial projects exist. They are not for the profit of some but for the benefit of all. They are scattered and lack visibility. Singly, they may not add up to much but together they are harbingers of the convivial society. This society is not a utopia. It exists. It is not only a possible world. It is actual and real. Their ideologies vary, usually from the ecological to the radical left. They are the successors of the kibbutzim, the ashrams, and the *Wohngemeinschaften* of the 1970s. Sometimes they are physical settlements *in situ*, sometimes they are more global; sometimes they only exist on the Internet. In comparison with their predecessors, they are intensively interconnected. They share similar visions of the world. Commonism, convivialism, solidarity economics, economics of the common good, P2P, etc. They are all covered in the new experimental journal *Inter pares* (to be launched soon). Whatever the movements and ideologies they associate with, they are metareflexive and postcapitalist, local and global, idealist and materialist, spiritual and realist, nonhierarchical and participatory, collaborative and inclusive. They are present on the Internet. However, the revolution is not necessarily happening there. It may not even be a revolution. It is evolution without violence. To get a glimpse of these myriads of interconnected local initiatives that are constructing a new society, you need access to the Internet. Not because the Internet is transforming society and culture as we know it, but because the screens of our computers are the windows through which we can observe in real time the joyous, subterranean communities that are working together to reconstruct society as we know it and bring a new convivial, postcapitalist society into existence.

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Boyer (2011); Lévi-Strauss (1961)

AU:6	Reference Boyer (2011); Lévi-Strauss (1961) are not cited in the text. Please clarify as to where they should be cited.	
AU:7	In reference Gramsci, A. (1971), can the publisher details be changed as London: Elec Book instead of Nova York International? Please advise.	
AU:8	Please check the sentence "Pace Clifford Geertz, the actor is ..." for clarity	