

Critical realist hermeneutics

Frédéric Vandenberghe

QUERY SHEET

This page lists questions we have about your paper. The numbers displayed at left are hyperlinked to the location of the query in your paper.

The title and author names are listed on this sheet as they will be published, both on your paper and on the Table of Contents. Please review and ensure the information is correct and advise us if any changes need to be made. In addition, please review your paper as a whole for typographical and essential corrections.

Your PDF proof has been enabled so that you can comment on the proof directly using Adobe Acrobat. For further information on marking corrections using Acrobat, please visit <http://journalauthors.tandf.co.uk/production/acrobat.asp>; <https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/how-to-correct-proofs-with-adobe/>

The CrossRef database (www.crossref.org/) has been used to validate the references. Changes resulting from mismatches are tracked in red font.

AUTHOR QUERIES

| QUERY NO. | QUERY DETAILS |
|------------------|--|
| Q1 | Please check whether affiliations have been set correctly. |
| Q2 | Please provide missing physical address for corresponding author. |
| Q3 | The reference "Bhaskar (1977" is cited in the text but is not listed in the references list. Please either delete the in- text citation or provide full reference details following journal style. |
| Q4 | The reference "Benton, 1982" is cited in the text but is not listed in the references list. Please either delete the in- text citation or provide full reference details following journal style. |
| Q5 | Please check whether acknowledgements have been set correctly. |
| Q6 | The disclosure statement has been inserted. Please correct if this is inaccurate. |
| Q7 | Please provide missing page range for reference "Harding 1993" references list entry. |
| Q8 | The reference "Vandenberghe 2019" is listed in the references list but is not cited in the text. Please either cite the reference or remove it from the references list. |
| Q9 | Please provide missing page range for reference "Vandenberghe 2022" references list entry. |



Critical realist hermeneutics

Frédéric Vandenberghe^{a,b}

Q1 ^aSociology, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; ^bMax Weber Kolleg, Erfurt, Germany

ABSTRACT

The article resituates critical realism within critical theory and proposes a tripartite articulation of British critical realism, German critical theory and French anti-utilitarianism. It suggests that the critique of positivism has to be enhanced with a critique of utilitarianism and makes the case that both critiques have to be grounded in a hermeneutic approach to social life. By taking the symbolic constitution of the world seriously, critical realist hermeneutics offers a *via media* between naturalism and anti-naturalism, explanation and interpretation, universalism and relativism, materialism and idealism, realism and constructivism.

KEYWORDS

Critical realism; critical theory; critical hermeneutics; MAUSS; ontological turn

Critical realism (henceforth CR) is a collective adventure, although it started out on the quads of Oxford in the 1970s when Roy Bhaskar laid the basis for it by systematising the various critiques of positivism. Since then, critical realism has influenced at least three generations of social theorists, first in the U.K. and more recently also in the United States. Although Bhaskar is, and remains, the central figure, CR is not identical to Bhaskarism. It transcends his figure and his writings. His legacy consists of a rare combination of philosophical seriousness and political progressiveness that continues to attract young scholars and inspire older ones. Singular, Bhaskar himself was a multiple and colourful figure with a somewhat erratic intellectual trajectory. Both *A Realist Theory of Science* (Bhaskar 1978) and *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Bhaskar 1979) were well received and acclaimed as important contributions to the philosophy of science.

As Bhaskar's writings became more elusive, critical realism was transformed from within into the system of dialectical critical realism. While *Dialectics* (Bhaskar 1993) contained interesting insights and developments, the system itself tended towards closure. One had to take it in or leave it. Many left the movement. When the dialectics finally transcended itself in a spiritual turn, more attrition led to further closure of the ranks. Only few people remained and tied together ontological realism, dialectics and spirituality into a single package. Paradoxically, the orthodoxy of CR explains its actual relevance and resilience. As a package, it cannot be sold. Those who only want to keep 'basic' or first wave critical realism to give their research a solid philosophical footing and the trappings of a science without otherwise changing too much, quickly ran into the politics, dialectics and spirituality. CR is not an alternative to positivism. It is a scientific, social and spiritual

Q2 CONTACT Frédéric Vandenberghe  fredericvdbrio@gmail.com

© 2022 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

movement that wants to change not only our conception of sciences, but also the world, starting with ourselves.

I discovered critical realism in the 1990s and skipped the dialectical transition at the turn of the millennium. Given my travels on the Indian subcontinent, I was able to tune into the philosophy of metaReality (Vandenberghe 2022), however, and understand it as an experience-based philosophy of Being. When IACR organized its annual conference in Brazil in 2009, where I settled in 2005, I met Roy Bhaskar for the first time. We bonded immediately and gave a couple of courses together on CR, first in Rio de Janeiro and then again at the first 'crash course' of the Critical Realism Network at Yale. Last time I saw Roy was at the IACR conference in London in 2014. I imagine he's having heavenly conversations with Eric Olin Wright and David Graeber about realist utopias, eudemonia and the end of times. I have known Margaret Archer since 1994. Her morphogenetic theory helped me to take my distance from Anthony Giddens's structuration theory (Vandenberghe 1997–98). When she published her work on reflexivity, I wrote an enthusiastic review of 'the Archers' (Vandenberghe 2005). Following Jürgen Habermas, I interpreted her work on the internal conversation as a form of 'intrasubjective intersubjectivity' that introduces reflexivity between the field and the habitus and mediates the relation between the lifeworld and the system. With Gadamer, I argued that we always already are in conversation and that the conversation is in us (Vandenberghe 2014, 100–53). I also claimed that hermeneutics is compatible with CR and defended the strong thesis that we don't have, but *are* the conversation. In 2019, Margaret Archer and I co-edited a French reader on critical realism (Archer and Vandenberghe 2019).

I am a social theorist and a soft line critical realist. As a fellow traveller for three decades, I will look back and offer a retrospective of my intellectual encounters with CR, exposing freely what CR can do for social theory and how in the process it can be reformulated and opened up to other currents in the social sciences. The article, which is based on the keynote I had the honour to give at the IACR Annual Conference in South Africa in 2021, is divided into three sections. In the first section, I will present CR together with the second generation of the Frankfurt School and the French Anti-Utilitarian Movement in the Social Sciences (MAUSS). I will argue that critical theory (*senso latu*) needs to combine anti-positivism in the natural sciences with anti-utilitarianism in the social sciences. In the second section, I will look at the philosophical foundations of the social sciences and discuss the ontology, epistemology and normativity of CR. Parsing the 'holy trinity' of ontological realism, epistemic relativism and judgmental rationality I will suggest some hermeneutic amendments. In the third part, I will reposition CR with regards to the current developments in social theory. I will reclaim Bourdieu's brand of critical sociology as a prime example of realist social theory and propose a peace treaty with Bruno Latour. Finally, in the conclusion, I draw some of the threads together and defend the 'realist embrace' as a dialogical gesture of inclusion that makes CR stronger by opening up to new developments in philosophy, the social sciences and the human sciences. The whole article is guided by the idea of the possibility of a critical realist hermeneutics. By taking seriously the symbolic constitution of the social world, it anchors CR in the lifeworld. Without ever abandoning the quest for truth, it relativizes the primacy of science to access the world.

1. Critical theory, critical realism and anti-utilitarianism

CR is part of critical theory. Broadly understood, critical theory refers to the whole set of radical writings of Marxist, post-Marxist, post-structuralist and post-colonial authors one finds in the rich and expanding catalogue of Verso Books. In its attempt to think through the ontology of the present, critical theory is inevitably a child of its times. As capitalism evolves, so does critical theory. Within critical theory, there are different strands, associated with the main traditions of continental philosophy. As a social theorist, working across various language traditions, I have a long-standing interest in the Frankfurt School in Germany and the Anti-Utilitarian Movement in the Social Sciences (MAUSS) in France. My contention is that CR can learn from these national traditions and that together they can advance the ontological, normative and political agenda of critical theory. One way or another, all are humanist movements on the Left, concerned with the social pathologies of alienation and looking for constructive alternatives to the industrial capitalism of the twentieth century. In all of them, the critique of science is only a first step in the reconstruction of societies.

Narrowly understood, critical theory (in the municipal sense of the term) refers to a series of thinkers associated with the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research (Wiggershaus 1994). Originally, critical theory was but a code word for a heterodox brand of Marxism characterized by weak mysticism and strong messianic tendencies. In the wake of Georg Lukács' (1967) *History and Class Consciousness*, the members of the Frankfurt School rediscovered the young Marx via Hegel. The national-socialist regime put the Hegelian philosophy seriously to the test, however. The fascist incorporation of the working class invalidated the Marxist philosophy of history and brought the dialectic to a grinding standstill. The first interdisciplinary research programme of the Institute for Social Research was developed to analyse, diagnose and criticize the structures of domination that blocked emancipation. A rational society was possible in theory; in practice, however, reason increasingly was reduced to its instrumental dimension. The end of the Second World War did not lead Horkheimer or Adorno to fundamentally revise their worldview. The dialectic remained frozen in the tracks of Auschwitz and Dachau. Domination took on a universal dimension and did not leave another escape from alienation and reification than guilt, melancholy, and longing for the complete Other.

Jürgen Habermas, the main representative of the second generation of the Frankfurt School, questioned the bleak diagnosis of the times on metatheoretical grounds (Habermas 1987). The problem with Adorno and Horkheimer is that they did not sufficiently distinguish between two types of relationships to the world: an instrumental one that is ego-centred and relates the subject to an object that it tries to master on the one hand and a communicative one that is mediated by language and connects the subjects to subjects as partners of interlocution on the other hand. According to Habermas, the emancipatory interest of reason finds its undertow in *logos*, that is in speech-acts and the validity claims they raise as the interlocutors try to come to a common understanding of the world. The discourse theory of truth can be considered an idealization of the conditions of felicity that make a communicative quest of truth possible; by extension, a discourse ethics that complements the theory of truth also philosophically sustains the progressive realization of a parliamentary democracy that joins representation and participation in active citizenship.

The Anti-Utilitarian Movement in the Social Science (MAUSS) is a School of thought in France that extends the critique of Marxism of *Socialisme et barbarie*, the journal founded by Cornelius Castoriadis, Claude Lefort and Jean-Francois Lyotard, with a critique of economic thinking in the social sciences (Caillé 2020). The reduction of reason to its strategic dimension complements the critique of instrumental reason of the Frankfurt School. It underscores the symbolic constitution of reality and relativizes the modern world-view as a particular symbolic configuration among others. Western rationalism is as imaginary as the other worldviews. It is therefore essential to excavate the symbolic structures of scientism, naturalism and positivism that constitute the world in such a way that it becomes calculable, predictable and controllable. In the social sciences, strategic reasoning finds its instantiation in the calculus of rational choice. It removes the symbolic layers of reality and leaves behind the *homo economicus* as a shadow of the human being. As an alternative to utilitarianism, the anti-utilitarian movement conceives of the human being not as a calculator (or, at least, not in the first place), but as someone who is driven by moral sentiments, like sympathy, care and generosity that transcend egoism and interconnect the humans in a community of solidarity. The MAUSS takes its clues from Marcel Mauss' (2016) famous *Essay on the Gift* that showed how symbolic representations of reality and the norms of reciprocity configure social practices that constitute society and tie its members together, though they can also tear it apart (Vandenberghe 2021).

I like to think of critical theory as a two-pronged investigation of the conditions of possibility both of rational knowledge and of a rational society. With Kant, and following his *Critique of Pure Reason*, the reflection is of a transcendental nature: What must knowledge be like for science to be possible and valid? In the traces of Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*, the investigation is social and concerns the systemic impediments of social structures that hinder the advent of a just and decent society. The critique of injustices and social pathologies that damage the possibility of a good life aims to make visible the 'degenerative mechanisms' and to reveal how they work, how they are produced and reproduced. It is understood that the objectivation of social structures enhances knowledge and, possibly, also raises consciousness and agency. To the extent that social reproduction and change are dependent on knowledge, both the Kantian and the Marxist critiques converge in a 'quasi-transcendental' inquiry into the conditions of transformative social knowledge, as one finds it in Jürgen Habermas' (1971) *Knowledge and Human Interests*. This inquiry is not transcendental, but quasi-transcendental, because the categories of reason are themselves produced in history by social agents. As knowledge about society changes, so does society, and given the reflexivity of social epistemics, one may draw the inference that it is by changing the concepts of society that societies can be intentionally changed too.

Critical realism shares this emancipatory interest in knowledge with other critical theories. Unlike other approaches that overshoot the mark, its critique of positivism does not come with any endorsement of post-modernism. Thanks to its no-nonsense approach to science and its trenchant critique of the epistemic fallacy, CR offers the best bulwark against the slippery slopes of deconstruction, constructivism and post-truthism. It is sympathetic to subaltern knowledges, but does not reject the rigours of science as a colonial legacy. CR acknowledges that there are other ways of knowing the world beyond science, like poetry and religion, but it hardly or never questions science as such. Like Habermas, Bhaskar remains faithful to the radical project of the Enlightenment and its promise of

emancipation from 'self-incurred immaturity'. Its ontological depth can correct some of the idealist tendencies of Hegelian Marxism and put it 'back on its feet'. Conversely, the discourse theory of truth and discourse ethics can strengthen the justification of its normative grounds. By taking seriously the symbolic constitution of the world, I will argue later, it allows for a better balance between the realism, relativism and rationalism that make up the tripod of CR's philosophy of science.

If critical theory has to combine Kantian and Marxist motifs in a philosophy of emancipation, it also needs to join its critique of positivism to a critique of utilitarianism (Vandenbergh 2017). Both positivism and utilitarianism are united by their militant scientism. They believe that science does not only describe and explain the world, but that it needs to remake it in accordance with its precepts. Scientism imposes its grid on the world. Through obfuscation of its own constitutive practices, it reifies its grid and surreptitiously identifies it with the world. While positivism overreaches by forcing its deductive-nomological model (aka 'covering law model') upon all the sciences, utilitarianism colonizes the social sciences with models that come straight from economics.

Incidentally, Karl Popper advocated both positivism and utilitarianism in his work (Vandenbergh 2010). Positivism is the standard philosophy of science. It shows forth in standard scientific articles with their zero hypotheses, their correlations between dependent and independent variables, and their statistical tables. It also appears in ontological assumptions of a linear universe, in the epistemology of the covering-law model, in the normative assumptions of axiological neutrality, in the technocratic assumptions of policy makers and, last but not least, in the philosophical anthropology with its Humean conception of the human as a kind of living billiard ball.

With its solid critique of the philosophical assumptions of positivism, critical realism has not only acted as an 'underlabourer' of the D-N model, but I want to suggest also as its 'undertaker.' By introducing a new conception of causality and breaking with the empiricist perception of the experimental sciences, scientific realism has defeated empiricist realism on its own terrain. It offers a coherent transcendental-dialectical approach of reality that points beyond the 'Erklären-Verstehen controversy' (Apel 1985). Thereby, it brings the *Positivismusstreit* to a proper end. Coming after neo-Kantianism (Weber), neo-positivism (Popper), neo-Wittgensteinian philosophy (Winch) and critical theory (Adorno and Habermas), critical realism is the grand finale that finishes off positivism and ends the positivist struggle.

As Popper had to admit that the covering law-model does not really apply to the social sciences, he developed an alternative model of explanation for the human sciences. Instead of straightforwardly arguing for naturalism and extending the covering law model to the social sciences, he developed an alternative model of explanation and introduced the 'situational logics' (Popper 1957) of rational choice as second best. As a substitute for Auguste Comte's social physics, he thus had nothing better to offer than social economics.

The main problem with rational choice is that it universalizes a particular vision of the human being that is clearly tied to the 'possessive individualism' of the emerging market society of the Victorian epoch. Its analytical models ensconce the methodological fiction of an 'unencumbered' or 'rugged' individual and turn it into a reality. Owing to a lack of reflexivity of its own social, cultural and historical presuppositions, rational choice eliminates the symbolic structures and the normative principles that guide social action from its

models. It only maintains the relations between the ends and the means, while leaving the rational determination of the ends out of its purview. That inevitably biases and binds its rationality to the existing ends. By projecting the context of its emergence into its presuppositions, it brings into existence what it presupposes. Human capabilities are reinterpreted as human resources that can be shuffled on a spreadsheet. As a result, the human being appears now, according to Foucault's genealogy of advanced liberalism, as 'one that is eminently governable' (Foucault 2004, 274).

Drawing on social anthropology and cultural ethnographies of the gift, the anti-utilitarian movement shows that society precedes the individual. Individualism is itself a social and moral fact of modern societies. It is not that individuals did not exist before modernity, but as an axiological constellation, the valuation of the individual over and above the community is a rather recent phenomenon (Dumont 1986). It coincides with the emergence of capitalism and the destruction of traditional forms of life. Underneath of capitalism, the 'spirit of the gift' is still blowing, however (Godbout and Caillé 1998). The triple obligation of the gift – 'to give, to accept and to return the gift' – continues to structure practices of everyday life. It animates a whole symbolic economy that has nothing to do with the exchange value of commodity capitalism. Words, services and other courtesies are exchanged with the intention or with the effect of strengthening the social bond. Those ordinary acts of mutuality constitute some kind of 'baseline communism' that is the foundation of all human sociability (Graeber 2014, 94–102). No doubt, there's some lingering romanticism in the anthropology of reciprocity and its radical critique of utilitarian reason. Both critical realism and critical theory offer a useful counterpoint. The critique of utilitarianism is compatible with the critique of industrial capitalism of critical theory, though not with a principled rejection of reason. For both Bhaskar and Habermas, reason is not the instrument of domination, but the organon of emancipation.

2. Metatheory for the social sciences

CR does not so much offer a theory of society as a metatheory for the social sciences. There are different kinds of metatheory, but I understand it here as an investigation into the philosophical presuppositions of the social sciences along the lines of Ted Benton's *Philosophical Foundations of the Three Sociologies* (1977). In this section, I want to take a closer look at the ontological, epistemological and normative presuppositions of CR. I will analyse them in dialogue with Habermasian and MAUSSian critical theories and defend the possibility of a critical realist hermeneutics. I will also assess the respective merits of CR and critical theory with regard to the 'holy trinity' of ontological realism, epistemic relativism and judgmental rationalism (Archer et al. 2016). Let's take them in turn.

Ontological Realism: By means of a transcendental investigation of experiments in the natural sciences, Bhaskar (1977) establishes that the world cannot be a contingent conca-

Q3 tenation of elementary facts. Science does not seek empirical correlations and constant conjunctions between events. Rather, it seeks to establish the existence of generative mechanisms that explain the correlation between the events as a necessary one, i.e. one that is being caused by virtue of the structural workings of the causal mechanism that connects causes to consequences.

In *The Possibility of Naturalism*, Bhaskar (1979) explored the ontological differences between natural and social kinds, indicating the limits of a transposition of models

from the natural to the social sciences. Unlike natural structures, social structures are human-made. They are historically transient and depend on concepts and agency for their reproduction and transformation. In Bhaskar, the reference to the agency- and concept-dependency of social structures is a thin version of hermeneutics. The argument comes straight from ordinary language philosophy (Wittgenstein and especially Peter Winch (1958)). It waters down the import of the 'linguistic turn' in an analytical fashion.

In Heidegger and Gadamer, hermeneutics is not just a method for the interpretation of texts (Gadamer 1975). It is an ontological mode of Being-in-the-world. The world is always already a human world, endowed with meaning. Saying that humans endow the world with meaning gives the impression that there's no meaning before the endowment. Meaning is part of the world and in the world. Hermeneutics is a holistic phenomenology of the lifeworld. The symbolic constitution of the lifeworld is a collective anonymous act that precedes, structures and informs social practices from within. The interpretation of meaning is therefore an interpretation of what is already understood. What has to be understood is the world-disclosure through language – the world as it appears in language. This world is not in the mind, but it is out there in all its splendour. The world is disclosed in language and appears in the light of language. That does not mean that everything is language. Language is the transparent medium in which the world is given to us as a human world. Language and the world are two sides of the same thing. The world only gives itself to us through language; through language, it appears as a world that is ordered, structured and meaningful.

At the limit of naturalism, we thus encounter hermeneutics and the symbolic constitution of the world. The impossibility of naturalism in the human sciences does not invalidate critical realism. Rather it qualifies it. Given our symbolic access to the world, the transitive dimension and the intransitive dimension of knowledge cannot be neatly separated out. In the socio-historical world, the transitive is constitutive of the intransitive. That does not mean that science does not have access to something that exists outside of language and does not depend on human activities. When we consider science as a social activity, we necessarily presuppose a form of life in which scientific research is possible. Even before the scientists disclose the world as a world composed of myriads of generative mechanisms, active at various levels of reality, the world is already there as 'ground and horizon' of their activities (Husserl 1989). Like any other activities, scientific activities presuppose the existence of a world that makes sense. The world whose mechanisms they try to disclose is a world that is systematically objectivated, translated in scientific language, theoretically reformulated and observed thanks to the intervention of 'phenomenotechnics' that make the mechanisms visible and tangible in their effects. It is not the same world in which they live, though the world as it is reconstructed, reconceptualized and observed by science may appear in the lifeworld as a conceptual construct and technical realization.

Hermeneutics is compatible with critical realism. All things considered, it represents an idealist version of realism (Vandenbergh 2014, 22–30 and 41–4). It encompasses critical realism and it relativizes it, by showing that the scientific interpretation of the world is only one way of disclosing the world among others. That does not disqualify science; it qualifies it. As far as we know – and the current Covid-crisis confirms it – science is the most rational means humans have encountered to know and master the real. Conversely, thanks to CR, hermeneutics is brought back into the world. Language has a referent.

Unlike structuralism and deconstruction, hermeneutics contests that there's nothing outside of language. To the contrary, what appears in language is the world. *Aletheia* or the deep truth of the world becomes manifest when language does not cover or hide the truth, but when the truth is revealed in and thanks to language.

320 Bhaskar has often expressed his sympathies for hermeneutics. Coming from a more analytic tradition, he has never taken it really seriously. With the exception of William Outhwaite (1987), realists have tried to corner structuralists and post-structuralists, but have not really tried to introduce realist arguments into hermeneutics. A critical hermeneutics is one that uses critical theory to analyse how social structures of domination interfere in
325 the symbolic constitution of the world. The former impinge on the latter not from without, but from within through ideological deformation. Causes work their way through symbolic structures and affect the reasons for acting. By making visible how causes affect the reasons of action, one can at least in part explain the reproduction of social structures. The objectivation of the 'degenerative mechanisms' and the exhibition
330 of symbolic violence are meant to raise consciousness and awareness of the mechanisms and thereby to partially deactivate them. Once again, we can see how knowledge about society and society itself are intimately related. *Ceteris paribus* social change occurs when social knowledge changes. The sociology of knowledge is therefore inherent to social change.

335 *Epistemic relativism*: The sociological investigation of how social power relations organize the production of truth in ways that produce systematic distortions of reality (ideology) is the topic of social epistemology. CR explicitly mentions epistemic relativism in its Trinitarian formula, but as it systematically foregrounds ontology to the detriment of epistemology, it does not really know what to do with it (Albert et al. 2020). CR affirms
340 again and again that scientists may have different visions of the world; they nevertheless have to presuppose that these are different perspectives on the *same* world. Without that ontological substrate, scientific progress is unthinkable, according to Bhaskar.

This may be true for the natural sciences, but I don't think it holds for the social sciences. In the social world, the distinction between the transitive and the intransitive
345 dimension of knowledge breaks down. Knowledge about the object is part of the object of knowledge. One can try to salvage the binary by defending the quasi-intransitivity of knowledge and argue with Margaret Archer (1988) that the social structures the social scientist encounters in the present embody concepts and practices of past generations. That is obviously correct, but given that knowledge is constitutive of the practices
350 that make social structures, the ontology of the social nevertheless questions the distinction between the knowledge of the object and the object of knowledge.

With standpoint theory and postcolonialism we may, moreover, assume that not all visions on the world and not all versions of reality are equally positioned. Due to power differentials, they do not all have the same chances of being received. If we introduce
355 some of the mechanics of critical realism into discussions on different epistemologies, such as feminist epistemologies (Harding 1993) or epistemologies of the South (Santos de Souza 2014), we may be able to explain the inequality between different worldviews and different versions of reality as a consequence of social structures and 'degenerative mechanisms' that skew the interpretation of reality. The demand to level
360 the field so that feminine and other subaltern voices can be heard is a social one. It is a question of justice. The amplification of positions and standpoints may lead to a revision

of the epistemic criteria and even to new truths, but I don't think it affects the principle of judgmental rationality. To the contrary, the inclusion of voices strengthens the presumption of universality of validity claims that have passed the test of discursive justification.

365 CR can handle other epistemologies. It has more difficulties with the comparative metaphysics and multiple ontologies of post-structuralist anthropologists (Charbonnier, Salmon, and Skafish 2017). For CR, the idea that different epistemologies can lead to different ontologies epitomizes the 'epistemic fallacy'. But if one shifts from critical realism to critical hermeneutics and accepts the idea that different conceptions of the real are themselves constitutive of the real, the multiplication of worlds is, perhaps, less shocking. The sciences with their experiments and their objectivation of nature are not the only way to get to the real. Nature can be experienced through the senses. Its qualities can be seen, felt, smelled or otherwise appreciated in different ways (walks in the countryside, art, meditation). The suggestion that these 'secondary qualities' are merely subjective and that science has to uncover the 'primary qualities' that underlie perception, is relatively recent, even in the West. Not that the distinction between subject and object or between primary and secondary qualities is not known elsewhere, but it may be drawn differently, and without the metaphysical guarantees that science offers.

370 If we dislocate the experimenter and the scientist from its privileged position, we get access to different experiences, different cosmologies and different ontologies than scientific ones. When anthropologists like Philippe Descola, Bruno Latour and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro invoke 'multinaturalism', they want to point out that the idea of Nature as an independent realm is not universal. In other cultures, the separation between nature, culture and society is not drawn in the same way. In animism and perspectivism, the prime examples of counter-ontology, spirits and matter are mingled. Nature is not inert, but alive; it is animated and ablaze with spirits. All entities are part of a living community of humans, spirits and things. From the point of view of CR, these ontologies can only qualify as ontologies in a metaphorical sense. If ontology is just another word for phenomenology, as David Graeber (2015, 23) correctly asserts, then we can accept that anthropologists describe the pre-predicative experience of pristine lifeworlds, before they were invaded, occupied and expropriated by Europeans. If the ontological turn in anthropology is meant as 'a return to the things themselves', as peoples experienced them before Western science supplanted their indigenous knowledges and common sense, then CR will be on its side in its struggles against oppression.

380 The challenge of cultural anthropology is more radical, however. It turns the tables and submits Western modernity to a reverse anthropology. The point of reverse anthropology is to make the familiar strange and to deprovincialize Western ways of world-making by analysing them as part of a cosmology, not as an ontology. From the perspective of comparative metaphysics, critical realism itself now appears as a kind of phenomenology. Its ontology is the best account we have of Western scientific practice. Its vindication of naturalism does no more refute the natural attitude than it contests the common sense not only of your average scientist, but probably of ordinary inhabitants of the modern world as well. By saying this I do not want to demean CR's accomplishments. I only want to indicate that its metaphysical presuppositions (such as the distinction between essences and appearances, mechanisms and events, transitive and intransitive dimensions, etc.) do not contest, but express the Western cosmology.

385

390

395

400

405

From the point of a reverse anthropology that investigates the Western ways of world-making, the way it has organized the relations between different entities (such as subjects and objects, persons and things, humans and animals) recoups and redoubles the naturalist worldview. It's not easy to think when the very categories of your universe are relativized and judged as being complicit in the naturalization of a cosmic order, but that is what it takes to preserve the beauty and the wisdom of other cultures and other world-views that have survived the destruction of their own worlds. What is called for is an enlarged humanism that embraces the elements that Western rationalism has excluded from its very concept of humanity – not just the other humans, but also the plants, the animals, the spirits and the Gods that sustain it. However difficult intercultural and intercivilizational dialogues may be, through friction and misunderstandings, they expand the universe and compose new arrangements and new worlds.

Judgmental rationalism: The idea that through dialogue and discussion one can arrive at mutual understanding tempers epistemic relativism. This idea is a regulative one. In reality, debate and discussion may lead to more division. As long as the discussants are willing to talk and listen to each other, they are able to keep violence at bay. The idea that in conversation a rational form of life is anticipated in which all participants, independently of their race, gender, creed or culture, can equally and freely participate in a common quest for the truth has been most eloquently formulated by Jürgen Habermas. Leaving aside the complexity of his philosophical system, the basic intuition of his universal pragmatics, which reconstructs the preconditions of a rational agreement on the state of the world, the validity of norms and the sincerity of the speakers, can be expressed and compacted in a single phrase: 'Agreement is built in human language as its telos' (Habermas 1981, I: 387). When a consensus on epistemic, normative and expressive issues is reached, we can counterfactually presume that through exchange of arguments the truth has been attained – until it is questioned by the next speaker.

From a realist point of view, however, Habermas significantly underplays the ontological dimension of science. Following the semiotics of C.S. Peirce, his discursive theory of truth assumes that a consensus among scientists can function as an index of the truth. This assumption is unwarranted, at least when it comes to the natural sciences. In the absence of a referential dimension of truth, the correspondence between statements about the world and the state of the world cannot be ascertained. It is only if we presuppose scientists talk about the same world and consider all the necessary evidence that they can arrive at a consensus. It is not because the scientists arrive at a consensus that we can presume that they have arrived at the truth. Rather, it is the reverse: it is because all the evidence points to the real and, hence, to the truth that they arrive at a consensus.

Once again, in the social sciences, the situation is more complicated. Given that we have no access to a world that is independent from the lifeworld, it is the status of the latter that is a stake. The acknowledgement that lifeworlds have to be disclosed through language and that one can only access meanings, norms and experiences from within a form of life does not necessarily lead to complete relativism. Thanks to language, lifeworlds are not impermeable to each other. Unlike Wittgenstein and Winch, hermeneuticians believe that horizons of meaning can be 'fused'. Through dialogue, standpoints can be exchanged and alien viewpoints understood. Dialogue between cultures (and also within cultures) may be difficult, but not impossible. One should not

assume a priori that frontiers between communities cannot be breached, that a consensus cannot be reached or that every dissensus is necessarily irrational. Acceptance that a consensus is not possible under given circumstances is not defeatist. A society that actively embraces pluralism and practices tolerance, not in spite, but because of disagreement, is one in which the principle of rational judgment has been institutionalized and incorporated into a democratic *modus vivendi* (Forst 2013).

The insistence on a phenomenological and hermeneutic disclosure of reality from within a form of life does not preclude an objectivating analysis of social structures and causal mechanisms that impinge on everyday life. It only means that for ontological reasons the perspective of the participant has epistemic priority over the perspective of the observer. Without this phenomenological-hermeneutic grounding, the analyst's constructions are insufficiently tied to the social structures they want to change. The task of the social analyst is not only to describe and interpret the lifeworld, but also to explain and to critically evaluate it. In all cases, the second order concepts of the analyst have to be reflexively tied to the first order concepts and practices of the agents themselves that constitute society.

Unlike traditional critical theory and critical realism, which remain indebted to Marxist forms of ideology critique, critical hermeneutics does not only reveal the deep structures of domination that systematically distort communication from within. It complements the structural analysis of ideological distortions that affect processes of meaning making, normative judgment and expression within a given society with a more cultural analysis that seeks to uncover the deep subtexts through intercultural and civilizational comparison. By dislocating the analysis from political economy to cultural anthropology, depth hermeneutics shifts the attention from alienation to estrangement. The dialogue with other cultures diminishes alterity while accentuating self-estrangement. In post-colonial times, the deconstruction of one's own *Weltanschauung* potentially liberates one from one's own ethnocentric conceit. However humbling and painful the experience of self-estrangement initially may be, by levelling the field of interpretations, it opens up the space for other standpoints and other ways of worldmaking. It is expected that in the long run, when all is said and done, the dialectics of self-estrangement will lead to a discovery of our common humanity and thereby, indirectly, also to an alleviation of alienation.

3. Realist critical social theory

The development of critical realism has to be situated and understood in the context of debates of the 1970s within the philosophy of science, British social theory and the New Left. *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Bhaskar 1979) takes up the dialogue with different theoretical formations that were then at the centre of the discussion of the philosophy of the social sciences at the time: the French School of historical epistemology, the structuralist Marxism of Louis Althusser, the causal powers approach of Rom Harré, Peter Winch's neo-Wittgenstein approach to interpretative sociology and Donald Davidson's argument that reasons can be causes. Within social theory, Jeffrey Alexander, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann presented their theoretical syntheses around the same time. They were preceded by important epistemological preambles: *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (Habermas [1967] 1988), *The Craft of Sociology* (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron [1968] 1991), *New Rules of Sociological*

Method (Giddens 1976), *Theoretical Logic in Sociology* (Alexander 1982) and *Social Systems* (Luhmann [1984] 1995).

500 Bhaskar proposed an original argument with important repercussions on British social theory. His demonstration that a non-positivist naturalism is possible opened the way for a productive reinterpretation of the classics of sociology (Keat and Urry 1975, Benton Q4 1982). Properly interpreted, Marx and Durkheim can be joined to work out a robust conception of social structures, while thanks to Wittgenstein's theory of practices, Weber can be refurbished to relink structure to agency. By introducing Aristotle's four causes into Marxism, Bhaskar developed his transformational model of social action (TMSA) and over- 505 came in a single move the opposition between the humanism of the young Marx and the structuralism of the mature Marx. Instead of developing a transcendental argument for the ontology of the social sciences, remaining agnostic about the ontics and the specifics of sociology, he took sides and conceived of his work as a scientific contribution to the rejuvenation of the Marxist tradition.

510 Like Giddens's structuration theory, TMSA wedded Saussure and Wittgenstein into a zipper that linked agency to structure. With a stronger philosophical grounding in dialectical materialism, Bhaskar was able to avoid the reductionism that vitiated Giddens' ontology of practices. For sure, Giddens had a better grasp of the hermeneutic tradition than Bhaskar. Instead of proposing a realist reinterpretation of hermeneutics, the Cambridge 515 sociologist latched on to structuralism and incorporated its nominalist conception of structure as a 'set of rules and resources' into his processual theory of society. As a consequence, as Margaret Archer (1988, 1995) has pointed out over and over again, he was not able to fully account for the dualism between agency and structure that characterizes modern societies with their alienations and reifications that fracture the joint between 520 the lifeworld and the system. It is my contention that hermeneutics is compatible with CR. It could be redeployed as a depth hermeneutics that complements the Marxist critique of alienation and reification (Vandenberghe 2009) with a self-critical reflection of its own cultural and civilizational presuppositions.

525 We may safely assume that a consequent actualization of *The Possibility of Naturalism* would have to take into account not so much the work of Louis Althusser, but of Michel Foucault; not of Anthony Giddens, but of Pierre Bourdieu; and it would also have to substitute Bruno Latour for Richard Rorty. For all purposes, CR should claim the critical sociology of Bourdieu as a stellar example of realist social theory. It is true that the rationalism of the French School of historical epistemology (Canguilhem, Bachelard) – which he 530 shares with Foucault's archeology of knowledge – and the structuralism of Cassirer and Lévi-Strauss place him squarely in a neo-Kantian lineage (Vandenberghe 2014, 198–245). Notwithstanding the conventionalist strategemes ('as if') he constantly uses to deflect from making of strong ontological claims, deep down he's a critical theorist and a social realist.

535 Like Bhaskar, he's looking for a solid scientific alternative to positivism and hermeneutics. Both his concepts of field and habitus refer to generative mechanisms that condition social practices. They are real, but as they can work at cross-purposes, their causal power may remain unactualized. Over and against common sense perceptions of reality, they have to be systematically constructed by the analyst. If they are to be more than 540 figments of creative imagination, one has to assume that they correspond to something

real. They usually cannot be observed directly, but their causal powers are manifest in their consequences.

545 All this is compatible with CR – provided one removes the critique of ‘central conflation’ that Margaret Archer (1988, 1995) has directed against one of her former mentors. This critique may be valid for the habitus-practice connection, which is indeed reminiscent of Giddens’ structuration theory, but does not hold for the articulation of the field and the habitus. In Bourdieu, the field is always the unit of analysis. One starts with the field as an objective a system of relations between social positions and only at the next stage will one introduce the habitus, its subjective counterpart, as a system of dispositions
550 that structure the practices that reproduce the field. It should be noted that, although the field is the result of practices that are conditioned by the habitus, the field precedes the habitus in time. The principle of analytical dualism is thereby respected.

555 As Bourdieu has fully incorporated hermeneutics and phenomenology in his theory of the habitus, his critical sociology is also compatible with critical hermeneutics. Displaying once again an amazing sense of theoretical synthesis, Bourdieu has been able to articulate not only hermeneutics to phenomenology, but also to structuralism into a coherent theory of symbolic representations that staddles the divide between the objectivism of the observer’s position and the subjectivism of the participant’s position. For sure, in order to maintain the communication between the analyst and the actors, the observer and the participants, one would want to bring in more reflexivity in the system than Bourdieu allows for. Reflexivity is not the privilege of the analyst who sees through the system.
560 Actors as well have a critical sense. They have a capacity to distance themselves from structures of domination that oppress them and they do not always act out structures without thinking. In between structures and practices, the mediation of meditation is always possible, as Margaret Archer (2003) has brilliantly shown in her social psychology of internal conversations.
565

570 Since the ‘science wars’ of the last century, Bruno Latour has come a long way. As science studies settled in the wealthy suburbs of normal research, the internal fights between the warring schools of STS subsided. The escalation to ever-higher levels of irrationalism was halted, at least on the Left. Sceptics on the right took over the scurrilous tactics of provocation and rapidly the trenches of constructivism of the ‘first science wars’ led to the rabbit holes of post-truth of the ‘second science wars’. The opposition between the ‘old rationalist left’ (CR and Bourdieu, both mandated and represented by Sokal and Bricmont) and the ‘new materialism’ (Deleuze, Latour, de Landa) was replaced
575 by a compromise that dislocated the positions and made new alliances possible between critical and speculative realisms. Thanks to Latour’s charm and ingenuity, social theorists came to understand that realism and constructivism do not so much oppose as complement each other. Structure and process are the same, analysed now as a thing (entity realism) and then as a fluid, an energy or a pulse (vitalism). From the point of view of
580 CR, constructivism appears as a form of dynamic actualism – let’s call it transactualism. Everything flows on the same plane and there’s no emergence. Constructivism does not investigate transfactual structures, but the actual processes that undergird and sustain the structures. The problem with constructivism is that it keeps its rhizomatic ontology flat and flowing, even if it’s approach to structuration allows via ‘blackboxing’
585 (Latour) for the seriation, striation and reification of fluxes of assemblages into emergent structures. From the point of view of Actor Network Theory, these structures are analysed

as a provisional end station in a never-ending process of reification and dereification, territorialization and deterritorialization. While CR focusses on structures as finished products (*terminus a quo*), ANT dynamically describes the socio-technical process of material construction that produce the structure (*terminus ad quem*). Like in a film that is played backwards, it shows the actual events and actants that fabricate the system through continuous association of humans and non-humans in a wobbly assemblage that covers the world. Although one should not underestimate the tensions between transactualism (structuralism) and transactuality (pragmatism), assemblage theories show that realism and constructivism can complement each other and potentially be combined in a new theoretical agencement (Rutzou and Elder-Vass 2019).

As Latour became more and more preoccupied with the climatic emergency, his constructivism gave way to a form of speculative realism. Instead of denying climate change, he brought in Planet Earth as a mega-actant that vociferously 'objected' to the treatment that humans had inflicted on it (Latour 2017). In real time, through a cascade of representations, the sciences were establishing the social destruction of nature as an uncontroversial fact and a serious matter of concern. How exactly the sciences were coordinating their observations in overlapping networks of metrology that confirm the evidence now became the object of science studies. Other modes of existence beyond science were systematically mapped (Latour 2013). The mononaturalism of science was overtaken and relativized as an important mode of worldmaking among others. Engulfed in a multiverse as one of its constituents, science, religion, technology, literature etc. became enrolled and embroiled in an exuberant public anthropology that investigates the *anthropos* in the age of the Anthropocene.

4. Conclusion: the realist embrace

Sociology is a discipline. As such, it is more than a discourse and less than a science (Baechler 2004). It shares this characteristic with philosophy and history. Instead of defining sociology as the science of society, with all the risks of scientism that this definition implies, I would rather deflate its pretensions and say that it is the collective consciousness and, perhaps, even the conscience of society (the French term *conscience* encompasses both senses of the term). With Hegel, I would say that sociology partakes of the objective spirit: It expresses, processes and articulates it. It is a discourse that comes from the depths of society and passes through academia for reformulation in accordance with the disciplinary canons. It often stays there for further and further refinement, though, eventually, it may return to society via the public sphere for further diffusion. The intellectual who acts as the mediator between the professional and the public sphere is also the one who connects, through critique, common sense to science, transforming consciousness and discourse so that science may be done with conscience. The intellectual is, therefore, to borrow the title of Bhaskar's (2016) posthumously published book, an operator of 'enlightened common sense'.

The hermeneutic reconnection of sociology to common sense is meant to make sure that the sociological objectifications of ordinary discourses and the anthropological relativizations of scientific discourses remain anchored in the lifeworld. It does neither exclude 'epistemological ruptures' (Bachelard-Althusser-Bourdieu) between science and common sense nor analytical dualisms (Gouldner-Lockwood-Archer) between agency and

635 structure. By foregrounding the reflexivity that connects science to common sense, it introduces a second epistemological rupture – ‘a rupture with the epistemological rupture’ (Santos de Souza 1989, 36) – into the picture so that both science and common sense can be transformed. Double hermeneutics in no way precludes that sociology and anthropology do their work, uncover material structures and ideological sub-
640 texts that affect the various discourses from within, but without the awareness of the actors. Even if they are part of the humanities, the social sciences have this capacity to reveal through scientific objectivation or cultural variation the existence of intersecting degenerative structures (caste, class, race, gender, etc.) or dominant cultures (scientism, positivism, utilitarianism) that transcend the actor’s consciousness. Thanks to a sociology of knowledge that is both hermeneutic and critical, they are thus able to combine explanation, understanding and judgment in such a way that the sources of misunderstanding and even ignorance can be shown to the actors and, at least, partially cleared through critical de-fusion and hermeneutic re-fusion of the horizons of meaning. The forms and
645 the forces that were acting behind the back of the actors are now potentially in front of them, available for critical inspection, selection and resignification. Through the systematic exchange of perspectives of participant and observer, in dialogue, consciousness can be enlarged and raised, though it should be acknowledged from the very beginning that the process of Enlightenment never ends.

650 In this article, I have tried to reconnect British thought to the mainland of philosophy and social theory. Continuing a dialogue that was initiated in the 1990s, when I was working in Paris on a Ph.D. thesis on theories of alienation and reification in German social theory, from Hegel to Habermas (Vandenberghe 2009), I have brought critical realism into communication with German critical theory and French anti-utilitarianism.
655 While the second generation of critical theory allows for a selective reconnection with the phenomenological hermeneutics of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur, the French tradition of anti-utilitarianism, which finds its inspiration in the *Essay on the Gift* of Marcel Mauss, brings back the anthropology of symbolic representations into the conversation about the possibility of naturalism. At the end of his life, Bhaskar acknowledged that he could have defended the position of critical hermeneutics: ‘I call this middle way [between naturalism and anti-naturalism] *critical naturalism*, but it could also be called, fairly enough, *critical hermeneutics*’ (Bhaskar 2016, 45). Just as the ‘third way’ had a right lane (Giddens) and a left lane (Beck), the realist way has a naturalist and a hermeneu-
660 tic lane. If I have taken the hermeneutic lane, it is because I am not concerned with the ontology or epistemology of the natural sciences. When it comes to nature, I simply oblige to transcendental naturalism. But when it comes to society and culture, including the society and culture of the natural scientists, I think that hermeneutics, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism offer a more promising inroad to the world. By taking the hermeneutic lane into CR, I have tried to bring the latter into hermeneutics and to articulate it to the concern of the Frankfurt School with structures of domination. Like critical
670 naturalism, critical hermeneutics offers a *via media* between naturalism and anti-naturalism, explanation and interpretation, universalism and relativism, materialism and idealism, realism and constructivism.

675 Broadly conceived, critical theory is not limited to the Frankfurt School. It encompasses other stands within the philosophical tradition that aim to uncover deep structures and degenerative mechanisms that lead to the reproduction of society and hinder its

conscious transformation. Although their anti-humanism does not allow them to fully subscribe to the emancipatory interest of the social sciences, as defined by Habermas and defended by Bhaskar, it is now generally accepted that structuralism, post-structuralism and the 'Studies' are part of this tradition. With Habermas and Bhaskar, I have made the case for a quasi-transcendental approach of the social sciences that would be critical, both in the Kantian and the Marxist sense of the term. Like Kant, it would investigate the conditions of possibility of social science; and with Marx, it would indict the social conditions that make the good life for all and everyone impossible. As critical hermeneutics is ultimately a revised version of the sociology of knowledge, this critical inquiry of how a rational science of society could contribute to the realization of a rational society is quasi-transcendental, because if the social sciences are themselves a form of conscious that is part of what it analyses, then its self-analysis, self-diagnosis and self-critique can potentially contribute to the transforming of consciousness that systemic change requires. (I said 'quasi-transcendental', but as critical hermeneutics breaks down the bar that separates the transitive and the intransitive dimensions of knowledge, I could as well have written 'quasi-intransitive').

With Habermas and Mauss, defending a 'Habermasian' position as it were, I have also argued that the critique of positivism should be complemented with a critique of utilitarianism that pushes back against the infeudation of the social sciences to standard economics and the colonization of society by market logics. Notwithstanding its critical impetus, the Habermasian position is not merely negative, however, but reconstructive (Vandenberghe 2018). It points to an alethic philosophical anthropology that conceives of the human being not as a *homo economicus*, but as a *homo symbolicus* who is part of a community of language and is open to alterity-in-dialogue.

This philosophical anthropology opens up the perspective of realist critical hermeneutics. This perspective is hermeneutical, because it takes as given that the human world is always already endowed with meaning. The lifeworld is the ground and horizon of all human activities. Scientific research presupposes a form of life in which an inquiry about the objective properties of the natural world makes sense. Phenomenological hermeneutics is more interested in experiences of nature than in experiments with nature. Without ever denying realism, it privileges actual knowledge and experiences. From this perspective, the ontological turn within cultural anthropology appears less as an aberration. When one recognizes the symbolic constitution of the world, one can accept that science is only one way to access the real. Other worldviews, other ways of worldmaking, other lifeworlds exist. And as the showcases of animism and perspectivism illustrate, we can learn from them, provided that we listen to what anthropologists say without immediately writing off their multinaturalism as a conjunction of epistemic, ontological and actualist fallacies.

The realist interpretations of Giddens's structuration theory, Bourdieu's critical sociology and Latour's actor-network theory were meant to update the 'philosophical critique of contemporary human sciences' (subtitle of *Possibility of Naturalism*). No doubt, a full investigation of current trends in the social sciences would have to take in Luhmann's systems theory and its aftermath in Germany, the many offshoots of post-structuralism, the fast succession of 'turns' (75 and counting) and the proliferation of Studies in the human sciences, as well as new developments in American and French pragmatism. To make clear that my hermeneutics is compatible with critical theory and other more

objectivist approaches to social systems, social structures and social fields, I have championed Bourdieu's generative structuralism as a form of CR (Vandenberghe 2014, 198–245). Provided one relaxes his neo-Kantianism, I think his theory of fields, habitus and practices shows how one can defend a strong version of critical naturalism that radicalizes the critiques of positivism and utilitarianism while fully incorporating critical hermeneutics into his theory of symbolic violence. More puzzling perhaps is my indulgence with Actor-Network Theory. Haven't I written a book in French on the anti-sociology of Bruno Latour in which I criticize his anti-humanist, anti-interpretative and anti-realist positions and provocations (Vandenberghe 2006)? Yes, I have, but I must also say that I felt that my critique of the strategic, experimental and utilitarian strands of his work was a bit unfair and did not do fully justice to the meta-realist strands in his work. I never doubted that Latour was a genuine amateur of the sciences, and I also trusted that his theological bent would preserve him from some of the nihilism of STS. Thanks to Latour, I've learned how to track the association of matter and language, nature and culture, technology and politics into an assemblage of variable geometry. His rejection of dialectics may be excessive, but his insistence on materiality made me also understand the idealism of historical materialist theories of fetishism and reification. Perhaps, Latour was right and the whole critical discourse on fetishism (from the Portuguese *feitiço*) is nothing but a colonial projection of the West on cultures that it does not understand. A reverse anthropology of modern ways of worldmaking can reveal the blind spots of the Western logos and make it more universal, inclusive and generous.

The dramatic events of the last decade (the economic crises, the populism, the pandemic, the climate emergency, the wars) have reorganized the field and made new intellectual alliances possible and necessary. CR is an old school approach to science and society. For almost half a century now it has infused the social sciences with a sense of philosophical seriousness, political urgency and hope. This is reason enough to start thinking about its Golden Jubilee in 2025. By holding fast to its baseline, it has been able to adapt to the times and assimilate new contents and approaches. Through a kind of philosophical anthropophagy, it has been able to welcome and digest contributions from deconstruction, social constructivism, neo-Kantianism, feminism and post-colonialism. Thanks to the warmth of the 'critical realist embrace' (Bhaskar and Hartwig 2010, 78), in a spirit of openness and self-transcendence, it has accepted alterity in its midst and, thereby, reaffirmed its identity as a social, intellectual and spiritual movement at the fringes of the academy.

Q5 Acknowledgements

The original title of my keynote address at the 2021 IACR conference was 'Critical Realism: A Retrospective'. The original title explains (but does not completely justify) the many references to my own work. Due to lack of space and time, I did not include a section on the internal conversations of the alethic self. I thank the local organizers for the honour, the participants for the discussion and the editors of the JCR for the invitation to write down my oral presentation and publish the text. I have also benefited from the comments and suggestions of various members of the Sociofilo Lab in Rio de Janeiro.

Disclosure statement

Q6 No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Frédéric Vandenberghe is professor of sociology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil and Distinguished Max Weber Fellow at the University of Erfurt in Germany. He has published widely on the history of ideas and various aspects of social theory in English, French and Portuguese. In English, he published *A Philosophical History of German Sociology* (2009), *What's Critical about Critical Realism?* (2014) and co-authored with Alain Caillé *For a New Classic Sociology* (2021).

References

- Albert, K., J. Brundage, P. Sweet, and F. Vandenberghe. 2020. "Towards a Critical Realist Epistemology." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 50 (3): 357–372.
- Apel, K. O. 1985. *Understanding and Explanation. A Transcendental-Pragmatic Perspective*. Boston: MIT.
- Archer, M. 1988. *Culture and Agency. The Place of Culture in Social Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M. 1995. *Realist Social Theory. The Morphogenetic Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M. 2003. *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M., C. Decoteau, P. Gorski, D. Porpora, T. Rutzou, C. Smith, G. Steinmetz, and F. Vandenberghe. 2016. "What Is Critical Realism?" *Perspectives. A Newsletter of the Theory Section*.
- Archer, M., and F. Vandenberghe. 2019. *Le réalisme critique. Une nouvelle ontologie pour la sociologie*. Lormont: Le bord de l'eau.
- Baechler, J. 2004. "Mais qu'est-ce que la sociologie?" *Revue du MAUSS* 24 (2): 147–153.
- Benton, T. 1977. *Philosophical Foundations of the Three Sociologies*. London: Routledge.
- Bhaskar, R. 1978. *A Realist Theory of Science*. Hassocks: Harvester Press.
- Bhaskar, R. 1979. *The Possibility of Naturalism*. Brighton: Harvester.
- Bhaskar, R. 1993. *Dialectic. The Pulse of Freedom*. London: Verso.
- Bhaskar, R. 2016. *Enlightened Common Sense. The Philosophy of Critical Realism*. London: Routledge.
- Bhaskar, R., and M. Hartwig. 2010. *The Formation of Critical Realism: A Personal Perspective*. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P., J. C. Chamboredon, and J. C. Passeron. (1968) 1991. *The Craft of Sociology. Epistemological Preliminaries*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Caillé, A. 2020. *The Gift Paradigm. A Short Introduction to the Anti-Utilitarian Movement in the Social Sciences*. Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Charbonnier, P., G. Salmon, and P. Skafish. 2017. *Comparative Metaphysics. Ontology after Anthropology*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Dumont, L. 1986. *Essays on Individualism. Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Forst, R. 2013. *Tolerance in Conflict. Past and Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foucault, M. 2004. *Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France (1978–1979)*. Paris: EHESS/Gallimard/Seuil.
- Gadamer, H. G. 1975. *Truth and Method*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Giddens, A. 1976. *New Rules of Sociological Method. A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies*. London: Hutchinson.
- Godbout, J., and A. Caillé. 1998. *The World of the Gift*. Montreal: McGill.
- Graeber, D. 2014. *Debt. The First 5000 Years*. London: Melville House.
- Graeber, D. 2015. "Radical Alterity Is Just Another Way of Saying 'Reality': A Reply to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro." *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5 (2): 1–41.
- Habermas, J. 1971. *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. 1981. *Theorie der kommunikativen Handelns*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Habermas, J. 1987. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Habermas, J. (1967) 1988. *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: MIT.

- Harding, S. 1993. "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is 'Strong Objectivity?'" In *Feminist Epistemologies*, edited by L. Alcoff and E. Potter. New York: Routledge.
- 815 **Q7** ↑ Husserl, E. 1989. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Keat, R., and J. Urry. 1975. *Social Theory as Science*. London: Routledge & Kegan.
- Latour, B. 2013. *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, B. 2017. *Facing Gaia. Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Luhmann, N. (1984) 1995. *Social Systems*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Lukács, G. 1967. *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. London: Merlin Press.
- Mauss, M. 2016. *The Gift*. Chicago, IL: Hau Books.
- 820 Outhwaite, W. 1987. *New Philosophies of Social Science: Realism, Hermeneutics and Critical Theory*. London: MacMillan.
- Popper, K. 1957. *The Poverty of Historicism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Rutzou, T., and D. Elder-Vass. 2019. "On Assemblages and Things: Fluidity, Stability, Causation Stories, and Formation Stories." *Sociological Theory* 37 (4): 401–424.
- Santos de Souza, B. 1989. *Introdução a uma ciência pósmoderna*. Rio de Janeiro: Graal.
- 825 Santos de Souza, B. 2014. *Epistemologies of the South. Justice Against Epistemicide*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Vandenberghe, F. 1997–98. *Une histoire critique de la sociologie allemande. Aliénation et réification*. 2 vols. Paris: La Découverte.
- Vandenberghe, F. 2005. "Review Essay: The Archers: A Tale of Folk (Final Episode?)." *European Journal of Social Theory* 8 (2): 227–237.
- 830 Vandenberghe, F. 2006. *Complexités du posthumanisme. Trois essais dialectiques sur la sociologie de Bruno Latour*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Vandenberghe, F. 2009. *A Philosophical Critique of German Sociology. Alienation and Reification*. London: Routledge.
- Vandenberghe, F. 2010. "Falsification Falsified. A Swansong for Lord Karl." In *On Objective Knowledge in Social Sciences and Humanities*, edited by C. Valentini, 73–77. Florence: European University Institute.
- 835 Vandenberghe, F. 2014. *What's Critical About Critical Realism? Essays in Reconstructive Social Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Vandenberghe, F. 2017. "Critical Realism, Anti-Utilitarianism and Axiological Engagement." *Revue du MAUSS* 27 (2 (no. 50)): 347–358.
- Vandenberghe, F. 2018. "Principles of Reconstructive Social Theory." In *Critical Realism, History, and Philosophy in the Social Sciences (Political Power and Social Theory, vol. 34)*, edited by G. Steinmetz and T. Rutzou, 73–88. Bingley: Emerald Books.
- 840 Vandenberghe, F. 2019. "The Normative Foundations of Critical Realism." *Journal of Critical Realism* 18 (3): 319–336.
- Q8** ↑ Vandenberghe, F. 2021. "The Axiomatics of the Gift. Alain Caillé's Reinvention of Marcel Mauss." Unpublished Manuscript.
- 845 Vandenberghe, F. 2022. "After Words: The Spirit of Evolution and Envelopment." In *Metatheory for the Anthropocene. Vol. 1: Big Picture Perspectives on Planetary Flourishing*, edited by S. Esbjörn-Hargens and N. Hedlund. London: Routledge.
- Q9** ↑ Wiggershaus, R. 1994. *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Winch, P. 1958. *The Idea of a Social Science*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- 850