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The Critical Function of Hegel's System: Philosophy of Right and the Possibility of a Systematic Critical Theory

1. The Separation Between Dialectics and Critique in Contemporary Radical Theory and the Need for a Renewal of Critical Theory

The premise of this paper is that current critical (or “radical”) theory cannot thematize the concept of the system, a concept which is thus left intact. The role of theory is limited to the dogmatic attribution of a certain primacy to an external-given factor, that being either “free communication” or the autonomy of the political or pre-given moral identity etc. In other words, the contemporary critical theory seems to be indifferent towards the internal processes of the system (these being social or epistemological). The “place” of its critical point of view lies in a premise which reduces itself to a non-reducible immediacy. Frequently takes additionally the prefix “bio” (bio-political, bio-power, bare life, etc.) as its basic determination. The transcendent dimension of a residual element which “resists” its systemic determinations (as the Foucauldian concept of the body) is posited as an ontological source of critique, rendering the critical reconstruction of the system impossible.¹ For someone interested in critical theory, we consider it a mistake to oppose these theoretical tendencies of the past decades. From a meta-theoretical point of view, it will be appropriate to consider these tendencies as a manifestation of weakness, before the domination of a social system that is so powerful it seems to become theoretically irrelevant and most importantly invisible, being hidden behind immediacies. It seems that it also remains invisible for contemporary critical theory itself, mainly when this theory is limited by what we call the *crisis of determinate negation*.

Especially we should underline that a certain reception of the critique that already the first generation of the Frankfurt school theorists launched against the “absorbing” character of Hegel’s identificatory Concept, as the principle guiding

¹ For a critical presentation of the alignment of these anti-dialectical critical theories with philosophical traditions which refer themselves to an immediate “origin” and can be described as philosophically irrational and politically conservative, see R. Wollin, *The Seduction of Unreason. The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Post-modernism*, Princeton, NJ 2004.