



Adornian “Meditations” on the domination of nature: Toward a new critique of power

‘Meditações’ adornianas sobre a dominação da natureza: rumo a uma nova crítica do poder

“Meditaciones” adornianas sobre la dominación de la naturaleza: hacia una nueva crítica del poder

Irene Strazzeri* 

ABSTRACT

Starting from the most recent forms of struggle in defence of the environment (among the forms alternative to integration to the logic of domination), weighing up the ethical value of intergenerational justice linked to environmental defence, and situating the new normative horizon prefigured by the constitutionalisation of Nature Rights and the consequent sustainability as a moral development of contemporary society, I will endeavour to arrive at a reinterpretation of the Adornian theory of society through Honneth’s critique of power. Theories of recognition have thus enriched the representative framework of subject claims, and this has led to a revision of the classical idea of individualistic law.

Keywords: Social theory, climate-activists, domination of nature, critique of power.

RESUMO

Partindo das formas mais recentes de luta em defesa do meio ambiente (entre as formas alternativas à integração à lógica da dominação), considerando o valor ético da justiça intergeracional vinculada à defesa ambiental e situando o novo horizonte normativo anunciado pela constitucionalização dos Direitos da Natureza e a consequente sustentabilidade como avanços morais da sociedade contemporânea, buscaremos chegar a uma reinterpretação da teoria adorniana da sociedade por meio da crítica honnethiana do poder. As teorias do reconhecimento enriqueceram, assim, o marco representativo das reivindicações dos sujeitos, o que levou a uma revisão da ideia clássica de direito individualista.

Palavras-chave: Teoria social, ambientalistas, dominação da natureza, crítica do poder.

* University of Salento, Lecce, Italy.

Associate professor of general sociology, Department of Human and Social Sciences University of Salento, Italy.

RESUMEN

Partiendo de las formas más recientes de lucha en defensa del medio ambiente (entre las alternativas a la integración en la lógica de dominación), sopesando el valor ético de la justicia intergeneracional vinculada a la defensa del medio ambiente y situando el nuevo horizonte normativo prefigurado por la constitucionalización de los Derechos de la Naturaleza y la consiguiente sostenibilidad como desarrollo moral de la sociedad contemporánea, intentaré reinterpretar la teoría adorniana de la sociedad a través de la crítica del poder de Honneth. Las teorías del reconocimiento han enriquecido así el marco representativo de las reivindicaciones subjetivas, lo que ha llevado a una revisión de la idea clásica del derecho individualista.

Palabras clave: Teoría social, activistas climáticos, dominación de la naturaleza, crítica del poder.

Introduction

The reflection moves from the trajectory proposed by Axel Honneth, in his work *Critique of Power* (2002), where the most influential approaches of Adorno, Foucault, and Habermas are combined to systematically investigate the theoretical models with which the construction and maintenance of models of domination can be criticised and countered.

Starting precisely from social theory, Honneth argued that Theodor Adorno would have missed the task of an analysis of society, as his entire vision is imprisoned by a totalising model of the domination of nature, from which it would seem impossible to understand the ‘social in society’ (Honneth, 2002, p. 115). For this reason, after expounding the theme of the domination of nature in Theodor Adorno and laying the foundations for an analysis of Honneth’s reinterpretation of the entire process described in *Dialectics of the Enlightenment* (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1981), an attempt will be made to counter-argue the thesis that Adorno’s vision does not resolve the aporias arising from the imprisonment of the social.

Starting with the most recent forms of struggle in defence of the environment – among the forms alternative to integration to the logic of domination –, weighing up the ethical value of intergenerational justice linked to environmental defence, and situating the new normative horizon prefigured by the constitutionalisation of Nature Rights and the consequent sustainability as a moral development of contemporary society, I will endeavour to arrive at a reinterpretation of Adornian theory of society through Honneth’s critique. Taking into account Adorno’s consideration of the aesthetic and artistic dimension as capable of transcending the status quo, the performative dissent of the *Last Generation* activists, in the context of the current climate emergency, who have introduced a series of climate protest actions targeting precisely works of art, is of particular interest.

The discussion of the latest generation of protests and climate activism involving works of art – in connection with Horkheimer’s critique of the domination of nature and his vision of aesthetic experience as capable of transcending reality and the status quo – leads to a new outcome for the sociological canon. This new outcome consists in the possibility of rejecting Axel Honneth’s thesis according to which Theodor Adorno’s vision would deliver us to a society completely imprisoned by the logic of domination. This

connection has repercussions both in terms of reinterpreting the classics (and consequently understanding Adorno's reading of the domination of nature in connection with aesthetic experience) and in terms of counter-arguments to Axel Honneth's reconstruction of a critical theory of power, since understanding climate activism within this theoretical framework allows us to demonstrate how it is possible, based on this, to examine forms of integration that are alternative to the logic of domination and that are connected to environmental protest. Following the Adornian theory, we know that there is a strong Eurocentric bias in the proposed perspective (Connell, 2018; Go, 2017); however, it cannot be ignored that climate activists think of and regard the artwork as a universal common good that somehow escapes particularizations.

Anyways, according to Carmen Leccardi,

on a symbolic level, pouring paint on the glass that protects these masterpieces of humanity, or other unusual forms of protest (such as gluing one's own hands to this glass), recall the very impossibility of artistic creation in a universe that is heading towards self-destruction. One also protests in this way against the ideology of productivism at all costs, and the ethical indifference that drives it (Leccardi, 2023, p. 96).

The battle against ever-increasing social inequalities is thus intertwined with that for the protection of the planet and the living, human and non-human, that it expresses. If the climatic catastrophe towards which we are heading contains the message of destruction, of the impossibility of the continuation of life on our planet, then even works of art – and the very possibility of artistic expression – is put into question. Extreme and seemingly senseless acts can represent not entirely absurd forms of provocation.

But the symbolic protest actions of next-generation climate activists can be considered as breaching events, or as soft-power actions that seek to undermine established interests of strong structures and power, where transformation and social change also pass through the emotions of agreement or disagreement that such actions evoke. Also linked to the climate crisis and resource distribution, climate activists have tried to influence collective mobilization at both political and social levels. In some cases, this type of protest has not shaken the order, either individual or social, since the massive exposure to such events and topics (a better environment for

future generations) has caused desensitization and emotional detachment from nature itself, causing only shock for the pollution of the artwork (while maintaining a blasé attitude in the response of the social actor).

In any case, in this historical phase, the *climatology* of the new generations not only prevents the sleep of reason, arresting that paralysis of critique that Adorno and Horkheimer had widely denounced as the arrest of critique at the dawn of advanced capitalism, but alludes to the possibility of change, of hope, of the construction of a different future (Friday for *Future*, italics mine). In this sense, forms of climate protest represent a praxis liberated from the imprisonment of the social, capable of embodying on a pre-scientific level a critique of the domination of nature, the task of social theory being to investigate and understand it.

1. Critique of domination of nature

Never before has the ecological question been more present in the public debate, in the media and in the spheres of institutionalised politics than in recent years. Even within the scientific community, the discussion on how we should relate to the environment and the practical and philosophical implications of human impact on it has gained new vigour. Approaches that affirm an original unity with nature propose to restore it by removing the current alienation, beneath which would lie the indissoluble unity with the whole (Krenak, 2020). In contrast, approaches that uphold the constitutive separation from nature capture its gap and clear separation with the human being.

From both perspectives, it is possible to support anthropocentric positions as well as nonanthropocentric conceptions (Pellegrino & Ricotta, 2020). Both approaches, however, ultimately tend to fall back towards one or the other pole, thus undermining the resilience of the idea of human alienation from nature that they affirm. The attempt of a difficult re-composition of society with nature, between the reorganization of an individual and collective order can be explained using a system of mutually influencing variables (Douglas, 1982) and through a sociology that conceives a new critical approach and a new practice which take into account the consequent social reconfiguration that inevitably requires awareness and political and social

struggle. In fact, it is impossible not to account for the numerous nature-environment variables in social development in the absence of a thorough analysis of social and collective networks – such as those implemented by climate activists – of social power but above all symbolic-cultural power that contrasts the current economic-productive order.

The production and consumption system, misaligned with environmental issues and whose damages are only postponed, generates ecological harm that exacerbates a social suffering already inherent to the inequality of globalized capitalism. The social normativity in which we are immersed leads us to perceive nature as a foreign body, in contrast to society, an alien system to be feared or exploited. This fracture of the original unity between man and nature – already present in the mythological and biblical roots (Prometheus and fire, Adam and Eve) – only strengthens a systemic dependency on the exploitation of the two subjects (man and nature), generating social consequences at economic, political, and cultural levels.

The reflections of Theodor W. Adorno, an author in whose thought the theme of alienation occupies a central place, can help us shed light on how a coherent and theoretically fertile concept of human alienation from nature can be articulated, as well as serve as a basis for tracing the fundamental lines of a perspective of environmental responsibility centred on the idea of a disalienation of human beings with respect to the natural world, to other living species, and also with respect to themselves. In the *Dialectics of the Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer trace the process of the development of instrumental reason, which they conceive of as the main ‘means of adaptation’ of early human beings to a dangerous and hostile natural environment, which presented itself to their eyes pervaded by mysterious phenomena. The drive to control this environment in order to improve the conditions of our existence is at the origin of the earliest forms of magical and mythical thinking; the latter, then developed into reason proper, understood as the power to dispose of the resources of the natural environment effectively and efficiently. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the process of developing instrumental reason is, on the one hand, what allowed us to survive in an initially very hostile environment and, subsequently, to develop prosperity, civilisation and technology. On the other hand, however, it has been paid for dearly: with the reduction of external nature to a fungible resource, with the repression of our instincts, and with the domination inflicted by human beings on other human beings.

In order to be able to exercise dominion, we must repress that which, in ourselves, drives us to perceive ourselves as akin to and supportive of that which we wish to dominate: the domination of internal nature, external nature and other humans are, for Adorno, so many forms of alienation. The path of civilisation we have embarked on, based on repression, exploitation and fear, now shows all its limits: we have overcome material scarcity but this has not given us happiness or put an end to the ancestral struggle for survival (which is now, however, being fought against unemployment, against relationships characterised by sometimes ruthless competition, against anxiety, depression and neurosis, against economic crises); the natural environment, for its part, is now collapsing after centuries of indiscriminate exploitation.

This very dominion we exercise over ourselves, nature and other men, as well as the powers – now no longer natural, but social – that terrify us (crises, unemployment, conflicts), are now perceived as immutable and necessary data, as mere ‘natural facts’ rather than as “a product of men, something revocable” (Adorno, 1984, p. 112-117). In this alienated everyday life, we are no longer able to imagine a different society and, moving in a circle of which we are largely unaware, we re-propose on a different scale the incessant struggle inherent in the natural order, to escape from which, millennia ago, we developed reason (Mellino, 2021). However, our original affinity with nature, which we repress every day, returns again and again. We are natural beings who, on the basis of our own instinct for self-preservation, have undergone an evolutionary process; along this path, we have come to partly differentiate ourselves from nature through the development of reason, culture and civilisation, but deep down we remain inextricably linked to it.

We cannot repress external nature or the nature within us without somehow feeling that we are damaging a link with something larger, in which we participate; with something heterogeneous, spontaneous and vital, which is, however, at the same time and just like us, vulnerable to suffering and repression. Nature and reason are for Adorno in a relationship of continuity, not mutual opposition: “irreducible to nature, the mind and its concepts are nevertheless immersed in nature, and part of it” (Adorno, 1982, p. 68-107). Alienation is repression: better still, it is the attempt to suffocate this bond. An attempt that we can make as beings endowed with reason and social actors who can also distance themselves from nature.

And yet, this attempt can never be completed because it causes suffering, precisely in relation to that call of beings embedded within nature. Nature and reason retain a dialectical character, although they do not have a single sign: nature is freedom, heterogeneity, spontaneity, but it is also a struggle for survival, the law of the strongest, a dangerous and uncontrollable power. Similarly, reason is the organ with which we repress ourselves and our surroundings, but it is also that with which we can think about justice and emancipation, that which allows us to survive, and which can also save us from ourselves. It is reason, combined with the instinctive recognition of our affinity with nature, that can lead us to put an end to violence. That violence that we are applying to the natural world and to ourselves: “that being which is outside nature, and which could be called the human subject, is nothing but self-reflection, the reflection on self in which the self observes. [...] ‘I myself am a piece of nature’” (Adorno, 1984, p. 112).

For Adorno, ethical-moral reflexivity and affinity with nature are equally important in the role of liberation from our own alienation from the natural world. They will only be able to guide us in this regard by being together, one as the thrust of the other: reason will only be able to reject anthropocentric prejudice and become critical reason if we become emotionally aware of the suffering we cause to nature and to ourselves, and also recognise emotionally the fact that we are “a piece of nature”. On the other hand, the instinct that communicates to us the suffering of nature outside and within us can only really be heard when we succeed, through reason, in delimiting our instrumental outlook towards the natural world, which, originating from our natural need for self-preservation, can no longer be our sole orientation of action. “If speculation on the state of salvation were permissible”, says Adorno, “in it one could imagine neither the undifferentiated unity of subject and object, nor their hostile antitheticality: rather the communication of the differentiated” (Adorno, 1982, p. 69). Disalienation means, therefore, the reconstitution of a participatory relationship between the two terms – at once related and different – that are humanity and nature (outside and inside us); and, at the same time, raising this relationship to a greater degree of awareness and articulation. We could not simply go back to a primitive and ‘natural’ life, nor would this be desirable: reason and civilisation are as much a part

of us as nature is; to renounce them would entail no less violence than we have inflicted upon ourselves so far. Not to mention that, in the course of history, both nature and the human being have changed profoundly, and there is therefore no longer an original nature to return to; nor has it ever been, or could it be, uniquely benign (Piromalli, 2023).

Critical reason is what allows us to withdraw from identifying thought, which, in the function of domination, would like to reduce nature to its own purposes and categories. But by delimiting the sphere of influence of our action aimed at control, categorisation, and instrumental intervention in the outside world, we can also make room for what Adorno calls the non-identical: the element of unpredictability, non-transparency and unknowability that we can encounter in nature and in ourselves, and which is part of any relationship between different people who are solidary despite their difference, without wanting to reduce themselves reciprocally to identity.

Reconciliation between human beings and non-human nature does not mean “the identification of all as subsumed under a totality, a concept of integral society”, but rather “the consciousness of non-identity” (Adorno, 1970, p. 53-93) and the capacity, which may derive from this, to limit our anthropising influence by respecting the intrinsic value of nature.

But how can Adorno’s reflections be developed in order to draw fundamental lines in a perspective of environmental responsibility centred on an idea of disalienation? It is pathocentric solution and emotional awakening.

The advanced industrial society, which has achieved the ability to dominate nature, both internal and external, in a pure manner, has achieved its purpose independently of the economic sphere. It is now the abstract forms of the commodity and the principle of identity that allow for the logical and capitalist domination of nature, now reduced to a storehouse of raw materials and a reservoir of productive activity both practical and intellectual.

2. The removal of social

The expression “reflexive stages of the critical theory of society” alludes to Honneth’s systematic attempt to recapitulate the history of critical social theory. Since 1990, the secondary literature relating to authors belonging to

the so-called Frankfurt School has increased considerably, so that the scope of the investigation limited to the concept of power is updated by new proposals.

In the historical investigation contained in his 1985 text, *Critique of Power*, Honneth focuses, in particular, on the relationship between power and social conflict. The starting point is his reconsideration of the difficulties encountered by critical theory during the second half of the 1900s. When, in the 1930s, Horkheimer attempted to define the specific programme of critical theory, assigning it the task of a clear vision of its context of application, he transferred its methodological prerogatives to the terrain of the social tasks to be assigned to theory. This reflexive stage required a very precise understanding of the social transformations taking place, such that the practical dimension of criticism emerged and elevated it to the rank of a constitutive condition of knowledge itself.

The specific way in which Horkheimer had recourse to Marx – i.e. by bringing together theory and praxis – presupposed an internal understanding of the historical process as well as of the social impulses that demanded the critique and overcoming of established patterns of domination. Only if emancipatory interest were placed in the sphere of the social could it legitimately be conceived as a reflexive moment of critical theory. In Horkheimer's view, the main theoretical difficulty resulting from this challenging task was certainly the meaning to be attributed to emancipation insofar as emancipatory interests are underpinned by pre-scientific considerations.

The empirical indication of a practical moment, which already existed in the Marxist framework, had to be transferred to the analytical level in order to be an objective presupposition of theory. Subsequently, “the fall of critical theory into Adorno's ‘negativism’ would mark the definitive decline of the reflexive task that critical theory had assigned itself” (Honneth, 2002, p. 87-115).

From the negative dialectic onwards, any attempt to share Horkheimer's original programme has had to contend with the problem of how to provide theoretical access again to that which escapes power and domination: that is, the problem of ensuring pre-scientifically grounded points of reference for critical theory. The central problem, still today, for social theory and criticism is in fact how to structure the theoretical framework and the consequent analysis for understanding both the forms of domination and the relative resources for overcoming it.

Honneth's reconstruction of the individual reflexive stages of critical theory and the complementary identification of the problem outlined above only confirm the importance in the search for a solution. The history of critical theory of society thus comes to be conceived as a "learning process". That is, if one accepts that the points of reference identified in the sphere of the social are 'intuitions' or progress, within the development of a well-defined theoretical framework and as will be the case for the model proposed by Habermas and which will essentially pursue this learning trajectory.

The concept of communicative action seems, in fact, to provide a theoretical way out of the philosophical-historical dead end into which Adorno's negativism had led critical theory. The use of the basic assumptions of the theory of communicative action, which can already be found in Habermas' early works, is also an answer to the central problem posed by Horkheimer and confirms it as a driving motif.

It is here, between the first and second generation of critical theory, that Honneth inserts Michel Foucault's critique of power as a term of comparison. It constitutes, from his point of view, a reflexive reconstruction of the history of critical theory in the form of a drastic alternative to the direction taken by Habermas, as it seems to indirectly want to concretise more a radicalisation of the negative dialectic rather than a positive resolution in the theory of interaction.

In developing this interpretation, Honneth paints an illuminating picture of the relationship between post-structuralism and the hermeneutic perspective, even though such a decisive broadening of the conceptual horizon of the history of critical theory could only go so far. The inclusion of Foucault and his critique of power, in contrast to the hermeneutic approach, constitutes both a possibility of resolving the basic problem identified and laid at the foundation of the programme of critical theory by Horkheimer and of overcoming the problems arising from Habermas' social theory.

Finally, from the perspective of a reflexive reconstruction, Honneth's own project is part of the conception of a development of critical theory that starts from the same stake: to test Horkheimer's original intent through Adorno's philosophy of history and Foucault's analysis of power in comparison with Habermas' theses. All this is substantial in the order to bring out the gradual vision of a social practice in which the critique of power/dominion is more effective in reflexively securing its own access

to historical change. This goal can only be fulfilled by Honneth through the theory of recognition, after he has shown that the task assigned by Horkheimer to critical theory has not been resolved, as it is only developed in relation to the dimension of social work. The inhibition of research focusing on the cultural dimension of everyday life – as the site of social conflict – has, in effect, resulted in the absence of systematic reflection on the relationship between it and his theory.

And precisely in relation to Adorno – who had no less privileged the dimension of social work among the experiences of his time – Honneth insists on showing that the result of a negative philosophy of history (in which the pre-scientific critique cannot be anchored to praxis), forces one to grasp in all social action only a mere extension of human dominion over nature.

Instead, Foucault would have identified a more ‘productive’ view of social work and conflict, tracing the origin of domination back to the social interaction of exchange between actors. This passage, however, failed to provide the basis for a foundation for his critique, as it is conceived outside of any normative agreement or moral ‘incentive’. Ultimately, even exchange turns out to be amenable to a purely systemic explanation.

In contrast to both scholars, the concept of communicative action introduced by Habermas proposes to reform a theoretical approach that is able to find an answer to this problem. In this way, the structures of social domination can be explained as the result of distorted processes of communicative interaction, which imply a claim to intersubjective realisation. This passage serves as the basis for a reflexive ‘critique’ of power. Habermas himself, however, eventually develops an approach that goes in the direction of two different theories of society.

The fundamental problem, therefore, remains that of a social development explained not with reference to a logic of rationalisation but with reference to a dynamic of social struggle, which is structurally located within the space of social interactions. It is thus that the reconstruction of the history of critical social theory reaches the point where the contours of a new theoretical model based on conflict emerge. In continuity with the normative tradition of critical theory, in this model, the process of social integration is conceived as a process that takes the form of a struggle for recognition, in which individuals and groups have an equal chance to participate in the organisation of their common life. In this way, the

historical-philosophical conception bequeathed by 19th century Marxist theory in the form of the doctrine of class struggle is taken up and concretely updated by Honneth.

However, in contrast to the tradition of social theory in which struggle becomes a universal feature of all evolving societies, its alternative model (conflict) should be conceived as a '*medium* of social integration', i.e. as a process that, in principle, refers to moral claims that can be realised socially.

In this way, Honneth's attempt to make use of the Hegelian idea of the 'struggle for recognition' to fill certain gaps left out of Habermasian theory fits into the history of critical theory following the so-called linguistic turn. However, opposing conceptions of social theory are the result of alternative interpretations of critical theory (Moore, 2017). In particular, starting from the 1980s, when the term "Anthropocene" was introduced to indicate the decisive role played by humans in the changes of terrestrial ecosystems, the international scientific community has not ceased to address two closely intertwined issues: on one hand, the appropriateness and correctness of using this concept, which seems to provide an unintended legitimization for the modern idea of human dominance over nature and thus anthropocentrism; on the other hand, the moment to mark as the beginning of what is variably considered in geological terms as an unfinished period. The conclusions reached have been discordant.

The fascination with the subject is mainly related to the power of its narrative, its ability to unify humanity and the Earth within a single system: the environmental and moral one. Subsequently, starting in the 1990s with the label 'ecological footprint' – which Mathias Wackernagel and William E. Rees adopted as an indicator to calculate the impact of human activity on the environment – there has been an increasing and problematic understanding of how the passage and crossing of human beings among the various colonized ecosystems was impactful (Wackernagel & Rees, 1962). Not only in terms of resources, social inequalities, accessibility, and redistribution thereof but also in how human dominion over nature could be reinterpreted through demonstrative and protest actions by future generations.

Concluding meditations

The specific reconstruction of a critical theory of power, in particular, raises crucial questions. On the one hand, whether the theoretical force of Foucault's analysis of power has not been misunderstood – when he is blamed for the absence of a practical, normatively grounded reference point within society –, and on the other, the overall role that the social struggle for recognition comes to assume in Axel Honneth's theory.

From negative dialectics onwards, any attempt to share Horkheimer's original programme has had to contend with the problem of how to provide theoretical access again to that which escapes power and domination. The fundamental problem, therefore, remains that of a social development explained not with reference to a logic of rationalisation, but with reference to a dynamic of social struggle, which is structurally located within the space of social interactions.

Beginning in 2022, groups of eco-activists across Europe began daubing works of art in museums and on the streets with food or washable paint to demand that governments tackle the climate crisis. These protest actions, with a high media impact, triggered uproar and indignation above all with the prospect that art too could stop and reflect on the meaning of struggle, of civil disobedience, and could take its side: those of the climate and of the unrepeatable, rather than predictable future. These new forms of expression of *performative* and environmental *dissent* are built on a certain degree of symbolisation and recognition of the value and appeal of artistic culture; however, they claim communicative acts with a strong media impact, and which rethink protest as also a political capacity to relocate the future with respect to the anxiety and urgency generated by consumer society. From the throwing of pea soup on the protective glass of Van Gogh's *Sower at Sunset* (Rome, Palazzo Bonaparte), to Maurizio Cattelan's sculpture known as 'Finger', placed in front of the Milan Stock Exchange and targeted with jets of paint, flour and liquids, to the 8 kilograms of flour thrown on a car customised by Andy Warhol in 1979 and exhibited inside the Fabbrica del Motore in Milan, the use of media, protest and pervasiveness allows for attempts at non-exclusion from a political and social stage that appears detached and virtual. Echoes already present in historical artistic currents such as *Situationism* and the more recent *cultural jamming*, activists ask

society to estrange itself (if only for a brief moment) from the message contained in the work of art and recharge it with a new message, with a more urgent unfiltered meaning. But if the Adornian work of art, as quoted at the beginning, is opposed to the world of *res* that characterises mass society, founded on consumption and forced identification, it is precisely the form that guarantees the work its own alienating autonomy from the empirical world, a distancing and recognition as a value in itself that is also a stance on the world itself. In the rebellion of the activists, *the res* multiplies and the work (whatever it is) does not estrange itself from the empirical.

Recognition theories have had the merit of bringing back to the centre of political philosophical debate the need to rethink social theory in terms of critical theory. From the 1980s onwards, due to major internal changes in the structure of society, combined with the difficulties of normative models that attempted to respond to these changes, a new mapping of social action became necessary, starting from assumptions that were not foreseen and predictable by the standards of previous sociological, philosophical, and social analysis. Recognition theories have therefore enriched the representative framework of subjects' claims, and this has led to a revision of the classical idea of individualistic law. The new criterion of justice that has come to be affirmed through recognition has made individuals into subjects who must be recognised as bearers of normative demands not only on the basis of their social function as principal actors, but above all on the basis of each person's ability to place themselves in a network of meaningful social relations without losing themselves in it.

The great social weight of environmental issues (natural disasters, atmospheric change) has proven to be a central and strong theme not only as a position in sociology and the subsequent readings and analyses of the phenomenon, but also in everyday life. Unfortunately, this relevance has had contrary repercussions on public opinion and society, which in many cases has shown itself to be incapable of acting in unison, inhibiting any long-term effective intervention, even after an event or news (natural disaster or social demonstrations). Even though social actors are informed about the crisis of planet Earth and the ongoing climate change, they delay confronting it, giving up on taking action oriented towards recognizing the problem.

Actively participating in environmental initiatives or even just reflecting on change strategies involves, in fact, a significant emotional cost (towards

the futuristic other) and intellectual cost (struggle for change), as well as a massive alteration of established habits and global economic contexts. Sociology, in this case, can awaken society from intellectual lethargy by helping it understand the new global movements and silent revolution.

References

- Adorno, Theodor W. (1984). The Idea of Natural History (Bob Hullot-Kentor, Trans.). *Telos*, (60), 111–124.
- Adorno, Theodor W. (1982). *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique* (Willis Domingo, Trans.). Blackwell.
- Adorno, Theodor, Wiesengrund. (1973). *Negative Dialektik, Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. 6, Rolf Tiedemann, Ed.). Suhrkamp.
- Adorno, Theodor W. (1970). *Esthetische Theorie, Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. 7, G. Adorno & R. Tiedemann, Eds.). Suhrkamp.
- Adorno, Theodor W., & Horkheimer, Max. (1981). *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente, Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. 3, ed. Rolf Tiedemann). Suhrkamp.
- Bhambra, Gurinder K. (2021). Decolonizing Critical Theory? Epistemological Justice, Progress, Reparations. *Critical Times*, 4(1), 73–89. <https://doi.org/10.1215/26410478-8855227>
- Connell, Raewyn. (2018). Decolonizing Sociology. *Contemporary Sociology*, 47(4), 399–407.
- Douglas, Mary. (1982). *Risk and Culture. An Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers*. University of California Press.
- Go, Julian. (2017). Decolonizing Sociology: Epistemic Inequality and Sociological Thought. *Social Problems*, 2(64), 194–199.
- Honneth, Axel. (2002). *Critique of power. The theory of society in Adorno, Foucault and Habermas*. Dedalo.
- Krenak, Ailton. (2020). *Idee per Rimandare la Fine del Mondo — L'identità esemplare di un piccolo popolo per il futuro delle società umane*. Aboca Edizioni.
- Leccardi, Carmen. (2023). Exploring New Temporal Horizons: A Conversation Between Memories and Futures. Bristol University Press: Bristol.
- Mellino, Miguel. (2021). *La critica postcoloniale. Decolonizzazione, capitalismo e cosmopolitismo nei postcolonial studies*. Meltemi.
- Moore, Jason W. (2017). *Antropocene o Capitalocene? Scenari di ecologia-mondo nell'era della crisi planetaria* (A. Barbero & E. Leonardi, Orgs.). Ombre corte/culture Editore.
- Rodriguez, Encarnacion G., Boatcă, Manuela, & Costa, Sérgio (Orgs.). (2010). *Decolonizing European Sociology: Transdisciplinary Approaches*. Ashgate.

- Pellegrino, Vincenzo, & Ricotta, Giuseppe. (2020). Global social science. Dislocation of the abyssal line and post-abyssal epistemologies and practices. *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, 4, 2020, pp. 803-828.
- Piromalli, Eleonora. (2023). L'alienazione sociale oggi. Una prospettiva teorico-critica. Carocci.
- Wackernagel, Mathias, & Rees, William. (1962). *Our Ecological Footprint. Reducing Human Impact of the Earth*. New Society Publishers.

Received: April 19, 2025.
Accepted: Sept. 25, 2025.



Licenciado sob uma [Licença Creative Commons Attribution 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)