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## **THEORY TRENDS AND DEBATES: WHAT THEORY DO WE NEED? ARE “SOCIOLOGY OF INDIVIDUALS” AND “CRITICAL THEORY” THE LEADING TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY THEORETICAL SOCIOLOGY?<sup>1</sup>**

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### **1. Introduction**

The fact that the European Sociological Association (ESA) organized at the Lisbon 2009 Conference a special semi-plenary session devoted to “purely theoretical” issues<sup>2</sup> (“sociology of individuals” and “critical theory”) seems to be a proof that the association of European sociologists highly regards the scholarly production which transgresses problems defined as narrow, descriptive and practical, and it looks forward to efforts and research projects which could lead to much broader, more general and abstract modeling and explanations. However, “theory” was not defined by the Program Committee of the Conference nor by the organizers of the session. Perhaps the understanding of the term “theory” was taken for granted. It

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<sup>1</sup> This article draws upon the author’s comments (as official discussant) presented at the Semi-Plenary Session “Theory Trends and Debates: what Theory do we need?” during the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the European Sociological Association, Lisbon, September 2009. It is a revised version of the Polish language article which appeared in “Studia Humanistyczne” 2010, No. 8. Many colleagues read this text and gave their opinions, but the responsibility is only the author’s.

<sup>2</sup> During the former, 8<sup>th</sup> ESA Conference (Glasgow 2007) no such a session was held; likewise, at the XVI World Congress of Sociology (Durban 2006) there was not such a session. At the (Gothenburg 2010) XVII World Congress of Sociology a similar session was held (Plenary Theme 5: Theoretical Challenges). The papers were devoted to the problems of the “opposition” between the sacred and the profane; the secularization processes; the critique of “politicized religion”.

should be remembered, too, that beside this “theoretical” semi-plenary session, the ESA Research Network on Social Theory organized in Lisbon its own working groups, as it does during each biannual ESA conference<sup>3</sup>.

The **research problem** of this article is: to what extent this session reflects what is, in actual “sociological practice” and not in various general methodologies of sociology (or “social sciences”), considered to be a “sociological theory” now, at the turn of the century, and what seems to be particularly important in the theoretical trends, as they are visible at major European and global sociological conferences, and also in Polish sociology, native to the author. Therefore, this article is an exercise in “**sociology of sociological theory**”. Differences between theoretical and empirical practice in sociology should not be considered absolute and a-historical; they do exist, however, and it is theory and not empirical sociology what will be analyzed here.

Following the Introduction, this article consists of four sections. In the first one, I outline, in a brief and descriptive way, how “sociological (social) theory” has been understood in the “conference practice” of the most important European (ESA) and global (ISA – International Sociological Association) congresses of the last four years. In the second one, I present the interests in sociological theory “as such” in Poland during the last few decades, concentrating on the recent times. Poland is not only the case I know best, but she can also serve as an example of a Central and Eastern European country in which, until 1989, Marxism was regarded as the only or the major legitimate sociological theory and other general perspectives were marginalized or even denied (obviously, in many other respects Polish sociology is exceptional in this region). Therefore, it seems to me interesting, how and which general Western sociological perspectives were slowly becoming legitimized here. In the third section, I analyze the debate of the semi-plenary, theoretical session of the Lisbon Conference, with an attempt to understand what it really was in sociological theory “that we need” so much. In the fourth and closing part, I discuss how the topics suggested by the Lisbon Conference are being practiced in post-Communist sociology in Poland. Again, I hope that this analysis can become fruitful for other post-Communist and post-authoritarian sociologies.

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<sup>3</sup> There is no space here for the discussion of similarities and differences between “sociological theory” and “social theory”. See e.g.: A. Giddens, *Sociology. A Brief but Critical Introduction* (1982), San Diego 1987, pp. 19–20.

## 2. Sociological theory as actually practiced by European sociologists and by larger sociological community. Case studies of congresses

As mentioned above, “theory” is seldom *explicitly* defined by organizers and program directors of big sociological congresses and even of major sessions devoted to theorizing at these events. This situation obviously differs from the advanced textbooks in the explicit fields of sociological theory (or theories) and from the historical and methodological conferences devoted to “theory as such”. In this article, I am interested in the point of view of “practitioners” of sociological theorizing and not of methodologists, historians or theorists of theory. I will distinguish between theorizing on some substantive social matters on the one hand and dealing with theory as such and the ways theory is, or should be, constructed and evaluated, on the other.

When analyzing conferences and congresses, I rely not only on my memory, but also on the printed programs and printed (as well as electronic) abstract books.

It is very difficult to summarize in a short way the content of the individual working groups of the ESA Research Network 29 (Social Theory) in Lisbon. They dealt with theorizing Europe; contemporary uses of the classical theories; new developments in social theory; the roles of intellectuals and intellectual production; methodological nationalism; social theory and the study of culture; philosophy and general methodology of social sciences; impact of mass media on contemporary social theory. There were only three sessions debating individual theoretical and methodological orientations in contemporary social theory and one session on new challenges to social theory.

What were these “theoretical issues” (concepts, ideas, approaches, theoretical and methodological orientations) discussed by the members or sympathizers of this research network? The scholars dealt with interpretations of the borders between sociology of knowledge and phenomenological sociology; system theory developed by Niklas Luhmann; modern utilitarian theories with the particular stress on theories of rational choice, pragmatism and social capital; and “critical theory”. In the last case, which is of particular interest for this article, the speakers debated on Jürgen Habermas’ work, on the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, on traditional German critical theory and critical analyzes of social aspects of new technologies. Although we can see here, in a sense, a reflection of what was important to the organizers of the “theoretical” semi-plenary session of the Conference, this is the background for only one of the papers presented at the semi-plenary and, moreover, it significantly narrows the concept of “critical theory”. We can ask, then,

if the working group devoted to new challenges for social theory could be considered an important background for the theoretical semi-plenary session. The answer would be rather negative. The working group dealt with the “internal complications” of theories as such at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with social creativeness and its consequences for social theory, and with the limitations for social theorizing caused by the natural environment in which we live. There were no papers on critical theory nor on sociology of individuals.

We can reach outside Europe and look at the Durban 2006 World Congress of Sociology, in search of the “practical” sociological (not “social”) theorizing by its participants. I will skip the theorizing on various very important phenomena and processes of the today’s social world and look at the issues raised by those scholars who were interested in contemporary “theoretical orientations” in sociology. Research Committee on Sociological Theory RC 16 consisted of working groups on social systems theory; philosophy and general methodology of social sciences; new perspectives in sociology of knowledge; action theory “after Bourdieu”; neo-Durkheimianism; contemporary interpretations of ideas which had been novel in sociology twenty years ago (globalization theories, “post-humanism”, modernization). As we can see, neither critical theory nor sociology of individuals were particularly attractive and they did not seem to be desirable.

At the Gothenburg 2010 World Congress of Sociology, the RC 16 met twenty times and dealt, in addition to theorizing (again) on various important social phenomena and processes, with the visual turn in sociological theory; relations between sociological theory and our understanding of environment; non-Western challenges to Western social theory; political philosophy and social theory (the program announced, among other issues, the analysis of the work of Axel Honneth, to whom I will return in due course); and provincializing of social theory. Critical theory was present marginally, and sociology of individuals was absent.

As we can see, the themes, which according to the organizers of the Lisbon 2009 Conference were particularly significant for the recent theoretical debates in sociology, appeared relatively seldom in programs and discussions of “theoretical” working groups of big sociological conferences.

### 3. Practicing sociological theory from the Polish perspective of last few decades<sup>4</sup>

In this section of the essay I would like to put its main problem into the context of Polish publications within the field of global theoretical discussion in sociology, in particular (but not only) after the socialist system (and the domination of the Soviet Marxism) was abolished in 1989. In my opinion, it would potentially be very interesting to compare the Polish experience in this field with the experience of other Central and Eastern European sociological communities.

I will briefly analyze textbooks and readers explicitly representing “sociological theory (or – theorizing)”, published in Poland. These books reach a much wider readership than the methodological and historical analyzes of what sociological theory is.

The first Polish edition of the textbook authored by Jonathan H. Turner, *The Structure of Sociological Theory* (original of 1974; the translated version came from 1978), was published in 1985. New Polish edition, based on the 1998 American version, was published in 2004. The last American version I know comes from 2003. Only the 1998 edition (and its Polish translation) takes the critical theory (in its many varieties: Jürgen Habermas, feminist sociological critique, postmodernism) into account. Sociology of individuals is not analyzed in the textbook.

The series “Sociological Library” (“Biblioteka Socjologiczna”) of the Warsaw’s PWN Publishing House has been publishing the old and new classics of sociology. Within this series, but also by other means, it published after 1989 selected theoretical books by Talcott Parsons, Robert K. Merton, Anthony Giddens, Niklas Luhmann, Pierre Bourdieu, Erving Goffman, Norbert Elias and Harold Garfinkel. Other Polish publishers have been publishing Parsons, Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Kaufmann, Raymond Boudon, Ulrich Beck, Immanuel Wallerstein, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor W. Adorno. After 2000, the Krakow’s Nomos Publishing House initiated a series Contemporary Sociological Theories with the intention to familiarize Polish readers not only with the post-Second World War sociological classics, but also with important works of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>4</sup> This chapter of my article draws, to a limited extent, upon some paragraphs of the text by Aleksander Manterys and Janusz Mucha. A. Manterys, J. Mucha, *Nowe perspektywy teorii socjologicznej. Punkt widzenia 2009 r.* [New Perspectives of Sociological Theory. The 2009 Point of View] [in:] *Nowe perspektywy teorii socjologicznej* [New Perspectives of Sociological Theory], A. Manterys, J. Mucha (eds.), Kraków 2009.

Before the 1989 system transformation, a number of readers in the field of theoretical sociology was published in Poland. However, only the readers of 1977<sup>5</sup> and of 1984<sup>6</sup>, both devoted to the crisis of sociology, paid attention to critical and radical theorizing. Much later, in 2006, another reader<sup>7</sup> presented recent contributions to neo-Marxism and post-Marxism as well as feminist criticism. These and other published in Poland translations of original works, as well as the readers, are very important since they present to the students majoring in sociology, to scholars and to the general public, what is considered to be the most recent and significant sociological theory. Actually, it would be an exaggeration to say, that critical theory is considered here to be very significant; and sociology of individuals is nearly completely absent.

There is no research committee on sociological (nor on social) theory in the framework of the Polish Sociological Association.

#### **4. “Theory Trends and Debates: What Theory Do We Need” – according to the 2009 Lisbon Conference. Semi-Plenary Session of sociological theory**

As I have noted before, the session under discussion was to present the recent trends and debates in sociological theory and, in particular, to answer the question what kind(s) of theory we need nowadays. The Program Committee decided that what was important and needed were critical theory and sociology of individuals. The chair of the session did not say why these topics were so important and necessary for sociology and society. The analysis presented above shows, in my opinion, that it is difficult to consider these two topics as very popular in recent European and global theoretical sociology. It does not, obviously, mean that they are not important or needed.

Both papers which were to be discussed during the session, that is the paper by Bernard Lahire<sup>8</sup> and by Gerard Delanty<sup>9</sup>, have some common features. Their au-

<sup>5</sup> *Czy kryzys socjologii?* [Is Sociology in Crisis?], J. Szacki (ed.), Warszawa 1977.

<sup>6</sup> *Kryzys i schizma* [Crisis and Schism], E. Mokrzycki (ed.), Warszawa 1984.

<sup>7</sup> *Współczesne teorie socjologiczne* [Modern Sociological Theories], A. Jasińska-Kania, L. Nijakowski, J. Szacki, M. Ziółkowski (eds.), Warszawa 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Lahire is a French scholar working in Lyon, a well known sociologist of individuals. See, e.g., the book by Jean-Claude Kaufmann. J.-C. Kaufmann, *Ego. Socjologia jednostki* [*Ego. Pour une sociologie de l'individu. Une autre Vision de l'homme et de la construction du sujet*, 2001], Warszawa 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Delanty is a British scholar working at University of Sussex. His field is cosmopolitan critical

thors stress the significance of the context of every social action as well as of the “positioning” of individuals (Delanty draws mostly upon Michel Foucault); both refer strongly and in a critical manner to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, namely to its different aspects and topics. Lahire stresses the individual level of social phenomena, while Delanty is rather interested in the macro level. These similarities and differences were very interesting for the debate and show the range of interests of today’s theoretical sociology.

Announced in the program, delivered to the invited discussant, the paper of Bernard Lahire was not presented during the conference (the author was not able to come). Its title was *From the Habitus to an Individual Heritage of Dispositions. Towards a Dociology at the Level of the Individual*<sup>10</sup>. It became very soon published on the official website of the conference. I will quote the exact wording of the abstract of the paper, so that it is clear what I am referring to in due course.

It is argued that the notions sociologists use to conceptualize psychological processes occurring at the level of social groups capitalize too strongly on the idea that these processes are general and homogeneous in nature. In particular, the notion of ‘disposition’, which is central to Bourdieu’s theory of the habitus and which is widely employed in sociological research, is found to rest upon these tacit and problematic assumptions which have never been tested empirically. Instead, we should envision that social agents have developed a broad array of dispositions, each of which owes its availability, composition, and force to the socialization process in which it was acquired. In particular, a distinction should be made between dispositions to act and dispositions to believe. Moreover, the intensity with which dispositions affect behavior depends also on the specific context in which social agents interact with one another. A focus on the plurality of dispositions and on the variety of situations in which they manifest themselves is at the core of a sociology at the level of the individual. Its research program conceives of individuals as being products of pluriform social processes occurring in very different domains. It focuses on

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theory. See: G. Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination. The Renewal of Critical Social Theory*, Cambridge 2009.

<sup>10</sup> It is very interesting, in my opinion, that Lahire’s text which was to be (and eventually was) discussed at the 2009 conference, had been in identical version published six years earlier in a periodical, marginal from the point of view of sociology (see: B. Lahire, *From the Habitus to an Individual Heritage of Dispositions. Towards a Sociology at the Level of the Individual*, “Poetics” 2003, No. 32). Perhaps it means that the organizers of the Lisbon Conference were of the opinion that the article has proved to be very important and “in need” for today’s sociology, and, therefore, it should be more widely distributed.

social factors that may account for behavioral variations and changes rather than for irreducible differences between social groups<sup>11</sup>.

Sociology of individuals is, according to Lahire, one of the versions of sociology of socialization. It analyzes the ways in which human dispositions to act emerge, are activated, transformed, how they transfer from one individual onto another, how they disappear or become destroyed. The author is of the opinion that the social context, interactions between people, activate the dispositions. In his view, sociologists' empirical research problem is to what extent the concrete dispositions are coherent and stable. He assumes that the social character of dispositions does not mean that they are collective and general. The significance of individuality lies in the fact that it is a more frequent, more typical phenomenon of human life, than something of a unique character. Following Mary Douglas, he links the significance of individuality with the culture of Enlightenment (in my own opinion, we should go even deeper, to the Renaissance).

Lahire's article, very interesting and in my opinion important, raises a number of questions, both regarding the role of his ideas within the "traditional sociology of individuals" (and, by the same token, this is an issue of its originality), and its justifications.

Sociology of "on the level of individuals", the analysis of macro – and micro-social, interactive contexts of the process of shaping the dispositions, should, in my opinion, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century prove that they transcend the well known theoretical ideas of Charles Horton Cooley from the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and later of, for example, Norbert Elias, who wrote on this topic until his last days in 1990. Lahire does not mention Cooley. He refers to one book by Elias, that on Wolfgang A. Mozart<sup>12</sup>. It is very much relevant here but it is only one of the possible exemplifications of very significant, more general views of that author, expressed, for instance, in his *Die Gesellschaft der Individuen* of 1987<sup>13</sup>, but developed and modified during the decades of his intellectual activities.

Lahire is against the application in social sciences of those scientific procedures which (in his opinion) have been successfully used in natural sciences. In his view, generalizations and universal laws have sense only in the latter sciences. For the analysis of society, it is impossible to reduce the important, internal and external

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<sup>11</sup> B. Lahire, *From the Habitus to an Individual Heritage of Dispositions*, op.cit., p. 329.

<sup>12</sup> N. Elias, *Mozart: zur Soziologie eines Genies*, Frankfurt am Main 2005.

<sup>13</sup> See: N. Elias, *The Society of Individuals* [*Die Gesellschaft der Individuen*, 1987], New York 2001.

contexts of social action to the limited series of parameters. I do not want to re-start the debate on relations between the humanities and natural sciences but it seems to me that Lahire's strictly "deterministic" vision of natural sciences comes rather from the 19<sup>th</sup> than the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and that the opinion on the impossibility of any generalizations and the senselessness of any "simplifications" in social sciences has not been proved in Lahire's text.

In my view, Bernard Lahire is right when he stresses the necessity and usefulness of distinguishing between dispositions to act and dispositions to believe. I am not sure, however, if his struggle for recognition of this distinction is worthwhile. The empirical work of Richard LaPierre of the 1930s, of Richard Kutner of the 1950s, Gordon Allports interpretations of the problems connected with the internal coherence of attitudes and his interpretations of tensions between prejudices and discrimination, published in the 1950s, and continued much later, for instance by Thomas Pettigrew, proved long before Lahire that his opinions are correct. However, he does not refer to these contributions and does not go beyond them. I do not see any "added value". His stress that human individuals can believe in something without having any material and dispositional means to achieve highly valued aims is also, in my opinion, very true, but it does not go beyond the contributions by Emile Durkheim and Robert K. Merton in their already very well known analyzes of anomy and individual (but also collective) adaptation to the tension between values and norms.

To sum up this section of my essay, I would like to express a very cautious opinion that the issues raised by Bernard Lahire are very important, but the sense of his 2003' article repeated in 2009 lies rather in the strong confirmation of the old and well known views that contexts are significant for the interpretation of individual's actions than in any opening of the novel avenues for theoretical analysis. I sincerely believe, like the French scholar, that it is not possible to reduce human worlds to nature but I have not found in Lahire's text any arguments which would support his thesis that "simplification" is senseless in social sciences and that generalizations are neither possible nor useful. My lack of enthusiasm for the recognition of Lahire's article as a turning point for the new debates in theoretical sociology is, however, even for me modified by the fact that I am aware of the respect for Lahire's work, visible, for instance, in the above mentioned book by Jean-Claude Kaufman.

Gerard Delanty, in his *Varieties of Critique in Sociological Theory and Their Methodological Implications for Social Research* analyzes critical theory/ies mostly in the cosmopolitan context. His own summary of the paper prepared for the Lisbon Conference reads as follows:

The notion of critique, as in the idea of a critical theory of society, is in urgent need of clarification both theoretically and methodologically. At least five major uses of the term can be found within sociological theory, the positions associated with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School from Adorno to Habermas and Honneth, Bourdieu's critical sociology, critical realism, Foucault's genealogical critique, and various notions of critical practice, most notably the work of Boltanski and Thevenot. It is possible to detect a movement from the Hegelian-Marxist approach towards interpretative conceptions of critique, leading to a pluralisation of critique and a shift from macro to micro analysis. A theoretical clarification of the notion of critique in these approaches, offers a basis for a new and more rigorous methodological application of critique in social research<sup>14</sup>.

I fully agree with the author's thesis that the very concept of critique demands clarification. On the other hand, it is not true that it is completely blurred. It seems to me that the problem is how the general notion of critique could be successfully applied in various social situations and in the sociological research practice. And this is exactly what the title of Delanty's paper offers.

Like Lahire the concept of individualism, Gerard Delanty links the concept of critique with Enlightenment. I wrote on this matter earlier<sup>15</sup>, so I will not go into details of my own interpretation of this intellectual history. I would like to stress, however, that in my opinion both of these concepts have a deeper origin and can be traced at least to the Renaissance, and its analysis of the texts of the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers and of the Bible. Slightly unlike Delanty, I would distinguish between critique in the Kantian sense (the analysis of "objective" determinants of knowledge) and critique in Marxian-Freudian sense (the analysis of the, generated by broadly understood culture, limitations of human knowledge and activities). I would typologize the ways of critical thinking in a different way than Delanty does. Following Jürgen Habermas, I would distinguish a critique in a common, everyday sense (pointing out that a statement does not reflect what is considered to be an "objective reality"); a critique in ideological sense (linking one's views with his or her defending of groups interests); Marxian and Kantian (linked

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<sup>14</sup> G. Delanty, *Varieties of Critique in Sociological Theory and Their Methodological Implications for Social Research*. A paper presented at the Semi-Plenary Session "Theory Trends and Debates: What Theory do We Need", 9<sup>th</sup> European Conference of Sociology, ESA, Lisbon, September, 27 pages. In print in "Irish Journal of Sociology" 2009b.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g.: J. Mucha, *Socjologia jako krytyka społeczna. Orientacja radykalna i krytyczna we współczesnej socjologii zachodniej* [Sociology as Social Criticism. Radical and Critical Perspectives in Contemporary Western Sociology], Warszawa 1986.

together for the purpose of this analysis) concept of critique of knowledge, understood as a critique of the object of this knowledge; and, last but not least, a critique as destruction, being a first step toward social emancipation. In stressing the particular significance of the latter, I would agree with Delanty. I would accompany him in understanding the “critical social science” only as this particular way of theorizing, which is self-reflexively and consciously critical. That means, perhaps paradoxically, that not only “critical theory” is critical. It is not only Karl R. Popper (Delanty refers to him) who was of the opinion that social sciences are critical out of their very nature. Much earlier, Vilfredo Pareto was of a similar view<sup>16</sup> when he wrote that every good sociology makes it clear to the readers that social life is based on illusions and it attempts to reveal these illusions. Anthony Giddens wrote the same, much later. He did not see any reason to construct a specific critical sociology, since every good sociology is characterized by a “critical imagination”<sup>17</sup>. Giddens stresses the fact that every form of social relations is temporary and the direction of transformations will depend on reflective activities of informed people. In the sense of Pareto, Popper and Giddens, sociology, in order to be *implicitly* critical, does not have to be normative. Delanty is for normative critical theory. For me, the above mentioned non-normative social theory can be in fact very critical but (like Delanty) I would not extend the term “critical theory” only because we can attach some critical functions to the revealing of the illusions or of the temporary character of what people consider to be eternal.

As suggested above, I would sympathize with Delanty’s linking (*implicitly* or *explicitly*) sociological criticism with emancipatory potential of thinking and research. To the classics mentioned by the authors, C. Wright Mills and Alvin Gouldner, I would add the pre-Second World War American sociologists like Robert S. Lynd, as well as the post-war radical current in American sociology. When Delanty writes about the critical work of Michel Foucault, he aptly points to the fact that the French philosopher’s ideas stress the necessity to study the perspective of the marginalized groups and to study the society’s mainstream from the point of view of these marginalized groups. We should bear in mind, however, that this perspective had been very important to the American radical sociologists, including Alvin Gouldner, which is overlooked by Delanty. Personally, I would not put Michael Burawoy to this thematic field outlined by Delanty. Obviously, Burawoy considers critical sociology as a very important part or aspect of general socio-

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<sup>16</sup> See e.g.: A. Kojder, *Wstęp* [Introduction] [in:] V. Pareto, *Uczucia i działania. Fragmenty socjologiczne* [Emotions and Actions. Sociological Fragments, 1916], Warszawa 1994, pp. xii–xiv.

<sup>17</sup> A. Giddens, *op.cit.*

logical practice, but he means not the sociological critique of society but rather (this is very important too, in my view) the critical analysis of the foundations, normative and factual, of the research programs of the professional sociology<sup>18</sup>.

I would agree with Delanty that the shift of the critical thinking in sociology from macro-sociological to micro-sociological analysis can mean a certain loss for sociology. However, to some extent this shift does not mean only substitution but also addition, or, in other words, that macro-critique is still practiced, but micro-critique is added, we can have to do with the broadening of the field of critique. This may be a pluralisation of critique, what should be considered, from the point of view of the message of Delanty's paper, something positive rather than negative.

As we can see in Delanty's summary of his paper presented above, the scholar offers his own typology of the today's complex, multiplot, based on various assumptions, critical sociology, or, rather, critical ideas present in current sociology, important for the methodologies of its research projects. As we remember, the author is interested in self-reflexive sociology, conscious of its own critical potential. I will not repeat this typology nor elaborate on it. I will only summarize what is important in my own opinion. The today's continuation of the classical critical theory is first of all the work of German sociologist and philosopher Axel Honneth, a leading representative of neo-Marxism, a critical analyst of the power relations, of social recognition, as well as reification<sup>19</sup>. He collaborates with such leading representatives of feminist criticism as Judith Butler and Nancy Fraser. The major figures in critical realism in sociology (in particular in sociology of culture) are Margaret Archer<sup>20</sup> and Andrew Sayer<sup>21</sup>. These scholars stress the significance of the objective and hard to observe empirically social reality which underlies the human actions and social transformations. This deep structural reality should be uncovered, disclosed, by the critical social sciences. Reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and its critical potential are very well known in sociological world, as much as the "genealogical critique" by Michel Foucault and its impact on sociology. "Critical practice", inherent in the work of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thevenot, leading representatives of the "pragmatic school" in today's French sociology,

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<sup>18</sup> See: M. Burawoy, *For Public Sociology*, "American Sociological Review" 2005, No. 70 (February), p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> See: A. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Cambridge 1996; A. Honneth, *Reification. A Recognition-Theoretical View*, Oxford 2007.

<sup>20</sup> See e.g.: M. Archer, *Realist Social Theory. The Morphogenetic Approach*, Cambridge 1995.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g.: A. Sayer, *Realism and Social Sciences*, London 2000.

their analysis of moral aspects of conflicts and of justifications of the legitimacy claims<sup>22</sup>, seem to be well known in sociological community, as well.

I like very much Delanty's typology and his analysis of particular types of critical approach in today's social sciences. I fully appreciate the fact that he is interested in methodological aspects and implications of the conceptions under consideration. At the same time, I have some problems with the scope of his idea of methodology, displayed in the title of his paper. In my opinion, his analysis concerns methodology understood as a set of directions how to interpret or explain social issues. This is a lot. However, the title refers to the implications for methodology of social research. We could potentially understand it as the directions how to collect the material (and what kind of material) and not only how to interpret material already collected. Does Delanty raise at all the issue of how to study the social phenomena according to a critical paradigm? He does not say a lot on that matter, but we can find in his paper some interesting directions. I have already mentioned that he stresses the emancipatory potential inherent *implicite* in critical research. We could refer this insight to the neglected by Delanty, but mentioned in my essay American radical sociology of the late 1960s and early 1970s, in particular to the work of Tom Bottomore, who underlined the necessity to study the emancipatory social movements, as well and the "sparks of the future", already visible today. This is a clear and realistic methodological directive. I have already mentioned the suggestions to study the power relations, social conflicts, and hidden below the surface of social life social and cultural structures, having significant consequences for our everyday life.

At the end of his paper, Gerard Delanty presents three research areas which should, according to him, be covered by critical theories. The first is the social crises, symptoms of the breakdown of important, for social actors, normative orders. The second are the processes of social resistance, social mobilization and the shaping and transformation of political agency. The third is the issue mentioned in the former paragraph of my article – the "world disclosure". The revealing of the objective social structures, which are the hidden foundations of social crises, is the background of the potential resolution of social problems (even if not all of them) and, finally, of emancipation. These aims of social research, significant for critical sociology, seem to me to be very important.

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<sup>22</sup> See e.g.: L. Boltanski, L. Thevenot, *De la justification. Les economies de la grandeur*, Paris 1991; L. Boltanski, L. Thevenot, *The Sociology of Critical Capacity*, "European Journal of Social Theory" 1996, No. 2, 3.

## 5. “Lisbon practice” in the field of sociological theory and the Polish “theoretical practice”. Toward conclusions

Let us “return” to Poland. Everything (or rather nearly everything) what is considered important and what is practiced in the international sociological community, is present in Poland now, not only in translations but also in the “local” research programs and in the interpretations by Polish scholars. In this section of the essay, however, I am interested in a specific issue, namely the “real” Polish interests in the topics and theoretical fields that were defined by the Lisbon 2009 Conference as particularly significant and “in need”. Therefore, I will be looking for the interest in “sociology of individuals” and in “critical theory” in Polish sociological activities, mostly publications. I hope it is obvious that I cannot know everything and that there might be some research projects and publications that escaped my careful attention. Another thing is that I will be primarily looking for the self-reflexive and conscious practicing of these two topics and not for a “common sense” sociology of individuals and a “common sense” critique practiced by sociologists.

I do not know if, from the point of view of the enthusiasts of “individualistic sociologies”, it is enough, but the Elias’ book on society of individuals<sup>23</sup> was translated and published in Polish in 2008, and the book by Jean-Claude Kaufmann on *Ego. Sociology of the Individual* was published in Polish in 2004. Polish scholars publish their interesting own books on this topic<sup>24</sup>. It is interesting, that the Polish own research projects do not rely very strongly on the translated classics of this field and ignore the contribution of Bernard Lahire who, as I have mentioned earlier, is very highly valued for instance by Kaufmann. It is possible that the present acquaintance of Polish sociologists with the recent French sociological literature is limited and Elias has become better known only very recently. My conclusion is that the debate on sociology of individuals is present in Poland, there are individual research projects in this field but it proceeds in a different way than the debate in the Western sociology. Moreover, it would be difficult to say that

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<sup>23</sup> N. Elias, *The Society of Individuals* [*Die Gesellschaft der Individuen*, 1987], New York 2001.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g.: Z. Bokszański, *Indywidualizm a zmiana społeczna* [Individualism and Social Change], Warszawa 2007; M. Jacyno, *Kultura indywidualizmu* [Culture of Individualism], Warszawa 2007; M. Olcoń-Kubicka, *Indywidualizacja a nowe formy wspólnotowości* [Individualization and New Forms of Collective Life], Warszawa 2009. See also a review of Polish contributions to individualistic sociology in: M. Gargula, *Dyskurs terapeutyczny jako główna tendencja współczesnej kultury* [Therapeutic Discourse as a Major Tendency of the Contemporary Culture], “Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 2009, LIII, No. 1.

theoretical or empirical sociology of individuals is considered to be particularly important in Poland.

I am much more interested in critical sociology. Critical theory of the Frankfurt School is well known in Poland. Some collections and authored books by the members of its first generation and also by Jürgen Habermas have been translated into Polish. There are a lot of Polish books, mostly published in the 1980s and 1990s, on various aspects of the School. There are books on the radical and critical American sociology of the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, the recent critical theory is much less known. Axel Honneth is known from one book authored by him and Nancy Fraser<sup>25</sup>. In May 2010, he gave a talk in the Department of Philosophy of Warsaw University. I do not remember any translation of the work by Margaret Archer or any analysis of her writings. Andrew Sayer is even less known than Archer. Most of the books written by Pierre Bourdieu were translated into Polish but the critical potential of his work is hardly stressed here (an exception will be discussed later in this article). Most of the books and essays by Michel Foucault were translated but, again, quite seldom are they discussed in the critical context. Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thevenot are not known<sup>26</sup>.

It is very difficult to say if there has been and continues to be a self-reflexive, conscious of its intellectual character and status, critical sociology of the contemporary Polish society. Andrzej Rychard writes that (the context shows that he means the period of socialism) most of the Polish sociological community was ill-disposed, critical toward the political system<sup>27</sup>, but this critical attitude, the author says, was motivated not politically but “esthetically” and morally. It is hard to disagree with Rychard. Even if we agree (I would) that there can be various ways of critical theorizing (not necessarily following the Frankfurt School or American radical sociology; we remember the Delanty’s typology), the “critical approach” of Polish sociology between Second World War and 1989 was not based on any self-reflexive, conscious of its character, critical methodology. The same can be said about various books on the Solidarity period (1980–1981) and on the post-1989 era. Sergiusz Kowalski published in 1990, written in the 1980s, in my opinion a very important (reprinted several times), analysis of the Solidarity motivated, common-sense, everyday mentality. The title (*Critique of the Solidarity Reason*) is obviously

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<sup>25</sup> N. Fraser, A. Honneth, *Redystrybucja czy uznanie: debata polityczno-filozoficzna [Umverteilung oder Anerkennung? Eine politisch-philosophische Kontroverse]*, Wrocław 2005.

<sup>26</sup> In the Internet catalogues of the major Polish university libraries, there are very few works by Honneth, Archer, Boltanski or Thevenot.

<sup>27</sup> A. Rychard, *Parę refleksji o trudnościach tworzenia krytycznej socjologii postkomunizmu [Some Musings on Critical Sociology of PostCommunism]*, “Studia Socjologiczne” 2007, No. 1 (184), p. 48.

referring to the titles of Immanuel Kant's critiques. The book is critical and radical in the everyday, common-sense way, but it does not use any critical or radical methodology and actually does not even refer to the content of Kant's critiques. Therefore, this is not what Gerard Delanty had in mind when he analyzed various ways of recent critical theorizing and what the characters of his narrative have had in mind. However, I would include Kowalski's book to the broadly understood, "vernacular" critical sociology, since it is a profound analysis of mentality, revealing its deep structures which were not understood by its subjects and which prevented their emancipation.

During last few years, two short but very interesting articles were published in Poland, which stress the urgent need to develop a critical theorizing not only in this country but also in the whole Central and Eastern Europe. I will discuss them separately since there actually are nearly no common ideas in them. What makes them similar to each other and to Kowalski's book is the common-sense, vernacular approach to sociological critical thinking.

Andrzej Rychard<sup>28</sup> quotes one text by Habermas and one text by Gouldner but unfortunately not in order to take advantage of their critical methodologies. However, he poses in his short essay very important problems, significant for any sociology, and in particular for the critical one: how to explain the social world without justifying its actual, present shape; how to analyze critically a social order without being involved in the political conflict; how to do a "critical research" without limiting oneself to the analysis of the political field (or to what is currently understood as political). Without directly responding the Rychard questions in the present essay, I could simply say that there exist various answers to them, well elaborated for instance in critical sociologies discussed by Delanty. Perhaps Andrzej Rychard, for whom critical sociology of post-communism is so important, will take them into account in his next works.

Tomasz Zarycki conceptualizes the issue of critical theorizing in a different way. He is interested in the same region and period (Central and Eastern Europe as well as Russia during the last two decades), but he puts it into the theoretical framework of the analysis of centers and peripheries. Many times, he uses the term "critical sociology" but he does not explain it at all. He reaches for critical reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu but I would hesitate to say that he is looking for any particular critical methodology in this classic. He reaches for the book of Craig J. Calhoun on the history and typology of critical thinking. These two sources serve him to draw the following, important conclusions: critical sociology should con-

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<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

tain some elements of its own sociology, i.e. be self-critical; it should understand that it will inevitably be involved in real conflict of interests; it should take as its assumption the thesis that the existing state of affairs is not the only possible one and that the social dynamics has not come to the end<sup>29</sup>.

However, I have a different opinion than Tomasz Zarycki on several topics. I cannot agree on some of his assumptions concerning critical sociology. *Classic Western Critical Sociology*, he says, “concentrates, as all of us know, on the problems of economic inequalities. To the majority of representatives of this current, they are *de facto* the only real inequalities, in particular in modern societies. Other dimensions of inequalities are treated as of secondary importance or ostensible”<sup>30</sup>. These sentences are, in my opinion, hardly true. It should be added that the author does not present any analysis of what he means by critical sociology. I will not continue this topic and come to his other ideas and postulates. According to Zarycki, in Poland (but also in other post-communist countries) the cultural capital (in Russia – political capital) is of a primary character, so critical sociology should concentrate on cultural inequalities. Because Zarycki does not believe in the existence of any (even in Bourdieu) cultural critical theory in the Western sociology, he does not look for any former methodologies of sociological critique (he does not offer his own methodology either). On the other hand, I find very interesting his conclusions of the assumption concerning the Central and Eastern European societies. In these societies with privileged role of cultural capital, sociologists belong to its carriers. Therefore, the practicing of critical sociology may be much more difficult than in societies where economic capital or even political capital dominate (and sociologists are not their carriers). In Central and Eastern Europe, according to this interpretation, critical sociologists would have to oppose their own social group base and, unlike in the West, they cannot expect any structural support from it.

I do not have a very clear opinion on the real significance of the sociology of individuals. If it is so important as the organizers of the Lisbon 2009 Conference thought, I am very sorry that it is not visible at other big sociological congresses and it does not develop faster in my country. Critical sociology, or, more generally, critical social theory, seems to me to be very important wherever there are strong social (economic, political, cultural, etc.) inequalities and where sociologists have a deep conviction that social life is ruled by some hidden mechanisms which prevent the social emancipation of large social groupings. Most probably, this is the

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<sup>29</sup> T. Zarycki, *Socjologia krytyczna na peryferiach* [Critical Sociology on the Peripheries], “Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 2009, LIII, No. 1, pp. 115–116.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 105.

case everywhere in the world. As we could see in this concluding chapter, it is possible to practice critical sociology in the common-sense, vernacular way, but it is also possible to take advantage of the existing ideas, like those debated in Lisbon.

In Poland, during the XIV Polish Congress of Sociology, held in Kraków in 2010, two students organized a regular thematic group devoted to “critical theory today”. Among eight speakers, there were only graduate students. Perhaps the change is coming.

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## SUMMARY

This essay is an exercise in the field of sociology of sociology. Its inspiration lies in the debate on "such sociological theory which will be needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century". The debate took place during the Lisbon Conference of the European Sociological Association in 2009. The Program Committee made the practical decision, by inviting the speakers of the semi-

plenary session devoted to social theory, that the most needed theoretical and methodological orientations in social sciences are “sociology of individuals” and “critical theory”. The author shows, based on the examples of the accomplishments of big international (European and global) sociological conferences held during last decade, that these two theoretical orientations are not, in fact, as popular in sociology, as the Lisbon Conference would suggest. Therefore, the Lisbon diagnosis does not seem to be accurate. Similarly, in Polish way of practicing theory and in the publication practice (textbooks in the field of theory, readers in the field of theory) of last few decades, it is difficult to find arguments supporting the thesis that “sociology of individuals” and “critical theory” are what is particularly needed. Further on, the essay summarizes the arguments of the Lisbon speakers on the nature of contemporary sociology of individuals and critical theory. At the end, the author discusses the actual interest of Polish sociologists in sociology of individuals and critical theory.

**Key words:**

sociological theory, sociology of individuals, critical theory, international sociology, Polish sociology