

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the way in which contemporary social theorists conceptualise the divisions, disturbances, and failures of social life. It examines the special role that classical ideas of *crisis* and *critique* play in grasping the experience of rupture and finitude of the institutional frameworks that sustain human relations. The analysis developed in this thesis is designed to examine the inner relationship between these concepts and to demonstrate their mutual capacity to give meaning to moments of *diremption* of the social. It does so against customary claims in contemporary social theory that, at least since the 1960s and 1970s, have tended to regard crisis and critique as obsolete and inadequate analytical tools. The thesis examines and challenges the idea that social theory must do away with these concepts, for it obscures what is essential to these concepts: the potentiality of revealing what limits and exceeds our current ways of life.

The thesis makes the case for the continuing importance of the concepts of crisis and critique as ‘social moments’ by way of rediscovering their mutual relationship in terms of ‘dialectical affinity’; that is to say, a non-causal relationship in which each term can actively register, bring about and turn into the other, and in which the unity of its elements is as important as their divorce. The core assumption is that social theory already provides us with essential tools for reconstructing different *modes of encounter* between the objective experience of crisis and the subjective practice of critique. To demonstrate this, the thesis draws upon the writings of Hannah Arendt on totalitarianism, Michel Foucault on governmentality, and Jürgen Habermas on communicative rationality.

The sought-for contribution of the thesis is to find neither new foundations nor better definitions for each of these concepts but rather *to rediscover the inner connectedness* between them as a mode of sociologically grasping moments of diremption of social life.