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Recognition as Generative Movement.
Axel Honneth between Structure of the Self and
Second Nature

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*Sagt, wo findet sich die Gerechtigkeit,
welche Liebe mit sehenden Augen ist?*

Friedrich Nietzsche

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Introduction

The term *recognition* has taken on a central position for at least thirty years now. And this not only in philosophical debates, but also – and perhaps above all – its relevance has acquired depth as a political and sociological conceptuality. In times of globalization of the markets, of forms of communication, of ways of leading one's own life, facing the challenges of pluralism, that of being recognized is a need that is increasingly and widespreadly manifested. Or perhaps, what is increasing is the impression of being misrecognized, the “feeling of not existing in the public discourse, in the eyes and voices of others.”¹ With the dialectic proper to socio-political claims, ‘recognition’ presents itself both as a need of social actors and as a theoretical concept. Then, the concept is outlined from received and acknowledged needs, and, by giving them a voice, interpreting them, theory (at any level) contributes to making them explicit and hence to grounding new claims – not without possible ambivalences. It is therefore no coincidence that the amplification of theoretical debates and the intensification of demands for recognition by social actors go hand in hand.

But recognition of *what*? Even remaining within the philosophical-political realm, the answer to this question seems to be extremely complex. A first hermeneutic step is certainly provided by Charles Taylor's intuition, by which the recognition of *equality* is distinguished from the recognition of *difference*. The first

¹ Alexandra Schwartz, ‘To Exist in the Eyes of Others: An Interview with the Novelist Édouard Louis on the Gilets Jaunes Movement’, *The New Yorker*, 14th December 2018 <<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/to-exist-in-the-eyes-of-others-an-interview-with-the-novelist-edouard-louis-on-the-gilets-jaunes-movement>>.

Another example – among many possible – that the acknowledgment of others' need to be seen and heard represents the basic fundamental step out of social and racial exclusion, portrayed by Erin Aubrey Kaplan through the similitude between anti-racism protests in the U.S. and Dr. Seuss's *Horton Hears a Who*. It is worth quoting some passages of the article, which revolves around the lexicon of recognition: “We are having a Horton moment. White people previously oblivious to the worst kind of racial oppression had their obliviousness shattered by the images of a police officer killing George Floyd. The dam burst, reality rushed in, and a critical mass of whites and others finally saw — and heard, and felt — Black people as they never had before. Suddenly everyone is paying attention [...]. This is where the Dr. Seuss story happily ends: by virtue of being recognized as equals by the wider world, the Whos are saved. They will never be devalued again. Unfortunately, we are not living in a Dr. Seuss story. The burgeoning new white consciousness about Black lives, though significant and encouraging, is not an ending, but a beginning.” Cf. Erin Aubrey Kaplan, ‘Everyone's an Antiracist. Now What? Recognizing That Black People Deserve Dignity Isn't Progress.’, *The New York Times*, 6th July 2020 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/06/opinion/antiracism-what-comes-next.html>>.

form of recognition would essentially concern the granting of equal rights, according to a certain universalism proper to liberal societies and the related conception of individual rights. The *what* of recognition would thus be the equal status of every individual, and its *how* the social-juridical instantiations of such equality. The recognition of difference, instead, would go beyond such a generalized fairness, to the extent that it would capture and frame more particularistic aspirations of individuals, groups, minorities, that strive for seeing their peculiar *identities* affirmed. In this case, even though the *how* is almost the same, the *what* seems closely related with the concept of *identity*, which cannot be assumed as equal for every individual. Clearly, equality and difference – especially in their respective relationship with ‘identity’ – are not to be sharply disjointed. In the name of equality with the other, one can demand recognition of one’s own particularity. But particularity itself – one’s own identity – can also be at the basis of requests and struggles for equal rights, autonomies, powers. Thus, the issue of recognition – of difference *and* equality – has emerged as a pivotal concern in debates and conflicts over civil rights, in the demands made by the most diverse minorities, but also in demands for greater political autonomy and in independence movements, in nationalist reactions to globalization, in conflicts to preserve an identity perceived as at risk, both in post-colonial contexts and with regard to migratory flows. In other words, the term ‘recognition’ has assumed a leading role in the contemporary socio-political landscape as conceptual catalyst for identities within pluralistic contexts. Given the breadth and dissimilarity of the issues at stake, it follows that this concept can hardly be framed or rendered as one-sidedly characterizing *one* political conception, movement, or even party. The impression is that the demand for being recognized concerns every range of the spectrum.

From this would follow that such a polysemy of the *what* and the *how* of recognizing (and being recognized) cannot be enclosed in the political sphere in the strict sense. And in fact, the term can be found as used in different practical, linguistic, applicative, educational, scientific, and academic meanings, so that the perception of being faced with a problem on which philosophy must ‘stop and think’ is increased. Is there any underlying element capable of reconciling the meanings involved by a minority’s political demands for recognition, facial recognition applications, the recognition given to an artist by the critics, or the recognition that the ruins discovered correspond to the ancient city sought after in the excavations? How can the same term be used in such different cases as recognizing an old acquaintance on the street, recognizing that I was wrong, recognizing a melody in a waiting room, recognizing a sovereign state, or recognizing the validity of an appeal to the court? With these examples – there are many others available, from daily life

or philosophical reflection – we are shifting from the what and how *of* recognizing to the what *is* recognition.

What *is* recognition, then? The above examples indicate first of all receiving, perceiving, knowing a physiognomy, an identity. But they also oscillate towards a more attributive dimension, which can be articulated through political measures, or critics' reactions, or the validation of the appeal. We are faced with a polarity, the one between reception and attribution, which lurks in how we speak the word 'recognition'. Recognizing is not simply the passive acceptance of an already-given, nor can it be considered as an actively unbalanced attribution, understood as a creative act. Re-cognition is not mere cognition, but cannot be disjointed from the apperceptive movement of grasping something as *the* something it is. Vice versa, recognition is not straightforward attribution, but cannot be disjointed from the affirming and confirming movement of *giving* recognition. This hybrid nature of recognizing, which oscillates between knowing and acting, is made even more blurred by the fact that the term entails different implications of meaning in the different languages in which the philosophical debate about it is conducted. To recognize and to acknowledge, *erkennen* and *anerkennen*, and *reconnaître* bring with them numerous nuances, often at the root of incomprehensions and misunderstandings, that often remain undetected. Above all, conceptual disagreements become manifest with regard to two other conceptual plexuses that are closely linked to recognition – in addition to identity and the reception-attribution polarity. These are the intersubjective character of recognition and the distinction between the so-called positive and negative theories of recognition.

With regard to the first issue, intersubjectivity that is, two principal insights are being sketched drawing principally from John Searle on the one hand, and Fichte and Hegel on the other. First of all, an idea of recognition is upheld that echoes the Searlean formula of collective intentionality, which acts as a constitutive rule for institutional realities: X counts as Y in C.² The well-known example provided by Searle is that of the piece of paper (X) which counts as a five dollar bill (Y) in the context of economic transactions (C). As we will see especially in Chapter 5, this formula is translated in terms of recognition as follows: X is taken/treated *as* Y in C, whereby C is the context or sphere of recognition, and Y the status or significant traits granted or endowed to the recognizee. For example, a human being (X) is taken/treated – namely, recognized – as legal person (Y) in the context of a contract or a process (C). What is noteworthy at this point is that X can be basically anything: a person, a law, an animal, a rock, a situation. A dog (X) is treated as my pet (Y) at home, by the neighbors, or by anyone thanks to the collar plate (C). Or a stone (X)

² Cf. John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995), p. 43 ff.

is taken as a keystone (Y) by the Roman architect at the aqueduct site (C). Regardless of what 'X' actually is, what matters is a certain 'harmony' between the mode by which X is regarded and the 'as Y', so that the treatment can be considered as a form of acting accordingly with respect to X's features: taking a dog as a keystone would certainly not fall under the idea of recognition we have in mind by speaking. This first insight, therefore, does not prevent to think of recognition outside of intersubjective relations. And clearly, such a definition of recognizing leaves the reception-attribution binomial undecided, oscillating between conceiving it as 'giving what is due' or as constituting capabilities or powers, so as it leaves open whether we are supposed to understand 'recognition' according to a more epistemological or a more normative matrix – both issues become blurred above all for what concerns individual rights and statuses.

The other insight about intersubjectivity adopts a different approach, not simply by stressing the interpersonal character of recognition, but rather a certain kind of it, namely reciprocity or *mutuality*. Or better: mutuality, considered inherent to recognition, is supposed as requiring both relational poles to be recognizers – either at a logical level, or at an explicit, reflexive level shared by the participants. Fichte, for example, describes the relationship of recognition as emerging from and instantiating in A's invitation (*Aufforderung*) towards B, and in the latter's responding. This presupposes that A has already recognized B as a free being (since you do not invite a chair to act or to assume a stance) and that B, by responding, understands A's exhortation as flowing from a free being, in a game of mutual conditioning. The interaction between human beings would necessarily be 'inhabited' by the reciprocity of recognizing each other as persons endowed with freedom. But this – on a second level – can concern the most everyday case for which we feel affirmed, recognized, only when the compliment addressed to us comes from a person who, in turn, we esteem or at least consider a competent judge. In being considered, our consideration of the considerer is constantly at stake. In this case it would seem that mutual conditioning leads recognition practices in a more receptive and normative framework. However, the epistemological matrix seems difficult to erase, because in order to 'invite' B, I must already have 'seen' its being a human person. And moreover, some room for discussion opens up as one notices that recognition itself does not represent, especially for Hegel, a simple 'addition' to the participants' being free, but the actual condition for and existence of freedom. Almost paradoxically, in order to be recognized as a free person I have to already inhabit the space-for-freedom constituted by reciprocal recognition. In order to be able to act autonomously, we must have mutually attributed each other (or 'seen' in each other) the status of responsible actors. In this sense, also the attributive/constitutive dimension of recognition cannot be ruled out. But a further

problem of this second insight concerns how this mutuality should be understood. This discloses, in addition to the logical-structural dimension of reciprocity, the *moral* problem of recognition relationships on multiple levels. While participants' equality and the symmetry of their reciprocal consideration seem to guarantee a solid moral standard, the concept of recognition is often appreciated as capable of decentering and unbalancing modern atomism and contractual views on sociality and morality – which actually revolve around symmetrical obligations and statuses. Conversely, it cannot be said that in imbalance *per se*, which can consist in or lead to a profound asymmetries between me and the other, lie factors that allow to distinguish recognition relationships from domination and subordination. Also in this case, therefore, recognition is conceptualized in hybrid forms, halfway between symmetry and unbalance, between freedom's becoming shared and (in-)voluntary subjection.

Basically, it is with respect to these dilemmas that in recent years critical literature has identified and distinguished negative and positive theories of recognition.³ On the one hand, in fact, disparate authors such as Rousseau, Louis Althusser and Judith Butler consider recognition relationships as the main way through which individual's subordination to society is instantiated and reproduced. As is well known, according to Rousseau the 'entry' into society would coincide with being grafted with non-authentic forms of desire (*amour propre*) that would bind the individual, in itself free, to other's gaze and to the urge for approval. Thus, always watching oneself from a second-person perspective, the access to one's own selfhood would become blurred, if not compromised. According to Althusser, mutual recognition exemplified in reciprocal interpellation represents the way in which the social order that towers above the subjects is daily confirmed, crystallized, reproduced. The reciprocal confirmation of being subjects (i.e. subjects to the social order) is in fact carried out according to modalities and expressions not decided by the participants, but proposed-imposed by the context they live in. And the same could be said of the confirming gestures' object, the social roles and standing, with related tasks, faculties, powers, that the subjects can biographically pursue, but not delineate autonomously in the first instance.⁴ This ambiguity and ambivalence of the term 'subject' is adopted and stressed also by Judith Butler. In a nutshell, Butler's question concerns voluntary (more or less conscious) subjection and the ways

³ Cf., for example, Rahel Jaeggi, 'Anerkennung Und Unterwerfung: Zum Verhältnis von Negativen Und Positiven Theorien Der Intersubjektivität', https://www.philosophie.hu-berlin.de/de/Lehrbereiche/Jaeggi/Mitarbeiter/Jaeggi_rahel/An-erkennungunterwerfung, 2006; Georg W. Bertram and Robin Celikates, 'Towards a Conflict Theory of Recognition: On the Constitution of Relations of Recognition in Conflict', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 23.4 (2015), 838–61.

⁴ Cf. Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (London - New York: Verso, 2014), pp. 232–72.

subjects become attached to the modes of their own subordination. Given the evident vulnerability and interpersonal dependence that characterize the human lifeform, relationships of recognition would hence represent a constitutive form of power, which – almost behind the participants’ backs – favors the assumption of roles, the transmission of ethical-cultural patterns, and the internalization of norms, leveraging on the need for acceptance and inclusion and, as it were, delivering the individual into the arms of heteronomy – by granting her subjectivity.⁵

The positive theories of recognition – which basically include various re-elaborations of Hegel’s thought – move in an almost opposite direction. That is, they look positively at the fact that recognition represents a vital human need and base on certain relational forms the possibilities of developing an undamaged practical identity and freedom’s actualization. Therefore, both an empirical dimension and a normative one would be outlined. On the one hand the concept of recognition would make it possible to ‘take seriously’ selfhood’s intersubjective constitution, and on the other hand it would provide evaluative criteria for judging and criticizing the intersubjective-institutional concretions we find ourselves living in. Clearly, also these positive theories entail various facets and provide different theoretical options. For instance, while recognition can be read in more deontological-normative terms as by Brandom and Pippin,⁶ Andreas Wildt argues it would represent an alternative to the ‘legalistic’ forms of Kantian morality.⁷ Ludwig Siep, by placing the principles of recognition at the center of practical philosophy, draws an evaluative framework for institutions from the norms of reciprocity;⁸ Heikki Ikäheimo emphasizes that recognition represents a fundamental element of humanization, of inclusion in personhood;⁹ or, not least, Paul Ricoeur emphasizes that, besides being a fundamental element by the formation of the ‘capable person’, the experience of mutuality coincides with those states of peace connected with giving and good receiving.¹⁰

⁵ Cf. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Amy Allen, ‘Dependency, Subordination, and Recognition: On Judith Butler’s Theory of Subjection’, *Continental Philosophy Review*, 38.3–4 (2006), 199–222.

⁶ Cf. Robert B. Brandom, ‘The Structure of Desire and Recognition: Self-Consciousness and Self-Constitution’, in *Recognition and Social Ontology*, ed. by Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 25–51; Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy. Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁷ Cf. Andreas Wildt, *Autonomie Und Anerkennung. Hegels Moralitätskritik Im Lichte Seiner Fichte-Rezeption* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982).

⁸ Cf. Ludwig Siep, *Anerkennung Als Prinzip Der Praktischen Philosophie. Untersuchungen Zu Hegels Jenaer Philosophie Des Geistes* (Freiburg - München: Alber, 1979).

⁹ Cf. Heikki Ikäheimo, ‘A Vital Human Need: Recognition as Inclusion in Personhood’, *European Journal of Political Theory*, 8.1 (2009), 31–45.

¹⁰ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. by David Pellauer (Cambridge - London: Harvard University Press, 2005).

Already from these brief arguments it is possible to grasp how varied the theoretical panorama on the concept of recognition is. It ranges over multiple disciplines, from philosophy to research on artificial intelligence; it concerns the macro-level of theories of society and justice, and the micro-level of individuation and of personal relationships; its understanding hangs either towards a cognitive act or towards an ethical-normative practice. Furthermore, we have already noticed some issues and problematic binomials that will accompany us throughout the course of this work. What is recognition's connection to identity? Does the former simply attest the latter, constitute it, or contribute to its formation? Or perhaps even to its fluidification? And, in any of these cases, is the act of recognition to be understood as the passive reception of other's features, or as attributing new ones? Can one speak of 'recognition' even when there is no interactional mutuality and, if not, why? What relationship, if any, do mutuality and reciprocity, symmetry and asymmetry entertain with each other? And, finally, should the evident connection between recognition and individual's social integration be understood as a form of (ideological) power that conforms and flattens the person to a given context, or as the possibility of breaking down the walls of atomism, providing the individual with (motivational and contextual) elements to effectively *exercise* her autonomy?

In this theoretical quagmire, there seem to be two alternatives for research to gain more clarity on the concept of recognition. It is possible to make a comparative work, entering the debate by comparing the alternatives proposed by different authors or paradigms. Or – and this is the choice made for our inquiry – the perspective of a single thinker can be deepened. Our focus will be on Axel Honneth. The reasons for dealing with a single author and for choosing Honneth as this author are closely related.

First, Honneth is certainly the philosopher who has contributed most, both in Europe and America, to reviving the contemporary debate on the concept of recognition. While Siep and Wildt (along with others) catalyzed German academic attention on the concept back in the 1980s, and Charles Taylor since 1992 has shaped the North American debate on recognition within the opposition between liberalism and communitarianism, Honneth has been able to develop a multi-faceted recognition paradigm, a prism through which the concept itself has been able to gain autonomy from unilateral approaches, thus able to show itself in its richness and polysemy. This is closely linked to Honneth's methodological and theoretical approach, which, in a nutshell, can be defined socio-philosophical, critical, and normative. *Socio-philosophical*, because first of all attention is paid to the social fact in its expressions and concretions. Moving from a more action-theoretical approach to a more institutions-related one, Honneth's thinking deals with different dimensions and philosophical domains without being 'locked' into

them. It should therefore come as no surprise that anthropology plays a fundamental role, as does sociological inquiry in the strict sense, or that literary works and novels – even autobiographical documentations, in his first publications – are taken as authoritative access points to society’s opacities. Or that Honneth joins the philosophical-political debates on justice, on the priority either of the right or of the good, on the relationship and tensions between the personal and public spheres, or between the market and democratic institutions. It is no coincidence that he refers to social psychology, psychoanalysis, and developmental psychology from both a phylogenetic and ontogenetic perspective, or that working conditions in the global market and the role of public education find their place in his investigations. Honneth’s thought is composite, meaning that it can hardly be reduced to a single concept – that of recognition –, even though he is of the view that recognition can provide, in the first place, an interpretative key to decipher the complexity of contemporary societies. However, Honneth’s approach is not only socio-philosophical, but also *critical*. Continuing the tradition of the Frankfurt School, he is not only interested in describing the social phenomenon, the *is* of society, but aims to detect, unveil, and expose an almost unfathomable *ought* immanent to society, among its frustrations, wounds, fractures, pathologies, injustices. Through an attempt of identification with social actors, with the participants involved in recognition relationships and institutional spheres, Honneth’s intention is to question and criticize those social concretions that are (more or less explicitly) perceived as harmful or unjustified by the actors themselves to the extent that they cannot find recognition in them. In this sense – it seems apt to underline it – even if his paradigm would certainly fall within the ‘positive theories’ of recognition, such positivity is given in the social facticity always in backlight, hindered, more yearned for than merely present. This issue can only be adequately grasped by hinting to the *normative* dimension that characterizes Honneth’s approach. In fact, critical theory’s possibilities are anchored by him on the dialectical relationship between the normative principles underlying social integration and their disregard, negation, subtraction in intersubjective institutional contexts. This relationship is dialectical for three main reasons. First, the ‘good’, normative forms of (inter-)acting become evident in their own failure, i.e. when mutual expectations, demands, or obligations are denied. This implies that the definition of a good life and the related norms of recognition are primarily under the responsibility of the social actors involved with the practices they perform, and that theory cannot anticipate this elaboration in its entirety, but only outline its contours. Being a *social* critical philosophy, it is social development that steers theory, not the other way around, given also the Left-Hegelian matrix that characterizes Honneth. The relationship is therefore dialectical first to the extent that normative principles would emerge in their

immanence to social reality only through their negation, and this negation is not seen as definitive, but as constructive. In a word, experiencing injustice raises a certain awareness about hitherto unthematized (and even blurred, incomplete, provisional) ideas of justice. But, secondly, this relationship is dialectical also because this dynamic is not unilateral. In fact, in order to be disregarded, actors' normative expectations must be based on and shaped by principles already present and operative in some way and at some degree. Experiencing injustice presupposes evaluative criteria already embedded in our social life. And, finally, it is dialectical because Honneth is convinced that this conflicting polarity of norms and facts represents the trigger of social conflicts aimed at reformulating of the latter to better realize the former, which in turn can be refined as their factual instantiations change. Injustice and justice, being immanent to social reality, are changeable, historical, *dependent* on their actualizations – dialectical.

While such a theoretical and methodological complexity is the first reason why the focus on Honneth seems well-founded, the second reason is more closely related to his paradigm of recognition. Indeed, Honneth grants to recognition the pivotal role of embedding the conditions for undamaged practical identity and freedom's realization – according to his Hegelian approach, he considers autonomy *actualized* if and when capable of not excluding otherness from its premises and motives, and during its unfolding process. But this generic definition does not take into account *how* this is supposed to happen. The dialectical relationship between the principles of recognition and social reality is in fact portrayed as dynamic underlying both social integration and the processes of differentiation typical of modern and contemporary societies. Thus, Honneth differentiates three modes of recognition – love, respect, esteem – which (dialectically) outline and are outlined by related spheres of recognition, which coincide with, underlie, and emerge from institutionalized forms of intimate-personal relationships, juridical relationships, and relationships in cooperative contexts (spanning from the workplace to the democratic public sphere).¹¹ Although Honneth himself defines his own approach as a *moral-theoretical monism* hinging on recognition, it is internally differentiated and complex. Furthermore, even if Honneth's aim is to propose a strictly interpersonal, mutual, and normative concept of recognition, the threefold differentiation betrays the diversity inherent to the concept and the difficulty of

¹¹ The ambiguity in expressing what could be superficially defined as cause-effect links between forms of recognition, relationships of recognition, and spheres of recognition is deliberate. In fact, Honneth often leaves in ambiguity the socio-ontological derivation links of his thought, as a consequence of his action-theoretical approach, first (*The Struggle for Recognition*), and of the focus on normative integration and legitimacy processes, then (*Freedom's Right*). Put in positive terms, this ambiguity is due to his Hegelian approach which imposes a certain impossibility to conceive a pure (apriori) beginning. The problem, that is, is not only hermeneutical, but pertains to the 'thing itself'.

reaching a unitary definition of it. For these three modes of interaction (love, respect, esteem) present themselves in very different guises and respond to different norms and logics of action – which are hardly inscribable in pure normative and symmetrical terms in the first place. Therefore, Honneth’s paradigm oscillates between a non-unilateral approach and the risk of reducing very different practices to a single hypernym. But it is precisely these possible ambivalences that make the confrontation with Honneth’s theory particularly interesting, since between the lines, through the clash with criticisms and the encounter with other paradigms of recognition, possibilities of different conceptualizations, formulations, and insights disclose themselves. But Honneth’s paradigm of recognition is differentiated not only because of the internal conceptual distinctions between three forms of recognizing/being recognized. Rather, it is differentiated also because undergoes internal evolutions that are too often left aside by critics. Indeed, defining *the* idea of recognition in Honneth can appear an affordable undertaking – we have already sketched the two basilar outcomes of recognition (positive self-relation and shared freedom), from which their intersubjective ‘causes’ could be induced. But being clear about the ‘outcomes’ of recognition is not the same as being clear about *what* recognition *is*. Defining *the* idea of recognition in Honneth seems to come at the price of certain simplifications that do not take into account the different nuances and the different socio-theoretical roles that are assumed by the paradigm itself over time – one might venture to say that what will be dealt with in the following research are the *ideas* of recognition proposed by Honneth. Therefore, internal differentiations and evolutions of the concept represent a promising starting point for an investigation into the notion of recognition in general, since different facets of recognition in general have the chance to emerge.

The third reason why dealing with Honneth’s thought seems particularly well-suited indirectly derives from the first two. In fact, although focusing on an author may lead to a narrower view, Honneth’s relevance in the contemporary landscape, his multi-faceted approach, and his internally differentiated concept of recognition, make the confrontation with this philosopher a unique springboard to enter the debate on recognition, something that other authors could not offer. Following the interdisciplinary approach that traditionally characterizes the Frankfurt School, Honneth ranges from psychoanalysis to theories of justice, from the investigation of social conflicts to a normative theory of institutionalization. His thought thus relates to traditions of thought, philosophical fields, methodologies, and objects of research that are in some cases extremely distant from each other, without dispersing in them the peculiar identity of his philosophical approach. In this way, Honneth’s work is able to draw attention and criticisms (which will be addressed in detail in each case) at such a level that dealing with the former requires constant

dialogue with the latter, which in turn provides the present research with an access point to the multiple voices involved in the contemporary debate on recognition, while not embracing a specifically comparative approach.

Given this brief overview on the difficulty of defining ‘recognition’, and having enumerated some preliminary reasons of interest in Honneth’s thinking, what is left to this introduction is to sketch the structure of what follows.

The first task is to frame the peculiarities of Honneth’s approach and aims, which also helps to understand many of the differences with other paradigms of recognition. A first step in this direction becomes possible by entering into his thinking through the door of the negative, i.e. by focusing on the issues of *social pathologies* and *moral injuries*. As mentioned earlier, Honneth’s own ‘Frankfurter’ attempt is to identify with ‘damaged life’ deriving from it the normative criteria that can enable social criticism. While the issue of moral injuries is directly linked to the possibilities of outlining an action-theoretical and normative account of social conflict that hinges on recognition (1.2), the matter of social pathologies appears in broader, more blurred terms. For now it suffices to mention, at a general level, that they indicate social reality’s *misdevelopments*, dysfunctional phenomena in which the processes of integration and differentiation run into contradictions. An analysis of three writings that span a large part of the Honnethian production – ‘Pathologies of the Social’ (1994), ‘A Social Pathology of Reason’ (2007), ‘The Diseases of Society’ (2013) – will make it possible to better outline the contours of this problem and to understand the decisive role played by the negative (1.1). The closing paragraph deals with some criticisms levelled at the consequences of the accounts on social pathologies and moral injuries. Honneth is indeed alleged of psychologizing or culturalizing injustice, as well as of implying an excessively substantive idea of teleology (1.3). After starting with these ‘meta-methodological’ issues, chapters 2-5 represent a critical reconstruction of Honneth’s four main works, focusing on the concept of recognition.

The second chapter focuses on the first pillar of Honneth’s paradigm of recognition: *The Struggle for Recognition*. Our inquiry starts with an analysis of the relationship with Hegel, who represent the main reference for the work’s accounts. Here we will stress the mediating role of Jürgen Habermas, Ludwig Siep and Andreas Wildt by Honneth’s framing his own theory (2.1). A similar task concerns the second paragraph, dealing with George Herbert Mead, who represents one of the greatest points of both proximity and distance with Habermas. Indeed, Mead plays a decisive role to the extent that his depiction of social integration and practical identity – understood as naturalization of Hegel – lays the foundations for Honneth’s intersubjective anthropology, idea of progress, and moral account of social struggles (2.2). After giving again to the negative a central position by deriving

the positive forms of recognition from those of misrecognition (2.3), we will deal with the formal concept of ethical life and Honneth's quasi-phenomenological reconstruction of the recognitional spheres in which it instantiates. Here, 'recognition' is defined as a multi-polar intersubjective practice (love, respect, esteem), instantiating in different interactive contexts (love-relations and friendships, legal relations, social and cooperative relations) and underlying three forms of undamaged practical identity (self-confidence, self-respect, self-esteem) (2.4). Finally, as at the end of every chapter of the following inquiry, some issues are raised, giving voice to and relaunching the debate (2.5).

Honneth's Tanner Lectures in 2005 published in the essay *Reification*, and the novelties brought with it to the concept of recognition represent the object of the third chapter. But before dealing directly with this work, it seems useful to address three previous writings that disclose the path to it and mark certain discontinuities with *The Struggle for Recognition* (3.1). Second, discussing the concept of reification implies new determinations of 'recognition' and – especially through the criticisms aimed at Honneth's approach – for deepening his critical perspective and approach (3.2). Subsequently, our attention shifts more explicitly on the concept of *antecedent recognition* or emotional identification – which constitutes the heart of the re-definition of the concept – as well as on its threefold declination: towards others, towards the world and towards one's own self (3.3). Finally, we are going to pull the strings and deepen the discussion, above all by making explicit the *two-level* account of recognition that Honneth sketches in this work, as well as its implications (3.4).

The fourth chapter is certainly the most broad and wide-ranging. In the first paragraph we will focus on *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom*, a text that gives us back the Spinoza Lectures held by Honneth in 1999. In a theoretical context similar to that outlined in *The Struggle for Recognition* and 'Pathologies of the Social', Honneth turns for the first time to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, taking his first steps in structuring a theory of justice in terms of social freedom. Here due attention is paid to how the Hegelian conception of *right* is interpreted, which plays a decisive role also for Honneth's later accounts of legitimation (4.1). The exchange with Nancy Fraser contained in *Redistribution or Recognition?* is then analyzed above all by granting due attention to the concept of *surplus of validity*, which effectively shows Honneth's gradually shifting from the justifying framework offered by formal anthropology to a historical-normative one, as well as the dialectical relation between principles of recognition, social reality, and its changing (4.2). The last paragraph turns to *Freedom's Right*, which can be considered as the second pillar of Honneth's theory. Our attention will be drawn again by recognition relations, whose specific characteristics seem at times generalized in the direction of a more neutral theory of intersubjectivity. In the course of this analysis, the two key concepts are

certainly those of *normative reconstruction* and *social freedom*, which represent the aforementioned fulcrums of this ‘second phase’ of Honneth’s thought, which hinges on Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. On the one hand, Honneth performs a reconstruction of Western societies’ recognition order and their institutionalized normative. And, on the other, he depicts recognition in almost opposed terms as those of identity politics: the main contribution offered by recognitional relations is not so much the affirmation of already-formed identities, but rather the mutually disclosed realization of freedom via complementary involvement and obligations, that is, the possibility of being oneself with the other (4.3).

Our reconstruction ends with Honneth’s last monography: *Anerkennung: Eine europäische Ideengeschichte*. Here, Honneth further addresses the issue of recognition providing a more in-depth depiction. Indeed, these last considerations are rooted in a debate left open since 2002, when *Inquiry* published an issue focused on the Honnethian concept of recognition. The first paragraph will therefore focus on the issues that emerged there and by Honneth’s response – ‘Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions’ – which was subsequently inserted as an afterword to *The Struggle for Recognition*; the exchange of 2002 revolve around defining what recognition is and how it is related to the personal features it addresses: it is the distinction between *attributive* and *receptive* models mentioned above (5.1). The second paragraph focuses on other left-open problems, in particular those presented by *ideological recognition* and power relations, dealt with in ‘Recognition as Ideology’ (2004) and by many critics (5.2). The third paragraph will focus precisely on *Anerkennung*: here Honneth takes up precisely the problems opened in the two writings just mentioned, contextualizing them in a history of ideas that tries to posit the different meanings that recognition assumes in three traditions of European thought: French, English and German – *reconnaissance*, recognition, *Anerkennung*. Without dwelling too much on the many historical inquiries and comparisons carried out by Honneth, our aim here will be to distil the image of recognition that thereby emerges, namely the idea of *mutual authorization* to normative *co-authorship* (5.3). Then we will emphasize the last evolutions undergone by the concept of recognition and its problems (5.4), and finally, we will provide an overview on the reconstruction carried out in these first five chapters (5.5).

The reconstruction of the Honnethian paradigm of recognition through the primary focus on four works – *The Struggle for Recognition*, *Reification*, *Freedom’s Right*, *Anerkennung* – guarantees an adequate understanding of the various tensions and possibilities that inhabit the contemporary debate on recognition, but also of the points and nodes left unsolved and in shadow. The first step is taken by recollecting four ideas of recognition put in place – critically or positively – by

Honneth, and by explaining four major perplexities about his paradigm and the concept of recognition in general, especially with regard to the issue of identity (6.1). Then, three macro-meanings of ‘recognition’ are distinguished, which prove to be useful in throwing analytical clarity on the contemporary debate on recognition, too often conditioned by inexplicit positions. Distinguishing between *re-cognition*, *acknowledgement*, and *mutual recognition*, the aim is to spotlight a set of practical modes – linked together by a thin action-theoretical thread – that is complex and holistic, which hardly lends itself to unilateralizations (6.2). The following steps embrace Honneth’s emphasis on detranscendentalization as Hegel’s fundamental operation with respect to Kant and Fichte, strengthening the bond of recognition with our lifeform, thus acquiring elements to outline the specificity of interpersonal recognition (6.3 and 6.4). The decisive focus of this chapter consists in analyzing the confession-forgiveness dialectic depicted by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Through this analysis it becomes possible to place the concept of mutual recognition in Hegel’s broader action-theoretical account, which is articulated between the dialectical poles of expressive action and necessity of the finite. Thus it will emerge that the normative core of mutual recognition concerns not so much identity as *reconciliation*. (6.5). From these elements, a concept of mutual recognition as *generative movement* will be sketched, which stands in discontinuity with the crystallizing role to which the notion is often confined. I argue that, as a fluidifying *We-form*, mutual recognition can represent a peculiar and specific critical criterion aimed at identifying emancipatory and reformulating interests (6.6).

1. A Negative Approach to Normativity

There is an issue to face before deepening our understanding of the dimensions the concept of recognition assumes in Axel Honneth's work. As one approaches his *corpus*, certain difficulties are apparently unavoidable, due to the polysemous constellation of theoretical levels at stake. 'Recognition' is indeed an all-encompassing philosophical means, through which many different fields are approached and managed. It would allow and disclose – among others – a critical theory of society, an intersubjectivistic anthropology, a theory of justice and of freedom, a certain social ontology.¹ And all these fields would also be included, thanks to recognition, in a unitary depiction, that is, the so-called “moral-theoretical monism”² continually at stake in Honneth's elaborations.

However, recognition is not only a 'starting point' or theoretical key useful for opening and unfolding the social philosophy. It represents also the conclusion of Honneth's efforts. The different fields engaged by Honneth are illuminated through the concept of recognition, which hence performs on an issue-informing level, but also on a justificatory and critical level. For certain elements and structures of contemporary societies emerge as problematic, unjust, and pathologic only by virtue of their announced 'solution' or 'reconciliation'. For example, one could say that recognition represents the blueprint of a 'rational' and 'real' freedom – so as it is described in *Freedom's Right* –,³ whilst pathological forms of autonomy become apparent only through the idea of recognition and its historical concretions. Given this double-faced vest of recognition, a legitimate doubt can be raised: that Honneth's thought revolves around a certain vicious circle.

The literature interpreting Honneth's approach is clearly divided, accentuating different aspects that are present in his works. On one side, questioning the relevance of his 'monism' to social reality, depicting the latter as indescribable and

¹ Cf., with regard to the social-ontological implications of a Frankfurt-informed social theory, Italo Testa, 'Ontology of the False State. On the Relation Between Critical Theory, Social Philosophy, and Social Ontology', *Journal of Social Ontology*, 1.2 (2015), 271–300. This issue will be later discussed in chapter 8.

² Axel Honneth, 'Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser', in *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London - New York: Verso, 2003), pp. 110–97 (p. 157).

³ Axel Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, trans. by Joseph Ganahl (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014).

unconceivable through the lens of a unique principle, which would result as a ‘leaving-behind’ concept. Hence, as a theoretical tool that makes Critical Theory overstep its real objects and goals, as incapable of accounting for the dynamics of power, domination and the structures of material inequality within capitalism.⁴ On the other side, one could also claim that the ‘monism’ should not be interpreted as exclusive, but as a theoretical threshold that can – and in fact does – encompass an “*inter-translation between the very different approaches, methods, vocabulary, and focal problems*”.⁵ By so claiming, one implies and affirms that Honneth does not demand sociality be interpreted in a monological-exclusive way, but in a monological-oriented one. Through the concept of recognition, then, social criticism would be guaranteed with a proper perspective, with a common denominator.

Finally, the ‘status’ or ‘structure’ of recognition is at issue, since it possesses diverse facets. If we accept that recognition represents a suitable tool for each theoretical and philosophical level hinted above, then we must grant it a certain multipolarity: it is, therefore, an anthropological, a moral, an ethical, a political and a critical concept. In fact, there is a clearly acknowledgeable tension between different dimensions in Honneth’s work. However, the author has almost always clearly labeled this concept as a normative one. Indeed, the formulation of a “formal conception of ethical life”⁶ rooted in specific practices of recognition represents the principal aim of his whole production. And, if one takes a closer look, the depiction of a non-damaged personal integrity is always at stake, although sometimes only as announced reflected image. Self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem,⁷ “inner aliveness”,⁸ freedom from indeterminacy,⁹ “expressionism”,¹⁰ “self-

⁴ Cf., for example, Danielle Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), secs 3, 5 and Michael J. Thompson, ‘The Failure of the Recognition Paradigm in Critical Theory’, in *Axel Honneth and the Critical Theory of Recognition*, ed. by Volker Schmitz (Basingstoke - New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 243–72.

⁵ Christopher F. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), p. 28. Cf. also Eleonora Piromalli, *Axel Honneth. Giustizia Sociale Come Riconoscimento* (Milano - Udine: Mimesis, 2012), p. 210.

⁶ Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. by Joel Anderson (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 175.

⁷ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, chap. 5.

⁸ Axel Honneth, ‘Postmodern Identity and Object-Relations Theory: On the Seeming Obsolescence of Psychoanalysis’, *Philosophical Explorations*, 2.3 (1999), 225–42 (p. 239).

⁹ Cf. Axel Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory* (Princeton - Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Axel Honneth, *Reification. A New Look at an Old Idea*, ed. by Martin Jay (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 71.

appropriation”,¹¹ “inner freedom”, “inward tolerance”:¹² all these different expressions describe a normative account of personhood through recognitional gestures and relations. If the ‘result’ of recognitional interactions is the formation of a normative account of personhood, then such recognition practices do result in normativity as well.

Hence, we face three problems. First, the paradigm of recognition’s bi-dimensionality: key to its critique and its ‘conclusion’. Second, the suitability of recognition as theoretic-critical tool and the according dichotomy between those that interpret Honneth’s monism radically, and others who consider it a unifying horizon among a multiplicity of methodologies and approaches. Third, the multi-dimensionality of recognition itself, keeping in mind its clearly ‘self-declared’ normative label.

Naturally, these questions are not easy to answer, and one could be at pains finding a conclusive explanation. My claim is that to dissolve these Gordian knots, we must start from a ‘meta-methodological’ question, that is, by questioning what is the adequate approach to Honneth’s thought. More precisely, we must focus on his own methodology. Thereby I argue that setting forth from the author’s “methodological negativism” represents the most suitable approach to his paradigm of recognition.¹³ For, if Honneth’s theory represents a critical theory of the social, it is crucial to interrogate it for its foremost perspective its interpretative capacities and its grip on social reality. In other words, what is the ‘grid of intelligibility’ the theory implies and proposes?¹⁴ By doing so, one engages an internal critique of Honneth’s thought.

Put synthetically, we derive three main advantages from this point of departure.

First, one better comprehends one of the main traits of Honneth’s ‘kinship’ with the first generation of the Frankfurt School¹⁵ and his related concern in identifying an *intramundane transcendence*, that is, the emergence of emancipatory interests

¹¹ Axel Honneth, ‘Appropriating Freedom. Freud’s Conception of Individual Self-Relation’, in *Pathologies of Reason. On the Legacy of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 126–45 (p. 128).

¹² Axel Honneth, ‘Democracy and Inner Freedom. Alexander Mitscherlich’s Contribution to Critical Social Theory’, in *Pathologies of Reason. On the Legacy of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 157–64 (pp. 160, 164).

¹³ Jean-Philippe Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth’s Social Philosophy* (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2009), p. 355. See also Id., ‘Injustice, Violence and Social Struggle. The Critical Potential of Axel Honneth’s Theory of Recognition’, in *Contemporary Perspectives in Critical and Social Philosophy*, 2004, pp. 297–322.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, ‘Society Must Be Defended’. *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76*, ed. by Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. by David Macey (New York: Picador), pp. 163–64.

¹⁵ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, pp. 456–60.

within social reality.¹⁶ In other words, it becomes easier to grasp the ‘critical’ dimension of his works. For one of the distinctive features of the Frankfurt School’s Critical Theory is not the mere description or depiction of social dynamics, but its effort to identify with social suffering, “adopting the point of view of those who are practically interested in the transformation of society”.¹⁷

Second, the idea of recognition itself becomes clearer. In contrast with many perspectives, which might refer to the so-called ‘identity politics’, Honneth’s paradigm is wider, and aimed at encompassing a *spectrum* of phenomena that emerge precisely due to his focus on the experience of damage.¹⁸ Accordingly, the normative character of recognition becomes easier to acknowledge, whereby normativity is rooted in the epiphenomena that such a negative approach spotlights.

Finally, I argue that with this approach, we can tackle and clarify the monism in its theoretical and critical dimension. Starting from the experience of the negative, recognition receives the character of a *desideratum*, both by the theory and by social actors themselves. That would be Honneth’s claim. Insofar, the paradigm of recognition should be a – more or less adequate – highlighting of what actually structures the social demands and of how they could be better answered, not a ‘predetermined’ simplification of the social complexity.

This methodological negativism instantiates Honneth’s tendency to unfold his different analyses from the social *suffering*, which has two principal faces: social pathologies and experiences of injustice.

1.1 Social Pathologies as Unfolding Point: Three Different Programmatic Views

It seems here helpful to sketch out three Honnethian contributions which focus on social pathologies and which show different vectorialities and evolutions. My claim here is that, by looking at these writings, three different phases, or directions, within Honneth’s elaborations can be distinguished: the view through which he

¹⁶ “It is perhaps not entirely wrong to speak here of ‘quasi-transcendental interests’ of the human race; and possibly it is even justified to talk at this point of an ‘emancipatory’ interest that aims at dismantling social asymmetries and exclusions”; Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition’, p. 174.

¹⁷ Emmanuel Renault, ‘A Critical Theory of Social Suffering’, *Critical Horizons*, 11.2 (2010), 221–41 (p. 222).

¹⁸ It is noteworthy that the first work of Honneth represents precisely an example of this effort, that is, the researched and as much as possible particular identification with the issues at stake in social reality. Cf. Axel Honneth, ‘Zur »latenten Biographie« von Arbeiterjugentlinchen’, in *Soziologische Analysen. Referate Aus Den Veranstaltungen Der Sektionen Der Deutschen Gesellschaft Für Soziologie Und Der Ad-Hoc-Gruppen Bei 19. Deutschen Soziologentag*, ed. by Rainer Mackensen and Felizitas Sagebiel (Berlin: TUB-Dokumentation, 1979), pp. 930–39.

interprets social pathologies and, correspondingly, how he conceives critique's apt engagement with those pathologies is quietly illuminating.

The first writing we'll look at is the early essay 'Pathologies of the Social' (original German: 1994), where Honneth proposes a concise historical interpretation of social philosophy – expressed as a *critical* social philosophy. He notes how, from Rousseau onward, a number of thinkers engaged with social analysis have used formulations such as “alienation” (*Entfremdung*), “bifurcation” (*Entzweiung*) “reification” (*Verdinglichung*), “massification” (*Vermassung*), “social leveling” (*soziale Gleichstellung*),¹⁹ “demystification” or disenchantment (*Entzauberung*), “depersonalization” (*Entpersönlichung*) and “commercialization” (*Vermarktung*).²⁰ Although there are clear differences between the concepts (and the authors who elaborated them), all these terms express a shared theoretical and ethical drive that “is primarily concerned with determining and discussing processes of social development that can be viewed as misdevelopments (*Fehlentwicklungen*), disorders, or ‘social pathologies’”.²¹

Honneth's claim here is not so much the definition or the explication of the concept of social pathology. Rather, he scrutinizes the methodological possibilities of a philosophy able to determine it. Systematically, there are three main features of Honneth's argumentation to be emphasized.²²

First of all, Honneth argues that social philosophy never appears “as a positive theory”.²³ It does not deal with a substantial, detailed prefiguration or prescription of how the society *should* be or which normativities should guide its reproduction. Rather, it gets involved with social reality, and more particularly with those aspects of it that do not simply appear unjust or unfair, but which reflect actual suffering, harm, and the deprivation of meaning. Thereby, two claims are moved. On the one side, the abovementioned concepts spotlight phenomena that are meant to be *social*. They are not the mere consequence of an individual decision, fault or error,²⁴ but represent a pervasive dysfunction that social partners ‘ought’ to live in their own context. On the other side, and consequently, these concepts rely “upon criteria of

¹⁹ Cf. Axel Honneth, ‘Pathologies of the Social: The Past and the Present of Social Philosophy’, in *Disrespect. The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), pp. 3–48 (pp. 10–16). Axel Honneth, ‘Pathologien Des Sozialen’, in *Das Andere Der Gerechtigkeit. Aufsätze Zur Praktischen Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 11–69 (pp. 21–30). Honneth, ‘Pathologien Des Sozialen’, p. 58.

²⁰ Honneth, ‘Pathologies of the Social’, p. 35. Honneth, ‘Pathologien Des Sozialen’, p. 58.

²¹ Honneth, ‘Pathologies of the Social’, p. 4.

²² For a wide and full-fledged inquiry on Honneth's account on social pathologies, cf. R. C. Smith, *Society and Social Pathology. A Framework for Progress* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), chap. 2.

²³ Honneth, ‘Pathologies of the Social’, p. 34.

²⁴ This idea is well explicated in the interpretation of Lukács' idea of reification; cf. Honneth, *Reification*, pp. 25–26.

ethical nature”.²⁵ Thus, given that the symptoms emerge in the individual condition and life-elaboration of an individual life, the ethical dimension shows itself in the “destruction of the conditions necessary for human flourishing”.²⁶ Hence, such pathologies would be ‘social’ precisely because they hinder the ethical possibilities of individuals who live in a particular environment.

Therefore, the second point underlined by Honneth is that the very possibility of becoming aware of these social diseases is based on normative, ethical criteria that announce (from reflex) a certain – albeit indeterminate – figure of ‘healthiness’.²⁷

[...] the determination of social pathologies in social philosophy always proceeds with a view to the social conditions that promote the individual’s self-realization. The fact that a whole spectrum of highly diverse standards of evaluation is nevertheless revealed as soon as these approaches are compared with one another is not related to differences in formal-ethical perspective, but to the respective foundational concept of personal self-realization.²⁸

Honneth’s strong historical interpretation goes therefore in the following direction: in order to grasp ‘pathology’ as such, certain ethical standards are required, which determine our judgments over the state of ‘health’. These criteria are ethical in the sense that they concern the social context and a certain perspective about the ‘good’, but formal because they concern the social conditions of an open-ended development, not a precise and predetermined vision of it. It is, moreover, interesting to notice that, despite the open character of such a formal ethics, oriented as it is towards a non-determined personal self-realization, this concept is considered sufficient to indicate those developmental outcomes that can be identified as harmful. The development is therefore open and formal, but its misdevelopments would be identifiable.

Turning back to Honneth’s historical interpretation, the formal character of ethics is not simply apparent, but is rather the fruit of his interpretation. In the history of social philosophy there were two main substantial currents through which flesh was put on the bones of formal ethics.

²⁵ Honneth, ‘Pathologies of the Social’, p. 4.

²⁶ Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 321.

²⁷ “The concepts of ‘diagnosis’ and ‘pathology,’ both of which are closely tied to that about which social philosophy seeks to gain knowledge, stem from the realm of medicine. ‘Diagnosis’ is understood here as the precise detection and definition of an illness affecting the human organism. The clinical notion of ‘health’ serves as a standard for the evaluation of abnormal symptoms – a notion that is often, for the sake of simplicity, regarded as consisting in the body’s ability to function. The concept of ‘pathology’ complements this concept of ‘diagnosis’: whereas ‘pathology’ originally indicated the theory of illnesses, it now mostly indicates an abnormal state of affairs. Pathology therefore represents precisely that organic aberration that is disclosed or defined in a diagnosis.” Honneth, ‘Pathologies of the Social’, p. 34.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Starting with Rousseau and continuing through Hegel, Marx, Adorno, Plessner, and Arendt, social philosophy has always been characterized by anthropological or historical-philosophical figures of thought out of which ethical criteria for determining social pathologies have arisen so seamlessly that they could never have been recognized as such.²⁹

But, for the decisive impact of Nietzschean perspectivism,³⁰ such substantive grounding statements illustrating an ideal social development that proceeds according to the ‘original’ figure of human beings or a teleological vectoriality, have been set aside. The methodological possibilities of social philosophy are then pushed to a crossroads: either they reduce themselves to a culturally restricted perspective – namely a hermeneutical point of view – or they are somehow allowed to persist in observing the sociality from an ethical viewpoint representing a universal standard, a theoretical and ethical threshold useful for identifying misdevelopments.

Social philosophy’s current problem thus consists in the following question: if, in accordance with its theoretical aim, social philosophy is dependent upon universal criteria whose validity can no longer be indirectly proven by a presupposed anthropology, then its continued existence is wholly contingent upon whether a formal ethics can be justified or not.³¹

In other words, how can social philosophy find or determine the ethical ‘normal’ standard in light of which social suffering could be identified, thus indicating a ‘path to healthiness’? How is this healthiness to be conceived? How should such a formal ethics be justified? A proceduralization of ethics – as proposed by Habermas – would be, according to Honneth, unsuccessful, since the “interpretive authority” of social philosophy “would be passed on to those who, as members of a concrete society, would alone decide on what is to be considered ‘pathological’ about their social form of life.”³² The issue at stake is theory’s immanence to the analyzed society. And here it becomes clear that some critics biased against Honneth’s searching for universal ethical standards are either misdirected or coming from an ‘external’ point of view,³³ since what is sought is not a universal *apriori* or even a mere deductive justification, as if the sought position was ahistorical.

Honneth is on the lookout for criteria that are certainly formal and – therefore – transcultural. But this means that he does not want to endorse culturally determined visions above the good or substantial social goals. Clearly, the shortcoming he sees in procedural ethics is that they lack ‘grip.’ Namely, they prescribe certain rules, but

²⁹ Honneth, ‘Pathologies of the Social’, pp. 40–41.

³⁰ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 323.

³¹ Honneth, ‘Pathologies of the Social’, p. 40.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³³ Cf. Fabian Freyenhagen, ‘Honneth on Social Pathologies: A Critique’, *Critical Horizons*, 16.2 (2015), 131–52 (pp. 133–34).

besides and before social facticity. What Honneth is looking for is precisely the possibility of an immanent critique which, in order to articulate itself, cannot be totally enveloped in a particular historical and cultural context. That context must represent its material and its starting point, but the theory needs a certain distance to be able to move, to be able to illuminate, or even just to be able to say that something *is wrong* in the social situation. Even such a minimalist observation, from which the discussion over social pathologies actually takes its impetus, requires certain ethical criteria. If philosophy will then not be condemned to aphasia, it needs standards that have at least some foundation and, therefore, some detachment from the immanence – that is, not to be completely assimilated in the observations to which they are applied.

Moreover, the formality of ethics sought by Honneth would also be able to accept the challenge posed by liberal pluralism. The procedural overlapping consensus systems have no say in the consequences of the procedures determined by it. This is Honneth's main criticism: they lack political engagement.³⁴ Honneth, on the other hand, intends, by means of the prospective position gained by (and proper of) critical thinking, to identify where the appearance of health is already announced. With Christopher Zurn's expressions, which follow the biological and medical simile adopted and operated by Honneth, the tasks of symptomatology, epidemiology, etiology, and above all of prognosis³⁵ are to be accomplished by a critical philosophy embedded in those social ethical perspectives that, seen in the light of a generalizing attitude, can be considered as valid within the view of pluralism.

Consequently, Honneth does not disregard the role that can be played by a "historically relativized justification of ethics", claiming that it allows to conceive of social philosophy "as an instance of reflection". Yet historically situated – and where else, if not there? –, critique requires adhering to a term of comparison, which, following Honneth, can be found only in the formulation and elaboration of a "weak, formal anthropology".³⁶

Although Honneth is rather hermetic in this text, that is, he does not fully outline which features this *merely formal anthropology* should possess, we can already identify three of them that will accompany us throughout our investigation. More

³⁴ Cf. Axel Honneth, 'The Fabric of Justice: On the Limits of Contemporary Proceduralism', in *The I in We. Studies in the Theory of Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), pp. 35–55.

³⁵ Cf., regarding the 'medical' tasks of a critical theory in front of social pathologies, Christopher F. Zurn, 'Social Pathologies and Second-Order Disorders', in *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays. With a Reply by Axel Honneth*, ed. by Danielle Petherbridge (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 345–70.

³⁶ Honneth, 'Pathologies of the Social', p. 41. "Daher hängt ihr Überleben in der Form, die hier in einer historischen Vergegenwärtigung offengelegt worden ist, von dem Erfolg ab, mit dem sich der Anspruch einer schwachen, formalen Anthropologie in Zukunft rechtfertigen läßt"; Honneth, 'Pathologies Des Sozialen', p. 69.

precisely, here the reasons behind the paradigm of recognition emerge. First, given the hermeneutical consequences of perspectivism, such a paradigm does not find its justification in a philosophy of history, no longer suitable, which attributes to certain groups the role of “bearer of historical progress”.³⁷ Hence, since, according to Honneth’s reading, the ethical justification has been always performed thanks to a historical or an anthropological ‘ideal’ term of comparison, he opts for the latter. However – second – in order to avoid the patent difficulties that availing such a concept would involve, ‘anthropology’ is not meant to be a substantive definition of the human being, at least programmatically. Therefore – third – the *formality* of such anthropology is to be understood in a twofold meaning. First, it concerns the individuation and discussion of social conditions:

This ethical background condition is formal in the sense that it only normatively emphasizes the social preconditions of human self-realization, and not the goals served by these conditions.³⁸

The ethical idea of a formal anthropology derives its characters only in acknowledging and posing the conditions of a undamaged human development, and is not therefore oriented to and does not stem from a substantive image of human nature or its goals. Although it can be argued that in the idea of self-realization a certain substantial image of human nature and good is already present, Honneth believes that the absence of content that he gives to this tendency of individuals should screen his thinking from such charges. Focusing on social conditions and allowing the premises of the critique to be led by a (quasi-)phenomenological observation of social reality should be sufficient to guarantee the formality of the theory.

But formality has another fundamental character: it also concerns *how* this anthropology shall be elaborated. Indeed, what is at stake in the proposals considered by Honneth – especially Habermas’ –, is an analysis of the social *practices of speech*. He wants to spotlight social and human interactions and thereby to derive subjectivity from intersubjectivity: *actors from acts*. The formality consists – and therefore also can be found – in the very structure of the self, which cannot be determined monologically, but only through certain types of relations: ‘self’ is not to be intended as substance, but as pole of interaction in the first place.

The proposed solution derived from Honneth’s first confrontation with social pathologies is a formal ethics based upon a formal anthropology, namely on an analysis of intersubjectivity.

³⁷ Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 323.

³⁸ Honneth, ‘Pathologies of the Social’, p. 36.

Analyzing two further Honnethian writings – respectively ‘A Social Pathology of Reason’³⁹ and ‘The Diseases of Society’⁴⁰ – we can obtain an insight into various themes that will be shown as decisive in the development of Honnethian thought.

In ‘A Social Pathology of Reason’ (original German: 2007), Honneth engages directly the tradition of the Frankfurt School. In this case as well, his approach can be defined as negative, since the starting point, taken as the key of critique, is represented by the category of ‘social pathology’. But, after a closer look, Honneth’s writing focuses on a binomial consisting of *rational universal* and, correspondingly, *rational deficit*. As underlined by Frayenhagen,⁴¹ three main features of this later essay could be synthesized as follows: the idea of social rationality, capitalism as object of criticism, and the conjoined analysis of Freud’s thought.

Regarding the first point, Honneth claims that the pivotal Critical Theory concept, which discloses its methodological possibilities as well, is that of the “rational universal”, shared with or inherited from Hegel through Marx and the Left Hegelians. Always speaking from an ethical point of view, that is, considering the concept as concerning the conditions of individual self-realization, Honneth outlines two main features. First, society is seen as the rationality’s complex field of concretion, where its forms take shape and reproduce themselves through practices. Second, and consequently, such rationality requires a social – namely an intersubjective – dimension.

The representatives of Critical Theory hold with Hegel the conviction that the self-actualization of the individual is only successful when it is interwoven in its aims – by means of generally accepted principles or ends – with the self-actualization of all the other members of society.⁴²

However, in Honneth’s arguments aimed at distinguishing the Frankfurt School – and his own position – from liberalism and communitarianism,⁴³ the author deepens further useful concepts, namely those of *reciprocity* and *universality*. Given the aims of social analysis, Critical Theory cannot narrow its own horizon to an atomistically understood individual, but must comprehend and embrace the cooperative and reciprocal dimension of social practices as the extents in which instances of rationality can find their better instantiation and realization. With Heikki Ikäheimo’s words, the Frankfurt School would propose a kind of *normative*

³⁹ Axel Honneth, ‘A Social Pathology of Reason. On the Intellectual Legacy of Critical Theory’, in *Pathologies of Reason. On the Legacy of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 19–42.

⁴⁰ Axel Honneth, ‘The Diseases of Society: Approaching a Nearly Impossible Concept’, *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 81.3 (2014), 683–703.

⁴¹ Frayenhagen, pp. 134–35.

⁴² Honneth, ‘A Social Pathology of Reason’, p. 26.

⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 27–29.

essentialism that characterized Hegel,⁴⁴ according to which social forms of interaction embody and realize human rationality in an ongoing process. On the other hand, social realizations of rationality through historical forms have to be considered as a universal dynamic, that is, as something that could be rationally justified: thereby, despite the necessary cultural and historical specificity of any particular social form, certain rational standards would represent a sort of comparative guarantee.

Without giving too much ontological weight to Honneth's reading, it seems that in some way rationality pushes for its own realization. Keeping in mind that the matter is normative, it becomes clear why the boundaries between "description" and "prescription" are respectively "blurred".⁴⁵ It could be said that this very blurring lies along the twofold dimension of rationality. This concept – understood normatively as expressing forms of social life that conduct along paths of self-realization – occupies the position both of the 'observer' and of the 'observed'. In this sense, a social pathology would be that (observed) form of rationality, that is, that social instantiation of it, which the rationality-as-observer identifies as frustrating its own claims. This hiatus between the observer and the observed, which should share the same – historically located, but justified – normative rationality, is precisely the key to comprehend what 'pathology of reason' means.

The organizational form of social relations in capitalism prevents rational principles that, as far as our cognitive potential is concerned, are already at hand, from applying to practical life.⁴⁶

That rationality is "already at hand" can be seen in its dimensions that were – and are – already unfolded in social formations through their historical development – at least in that rationality which is exercised by the observer. (Though not only in this way, as we shall see.) In this sense, the hermeneutical threshold, the theoretical perspective useful to the actualization of critique, as well as to perceive its universalism, once again should not be seen as an ahistorical eye. On the contrary, precisely thanks to the historical development of reason, some domains of society are endowed with those normative standards that allow the critique to be exercised, to make it an *immanent* critique.

Moving to the second point of the essay, Honneth underlines that the Frankfurt School's tradition aims at criticizing the complex and pervasive social formations of capitalism. Indeed, the focus of Critical Theory points a finger not only at social

⁴⁴ Cf. Heikki Ikäheimo, 'Holism and Normative Essentialism in Hegel's Social Ontology', in *Recognition and Social Ontology*, ed. by Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 145–209.

⁴⁵ Honneth, 'A Social Pathology of Reason', p. 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

injustice, but should also provide an apt “explanation of the processes that obscure that injustice”.⁴⁷ In this sense, the rational *misdevelopments* shall be unveiled in two dimensions: a) the ‘objective’ one, which focuses on the irrationality of social instantiations that hinder, through their mechanisms and consequences, a full-fledged path of self-realization; and b) the ‘subjective’ one, which names the reasons behind individuals’ detachment from their actual situation, preventing them from becoming aware of the state of things, which lies concealed.

At this point, a major question about the reliability of such a critique can be raised, for the theoretical perspective is supposed to be immanent to society and imputes dysfunctions that can be hidden from the eyes of those who experience them firsthand. How is it meant to disclose a rational and, correspondently, universal level of comprehension, more than simply ‘a voice in the crowd,’ confinable as merely a culturally punctual point of view? In other words, how are we allowed to understand that *this* immanent critique addresses and spotlights dynamics actually present in society?

Once again, the answer comes from the negative dimension of the critical attitude, explicated by Honneth’s reference to the Freudian influence on the Frankfurt School. It is suffering from certain symptoms that shows a social condition as pervasively frustrating, whether its subjects find the situation inextricable or not.

Critical Theory no doubt takes Freudian psychoanalysis as its methodological model for how it establishes a connection between defective rationality and individual suffering. [...] the impetus to bring the category “suffering” into connection with the very pathologies of social rationality probably finds its origin in the Freudian idea that every neurotic illness arises from an impairment of the rational ego and must lead to individual cases of stress from suffering.⁴⁸

Keeping again the clinical simile that plays a decisive role in ‘Pathologies of the Social’, Honneth upholds that suffering emerges as symptom when certain impairments or failures present themselves as identifiable epiphenomena of a social dysfunction. Although this nexus rests on a strong assumption, namely that one can infer to social conditions an inability to disclose one’s own self-realization, another Freudian insight appears fundamental in order to test the claims of Critical Theory.

[...] the stress from suffering presses toward a cure by means of exactly the same rational powers whose function the pathology impedes. An assumption about what in general is to count as a self-evident condition for admission into psychoanalytic treatment also accompanies this suggestion – namely, that the

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 38.

individual who subjectively suffers from a neurotic illness also wants to be free from that suffering.⁴⁹

And it is precisely this push for healthiness that Honneth individuates as the keystone of the tradition of the Frankfurt School and of its possibility to survive.⁵⁰ The importance of the “emancipatory interest” can be clarified by referring to two main issues, different sides of the same coin as it were. First of all, it would represent a sort of test that reflects the fallacy of certain forms of social interaction. Secondly – and to this extent – it would show the objectivity of critical analysis: without the aforementioned ‘objective’ side of rationality, a reflexive awareness on the part of those involved in and touched by social pathologies could not take place. If, on the one hand, suffering shows the actual possibilities of a critique that adheres to social reality, the presence of an emancipatory interest shows in the end a vectoriality of social rationality: the latter, in some way, manifests itself in its own tendency to evolution. However, this cannot be presupposed by the critique, but only ascertained from it.

In the last script that we are going to consider here, ‘The Diseases of Society’ (original German: 2013), Honneth faces the issues of social pathologies twenty years later for the first time and formulates, according to Hirvonen, a *thick conception* of social pathologies.⁵¹ Already, the subtitle – *Approaching a Nearly Impossible Concept* – shows that Honneth once more wants to deal with the problem by starting from the elusiveness of the concept and consequently to elaborate a programmatic view for Critical Theory. So far, Honneth has not *comprehensively* defined the concept of social pathology. Rather, he has defined the possibilities to be fathomed and grasped by deriving it from socially experienced suffering. This work also starts precisely by considering the affected subject: any question to be asked should concern first and foremost the ‘addressee’ of the supposed diseases, since – as Zurn underlines –⁵² an accepted epidemiology represents an irreplaceable step for such analysis, which starts from the emerging negative epiphenomena within social life. But, inasmuch as the very determination of the spectrum of pathologies does not represent a mere

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 39–40.

⁵⁰ “Without a realistic concept of “emancipatory interest” that puts at its center the idea of an indestructible core of rational responsiveness on the part of subjects, this critical project will have no future”; *Ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

⁵¹ Cf. Onni Hirvonen, ‘On the Ontology of Social Pathologies’, *Studies in Social and Political Thought*, 28 (2018), 9–14.

⁵² Cf. Zurn, ‘Social Pathologies and Second-Order Disorders’, pp. 362–66.

empirical datum or evidence,⁵³ the identification of society as pathogenic presupposes some hypotheses and philosophical hikes over the issue.

For this reason, Honneth decides to focus on Mitscherlich and Freud as significant examples for both their methodological approach and their conclusions. First of all, they try to explain the symptomatology inquiring “psychic constellations” and take into account the social environment – thus not splitting individual and societal.⁵⁴ Both for Freud and for Mitscherlich the deficiencies manifesting within a personal existence must be traced back to their interactions with and within their social context or, more precisely, to the personal process of social integration. In this sense, there are two particular issues that convince Honneth of the arguments’ cogency. On the one side, both treat the diseases without narrowing them to the level of individual life-choice or responsibility: though they share the assumption, according to which there is actually “an intimate bond between such” social “pathologies and individual symptoms”,⁵⁵ the sought solution implies an analysis of the environment, which lays the foundations for a structuralist diagnosis. Put synthetically, given the increase in cases without physical explanation, the causes of disease must reside in a dysfunctional coping with social demands, which would in turn lead to impairment or neurotic experiences.

However – in the second place – what seems rather convincing in the Freudian and Mitscherlichian depictions of such diseases is the assumption behind the nexus of individual symptomatology and social integration, namely a certain perspective on how social reality should be conceived.

They never endorsed the idea that social pathologies would present nothing but the generalized or extended psychic disorders of the members of society. On the contrary, both perceive society as an entity *sui generis*, whose potential functional disorders also have to be of another categorical kind than the illnesses that might strike singular persons during their lifetime. The “diseases” of society are to be understood as the causes of individuals’ illnesses, but between these two terms stands an ontological difference prohibiting the use of one and the same psychological or psychoanalytical language in both cases.⁵⁶

Although this ontological vision – according to which the social cannot be obtained through a generalization of the individual – meets the initial and pivotal intuition in keeping with which social pathologies must be attributed to the social in its entirety, the limits of Mitscherlich’s perspective (on which Honneth focuses

⁵³ As Honneth shows, for all the three possible attributions of pathogenic causes (individuals, collective subjects and groups, the society itself) there are several examples. Cf. Honneth, ‘The Diseases of Society’, pp. 63–64.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 685.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 690.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 688.

most) represent the key through which Honneth outlines his own perspective. The shortcomings can be imputed to a missing critical potential and a concern with what could be called the *ideological* dimension of social pathologies.

The first flaw consists of a sort of medicalization of the matter, that is, in narrowing the analysis to the spectrum bound by taking into account only individual symptoms of impairment or nonfulfillment performances. Indeed, even if this is the most adequate starting point for Honneth too – as shown in ‘Pathologies of the Social’ and in ‘A Social Pathology of Reason’ –, relying exclusively on the subjectively perceived psychical encumbrances or imbalances could prevent one from acknowledging those pathologies, which “consist of behavioral patterns that cause no individual suffering and thus also do not necessarily constitute psychic disorders”.⁵⁷ In other words, there could also be no psychic or suffering emergence that help in ‘spotting’ a pathology, since – as already mentioned – the individual capability of awareness regarding her own situation can be affected by a systemic hindering. In this sense, though the two references explicitly expressed by persons – psychical suffering and the emancipatory interest – represent the main circumstantial evidence of *misdevelopments* and of rationality’s pressures to self-actualization, the position gained by the critique should disclose as well phenomena that do not reach the observable surface.

The second shortcoming of Mitscherlich’s position would consist precisely in his structuralist approach. Focusing on the dynamics of internalization of environmental norms and values, and attributing the causes of pathologies to difficulties in coping with the demands implied by such processes, Mitscherlich elaborates a model of social efficiency based on the balance between individual and social instances. That is, the social whole could harmoniously reproduce if two conditions are respected during the process of social integration.

(a) the rules of behavior to be learned must not be so rigid and restrictive as to suffocate the characteristically human need for individuation; and (b) these rules must be constantly adapted to an environment in steady flux due to being transformed by human innovative capacity in a manner that allows for motivated and competent adolescents. Openness for individual deviation and power to provide security in dealing with new technological or social challenges—flexibility as well as confidence-giving determinacy—these are the two not easily combined capacities that, according to Mitscherlich, prevailing norms and values need to have if social integration is to run smoothly.⁵⁸

Once the key to social reproduction has been identified in the accordance between these two factors, it becomes clear that pathologies arise when the values

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 690.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 694.

or norms leave either too much or too little space for individual experimentation and innovation. Neither in one case nor in the other would the person be truly free, either because she is totally ‘surmounted’ by the presence of an intrusive alterity, or because she is exposed to it without any possible access, that is, without being provided, through culture and education, with the necessary means of biographical elaboration. However – and here lies the second criticism of Honneth – Mitscherlich means for the correct measure between the contrasting instances to be definable “independently of any information about the normative self-understanding of the society in question”.⁵⁹ In other words, the aim would be to test the social formation’s reproduction rules and norms from the point of view of their efficiency, measuring their ability to provide the new social members with the appropriate conditions for implementing their self-realization. Representing what might seem to be the solution presented in ‘Pathologies of the Social’ – the determination of formal social conditions for self-realization – Honneth claims that overseeing society’s normative content is rather misleading.

To cut a long story short, determining the functional requirements of social life and, with it, getting to the bottom of what a potential systematic disorder might consist in, involves restricting oneself to the current self-understanding of a historical epoch.⁶⁰

Indeed, one could also say that already in Mitscherlich’s perspective some historically situated values are at stake, insofar as such an importance of the individual possibility of freedom within the social context represents a modern and contemporary idea. Nonetheless, in Honneth’s criticism lie two important hints. On one side, it confirms that over time he maintains a clear – if not increasing – importance that historical non-naïvity holds within the critique: while seeking a formal plan capable of accommodating the challenge posed by pluralism, he proposes a critique *of* time, *from* time. On the other side, keeping in mind the argument previously set forth against the position of Freud and Mitscherlich, one can say that a too formalist approach would not be able to adequately notice the ideological features of an apparently healthy society.

A third problem lies in the unidirectionality of this analysis of social pathologies, which in Honneth’s eyes is too concentrated on the process of social integration and on the ‘hitches’ that could occur by the internalization of social demands. Though the learning dynamics of mediation between the inner life and environmental constraint is certainly essential for the purposes of social reproduction, social life is

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 696.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 697.

constituted from and survives through other dimensions that cannot be faced through such a monological perspective.

Referring to the “traditional line of inquiry from Marx to Parsons”, Honneth argues that there are three fundamental dimensions that constitute what a society is, what are its challenges, and its possibility to survive: “confrontation with external nature, social shaping of inner nature, and regulation of inter-human relations”.⁶¹ Hence, given the intuition according to which social criticism should perceive dysfunctions within a society itself, an adequate account of social pathologies should result from the consideration of these three dimensions. Neglecting their importance would narrow its own diagnostic gaze.

Honneth makes therefore a proposal that can do justice to the second fruitful premise of Freud and Mitscherlich, that is, that the analysis of society should move on its own level, not anthropomorphizing the social world through a generalization of human and individual illnesses. Taking this into account and aiming to properly consider the aforementioned dimensions of social life, Honneth argues that what must be considered in order to grasp social diseases is the “institutional arrangement” of a given society.⁶² The provided solution therefore aims to leave a mere subjectivist level by engaging in a more social-ontological inquiry, that is, the analysis of institutional reality. Thereby Honneth does not neglect the importance of referring to individual experience, since this is the place where the chances to conceive the social pathology take their clues: in what “we experience as a restriction of freedom”.⁶³

If the discussion of what concerns the relation between subject and society cannot be unilateral, focusing on the latter implies that it must be regarded as a whole, namely in its three essential cycles of reproduction: relation with nature, social integration and interpersonal practices. More precisely, by not focusing on every single dimension, the critique has to turn its attention to their *interplay* and to their mutual adjustments.

Here, on this higher level of the entanglement of diverse functional spheres, there might also occur disorders and frictions, namely, in cases where the respective institutional regulations contradict or even mutually disenable each other [...]. What such frictions and tensions have in common with individual illnesses is that they display a troubled relationship of a subject to its self, whether this subject is a person or a society. And in the case of societies, the restriction of freedom, which belongs to our concept of “disease,” consists in these functional spheres’ mutually

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 698.

⁶² Ibid., p. 699.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 700.

preventing each other from successfully developing, as their specific institutional solutions get in each other's way.⁶⁴

By so doing, Honneth closes also this writing with a programmatic proposal, that is, with a necessary rehabilitation of an organic conception of society. This social-ontological move – which shall be discussed in detail later – represents in his eyes the only chance to detect social pathologies.

One can only eventually speak of “diseases of society” coherently and substantially enough if one represents the society as an organism in which the individual spheres or subsystems, thought of as organs, are cooperating so harmoniously that we can work out an idea of its unhindered, “free” development.⁶⁵

Starting from the analysis of these three Honnethian writings, we have reached an overlook, a point of access to his thought. Indeed, these three respectively programmatic intentions show what could be called three distinct phases of his thought or – probably better – three different but always present dimensions or accents that reciprocally involve each other and take over, in subsequent periods, the balance of his productions. Put synthetically, in his reflections on social pathologies, Honneth takes the ascertainment of such dysfunctions and misdevelopments as an unfolding point of critique, as reflection point in the presence of suffering. Depending on the various assumptions and focuses gradually employed by Honneth, he himself makes the following programmatic statements. The attainability of critique should rely on a) the formulation of a weak, minimal, and formal anthropology, as ethical and normative landmark; b) the faculty to identify an emancipatory interest, which would represent the objective pressures of rationality's tendency to self-realization within and through social concretions; c) an organic depiction and conception of social reality and of its inner interplays.

Hereby already, the characteristic multipolarity of the Honnethian paradigm emerges, since – as the illuminating suggestion of Jean-Philipp Deranty makes clear – the anthropological and the normative levels overlap and follow one another in a framework of justification and critique.⁶⁶ One can add to this binomial a third element or dimension, that is, the social-ontological one that crops up in the last bars of ‘The Diseases of Society’.

1.2 Vulnerability and the Normative Experience of Injustice

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 701.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 701.

⁶⁶ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 463.

The other side of Honneth's methodological negativism concerns an axis of phenomena that could be summarized by the concept of *moral injury*. This theme helps Honneth to show the normative fabric social life is woven "either in a historical sense, in the reconstruction of the normative core of modern society, or in a critical sense, when it comes to uncovering new applications of those principles."⁶⁷

To deal with the subject – without already approaching *The Struggle for Recognition* and thus keeping this first chapter within the bounds of an introduction – we will focus on two aspects of the issue: a) the identification of the demands of justice as a pre-theoretical fact capable of disclosing the critique; b) the connection between the concept of human dignity and that of vulnerability. By so doing, further elements will be added to the concepts of emancipatory interest and self-realization, and the dimension of conflict will be introduced.

In 'The Social Dynamics of Disrespect' (original German: 1994)⁶⁸ Honneth engages again the theoretical possibilities of critical thinking, taking as his point of departure Horkheimer's aim of developing a theory that could be conceived as self-reflection of the social itself. Briefly sketching a history of the Frankfurt School, Honneth describes its difficulties – due to its inability to escape positively from the Marxian setting – to connect to pre-theoretical phenomena, thus falling into a negative sociology. At this point he embraces Habermas' communicative shift, because the linguistic rules of agreement can actually represent "a pre-theoretical sphere of emancipation through which critique can ground its normative standpoint within social reality."⁶⁹ In other words, linguistic consensus would stand for that practical context addressed by the theory in order not to self-produce its own aims and conceptual frameworks: in verbal interactions, individuals meet and confront one another bringing with themselves certain expectations, already sharing a horizon of meaning and the form of their communicative exchanges. The structure of these elements would therefore represent an apriori, (quasi-)transcendental dimension embedded in practical life. According to Habermas, the task of the Critical Theory would therefore be to consider the replacement of this normative horizon, proper to the practical and plastic facticity of the lifeworld, with other practical logics and imperatives coming from rationalized systems – that is, the so-called *colonization thesis*. Identifying such a dimension of communication – which is indeed practical and structural at the same time, that is, which belongs to the experience and shapes it –, the theory would represent an instance of reflection

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 399.

⁶⁸ Axel Honneth, 'The Social Dynamics of Disrespect: On the Location of Critical Theory Today', in *Disrespect. The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), pp. 63–79.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 68.

capable of giving voice to the demands already at stake in social life, and of justifying a not-substantially conceived account of progress.

In shifting Critical Theory from the production paradigm to the paradigm of communication, Habermas unveiled a social sphere that fulfills all the presuppositions included in the claim to intramundane transcendence. In communicative action, subjects encounter each other within the horizons of normative expectations whose disappointment becomes a constant source of moral demands that go beyond specifically established forms of domination.⁷⁰

Honneth embraces Habermas' communicative shift and shares the perspective from which the pre-theoretical sources of Critical Theory should be found within intersubjective interaction and those normative expectations that inhabit and shape it. Moreover, Honneth shares once again the idea that it is always by an interruption, a discrepancy, a negative that the fabric of normative expectations is revealed, a fabric which until then had been hidden behind the explicit. But, Honneth claims, approaching factual interactions, it becomes clear that the fundamental experience revealing such an underpinning structure and network cannot be represented by a failure of linguistic rules, but by the unfulfilled demands for identity. Living (and acting) persons "experience an impairment of what we can call their moral experiences, i.e., their 'moral point of view', not as a restriction of intuitively mastered rules of language, but as a violation of identity claims acquired in socialization".⁷¹

Engaging then an interdisciplinary issue, a large number of "historical and sociological studies" show that the core of the moral experience embedded in such discrepancy-moments – namely, Honneth specifies, in the experience of the lower social classes and of protest movements – never appears as an explicitly formulated and coherent scheme of principles. Rather, the spark of protests is always "the experience of having their intuitive notions of justice violated".⁷² Thereby, Honneth is taking at the same time three significant steps, actualizing "the so-called 'negative phenomenology' of social life".⁷³ First, he is pointing to *conflict* as the primary epiphenomenon in which individuals' motivations can be pinpointed. Secondly, he identifies Critical Theory as moment of *social self-reflection*, as an element of society capable of unravelling such motives. Thirdly, and given these first two points, such theory must be able to identify with the non-positivity of expectations of justice,

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 69.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 70.

⁷² Ibid., p. 71.

⁷³ Onni Hirvonen, 'Grounding Social Criticism: From Understanding to Suffering and Back', *Digithum. A Relational Perspective on Culture and Society*, 2019, 1–10 (p. 5).

which arise when they are ignored or infringed upon, and which are only *intuitively intertwined* with positive moral content.

One could therefore say that Honneth, thanks to his attention to the negative, conceives of Critical Theory as responsible for giving voice to a certain type of suffering that reveals itself in the mesh of society and in the very individual experience of such suffering.⁷⁴ The element added here with respect to the analysis of social pathologies is a further determination of the critical field of inquiry: the normative criteria that were presuppositions for identifying the so-called misdevelopments are described as emerging in the intersubjective interaction and in “the human lifeform”.⁷⁵

[...] this model asserts a close connection between the kinds of violation of the normative assumptions of social interaction and the moral experiences subjects have in their everyday communication. If those conditions are undermined by the fact that people are denied the recognition they deserve, they will generally react with moral feelings that accompany the experience of disrespect – shame, anger or indignation [...]. The feelings of injustice that accompany structural forms of disrespect represent a pre-theoretical fact, on the basis of which a critique of the relations of recognition can identify its own theoretical perspective in social reality.⁷⁶

The veering from the Habermasian communicative shift towards a paradigm of recognition is therefore motivated by the persuasion that the experiences of injustice reveal a deeper normative level than that explicable through linguistic rules, a field that precedes the dialogical one and therefore coincides with the pre-theoretical anchorage the theory must refer to.

However, two issues have not yet been addressed at this stage. First of all, it is not yet clear why the intersubjective field already preferred by Habermas should actually represent the privileged starting point for Critical Theory. Secondly, it remains to be understood why, leaving aside linguistic normativity, one has to land on the concept of recognition. These two questions can be answered precisely – I argue – through the binomial of ‘human dignity’ and ‘vulnerability’.

⁷⁴ As well explained by Renault, experience represents the field or the moment where subjects themselves become aware of the normative ground that underpins their social interactions: cf. Emmanuel Renault, *L'expérience de l'injustice* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004), pp. 28–61, 117–27. Therefore, social criticism's reflexive character is considered here, contrarily to what has been argued during the reflection on social pathologies, almost as a re-proposition and a formalization of the experiences of the involved subjects, rather than as a diagnosis of symptoms that are to be considered even as virtually inaccessible on the part of lifeworld actors – because of their eventual unawareness with regard to the misdevelopments they are affected by.

⁷⁵ Hirvonen, ‘Grounding Social Criticism’, p. 6.

⁷⁶ Honneth, ‘The Social Dynamics of Disrespect’, p. 72.

In 'Integrity and Disrespect'⁷⁷ Honneth approaches, referring to Bloch, the concept of *human dignity*, endorsing that idea by which it can only be accessed through a negative path. The moral reactions to insults, humiliations, offences and contempt reflect the normative assumptions to which the subjects have supposedly always referred, shedding light on one content – that of dignity – which therefore receives its definition 'by subtraction'. Taking as point of departure the "language of everyday life", where those affected by moral harm "describe themselves" as injured in their positive self-comprehension,⁷⁸ one can obtain a certain image of human self-realization that lies on intersubjective conditions. In this way, the theory does not need to presuppose a more or less positive concept of dignity, which could be easily criticized as substantial or as culturally determined. Once again, Honneth makes use of the very specularity of the idea of health and thus enforces it: not only the presence of suffering would imply a lack of healthiness, but also the 'means' of health are determined in opposition to those of damage. For, if moral damage is first of all perceived as disrespect that hinders a certain positive self-relation – that is, damage to one's own dignity as a person – this would imply, according to Honneth, that the moral intuitions of the affected refer to a positive image of dignity constituted within relationships in which such an image is formed, informed, and affirmed.

If in a concept of the dignity, the complete integrity of man is only to be approximated by determining what forms personal insult and disrespect take, then, conversely, it would hold that the constitution of human integrity is dependent on the experience of intersubjective recognition. [...] the integrity of human subjects, vulnerable as they are to injury through insult and disrespect, depends on their receiving approval and respect from others.⁷⁹

It becomes then clear why Honneth decides to keep the Habermasian intersubjective framework. Not only, in fact, does intersubjectivity represent the field where our normative expectations, in their disappointment or frustration, arise. If the self-notion or self-perception of one's own integrity depends on the gestures that another *can* address to her, intersubjectivity represents not only the threshold of manifestation of such a normative concept of the person, but also its genealogical spring with regard to the moral demands upon the addressee.

And that is why such a concept of the person embeds, derives from, and relies upon a particular relevance accorded to the concept of *vulnerability*. Without anticipating too many aspects, one can already say, however, that this importance

⁷⁷ Axel Honneth, 'Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition', *Political Theory*, 20.2 (1992), 187–201.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

can be attributed to “the internal, conceptual, and empirical connection between *physical vulnerability and social dependence*”.⁸⁰ If, from the experience of moral damage, the decisiveness of the intersubjective dimension to the constitution of the idea of human dignity is derived, then it can be argued that the primary character of the person consists in her vulnerability – namely in her being dependent on the approval of others, or more generally upon the position that others assume towards her.

So, the introduction of the concept of recognition within the communicative shift has two main reasons. The first has to do with the aspiration of a theory which can be ‘nearer’ to the experience of injustice as it appears. The second concerns the content of the demands of justice (which are directed – also indirectly – to the possibility of considering oneself as worthy) and their addressee: the other is the only one who can confirm such worthiness, which has been eventually wounded. For her social exposition, the person is vulnerable to moral damage and needs recognition from others, because her own self-consideration is clearly not self-posed.

Hence, the framework within which the paradigm of recognition receives its theoretical dimensions begins to emerge.

First, social suffering represents a decisive element in anchoring theory to the effectiveness of life-world. Also in this sense, the dimension of conflict emerges as epiphenomenon capable of unveiling an emancipatory interest that is experienced by the involved subjects thanks to their moral intuitions, and triggered by such suffering. As insightfully stated by Renault, Honneth’s social philosophy, due to its clinical approach, implies anthropological and social-ontological presuppositions,⁸¹ for the very possibility of identifying an always already-embedded normative network presupposes a reference to ‘positive’ social conditions (institutional spheres), intersubjective practices (relations), and an image of human dignity (self-relations).

This brings us to the second point, namely the programmatic possibilities of the paradigm of recognition, which has – so to say – to be porous and open. Without underestimating the positive theoretical premises of Honneth’s elaborations, it

⁸⁰ J. M. Bernstein, ‘Suffering Injustice: Misrecognition as Moral Injury in Critical Theory’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 13.3 (2005), 303–24 (p. 314).

⁸¹ “[...] the idea of the normative presuppositions of social life implies that the argument belonging to philosophical anthropology (some institutions are essential for human life) is associated with an argument that is belonging to social ontology (some behaviours are essential to institutions). In brief, Honneth’s model could be interpreted as a mixed programme of social philosophy combining a weak understanding of the descriptive side (as philosophical anthropology and social ontology) and a strong understanding of the normative side (as normative presupposition of the social life).” Renault, ‘A Critical Theory of Social Suffering’, p. 236.

clearly emerges nonetheless that his very aims arise from the consideration of the normative implications that come into play through the experience of moral injury. If certainly, for example, Habermas' communicative shift represents an embraced positive presupposition that determines the field of inquiry, it is its inadequacy in accounting for social experiences that persuades Honneth to broaden it in recognitional terms. It is, hence, not inaccurate to say that the paradigm of recognition receives its inquiry-issues from the opacity of moral feelings. Already taking social suffering regarding one's own identity and integrity as a point of departure encompasses a multidimensional structure, where the boundaries between the sociological, psycho-sociological, anthropological, moral and political levels become blurred and tangled because of the (desired) adherence to actual phenomena.⁸²

Respectively – third – the opacity of moral intuitions and reactions to damage and the experience of injury itself concern polarities, where a pivotal role is played by the specularly of hurt and health. Every form of recognition is in fact described by Honneth as the counterpart of damage-experiences and must therefore show itself able to penetrate the different levels within the moral damage that are shown to be inextricable. This is perceived by Honneth as the main task of his thinking: the redefinition of morality,⁸³ of the concept of justice and of the idea of autonomy within an ethical perspective. For in the perception of injustice normative standards are always embedded, and in social conflict, moral issues concerning dignity are always pursued; the critical proposal cannot be reduced to the level of a better equal distribution. Not only then does the horizon of the recognition paradigm have to be porous, but it should shape a “formal conception of ethical life.”⁸⁴ That is, its fields have to be, according to Honneth, included in a perception of the good – a moral content lived as such by the lifeworld-subjects – intertwined in social practices, but within which the theory assumes a structural approach, aiming to a certain formality

⁸² Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁸³ Such philosophical position can be summarized noteworthy through a passage from Habermas: “I conceive of moral behavior as a constructive response to the dependencies rooted in the incompleteness of our organic makeup and in the persistent frailty (most felt in phases of childhood, illness, and old age) of our bodily existence. Normative regulation of interpersonal relations may be seen as a porous shell protecting a vulnerable body, and the person incorporated in this body, from the contingencies they are exposed to. Moral rules are fragile constructions protecting *both* the physis from bodily injuries and the person from inner and symbolic injuries.” Jürgen Habermas, ‘The Debate on the Ethical Self-Understanding of the Species’, in *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), pp. 16–74 (pp. 33–34). It is at the same time interesting to note that such all-encompassing tendency of Honneth's concept of recognition does not embrace a reflection on the so-called *identity politics*, without ever directly engaging in a dialogue with Charles Taylor's thinking. Cf., for example, Simon Thompson, *The Political Theory of Recognition: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006); Wendy Martineau, Nasar Meer, and Simon Thompson, ‘Theory and Practice in the Politics of Recognition’, *Res Publica*, 18 (2012).

⁸⁴ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 175.

and not to culturally punctual visions of the good. In this sense, Honneth wants to distinguish “any concrete instantiations” of socially posed goods and “the structurally universal features of any socially organized forms” and preconditions for undamaged personal integrity.⁸⁵

Summarizing, the closeness with suffering would allow and imply an intersubjective perception of normativity as well as a recognitional perspective on intersubjectivity. But, given such a perspective, some important issues must arise. As Fraser states, Critical Theory should be able to determine “what really *merits* the title of injustice, as opposed to what is *merely* experienced as injustice”.⁸⁶ In other words, is Honneth’s point of departure legit? And are its implications theoretically bearable?

1.3 Some Preliminary Issues: Psychologization, Culturalization, and Teleology

In what follows, I want to mention three of the main criticisms that are moved against Honneth’s perspective by which the *experience* of moral suffering is the starting point of the critique. Rather than arguing for or against such criticisms, the intention is rather to leave the issues open, in order to then let Honneth’s texts speak and go deeper into the issues later. Such observations can therefore play a guiding role, that is, they can help to better frame the Honnethian paradigm, because a minimal consideration of them can immediately exclude certain doubts and deepen the justifying claim of some positions.

The first criticism could be named *psychologization of injustice*. In fact, taking as a starting point – both in the case of social pathologies and in that of moral injury – the suffering experienced by individuals and their consequent inability to develop a positive image of themselves could imply the reduction of normative matters into psychological terms. Similarly, the positive representation of what is damaged, that is, the intuition on which hinge the images of human dignity and integrity, would come to coincide with an idea of psychological health. In doing so, Honneth would end up embracing a specific substantial content of the good, failing to define a formal concept of ethical life.⁸⁷ But, above all, two further consequences seem to

⁸⁵ Christopher F. Zurn, ‘Anthropology and Normativity: A Critique of Axel Honneth’s “Formal Conception of Ethical Life”’, *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 26.1 (2000), 115–24 (p. 118).

⁸⁶ Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, trans. by Joel Golb, James Ingram, and Christiane Wilke (London - New York: Verso, 2003), p. 205.

⁸⁷ “Despite [Honneth’s] claim that he does not endorse a particular conception of the good, it can hardly be denied that his notion of self-realization is closely associated not only with Aristotle’s notion of

seriously limit Critical Theory's potentials. Since Honneth's theory has to refer to psychologically perceived suffering, it risks, on the one hand, not being able to give voice to the injustice for which there is no symptoms – think of the ideological processes and dynamics –⁸⁸ and, on the other hand, to justify any identity demand that is accompanied by phenomena of social exclusion or disrespect. If, therefore, Honneth is absolutely aware of this second risk – that is, that of more or less explicitly justifying demands for recognition of violent or reactionary groups –,⁸⁹ the paradigm of recognition must provide further normative standards that do not directly derive from its negative access.

A second charge aimed towards Honneth is that of *culturalization* of injustice, which would imply an *idealistic turn* in Critical Theory. Extremely synthetized, such criticisms, moved principally by Nancy Fraser and Michael J. Thompson, possess two principal cores. On the one hand, they claim Honneth, due to an approach centered on identity claims, would propose “a reductive culturalist view of distribution” and therefore overstep fundamental objective issues of (in)justice.⁹⁰ Conversely, Fraser proposes a *two-dimensional concept of justice*, where ‘classical’ justice issues and identity issues would be given due weight. In this sense, given an aim of *parity of participation* for every adult citizen in the democratic sphere, objective and intersubjective conditions cannot be reduced to one another. The participants of a democratic context must be able to benefit from a fair material distribution and be protected from phenomena such as cultural or racial discrimination.⁹¹ Confusing identity demands with material conditions of equality would make critique “detached from a confrontation with the economic and structural organization of society”. In other words, the priority of the intersubjective dimension – that is, of recognition – would lead to a misunderstanding of the ontological status of social, which is not “constituted by intersubjective social practices”, and rather “is distinct from that intersubjectivity and possesses causal powers separate from it as well”.⁹² These two criticisms, taken together, effectively

human flourishing (the fulfilment of a person's capacities and desires) but more importantly to psychological well-being or health.” Renante D. Pilapil, ‘Psychologization of Injustice? On Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognitive Justice’, *Ethical Perspectives*, 18.1 (2011), 79–106 (p. 87).

⁸⁸ Cf. Rosie Worsdale, ‘Recognition, Ideology, and the Case of “Invisible Suffering”’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 26.1 (2017), 614–29.

⁸⁹ Cf. Honneth, ‘The Social Dynamics of Disrespect’, pp. 77–78.

⁹⁰ Nancy Fraser, ‘Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation’, in *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, 2003, pp. 7–109. Cf. also Lois McNay, ‘The Trouble with Recognition: Subjectivity, Suffering, and Agency’, *Sociological Theory*, 26.3 (2008), 271–96.

⁹¹ Fraser, ‘Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation’.

⁹² Michael J. Thompson, ‘Axel Honneth and Critical Theory’, in *Sage Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory*, ed. by Werner Bonefeld and Chris O’Kane (Newcastle: Sage, 2018), pp. 564–80 (p. 575).

question decisive points of the Honnethian theory, which, in order to respond, must justify its empirical claims, the onto- and phylogenetic capabilities of recognition and its social-ontological consequences. In other words, what is under discussion is precisely the diameter, the adequacy and the comprehensiveness of Honneth's paradigm.

A third problematic point can be tied with Honneth's *teleological* setting. In fact, by describing social justice as the achievement of a good – even formally posed through the determination of its intersubjective conditions – Honneth employs not a deontological justification, but a teleological one,⁹³ trying to derive “an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’.”⁹⁴ If ‘justice’ has to be somehow determined as counterweight to intersubjective hindrances to positive self-perception, then the theory itself relies upon a (not yet precisely outlined) strong assumption: the desire of individuals to achieve self-realization, and its collocation in subjects' social normative demands. Therefore, two of the main challenges facing Honneth – besides having to maintain the formality of his ethical concept without losing the link with lifeworldly facticity – are: a) to justify the motility of human beings towards self-realization within an intersubjective context and outside a substantial conception of human nature; b) to provide a post-metaphysical concept of progress, by which this can be thought of as directed to a goal without an assumed aim, but conceived only as a result of an unfolding process. In other words, progress should be ‘distinguishable’ *a posteriori* and not delineable *a priori*.

Thanks to this introductory ‘incursion’ into the negative methodology and phenomenological tendency of Honneth's social thought, some directions have been clarified, wholesome challenges have emerged. The paradigm of recognition will have to prove that it can respond adequately.

An intention to implement the Habermasian communicative turn with a deeper focus on damaged life, derived from the first generation of the Frankfurt School and especially from Adorno, has clearly emerged. Although starting from the wounds to the identity, integrity and dignity of individuals, Honneth's claim would be not to reduce the spectrum of recognition to ‘identity politics’, but to include a more structural dimension of life in society and of the formation of the person. Precisely for this reason, thirdly, the normativity of recognition derives above all from the experience of suffering understood as a grid of intelligibility of expectations ‘always’ at stake: those on the good, submerged into the plot of relationships. Thus, finally, Honnethian monism, which consists in the persuasion to identify in recognition the key to a post-modern ethical theory, would be legitimized by the overlap of the

⁹³ Cf. Pilapil, p. 87.

⁹⁴ Zurn, ‘Anthropology and Normativity’, p. 119.

different levels present in the experience of injustice, which must represent the point of anchorage and the theoretical foundation for a Critical Theory not locked in either an aphasic perspective or a relativistically reducible one.

2. A Post-Metaphysical Moral Grammar: *The Struggle for Recognition*

The Struggle for Recognition is the first work in which the paradigm of recognition is defined in all its dimensions, laying the foundations for the later evolutions of Honneth's thought. For this reason, the analysis of this work is more detailed and it is necessary to face and question many of its aspects. In fact the Honnethian concept of recognition and its implications in the elaboration of a social theory are indivisible: to deeply understand the former it is necessary to consider the latter, addressing the motivations that lead to identifying not only recognition as pivot of the social normative theory, but also the references brought to a certain definition of recognition and the purposes assigned to it, as well as its justification.

The present chapter opens with an analysis of the relationship between Honneth and Hegel, oriented above all to show that the Honnethian reading is significantly mediated by Jürgen Habermas, Ludwig Siep and Andreas Wildt: in this sense, Honneth's interpretation, decidedly original, explicitly nonexegetical, and totally oriented to the tasks perceived as relevant for the social theory, finds a place in the *Hegelforschung* of his time (2.1).

The second paragraph intends to focus on the use that is made of the thought of George Herbert Mead, which represents one of the greatest points of both proximity and distance with Habermas. The discussion is not about the three distinct spheres of recognition that Honneth details in this case, but about the theoretical centrality of the Meadian ideas of social integration and practical identity to the determination of a subjective figure intersubjectively conceived, for the idea of progress, and for the justification of a moral account of social struggles (2.2).

The next step coincides with returning to the center the negative methodology set out in the previous chapter, retracing the steps through which Honneth defines three forms of moral damage in terms of misrecognition. In fact, although they are explicitly derived from the positive forms of recognition, the focus on the former opens up an insight into the normative character of recognition and its link with the concept of relation-to-self (2.3).

It is only with the fourth paragraph that the Honnethian paradigm of recognition is dealt with, connecting the formal concept of ethical life and Honneth's quasi-phenomenological reconstruction of its spheres. Here, 'recognition' is defined as a

multi-polar intersubjective practice (love, respect, esteem), operational in different interactive contexts (love-relations and friendships, legal relations, social and cooperative relations) and underlying three forms of undamaged practical identity (self-confidence, self-respect, self-esteem). Thereby, of course, some issues are raised, such as the tension between the symmetry and asymmetry of recognition and the anthropological justification of the paradigm (2.4).

Finally, the last paragraph aims to summarize the essential features of the concept of recognition used in dealing with the work and to relaunch a theoretical discussion of some issues (2.5).

2.1 Honneth's Hegel: An Intersubjective Social Ontology

With a certain discontinuity with the previous works, Hegel – and more precisely the so-called 'Jena Period' – represents the main reference of *The Struggle for Recognition*, through which Honneth seeks to elaborate an original social theory able to encompass a persuasive account of the conflict as engine and dynamic of social change; the reasons behind this choice are multiple and would require a quite demanding historical, exegetical and theoretical collocation of Honneth's work.¹

However, the first pages of the text can already show *ex abrupto* which theoretical problem Honneth is trying to face by bringing up Hegel. Indeed, the aim of the book is to propose a *third* concept of sociality, which could overcome the opposition between the individualistic and the Aristotelian views. In this sense, as Deranty rightfully claims, Honneth's "focus is not on Hegel, but on the ontology of the social,

¹ As Deranty remarkably synthesizes, the reference to Hegel is by no means a foregone conclusion on the part of Honneth. In *Social Action and Human Nature* and *The Critique of Power* Hegel is seen as an obstacle to the de-idealization that the Critical Theory had to operate to face the contemporary challenges. But especially in the first of Honneth's two early works, co-written with Hans Joas, one can find the main reason for the initial interest in Hegel. In fact, Honneth believes that the possibilities of developing a materialistic social theory can be opened up through the formulation of an intersubjectivistic anthropology. This, together with the Habermasian interpretation of the Jena writings could represent a first contextualization of Honneth's motivations. On the other hand, another series of Honnethian publications show the interest in performing a critique of society based on the experience of moral damage. All these other studies prior to *The Struggle for Recognition* hence represent the basis for the delineation of suffering as misrecognition, i.e. for the placement in social contexts of the origin of normativity and expectations of justice. Cf. Axel Honneth, *The Fragmented World of the Social. Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. by Charles C. Wright (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), in particular: 'Domination and Moral Struggle: The Philosophical Heritage of Marxism Reviewed', pp. 3–14; 'Work and Instrumental Action: On the Normative Basis of Critical Theory', pp. 15–49; 'The Struggle for Recognition: On Sartre's Theory of Intersubjectivity', pp. 158–67; 'Moral Consciousness and Class Domination: Some Problems in the Analysis of Hidden Morality', pp. 205–19; Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth's Social Philosophy*, pp. 185–89; Chiara Giovenco, 'Honneth Prima Del '92. Il Percorso Verso "Lotta per Il Riconoscimento"', *Epékeina*, 5.1 (2015), 209–26.

even before any concept of subjective identity and agency”.² In other words, the aims of the ‘re-actualization’ of Hegel’s thought derive from a theoretical need, that is, that of offering an original proposal to the social-philosophical research of the 20th century. For this reason, Honneth’s quite freely and explicitly ‘external’ interpretation of the ‘The Scientific Way of Treating Natural Law’ (1802), the *System of Ethical Life* (1802), the *Systementwurf* (1803-04), the *Realphilosophie* (1805-06) and of the ‘predominance’ of recognition among other forms of praxis should not, in my view, raise too many issues.³ Rather, the problem would be to prove whether Honneth’s original social-philosophical proposals will be able to respect their own claims or not. In fact, the interpretation of the Hegelian conceptual world is too original and far too aimed towards Honneth’s own purposes, that its analysis through historical-philosophical criteria would risk reducing one author to another.

However – and with this in mind –, Honneth’s use of Hegel is clarified through the *incipit* of *The Struggle for Recognition*, which starts with the depiction of a theoretical bifurcation within social philosophy, embodied by the classical figures of Hobbes (and Machiavelli) and Aristotle. On the one side, the English author proposes a model of society constituted through conflict resulting from individual purposes and motivations, from subjects’ capacity to put on the field rationally calculated aims and ends, which conflagrate as they clash with each other. In this sense, in a nutshell, we are in front of a depiction of sociality as outcome that presumes the encounter between already formed persons, the purposive-rationality of which orients their own aims, demands, interests and motivations. The other person is correspondingly conceived as a potential obstacle and as an effective interference in the realization of my aims. On the other hand, Aristotle represents the apex of a diametrically opposed tradition of thought, according to which human beings are properly social, by nature political animals (*φυσει πολιτικον ζων*). Community would hence precede the individual, both in a genealogical and in a conceptual sense, and the personal dimension becomes intelligible only if conceived as emerging from a pre-existing weave of relations. In this sense, the other does not represent an interruption from the outside, but rather a condition of possibility for the very process of individuation. Honneth himself clearly embraces this second hypothesis or perspective.

[...] every philosophical theory of society must proceed not from the acts of isolated subjects but rather from the framework of ethical bonds, within which

² Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 192.

³ With no doubt, as Petherbridge well shows through a close comparison between the Hegelian texts and their reading by Honneth, Honneth’s move consists of a quasi-unilateral focus on recognition, which tends to identify it with intersubjectivity itself (cf. Petherbridge, chap. 6.).

subjects always already move. Thus, contrary to atomistic theories of society, one is to assume, as a kind of natural basis for human socialization, a situation in which elementary forms of intersubjective coexistence are always present.⁴

This sentence, that apparently relies upon the almost self-evident ascertainment that every human lifeform implies an already existing human context or set of practices, poses some compelling issues. Honneth's attempt at a response revolves around a conversion of the Habermasian communicative theory into a paradigm of recognition, which would be able to rephrase the idea of "ethical totality".⁵ Thereby, the Hegelian conceptual plexuses proposed in the Jena Period would be seen to be helpful in the elaboration of such a social theory. But, since the Honnethian reading of the Jena Period is quite free and certainly not locked in criteria of a 'philological inquiry', it may be useful to fathom such originality by mentioning the comparison between Honneth and some of his contemporary references. In fact, such an interpretation of the Jena works is in some way the result of some precursors' elaborations: Habermas, Ludwig Siep and Andreas Wildt.⁶ Hereby, my intent is to bring to light Honneth's self-comprehension through a comparison with such authors, for his aims can become clearer when compared to their presuppositions.

The first decisive point coincides with choosing the Jena Period as subject of analysis, which certainly represents a quite original label of Honneth's work. However, this choice comes not out of the blue, so to speak. As is well known, Habermas is of the opinion that the period preceding the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* represents the most fertile ground for a resumption of the Hegelian themes. At this time the developmental formation of the spirit would be not considered as a monological self-manifestation through human forms, already destined to be subsumed in an all-encompassing metaphysical substance. Rather, "it is the dialectical interconnections between linguistic symbolization, labor, and interaction which determine the concept of spirit".⁷ In other words, the spirit would represent the 'end' of an open-ended unfolding formation process, which takes its moves from practical actions and interactions – or, better: the resulting spiritual dimension is anchored to the practical engagement, instead of, as in the later Hegelian works, the underlying self-moving totality that assumes particular manifestations in order to reach itself.⁸

⁴ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 14, our emphasis.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶ In order to gain an overview on Honneth's collocation within the *Hegelforschung* cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, pp. 206–15.

⁷ Jürgen Habermas, 'Labor and Interaction: Remarks on Hegel's Jena Philosophy of Mind', in *Theory and Practice*, pp. 142–69 (p. 143).

⁸ Cf. Robert Sinnerbrink, *Understanding Hegelianism* (London - New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 105–11.

For similar considerations, Ludwig Siep, in his *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, looks at the Jena Period as the most apt Hegelian resource for the framing of a contemporary moral and institutional theory. Hegel's ethical theory would be able to overcome the difficulties emerging from the proceduralization of ethics and the reduction of such formal procedures to *one* type of social action. First of all – against the proceduralization – Siep finds in Hegel an indissoluble bond between principles and institutional realities, which mutually shape each other within historical evolvments. On the one hand, institutions would embody (*verkörpern*) principles, which are therefore so de-formalized and seen as shared praxis-orienting norms in the social world. On the other hand, principles themselves are “genesis”, namely processes of significance-development (*Prozesse der Bedeutungsentwicklung*), which clearly take place in the institutional world. In this sense, principles would possess a quasi self-generative power, which is all but ahistorical and concerns the ongoing reflection and counter-reflection of practices that occur within and by institutions. Principles are in fact genesis of their own meaning (*Genesen ihrer eigenen Bedeutung*) and their definition comprehends both their belonging to the lifeworld and their inner evolution. To be sure, principles orient moral praxis within and through the institutional world and so set the concrete conditions for their own overcoming, development or refinement. Secondly, the principle of recognition (*Prinzip „Anerkennung“*) would be able to play an encompassing role, avoiding the reduction of the institutional and practical multiplicity to only one fashion of praxis – whether it is, for example, verbal communication, speech or social contract.⁹ As Hegel describes it, recognition is the deep dynamic that underlies a wide spectrum of (objectual and interpersonal) interactions, all unified by the subject's getting lost in the other and self-regaining, whereby it both gives shape to the world and forms itself, since it is constituted by and formed in the already-present otherness.

It is therefore not surprising that Honneth chooses or discovers these Hegelian texts as his source. In fact, precisely the outlining of such (formally conceived) *principles* and of their bond with the practical spheres of interaction is one of the main tasks of his normative social theory. But it is at this level that we find the originality of Honneth's reading, which – unlike Habermas and Siep – situates Hegel's most insightful purpose in the *System of Ethical Life* and in the corresponding attempt to describe social reality as a conflictual movement originating from an original ethical core. The aim, therefore, is to describe *a theory of the social* that dynamizes – so to say – Aristotle through Hobbes: conflict would not coincide with a natural condition, but rather with a rupture-stage whose result

⁹ Cf. Siep, *Anerkennung Als Prinzip Der Praktischen Philosophie. Untersuchungen Zu Hegels Jenaer Philosophie Des Geistes*, pp. 14–18.

is the evolution of the “elementary forms of interpersonal recognition” into “a state of social integration”, which “can be conceptualized formally as an organic relationship of pure ethical life”.¹⁰ Two forms of recognition belong to the stage of ‘natural ethical life’, that is, love (love-relations and parent-child relations), characterized by its biologically-oriented attitudes, and the one concerning the exchange of wares, which introduces a certain legal universality thanks to the forms of contract. Hence Hegel describes the stage of crime – although leaving aside a proper explanation both of the motives and of the social-historical situation of such acts –¹¹ as the moment where social partners are made “aware of underlying relations of recognitions”.¹² The stages of crime individuated by Honneth – natural devastation, theft and that regarding the struggle for honor – are already spotlighted and directed to the following distinction between three different spheres of recognition, which are quietly difficult to acknowledge in Hegel’s own scripts. Admittedly, Honneth asserts that such an interpretation of the *System of Ethical Life* as developmental social history of intersubjective relations of recognition represents a debatable thesis, above all because of the Aristotelian ontological ground that underpins the whole structure of the text.¹³ Correspondingly, Honneth performs the more incisive interpretation effort of the *struggle of honor*, extrapolating from such passages a third stage of recognition against the unconvincing conclusion of Hegel’s own discourse about the state. In order to grasp the motives behind such interpretative choice, it seems helpful to look at how Andreas Wildt’s *Autonomie und Anerkennung* contributes in the Honnethian interpretation.

Wildt focuses his interpretation of Hegel’s moral thought on the attention paid to certain life-practices, which leads to the de-transcendentalisation of practical reason and its principles. In contrast with Kant, the relevance gained by *non-legalistic* morality (*nichtrechtsförmige Moralität*) and the consequent *ethical relativism* of practical rationality (*sittlichen Relativität der Vernünftigkeit*) – which has to be understood in a non-radical sense – requires a re-definition of moral obligations.¹⁴ Hegel’s starting point coincides therefore with a closer observation of the lifeworld, where the rightfulness of practical intercourses is determined mostly by intersubjective motivations (*transsubjektive Motivationen*), altruistic tendencies (*altruistische Neigungen*), life-conceptions (*Lebenkonzeptionen*) and moral intentions (*moralische Intentionen*). Such phenomena, always at stake in those practical positions assumed by social partners in their vital interplay, cannot be

¹⁰ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 18.

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–22, 26.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁴ Cf. Wildt, *Autonomie Und Anerkennung. Hegels Moralitätskritik Im Lichte Seiner Fichte-Rezeption*, pp. 9–13.

completely embedded in an obligations-view determined by legal-conformity. In fact, such practices establish the idea of undemandable obligations (*nichtforderbare Verpflichtungen*), which clearly exceed the legal form in two specific dimensions.¹⁵ First, the assumption of a moral position has as its necessary precondition the immanence to certain vital relations – relations of recognition – which allow the subject to act according to criteria provided to him by this context.¹⁶ In this sense, Wildt argues, the form of relativism introduced by Hegel in the moral sphere does not concern the correctness of practical actions, but coincides with a relativism of moral motivation (*Relativismus der rationalen moralischen Motivation*). Correspondingly, and second, the moral obligations' validity (*Gültigkeit*) does not disappear within the self-justification of legalistic morality, the precepts of which find their own explanation regardless of the ethical relations, but has to be relativized to the immanence to certain milieus. But to show that a moral standpoint can be adopted simply by membership in certain groups (*Bezugsgruppen*), whose relations are of recognition, consists precisely in the formulation of a theory of non-institutional ethical life (*Theorie nichtinstitutioneller Sittlichkeit*).¹⁷

The second central point Wildt focuses upon concerns the possibility for the subject to be in-itself and for-itself (*Anundfürsichsein*). The subject's self-certainty relies on the affirmation or confirmation of oneself achievable through recognition relations and can be therefore always unsettled anew and regained. In this sense, Hegel's description of self-consciousness concerns the concept of qualitative ego-identity (*qualitativer Ichidentität*), which refers both to the position assumed by the self towards itself and, almost directly, to the relational context, which serves as ethical condition of the possibility of such self-relation.¹⁸ Personal identity hence represents a *qualitative* concept, which is essentially dependent on the quality of relations that 'encircle' the subject.

But a third point highlighted by Wildt reveals one of the most interesting aspects of Honneth's theory. This definition of qualitative practical identity would in turn hinge on a delineation of the affective-emotional ego-identity (*affektiv-emotionale Ichidentität*).¹⁹ Such a dimension, not alien to Hegel, but certainly oriented to

¹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁶ "Hegels grundlegende These lautet hier: Nur in sittlichen Lebenszusammenhängen gibt es überzeugende Gründe, diesen Standpunkt einzunehmen; wenn aber die transsubjektiven, sittlichen Anerkennungsbeziehungen hoffnungslos zerstört sind, gibt es auch keinen zwingenden Grund mehr, moralisch zu sein. Und dann haben moralische Verpflichtungen, seien sie im übrigen legitim forderbar oder nicht, prinzipiell den Charakter eines grundlosen, bloßen ‚Sollens‘"; *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 350 ff. Honneth emphasizes the importance of the recognition relations of love as a dimension in which the "emotional conditions for successful ego-development" are realized, on the trail marked by Wildt; Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 38.

contemporary developments, sheds light on the decisive significance attributed by Honneth to the dimension of love, above all with concern to child-caregiver relations. In fact, as Wildt underlines, the love-recognition cannot be addressed to the subject's personal features, performances or abilities, simply since the child has not yet had the opportunity to develop them. Because of that, the object of recognition is the naturalness of the body itself, its particularity, and the consequent neediness, the affirmation of which represents a central step to the self-realization.²⁰

Turning back to crime, it becomes clearer, given Wildt's interpretation, that Honneth's explanation hypothesis, which apparently reduces crime to a "pathology of recognition" and therefore functionalizes it into a "learning process",²¹ does not completely overlook the material or power-related grounds that can underlie such phenomena. In fact, as Wildt clearly shows, the formation of a qualitative ego-identity relies upon ethical, social and relational presuppositions. Therefore, within the lifeworld, the material reasons of criminal acts or the perception of domination always concerns the destruction or obstruction of the possibilities of individuation (*Individuationsmöglichkeiten*), precisely because they represent a ripple within the best possible ethical conditions.²² Honneth, inheriting this Wildtian perspective, does not therefore reduce the criminal motivation to a pathology of recognition, but rather to the perception of impediment that the subject experiences in the moment in which the conditions for his own self-realization are lacking.²³ Nor does Honneth cancel the material dimension. Rather, he brings it back to the social environment in which the object is value or instrument and not pure objectuality: thereby, the objects are clearly not reduced subjectively, but are comprehended as social objects. In this sense, it becomes even clearer that the *struggle for honor* concerns first of all the "integrity of the person as a whole"²⁴ – Wildt speaks of *Integrität als Person* – that is, the very self's possibility to state its own ego-identity (*Selbstbehauptung der Ichidentität*).²⁵ In this sense, such motivational background can be defined as *pathology of recognition*, but only in a not-reduced meaning.

²⁰ "Im Fall des ‚ungebildeten natürlichen Selbst‘ kann es sich kaum um die Anerkennung von Leistungen oder Bemühungen handeln, sondern wohl nur um die Anerkennung des legitimen Bedürfnisses bzw. Anspruchs auch in seiner Natürlichkeit und ‚ungebildeten‘ Besonderheit bejaht zu werden und sich verwirklichen zu können"; Wildt, *Autonomie Und Anerkennung*, p. 356.

²¹ Petherbridge, pp. 97–98.

²² Cf. Wildt, *Autonomie Und Anerkennung*, p. 102.

²³ "[...] one can also understand the disrespect said to be tied to the exercise of legal coercion in the sense of an abstraction from the material conditions for the realization of individuals' intentions. In this case, the 'individual will' would lack social recognition because the legal norms institutionalized together with contractual relations are so abstractly constituted that the individual opportunities for the realization of legally guaranteed freedoms are not taken into consideration"; Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 54–55.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁵ Cf. Wildt, *Autonomie Und Anerkennung*, p. 324.

All such factors come together in Honneth's definition of the struggle for honor, where the object of dispute is the "entirety" of the individual existence – that is: "the stance I take towards myself when I identify positively with all my traits and peculiarities".²⁶ The involved subjects become more aware of the fact that the "possibility of such an affirmative relation-to-self is dependent" upon the – partially underlying – "confirming recognition of other subjects".²⁷ The resulting conflict aims to regain the integrity of such confirmation from others and moves toward a better social framework, one more able to assure the person their self-position. In this sense, *conflict* would apparently represent a 'second' or derived character, the interruption or disruption of a previous intersubjectivity.²⁸ The very idea of an always-previous ethical life – which would represent the originality of the *System of Ethical Life* – implies a twofold role assigned to struggle. On the one hand, it reveals the priority of the already-existing form of intersubjectivity; on the other, it represents the "vehicle by which subjects articulate their unmet claims of identity".²⁹ So, the central idea resides in struggle's possibility of opening new – ethical, and therefore relative – horizons of affirmation and self-affirmation, which branch out from the needs and demands that clash in the conflict.

At stake in the conflict there is therefore the desire of the subject to pose and affirm itself (*Bedürfnis nach Selbstsetzung, nach Selbstbestätigung und Selbstdarstellung*),³⁰ a desire which depends upon the social condition, namely on recognitional confirmation: self-affirmation follows social affirmation. Yet the struggle reveals the already-underlying recognition, which at least allows the subjects to take each other as opponents. With respect to this, a fundamental question ought to be asked: what are the motives to *recognize* the other, if not as necessary pre-condition of *being recognized* by someone already recognized as worthy of doing that?³¹ Or, put another way, what is the nature of the non-legal moral obligations described by Wildt in Honneth's thinking?

Postponing an in-depth discussion of the issue in the sixth chapter, here we need only mention the *symmetrical* structure of recognition, which is one of the salient features of Siep's interpretation. For, if recognition seems totally unbalanced – either because it is utilitarianly self-referential or because it is altruistic – nevertheless one of its main features is precisely a certain *mutuality*.

²⁶ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 22.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁸ Cf. Wildt, *Autonomie Und Anerkennung*, p. 340.

²⁹ Petherbridge, p. 99.

³⁰ Cf. Wildt, *Autonomie Und Anerkennung*, p. 339.

³¹ Exactly in such terms Honneth speaks of "obligation to reciprocity"; cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 37–38.

Ludwig Siep's analysis of – and criticisms against – the Jena works revolves directly around the idea of mutuality as central character in the principle of recognition. According to his reading, Hegel grasps recognition foremost as a process of mutual formation of the individual and the general consciousnesses. At the level of interpersonal relationships, self-consciousness arises through the various forms of recognizing oneself in the other as a unity of particularity (*Einzelheit*) and generality (*Allgemeinheit*). In this sense, every individual concretization within action and interaction consists of the simultaneous being-determined and being-free from such determinations.³² The central role is therefore assigned to the terms 'freedom-giving' (*Freigabe*) and self-negation (*Selbstnegation*), which describe the dialectic of getting lost and finding oneself in the other. Mutuality would not, therefore, be primarily about the "positive side" of recognitional attitude, but would concern self-negation attitudes, which are configured as contemporaneity of dispersion and leaving-space to the other, a sort of game of dialectical mirroring through which individuality emerges. Yet, this interpersonal level would be seen by Hegel as necessarily already subsumed in a "supra-subjective" level, that of the "trans-subjectivity of ethical life",³³ which allows us to conceive such a process as a development: the freedom-from the natural determination coincides with a freedom-in the spiritual step, the self-loosening represents a self-letting in ("*Freiheit von* [ist] *zugleich eine Freiheit in*, *das Sich-Lösen zugleich ein Sich-Einlassen*").³⁴

In this sense, three facets of Siep's interpretation are noteworthy for our present interests. First, Hegel's theory of recognition could serve as normative 'benchmark' (*Maßstab*) in the depiction of the different stages of personal and social identity. In any case, it remains difficult to conclude that Hegel develops a theory of full-fledged individuation (*vollständigen Individuierung*) – as Habermas and Honneth claim. Rather, Hegel's theory concerns the liberation of the particular from its own determination and the acceptance of the latter.³⁵ Second, as already said, this liberation implies a constellation of lifeforms, such that any freedom-from is always a freedom-in. This implies being theoretically involved with a concept of *good life*, which further derives from the fact that the development of the person occurs within concrete relationships that the subject immanently inhabits and the instantiation of principles in institutions.³⁶ The third and final observation from Siep brings to light several consequences of the structure of Honneth's thought. The former considers the teleological evolution of the process of becoming-free as an

³² Cf. Siep, *Anerkennung Als Prinzip Der Praktischen Philosophie*, pp. 278–79.

³³ Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 220.

³⁴ Siep, *Anerkennung Als Prinzip Der Praktischen Philosophie*, p. 283.

³⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 232–33.

“injury” (*Verletzung*) of the reciprocity-principle of recognition.³⁷ In this respect, especially in the *Systementwurf*, from the struggle onward the individual is considered as substitutable (*substituierbar*) in his uniqueness and is exclusively seen as subsumable in the following and more general stages.³⁸ In the sphere of rights and above all of the state, an asymmetrical relation („*asymmetrischen*“ *Verhältnis*)³⁹ where the self-negation of the individual does not correspond to a reciprocal self-negation within institutions, which, on the contrary, perform a conclusive function of the development.

There are three main problems concerning Hegel’s asymmetrical-teleological shortcomings identified by Siep. First of all, this asymmetry makes it difficult to identify possible sources of innovation or social change. If, in fact, the reciprocal formation of the individual and the general embody a theoretical framework capable of explaining the progress of the principles – and therefore of the practices – the ‘teleologization’ of this dynamic, that is, its description according to an axis of the annulment of the particular in the general, this makes the detection of ‘emancipatory resources’ at least problematic, using a more Honnethian lexicon.⁴⁰ Secondly, Hegel’s teleological description implies the functionalization of the first acts of recognition in view of the subsequent and higher ones. In this sense, liberation from naturalness would coincide with an assimilation that eliminates the singularity of the individual or, using Honneth’s terms, its “biographical uniqueness”.⁴¹ Finally, this priority of the conclusion over the commencement also implies an asymmetry between the spheres of recognition themselves.⁴² By justifying the “right” of the spheres of recognition not on the basis of their capacity to render the individual herself, but on the basis of their distance from naturalness and particularity, the higher spheres possess a priority that can also be considered coercive. In other words, observing the dynamic not in its development, but from its conclusion or from the outside, the necessary contemporaneity of the spheres does not coincide with an equal interplay.

Once these limits or risks have been defined, Siep proceeds to list a number of points programmatically. In fact, by rejecting this teleological approach, the possibilities for a moral theory centered on recognition would consist, briefly, in the

³⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 285.

³⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 126–27; 282–83.

³⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 279. “Accordingly, the construction of the ethical sphere occurs as a process in which all elements of social life are transformed into components of an overarching State. This generates a relationship of asymmetrical dependence between the State and its members similar to the one that holds fundamentally between Spirit and the products of its manifestation”; Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 59.

⁴⁰ Cf. Siep, *Anerkennung Als Prinzip Der Praktischen Philosophie*, p. 281.

⁴¹ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 61.

⁴² Cf. Siep, *Anerkennung Als Prinzip Der Praktischen Philosophie*, p. 284.

description of successful or unsuccessful identity-formations (*gelungener oder mißglückter Identitätsbildungen*) within the institutional context and in the analysis of the interdependency between principles and institutions, spheres where recognition also represents a framework for judgment (*Beurteilungsrahmen*) of institutional contexts, without falling into relativism. Recognition is thus able to criticize pathological developments.⁴³

When one turns to Honnethian interpretation, and especially to the tasks he assigns to the re-actualization of Hegel, it is not difficult to find the legacy he assumes from Wildt and Siep. His reading of Hegel is almost perfectly encapsulated in a rather long passage, which is worth re-proposing and from which derive several necessary observations.

The structure of any of these relationships of mutual recognition is always the same for Hegel: to the degree that a subject knows itself to be recognized by another subject with regard to certain of its [the subject's] abilities and qualities and is thereby reconciled with the other, a subject always also comes to know its own distinctive identity and thereby comes to be opposed once again to the other as something particular [...]. Since, within the framework of an ethically established relationship of mutual recognition, subjects are always learning something more about their particular identity, and since, in each case, it is a new dimension of their selves that they see confirmed thereby, they must once again leave, by means of conflict, the stage of ethical life they have reached, in order to achieve the recognition of a more demanding form of their individuality. In this sense, the movement of recognition that forms the basis of an ethical relationship between subjects consists in a process of alternating stages of both reconciliation and conflict. It is not hard to see that Hegel thereby infuses the Aristotelian concept of an ethical form of life with a moral potential that no longer arises merely out of the fundamental nature of human beings but rather out of a particular kind of relationship between them. Thus, the coordinates of his political philosophy shift from a teleological concept of nature to a concept of the social, in which an internal tension is contained constitutively.⁴⁴

First, the transition to the philosophy of consciousness by the *Systementwurf* and the *Realphilosophie*, while it provides Honneth with important insights into the motivations of conflict and the forms of recognition, is rejected mainly because of the subjection of the consciousness-constitution process to the totality of the spirit.⁴⁵ In other words, according to Honneth, Hegel's focus would no longer be on the evolution of the ethical primary relations into more sophisticated forms, but rather emphasizes the self-mediation of the individual consciousness, which, after all, would only represent a wave in the sea of the spirit. Thereby, the main problem is that "communicative relations between subjects can no longer be conceived as

⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 295–97.

⁴⁴ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 17.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 27–29.

something that in principle precedes individual”.⁴⁶ In this sense, besides the problematic embedding of the individual in the spiritual, the starting point already seems to Honneth to be a misleading one, one which fails to bring carry out Hegel’s original intuition, shifting the focus away from social theory.

Second, it is therefore understood that the priority assigned to *the System of Ethical Life* derives from two factors, both entailed in the *genealogical and logical priority* of intersubjectivity. On the one hand, the Aristotelian assumption of an original sociability of human beings would make it possible to justify the perception of an ever-previous normative consensus or threshold of evaluation, which emerges in cases of social pathology or in those of moral damage. Even conflict presupposes such a background: in fact, both in the cases of property or contract and in those concerning honor, the possibility of confrontation already presupposes the consideration of the other as such, according to a degree of recognition that can always be perfected. In this sense, Honneth maintains that “theoretical attention must be shifted to the intersubjective social relations that always already guarantee a minimal normative consensus in advance”.⁴⁷ Such previous ‘unity’ is also defined by Honneth using an expression of Barrington Moore, according to which members of society move within a horizon of expectations, demands and attitudes defined by and instantiated in an “implicit social contract”.⁴⁸ On the other hand, this intersubjective precedence also regards the generation of such expectations, namely the constitution of the person. Not only does the precedence of certain forms of relationship allow for the elaboration of a normative social theory, but it also lets the development of a model in which individuation and social integration coincide, according to a dialectical process of objectification, identification and liberation from determination. For every aspect in which the self is affirmed, it will know how to recognize itself and will be able, by this, to distance itself from such determination. Without, therefore, a determined idea of primary intersubjectivity one would fall again into the impasse of the different atomistic perspectives on the person. Honneth claims therefore that the first task of his own social theory coincides with a post-metaphysical – that is, formal and not substantive in the Habermasian sense – argument on such primary intersubjectivity, which could

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 167.

avoid a purely ontological or speculative justification,⁴⁹ and on the subject-formation within recognition relationships.⁵⁰

Third, with the research subject thus structured – in particular the second and third tasks of the normative theory, that of structuring the three spheres of recognition and the delineation of a concept of progress anchored to conflict –⁵¹ Honneth does not consider what precedes the natural ethical life in the Hegelian works and, in general, he does not consider adequately the dimension of materiality.⁵² Nonetheless, here I would like to limit myself to arguing that this perspective does not coincide with a simple annulment of materiality, but rather with its re-comprehension within intersubjectivity, inherited primarily from Habermas and his reading of Hegel. Habermas' arguments about the dimensions of *language* and *labor* within the *Systementwurf*, which actually precede the forms of the natural ethical life, can apparently allow a first sketching of the priority of recognition (*Anerkennen*) over cognition (*Erkennen*), albeit this is dealt first in *Reification*.

As cultural tradition, language enters into communicative action; for only the intersubjectively valid and constant meanings which are drawn from tradition permit the orientation toward reciprocity, that is, complementary expectations of behavior. Thus interaction is dependent on language communication which has established itself as part of life. However, instrumental action [...], as social labor, is also embedded within a network of interactions, and therefore dependent on the communicative boundary conditions that underlie every possible cooperation.⁵³

For the time being, we can therefore limit ourselves to arguing that Honneth – preceded by Habermas – does not simply get rid of the material dimension or overtake it in order to facilitate his intersubjective foundation. Rather, he understands the material dimension or even language as always situated in an intersubjective horizon, with an almost phenomenological attention both to the ontogenetic and phylogenetic development of human beings.

⁴⁹ Both Deranty and Petherbridge speak of an ontological concept of original intersubjectivity (cf. Petherbridge, p. 88; Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, pp. 220–21). However, if the word 'ontology' itself represents a problematic issue and could each time elsewise interpreted, it emerges quite clearly that Honneth means to avoid such level of discussion by producing a post-metaphysical account of Hegel's ideas, that is, by giving an empirical and psychological justification of the primary intersubjectivity.

⁵⁰ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 68.

⁵¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁵² Besides the already mentioned works, which deal with such issues, cf. Joel Whitebook, 'First Nature and Second Nature in Hegel and Psychoanalysis', *Constellations*, 15.3 (2008), 382–89.

⁵³ Habermas, 'Labor and Interaction', p. 158.

The final point concerns the interactionist reading of Hegel performed by Honneth,⁵⁴ which would lead to a “one-dimensional account of the concept of ‘relationality’ operating in Hegel’s work”,⁵⁵ namely to a pure intersubjectivistic reading of recognition, incapable of entailing the complex dialectic between particular and universal. Moreover, such peer-oriented view on intersubjectivity and recognition, according to which they consist of a “horizontal dependency of each on each, not the dependency of each on all”,⁵⁶ would imply an inadequacy to account for the complex relationships between individuals and institutions, for crime and for the dynamics of power.⁵⁷ My claim here is that such a tendency, clearly taken on by Honneth, aims to avoid the risks identified by Ludwig Siep in Hegel’s thought and description of ethical life, where the subject is left with the role of instance emerged-from and again subsumed-into the spirit. To avoid such characterizations, Honneth – at least in *The Struggle for Recognition* – describes institutions as a moment of intersubjectivity, depicting the latter primarily in terms of an I-you, rather than an I-we which is teleologically oriented.

On one level, even if the dialectic between general and particular is not completely eliminated, it emerges distinctly that such horizontal forms of recognition derive from the intent to develop a normative social theory reconcilable with the non-prescription of certain goods or ends, transitions leading to which would only live as functionalized to them. Such a framework comes therefore from a concern oriented towards ‘de-transcendentizing’ the theory of progress, now conceived as open-ended social change, driven by conflict, namely by a negative and denying practice.

On a second level, the horizontal nature of recognition aims to keep the individual’s own biographical uniqueness. This idea finds space in *The Struggle for Recognition* above all in the centrality assigned to the principle of self-realization, and in the importance given to the form of recognition of love, in which the subject knows and experiences itself, in its own particularity and corporeity, as a “vital subjectivity”.⁵⁸ This idea is based on Wildt’s interpretation, according to which Hegel links the foundation of the moral theory not to general principles, but to the constitution of the person, where recognition in the form of love is the first fundamental level of affirmation. Indeed, in a rather radical way, Wildt argues that love is the form of recognition that supports all subsequent ones: a thesis which,

⁵⁴ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 218.

⁵⁵ Petherbridge, pp. 100–101.

⁵⁶ Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 220.

⁵⁷ Cf., regarding Honneth’s reading of Hegel, Petherbridge, pp. 92–96.

⁵⁸ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 39.

despite the affirmed equality between the different spheres of recognition described by Honneth, certainly makes its influence felt.⁵⁹

On a third level, such a ‘horizontalization’ of intersubjectivity plays its role not only at the ‘end’ of the teleological route, but also at its beginning. In fact, one of the more compelling tasks of Honneth’s own theoretical operation consists in substituting the ontological and holistic model of primary sociality, according to which individuality must always be traced back to a precedent substantial common element. Honneth intends to replace this model, centered on the Aristotelian metaphysics, with fundamental relational structures, in order to de-ontologize the concept of natural ethical life and to be able to conceive subjectivity from a practical perspective and not as a mere sub-category of a previous totality.⁶⁰

To sum up, one can say that Honneth’s reading of Hegel leads to three main theoretical points. The first one is clearly the concept of *recognition*, seen as interactional keystone-principle that constitute the normative fabric of society, as it emerges in the experience of suffering. With regard to this, it is important to underline that Honneth takes on Siep’s appreciation of the multipolarity of the principle of recognition, which therefore does not run into the shortcomings of the univocal proceduralizations of ethics. Moreover, Honneth uses this polysemanticity of recognition to place in its system, at the same time, non-legalistic and therefore unbalanced forms of recognition (Wildt) together with symmetrical and mutual forms (Siep). Second, ‘recognition’ implies and relies on an intersubjective definition of the subject and of *personal identity*, the undamaged unfolding of which represents a normative standard – according to Siep’s reading. Third, however, the analysis of the intersubjective conditions of the formation of an undamaged identity (Wildt) is sociologized through the formal concept of *ethical life*. Honneth identifies the appropriate normative criterion not in a theory of the determined relationship between existing principles and existing institutions (Siep), but in the much more modest – or more ambitious – idea of formally identifying the structural social conditions for the undamaged development of the person.⁶¹ Fourth, the Hegelian idea of ethical life would be able to furnish accounts of normativity and of the social that encompasses the embryonic *sociability* of human beings with the dimension of

⁵⁹ “Daß Hegel Liebe darüberhinaus als die erste Form von Anerkennung thematisiert, impliziert die These, daß die Rationalität der rechtlichen, moralischen und sittlichen Anerkennung nur auf der Basis liebender Anerkennung möglich ist. [...] Voluntative Ichidentität impliziert nur dann notwendig moralische Motivation, wenn die Erfahrung lebendig bleiben kann, daß die Besonderheit des Individuums als solche, also nicht nur als Fall genereller Regeln, bejaht und anerkannt ist”; Wildt, *Autonomie Und Anerkennung*, p. 356.

⁶⁰ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 197.

⁶¹ On Honneth’s taking distance from Siep and Wildt, cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 189–90 notes 2, 3; Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 258.

conflict and *struggle*: social reality would be the disharmonic yet identifiable development of a primary intersubjective structure. Correspondently – and finally – despite Honneth’s (present) refusal of Siep’s account of institutions, the account of the three *spheres of recognition* as *instantiations* of normative principles embedded in intersubjective practices must be traced back to the intention to inherit Hegel’s perspective on the *Sitten*, while still avoiding the logical or metaphysical dimension of his thought. In this sense, Honneth’s action-theoretical approach would lead to challengingly conceiving the objective implications of ethical practices without recourse to the concept of objective spirit.

2.2 ‘I’ and ‘me’: Mead’s Concept of Practical Identity

The first step in developing Hegel’s concept of recognition in a post-metaphysical framework is implemented through a confrontation with George Herbert Mead. The idea that the American psychologist-philosopher offers the best approach to pursue such an operation is owed to the influence of Habermas and shows – despite criticisms – that Honneth elaborates his original thought in close relation with the groove furrowed by his master.⁶² Also in this case our interest is not oriented to a verification of the Honnethian reading’s ‘correctness’ – even the very idea that Mead depicts a clear distinction between three spheres of recognition is debatable –⁶³ but rather to a comparison with the closest references to observe for a better understanding and placement of his original intentions. Thus, the following attempt is to read Honneth’s interpretation via Habermas’, so that – in the similarities and differences – the main traits of the so-called re-actualization and naturalization of Hegel’s thought can be identified.

In ‘Individuation through Socialization’ (1988), Habermas finds in Mead’s works – and especially in the binomial ‘I’ and ‘me’ – the key to re-interpret the concept of individuation within the postmodern contexts of rationalization, differentiation and detraditionalization of society. Mead’s merit is in the understanding that, in such a context of rarefaction and of autonomization of traditional bonds, even the process of individuation could no longer be based on the agency of a monologically understood subject able to express its sovereignty and aims in the external world. Thereby, the very concept of ‘individuality’ has to be re-conceived. Mead would therefore allow thinking autonomous individuation paths within the contemporary

⁶² For a deeper focus on Habermas’ engagement with Mead cf. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2, Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

⁶³ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 80–91; Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, pp. 264–68.

de-subjectification and, indeed, depict a model in which these two dimensions match. In addition to this theoretical need – and to the very identification of Mead as a suitable figure for rethinking ego in inter-subjective terms – there are three main reasons why this Habermasian essay can represent an interpretative basis for Honneth’s reading.

Even if Honneth wants to maintain a normative character in his discussion of Mead – that is, outlining the social constitution of practical identity and, through this, the depiction of the normative fabric of society – his account almost inevitably takes on different aspects, which will then lead him to abandon this philosophical reference. In fact, as Habermas notes, in Mead “the important distinction between the *epistemic* self-relation (*Selbstbeziehung*) of the knowing subject and the *practical* relation-to-self (*Selbstverhältnis*) of the acting subject” remains unclear and blurred.⁶⁴ These different levels of ‘ego’ are in Mead (as in Hegel) not separable from each other, because of a certain holistic conception of the experiential starting point, which is pragmatistically conceived. From a certain point of view, this blurring represents one of the reasons for Honneth’s appreciation, which often refers to diverse authors who first adopt a tentatively all-encompassing approach.

Apart from this issue, the first decisive point to understand the importance attributed to Mead by Honneth consists in the conception of individuality, which (as by Hegel) is not conceived as a “singularity, nor as an ascriptive feature, but as one’s own *achievement*”.⁶⁵ In this sense, ‘subjectivity’ would not be a mere starting fact, but a point of arrival or – better – an open-ended process; an unfolding that implies dynamism. By this process, individuation and social integration would run – so to speak – on the same track, inevitably intertwined with one another. Indeed, the subject is not seen as a substance, as a givenness already fulfilled in itself before any (cognitive or practical) relation with the world. Rather, the subject always comes-*from*, its provenance disperses into the social milieu from which it emerges and in which it is always situated: it’s always-actual origin coincides with the otherness in its social dimension, with interpersonal and gestural interactions, and with communicative gestures. Mead’s insightful element is therefore represented by the identification of the constant origin of the self from the alterity that again appears in certain practices. More precisely, individuality would form itself through the communicative interactions, which disclose the very possibility of “intersubjectively mediated self-understanding”,⁶⁶ gained ever anew thanks to

⁶⁴ Jürgen Habermas, ‘Individuation through Socialization: On George Herbert Mead’s Theory of Subjectivity’, in *Postmetaphysical Thinking. Philosophical Essays* (Boston: The MIT Press, 1992), pp. 149–204 (p. 178).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

practical reactions in front of vocal gestures. Moreover, Habermas explicitly links such interpersonal dynamics through which the self emerges with the Hegelian idea of recognition.

One organism can understand another organism's behavioral reaction that is triggered by the first's gesture as if it were an interpretation of this gesture. This idea of recognizing-oneself-in-the-other serves Mead as the key to his explanation, according to which the elementary form of self-relation is made possible by the interpretive accomplishment of another participant in the interaction.⁶⁷

Relations with others are therefore the fundament for one's own self-relation.

This brings us to the second point, which goes beyond a purely normative plan and concerns the very structure of the self: the *I-me polarity*. Therewith, the practical modalities of achieving one's selfhood are underlined according to different accents. In fact, Habermas and Honneth consider two different aspects through which Mead reaches the postulate of 'I' and 'me': if Habermas focuses on communicative action, vocal interactions and the reflexivity allowed by the shared objectified meanings, Honneth focuses on the dynamics of internalization of the generalized other's norms through practical intercourse. However, the core of Mead's account is that through practical interactions the subject can have itself as object, namely as 'me'. In this possibility of shaping one's self from the otherness as otherness, the 'I' – the proper singularity of the subject – would emerge as beyond that is before: as memory of the singularity of the self that is implied in every gesture, which however is always expression of 'me'. In every practical attitude that is seen by me as gesture of the 'me', as an already socialized and objectified gesture, my 'I' has to be implied as 'before' such practical happenings. 'I' encounters the acting 'me' always as an alter-ego, a second person, but then, through the reactions of the actual partners in interaction, can – so to speak – re-gain the never-objectified source of individual action, namely the always-present 'I' behind every action.⁶⁸ In this sense, the very reflexivity of the subject, that is, the possibility of the subject having oneself as object, would not primarily coincide with an intentional (and somehow transcendental) self-relation, but as a result of a social interaction. Thereby “the distinction between an originary self-relation” and “the reflected self-

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 175.

⁶⁸ “Mead explicates the self of self-consciousness as this *social* object. In the first person of his performative attitude, the actor encounters himself as a second person. In this way there arises an entirely different 'me.' Even this 'me' is not, however, identical with the spontaneously acting 'I,' which [...] withdraws from every direct experience; but the 'me' that is accessible in the performative attitude *does* present itself as the exact memory of a spontaneous state of the 'I,' which can, moreover, be authentically read from the reaction of the second person. The self that is given for me through the mediation of the gaze of the other upon me is the 'memory image' of my ego”; *Ibid.*, p. 172.

relation” would be neglected.⁶⁹ In other words, through this polarity, Mead describes the self-relation not as a transcendental, epistemological threshold of appearance, which would also precede any self-manifestation, but properly as a reflection of social interaction, as the very specularity implied in every practical attitude. Through the interaction and the reactions of practical partners, the ‘I’ can re-gain itself as ‘me’ not as an object observed through an inward-directed introspection, but as partner of the social partner.⁷⁰ Thereby, just as the ‘me’ is not conceived of as an internal object of consciousness, the ‘I’ does not represent an internal core of consciousness, an inward-directed ego or a ‘inward eye’.⁷¹ Rather it would represent an instance that precedes every determination, “a shadow, because ‘I,’ as the author of a spontaneous gesture, am given to ‘me’ only in memory”.⁷² In this sense, the logical priority of the two selfhood’s poles is inverted: no longer would a gazing ‘I’ objectify an observed ‘me’, but the always-already social ‘me’ would disclose the ‘I’ as implied memory. Such an understanding of selfhood is the key to the Honnethian elaboration of the concept of *practical identity* as derived from recognitional relations. In fact, Honneth describes certain possibilities of relating to oneself as dependent upon being the addressee of recognitional attitudes, according to a scheme that can be easily understood when we – hitherto still generically – talk about the nexus of received esteem and self-esteem: a subject is able to relate positively to some aspects of its personality only when these are affirmed in the practical horizon of surrounding relationships. But this very possibility is rooted in a more fundamental one, which concerns the structure of the self, and that clarifies why Honneth proposes, in *Pathologies of the Social*, the formulation of a formal and intersubjective anthropology as an actual possibility for the Critical Theory to accomplish its tasks. Through the mediation of Habermas, Mead’s theory allows Honneth to explain in post-metaphysical terms an anthropology in which the *self* is such as a consequence of the *inter-*, and the ‘I’ is the undeterminable reflection of the social ‘me’.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 178.

⁷⁰ Habermas clarifies this ‘inner’ yet ‘inter-’ structure in linguistic terms – which are not adequately considered by Honneth, at least in *The Struggle for Recognition*: “The idea that lets Mead break out of this circle of self-objectifying reflection requires the transition to the paradigm of symbolically mediated interaction [...]. The ‘me’ casts off the reifying gaze, however, as soon as the subject appears not in the role of an *observer* but in that of a *speaker* and, from the *social perspective* of a *hearer* encountering him in dialogue, learns to see and to understand himself as the alter ego of another ego”; *Ibid.*, pp. 171–72.

⁷¹ In *Reification* Honneth mentions such ‘reified’ perspective on self-consciousness under the concept of ‘detectivism’. As we shall see in chapter 3, the paradigm of recognition almost necessarily implies (or explicitly founds) a re-conceptualization of the structure of the self in intersubjective terms. Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look at an Old Idea*, pp. 67–69; Honneth, ‘Postmodern Identity and Object-Relations Theory: On the Seeming Obsolescence of Psychoanalysis’.

⁷² Habermas, ‘Individuation through Socialization’, p. 177.

The third aspect that flows into the theoretical use of Mead in *The Struggle for Recognition* is illuminated by Habermas in more properly normative terms, thus concerning the paradigm-shift when moving to the *practical* dimension of self-relation.⁷³ As has been said before, the boundaries between epistemological and normative discourses are quite blurred by Mead because of his pragmatist approach. However, once one enters the world of reasons and moral acts, the ‘I-me polarity’ takes on a rather different meaning, which is adopted by Honneth to justify various aspects and consequences of his paradigm. Assuming, as he does, that Hegel’s interest in the Jena texts resides more in the discussion of the *practical* rather than the epistemic self-relation,⁷⁴ Honneth focuses with Mead also only on the former – but leaves the inevitable consequences that the latter continues to exert quasi-undetected. Just as by the epistemic self-relation, the practical one is similarly conceived as emerging from and through interactions with concrete partners, but the forms of adopting the other’s perspective no longer coincide with the acknowledgment of the other’s reactions in front of shared communicative significances, but are “extended into *role-taking*: Ego takes over alter’s *normative*, not his *cognitive* expectations”.⁷⁵ In such a frame, ‘me’ no longer represents the occasion of self-consciousness, but “an agency of *self-control*”, which accomplishes behavioral tasks.⁷⁶ The behavior-controlling function of ‘me’ derives once again from its alterity-related features: as soon as we conceive the relationship with the other in practical terms, ‘me’ coincides with the resulting instance of the shared expectations towards the self among the partners in the interaction. The ‘me’ as ‘already-other’ represents the individual face of the existing institutionalized practices and normativity: these are therefore ‘internalized’ and act on the behavior of the subject as action-controlling promptings.

In *The Struggle for Recognition*, referring, like Habermas, to Mead’s *The Social Self*, Honneth introduces this dimension describing the constitution of the moral self through patterns of internalization: “the child can think about his conduct as good or bad only as he reacts to his own acts in the remembered words of his parents”.⁷⁷ In other words, only through the criteria that the self receives within its social context it can ensure itself a practical identity. In order to approach such an idea, Honneth sketches his post-metaphysical re-actualization of Hegel’s

⁷³ Focusing only on the late writings, Honneth focuses on Mead’s social psychology and not on his pragmatic and functionalistic approach to the constitution of selfhood in problem-solving situations. In this way, he overlooks the rich possibilities that might arise from the Meadian analysis of the social constitution of material objects. Cf. Petherbridge, pp. 135–36.

⁷⁴ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 76.

⁷⁵ Habermas, ‘Individuation through Socialization’, pp. 178–79.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁷⁷ George Herbert Mead, ‘The Social Self’, in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Andrew Reck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 142–49 (p. 146).

recognitional account of practical identity through the categories of *play* and *game*,⁷⁸ found in *Mind, Self, and Society*.⁷⁹ ‘Play’ presupposes the capability of assuming different personal roles within the ludic activity, so that one can identify with concrete expectations and anticipations of action – properly, the ability to put oneself in another’s shoes. But the stage that exemplifies and instantiates the internalization-dynamics that interest Honneth most is that of ‘game’.

If we contrast play with the situation in an organized game, we note the essential difference that the child who plays in a game must be ready to take the attitude of everyone else involved in that game, and that these different roles must have a definite relationship to each other.⁸⁰

In games such as team sports, all participants have to deal with a normative plan that precedes and goes beyond them, consisting of the rules of the game, tactics, and concrete possibilities for shared action such that the actual game can develop. The capability of the players is not to know how to identify with each concrete other, but with a *generalized other*, which coincides with the shared pattern of elements that actually shapes the game. This would lie in the child’s own possibility to generalize or to abstract the shared norms in order to move into a collective field of action, and to conceive of herself within (or, possibly, also outside) the group that organizes itself according to these norms. As Deranty points out, the process of internalization is allowed by the previously mentioned configuration of the ‘I’ as memory: *Erinnerung* coincides with the ability to internalize certain reactions and expectations that arise in the conversation of gestures and, therefore, create the capacity to anticipate them in future interactions.⁸¹ Accordingly, the *generalized other* and the capacity of the subject to confront a wide horizon of expectations underlie also the very process of social integration as a whole, for it “involves the internalization of norms of action that result from a generalization of the action-expectations of all members of society”.⁸² In this sense, ‘me’ coincides with the counterpart of the conventional expectations that can find a consensus among a generalized community or, in other terms, the self-understanding of a subject that knows itself as included in a so shaped social milieu. And it is here that Honneth properly

⁷⁸ Cf. George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 149–61. Also here Habermas’ plays a decisive role, through his reconstruction of the binomial *play-game* in *Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2*.

⁷⁹ It is worth noting that describing the dynamics of internalization through which selfhood is constituted in terms of a theory of recognition involves a certain ambiguity, because of the one-sidedness inherent in the phenomenon, which might overlook forms of productive power and normalization. Cf. Petherbridge, p. 139.

⁸⁰ Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, p. 151.

⁸¹ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 251.

⁸² Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 78.

introduces the concept of recognition within his analysis of Mead's thought. The ability to abstract group norms and to adequately take part in them would prelude being recognized and self-recognizing as members of such a community.

If it is the case that one becomes a socially accepted member of one's community by learning to appropriate the social norms of the 'generalized other', then it makes sense to use the concept of 'recognition' for this intersubjective relationship: to the extent that growing children recognize their interaction partners by way of an internalization of their normative attitudes, they can know themselves to be members of their social context of cooperation.⁸³

These dynamics of abstraction, generalization, internalization and sharing of norms describe therefore the emergence of the practical 'me', as a socialized self that knows itself as an included member of a group. Thereby, it is noteworthy that the concept of game – and the very expressions that Honneth uses in these passages – might suggest that the cooperating group is composed of peers, as well as in a team, drawing therefore a model that would be inapplicable to social effective misbalances. However, evidently, this same dynamic can easily be used to explain the different power relationships present in society through a de-generalization of the 'other', which could then be described as a more or less exclusive 'provider' of social norms which when internalized and shared have different effects.

In this context – and also given this latest issue –, the practical 'I' takes on a slightly different form as well. If, as far as the epistemic self-relation is concerned, it coincided with the withdrawal from any determination, with that 'shadow' behind and beyond any objectification of the self, on a practical level this instance of elusiveness presents itself under two faces, also originally highlighted by Habermas. It represents at the same time "the onrush of" pre-social "impulses" and "the source of innovations", which might transform the moral rules interiorized by the 'me' – and, thereby, the context of the 'social game'. Even if such a distinction is emphasized by Habermas – representing, the unconscious impulses placed under control by the 'me', but which continuously emerge, and, on the other hand, also a more conscious innovative capacity that might overwhelm the conventional norms

⁸³ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 78. Honneth himself quotes Mead employing the term 'recognition': "It is that self which is able to maintain itself in the community, that is recognized in the community in so far as it recognizes the others. Such is the phase of the self which I have referred to as that of the 'me'"; Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, p. 196.

–,⁸⁴ Honneth puts together the two dimensions⁸⁵ and defines the ‘I’ as “the unregimented source of all my current actions”.⁸⁶

Synthetically, Honneth’s reading of Mead revolves around three main points: first, the description of an intersubjectivistic model of the emergency of the self, which is now clearly *decentered*; second, the I-me polarity as inner relationality, no longer conceived in intentional or transcendental terms, but properly social ones; and finally, the delineation of the practical self-relation as result of the internalization of behavioral and normative models and the overflow over them. Upon such conceptions rely three main issues that are intertwined with each other and shape significantly the Honnethian paradigm of recognition.

In the first place, the ‘I-me’ relation concerns the process of social integration and the ‘position’ of the individuality or singularity of the self within it.⁸⁷ In this sense, even if not dyadically determined as in Habermas, the Honnethian interpretation of the ‘I’ serves mainly to reserve to the subject a space of *singularity* and *potentiality*.⁸⁸ The peculiarity of the ‘I’, deriving from its inability to accept any objectification, is therefore not to be understood as a reintroduction of a sort of atomism, of a strict split between the social and the individual. Rather, it represents the deprivation of the socially determined, where its emergence-from the social has a founding character. Without ‘me’, ‘I’ could not surface as a reflected image, but without the latter, the self would not be as such: the subject would be totally ascribable to its social environment. In contrast to the actuality of the ‘me’, to its –

⁸⁴ “This distinction should account for the experience we have of the *difference* between the way in which institutionalized forms of social intercourse are placed in question by the revolt of split-off motives and repressed interests, and the way in which they are placed in question by the intrusion of a revolutionarily renewed language that allows us to see the world with new eyes”; Habermas, ‘Individuation through Socialization’, p. 180.

⁸⁵ “What [the ‘I’] stands for is the sudden experience of a surge of inner impulses, and it is never immediately clear whether they stem from presocial drives, the creative imagination, or the moral sensibility of one’s own self”; Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 81.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁸⁷ As Deranty points out, such relation between singularity and sociality at stake in the internalization of the normative rules proper of the generalized other shows that Honneth’s idea of recognition is not only “horizontal” (between an I and a you), but also “vertical”, that is, facing with the society as a whole. The determination of such levels within recognition does represent one of the most problematic aspects in Honneth’s paradigm, and will therefore be discussed later. Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 254; Ludwig Siep, ‘Recognition in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit and Contemporary Practical Philosophy’, in *The Philosophy of Recognition. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, 2010, pp. 107–27.

⁸⁸ Cf. Patchen Markell, ‘The Potential and the Actual: Mead, Honneth, and the “I”’, in *Recognition and Power. Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory*, ed. by Bert van den Brink and David Owen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 100–132 (pp. 107–14). Contrary to what Markell said, I don’t think that the one implemented by Honneth is a clear separation between the two poles, but rather the opposite: the co-implication of ‘I’ and ‘me’ shows in fact an inseparable binomial. The application of the categories of ‘potentiality’ and ‘actuality’ to the concept of recognition will be discussed later.

so to speak – ‘presence’, the ‘I’ represents a *to-come*, the sources of which can only coincide with the surrounding effectiveness. In this sense, the Aristotelian terms – potentiality and actuality – are overturned both in a logical and in a ‘chronological’ sense, thus outlining an open-ended and indeterminate *teleology*, the definition of which represents one of the most challenging theoretical issues for Honneth.

The second element is quite implicit in *The Struggle for Recognition*, but finds adequate place in *Decentered Autonomy*. For as the relation between ‘I’ and ‘me’ sketches a decentered subject, it lays also the foundations for an intersubjectivistic rethinking of *autonomy*, able to positively include in its definition the dimension of otherness. This represents for Honneth a particularly decisive issue because contemporary reflections on freedom require paradigms that enable the alterity to be conceived not as a heteronomous obstacle: after the crisis of the modern perspective of the self-posing subject, ipseity itself seems *de facto* overwhelmed on every side by an alterity that precedes it and that expropriates its own ‘sovereignty’, dissolving it in the social, environmental, psychological and biological antecedents.⁸⁹ Given such a situation, in which the individual seems precluded from freely elaborating its own path of self-realization,⁹⁰ the ‘I-me’ polarity apparently allows re-actualizing the Hegelian definition of freedom – being with oneself in the other – at an elementary level. Not only, then, is the Meadian perspective able to guarantee an intersubjectivist-founded definition of selfhood, but also, through its own dynamicity, a pattern of individuation. In fact, the absolutely singular creativity of the ‘I’ can only be expressed within the objectivizing and objectified horizon of the ‘me’: the other is already present in the articulation of each individual initiative as a necessary condition of existence. The other – ‘me’, the language, the generalized other – represents an irreplaceable dimension for the ‘I’, since it provides modes of expression and contexts that are meant to be transcended. In this sense, the former constitutes situations so the latter is enabled to elaborate, and elaborate itself freely, receiving space for action. Without this precedence of the other, without this provenance, the ‘I’ would find itself in an inconceivable non-situation of total aphasia and immobility. Hence, the self is ‘with oneself by another’ as non-objectified that objectifies itself in the beyond that precedes it, as antecedent traceable only afterward. Such a definition of freedom implies not the merely given sociality, but one that has to come, bringing us to the third point, that is Honneth’s “non-utilitarian *moral sociological explanation* of social conflicts”.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Cf. Axel Honneth, ‘Decentered Autonomy: The Subject after the Fall’, in *The Fragmented World of the Social. Essays in Social and Political Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), pp. 261–71.

⁹⁰ Cf. Habermas, ‘Individuation through Socialization’, p. 184.

⁹¹ Mauro Basaure, ‘In the Epicenter of Politics: Axel Honneth’s Theory of the Struggles for Recognition and Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot’s Moral and Political Sociology’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 14.3 (2011), 263–81 (p. 264).

By pointing out the motivational horizon of the conflict in the suffered *misrecognition*, Honneth finds himself in the difficult position of having to found a potentially violent practice without running into a vicious circle, so that the expansion of the spaces of recognition coincides in turn with their negation (for other members of society).⁹² I argue that it is mainly to avoid this difficulty that Honneth outlines his own theory of conflict on the basis of Mead and, precisely, on the ‘I-me’ relation. Conflict does not represent, first and foremost, a reaction to social domination or to power dynamics, but rather – even if these occur, as in the case of misrecognition – it takes place thanks to the structural sociality of the self,⁹³ that is, precisely from the creativity of the ‘I’ and its consequent capacity to expand the normative concretions proper to the ‘me’. Being always beyond the forms of the ‘me’, the ‘I’ would somehow succeed in anticipating social assets more suited to its moral expectations – which are inevitably formed and shaped through the process of internalization and the confrontation with the generalized other, but which may eventually lose their effectiveness and generate frictions with respect to the abovementioned expectations.⁹⁴ The initiative of the ‘I’ is not, therefore, a setting outside the fabric of social relations, but the possibility of anticipating a better realization of that starting material which society – in one way or another – provides it with. In this sense, creativity, anticipation, abstraction and imagination are decisive factors for the elaboration of a conflict conceivable in terms of *moral progress*:⁹⁵ in other words, this is about a “dialectic of conformity and uniqueness”.⁹⁶ Thus, the struggle for recognition is properly a conflict aimed at widening the spaces of recognition, aligning them with the expectations of the members of the social environment according to two vectors: the social *inclusion* of a larger number of members and the *individualization* of the forms of recognition, i.e. the

⁹² As Aboulafia has already pointed out, Mead himself proposes an exclusively positive and constructive understanding of social conflict. This view is evidently inherited from Honneth in order to avoid possible contradictions, which would emerge as such in the light of disrespect and moral suffering as critical starting point. Cf. Mitchell Aboulafia, ‘Self-Consciousness and the Quasi-Epic of the Master’, in *Philosophy, Social Theory, and the Thought of George Herbert Mead*, ed. by Mitchell Aboulafia (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), pp. 223–34. Honneth’s account on social conflict does not stand about violence (cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 163), because violence in social struggle can be justified *a posteriori*, under given conditions; Axel Honneth, Jonas Jakobsen, and Odin Lysaker, ‘Social Critique Between Anthropology and Reconstruction: An Interview with Axel Honneth’, *Norsk Filosofisk Tidsskrift*, 45.3 (2010), 162–74 (p. 168).

⁹³ Cf. Lonnie Athens, ‘Mead’s Analysis of Social Conflict: A Radical Interactionist’s Critique’, *The American Sociologist*, 43 (2012), 428–47.

⁹⁴ These expressions refer quite clearly to Searl’s idea of *collective intentionality*. The possibility of linking some elements of the Honnethian paradigm with a certain ontological-social thought will be discussed in chapter 8.

⁹⁵ Cf. John Rundell, ‘Imaginary Turns in Critical Theory: Imagining Subjects in Tension’, *Critical Horizons*, 2.1 (2001), 61–92.

⁹⁶ Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 263.

improvement of their ability to encompass ever more aspects of their practical identity.⁹⁷ These are also the most exemplary features of the Honnethian conception of *progress*: struggle for recognition and the latter, in fact, cannot be separable from one another, because – at least in *The Struggle for Recognition* – it is precisely the conflict that represents the praxis in which progress can be discovered and traced in the historical path of the West. Accordingly, outlining a social world whose characteristics are able to correspond more adequately to the expectations shaped by society itself represents the other side of *freedom*: giving shape to institutions allows the self to recognize itself in them, that is to say, to experience being with oneself in the other. In this sense, the dynamic of internalization and the corresponding creativity of the ‘I’ would describe not only the development of the selfhood of the self, but the very shaping of social reality.

As Petherbridge critically points out, with this depiction of social conflict, “Honneth seems to assume there is a seamless flow between internal psychic and external social world”.⁹⁸ This would imply two risky consequences: first, a ‘naïve’ reconstruction of the relationship between the inner and outer worlds and, second, an excessively social determination of the psychic. However, although the first aspect may represent an effective objection to the current take on Mead, the discussion of the object-relations theory contained in *The Struggle for Recognition* already shows that such an unfolding of the ‘I’ through the elaboration of new social forms is by no means without obstacles, possible constraints, or even frustrations and imbalances. With regard to the second point – as we have tried to show – the richness of Mead’s paradigm consists precisely in proposing a description of the psychological as determined socially, but not depleted within society. Therefore, the justification for the conflict adopted by Honneth is – I would claim – certainly psychological, but not psychologistic, because the psyche itself is social. Conversely, the exposure from excessively socializing the psyche or reducing the singularity of the self (even in its unconscious elements) to the priority of the social is avoided by the centrality attributed to the pole of the ‘I’. Rather, this risk – if present – appears once Honneth abandons the Meadian model because of its excessive cognitivism. Moreover, this criticism overlooks the very pragmatist concept of the psychological at stake by Mead and Honneth,⁹⁹ especially with regard to emotions. Referring to Dewey, Honneth intends to develop an action-theoretical idea of emotions (shame) as spark that can potentially ignite social conflicts. Put in a schematic way, the heart

⁹⁷ Cf. Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition’, pp. 184–89.

⁹⁸ Petherbridge, p. 143.

⁹⁹ “The ‘psychical’ represents, as it were, the experience that one has of oneself whenever one is prevented by a problem that emerges in practice from carrying out the action in the usual way”; Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 72.

of this subject coincides precisely with rejecting the perspective wherein emotions represent a ‘bridge’ between an ‘interior’ of consciousness and an ‘exterior’ of the world. Rather, starting from the practical action and the expectations at stake by the anticipation of its developments and consequences, emotions would be characterized on the basis of their adherence or not to such individual anticipation. They would represent an aspect of practical gestures, marking individual reactions to the success or failure of actions. Thanks to this pairing of satisfaction and frustration, Honneth proposes again, at the base of the struggle for recognition, the same account as Wildt: the motivations for the struggle correspond to the perception of impediments, inhibitions or frustrations to one’s own practical expectations (of self-realization).¹⁰⁰ The centrality of this action-theoretical perspective put into play by Honneth is not limited to the description of emotions – and therefore not limited to the psychological, showing a certain impossibility of opposing internal and external in Honneth’s thinking – but represents a key to his social theory in *The Struggle for Recognition*.¹⁰¹

Concluding, the importance of Mead for Honneth’s thought could be read in light of the apprehension that the individual would be subsumed into the social totality, proper to Siep’s argument and which, according to the aforementioned interpretation, leads Honneth to ‘horizontalize’ recognition relationships. As Deranty argues, the interaction between self and generalized other can already be read as the re-proposition of the dialectic between particular and universal, which at first glance seems absent from the re-actualization of Hegel. My claim here is that the intent not to subsume the particular in the universal, that is, the singularity of the self in the ethical totality, finds an interesting antithetical equivalent in the theory of social change based on the I-me polarity. In fact, where in Hegel the particular coincides with the individual and the universal with the spirit (objective, therefore social), and progress consists in a teleology that moves from the first to the second, in Mead the terms are reversed. The particular that is overcome is always the determined ‘me’ – namely the social – whilst the ‘universal’ coincides with the undetermined ‘I’, that is the exclusively individual, driving force of an open-ended development. In this sense, progress is not ‘vectorized’ to the attainment of a goal other than the individual, but itself possesses the character of singularity, which must, of course, find collective forms to change, via struggle, the particular forms of the ‘me’.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 136–38.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 335 ff.

2.3 Disrespect as Misrecognition and Conflict

The account on emotions represents the best introduction to Honneth's argument about *misrecognition*. In fact, the idea that emotions represent the implication of actions, and thus coincide with frustration or the satisfaction of expectations, allows Honneth to treat different forms of violence as an impediment to well-founded normative demands. Although the chapter of *The Struggle for Recognition* focused on disrespect, moral injury and injustice is meant as a sort of 'counter-evidence' of the already explicated spheres of recognition – and the three forms of misrecognition are admittedly to be traced back to the latter –,¹⁰² it seems useful here to start Honneth's re-actualization of Hegel from the negative point of view, namely, keeping the perspective sketched in the previous chapter. This will be for four main reasons. First, taking the negative starting point shows more easily the *critical* potential of the work, which otherwise would almost exclusively delineate a 'positive' social theory;¹⁰³ thus, in a general way, the whole perspective of Honneth emerges more clearly. Second, it is negatively that the connection between *personal integrity*, *practical identity* and *practical self-relation*, namely, the core of the *formal anthropology* depicted in the book, is to be conceived, as an almost unapproachable idea circumscribable from the moral insights active within the experiences of suffered damage. In other words, focusing on the negative allows the gaining of a positive, yet unsubstantial perspective. Third, such an approach is an apt way to further distinguish Honneth's positions from those of Wildt and, above all, Siep. In fact, if the arguments that bring us to embrace 'recognition' as the key of critique are anchored to negative experiences, it is clear that the 'positivity' of the normative theory has to be both socially informed and more modest than an institutions-directed normative judgment, as if one was stopping at one step before reaching a conclusion. Finally, starting from the classification of disrespect sheds light on the positive spheres of recognition and the relative forms of self-relation. Indeed, many criticisms or observation about the spheres of recognition are – legitimately – aimed against or about their interplay, their dependence upon each other, their capability to entail certain inter-practices or not. My claim here is that one can gain a precious insight through the lens of three forms of disrespect: physical violence, legal exclusion (denial or subtraction of rights), and social denigration.

Honneth's analysis takes its phenomenological anchor on the everyday language, where the experiences of injustice are seen by the affected as *disrespect*.¹⁰⁴ In other

¹⁰² Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 132. To claim, therefore, as a criticism, that the identification of these spheres of misrecognition derives exclusively from the spheres of recognition is more a statement than anything else.

¹⁰³ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, pp. 310–11.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 131 ff.

words, every injustice is perceived as lacking ‘respect’ or apt consideration of the affected individual’s personal worth. Without wanting to be redundant by repeating elements already highlighted in the previous chapter, it is nevertheless useful to underline two aspects. First of all, anchoring his thought to everyday language shows the Honnethian intention to develop a theory that starts from an identification with suffering, its factuality and concreteness. Secondly, the central element is personal *vulnerability*: just as every injustice coincides to a certain extent with disrespect, so every longed-for form of justice should refer to undamaged forms of relationships. These represent both the ground on which injustice can be felt as such as well as the end of any struggle for recognition. In other words, we are dependent on others – through recognition – for the formation of our practical identity: this means that any damage suffered is perceived not only as an ‘external’ limitation of freedom, but also reflexively understood as a wound to one’s own personal integrity. Thus, as we have already seen, conflict is understood not as an end in itself, but as a means,¹⁰⁵ thanks to which the already existing conditions of recognition are highlighted and the foundations for the elaboration of new and more suitable ones are laid.

In this sense, the attention to “non-material forms of injury”¹⁰⁶ allows Honneth to fill what, in his view, was one of the most significant shortcomings in the paradigms of Hegel and Mead, namely the *motivational drive* to conflict.¹⁰⁷ If, in fact, the interplay of ‘me’ and ‘I’ represents the justification of the dynamics of the conflict, emotional reactions to misrecognition represent the socio-existential spark that *can* activate this dynamic.

But, before dealing with conflict, it is worth concentrating on the forms of disrespect, underlining again the centrality of vulnerability, that is, of *intersubjective dependence*. Although the aforementioned analogy with the biological diseases and the relative health of the body also plays a decisive role in *The Struggle for Recognition*,¹⁰⁸ it is useful to stress that the violations to personal integrity highlighted here are not generally conceived ‘social pathologies’, but pathologies of recognition, i.e. deficient forms of *intersubjective* relations, which undermine the constitution of the person. Therefore, a possible criticism emerges: the broader theme of social pathologies is reduced to the theme of pathologies of recognition, narrowing the horizon of the critique to intersubjective relationships. Honneth’s idea, instead, is that misrecognition – as well as recognition – represents, for the social partners, the ‘encounterable’ and experienced side of social dynamics.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Jonathan Allen, ‘Decency and the Struggle for Recognition’, *Social Theory and Practice*, 24.3 (1998), 449–69 (p. 461).

¹⁰⁶ Jonathan Allen, p. 450.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 132.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

Therefore – in a nutshell – for social theory there can be no other credible access point to social complexity in all its dimensions, than a *pre-theoretical* one. Moreover, it is clear that the same category of suffering – if taken seriously – takes the discourse to a much broader level than that of identity politics, to which those who accuse Honneth of culturalism refer. The materiality of suffering and its corporal dimension, in fact, represent the heart of Honneth’s critique at this point.¹⁰⁹ The fact that every form of misrecognition (not only physical violence) is analyzed in terms of suffering does not allow us to skip the material dimension. Consequently, it enables us to understand the bold claim of the critical project, that is, to highlight the most hidden folds of social dysfunctions.

What is at stake in the form of misrecognition represented by *physical violence* – such as torture and rape – is the undermining of the very possibility of *having* a body. Such violent acts, directed against a person’s freedom of *being* a body, represent the “most fundamental sort of personal degradation”, because of the combination of pain and the most elementary experience of subjection to another’s will. Such experiences lead to damages in one’s autonomous relation with its own body, which, “coupled with a type of social shame”, has as its proper consequence “the loss of trust in oneself and the world”.¹¹⁰

Although Honneth is quite succinct about it, there is room for some considerations. On the one hand, it could be said that precisely these grievous consequences to the openness towards one’s own corporeity, to others, and to the world can be caused also by psychological damage not included in physical violence.¹¹¹ On the other hand, it is noted that Honneth would overstep damages caused by deficient forms of care and by “poor parenting”.¹¹² This last observation clearly takes its cue from Honneth’s ‘positive’ discourse, which identifies the child-caregiver relationship at the center of the first form of recognition, i.e. *love*. Moreover, Ricoeur criticizes Honneth’s failing to identify that the more fundamental form of misrecognition should coincide with a sort of humiliation that withdraws the experience of ‘being-with’, by denying an essential-existential approval and therefore making the subject feel “insignificant” and “nonexistent”.¹¹³ This observation comes from a certain priority given by Ricoeur, within the sphere of love-recognition, to the essential affirmation of the uniqueness of the person in friendship and in love relationships. Even if such a comment raises, in my opinion,

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Deranty, ‘Injustice, Violence and Social Struggle’.

¹¹⁰ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 132–33.

¹¹¹ Cf. Piromalli, p. 114. Cf. also Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition* (Cambridge - London: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 190–91, which will be discussed later.

¹¹² Simon Thompson and Paul Hoggett, ‘Misrecognition and Ambivalence’, in *The Politics of Misrecognition*, ed. by Simon Thompson and Majid Yar (London: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 32–60 (p. 43).

¹¹³ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 191.

an open point in Honneth's theory – which in fact will be taken up later in *Invisibility* and *Reification* – both this criticism and the immediately preceding one risk to be more focused on the form of acquiring (or denying) a certain self-relation, than on the features of self-relation itself. In other words, in analyzing the forms of misrecognition it is fundamental to focus foremost on *what* is damaged: in this case, the fundamental and minimal familiarity – *confidence* – that, through and with our body, allows us to relate to ourselves, to others and to the world. Honneth's arguments concern the centrality of embodiment in social integration¹¹⁴ and any addition to this – also in light of the positive forms of recognition – represents, in my opinion, an over-interpretation of the issue at stake. Our experience of injustice is indissolubly and inevitably tied to our having a body, which, even in its closest intimacy, always remains exposed, vulnerable, and potentially dependent. This impossibility of exclusive possession of one's own body – because violence has the potential to threaten it – is the first concept through which Honneth intends to show the intrinsic sociality proper to any experience of injustice, as well as its moral dimension. If, therefore, it is true that his attention is directed to the experience of non-material injury, it is useful to underline that such non-materiality represents – explicitly in the case of physical violence – an aspect of actual episodes, which concern the materiality of the corporal relationship with the world in all its dimensions, both 'internal' and 'external'. As for the first observation mentioned – that Honneth does not consider certain forms of psychological violence that can actually cause the same impossibility of experiencing oneself and living in the world with confidence through and with one's own body – it certainly touches an open point. In any case, it is not useless to underline that Honneth's definition of the first forms of misrecognition touches the most fundamental experiences of damage, without excluding other forms, provided that they are actually directed to this type of self-relation.

The second class of misrecognition concerns rights and legal relations.

What is specific to such forms of disrespect, as exemplified by the denial of rights or by social ostracism, thus lies not just in the forcible restriction of personal autonomy but also in the combination with the feeling of not enjoying the status of a full-fledged partner to interaction, equally endowed with moral rights.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Cf. Bernstein, 'Suffering Injustice: Misrecognition as Moral Injury in Critical Theory', pp. 313–14. Although Bernstein's argument is not explicitly addressed to Honneth, it may be to some extent useful to illuminate some aspects between the lines of *The Struggle for Recognition*. Moreover, Bernstein argues that Honneth, by developing a concept of formal ethical life, moves away from a necessary 'closeness' that critical thinking should maintain in order to respond to injustice against the body (cf. Bernstein, p. 305). In dealing with the first sphere, I intend to argue that the formality of Honnethian normative social theory is not in contrast with such proximity and concreteness.

¹¹⁵ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 133.

Honneth's account therefore concerns once again the consequences on the perception that a subject has of itself, namely its self-relation. Through the denial of rights the individuals affected are threatened, first of all, in their own perception as rational-moral subjects, capable of moving autonomously within the social context, that is, in their self-respect. Such an account of misrecognition as legal injustice implies not a "quantitative" (to receive what one is due), but a "qualitative" (to receive what one needs in order to be a full subject)" account on justice.¹¹⁶ In other words, Honneth argues that the deprivation of rights – be they civil, political or social – fundamentally undermines the experience of individuals, in so far as it hinders their ability to be considered equal, endowed with the same qualities and faculties as other citizens, according to a trajectory that can be increasingly expanded. In this sense, the reflected object of the denial of rights is clearly human *dignity*, which leads us directly to the third form of misrecognition.

In fact, the idea of dignity – since the American Revolution – has been following a path of ever greater universalization, which implies, on the other hand, ever greater individualization, that is, its ongoing particularization: the dignity of every human being coincides with its uniqueness. It is with the third form of misrecognition that, according to Honneth, we enter the dimension that in everyday language is indicated by terms such as 'disrespect', 'insult' or 'degradation'. These "evaluative forms of disrespect" aim the "individual or collective ways of life", thereby downgrading certain manners "of self-realization within a society's inherited cultural horizon". Therefore, the addressee of such forms of denigration cannot "relate to their mode of life" as something that is 'at home' within certain communities, as something worthy for the others, hence experiencing "a loss of self-esteem".¹¹⁷

The transition from such forms of disrespect and the depiction of social struggles is performed by the concept *shame*, the emotion that accompanies the particular response to every form of misrecognition. Given that "the injustice of disrespect does not inevitably *have to* reveal itself but merely *can*", Honneth considers such emotions as the "motivational impetus" for social struggles.¹¹⁸ Thereby, Honneth sketches an original account of social struggle that tries not to detach "the emergence of social movements" and "the moral experience of disrespect".¹¹⁹ In other words, Honneth aims to depict a model of struggle that avoids the "zero-sum game" of the Hobbesian-interest model of conflict,¹²⁰ by bringing to the foreground

¹¹⁶ Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 297.

¹¹⁷ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 134.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹²⁰ Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 56.

the emotional-moral component left aside by many academic sociologists.¹²¹ In doing so, Honneth does not mean that the interest-oriented conflicts do not represent an actual feature of the modern and contemporary social struggle. Rather, referring to the historical-sociological studies of E. P. Thompson and Barrington Moore,¹²² he intends to support the ‘secondary’ character of interest-guided conflicts. That is, they would always be situated, and would always find their origin “within a horizon of moral experience that admits of normative claims to recognition and respect”.¹²³ In other words, the struggle-model outlined by Honneth is intended to be a broader and more comprehensive one in comparison with those described according to the paradigms of purposive-rationality or identity politics, thanks to the conviction that these models also find their foundation or their adequate collocation in the primary experience of personal self-relation.¹²⁴

But the transition from the experience of misrecognition and from emotional reactions to social conflict is far from immediate, despite the suspicions that the ‘I’-‘me’ dynamic may have brought out. What is required is a “moral insight” that allows affected individuals to grasp the “cognitive content” of the injury and its social nature.¹²⁵ Synthetically, such forms of disrespect have to be identified as group-directed and as socially caused,¹²⁶ otherwise any form of conflict they may bring about would remain confined to the private sphere, to the quarrel and to the dispute. Instead, the conversion of the (necessarily) individual experience of suffering into the sociality of struggle is allowed by a “semantic bridge”, where such experiences of injustice can find adequate space for expression thanks to a “shared semantics”. Only through such communicative practices can a “collective identity” based on misrecognition be developed.¹²⁷

Even if Honneth does not give a more precise account of how this communicative process is shaped,¹²⁸ it is rather clear that his intention is to propose at a theoretical level the structures and mechanisms that have developed and been effective (at least) in the experiences of struggle in the last centuries of the West. Despite the already mentioned intention of biographical identification with suffering and with the oppressed which is present in Honneth’s early writings, the object of social theory he promotes in *The Struggle for Recognition* is a *grammar* of social conflicts:

¹²¹ For a brief, yet useful comparison between the different struggle-models, cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 57–59.

¹²² Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 166–68.

¹²³ See also the reference to Simmel and economic struggles; cf. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹²⁴ Cf. Mariana Teixeira, ‘The Sociological Roots and Deficits of Axel Honneth’s Theory of Recognition’, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory*, ed. by Michael J. Thompson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 587–609 (pp. 593–97).

¹²⁵ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 138.

¹²⁶ Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, pp. 66–67.

¹²⁷ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 163.

¹²⁸ Cf. Pilapil, p. 83.

every step in characterizing how this semantic bridge develops coincides with a historiographical and empirical task. More than anything else, although such shared semantics clearly represent a necessary condition for the emergence of social groups of protest, the risk for the critique is to leave aside the instances that remain “in the shadow of the political public sphere”.¹²⁹ Although this is a criticism that Honneth makes of Fraser and her model of struggles for recognition, which focuses on the public recognition of minority identities, it could be, once it has been pushed to the extreme, addressed to Honneth himself. In other words, the assumption of the experience of misrecognition as a starting point and of emotional reactions as a spark constituting the fight groups – that is, the whole metaphor centered on the binomial pathology/health – risks condemning the critique for its inability to exercise its tasks in the absence of symptoms. What position should the theory take with respect to suffering that has no voice, that is, which cannot be articulated more or less publicly? In addition, the absence of symptoms could be caused not only by the impossibility of establishing a semantic bridge of sharing, but also by the fact that the subjects themselves are not able to articulate the aforementioned “moral insight”, namely they cannot acknowledge disrespect as such and therefore identify themselves as victims. In other words, how could the affected people ‘escape’ (at least cognitively) from an ideological system?

Although Honneth does not engage directly these issues in *The Struggle for Recognition*, some observations may be made. On the one hand, the matter concerns the general approach of the Honnethian philosophy, which is always oriented towards the definition of structures and the identification of historical developments of pre-conditions: while admitting that the normative level always indicates a *ought*, it never goes as far as determining or predetermining how these conditions should be characterized in content. It always assumes – so to speak – the position of the ‘owl of Minerva’,¹³⁰ leaving the evolution of the identified tendencies to historical actuality. On the other hand, the problem of the (im)possibility of catching the damage suffered concerns the ideological forms of recognition – which will be dealt with in more detail below – represents a quite compelling problem. At this juncture, the central issue of the possibilities of critical philosophy, as Honneth understands it, is re-proposed. Not only for the theory, but also for the affected subjects, there seems to be a need for a hermeneutical threshold to ‘go out’ from the inhabited context and its horizon, that is, from the reproduction of forms of domination that the subject would not be able to acknowledge and, therefore, to rebel against.

¹²⁹ Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition’, p. 122.

¹³⁰ See, above all, the conclusions of *The Struggle for Recognition* and of *Freedom’s Right*.

Even if Honneth does not directly answer this question regarding the oppression-without-symptoms, the problem allows us to read the concluding passages on the conflict in another light, where the main role is played by the concept of *progress*. In the struggle-communities, the disregarded subjects can newly find basic communicative conditions to relate to themselves in an undamaged way, thanks to the reciprocal respect and solidarity that – at least at a minimal level – must be accorded among the members. In such groups, the idea driving the praxis is represented by the “anticipation” of a future “communication-community”, where the subjects should be recognized for the traits, abilities and features that are disregarded in the present situation.¹³¹ Honneth’s account of social conflicts as “struggle for recognition as a historical process of moral progress”,¹³² hinges precisely on the capability to anticipate a hypothetical future where recognition would be more fitting for the oppressed or disrespected. This implies a certain degree of ‘hoped’ progress: in other words, conflict would instantiate the *emancipatory interest*. This idea, rather than indicating an evolutionary approach to morality and history,¹³³ is introduced by Honneth to respond to a crucial problem, that is, the need to be able to anchor the mechanisms of struggles to evaluation criteria, by which it is then possible to condemn reactionary, hierarchical, or subjugating pressures originating in requests for recognition.

[...] moral feelings – until now, the emotional raw materials of social conflicts – lose their apparent innocence and turn out to be retarding or accelerating moments within an overarching developmental process. [...] in order to be able to distinguish between the progressive and the reactionary [struggles], there has to be a normative standard that, in light of a hypothetical anticipation of an approximate end-state, would make it possible to mark out a developmental direction.¹³⁴

If from the point of view of the subjects involved in the struggle the anticipation of this hypothetical end-state is elaborated in a negative way – as absence of misrecognition suffered – from the point of view of theory, the question is more complex. The idea of progress based on the image of health should not be conceived as an evaluation-yardstick outside history, on the basis of which historical phenomena shall be judged. Rather, it intends to anchor itself empirically in the

¹³¹ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 164.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 168.

¹³³ Cf. Jeffrey C. Alexander and M.P. Lara, ‘Honneth’s New Critical Theory of Recognition’, *New Left Review*, 1996, 126–136 (p. 130).

¹³⁴ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 168–69.

historical development of forms of recognition and has the claim to enunciate, from within this development, the forms of its becoming.¹³⁵

Before concluding, it might be useful to add an element that has not yet been clarified. The Honnethian approach could be considered problematic not only because of the risks related to the psychologization or culturalization of (in)justice, but also because of the very assumption of emotions as a starting point. In other words, not only would this assumption excessively reduce the Critical Theory's field of investigation, but it would also imply a reified treatment of the emotions themselves, which are considered as a given starting fact, as an unmediated realm of experience: that is, their social constitution would be bypassed.¹³⁶ That this is not the case emerges clearly from Honneth's positive account, because recognition expectations are only established within the recognition relations themselves. In this sense, a previously mentioned question reopens: the conflict always throws light on the conditions of recognition that precede it. Put in more Honnethian terms, even the 'initial' relation-to-self, by virtue of which the subject is entitled to perceive injustice as an impediment or damage and that triggers an eventual struggle to 'improve' the present context, is not self-generated, but always follows the priority of the intersubjective relations. Even emotions, therefore, are always dependent on the social context.

We are therefore in a position to explain the factors that constitute a response to the four issues raised at the beginning of the paragraph. First of all, the negative approach guarantees an understanding of the *critical dimension* of *The Struggle for Recognition*, which starts from the experiences of disrespect and – anchored in the binomial pathology/health – tries to determine 'in backlight' the conditions for an *ought*. In this context, the idea of *progress* plays a fundamental role, which in some way restores the objectivity necessary not to close the possibilities of a critique of the subjective perspective, according to the idea of rationality stated above. Second, the main elements of a *formal anthropology* have been touched, but not defined. Honneth intends to negatively determine a constellation of concepts – such as practical identity, self-relationship, dignity, etc. – from injuries to the person, which, if defined on the basis of positive assumptions, could appear an excessively substantial idea. The different objects of misrecognition instead refer – perhaps only intuitively, but on this elusive link is Honneth's discourse based – to an idea of the person that is essentially *structural*. Thus, the wholeness (*integrity*) of the person is tied to their perception of themselves (*self-relation*), and thus to their *identity*. In

¹³⁵ Cf. Nikolas Kompridis, 'From Reason to Self-Realisation? Axel Honneth and the "Ethical Turn" in Critical Theory', in *Contemporary Perspectives in Critical and Social Philosophy*, ed. by John Rundell and others (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2004), pp. 323–60 (pp. 327–28).

¹³⁶ McNay, 'The Trouble with Recognition: Subjectivity, Suffering, and Agency', p. 278 ff.

addition, three spheres of this self-relation – self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem – have been negatively approached as having to constitute a minimal idea of dignity. Third, the attention to the experience of damage and the related account on the conflict further clarify the distance towards Wildt and Siep. Turning the issue upside down in positive terms, it can be said that the heart of the issue of recognition, as in Wildt, is the definition of a moral dimension based on the idea of practical identity. However, the negative access allows Honneth to ‘sociologize’ his theory right from the start: the purpose of the text coincides with the mirror image with respect to the social forms of misrecognition and at which social struggles aim. Thus, the social conditions for the establishment of a non-damaged practical identity are put in the foreground, formulating a social (and not moral) normative theory. As far as Siep’s thought is concerned, it is the combination of the concepts of practical identity and conflict that pushes Honneth to reject the idea that the normative standards acquired within (mis)recognition can lead to the development of a theory of institutions and their critique. Rather, the purpose is that of developing an idea of the end-state that guides the conflict not to the very determinations it ought to take on, but stops at the genetic and formal conditions of its development, whose center is and remains the practical identity. Fourth, it has become clear – again via mirroring – what the focal point of the spheres of recognition should be. In fact, if the focus of the sections on misrecognition is the analysis of certain forms of damaged self-relation (and of related practices), Honneth’s positive account revolves around the definition of the relational conditions necessary for an undamaged practical identity. With this focus on forms of relation-to-self in mind, it will be clearer – especially in the case of love, which includes phenomena of a different kind, and which in some respects has a broader claim than the other spheres – what Honneth states from sphere to sphere. In addition, the discussion about emotions and demands of recognition helps us to focus attention on another purpose of *The Struggle for Recognition*: dealing with the concept that ethical life cannot be separated from the *genealogical* tasks of recognition.

2.4 A Formal Conception of Ethical Life: An Anthropological Justification

Honneth’s positive account revolves around the definition of three patterns of intersubjective recognition, which differ “from each other with regard to the ‘how’ as well as the ‘what’ of practical confirmation”.¹³⁷ First, these patterns would be, philosophically, a re-proposal of Hegel’s and Mead’s theories, which respectively

¹³⁷ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 25.

represent a threefold model of the social and of the constitution of personal identity. Second, sociologically, they would coincide with the scope of demands that emerge in the history of struggles. Finally, such forms of recognition would represent not merely the historical and social development of a not-further-definable idea of *good*; Honneth indeed intends, in a constant confrontation with the empirical hints, to distill a formal model that can explain at a 'grammatical' (and therefore structural) level the mechanisms of the struggles for social change. Thus, the main aim of the text is the delineation of a *formal model of ethical life*, which would lie halfway between the procedural and deontological ethical models and the substantial perspectives on the good.

However, before approaching these three intersubjective forms – and thus outlining our major object of interest, that is, the paradigm of recognition – we can turn briefly to the observations preliminarily listed in the first chapter: psychologization, culturalization and teleology. We have indeed reached a point where an 'internal' response could be given and the following issues introduced. With regard to the first point, the criticism claims that Honneth focuses his attention erroneously and excessively on the psychological side of suffering, giving therefore a reduced image of justice; moreover, that would implicitly lead to an image of psychological health that compromises the sought formality of the paradigm. This can be answered mainly through the account on emotions, which indissolubly links the latter to the practical dimension and expectations that are articulated in it. In this sense, suffering should not be characterized primarily in psychological terms (which are certainly present), but in practical, interactional and intersubjective ones: in other words, normative. However, it is true that Honneth relies decisively on psychoanalytical arguments to elaborate his theory. But even in this case, the shift from Freud's ego-psychology to an object relations theory would guarantee a recourse to psychology in constant dialogue with sociality, for the distinction between internal and external dimensions is not marked in atomistic or solipsistic terms. Secondly, during the discussion of the conflict, we can observe a topic that arouses the critics who accuse Honneth of culturalism. Honneth argues that every struggle, even that for a fairer distribution, finds its horizon within demands for recognition. In this claim, which seems to be a confirmation in favor of the criticism, there are two factors, which, however, reduce the corrosive capacity of the latter. On the one hand, Honneth does not intend to reduce 'material' social conflicts to those of a cultural nature: his model would equally concern both and would present itself as a basic structural model, which can then assume different specific connotations. Therefore, even if Honneth never performs a direct critique of the economic system, it could be said – on the other hand – that his is not a reduction of the just to the cultural, but a constant *return* to the (even existential,

one could say) instances and claims of the subjects (individuals or groups) that struggle. Therefore, what is at stake is a much broader concept of *identity*, as we have already seen by the forms of misrecognition regarding basic self-confidence and self-respect, which clearly cannot be reduced to a restricted account of ‘cultural identity’. The third point concerns the concept of progress and its link with the idea of good life, which together would characterize the Honnethian thought in strongly teleological terms. As for the second factor, that of the good, we will soon see that Honneth does not intend to define a substantial idea of it and by doing so assign a specific purpose to the vector of progress. However, the very idea of an ‘end-state’ and the capability to anticipate it on the part of the struggling subjects represents an elementary and essential normative standard, necessary in order to characterize the conflict in terms of the moral progress of society. It is therefore useful to underline that Honneth’s claim is not to *assign* to historical progress a determined progressive path or an end, but to extrapolate the contours of such a dynamic starting from the effectiveness itself. In this way, the idea of progress would receive its characteristics from the evolution of the struggles themselves and their demands, with respect to which the task of the social philosopher would be that to distill a structure – a moral grammar – which plays the role of an always-open formal condition for the future.

All these issues converge in the definition of the formal conception of *ethical life*, which would coincide with a minimalistic representation of what, at the present time, can be considered as the “provisional end-state” sought and pursued through social struggles.¹³⁸ Again, Honneth’s aim would be to unearth the emancipatory interest actually at stake in, and which shapes, the conflicts aimed towards social change: the identification of the structural normative level and its delineation would then guarantee the critique an apt evaluative standard to name social pathologies as such and to distinguish regressive and progressive dynamics in the context of pluralism. The attempt is therefore to define an ethical model that is equally distant from the Kantian morality and from the different substantive images of *ethos*, which can be found for example in communitarianism or neo-Aristotelianism. The distance from the former is marked by Honneth’s intention to derive ethical principles thanks to a phylogenetic and ontogenetic reconstruction, the directions of which are already present thanks to the analysis of the forms of misrecognition and of the grammar of the conflict, besides the confrontation with Hegel and Mead. Precisely for this reason, the paradigm that Honneth intends to define is that of the good, not of the just or of the right, as ‘ideal’ sought by the subjects for the purpose of their own realization. On the other hand, Honneth distances himself from substantial perspectives on the good of “concrete tradition-based” communities.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 171.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

This is basically for two reasons: first, there is the intention not to lose the universality of Kantian morality and, second, in order to outline a model capable of withstanding the challenges of liberal pluralism. The characters of the depicted *ethical life* have therefore to “be formal or abstract enough”, but, at the same time, “have sufficient substantive content” in order to give a broader insight into the self-realization paths of individuals.¹⁴⁰ Such a balance between the ‘formality’ and ‘consistency’ of the good then allows us to define an ethical framework neither through the description of a substantive content nor through procedures, but through the delineation of “the structural elements of ethical life, which, from the general point of view of the *communicative enabling* of self-realization, can be normatively extracted from the plurality of all particular forms of life”.¹⁴¹ Honneth’s account relies therefore upon the “intersubjective structure of personal identity”,¹⁴² depicting three concentric and progressive spheres of recognition, which must be understood first of all as bundles of practices aimed at the formation of an undamaged personal relation-to-self – that is, actual freedom – and not as realities of institutional nature.

The forms of recognition associated with love, rights, and solidarity provide the intersubjective protection that safeguards the conditions for external and internal freedom, upon which the process of articulating and realizing individual life-goals without coercion depends. Moreover, since they do not represent established institutional structures but only general patterns of behaviour, they can be distilled, as structural elements, from the concrete totality of all particular forms of life.¹⁴³

A central way to achieve this balance between ‘structure’ and ‘good’ concerns the empirical accountability of Honneth’s genealogical reconstruction of the spheres of recognition as dimensions of the constitution of an undamaged self-relation. The explicit aim is in fact to re-actualize the Hegelian model in accordance with an “empirically supported phenomenology”:¹⁴⁴ this use of empirical data – which is concretized in referring to psychoanalysis for the reconstruction of the first phases of the child’s life and to historical-sociological inquiries – would accomplish the precise purpose of accessing the content without presupposing a substantive perspective.

Before analyzing the respective forms of recognition and the self-relation modes they enable, it is necessary to address three general points, which provide an adequate condition for reading. The first concerns the relationship between the

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 172, our emphasis.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

spheres of recognition, the second the use of empirical sources as means for justification of the theory and the third the anthropological character of Honneth's discourse.

Regarding the first point, critical literature is divided by assigning a certain priority, hierarchy, or order to the different spheres. While it is true that Honneth (following Wildt) argues that love represents the most fundamental form of recognition – both in logical and chronological terms –¹⁴⁵ it is not clear whether this coincides with the idea that the three spheres should actually be considered as steps of a progressive logic.¹⁴⁶ This thesis would be supported by the Hegelian insight that accompanies Honneth's model: the three spheres concern practical modes of affirmation and confirmation of three different aspects necessary to an undamaged personal self-relation, so that the subject can know itself in its particularity (love), universality (rights) and individuality (esteem).¹⁴⁷ On the other hand, it could be argued that the priority-sphere is the recognition of legal rights, because of its ability to fit into the others' 'domain' through the universal character of laws,¹⁴⁸ and for the degree of equity that the other forms of recognition also need in order to be articulated according to a logic of symmetry. Equal access to recognition would therefore be a pre-condition for all spheres and the very idea of equality has to be conceived as the core of the universality of law.¹⁴⁹ Third, it could also be claimed that the last sphere has to possess a certain priority, because of its focus on the uniqueness of the person. Merging Siep's worries about Hegel's asymmetrical tendencies and Ricoeur's observation on misrecognition, according to which the more fundamental form of disrespect coincides with the withdrawal of the person, one could say that the core of recognition should be represented not by the affirmation of certain characters, but of the person as such for how she is and because she is. Clearly, in Honneth's model this type of recognition could be found above all in the sphere of social esteem – not without some overlap with love – where the uniqueness of individuality is at stake. Moreover, it has already become clear in the analysis of misrecognition that everyday language means 'recognition' precisely in this connotation: if the analysis is to be phenomenological, this aspect should not be ignored. Although it is useful not to overlook the multipolarity of recognition and

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 176. This goes together with the 'fundamental character' that physical violence possesses in terms of damaging the personal self-perception.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Zurn, 'Anthropology and Normativity', p. 117.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 40.

¹⁴⁸ Cf., for what concerns the priority of legal recognition on love-relations within the family, Axel Honneth, 'Between Justice and Affection: The Family as a Field of Moral Disputes', in *Disrespect. The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, 2007, pp. 144–62; with regard to a certain priority of equity on social contribution, cf. Axel Honneth, 'Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation. John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today', *Political Theory*, 26.6 (1998), 763–83.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Piromalli, pp. 121–22.

of its spheres – an element through which Honneth intends not to fall into the risk of unilateralizing the ethical discourse – it seems to me correct to argue that all spheres are both equally ‘subdued’ to the purpose of individual self-realization, which has to be understood first and foremost as the “ontological possibility of subjective identity before the ethical notion of the good life”.¹⁵⁰ The very fact that one can reasonably argue in favor of the priority of each sphere over the others, and the tensions between them, shows nothing more than that each of them – according to ways and balances that depend upon social developments and configurations – illuminates a fundamental dimension of how the concept of the ‘*person*’ can be conceived in terms of identity, integrity and dignity under contemporary conditions. Given this priority accorded to personal identity on the singular spheres and their interplay, a main problem arises: why should the idea of self-realization be considered *the* critical normative standard? Is it sufficient to say that the reason relies on its being the structural abstraction-result of the particular aims of recognitional relations and social struggles?¹⁵¹ Why does Honneth choose *this* value among others? The question leads us once again to the idea of suffering and moral damage. Honneth’s most ambitious intent is to outline a critical theory that, at the structural level, lays the foundations for the elimination of individual suffering. In these negative terms the priority of self-realization seems to me less arbitrary, and in fact is capable of describing a universal and effective principle at the same time: the unacceptability of pain.

But the fact (and here we move to the second issue) that Honneth resorts to determined ideas of the good does not represent, in my opinion, a threat to his thought. In fact, it is precisely Honneth’s intention to find in social reality the substantial content of good life and then to strongly distinguish it – via means of formalization – from the structural conditions that only historical progress can fill with – for the theory, unpredictable – new content. In any case, this theme leads us to once again address the relationship between Honneth’s critical social theory and its effectiveness, and empirical data, which are conceived at the same time as starting point and as the testing means of the theory. Are such values or, more generally, Honneth’s setting supported by a plausible empirical reconstruction? This issue, which seems unresolvable, is omnipresent, since critical thinking finds itself dependent on its object. I do not claim to find a definitive answer here, which in my view would be impossible to provide,¹⁵² but I intend to discuss Honneth’s attitude towards historical-sociological effectiveness, rather than the conclusions he

¹⁵⁰ Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 275.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Zurn, ‘Anthropology and Normativity’, p. 120.

¹⁵² For an insightful account on the relationship between Honneth and empirical data cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, pp. 277–86.

draws from it. First of all, it seems useful to underline that Honneth's approach is primarily philosophical and his analyses are conducted in a "half-speculative, half-empirical" way.¹⁵³ The use of empirical data provided by psychoanalysis, historiography and sociology is intended as a tool for the re-actualization of Hegel's theory, not as its raw material. However, some criticisms levelled at the formulation of the spheres of recognition, and more particularly at the centrality assigned to the family – that sphere in which the purpose to verify empirically Hegel's model is widely implemented through the object relations theory – allow a more general discussion of Honneth's setting. The assumption of the family as starting point can be criticized from three different perspectives. First, this empirical testing would possess a tautological structure. In fact, the empirical reconstruction of the child's development already implies the environment that should be tested as justified form of recognition. Second, the context of the family, as historical contingent, should also be tested and not taken uncritically as a starting point. This would imply the theoretical possibility of accessing the issue of recognition from other phenomena.¹⁵⁴ Third, this starting point would move naively in the capitalist context, without considering the dissolution and functionalization that the bourgeois nuclear family undergoes, as the first cell of power and assimilation of the individual into the consumerist system.¹⁵⁵

Generalizing the heart of these criticisms, one could say that in Honneth's thought there is an ambiguity, a lack of theoretical distinction between *facticity and legitimacy*. Keeping the example of the family, it could be disputed that the mere existence of such an institution – and its currently intersubjectively constituted subjects – is a sufficient prerequisite to justify its role in an ethical model, even more so when this institution itself performs functions of power. This is certainly due to two elements. On the one hand, the approach proper to Critical Theory cannot fail to assume a starting point proper to present reality: in this sense, even the intention of formulating a formal and minimal model could only be 'determined' through the intersubjective relationships actually lived. To think of another starting point would also lead to the same conclusion and to what would no longer be a problem: a both timely and culturally determined access.

What can count as an intersubjective prerequisite for a successful life becomes historically variable and is determined by the actual level of development of the patterns of recognition. The formal conception loses its ahistorical character in

¹⁵³ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 187.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Paul Cobben, *The Paradigm of Recognition. Freedom as Overcoming the Fear of Death* (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2012), p. 132.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Michael J. Thompson, 'Axel Honneth and the Neo-Idealist Turn in Critical Theory', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 40.8 (2014), 779–97 (pp. 783–85).

that, hermeneutically speaking, it winds up dependent on what constitutes, in each case, the inescapable present.¹⁵⁶

On the other hand, Honneth's Hegelianism plays a significant role here, because – as we have seen – the decisiveness assigned to the actual life-contexts in the justification and formulation of an ethical theory is precisely one of the fundamental elements of Hegel's criticism of Kant. However, within Hegel's system, this starting point finds its premise in the conviction that the real is rational, that is, that the practical and institutional forms, by their unfolding, embody and better realize rationality in its universality, in an ongoing process. This idea, stripped of its metaphysical habit, is inherited from Honneth through the Hegelian Left and the Frankfurt School under the name of 'emancipatory interest'.

But it is precisely this point that leads us to the third issue, namely that Honneth's philosophical proposal lies on an *anthropological justification*.¹⁵⁷

The concept of 'ethical life' is [...] meant to include the entirety of intersubjective conditions that can be shown to serve as necessary preconditions for individual self-realization.¹⁵⁸

The normative significance of the forms of recognition is not justified solely on the basis of their actual existence – and thereby through the nexus established with emancipatory interests – but because they are identified as the conditions for an undamaged person-formation. Normativity, and therefore the possibilities of critique hinge on the intersubjective conditions of human self-realization, the intact image of which represents the guiding idea of 'healthiness' for the whole paradigm. Consequently, the very idea of progress – which represents the other normative set of evaluative criteria – concretizes its unfolding consistency dependent upon dynamics that serve to this aim or not. It must be said that Honneth describes the concept of self-realization sparingly, precisely to avoid falling into a substantial definition of the good. However, this normative idea clearly embraces *a certain*,¹⁵⁹ albeit broad, concept of freedom proper to the historical, cultural and social development of the West.¹⁶⁰ In fact, in Honneth's eyes, self-realization is that minimalistic *good* that is represented by the possibility to freely articulate a

¹⁵⁶ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 175.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 94; Petherbridge, pp. 162–63, 167–69.

¹⁵⁸ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 173.

¹⁵⁹ It can be reasonably argued that Honneth's anthropological depiction is not formal, but "essentially contested" regarding certain embraced values. Cf. Bert van den Brink, 'Recognition, Pluralism and the Expectation of Harmony: Against the Ideal of an Ethical Life "Free from Pain"', in *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays. With a Reply by Axel Honneth*, ed. by Danielle Petherbridge (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 155–76 (p. 174).

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Kompridis, 'From Reason to Self-Realisation? Axel Honneth and the "Ethical Turn" in Critical Theory', p. 333.

“successful life”,¹⁶¹ namely undamaged life, which could be further reduced to a generic idea of “human well-being”.¹⁶²

Three further consequences can be derived from this type of justification of the theory. First, Honneth would depict a “maximalist concept of self-realization”,¹⁶³ which seems presupposed rather than demonstrated.¹⁶⁴ So, the alleged basilarity of emotions and moral injury would represent a consequence of the positive idea. This apparent short circuit, however, corresponds perfectly to the Honnethian approach, symbolized by the pathology/health pair: through the symptom, the wound, the damage, it is possible to find its opposite, by virtue of which the symptom emerges as such: the ‘first’ shows itself as ‘second’ and vice versa. Both ideas – that of pathology and that of self-realization – therefore oscillate on the threshold of perceptibility of the emancipatory interest. Second, if the justification of social forms and practices relies on their contribution to subject-formation, then the anthropological level and the social one cannot be separated from each other.¹⁶⁵ And here – third – the tension between the normative and generative dimension of recognition comes to the surface.¹⁶⁶ In fact, the primacy of the normative idea of self-realization as the aim of emancipatory interests – Honneth also says: “quasi-transcendental interests’ of the human race” –¹⁶⁷ is almost totally based on the intersubjective anthropology outlined through recognition. And this modest, formal anthropology cannot, despite the intentions of the author, be enclosed in the normative idea of personhood, which concerns integrity, personal identity and autonomy by acting. In fact, the tendency to use psychoanalysis to reconstruct the steps of subject-formation brings the Honnethian discourse to a much broader level, which has anthropological and, perhaps, ontological claims: the subject’s constitutive vulnerability and its dependence on relationships with others are the basis for which a normative account of personhood can be grounded on recognition. Thereby, I argue that the *motility* implicit in the concept of self-realization, i.e. a concept of freedom not enclosed in the idea of free will – but describable through the idea of ‘possibilities to develop a harmonious biographical path’ – finds its justification in the dynamics of the I-me polarity and in the tension between selfhood of the self and the annulment of the ego-boundaries, which are proper anthropological ideas and not merely normative.

¹⁶¹ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 174.

¹⁶² Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 75.

¹⁶³ Jonathan Allen, p. 462.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Kompridis, ‘From Reason to Self-Realisation? Axel Honneth and the “Ethical Turn” in Critical Theory’, p. 333.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Kompridis, ‘From Reason to Self-Realisation? Axel Honneth and the “Ethical Turn” in Critical Theory’, p. 328.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 463.

¹⁶⁷ Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 174.

2.4.1 Love and Self-Confidence

As has been said, the core of the physical violence is the injury to the basic self-confidence that allows the person to experience herself and the world “without anxiety.”¹⁶⁸ The experience of being denied the intimacy, closeness and ‘usability’ of one’s own body would therefore represent such a fundamental experience of “breakdown” that it would not open up a conflict for recognition that could change the essential characteristics of this sphere, as opposed to what happens with legal forms of respect and social esteem.¹⁶⁹ This is because of the historical invariance of the harmfulness of violence, which would, despite cultural and social changes, embody the same degree of danger for one’s relation-to-self. Specularly, the first form of recognition – *love* – possesses in Honneth’s eyes “trans-historical and trans-cultural” characters that concern the socialization of every human being.¹⁷⁰ Given that, Honneth interprets the form of recognition of love as an almost unchanged constant throughout history – although of course the struggles for recognition that affect other spheres lead to consequences in this as well. But, in addition to the anthropological dimension concerning socialization, another aspect leads to this conclusion: the impossibility of universalizing ingroup instances – through the so-called semantic bridge – dynamics connoted by a marked moral particularism.¹⁷¹

Moreover, this ‘fundamentality’ comes together with the fact that in this sphere Honneth has two purposes: on the one side, he intends to re-actualize the concept of *primary intersubjectivity*; on the other, to depict the intersubjective conditions of self-confidence. Correspondingly, two main features of the genealogical reconstruction of this sphere of recognition are first, the role and ambiguity of the concept of *symbiosis* inherited from Winnicott; and second, the centrality of the capacity of *being alone* as main character of the positive self-relation here described.

Before reconstructing quasi-phenomenologically the steps by which the person is constituted through love-relations, Honneth proceeds to define the first sphere of recognition by considering the environmental scope of the involved subjects, the object of recognition and its expressive mode. Love-recognition is in fact, first, a “strong emotional attachments among a small number of people”,¹⁷² which cannot be expanded indefinitely to include larger groups or even all of humanity. Taking inspiration from the Hegelian treatment of sexual love, it is later argued that, in such

¹⁶⁸ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 104.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁷⁰ Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 288.

¹⁷¹ Honneth significantly changes his own view in the debate with Nancy Fraser, claiming that also this sphere of recognition is subjected to social changes able to re-phrase the ways and the practices of recognition themselves; cf. Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition’, pp. 138–39.

¹⁷² Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 95.

intersubjective practices, “subjects mutually confirm each other with regard to the concrete nature of their needs and thereby recognize each other as needy creatures”.¹⁷³ Finally, such confirmation of the other’s (foremost biological and corporal) needs would be accomplished via “affective approval or encouragement”¹⁷⁴ The form of recognition defined by ¹⁷⁵ since the circle of involved subjects is restricted to concrete others because of the emotional and affective character of the bonds (*who* are the recognizers/recognizees); the ¹⁷⁶ of the other in its needs (*what* is recognized) is therefore implemented through the affective taking care of the other, and is motivated by feelings and attachment (*how* the subject is recognized).

Moving to the genealogical analysis carried out by Honneth, the first issue, the concept of symbiosis – also called ‘absolute dependence’ – describes the first phases of the child’s life, in which the practical identities of newborn and caregiver are completely assimilated to each other. Honneth opens his analysis with this concept first to re-elaborate in post-metaphysical terms the Hegelian idea of a primary intersubjectivity, that is, the structural intersubjectivity of human beings. This aim is pursued foremost by moving away from the *intra*-psychic focus of the Freudian ego psychology to the *inter*-psychic dimension, thus showing that the constitution of the person depends on their innate exposure-to and dependence-on interpersonal relationships; in other words, to show that the intersubjectivity precedes the subjectivity. A second aim of this starting point is to take distance from the Habermasian model through a focus on “prelinguistic interactive experiences”:¹⁷⁷ just as the normative thresholds operating in society are not realized in discursive practices but in the instances of recognition, in the same way the structuring of such demands is found, above all, in modes of relationship that precede the rational-symbolic expression of language, and that hence possess the claim to be more ‘original’. It is precisely from these purposes that the numerous ambiguities that have arisen around this sphere of recognition derive.

The first aspect to be noted coincides with the possibility opened by the (problematic) interpretation of the Meadian ‘I’ as the seat of the unconscious impulses: this allows Honneth to develop a psychological model totally inscribed within an intersubjective philosophical model and, therefore, to use the object

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107. However, by affirming this clear point, Honneth could be blamed for a certain ‘privatization’ of love relationships, which does not consider the social dimension of family roles; cf. Julie Connolly, ‘Love in the Private: Axel Honneth, Feminism and the Politics of Recognition’, *Contemporary Political Theory*, 9.4 (2010), 414–33.

¹⁷⁶ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 107.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

relations theory as a paradigm for the constitution of the psyche.¹⁷⁸ In this sense, Honneth's explicit intention to formulate an account that exclusively concerns the moral personality has its roots in a larger dimension that – even if only between the lines – has much greater demands: the depiction of a general account of subjectivity.¹⁷⁹ In this regard – and also taking into account the centrality of the corporal dimension in the specular sphere of misrecognition – the centrality of the phase of *being-held* is noteworthy. With Winnicott, Honneth claims that a coherent development of embodiment and spatial orientation is allowed only as the newborn is held in its mother's arms.¹⁸⁰

The second problem concerns how one is meant to conceive this state of “symbiotic oneness”.¹⁸¹ Honneth describes it as a state of undifferentiated practical intersubjectivity, in which the two interactional poles are completely merged, “incapable of individually demarcating themselves from each other.”¹⁸² Even for the mother, the perception of the child's neediness would be felt as her own and thus capable of defining the totality of her practical identity. First of all, Honneth tends to describe in intersubjective terms a phase in which subjectivity cannot exist, given the lack of distinction between the interactional dyads, thus confusing interrelation and sociability with intersubjectivity.¹⁸³ Without the experience of *being-with*,¹⁸⁴ in which necessarily two egos are involved, one cannot speak of intersubjectivity and therefore of recognition. Secondly, since one has to exclude the intersubjective dimension, the practical dimension of this phase of the relationship could be questioned, insinuating that what is posed by Honneth is an ontological description of the primary nature of the intersubjective.¹⁸⁵ The third issue concerns the problem of describing this symbiotic phase – but more generally parenting itself – in mutual and symmetrical terms. On the one hand, the submission of the care to the rules of reciprocity would undermine the idea that caring for the other should be a gesture aimed primarily at its uniqueness and tendentially free, unbalanced, without wanting anything in return;¹⁸⁶ on the other hand, to describe parenting in mutualistic terms would imply a serious gap, i.e. not adequately consider the implied

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Joel Whitebook, ‘Mutual Recognition and the Work of the Negative’, in *Pluralism and the Pragmatic Turn. The Transformation of Critical Theory*, ed. by William Rehg and James Bohman (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), pp. 257–91 (pp. 276–78); Petherbridge, p. 148.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 291.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 99.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁸³ Cf. Whitebook, ‘Mutual Recognition and the Work of the Negative’, pp. 279–80.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Johanna Meehan, ‘Recognition and the Dynamics of Intersubjectivity’, in *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays. With a Reply by Axel Honneth*, ed. by Danielle Petherbridge (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 89–123.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Petherbridge, p. 150.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Petherbridge, p. 154.

asymmetrical power relations and roles,¹⁸⁷ and a devaluation of the independence of the caregiver.

Although Honneth never speaks of proper recognition for the phase of symbiosis, these observations are useful to explicate two main features of his paradigm of recognition, which are derived from the intent to found the theory of recognition on the Aristotelian idea of the natural sociability of the human being. First of all, to the already mentioned overlap between intersubjectivity and recognition one can now add also an assimilation between interactivity and intersubjectivity. By describing a non-personal interactive phase through intersubjective-interactional terms, Honneth is led to over-expand the characters of recognition by giving them an all-encompassing capacity and thus de-powers the specificity of the concept towards a more generic concept of *practical interpersonality*.¹⁸⁸ Second, the focus on parental relationships reveals a lack of theoretical clarity about the terms *reciprocity*, *mutuality* and *symmetry*, which are often used as synonyms, but which cannot 'find the same space' if applied to the reality of the relationship between caregiver and newborn. In any case, Honneth seems here to propose a model of recognition that affirms in milder terms the Hegelian assumption of the *biunivocity* of recognition, opening up to a more *unbalanced model*, where reciprocity and symmetry do not coincide.¹⁸⁹

In any case, the heart of the Honnethian account coincides with the analysis of the steps that lead to the development of a form of relation-to-self that can be described as basic self-confidence. Here the central concept is the child's *capacity of being alone* and its paradox: it depicts indeed "the experience of being alone while someone else is present".¹⁹⁰ The discussion focuses on two phenomena, that of destruction and aggression, and that of transitional objects which allow the progressive detachment from the symbiosis and the acquisition of an individuality by the child (and the caregiver). According to Winnicott's analysis, the phase in which the mother gradually moves away from the newborn, and acquires a form of life closer to that before childbirth, marks the transition to *relative dependence*. In this phase the child is subjected to pressures, due to the progressive awareness of its

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Iris Marion Young, 'Recognition of Love's Labor: Considering Axel Honneth's Feminism', in *Recognition and Power. Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory*, ed. by Bert van den Brink and David Owen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 189–212 (p. 207).

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, pp. 467–79; Piromalli, p. 246.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Lucio Cortella, 'Riconoscimento Normativo. Da Honneth a Hegel e Oltre', *Quaderni Di Teoria Sociale*, 8 (2008), 15–32; Arto Laitinen, 'On the Scope of "Recognition": The Role of Adequate Regard and Mutuality', in *The Philosophy of Recognition. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch and Christopher F. Zurn (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), pp. 319–42. This issue will be widely discussed in chapter 6.

¹⁹⁰ Donald Woods Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment. Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (London - New York: Karnac, 1990), p. 30, cf. also 30–38.

own distinction from the mother and the world, which are not immediately available. Thus, the *aggressive gestures* of the child towards the mother would represent first of all gestures testing the resistance and independence of reality, which shows itself in all its ‘impertinence’.

In this sense, the child’s destructive, injurious acts do not represent the expression of an attempt to cope negatively with frustration, but rather comprise the constructive means by which the child can come to recognize the ‘mother’, unambivalently, as ‘an entity in its own right’. If she survived the infant’s destructive experiments as a person capable of resistance – indeed, if she, through her refusals, even provided the child with occasion for fits of temper – then the child will, by integrating its aggressive impulses, become able to love her.¹⁹¹

Thereby, two elements are noteworthy. First of all, these aggressive acts of the child constitute a structural moment of subject-formation,¹⁹² whose constructive character must not obscure the centrality of the “infant’s painful compulsion to break with the merely momentary states of symbiosis with the primary care-giver and become an independent entity”.¹⁹³ Although Honneth undoubtedly paints a rather positive anthropological image, such a statement cannot but consider that at the basis of individuality itself there is an experience of fracture that connotes all the successive steps of the constitution of the person. Second, these aggressive gestures of testing the independence of the ‘outside’ world – and as a consequence, of the child itself – may imply a step towards individuality and relationship only if the mother’s response is marked by a renewal of affective confirmation. In other words, only if the caregiver resists the attacks of the child, can he or she be perceived by the latter as an independent entity, and only if the response to these attacks is affectively charged will the child know to be confirmed in its own agency. If these transitions succeed with a certain balance, “then mother and child can acknowledge their dependence on each other’s love without having to merge symbiotically”.¹⁹⁴

The second decisive step in establishing a personal identity is characterized by interaction with *transitional objects*. These objects, loaded in a strongly emotional way by the child in an attempt to relive experiences of symbiotic union, find their ambiguous ontological realm in the intersubjective acceptance of their semantic versatility. By playing, the way of relating to objects corresponds to an over-signification which is possible only via the encouragement or the tacit agreement by others. In other words, “out of a basic confidence in the care of a loved one”, the

¹⁹¹ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 101.

¹⁹² Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 291.

¹⁹³ Axel Honneth, ‘Rejoinder’, in *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays. With a Reply by Axel Honneth*, ed. by Danielle Petherbridge (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 391–421 (p. 394).

¹⁹⁴ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 102.

child is “capable of being ‘lost’ in interaction with the chosen object”,¹⁹⁵ which accomplish the task of bridging the inner and the outer realities, because of the emotional meaning assigned to the object itself. Being unbalanced towards objectual reality by playing without merging with it is allowed by a ‘self’ which is kept – guaranteed – by the affection of other loved ones. This dynamic, the consequences of which in the adult’s relations with cultural object are only mentioned by Winnicott and Honneth, represents the theoretical key that describes the positive self-relation here at stake and its link with recognitional relations.

Only a refracted symbiosis enables the emergence of a productive interpersonal balance between the boundary-establishment and boundary-dissolution that, for Winnicott, belongs to the structure of a relationship that has matured through mutual disillusionment. There, the capacity to be alone constitutes the subject-based pole of an intersubjective tension, whose opposing pole is the capacity for boundary-dissolving merging with the other.¹⁹⁶

In other words, in being emotionally tied with someone, the subject can find its space of independence and the capacity of interacting freely with otherness, without being embedded in it. Likewise, the contribution of friendships and love relationships to the formation of an undamaged relation-to-self is interpreted by Honneth as an intimacy that affectively guarantees this balance of confidence, a ‘being-with-oneself’ or ‘being at home in the world’.

We are now able to synthesize the main features of this sphere of recognition, genealogically reconstructed by Honneth through a focus on the subject-formation’s steps. First of all, as physical violence causes the long-lasting damage of denying an immediate access to one’s self, the others and the world, so the positive *basic self-confidence* has to be conceived as a freedom from anxiety gained and instantiated in the experience of *being alone thanks to the others*. The practical relation-to-self here described revolves around a delicate and fragile *balance* between merging with the otherness and keeping one’s selfhood. Thereby, it is noteworthy that Honneth describes the interaction with the *objectual world* as derived from a certain self-relation guaranteed by the affective affirmation from others: the access to objects is therefore always *mediated*. Second, the description of the subject as a “ruptured symbiosis”¹⁹⁷ has not only the purpose of placing the first piece of a normative concept of personal integrity, but also the broader one of defining independence as conceivable only within patterns of dependence, namely to depict the particularity of the individual without falling back into atomism or subjectivism. Thirdly, it has to be underlined that this independence within

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁹⁷ Petherbridge, p. 158.

dependence concerns first of all the *corporal dimension* and physical interactions: through being held, aggression-testing, transitional objects, affection from others, the subject is formed by developing an immediate sense of familiarity with the world, which friendships and sexual relations confirm even in adulthood. Every other dimension of love relationships or friendships – in *The Struggle for Recognition* – can be traced back to the sphere of social-esteem. The object of recognition is the subject’s biological neediness and corporal vulnerability, which relies on “an affective confidence in the continuity of shared concern”,¹⁹⁸ through which the self can achieve the balance necessary to avoid re-falling into merging with the other. Fourth, recalling Wildt’s arguments, one can deduct from Honneth’s account a first form of *undemandable obligations*: it is the vulnerability of the other to establish unbalanced moral commitments, which fall outside the Kantian legal-form paradigm.¹⁹⁹ This imbalance implicit in the forms of recognition of love and the moral particularity of care and affection profoundly calls into question a symmetrical model of recognition.

2.4.2 Respect and Self-Respect

Also in the second sphere, Honneth proceeds in the first instance with a theoretical definition of the form of recognition, and then genealogically traces the characters in their unfolding.

The core distinction that Honneth introduces in approaching his discourse on the sphere of recognition of *respect*, is between Hegel’s and Mead’s views on the system of rights. Indeed, if the latter, focusing on the experience of actual recognition relations, defines the sphere of rights as first belonging to a community of rights-bearers, the former embraces within his own perspective some Kantian assumptions that are fundamental for the understanding of the modern law system. The limit of the Meadian perspective would be to conceive a traditional system of rights, in which the main aspect is that of group-belonging. The Kantian perspective, on the other hand, introduces a universal concept of moral responsibility tied to criteria of rationality, which would find its most immediate concretion in rights expressed at least since the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, according to a scheme of progressive decoupling of human dignity from belonging to value communities that represents a criterion of distinction – only possible in modern societies – between the second and third spheres of recognition. However, Honneth maintains a certain tension between the universal dimension of

¹⁹⁸ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 107.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Axel Honneth, ‘Recognition and Moral Obligation’, *Social Research*, 64.1 (1997), 16–35.

moral rationality and group-belonging, and tries to harmonize them by focusing on the possibilities of recognizing a subject as capable of rational morality.²⁰⁰ In fact, such universal moral accountability is not approached as transcendental feature, but as – first of all – disclosed through recognitional acts, that is, through recognizing a person as bearer of the rights and the obligations proper to a given community. Therefore, keeping the community dimension guarantees, in the first place, a de-formalization of the Kantian idea, in an attempt to show that the concept of ‘moral responsibility of every man’ can only be effectively implemented through an extension of the legislation of given communities. In this sense, even the partner of the interaction would know herself as morally responsible only when she is recognized as one from whom it is expected to adhere to certain legal obligations and as bearer of rights, both – evidently – valid in the definiteness of a community. On the other hand, this approach is aimed to respond to a cognitive issue, that is, the necessity for a context in order to claim whether the subject before me is a concrete bearer of universal rights.

In legal recognition, two operations of consciousness flow together, so to speak, since, on the one hand, it presupposes moral knowledge of the legal obligations that we must keep vis-à-vis autonomous persons, while, on the other hand, it is only an empirical interpretation of the situation that can inform us whether, in the case of a given concrete other, we are dealing with an entity possessed of the quality that makes these obligations applicable.²⁰¹

Honneth therefore argues that the concrete recognition of a human being as a person (with moral accountability) is dependent “on background assumptions about the subjective prerequisites that enable participation in rational will-formation”.²⁰² However, if this process of contextualization seems to weaken the universality of Kant’s perspective and, thereby, sketches a risky relativistic account of human dignity, it is also true that, conversely, the inscription of such an idea in the concreteness of a given community indissolubly binds the sharing of underlying normative standards and their possible questioning through rational criteria of justification.²⁰³ Such an account – present in Hegel, but not in Mead, prevents the process of social integration from being uncritical and equivalent to social assimilation, precisely because belonging to a community endows the subject with a universal insight on its moral rationality, which can affect the subversion of unjust law systems.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Jonathan Allen, pp. 454–55.

²⁰¹ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 112–13.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 114.

²⁰³ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 295.

Given this speculative account, Honneth moves to genealogically reconstruct the evolution of this social form, namely explicating why it has become a dimension within which personal integrity forms itself under contemporary conditions. Nonetheless, contrary to what has been seen in the sphere of love, Honneth maintains that an empirical verification cannot be carried out in proper terms.²⁰⁴ However, the distinction made by T. H. Marshall between civil, political and social rights provides Honneth with two arguments, which are therefore related, albeit mildly, to matters of a historiographic nature.²⁰⁵ Since these different types of rights characterize instances of social change in successive periods, they would be able to show in the first place the link between rights and demands “for full-fledged membership in the political community”.²⁰⁶ Throughout history, different categories of rights – civil, political, and social – have been required as determined instruments of affirmation of one’s universal dignity. On the other hand, this historical evolution suggests a vectoriality already underway, a path of progress that can be identified along two axes: the *de-formalization* of rights, i.e. their ever-increasing acquisition of content and the opening up of possibilities through material means; the *universalization* of rights, namely the increasingly inclusive expansion of their spectrum to include – ideally and not without contradictions – every human being. It is noteworthy that this second direction cannot be fully realized without the first, which is the effective instrument of de-abstraction of the Kantian perspective.

Having briefly sketched the theoretical situation of recognition and its historical evolution, a rather intricate question arises: the relationship between rights and recognition. Honneth first argues that the different forms of rights are tied to demands for recognition, as mentioned. Therefore – second – social partners experience rights as “depersonalized symbols of social respect”:²⁰⁷ through rights, subjects relate to themselves with regard to their moral responsibility and accountability. However – third – this process of symbolization is also thought of as an abstraction in legal form of an effective gesture of personal recognition. But, finally, the system of rights and obligations – the outcome of the depersonalization of recognizers – represents the concrete precondition that enables recognition within a given community; only thanks to the social assumptions of moral accountability can the concrete other be considered worthy of recognition under this respect. This apparent vicious circle, in which the result of the depersonalization of recognition is also the precondition for the personal

²⁰⁴ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 110, 120.

²⁰⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 115–18.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

recognition of the concrete other, finds a conciliation if we focus on the relationship with the social effectiveness inherited from Hegel and on the importance of progress: this coincidence of result and condition of possibility must be conceived in diachronic and progressive terms, where the initial situation is never – not even conceptually – an ‘absolute’. Moreover, it could be noted that at this point the discourse on law could shift the axis of recognition from the interpersonal to the institutional level. However, Honneth does not seem interested in further detailing this process of depersonalization, thus leaving the structural contours of the institutional world vague, but suggesting a first aspect to be established: institutions are instantiations of principles and, even more, of practices of recognition.

However, this process of *depersonalization* does not only concern the recognizers, but also the recognized and the mode of recognition, since the Kantian insight leads to the depiction of the sphere. First, the form of recognition of *respect* is not graduated or differential (within the community where the laws are valid) and, second, it considers the subject neither for its needs nor for its peculiar traits, but as fine-in-itself (given the assumptions of moral accountability).²⁰⁸ Respect, unlike love, is therefore not motivated by emotional reasons and is not articulated according to particular modalities of caring, but has a strongly *cognitive character* aimed at the mutual affirmation of an “equal status”.²⁰⁹ In relation to this – second – ‘respect’ outlines a principle of *equity* between the recognizing partners, which forms a moral obligation of a properly legal nature: contrary to the imbalance of the principle of love, the attitudes of the subjects involved are articulated according to symmetrical forms of relationship. Third, the second form of recognition represents an affirmation of the person – of her status as bearer of rights – that implies, however, at the same time, a distancing, a step back from the other. This connotation – implicit in the German term for respect: *Achtung*, which means also ‘watch out!’, ‘danger’ or ‘attention’ –²¹⁰ is fundamental for the delineation of the universal dimension that otherwise seems to be taken for granted: it is by means of such a cognitive distance – the idea that one is in the presence of someone that should remain untouched – that respect can be addressed to every human being.

Having clarified the *what* of respect – the dignity of human beings according to their moral accountability – and its *how* – equal and mutual cognitive perception, which presupposes a certain distance – it remains to be determined the positive form of self-relation of this sphere, which, according to Honneth, becomes

²⁰⁸ Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 35.

²⁰⁹ Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 294.

²¹⁰ Cf. Andreas Wildt, “Recognition” in Psychoanalysis’, in *The Philosophy of Recognition. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch and Christopher F. Zurn (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), pp. 189–209 (p. 197).

intuitively more graspable through the negative method, namely by observing the reactions in the face of the denial of rights. However, the elements already enumerated allow for an understanding of *self-respect* as reflection of respect. The first would therefore coincide with that relation-to-self in which the subject looks at itself from a general point of view and knows itself as *deserving* legal rights,²¹¹ by means of its participation in a universalizable community in which the granting of such rights affirms and confirms its moral accountability and responsibility; in other words, its dignity.

2.4.3 Esteem and Self-Esteem

The emergence of the third sphere of recognition is closely tied, from a historical point of view, with a decoupling to which the concept of human dignity has been subjected throughout the course of modernity. Though the sphere of law has assumed the universal element of the idea, this dynamic is not able to welcome within itself the consideration of the singularity of the individual. But, Honneth claims, besides the forms of love and rights, subjects need “a form of social esteem that allows them to relate positively to their concrete traits and abilities”,²¹² in order to develop an undistorted relation-to-self. Then, if the neediness of the person finds its context of affirmation in the relationships of love and her moral responsibility in the sphere of rights, those rights not yet included in the form of recognition can find their scope thanks to evaluative criteria tied to ethical ideas, images of the good, and so on, which take place in a social horizon of shared values, namely always group-mediated.

This task of mediation is performed, at the societal level, by a symbolically articulated – yet always open and porous – framework of orientation, in which those ethical values and goals are formulated that, taken together, comprise the cultural self-understanding of a society.²¹³

One could say that the definition of this mode of recognition starts from the phenomenological ascertainment – supported by the observation of the acts of misrecognition – that people see themselves, in specific contexts, evaluated, esteemed or degraded for their uniqueness, which is always related to evaluative criteria. However, it is precisely here that the ambiguity of this sphere emerges. In an attempt not to superimpose a substantive value framework, the structure

²¹¹ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 118–19; Zurn, Axel Honneth. *A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 37.

²¹² Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 121.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

described by Honneth is much broader than those of love or law and tends to embrace many different aspects and phenomena. Such a “context-dependent”²¹⁴ form of recognition is indeed considered as addressing the person’s unique “traits and abilities”, “accomplishments”, achievements, “integrity”, “ways of life”,²¹⁵ “manner of self-realization”, “forms of life and manners of belief”,²¹⁶ etcetera. In other words, the Honnethian discourse seems to oscillate between three dimensions. On the one hand, the focus is on the individual’s qualities and abilities that are worthy of esteem in light of their representing a contribution “to the practical realization of society’s abstractly defined goals”.²¹⁷ On the other hand, the reference to cultural conflicts between different value-groups and ways of life²¹⁸ legitimately allows us to include in this sphere of recognition a broader dimension which cannot be reduced to the concept of contribution, but which properly concerns the idea of cultural identity. Finally, keeping our eyes on the third form of misrecognition, where insult, degradation and downgrading coincide with the daily understanding of the concept of disrespect, it can be understood that the spectrum of this form of recognition embraces a dimension that coincides with what could be defined as the dignity of the person in its most immediate sense: the integrity of the person *per se*, that is, my being who I am and how I am. Even if, from an extremely functionalized perspective of the social groups’ interplay, cultural identity could be seen as a contribution to the realization of the ends of society, it seems to me that certain instances of identity and requests for recognition of one’s own personal integrity cannot be exclusively traced back to the “way in which the individual fulfils social functions”,²¹⁹ but concern also the elementary plan in which one can see one’s worthiness in the eyes of others, not for particular contributions or achievements, but also for one’s own particular presence.

This three-dimensionality (contribution, cultural identity, singularity) of the third sphere of recognition – in addition to leading to later variations –²²⁰ is due to the genealogical analysis that leads Honneth to root the idea of esteem in that of *honor*, inherited *prima facie* from Hegel and identified as that pole of human dignity ‘left aside’ by the universalization of legal rights. This concept expresses a traditional idea of personal integrity and esteem totally attributable to group belonging.

²¹⁴ Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 41.

²¹⁵ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 125–28.

²¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 134.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

²¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²¹⁹ Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 301.

²²⁰ In *Redistribution or Recognition?* Honneth defines the principle characterizing the third sphere as *achievement*, while in *Suffering from Indeterminacy, Freedom’s Right* and *The Idea of Socialism* – due to the greater influence of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* –, the third sphere of recognition coincides with the dimension of the *democratic state*.

Honneth maintains that, as long as the value system maintained an objective validity, the degree of esteem accorded to the subject depended strictly on its place in the classification of the different groups, which constituted, therefore, the authentic object of esteem: the individuals were only participants in group-pride.²²¹ However, because of the compactness and cohesion of these social groups, within them relationships of *solidarity* could develop. The latter represents “not just passive tolerance”,²²² but the way through which subjects sympathize with each other on the basis of *symmetrical* mutual esteem. It is noteworthy that in this sphere of recognition Honneth uses for the first time the attribute of symmetry to describe recognitional interactions, and above all to describe the ‘authentic’ form of esteem: as our reconstruction allows us to understand, this insistence is due to the reading of Siep and intends to maintain the dynamic of recognition – and especially the third sphere – in the field of horizontality, avoiding a subsumption of the individual into totality. The multiporality of objects of esteem in contemporary societies thus becomes comprehensible in light of the fragmentation and multiplication of groups within the modernization of society, which leads to the *individualization* of the idea of ‘honour’ and to its openness to all social classes, according to an *equalization* dynamic: personal integrity is no longer structurally ascribable to any belonging, but depends on a myriad of factors, which hinge on the multiple contexts that a contemporary subject may find itself living within. If esteem is granted according to eclectic and multifaceted standards, the task in front of which the theory stops is to elaborate a general collaboration-context and value-horizon in which relationships of solidarity (as full-fledged form of esteem) can be developed under contemporary situations for all members of society, according to the axes of individualization and equalization. In Honneth’s view, this operation cannot be prescribed by the social theory, but only be carried out by future struggles for recognition.²²³

In any case, the historical-speculative reconstruction of Honneth allows us to define the characters of the third form of recognition. The object of esteem is represented by what can be synthesized through the term ‘individual’s *singularity*’ – traits, abilities, achievements, forms of life – which is affirmed through *symmetrical forms of social esteem* – solidarity. Thanks to this form of recognition, which always assumes its dimension in relation to the context of reference and its evaluation

²²¹ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 127–28.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²²³ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 178–79. I think that this idea of openness and dependence of theory on practice shows quite clearly that the Honneth paradigm, which also concerns issues of justice (especially in *Redistribution or Recognition?* and *Freedom’s Right*), is to a certain extent open to the *to-come* dimension, contrary to what Bankovsky claims. The normative dimension derives its traits from a genealogical reconstruction that allows structural proposals from the present perspective, but future evolutions are not pre-determinable. Cf. Miriam Bankovsky, *Perfecting Justice in Rawls, Habermas and Honneth. A Deconstructive Perspective* (London: Continuum, 2012).

standards, the subject is enabled to relate to itself with *self-esteem*, that is, looking positively at its own singularity as something worthy.

2.5 Some Open Issues: Recognition, Subject-Formation, Social Ontology

The formal conception of ethical life outlined by Honneth is therefore a structural concept of good that defines the conditions for the development of an undamaged practical identity, in which recognition practices, principles and spheres of interaction are closely intertwined. For the sake of clarity, these levels can be schematized as follows:²²⁴

Mode of recognition	emotional support	cognitive respect	social esteem
Dimension of personality	needs and emotions	moral responsibility	traits and abilities
Forms of recognition	primary relationships (love, friendship)	legal relations (rights)	community of value (solidarity)
Practical self-relation	basic self-confidence	self-respect	self-esteem

In any case, there are some theoretical knots that still need to be investigated.

The first set of questions concerns the definition of the *concept of recognition*. First of all, Honneth embraces the idea of Siep, according to which one of the theoretical advantages found in the principle of recognition consists in its *multipolarity*. As we have seen, this would allow the foundation of an ethical theory that approaches reality in a non-unilateral way. This idea, which certainly brings benefits, also has its drawbacks. First of all, Honneth does not clarify how a *uniform concept* of recognition could be unearthed from such diversity, one that would be able to comprehend the different faces of the three forms. In fact, there lacks a common definition of practical acts that actually differ from one another with regard to their aims, practical modalities of accomplishment and consequences. Surely the idea of affirmation or confirmation allows us to understand a certain unity, but – second – this lack of clarity has an even greater impact when looking at the conceptual consequences implied in the different forms of recognition. Beyond the immediate differences seen when observing affection, respect and esteem, the biggest problem concerns the idea of *mutuality*. While reciprocity is affirmed as a characteristic of all three forms, it has been seen that love-recognition possesses a

²²⁴ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 129.

structural imbalance, resting on undemandable obligations in the face of the other's vulnerability, while legal relationships and esteem require equity and symmetry, pain their very collapsing qua recognitional acts (don't understand the last part after the comma). Therefore, it would become even more difficult to gather, under a single concept, forms of relationship that respond to different logics. Third, it could be argued that recognition has a *functionalistic* character, because such a unitary concept could be provided by the efficacy of the intersubjective gestures to the possibility of the person's formation. Here, however, another binomial opens up, that is, the simultaneous presence of *generative and normative* dimensions in the Honnethian paradigm of recognition. Regarding this, it could be said that what constitutes recognition is its person-generative character, according to the different dimensions that 'person' possesses under contemporary conditions. But this solution is apparently not completely suitable for a normative account of recognition, as Honneth's. Fourth, in *The Struggle for Recognition*, it is not particularly clear whether such gestures of recognition – which have first and foremost to do with aspects of the person and not with the person *per se* – play an *attributive* or *perceptive* role, that is whether they actually grant personal features or, rather, acknowledge them. Finally, a problematic aspect of the text is that the concept of recognition is dealt with almost exclusively from the point of view of the recognized. This perspective, which finds its motivation in the focus on misrecognition and on the purpose of individual self-realization, however, provides a partial definition of the idea, which strongly characterizes the entire Honnethian paradigm. In other words, while the reason for being recognized is clarified, the reason for recognizing is not. By postponing the in-depth discussion of these issues to chapter six, it is useful here to open up two further unclarified issues, which open the way for chapters seven and eight of this work.

First of all, we have seen that the formal concept of ethical life is based on the idea of self-realization, which in turn has anthropological connotations that cannot be eliminated. Despite Honneth's intention to keep his discourse on a normative level, I believe that his paradigm of recognition has – even in its development, and therefore not limited only to *The Struggle for Recognition* – some relevant guidelines for the formulation of a *post-modern anthropology*. Besides the centrality of the problem of the justification of the Critical Theory, this anthropological problem concerns the concept of recognition in more general terms: since the Hegelian description, this peculiar form of intersubjective relation has been presented as the basis for the generation of self-consciousness in the broad sense. One could therefore argue – as a first phase of Honneth's thought shows – that the concepts of recognition and of personhood are complementary.

Secondly, the confrontation with Siep and the issues at stake in the sphere of legal recognition have brought to light a very problematic issue: the relationship between intersubjective practices of recognition and institutional reality. This theoretical dimension is developed by Honneth above all during the following works, but it is useful to underline that already in *The Struggle for Recognition* a link between recognition and the process of generation of institutions is central, especially with regard to the mechanisms of social change. However, an analysis of the relationship between the horizontality of recognition and the verticality of the individual-institution relationship is (perhaps voluntarily) overlooked, and the ways in which recognition practices can instantiate in spheres, the nature of the latter and their interplay remain implicit. Therefore, even if the aim of the work is a re-actualization of the Hegelian idea that conflict leads to the evolution of primary forms of sociality, many details of such a theory applicable to contemporary reality are missing.

3. *Reification* and the Antecedence of Recognition

Reification (2005) is the more comprehensive and in-depth expression of a series of ongoing changes in the Honnethian paradigm after *The Struggle for Recognition*.¹ Before dealing with the text and the new outlines of the concept of recognition contained within it, it seems useful to focus briefly on these changes – summarized in six nuclei – that enclose a certain perspective or a second ‘phase’ in Honneth’s thinking.

a) First of all, the tripartition of recognitional forms and the relative multidimensionality of the subject is left aside. Consequently, the investigation is directed towards “individuality itself, taken as a normative fact” and described as an ‘indivisible’ phenomenon;² similarly, recognition is beheld within a certain unitariness, and theoretically deepened as a conceptual and existential ‘whole’, within dimensions other than the normative one.³

b) Honneth also departs from Mead’s social psychology, because of the “tendency toward cognitivism” that characterizes the *internalization* of the generalized other’s behavioral models.⁴ This feature would in fact hinder an adequate understanding of the role played by recognition during the processes of constitution of selfhood and social integration. In this way, Honneth is further away from Habermas and from a possible explanation of the recognition that includes the dimension of language, accentuating the role assigned to the pre-linguistic and reciprocal “expressive gestures”.⁵

c) Entering the twenty-first century, Honneth’s link with psychoanalysis is deepened and broadened, with numerous consequences – an example being ‘Postmodern Identity and Object-Relations Theory’, but also ‘Appropriating Freedom’. In *Reification*, however, the reference to Winnicott is considerably reduced, in favor of the empirical results of different researchers in the field of developmental psychology, which lead Honneth to describe the first phases of the

¹ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth’s Social Philosophy*, p. 461.

² Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth’s Social Philosophy*, p. 442.

³ Cf. Axel Honneth, ‘Invisibility: On The Epistemology of “Recognition”’, *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 75.1 (2001), 111–26.

⁴ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 42. Cf. also Axel Honneth, ‘Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions’, *Inquiry*, 45.4 (2002), 499–519.

⁵ Honneth, ‘Invisibility: On The Epistemology of “Recognition”’, p. 117 and ff.

child's life in a different way from *The Struggle for Recognition*.⁶ From a genealogical and logical point of view, the 'first place' is assigned to a type of interaction defined as "antecedent act of recognition",⁷ affectively or empathetically characterized. This concept – at least in the first instance – seems irreconcilable with the Winnicottian symbiosis.

d) The above-mentioned differences from *The Struggle for Recognition* are largely due to a re-evaluation of Adorno's thought and above all to the influence exerted by the concept of *mimetic reason*.⁸ With the marked and explicit adoption of some Adornian accounts, Honneth acquires new tools to unveil the unfulfilled promises of modernity,⁹ as well as the pathological effects of paradoxical modernization, of the "dialectical intertwinement of enlightenment and power" that is.¹⁰ Honneth redefines these contradictory and detrimental outcomes for personal integrity through Lukács' concept of *reification*.

e) A further peculiarity of *Reification* concerns the "indirectly normative character" of the inquiry.¹¹ The sought original or genuine form of recognition, in fact, "draws its justification much more strongly from social ontology or philosophical anthropology than from the sphere customarily termed moral philosophy or ethics".¹² The description of recognition as "existential engagement"¹³ with otherness thus marks a profound distance with the social-theoretical and political connotations of the struggle for recognition,¹⁴ and possesses more theoretical insights as well thanks to the references to authors such as Heidegger, Dewey, Cavell and Sartre, which make the tone of the arguments wide-ranging and comprehensive.

f) A last notable difference between *The Struggle for Recognition* and *Reification* concerns conflict. If, on the one hand, conflict was considered a dimension intrinsically inherent to the intersubjective interactions of recognition – which represents the very core of Honneth's account on social reality – in the second work it is completely set aside. From a certain point of view, this absence could find its

⁶ Cf., among others, Honneth, 'Rejoinder', p. 393.

⁷ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 52.

⁸ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth's Social Philosophy*, p. 461.

⁹ Cf. Alessandro Ferrara, 'The Nugget and the Tailings. Reification Reinterpreted in the Light of Recognition', in *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays. With a Reply by Axel Honneth*, ed. by Danielle Petherbridge (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 371–90 (p. 372).

¹⁰ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 138.

¹¹ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 21.

¹² Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 26.

¹³ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 32.

¹⁴ Cf. Anita Chari, 'Toward a Political Critique of Reification: Lukács, Honneth and the Aims of Critical Theory', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 36.5 (2010), 587–606 (p. 601).

explanation in the very attempt to describe a level of recognitional interaction that precedes “all other, more substantial forms of recognition”¹⁵ – love, respect, social esteem, with their respective spheres – and, by so doing, to ground the aforementioned anthropological justification. In this sense, this originality or primacy of recognition would precede, even in a ‘chronological’ sense, any form of recognition or misrecognition and consequently any struggle aimed at correcting such distortions in social interaction. However, the aspect of conflict that *Reification* seems to lack most is not so much the political one – which concerns the moral progress of society – as the genealogical one. In fact, the tension or balance between autonomy and boundary described by the object relations theory played an essential role in the constitution of the subject, since it allowed for the coexistence of the two selves necessary for the very existence of relationships and thus of recognition itself.

Although all these issues are apparently in contradiction with some of the focal points of *The Struggle for Recognition*, *Reification* embodies a certain continuity with the instances left in abeyance in the first work and, with this, is a bold attempt to base normative social theory on social-ontological and anthropological structures aimed at showing the priority of recognizing (*Anerkennen*) over cognizing (*Erkennen*). However, it is precisely because of the criticisms received by this admixture of normative and onto-anthropological dimensions that Honneth, after this work, decisively abandons these levels of investigation.

Therefore, before analyzing and focusing on the novelties that the definition of recognition contained in *Reification* brings with it, it is useful to briefly mention some articles in which Honneth focuses on certain aspects – the epistemological dimension of recognition, the problematization of the idea of self-realization, and the Adornian concept of mimetic reason as key for social criticism – that lay the foundations for the work and show its relationship with *The Struggle for Recognition* (3.1). Second, discussing the concept of reification will be useful for introducing new determinations of ‘recognition’ and – especially through the criticisms aimed at Honneth’s approach – for deepening his critical perspective and setting (3.2). Subsequently, the focus will be on the concept of antecedent recognition or emotional identification - which constitutes the heart of the re-definition of the concept of recognition - as well as on its triple declination: towards others, towards the world and towards one’s own self (3.3). Finally, we will try to condense some critical points to relaunch the discussion in the following sections (3.4).

3.1 Some Premises: Visibility, Authenticity and Mimesis

¹⁵ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 90, note 70.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how *Reification* represents the outcome of the Honnethian elaborations of the early 2000's, still strongly determined by the attempt to elaborate a formal and intersubjective anthropology, conceived as a normative pivotal principle and enabling-threshold for critical thought. In fact, some of the criticisms levelled at the idea of 'antecedent' recognition – and, consequently, at the new description of the first phases of the infant's life –¹⁶ lack what could be called 'continuity-perspective', that is, they fail to take *Reification* as a further step in an ongoing research project. However, leaving these themes aside for the moment, we want to focus on three articles published by Honneth between 2001 and 2003, which focus on several issues left unresolved by *The Struggle for Recognition*: the *epistemological* character of recognition, the apparent unproblematicity of the work's core concept – namely the idea of individual *self-realization* – and the almost immediate link made in identifying moral *injury* with misrecognition.

The first of these attempts, 'Invisibility' (2001), plays a crucial role in widening the concept of recognition,¹⁷ since it is in this writing that Honneth, for the first time, considers the relation between 'cognizing' (*Erkennen*) and 'recognizing' (*Anerkennen*). Once again, Honneth's starting point is the experiences of disrespect and moral damage, examining Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man*, where racial discrimination is described as the experience of being 'looked through', as the impossibility of being seen. Honneth's argument can be summarized in the following four points.

First, Honneth takes his cue from the definition of 'physical visibility', the core of which is the idea of "individual identifiability". The possibility of acknowledging an object as such, that is, to identify it visually, would be – trivially expressed – allowed by its manifestation within a perceptive space-time horizon, namely within situational parameters. This "represents a first, primitive form of what we call 'cognizing' (*Erkennen*)."¹⁸ However, second, the experience of being 'looked through' clearly cannot be defined in such physical terms, but rather implies they exist, and relies upon a "performative aspect": the affected subjects would be able to perceive being overlooked because of the absence of certain intersubjective

¹⁶ Here I think above all at Judith Butler and Jonathan Lear comments contained in the English edition of *Reification*, where Honneth is reproached for not giving sufficient weight to the symbiotic phase of the newborn-caregiver relationship. Cf. Judith Butler, 'Taking Another's View: Ambivalent Implications', in *Reification. A New Look at an Old Idea*, ed. by Martin Jay (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 97–119; Jonathan Lear, 'The Slippery Middle', in *Reification. A New Look at an Old Idea*, ed. by Martin Jay (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 131–43.

¹⁷ Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 43; Petherbridge, p. 177.

¹⁸ Honneth, 'Invisibility: On The Epistemology of "Recognition"', p. 113.

practical reactions that are, under ‘normal’ social conditions, signs or expressions of consideration, respect, and affirmation.

The ‘making visible’ of a person extends beyond the cognitive act of individual identification by giving public expression, with the aid of suitable actions, gestures or facial expressions, to the fact that the person is noticed affirmatively in the manner appropriate to the relationship in question; it is only because we possess a common knowledge of these emphatic forms of expression in the context of our second nature that we can see in their absence a sign of invisibility, of humiliation.¹⁹

Social visibility hinges on an evaluative framework, within which gestural and symbolic expressions become capable of accounting for the performative ‘seeing or ignoring the other’. And thanks to these evaluative criteria, the subject can know itself as recognized: recognizing is always originally both a perceiving and an expressing, both of which actions are in some way formed within a normative, second-natural context.²⁰ Therefore, just as physical visibility depends on the space-time horizon that allows the identifiability of an object, a person’s social visibility depends on a moral horizon, within which perception and expression represent two ‘phases’ of recognition. Conversely, making the other invisible through the deprivation of gestures that publicly attest to affirmation would be an essential element of misrecognition and, thus, a cause of moral suffering.²¹

Third, Honneth defines recognition as a “meta-action”,²² i.e. as adoption of a public *stance*, testified and instantiated in expressive gestures, through which we make the other aware of our attitudes. In this sense, recognition would not only coincide – as could be synthesized from *The Struggle for Recognition* – with punctual affirmational acts towards other’s personal dimensions, but would at the same time depict a *stance*, within which we are able to *bring to expression* the character of the others being perceived. In other words, recognition is first of all a position towards the interacting partner, which ‘acts’ as a condition of possibility for the active manifestation of determined and positive practical gestures of affirmation.

¹⁹ Honneth, ‘Invisibility: On The Epistemology of “Recognition”’, p. 116, our emphasis.

²⁰ Cf. also Honneth, ‘Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions’. Although this article represents a decisive turning point in the definition of ‘recognition’, we will focus on it – and on *Recognition as Ideology* – in chapter 6, where the concept will be addressed as such.

²¹ This argument, which in fact seems to anticipate Ricoeur’s criticism of the form of misrecognition of love, represents, according to Zurn, a considerable difference with *Reification*, where primary recognition would not possess a normative character. However, in my view, the fact that Honneth repeatedly emphasizes the non-normative character of the antecedent recognition does not coincide with the ‘amorality’ of suffering due to its deprivation. Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 217, note 11.

²² Honneth, ‘Invisibility: On The Epistemology of “Recognition”’, p. 120.

Finally, one could therefore say that, in addition to the epistemological dimension, a notable passage concerns the *expressivist model* of recognition, according to which its content and its mode of expression cannot be unrelated.²³ The inseparability of these two dimensions – the *how* and the *what* of recognition – is found in the developmental account showing the relation between recognition and expressive gestures. Drawing on Daniel Stern’s account, Honneth emphasizes the gestural and reciprocal component of the child’s process of social development. The key to this process revolves around the caregiver’s facial expressions - which are affectively charged and reveal his or her “readiness to interact” - and the infant’s “spectrum of reflex-like activities that, in reaction to the gestural stimulation of the caregiver, can develop into the first forms of social response.”²⁴ In such a relationship, the affective character of certain gestures immediately expresses the other as recognized. Hereby, it is important to make two observations. First of all, such a reciprocal practical interaction between infant and caregiver – whose core would be represented by the smile and similar affective interactions – is at least partially in contradiction with the concept of symbiosis, which excludes any form, albeit primordial, of agency on the part of the child, because any nuclear form subjectivity would have not yet emerged: as we have already seen, the idea of symbiosis cannot be accompanied by the experience of ‘being-with’.²⁵ Or, in any case, it could be argued that the experience of symbiosis cannot be established on a reciprocal level; the two poles of interaction overlap each other.²⁶ Second, the “dependency of recognition on expressive gestures”²⁷ and its consequent definition as meta-action gives us a greater clue about the very nature of the concept and, in particular, its difference from verbal expressions. In fact, the practical gestures of affirmation, even in adulthood, coincide with ‘symbolic abbreviations’, which “express in abbreviated form the totality of the actions that are supposed to be accorded” to the other in view of his or her ‘situation’ within the second-natural evaluative horizon.²⁸ In other words, if by linguistic articulation the signifier ‘conveys’ the signified and can be separated from it, in recognitional affirmation acts the *how* and the *what* of expression are co-extensive and co-immanent to each other, because of their expressive structure. This holistic character of recognition, as we

²³ Cf. David Owen, ‘Reification, Ideology and Power: Expression and Agency in Honneth’s Theory of Recognition’, *Journal of Power*, 3.1 (2010), 97–109.

²⁴ Honneth, ‘Invisibility: On The Epistemology of “Recognition”’, p. 117.

²⁵ Cf. Meehan, p. 98.

²⁶ Cf. Franco Crespi, ‘Riconoscimento e Relativizzazione Delle Identità’, *Quaderni Di Teoria Sociale*, 8 (2008), 33–43 (p. 39).

²⁷ Honneth, ‘Invisibility: On The Epistemology of “Recognition”’, p. 120.

²⁸ Honneth, ‘Invisibility: On The Epistemology of “Recognition”’, p. 118.

shall see, is one of the main features of *Reification*'s redefinition of the concept, as well as its determination as an epistemic stance.

Moving to the second article, 'Organized Self-Realization' (original German: 2002),²⁹ our object of interest changes. In this paper, Honneth does not focus on the concept of recognition, but on the idea of self-realization, highlighting the problematic nature of 'individualization' within capitalistic society. The main idea of the paper revolves around the fact that sociology has from the very beginning considered the process of individualization as an 'enrichment' and an 'impoverishment' of personal freedom. Drawing on Simmel's account, Honneth underlines the ambiguity of the term, which hinges on four different meanings: the increasing 'external' biographical possibilities, the "growing isolation of individual actors" in metropolitan contexts, the "increase in individuals' powers of reflection" and individual autonomy.³⁰ Given this great multiplicity of meanings, the causal (or consequential) element of such ambiguity is represented by a "paradoxical reversal", whereby self-realization claims are institutionalized and therefore "the particular goals of such claims are lost" and "transmuted into a support of the system's legitimacy".³¹ Referring to numerous sociologists, as well as to dynamics such as the 'purification' of family relationships, the experimental exploration of one's own personality in leisure activities, and the consumption of luxury goods, Honneth comes – always together with Simmel – to the conclusion that a so-called "individualism of irreplaceability",³² rather than expressing an effective instance of a subject coming to its own self-realization, represents an effective and pervasive mechanism of a system aimed at its own maintenance and social reproduction. It is an *organized* self-realization, which furnishes contemporary social actors with "pre-given templates for individuality".³³ One example is that of the 'entrepreneurial employee', an idea that favors the deregulation of work by means of an earned flexibility, conceived as measure and result of the worker's willingness. Another example concerns the advertising industry, whose strategies tend more and more to propose representations according to which the consumers would be able to find in the purchase "an aesthetic resource for both the presentation and the heightening of the originality of their own chosen life-styles".³⁴

²⁹ Axel Honneth, 'Organized Self-Realization: Some Paradoxes of Individualization', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 7.4 (2004), 463–78.

³⁰ Honneth, 'Organized Self-Realization: Some Paradoxes of Individualization', p. 466.

³¹ Honneth, 'Organized Self-Realization: Some Paradoxes of Individualization', p. 467.

³² Honneth, 'Organized Self-Realization: Some Paradoxes of Individualization', p. 471.

³³ Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 110.

³⁴ Honneth, 'Organized Self-Realization: Some Paradoxes of Individualization', p. 472.

[...] the individualism of self-realization, gradually emergent over the course of the past fifty years, has since been transmuted – having become an instrument of economic development, spreading standardization and making lives into fiction – into an emotionally fossilized set of demands under whose consequences individuals today seem more likely to suffer than to prosper.³⁵

After this rather stringent synthesis, we can still highlight two points for which ‘Organized Self-Realization’ is noteworthy. On the one hand, it probably represents the clearest example of the escape from the Honnethian moral-theoretical *monism*. To explain the reversal from the search for authentic individual self-realization to an institutionalized demand, Honneth refers to various factors of social and cultural change ranging from the productive system to the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, from mass education to celebrity culture.³⁶ This seems significant because, although this is not a major work, such a ‘willingness’ on the part of Honneth to question one of the fundamental concepts of *The Struggle for Recognition* – that of self-realization – through a non-monological approach makes us understand that the latter – explicitly formulated only a year after the publication of ‘Organized Self-Realization’ in the debate with Nancy Fraser³⁷ – is not to be understood in a radical way. On the other hand, the questioning of the concept of self-realization further clarifies that Honneth’s notion of freedom concerns both autonomy and *authenticity*. Although this second term is never used unilaterally and plainly by Honneth, because of the substantial consequences that would result and of the “profound tension between” it and the “demands of autonomy” that characterize contemporary societies,³⁸ it represents a key through which many aspects of his thought are connoted. The weight that this concept assumes, from the beginning of 2000 onwards, is always greater and concerns the ‘effects’ of recognition, understood as an intersubjective condition of the self’s actualization,³⁹ and the definition of self-realization, understood as the proximity to one’s own inner contents and as “biographical continuity”.⁴⁰ Such an idea evidently converges in a significant way in *Reification*, where – also through the reference to Heidegger – the attempt is to describe an original form of praxis.

³⁵ Honneth, ‘Organized Self-Realization: Some Paradoxes of Individualization’, p. 474.

³⁶ Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, pp. 111–12.

³⁷ Cf. Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 157.

³⁸ Axel Honneth, ‘Considerations on Alessandro Ferrara’s Reflective Authenticity’, *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 30.1 (2004), 11–15 (p. 15). Cf. also Alessandro Ferrara, ‘The Relation of Authenticity to Normativity: A Response to Larmore and Honneth’, *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 30.1 (2004), 17–24; Alessandro Ferrara, ‘Esemplarità e Teoria Critica. Quale Normatività per Una Teoria Critica Come Critica Immanente?’, *Politica & Società*, 4.3 (2015), 355–70.

³⁹ Cf. Honneth, ‘Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions’, pp. 509–10.

⁴⁰ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 36.

Our last introductory reference concerns ‘A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life’ (original German: 2003),⁴¹ where Honneth focuses on Adorno’s social critical theory. In this case as well, the intention is not to engage the text or the Honneth-Adorno relationship in depth, but to highlight the elements that allow us to better contextualize and understand *Reification*. In this sense, two aspects are of major interest: the first is methodological, while the second concerns the concept of *mimesis* or imitation.

From a methodological perspective – Honneth points out – Adorno’s work never takes the form of an explanatory social theory, but is rather unsystematically configured around *ideal-types*, which emerge, by means of critical questioning, as expressive of social formations: social analysis-critique would therefore coincide with a “materialistic hermeneutic of the capitalist form of life”.⁴² Keeping the strong persuasion – already engaged in chapter 1 – that social forms, rational capacities and suffering are deeply intertwined with each other, Honneth argues that the apt method of social hermeneutic would then be that of *physiognomy*: with regard to the body, such approach aimed at considering the ‘physical’ appearances and features as epiphenomena or symbolical concretions of the person’s character. In the same way, sociological physiognomy purposes to induce “the social deformation of our rational endowments, by means of a stylized, ideal-typical construction of its surface appearances”,⁴³ that is, distilling an idea of a form of life through the theoretical engagement with literature, music, art, but also through “gestures, mimicry, modes of practical intercourse in and with the world”.⁴⁴ In this sense, always referring to Freud, this deeply *practical-hermeneutical* methodology – through which potentially every practical form is traced back to its socially constituted form of life – would disclose suffering-symptoms that would be otherwise not perceptible, namely the deformations of rationality.⁴⁵

This brings us to the second relevant point of this article, that is, the idea of *mimetic reason*. Given Adorno’s persuasion that every form of social domination systematically causes a diminishment of one’s rational capabilities and, therefore, even physical suffering, critical thought cannot avoid sketching out a form of undamaged rationality. Here, the relation between Adorno and Lukács plays an important role, as it does in *Reification*. In fact, even if Lukács and his *History and*

⁴¹ Axel Honneth, ‘A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life. A Sketch of Adorno’s Social Theory’, in *Pathologies of Reason. On the Legacy of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 54–70.

⁴² Honneth, ‘A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life. A Sketch of Adorno’s Social Theory’, p. 55.

⁴³ Honneth, ‘A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life. A Sketch of Adorno’s Social Theory’, p. 63.

⁴⁴ Honneth, ‘A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life. A Sketch of Adorno’s Social Theory’, p. 63.

⁴⁵ Cf. Honneth, ‘A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life. A Sketch of Adorno’s Social Theory’, pp. 68–70.

Class Consciousness represents an unavoidable point of reference in regard to this issue, the idealistic legacy concerning the subject-object relation and the consequent Lukácsian delineation of an undamaged praxis decidedly represents, according to Adorno and Honneth, a relapse into identity-thought, that is, the domination of the otherness. The re-appropriation of the object by the subject in an ‘authentic way’, would not *per se* be able to re-assess the rational capacity *and* to avoid the social pathology of reification.⁴⁶ Adorno’s counter-proposal revolves around the idea of imitation or mimesis, that is a re-definition of rationality itself.

The human is indissolubly tied with imitation: a human being only becomes human at all by imitating other human beings.⁴⁷

An undistorted form of rationality would be therefore re-constructible through the observation of the first phases of the infant’s life,⁴⁸ where it emerges that our rational faculties are structured through intersubjective relations. This formation process would imply that even in adult life the human way of knowing is determined by an “attitude of non-conceptual affinity that escapes and lies beneath the subject-object relation shaped by the cognitive-instrumental way of seeing”.⁴⁹ In imitational acts, rational domination would therefore be avoided⁵⁰ and, indeed, the priority ‘within’ the knowing-process is given to otherness: in other words, one could say that ‘imitation’ represents a pre-cognitive stance in which a ‘nuclear’ form of self-decentering guarantees a practical attunement to the other, and through this attunement cognizing would be opened and at-hand, always mediated by the decentered perspective furnished by the imitated.

Only through imitative behavior, which for Adorno originally goes back to an affect of loving care, do we achieve a capacity for reason because we learn by gradually envisioning others’ intentions to relate to their perspectives on the world. For us reality no longer merely represents a field of challenges to which we must adapt; rather, it becomes charged with a growing multiplicity of intentions, wishes, and attitudes that we learn to regard as reasons in our action [...]. He is therefore convinced that any true knowledge has to retain the original impulse of

⁴⁶ Cf. Honneth, ‘A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life. A Sketch of Adorno’s Social Theory’, p. 60.

⁴⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. by E. F. N. Jephcott (London - New York: Verso, 2005), p. 154.

⁴⁸ Noteworthy, precisely in this passage Honneth refers to Tomasello, Hobson and Dornes, which represent, also in *Reification* the development researcher, which furnish Honneth’s account with empirical confirmations. Cf. Honneth, ‘A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life. A Sketch of Adorno’s Social Theory’, p. 61, 201, note 22.

⁴⁹ Somogy Varga, ‘Critical Theory and the Two-Level Account of Recognition – Towards a New Foundation?’, *Critical Horizons*, 11.1 (2010), 19–33 (p. 26).

⁵⁰ Cf. Martin Seel, “Jede Wirklich Gesättigte Anschauung”. *Das Positive Zentrum Der Negative Philosophie Adornos*, in *Adornos Philosophie Der Kontemplation*, ed. by Martin Seel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), pp. 9–19.

loving imitation sublimated within itself in order to do justice to the rational structure of the world from our perspective.⁵¹

Therefore, the abandonment of imitation as affective and non-conceptual form of relation with otherness would lead to identity-thought and social pathologies such as collective narcissism and, by the process of organization, purposes' becoming end-in-themselves.⁵² These phenomena within capitalist societies, "just as 'typical' as the suffering they generate",⁵³ would show that an original stance towards the other – imitation, mimesis – has been lost or forgotten in social life.

As we shall see, both this methodological approach and the concept of imitation are decisive in Honneth's elaborating *Reification*.

3.2 Reification as Forgetfulness of Recognition

Honneth's account on the concept of reification has raised numerous criticisms, which have then led the author to abandon some instances contained within it. For this reason, we will focus briefly on the salient features and criticisms, and then move on to the idea of recognition proposed in the Tanner Lectures of 2005. By this, we do not intend to engage in a direct confrontation with the work of Lukács and with Honneth's approach, which, once again, is rather free, based in fact on a so-called "unofficial version" of *History and Class Consciousness*.⁵⁴ Distilling this non-linear relationship with Lukács, Honneth's original thesis on reification can be summarized with regard to five main traits.

First in this juncture – as for the Hegelian recognition theory – Honneth's aim is to re-actualize the concept taken into consideration, maintaining, so to speak, its critical core, but reshaping the respective justification paradigm. Accordingly, Honneth attempts to maintain three principal features of the Lukácsian concept of reification. First, the starting point coincides with the definition of the concept, according to which reification consists of "a cognitive occurrence in which something that doesn't possess thing-like characteristics in itself (e.g., something

⁵¹ Honneth, 'A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life. A Sketch of Adorno's Social Theory', p. 61.

⁵² Cf. Honneth, 'A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life. A Sketch of Adorno's Social Theory', pp. 65–66. Interestingly, the pathological dynamic of independentizing and fixing of the ends represents the first pattern of reification of the other described in *Reification* through the example of the tennis player; cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 59.

⁵³ Honneth, 'A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life. A Sketch of Adorno's Social Theory', p. 69.

⁵⁴ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 29. Also Habermas' colonization thesis can be read through these lenses, namely those of a re-actualization of Lukács' core idea; Cf. Konstantinos Kavoulakos, 'Lukács' Theory of Reification and the Tradition of Critical Theory', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory*, ed. by Michael J. Thompson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 67–85 (pp. 75–77).

human) comes to be regarded as a thing”.⁵⁵ On a second level, Honneth wants to keep Lukács totalizing tripartition – even if only to a certain extent – according to which

Subjects in commodity exchange are mutually urged (a) to perceive given objects solely as “things” that one can potentially make a profit on, (b) to regard each other solely as “objects” of a profitable transaction, and finally (c) to regard their own abilities as nothing but supplemental “resources” in the calculation of profit opportunities.⁵⁶

On a third level, according to Lukács, this attitude would derive from the actor’s participation in the commodity-exchange process. Precisely because of the incessant expansion of the latter, the subject would be led to assume a *contemplative* and detached perspective towards its surroundings. This contemplative stance, clearly, does not concern the ‘un-emotionality’ of the practical acts. To be sure, Lukács – and Honneth with him – does not claim that forms of instrumental reason could not “themselves become forms of passion, modes of attachment, sites of emotional investment and excitation”.⁵⁷ To raise the issue of contemplative attitude and instrumental reason by contrasting coldness, absence of emotions on the one hand, and emotionality on the other, can lead to misunderstandings of the Honnethian argument – and in general of the discourse on reification –, which cannot be reduced to this simple juxtaposition. Rather, such a detached, reifying perspective is not “simply cognitive”, but is a systematical misinterpretation that is “emotive and encompassing: it affects all aspects of life”.⁵⁸ In other words, the detached and contemplative stance would coincide with an “abstraction” of the “qualitative singularity” of the otherness,⁵⁹ so that even emotions themselves could have a reified form.

Secondly, given these first three points, Honneth proceeds by ascribing one more feature to this social pathology. Deriving from the pervasiveness of the system of exchange of commodities, this distorting attitude cannot be conceived as mere moral misconduct or a simple categorical error. Rather, the reifying ‘gaze’ has to be considered “as a form of praxis that is *structurally* false”.⁶⁰ Reification cannot be a categorical error precisely because of its pervasiveness and constancy: it is not merely a matter of mistakenly and occasionally confusing a non-thing for a thing,

⁵⁵ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 21.

⁵⁶ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 22.

⁵⁷ Butler, ‘Taking Another’s View: Ambivalent Implications’, p. 105. The quotation is borrowed from a criticism addressed by Butler to Honneth: according to the first, an error of the second would be to describe the reifying attitude as emotionally ‘arid’.

⁵⁸ Lear, p. 132.

⁵⁹ Kavoulakos, ‘Lukács’ Theory of Reification and the Tradition of Critical Theory’, p. 68.

⁶⁰ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 26.

but is rather the systematic replacement of ontological characters. On the other hand, the distinction between reification and moral error is more problematic, because Honneth's argument always presents a normative character, such that 'reification' can be considered as "morally criticizable".⁶¹ Moreover, at a rather simple level, regarding the interaction partner as thing-like clearly represents a form of misrecognition and disrespect; indeed, probably their most radical forms. As Jütten points out, the fact that such forms of reification of others can lead, in an obvious way, to forms of moral suffering on the part of the affected should require a certain measure of moral accountability of the reifying subject, that is, implying a concept of moral responsibility that is incompatible with the statement that reifying gestures cannot beget from or coincide with moral misconduct.⁶² What I think Honneth intends to support by saying that reification is not a moral error is not so much that the acts of reification do not lead to moral injury, but that any reification, by the performers, is also ideology, that is, essentially unfreedom.⁶³ It is indeed caused by and instantiated in a *second nature*, an ensemble of habits, behaviors and attitudes which structurally "obscure the practices in which they originate".⁶⁴ In this sense, social subjects would find themselves living in a world that systematically 'proposes' itself as fixed by naturally endowed laws that leave no room for individual practices in terms of responsibility or options. 'Reification', for those who carry it out in relation to others, would therefore not be a moral error, but the consequence of an ideological bias that finds its origin and concealment in social structures. In other words, it is not a matter of individual choice. However, reading 'Organized Self-Realization' – and the focus on social pathologies contained in chapter 1 – gives us one more factor: in that text it emerged that social pathologies possess a *second-order disorder* character. In fact, what is problematic is not the pursuit of individual self-realization, but rather the reflexive and practical ways in which this ethical content is pursued, under the influence of social structures. Therefore, to conceive reification also as second-order disorder allows us to reconcile the moral imputability of the acts of misrecognition with the essential unfreedom of social pathologies.⁶⁵ What Jütten's criticism seems to forget is that 'reification' is "a name

⁶¹ T. Hedrick, 'Reification in and through Law: Elements of a Theory in Marx, Lukacs, and Honneth', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 13.2 (2013), 178–98 (p. 183).

⁶² Cf. Timo Jütten, 'What Is Reification? A Critique of Axel Honneth', *Inquiry*, 53.3 (2010), 235–56.

⁶³ Cf. Dirk Quadflieg, 'Zur Dialektik von Verdinglichung Und Freiheit. Von Lukács Zu Honneth – Und Zurück Zu Hegel', *Deutsche Zeitschrift Für Philosophie*, 59.5 (2011), 701–15 (p. 701).

⁶⁴ Andrew Feenberg, 'Rethinking Reification', in *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence. Aesthetics, Politics, Literature*, ed. by Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 101–20 (p. 110).

⁶⁵ Cf. Zurn, 'Social Pathologies and Second-Order Disorders'; Titus Stahl, 'Verdinglichung Als Pathologie Zweiter Ordnung', *Deutsche Zeitschrift Für Philosophie*, 59.5 (2011), 731–46; Arto Laitinen, 'Social Pathologies, Reflexive Pathologies, and the Idea of Higher-Order Disorders', *Studies in Social and Political Thought*, 25.Special Issue: Pathologies of Recognition (2015), 44–65.

for both a process and a result”,⁶⁶ which leaves no room for full moral responsibility. In other words, there is something wrong or unjust about reification, but this factor is rooted in a dimension that goes beyond individual responsibility, that is, it lies in social and second-natural mechanisms and structures. If, therefore, reification can be considered a structurally *false* form of practice, Honneth maintains that it cannot be totally free from normative connotations and that – always following the pathology-health pair – on the contrary, it announces the presence and “the existence of a ‘true’ or ‘genuine’ praxis over and against its distorted or atrophied form”,⁶⁷ which allows the identification of the latter as deviation or misdevelopment.

Third, it is only now that Honneth explicitly distances himself from Lukács, referring to a so-called unofficial version of *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat*. The reasons for the divergence are to be found in the reception of the Lukácsian work through the tradition of the Frankfurt School and in the consequent detection of an “idiosyncratic coexistence of materialist and idealist motifs” in Lukács’ thought.⁶⁸ By schematizing, two points can be identified. Following Adorno,⁶⁹ Honneth argues that Lukács’ image of undistorted human praxis, configuring itself as harmonic coincidence of producing subject and produced object, is unable to escape from identity-thought and therefore idealism.⁷⁰ Following Habermas,⁷¹ Honneth rejects Lukács’ totalizing attitude, which seems to lead to the equalization of every objectification through reification.⁷² If ‘reification’ is merely defined as an abstraction from the qualitative characteristics of otherness in favor of the objectifying attitude of instrumental reason, then the numerous spheres of social action that require this type of objectification or “depersonalization”⁷³ – such as any technical practice or natural-scientific inquiry – should be considered as manifestations of reification, which could not be acceptable.⁷⁴ According to Honneth, therefore, what is required is a new and more ‘sophisticated’ definition of

⁶⁶ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 53.

⁶⁷ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 26.

⁶⁸ Hedrick, p. 182.

⁶⁹ Cf. Kavoulakos, ‘Lukács’ Theory of Reification and the Tradition of Critical Theory’, pp. 72–73; Honneth, ‘A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life. A Sketch of Adorno’s Social Theory’.

⁷⁰ Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 27.

⁷¹ Cf. Ferrara, ‘The Nugget and the Tailings. Reification Reinterpreted in the Light of Recognition’, pp. 374–75.

⁷² On Honneth’s unwillingness to reject modernity as a whole, because of its historical-normative significance, cf. Jean-Philippe Deranty, ‘Reflective Critical Theory: A Systematic Reconstruction of Axel Honneth’s Social Philosophy.’, in *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays. With a Reply by Axel Honneth*, ed. by Danielle Petherbridge (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 59–88.

⁷³ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 76.

⁷⁴ Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, pp. 54–55.

reification, which could remain closer to the “literal meaning of the term”.⁷⁵ This would also be required as a final point of distance from Lukács, and could be considered as a rejection of Habermas’ colonization thesis.⁷⁶ As far as Lukács is concerned, Honneth intends to distance himself from the totalizing tendencies with regard to a certain economic monologism, according to which “the effects of a capitalist free-market society” lead *automatically* “to a generalization of reifying behavior in all three dimensions”,⁷⁷ and *only* the commodity exchange system could be the cause of reification. Such a unilateral explanation leads to further consequences. On the one hand, it would result in Lukács not considering brutal practices of de-humanization – such as “racism or human trafficking”⁷⁸ – on the other, it does not regard those elements which, in the sphere of the market, guarantee the person a minimal defense against being hypostatized as a thing. In the case of the “protective power of law”,⁷⁹ which Lukács disregards as an expression of the reified and reifying capitalistic institutions, Honneth sees them rather as a form of recognition and respect, a form of safeguard against the de-humanization of the person.⁸⁰ Therefore, forms of reification should be sought in the weakening of the labor contract, which corresponds to ends-autonomization and to the consequent identification of others as instruments and means. But leaving aside this case, which will be dealt with later, the argument against the unilateralization of the economic sphere as totally reified is also significant in relation to Habermas. The problem with the colonization thesis is the loading of the functionalist distinction between system and lifeworld “with a normative burden of proof that they cannot possibly shoulder”.⁸¹ In other words, the separation of two spheres of action and the idea of one colonized by the other would not be able to justify the normative perception one has of reification as a ‘false’ praxis. ‘Reification’ cannot be merely

⁷⁵ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 149.

⁷⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1, Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984). Timo Jütten, ‘The Colonization Thesis: Habermas on Reification’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 19.5 (2011), 701–27. These brief observations echo Honneth’s arguments against Habermas’ perspective contained in *The Critique of Power*; cf. Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power. Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge - London: The MIT Press, 1991), above all chap. 9.

⁷⁷ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 76.

⁷⁸ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 78.

⁷⁹ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 80.

⁸⁰ It is important to underline that Honneth – as we will see in the next chapter – is well aware that not the legal form per se represents an ‘embankment’ to the phenomenon of reification, but it’s being a modality and expression of intersubjective relations. In fact, the unilateralization of this sphere of action, as Hegel already did, is read by Honneth as an imbalance or sclerotization, which itself produces reification; cf. Daniel Loick, “‘Expression of Contempt’: Hegel’s Critique of Legal Freedom”, *Law and Critique*, 26 (2015), 189–206; Hedrick.

⁸¹ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 55.

phenomenologically described, precisely because of its normative implications.⁸² Moreover, the idea that the employment contract represents a normative element – as recognition relationship – within the market’s systemic sphere shows that Habermas’ functionalistic argument does not take into account even the fact that the system is to a certain extent delineated by normative expectations, and is not a norm-free realm.⁸³ Therefore, although it can certainly be argued that Honneth inherits the Habermasian rejection of an economic-systemic explanation in favor of an intersubjective paradigm,⁸⁴ which accounts for reification in terms of a thinning or a veiling of an intersubjectively understood social freedom,⁸⁵ one could at the same time argue that Honneth’s claim is even more radical: he intends to show the (not total) referability of the system to the normative sphere, not to separate one from the other.

Fourth, Honneth intends to provide a new concept of reification, taking again into account its relationship with the idea of ‘authentic’ or ‘genuine’ praxis. Starting from this concept one can stress the impossibility of a totalizing idea of reification, which would definitively eliminate any possible non-reifying attitude. In other words, Honneth intends to argue that the original form of praxis is somehow also present in the acts of reification, albeit in– so to speak – an ‘inactive’ way: the perception of reification as ‘false’ would announce the persistence of a ‘true’ praxis, which cannot therefore be totally dissolved. It is therefore necessary to find a definition that reconciles these two poles of praxis according to a reciprocal non-exclusivity,⁸⁶ which would lead to the aporia just mentioned: hence, Honneth defines reification as *forgetfulness of recognition*.

We have, on the one hand, forms of knowledge sensitive to recognition, and, on the other, forms of knowledge in which every trace of their origin in an antecedent act of recognition has been lost.

[...] it is prima facie most advisable for us to distinguish between two modes in which these two kinds of stances relate to one another: they are either transparent to each other or obscure, accessible or inaccessible. In the first case, the act of cognition or detached observation remains conscious of its dependence on an antecedent act of recognition; in the second case, it has freed itself of the knowledge of this dependency and deludes itself that it has become autonomous of all non-epistemic prerequisites. By further pursuing Lukács’ intention at a higher level, this kind of “forgetfulness of recognition” can now be termed “reification.” I thereby mean to indicate the process by which we lose the consciousness of the degree to which we owe our knowledge and cognition of

⁸² Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 55; Jütten, ‘The Colonization Thesis: Habermas on Reification’, pp. 703, 711.

⁸³ Cf. Hedrick, p. 183.

⁸⁴ Cf. Chari, pp. 594–98.

⁸⁵ Cf. Quadflieg, p. 708.

⁸⁶ Hedrick, p. 182; Butler, ‘Taking Another’s View: Ambivalent Implications’, p. 100.

other persons to an antecedent stance of empathetic engagement and recognition.⁸⁷

Although the definition of the antecedence of recognition has not yet been addressed, the characterization of reification as forgetfulness can be understood in its essential character. The concept of reification concerns first of all the nature of action and then its social sources.⁸⁸ Therefore the reifying attitude coincides with a form of detached, contemplative knowledge that – at a social-ontological level, but with normative implications – attributes to the other a thing-like character, which does not merely unlearn the latter’s qualitative features, but, under the pressure of binding social formations, acquires a habit of non-attentiveness to its own process of formation.⁸⁹ Specularly, this structurally false praxis implies a genuine form, which cannot therefore be considered as ‘completely absent’ or ‘removed’ by means of objectification or depersonalization, but rather must always be - with a certain permeability - combined with reification itself. Thus, rejecting Lukács’ idealistic assumptions, Honneth follows the same solution attributed to Adorno in ‘A Physiognomy of the Capitalistic Form of Life’:⁹⁰ by abandoning the subject-object binomial, an original praxis must be found in intersubjectivity.

Finally, even if we want to leave the analysis of the concept of recognition exposed in *Reification* to the next paragraph, it is necessary to anticipate some elements in order to be able to summarize a comprehensive definition of Honneth’s methodology. As already mentioned, recognition acts are identified as the genuine form of praxis that can be ‘forgotten’ when a reifying habit is being assumed. Therefore, a detached and de-humanizing position would coincide with the overshadowing of the previous knowledge of the other as a human being, opened within primary recognition gestures, particularly evident and significant – as we have seen in ‘Invisibility’ – in the early stages of the child’s life. In contrast to contemplative detachment, ‘recognition’ would indicate an involvement that finds its main trait in the affective dimension: it would be an *openness* that allows the receptivity of the qualitative traits of otherness in all its forms and informs an attitude that allows the *decentering* of the ego. At this point, Honneth not only intends to propose an alternative explanation to that provided by the Lukácsian economic monologism, but believes that the identification of reification with recognition-forgetfulness would allow for avoiding Lukács’ idea that the three forms of reification – of the other person, of the world, and of oneself – necessarily

⁸⁷ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 56.

⁸⁸ Cf. Andrew Feenberg, ‘Lukács’s Theory of Reification and Contemporary Social Movements’, *Rethinking Marxism*, 27.4 (2015), 490–507.

⁸⁹ Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, pp. 58–59.

⁹⁰ Cf. Honneth, ‘A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life. A Sketch of Adorno’s Social Theory’, pp. 60–61.

manifest themselves as intrinsically co-dependent, due to being caused by the same phenomenon: the commodity exchange. To avoid this further consequence of Lukács' totalizing tendency, a heterogeneous explanation of the emergence of reifying practices is therefore provided,⁹¹ in which, however, the link between the latter and the relative social sources is "non-essential".⁹² What Honneth provides is therefore not a sociological-explanatory theory of the causes of reifying acts, but rather – I argue – a critique of the *reifying and reified form of life*, which refers to emerging epiphenomena, so that even attitudes, behaviors and gestures that may appear as episodic shed light on the system that lies 'behind them'.

Although this identification with a critique of the capitalist form of life is not made explicit by Honneth – and is indeed unfamiliar with his vocabulary – I believe that there are three main reasons for supporting it, at least with regard to *Reification*. The first is represented by Adorno's influence on the text, which – as we shall see – plays a fundamental role in the definition of recognition as the genuine form of praxis and in the description of forms of reification. Already in 'A Physiognomy of the Capitalistic Form of Life', Honneth sees in Adorno's methodology, which addresses non-systematic and quasi-episodic aspects of everyday life, an incisive way to implement a critique of capitalism. If the main effect of reification is to annihilate the understanding of economic structures as based upon human practices,⁹³ then a legitimate starting point for critique – not reified in turn – may be to question structures out of practices, i.e. to remove the latter from concealment, showing their blindness, opaqueness and discrepancy,⁹⁴ and then to show that they are the 'basis' for the system.

Second, the concept of 'form of life' is applicable to the kind of critical theory that Honneth wants to carry out. If, from a minimal point of view, we can consider a lifeform as a set of practices that possess a certain continuity, reproductive independence and identifiability,⁹⁵ then their critique responds to Honneth's need to expand the subject and normative theories (and therefore of social criticism) with respect to mere issues of distributive justice. Honneth's critical aim – in general, but perhaps even more so in *Reification* – is to reverse a trend that has been established since the 1970s in social normative theories, namely that of "evaluating the normative order of societies according to whether they fulfill certain principles of

⁹¹ Cf. Quadflieg, p. 708.

⁹² David T. Schafer, 'Pathologies of Freedom: Axel Honneth's Unofficial Theory of Reification', *Constellations*, 25.3 (2017), 421–31 (p. 424).

⁹³ Cf. Chari, p. 589.

⁹⁴ Cf. Rahel Jaeggi, "'No Individual Can Resist": Minima Moralia as Critique of Forms of Life', *Constellations*, 12.1 (2005), 65–82.

⁹⁵ Cf. Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, trans. by Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge - London: Harvard University Press, 2018), chaps 1–2.

justice”; and by so doing, losing “sight of the fact that a society can demonstrate a moral deficit without violating generally valid principles of justice”.⁹⁶ Critical theory’s need is therefore to broaden its own understanding-horizon in order to address social pathologies, which coincide – it can be argued – with socially caused dysfunctional forms of life.

Finally, this would provide the slightest justification for Honneth’s disregard for an explicit questioning of the systemic factors of the phenomenon of reification. In other words, this lack of consideration would not coincide with a separation between lifeworld and system, or lead to a lack of understanding of the structural causes or systemic factors at stake. Rather – as already mentioned – Honneth rejects a monological and all-encompassing economic explanation: as mentioned with regard to ‘Organized Self-Realization’, a sociological explanation is by no means extraneous to his interests, rather the key to the critique of social pathologies can only be found through broad normative criteria, which, in *Reification*, are found in the formal anthropology proposed in ‘Pathologies of the Social’ and in *The Struggle for Recognition*.⁹⁷ In other words Honneth appears to demand that even the critique of the economic system requires criteria for its own justification that cannot be found in the system itself.

In any case, *Reification* was negatively received almost unanimously, leading Honneth to concentrate and develop other dimensions in his own thinking, considered more appropriate to justify critical theory. These criticisms – which can be summarized in three groups – indirectly show that *Reification* represents the most radical attempt of anthropological justification of the critique and of intersubjective ‘reductionism’ carried out by Honneth: rather than trying to engage in a close confrontation with each of them, mentioning some issues opens the possibility to focus further on elements that have gone unnoticed or have not been properly evaluated.

The first criticism concerns the fact that Honneth considers the concept of reification exclusively in its *literal meaning*.⁹⁸ The fact that reification means to know, encounter or interact with a human as thing-like seems also to legitimize an observation by which this phenomenon is reduced to a “cognitive process”,⁹⁹ an

⁹⁶ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 84.

⁹⁷ Cf. Konstantinos Kavoulakos, ‘Reifying Reification: A Critique of Axel Honneth’s Theory of Reification’, in *Axel Honneth and the Critical Theory of Recognition*, ed. by Volker Schmitz (Basingstoke - New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 41–68 (p. 42).

⁹⁸ Cf. Andrew Feenberg, ‘Rethinking Reification’, in Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence. Aesthetics, Politics, Literature, 2011, pp. 101–20 (p. 102); Timo Jütten, ‘What Is Reification? A Critique of Axel Honneth’, *Inquiry*, 53.3 (2010), 235–56 (p. 236).

⁹⁹ Chari, p. 600.

epistemic problem,¹⁰⁰ or even to a “psychological pathology”.¹⁰¹ The ‘Rejoinder’ added to the 2008 English edition of *Reification* shows that the author acknowledges the problem of such an assumption. Here, Honneth maintains and clarifies that “Reification annuls the form of elementary recognition that ensures that we existentially experience other humans as the other of our self”.¹⁰² In this sense, it has to be distinguished from the *instrumentalization* of the other,¹⁰³ precisely because, in order to instrumentalize someone *as if* he/she was a thing, one must have already recognized someone as someone, with characteristics that allow one to instrumentalize him/her. But then, even one of the most explicit cases of dehumanization of the human being, slavery, cannot be considered as a reification in the literal sense.¹⁰⁴ These difficulties lead Honneth to admit “how improbable true cases of reification are for the social lifeworld as a whole” and to introduce a distinction between ‘real’ reification (which is difficult to trace socially) and “fictive reification”, which would include all those cases of instrumentalization or declassification of the other, such as racism, exploitation, slavery, and so on.¹⁰⁵

A second criticism concerns Honneth’s methodological path, which follows “the anthropological scheme ‘primary–secondary’” in order to address recognition and reification as genuine and distorted forms of praxis.¹⁰⁶ Consequentially, reification, as ‘false’, would be reduced as a “morally objectionable form of intersubjectivity”,¹⁰⁷ losing thereby the critical scope of the concept. This second aspect of the criticism can be answered by the already mentioned argument according to which ‘reification’ does not involve a moral error and therefore does not represent the violation of positive moral obligations: it rather means – explains Honneth in the ‘Rejoinder’ – a “violation of necessary presuppositions of our social lifeworld”.¹⁰⁸

So, – third – Honneth is accused of not being able to consider the historical-social factors of reification,¹⁰⁹ that is, that reification represents the ‘other side’ of the capitalistic production-system, commodities exchange and consumption. In other words, Honneth would fail to consider that reification not only possesses a *subjective*

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Quadflieg, p. 707.

¹⁰¹ David T. Schafer, ‘Pathologies of Freedom: Axel Honneth’s Unofficial Theory of Reification’, *Constellations*, 25.3 (2017), 421–31 (p. 422). This criticism also concerns Honneth’s later thinking about social pathologies in general: cf. Neal Harris, ‘Recovering the Critical Potential of Social Pathology Diagnosis’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2018, 1–18.

¹⁰² Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 154.

¹⁰³ Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, pp. 148–49.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Owen, p. 101.

¹⁰⁵ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁶ Kavoulakos, ‘Lukács’ Theory of Reification and the Tradition of Critical Theory’, p. 77.

¹⁰⁷ Hedrick, p. 183.

¹⁰⁸ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Chari, pp. 598–601; Stahl, ‘Verdinglichung Als Pathologie Zweiter Ordnung’, p. 737; Quadflieg, pp. 707–8.

dimension – the distorted fashions of praxis – but also, and foremost, an *objective* one – the consolidation of social systems that carry out such distortions.¹¹⁰ This involves three intertwined implications. First, Honneth’s approach would bring a “*methodological individualism*”:¹¹¹ Honneth in fact explains ‘reification’ as an attitude that always belongs to an individual subject. On a second level, this lack of consideration of the systemic and material factors leading to the adoption of certain reifying attitudes could be considered as the effect of an idealistic approach.¹¹² In this sense, Honneth’s perspective would not be individualistic, but his intersubjectivism would suffer from an excessive ahistoricity, by overly opposing system and lifeworld. Third, such an a-sociological approach would lead to blindness with respect to the concept of ‘second nature’, which is one of the cornerstones of Lukács’ concept of reification. Honneth therefore overlooks that the persons may appear as thing-like only because of their being encountered in certain social structures and contexts,¹¹³ the “naturalization” of which enables the self-reproduction of forms of power and ideology.¹¹⁴ Summarizing these (quite different) criticisms at the heart of Honneth’s approach, one could even say that his own definition of reification is reified,¹¹⁵ because the purely anthropological approach, which refuses to consider the systematic mechanisms and powers as the basis for the individual praxis, would itself lead to obscure the real relationships that lead subjects to suffer.¹¹⁶

While stressing that these criticisms do not do complete justice to Honneth’s perspective, this concept of reification seems to be unable to respond to its own premises and to represent in this sense a useful tool for the unfolding of critical theory. In the same way, the difficulty of grasping episodes of literally understood reification in social reality calls into question the normative potential of the specular concept of primary recognition. Although such concepts therefore seem to be a blunt tool for the purposes of a critical theory of society, I believe that the concept of recognition described in *Reification* represents a significant step in the Honnethian paradigm.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Kavoulakos, ‘Lukács’ Theory of Reification and the Tradition of Critical Theory’, p. 69.

¹¹¹ Kavoulakos, ‘Reifying Reification: A Critique of Axel Honneth’s Theory of Reification’, p. 54.

¹¹² Cf. Chari, pp. 598–600; Michael J. Thompson, ‘Ontology and Totality: Reconstructing Lukács’ Concept of Critical Theory’, in *Georg Lukács Reconsidered: Critical Essays in Politics, Philosophy and Aesthetics*, ed. by Michael J. Thompson (London - New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 229–50 (p. 235).

¹¹³ Cf. Hedrick, p. 183.

¹¹⁴ Michael J. Thompson, ‘Collective Intentionality, Social Domination, and Reification’, *Journal of Social Ontology*, 3.2 (2017), 207–29 (p. 208).

¹¹⁵ Cf. Kavoulakos, ‘Reifying Reification: A Critique of Axel Honneth’s Theory of Reification’, pp. 55–56.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Quadflieg, p. 702.

3.3 *The Priority of Recognition*

The redefinition of recognition therefore starts from the need to outline a form of genuine praxis, which would in some way persist even in acts of reification as a ‘forgotten’, according to a criterion of mutual non-exclusivity of both practices. Although Honneth now addresses very different authors,¹¹⁷ such as Lukács, Heidegger,¹¹⁸ Dewey, Adorno and Cavell, the aim is quite clear: to outline a holistic form of knowledge involved with the world, which attests ‘before’ the subject-object polarization at the basis of identity-thinking and the detached reifying attitude¹¹⁹ – or, better: a practical stance through which “the world is” foremost “disclosed to us as an inhabitable reality”.¹²⁰ Thereby, Honneth’s main aim is to outline the *genetic and conceptual priority of recognition (Anerkennen) over cognition (Erkennen)*.¹²¹ This aim is pursued through four steps, which can be summarized as follows.

First of all, drawing on Lukács’ concept of ‘empathetic engagement’ and on Heidegger’s ‘care’, Honneth intends to show that the most genuine way of relating to the world coincides with a practical involvement, from which the emotional and affective dimensions are not excluded.¹²² Even turning to some contemporary philosophical proposals, which see the possibility of assuming the ‘perspective of the participant’ as alternative to detached knowledge, Honneth argues that the concepts mentioned above cover a broader horizon and – above all – are able to embrace within themselves a “nonepistemic character”,¹²³ which would precede even the faculty to take the other’s perspective.

The second step is represented by the reference to Dewey. With him, Honneth intends to show that “every rational understanding of the world is always already

¹¹⁷ Cf. Bart Van Leeuwen, ‘Book Review: Axel Honneth, *Verdinglichung*’, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 9.2 (2006), 237–42 (p. 237).

¹¹⁸ Although the interest in Heidegger may raise more than one eyebrow, especially in a work that should mark Honneth’s rapprochement with Adorno, it is important to stress that Marcuse had already tried to translate the thought of *Being and Time* into Marxist terms, precisely to address the dispersion and sclerotization experienced in the capitalist system; cf. Andrew Feenberg, ‘Heidegger and Marcuse: On Reification and Concrete Philosophy’, in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, ed. by Francois Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson (New York: Boomsbury, 2013), pp. 171–76; Feenberg, ‘Rethinking Reification’, pp. 113–15. But Honneth and Marcuse are not the only one who retrieve Heidegger’s account on *das Man* and inauthenticity for critical purposes; cf. William Koch, ‘Phenomenology as Social Critique’, in *Horizons of Authenticity in Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Moral Psychology. Essays in Honor of Charles Guignon*, ed. by Hans Pedersen and Megan Altman (Dordrecht - Heidelberg: Springer, 2015), pp. 311–28. Moreover, Honneth’s engagement with Heidegger’s *Mitwelt*, albeit indirectly, is testified by an article that precedes by little *Reification*; cf. Axel Honneth, ‘On the Destructive Power of the Third: Gadamer and Heidegger’s Doctrine of Intersubjectivity’, *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 29.1 (2003), 5–21.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Varga, p. 21.

¹²⁰ Ferrara, ‘The Nugget and the Tailings. Reification Reinterpreted in the Light of Recognition’, p. 378.

¹²¹ Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 36.

¹²² Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, pp. 33–36.

¹²³ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 151.

bound up with a holistic form of experience, in which all elements of a given situation are qualitatively disclosed from a perspective of engaged involvement”.¹²⁴ ‘Reification’ would therefore coincide with forgetting the primacy of the qualitative dimension of our interaction with the world in which we live and with which we have always been ‘in tune’. And in this sense it is clarified that ‘detachment’ represents a *derived* possibility, rather than an ‘annihilation’ of the genuine interaction with the world. Taken together, empathetic engagement, care and involvement describe a certain form of knowledge, but even more so, a not “self-centered, egocentric” relationship with the world.¹²⁵

[...] our actions do not primarily have the character of an affectively neutral, cognitive stance toward the world, but rather that of an affirmative, existentially colored style of caring comportment. In living, we constantly concede to the situational circumstances of our world a value of their own, which brings us to be concerned with our relationship to them.¹²⁶

It is precisely this character of ‘decenteredness’ and care, proper to our ‘primordial’ way of being open to the world, that constitutes the bridge through which Honneth comes to the concept of recognition. This transition from care and the Deweyan concept of interaction to the idea of recognition – besides appearing not fully justified – brings with it a central problem: Honneth’s discourse oscillates several times between an idea of openness to the world and the delineation of primal intersubjective relationships. This is where Honneth’s claim actually resides: to bring openness to the world back to intersubjective relations of recognition, indicating that “what defines the ideal of genuine praxis is a norm of reciprocity”.¹²⁷ However, as will be seen in the next two passages, the discourse seems to be developed exclusively on human relationships and therefore to represent a basis only for taking the perspective of the participant. Moreover, this unmediated shift from ‘care’ and ‘interaction’ to ‘recognition’ entails an additional consequence. As Varga brilliantly points out, Honneth hesitates between two alternatives concerning the intentionality of cognition: on the one hand, this antecedent form of recognition seems to represent a pre-intentional openness to the world, which structures, on a (quasi-)transcendental level, our experience as a whole; on the other hand, recognition itself seems to require an intentional object,¹²⁸ which tends to coincide with an ‘other’ with human features – whether it be the other person or our own

¹²⁴ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 36.

¹²⁵ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 37.

¹²⁶ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 38.

¹²⁷ Butler, ‘Taking Another’s View: Ambivalent Implications’, p. 101.

¹²⁸ Cf. Varga, p. 24.

‘mental contents’. However, here it seems helpful to maintain that recognition so far would be the condition of thinking itself, and that too on a pre-epistemic level.¹²⁹

We can now move to the third step of Honneth’s argumentation, namely the *genetic priority* of recognition over cognition: here the first tension mentioned earlier appears immediately clear, because the issue seems to be narrowed to the self’s possibility for decentering its own position by taking on the perspective of the participant. It is useful to focus on three relative steps. The first step consists in referring to those thinkers – including Mead – according to whom the child’s ability to develop a symbolic thought hinges on the possibility of taking on the perspective of the other. However, this view seems to be marked by a “tendency towards cognitivism”,¹³⁰ which would be discredited also by more recent studies in developmental psychology.¹³¹ Thus, Honneth not only rejects this perspective, but argues that the very possibility of taking on the other’s perspective – instantiated in the Meadian phases of *play* and *game* – depends on an earlier stage of *emotional attachment* between infant and caregiver. This passage, which at first glance seems to contradict the centrality occupied by Mead in *The Struggle for Recognition*, does nothing more than reaffirm in different terms and redefine the phase of symbiosis and primary interactions described through the use of the object-relations theory – and this in an attempt to avoid the ambiguities of the concept of symbiosis, giving a greater weight to reciprocity.¹³² Hence – second – referring to Hobson and Tomasello’s research on autism, Honneth continues to outline the centrality of *emotional identification*. The child’s cognitive progress is made possible by the presence of a “emotional attachment to a psychological parent, for it is only by way of this antecedent identification that the child is able to be moved, motivated, and swept along by the presence of a concrete second person in such a way as to comprehend this person’s changes of attitude in an interested way”.¹³³ What is at issue is precisely the gestural-expressive reciprocity already described in ‘Invisibility’, i.e. a first form of pre-linguistic recognition. Before moving to the last step, it is useful to make two observations. On the one hand, it seems problematic to affirm that here, subjectivity is a product of recognitional acts,¹³⁴ precisely because this type of attachment and gestural reciprocity presupposes or requires a certain form of ipseity – albeit minimal – even on the part of the infant. This

¹²⁹ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth’s Social Philosophy*, p. 462.

¹³⁰ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 42.

¹³¹ For a concise but enlightening overview, cf. Somogy Varga and Shaun Gallagher, ‘Critical Social Philosophy, Honneth and the Role of Primary Intersubjectivity’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2012, 1–18.

¹³² Cf. Tommaso Sperotto, ‘Il Paradigma Honnethiano Del Riconoscimento: Interazione, Antropogenesi e Normatività’, *Rivista Internazionale Di Filosofia e Psicologia*, 8.3 (2017), 294–308.

¹³³ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, pp. 43–44.

¹³⁴ This is claimed, for example, by Schafer; cf. Schafer, p. 424.

solution therefore seems to sweep away the ambiguities and problems inherent in the concept of symbiosis. On the other hand, implying a nuclear form of subjectivity in the young child apparently denies the priority of the intersubjective over the subjective, since the interaction would be allowed by an implicit distinction, that of the partners being determined as ‘selves’. One would then fall into a modern concept of subjectivity, which would precede entering into a relationship with the other. Although it could be argued that the idea of symbiosis already represents a primarity of interaction on the two poles – and not a meta-subject in which the ‘ontological’ boundaries of the two selves are confused and opaque, but rather referring to their *practical identities* – it is clear that the only way out this deadlock is to think about the antecedence (of subjectivity on intersubjectivity or vice versa) outside of merely ‘temporal patterns’. This would lead in fact to a vicious circle, which – trivially said – would force us to indicate whether the egg or the chicken came first. Rather, it seems more fruitful to conceive of the “*equiprimordiality* of subjectivity and intersubjectivity”,¹³⁵ with vital consequences concerning the very concept of recognition too. According to this perspective, subjectivity arises within interpersonal interactions of which and in which it is itself actor and partner. It is only with the last step that Honneth demonstrates the genetic priority of recognizing over knowing. Drawing on the Adornian concept of *imitation* or *mimesis*, Honneth reaffirms the centrality of affectively-charged primary interactions for our access to the world and for our knowledge of objects. But, once again, this access to the world is seen as intersubjectively mediated. The qualitative knowledge of surrounding objects and their different facets would hinge on the possibility of assuming the different interaction-partners’ perspectives on them. Thus, by generalizing this multiplicity of views, the knowledge of a world consisting of constant and independent objects would depend essentially on a decentering of the ego’s perspective.¹³⁶ However, such a possibility of taking the other’s perspective on objects is in the first instance only allowed by an “involuntary openness, devotedness, or love” towards the other: that is, imitation. Without such an attachment, the child would not be able to place him/herself in the triangular relationship with the object, which is always seen in some way through the other’s eyes.

[...] it is from the perspective of a loved one that small children first gain an inkling of the abundance of existential significance that situational circumstances can have for people. Therefore, it is through this emotional attachment to a “concrete

¹³⁵ Varga, p. 24.

¹³⁶ Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth’s Social Philosophy*, p. 462. As Petherbridge points out, Honneth here seems to draw an object-relational account of Adorno’s mimesis; cf. Petherbridge, p. 178.

other” that a world of meaningful qualities is disclosed to a child *as* a world in which he must involve himself practically. Genesis and validity—or in Marxist terms, history and logic—should not be torn apart to such an extent that the conditions under which a child’s thinking originates lose their relevance for the categorial significance of our knowledge of the world.¹³⁷

As has already been partially seen in *The Struggle for Recognition*, that *genesis and validity are inseparable from each other* is a characteristic trait of Honneth’s normative theory. Thus, as far as knowing is concerned, that the cognitive process ‘starts’ from intersubjective relations would provide a justification for the notion that a ‘correct’, ‘genuine’ interaction with otherness, even in adulthood, must retain within itself the ‘memory’ of this intersubjectively-marked process of development: recognition, to a certain extent, *should* precede cognition.

With the fourth and final step, Honneth attempts to depict the *conceptual priority* of recognition, drawing on Stanley Cavell’s account on acknowledgment. But here again, the argumentation is narrowed to the intersubjective dimension, or more precisely, to the issue of the possibility of gaining access to “other minds”.¹³⁸ The issue at stake coincides with the investigation of the ways in which the mental states of the other are accessible to the interaction-partner. Since they do not possess the same characteristics of material objects, they would not be accessible according to a simple cognitive relationship based upon the subject-object polarity. In order to avoid skeptical conclusions about the existence of other minds, Cavell draws two arguments. According to the first, we can conceive our relation to the other’s mental states in the same terms as we grasp this other’s relation with its own ‘inner contents’.¹³⁹ In other words, cognition of the other’s mental state would be disclosed in the first place by the awareness of ourselves as the other’s *alter*: this would ‘bring’ us in such a position, thanks to which we can conceive of the other’s inner life as comparable with our own. On the other hand, the knowledge of the other’s interior state is not based on a contemplative gaze, but on the verbal indications through which the other makes us aware of its own emotions and thoughts. These indications require the “listener’s ‘sympathy’” to be intuited, approached, understood,¹⁴⁰ leading to a form of knowledge that is characterized more as proximity than as observation. Therefore, “a certain stance, in which a subject feels existentially involved in the emotional world of another subject, must precede all possible cognitive knowledge of that other subject’s mental states”.¹⁴¹ Even if this

¹³⁷ Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, pp. 45–46.

¹³⁸ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 47.

¹³⁹ Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, pp. 48–49; Ferrara, ‘The Nugget and the Tailings. Reification Reinterpreted in the Light of Recognition’, p. 379.

¹⁴⁰ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 49.

¹⁴¹ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 49.

argument displays a certain validity solely with regard to “the sphere of interpersonal communication”,¹⁴² Honneth believes it has provided sufficient arguments to justify his “recognition-precedes-cognition claim”.¹⁴³

However, two aspects concerning the very nature of this form of recognition need further clarification. In the first place, it is noteworthy that this notion of antecedent recognition oscillates between numerous connotations, which find their unity more in the concepts of imitation, attachment, engagement, or identification than in the idea of mutual recognition, as it is normatively conceived in *The Struggle for Recognition*. Secondly, the pre-epistemic emotional identification – above all with regard to the ‘genetic argument’ – can lead to some ambiguities, that is, to overburden ‘positive’ emotions – such as love, caring, etc. – and to leave aside any contribution to the development of ‘negative’ intersubjective forms and thus provide an unrealistic model of intersubjectivity.

As for the first issue, even if only in a footnote, Honneth explicitly refers to ‘Invisibility’ and clarifies the relationship between this form of recognition and the concepts of love, respect, esteem outlined in *The Struggle for Recognition*.

[...] I now assume that this “existential” mode of recognition provides a foundation for all other, more substantial forms of recognition in which the affirmation of other persons’ specific characteristics is at issue.¹⁴⁴

This antecedent form of recognition would therefore constitute the threshold that allows us to grasp the other as a human being and therefore as an appropriate addressee of those gestures of recognition indicated as ‘substantial’ because they are connoted from the historical-cultural point of view – love, respect, esteem. In other words, the possibility of normatively recognizing the other would be disclosed by the fact that he or she is already recognized as such, in a non-reified way, as a human being.

The answer to the second question – the presumed ‘positivity’ of emotional identification or empathetic engagement – proceeds in the same direction as well.

Thus the adjective “positive,” [...] mustn’t be understood as referring to positive, friendly emotions. This adjective instead signifies the existential fact—which certainly has implications for our affects—that we necessarily affirm the value of another person in the stance of recognition, even if we might curse or hate that person at a given moment. [...] even in cases where we recognize other persons in an emotionally negative way, we still always have a residual intuitive sense of not having done full justice to their personalities.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 51.

¹⁴³ Jütten, ‘What Is Reification? A Critique of Axel Honneth’, pp. 239–40.

¹⁴⁴ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 90, note 70.

¹⁴⁵ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 51.

After having clarified these issues at least partially – and planning to relaunch a more in-depth discussion in the next paragraph – it is useful to turn to the sections in which Honneth once again devotes himself to the concept of reification and its threefold dimension. In doing so, the main interest that guides us is not questioning again the attempt to re-actualize the Lukácsian concept, but focusing rather on the threefold dimension specularly attributed to recognition: towards others, the external world and one’s own self. In fact, it is only through such an explanation that one can fully understand how Honneth redefines recognition in this work, while so far we have focused almost exclusively on its precedence over other practical forms.

3.3.1 Recognition as Apperception of Human Features

As we approach the concept of the reification of others, we can briefly say that it coincides with those cases in which “a person unlearns something he or she previously and intuitively mastered”.¹⁴⁶ That is, to consider the other as a person. At a fundamental level, this facet of reification could be plainly named “*misrecognition*”.¹⁴⁷ Honneth depicts two different dynamics. First, just as by Adorno’s explanation of ‘organization’, the matter concerns the making themselves independent on the part of the ends. In our practical interactions, we can pursue an aim so energetically that what is different from it – the others around us – become abstract from their human characteristics. This can be expressed by the example of the tennis player, who, fossilized in the purpose of the victory, forgets that her opponent is actually her best friend.¹⁴⁸ In the ‘Rejoinder’, responding to Butler’s criticisms, Honneth rejects this example and maintains that independent aims do not always lead to reifying attitudes. Rather, mentioning the case of a soldier about to annihilate the enemy and the Holocaust,¹⁴⁹ he retracts his thesis, claiming that only “the independence of those practices whose successful execution demands that we ignore all the human properties of our fellow human beings can lead to intersubjective reification”.¹⁵⁰ However, I argue that it already emerges clearly from the distinction between reification and objectification that not every abstraction of purpose coincides with a reifying act. Moreover, including the aims of acting in the consideration of the matter – albeit comprehensible – exacerbates the tension and the overlap between the normative and socio-ontological/anthropological dimensions.

¹⁴⁶ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 79.

¹⁴⁷ Ferrara, ‘The Nugget and the Tailings. Reification Reinterpreted in the Light of Recognition’, p. 383.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 59.

¹⁴⁹ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, pp. 156, 158.

¹⁵⁰ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, pp. 156–57.

The second case of misrecognition taken into consideration is not so intimately embodied in practical acts, but rather concerns the consequences that certain models of thought may have on our evaluation of social facts, groups or people.¹⁵¹ This is the case with discrimination of all kinds in which, through the assumption of ideological models, “antecedent recognition is retroactively denied”.¹⁵² Here, too, however, the normative implications are quite clear: it emerges that reification in the form of misrecognition causes moral suffering.

But these observations, rather than reopening the discussion on reification, are useful for a better understanding of what Honneth means by ‘primary recognition’ and to highlight some respective problems. In fact, although Honneth intends to characterize this previous form of recognition in pre-normative terms – so that it precedes the forms of love, respect and esteem – when such acts of recognition are denied they lead to cases of clear normative matrix, such as racism, exclusion or even the annihilation of other human beings. The following long quote from the ‘Rejoinder’, in addition to providing the clearest definition of the nature of this form of recognition, illuminates the relationship between this antecedent dimension and the normative one.

[...] this stance itself has no normative orientation. Although it compels us to take up some sort of position, it does not determine the direction or tone of that position [...]. Therefore, this type of recognition is still far from the threshold beyond which we can speak at all of norms and principles of reciprocal recognition. Normatively substantial forms of recognition such as are embodied in social institutions [...] represent instead various manners in which the existential scheme of experience opened up by elementary recognition gets “filled out” historically. Without the experience that other individuals are fellow humans, we would be incapable of equipping this schema with moral values that guide and limit our actions. Therefore, elementary recognition must be carried out, and we must feel existential sympathy for the other, before we can learn to orient ourselves toward norms of recognition that compel us to express certain specific forms of concern or benevolence. The implication for the structure of my own theory of recognition is that I must insert a stage of recognition before the previously discussed forms, one that represents a kind of transcendental condition.¹⁵³

3.3.2 A Triangular Relationship with the World

Lukács’ concept of reification, however, also concerns the relationship with material objects. Honneth therefore has the difficult task of providing an account of genuine interaction with the ‘external’ world through the “narrow basis” provided

¹⁵¹ Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 59.

¹⁵² Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 81.

¹⁵³ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 152.

by recognition.¹⁵⁴ In contrast to what could be defined as “*technical fetishism*”,¹⁵⁵ the need is to describe a mode of interaction with the world that is able to let objects emerge in their *independence* and *qualitative peculiarities*: this authentic mode of interaction – as opposed to a calculating detachment and instrumentalization – must therefore be able to coincide with an acknowledgment of the objects’ ‘autonomy’ (for example, of nature), but at the same time with a practical involvement with them. Honneth’s argument revolves around the pivotal role played by the infant’s mimetic and gestural interactions in structuring the experience itself,¹⁵⁶ and so again refers to Adorno. If on the one hand – as we have already seen – the primary interactions constitute the condition of possibility for the mentation itself, the child gradually learns to distinguish attitudes towards objects from the objects themselves, generalizing the multiplicity of perspectives. On the other hand, this mediation of the figures of attachment to objects would be maintained by the subject, who would then relate to the objects according to those facets that are considered worthy by relevant partners. Through the imitation of other persons, we relate to the object “by endowing it with additional components of meaning”, which are triangulated by the perspective of the loved ones.¹⁵⁷

It could then be argued that Honneth fails to describe a “non-anthropocentric value” to nature and physical world;¹⁵⁸ or, conversely, that, *for us*, “objectively given objects are those that are intersubjectively given”,¹⁵⁹ which concerns our necessarily cultural access to the world. However, although this later dimension is surely present in Honneth’s thinking horizon, I think that here the argument is slightly different.

With Adorno, we could add that this antecedent recognition also means respecting those aspects of meaning in an object that human beings accord that object. If it is indeed the case that in recognizing other persons we must at the same time recognize their subjective conceptions and feelings about nonhuman objects, then we could also speak without hesitation of a potential “reification” of nature [...]. We then perceive animals, plants, or things in a merely objectively identifying way, without being aware that these objects possess a multiplicity of existential meanings for the people around us.¹⁶⁰

What Honneth argues here is therefore not a phenomenological or hermeneutic argument, nor does he intend to reduce cultural mediation – which can be understood both as a transcendental condition of possibility for cognitive processes,

¹⁵⁴ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 61.

¹⁵⁵ Ferrara, ‘The Nugget and the Tailings. Reification Reinterpreted in the Light of Recognition’, p. 383.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Butler, ‘Taking Another’s View: Ambivalent Implications’, p. 112.

¹⁵⁷ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 62.

¹⁵⁸ van Leeuwen, p. 239.

¹⁵⁹ Butler, ‘Taking Another’s View: Ambivalent Implications’, p. 116.

¹⁶⁰ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 63.

and as media's influence, as mechanism of power – to the intersubjective dimension. Even less does he seek to pursue an idealistic view whereby objects are enclosed within an anthropocentric perspective. Rather, the issue at stake concerns – much more modestly – the fact that our apperception of the objects' qualitative value is inevitably mediated by the figures around us, proposing what could be named as an Adornian account on Habermas' intersubjectivistic turn. This does not mean that all forms of interaction with the world are reduced to this dimension. If, therefore, from a genetic point of view it is true that Honneth attributes a fundamental role to the antecedent recognition for the structuring of the experience itself, the recognition of objects represents only an indirect form; in recognizing the other we are compelled to consider the meanings (even personal, affective) that our partner attributes to physical objects. However, this argument does not seem to do complete justice to the Honnethian assumption that recognition precedes cognition. Rather, the use of Adorno seems to concern a single dimension of experience, not its totality: the relationships of recognition, besides allowing a harmonic structuring of the cognitive faculties in the child, allow us to deal with objects, perceiving their qualitative value according to an attitude of respect, through which objects manifest themselves as concerning, engaging and involving *us*. Such an attitude would be borrowed triangularly from the stance we live in relation to our interaction partners. Recognition towards the world is therefore an asymmetrical *reflection* of the recognition we perform towards others: whereas the terms 'reification' and 'antecedent recognition' can be used in a direct sense when referring to intersubjective relations, they can be meant only indirectly when referring to physical objects or non-human living beings.¹⁶¹

3.3.3 Self-Recognition as Inner Proximity

The last dimension of reification – and therefore of recognition – to be dealt with is that which concerns the relationship with one's own self. In this case, it seems legitimate to use the binomial "*inauthenticity*"/authenticity.¹⁶² Although these expressions can be problematic for various reasons, especially in the context of a critical theory of society, letting ourselves be guided by the conceptual constellations evoked by these terms is enlightening for three main reasons. First of all, the anthropological connotations with which the concept of reification is described – a constant 'decay' from a more original mode – allows us to glimpse a deeper

¹⁶¹ Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, pp. 63–64.

¹⁶² Ferrara, 'The Nugget and the Tailings. Reification Reinterpreted in the Light of Recognition', p. 383.

connection with Heidegger's thought than what appears in the written word.¹⁶³ Secondly, 'Organized Self-Realization' represents an interesting point of contact between the concept of self-realization and that of authenticity. Although in negative and critical terms, this testifies that Honneth approaches a comparison between the two terms: they could coincide if the latter were to be interpreted at a formal level, as a possibility of harmonic self-expression within a certain biographical continuity. Thirdly, the term authenticity can summarize a series of Honnethian contributions belonging to *Reification's* chronological period, which testify to the intention to deepen the idea of 'undamaged self-relationship' expressed in *The Struggle for Recognition*. In this case, therefore, it should not come as a surprise that this form of recognition towards one's own self, while attesting to a socio-ontological and anthropological level, has normative implications, given the effective closeness with concepts such as self-confidence,¹⁶⁴ "inner aliveness",¹⁶⁵ "self-appropriation",¹⁶⁶ "inner freedom", or "inward tolerance".¹⁶⁷ The surprising aspect of *Reification*, however, is that this undamaged self-relation is described in terms of a recognition relationship.

Again, Honneth proceeds negatively. First of all, he takes into consideration two reifying forms of relationship with one's own inner contents, both of whose shortcomings – even though they are diametrically opposed modalities – is that of considering the relationship with the latter as comparable with the relationship with physical objects. The first form of reification towards oneself is derived from the concept of *detectivism* developed by David Finkelstein. According to this view, the subject would act as "a detective who possesses privileged knowledge of his own desires and feelings", who 'encounters' and 'discovers' his own mental states as if their existence preceded the gaze of an "inward eye".¹⁶⁸ This perspective is criticized by what could be identified as the second form of self-reification and which is called *constructivism*, or, again referring to Finkelstein, 'constitutivism'. This view takes its clues from the statement that our "mental states generally possess a rather diffuse and highly indeterminate substance that cannot be grasped" by the cognitive stance outlined by detectivist approaches.¹⁶⁹ If, therefore, mental states, desires and sensations appear to us as not perfectly defined, it implies an active role for us in their constitution through linguistic elaboration. However, this solution, which in

¹⁶³ Cf. Schafer, p. 424.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 45; Piromalli, p. 247.

¹⁶⁵ Honneth, 'Postmodern Identity and Object-Relations Theory: On the Seeming Obsolescence of Psychoanalysis', p. 239.

¹⁶⁶ Axel Honneth, 'Appropriating Freedom. Freud's Conception of Individual Self-Relation', p. 128.

¹⁶⁷ Axel Honneth, 'Democracy and Inner Freedom. Alexander Mitscherlich's Contribution to Critical Social Theory', pp. 160, 164.

¹⁶⁸ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 67.

¹⁶⁹ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 68.

Honneth's opinion presents fewer problems than detectivism, "transforms our desires and feelings nevertheless into products of our own free decision".¹⁷⁰ Simplifying, one could say that the shortcoming of detectivism coincides with considering mental states as 'prior' to reflexive activity, while the limit of constructivism lies in conceiving them as products, and therefore 'posterior'. Sociologically speaking, both these forms of reifying one's inner contents would be detectable in those institutionalized practices – such as job interviews or interaction through social media – in which subjects are constantly urged to exhibit and elaborate themselves through forms of self-portrayal.¹⁷¹ In this sense, the concepts of detectivism and constructivism could be used for the aims of an ideology critique, since they could be considered not "as deficient descriptions of the original mode in which we relate to our mental life, but as appropriate descriptions of deficient modes of self-relationship".¹⁷²

Conversely, the 'original' or undamaged form of self-relationship is depicted by mentioning different figures and concepts: Winnicott's idea that psychic health hinges on a playful dealing with desires, Aristotle's concepts of self-friendship and self-love, or Bieri's account on appropriation of one's own desires.¹⁷³ But above all, Honneth tries to outline a middle way between detectivism and constructivism. While the constructivist emphasis on the role of the linguistic articulation is an element to be valued, the passivity of the detectivist approach does justice, from a phenomenological point of view, to the fact that the reflexive elaboration of mental states always has a 'starting material'. The relationship with the inner contents is therefore characterized by an activity that can only be articulated towards a *something*, which in fact can appear to us even as extraneous and uncomfortable. In this sense, *self-recognition* would coincide with an *inner proximity*, which approaches the inner contents as something worthy of expression. To this primary mode of self-relation Honneth gives the name of *expressionism*.

According to this model, we neither merely perceive our mental states as objects nor construct them by manifesting them to others. Instead, we articulate them in the light of feelings that are familiar to us. A subject who relates to himself in this original manner must necessarily regard his own feelings and desires as worthy of articulation.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 69.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, pp. 82–83; Gonçalo Marcelo, 'Recognition and Critical Theory Today: An Interview with Axel Honneth', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 39.2 (2013), 209–21 (pp. 218–19).

¹⁷² Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 72.

¹⁷³ Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, pp. 65–66, 74.

¹⁷⁴ Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, p. 75.

3.4 Some Open Issues: *Ontology or Normativity, Recognition or Identification*

The concept of recognition described in *Reification* is also the subject of numerous criticisms, many of which contradict each other, an aspect that reveals a certain ambiguity in Honneth's argument. If, however, this work seems to represent a dead end for the purposes of a normative and critical social theory, I believe that it contains some important indications for the definition of the concept of recognition both in Honneth and in general.

In this case, the criticisms can be summed up in three groups: the first concerns the 'ahistoric' and 'asocial' nature of the argument, the second the all-encompassing account of recognition and the third the relationship between antecedent recognition and normativity.

The first set of criticisms is therefore inextricably tied to those aimed at the redefinition of the concept of reification. In fact, the bonds of recognition described by Honneth seem to be exclusively interpersonal, a "purified" – because out of history – "concept of intersubjectivity":¹⁷⁵ in this sense, the anthropological investigation seems to be superordinate to the sociological one,¹⁷⁶ since even in this work every normative implication is derived from the singular I-Thou relation,¹⁷⁷ to which the role of institutions (in the broadest meaning of the term) is external, even up to being marginal.¹⁷⁸ The references to institutionalized practices – which in any case concern 'reification' and not 'recognition' – seem to be episodic and do not flow into the process of defining the concepts at stake.

Secondly, Honneth would propose an "overstretching" concept of recognition,¹⁷⁹ which serves as the basis for the unfolding of every human faculty. This raises a problem possessing two facets. On the one hand, the "transcendental and genetic exclusivity placed on recognition",¹⁸⁰ beside not seeming very plausible, diminishes the contribution of other dimensions and dynamics that contribute to the development of human beings and other modes of interaction that go beyond the spectrum of intersubjective gestures of recognition. Therefore, if on the one hand 'recognition' does not seem to be a sufficiently broad concept able to encompass all these dimensions, on the other hand the concept itself seems to be distorted. In fact, although the 'modest' account of recognition towards the physical world can avoid such criticism, it does not fully respect the assumption that recognition precedes

¹⁷⁵ Chari, p. 588.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Butler, 'Taking Another's View: Ambivalent Implications', p. 101.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth's Social Philosophy*, p. 464.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Chari, p. 598.

¹⁷⁹ Varga, p. 10 and ff.; cf. also Piromalli, p. 246.

¹⁸⁰ Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth's Social Philosophy*, p. 464.

cognition. More than one perplexity can also be raised about the adequacy of using the term ‘recognition’ as far as the self-relation is concerned. Although (Sartre’s and) Cavell’s argument may possibly provide a justification in this direction, since it shows a connection between our recognition of the other and the relationship between the other and its own inner contents, Honneth cannot be said to fully develop this aspect. With this work, therefore, one can raise the doubt that Honneth blurs the characteristic traits of recognition in the direction of a more general and generic idea of identification or, more simply, interaction, reducing the latter accordingly.¹⁸¹

The third group of criticisms concerns the relationship between the concept of ‘antecedent recognition’ and normativity. A first criticism can be stated as follows. This form of recognition should be neutral from a normative point of view: affective involvement in the early stages of childhood would not imply any stance of respect for the other or for his autonomy.¹⁸² But, if so – that is, if it represents an all-encompassing foundation for every intersubjective stance regardless of moral principles (and therefore also for hatred, disrespect, instrumentalization and racism), it is rather unlikely that such an intersubjective form could be a basis for ethics or social criticism.¹⁸³ However, because of the constant tension between description and prescription in Honneth’s texts,¹⁸⁴ this concept of social-ontological recognition seems to imply some normative account¹⁸⁵ – Honneth in fact admits that this form of identification urges subjects to assume a certain stance. Then – a second criticism – the delineation of the antecedent recognition would coincide with the position of an *a priori* ethical ‘good’, which prevents, among other things, the development of a multipolar account of intersubjectivity.¹⁸⁶ Moreover – third criticism – if such an essential involvement were at the basis of some normative value, this would certainly not be due to the fact that involvement *per se* possesses some relevance from this point of view:¹⁸⁷ that is, even if antecedent recognition possibly conveyed any normative value, it would not itself represent one of them.

Certainly, Honneth proposes in this work a *two-level account of recognition*.¹⁸⁸ As Lear insightfully points out, on the one side there is *recognition-as-sine-qua-non* for any real human development at all; on the other, *recognition-as-paradigm* of healthy

¹⁸¹ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth’s Social Philosophy*, p. 463.

¹⁸² Cf. Lear, p. 134.

¹⁸³ Cf. Raymond Geuss, ‘Philosophical Anthropology and Social Criticism’, in *Reification. A New Look at an Old Idea*, ed. by Martin Jay (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 120–30 (p. 127).

¹⁸⁴ Koch, p. 313.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Petherbridge, p. 179.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Petherbridge, p. 180.

¹⁸⁷ Butler, ‘Taking Another’s View: Ambivalent Implications’, p. 104.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Varga, p. 20.

human development.¹⁸⁹ If by the first form he means recognition as a (quasi)transcendental condition for the ‘entry’ of subjects into the web of intersubjective relations and the social world itself (also with its objects)¹⁹⁰ – which seems to be the object of *Reification* – the second definition of recognition would describe the normative and institutionally instantiated dimension depicted in *The Struggle for Recognition*, which would help to constitute the conditions for an undamaged practical identity and for a free path of self-realization. This distinction, although admitted by Honneth, brings with it numerous problems. In fact, such a separation can be thought of in three ways. The first two coincide with two criticisms already exposed: either it is a sharp distinction, and the antecedent recognition has no normative implication, or it constitutes an ethical good, but its ‘original’ character seems to cast a substantial shadow on its normative character. A third possibility is that which I think is embraced by Honneth: the normative constraint proper to antecedent recognition invites us to take a certain position in front of a human being, recognized as embodying human features through this precise form of recognition. Accordingly, this anteriority of recognition should not be conceived in ahistorical terms, since such ‘awareness’ of the other as a human being is instantiated in every gesture of recognition within our social, determined world; even hate towards someone presupposes a preliminary recognition, for the simple fact that we cannot hate a chair or a bookshelf – unless it is the object of a triangular relationship in which our position towards someone is ‘projected’ upon it. In this sense – in response to Geuss’ criticism – the ‘usefulness’ of this concept for the purposes of social criticism is clearly indirect: it does not in itself set any stringent normative criteria – given, among others, the unsuccessful consequences of Honneth’s re-elaboration of ‘reification’. However, it does pose a fundamental element to be able to develop a critique of society through the concept of recognition, because it clarifies the structure of this very concept.

However, it is precisely at this conceptual level that most of the problems condense and tensions emerge in the use of the term recognition.¹⁹¹ In fact, by describing the concept of antecedent recognition by referring to ideas such as care, involvement, imitation and emotional attachment, Honneth describes a non-mutual and non-reciprocal praxis. Moreover, when referring to self-relation, such an attitude of familiarity with inner contents seems to have the traits of a (albeit affective and participatory) cognition (*Erkennen*) more so than of a recognition (*Anerkennen*). Moreover, as already mentioned, the reference to Heidegger and

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Lear, p. 134.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Ferrara, ‘The Nugget and the Tailings. Reification Reinterpreted in the Light of Recognition’, p. 380.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth’s Social Philosophy*, p. 463.

Dewey strongly questions the intentional character of this form of recognition. In fact, if on the one hand the very concept of recognition would imply an intentional (human) object, thus describing a certain knowing-stance endowed with a precise addressee, on the other hand the Honnethian depiction of the genuine praxis describes more a pre-intentional openness to the world, that is, of a certain stance that lets otherness in general emerge in all its qualities and independence. According to Varga, embracing this second interpretative hypothesis would be more fruitful, precisely because antecedent recognition does not possess a precise addressee, but rather opens up the very horizon of the experience. Thus, then, it would be preferable to replace the expression ‘primary recognition’ with “affective attunement or ‘acquaintedness’”, which have the merit of maintaining the priority of the intersubjective over the subjective, while avoiding the normative and conceptual implications proper to the concept of recognition.¹⁹² This solution effectively solves many of the contradictions highlighted by critical literature, avoids the improper stretching of the concept of recognition and dissolves the tension between it and the idea of identification, while maintaining what could be considered the main thrust of the work: interpersonal interactions have a major, indeed primal role in the constitution of the cognitive faculties of the subject and the human person and thus in their relation with the world. However, I would argue that the concept of antecedent recognition should be maintained at least in its ‘epistemological’ dimension, thus drawing closer to how it is described in ‘Invisibility’. Every normative act of recognition can be articulated on the basis of a cognitive potential which, at the same time, is both instantiated within it and represents its foundation. As Honneth points out in an interview in 2010, “before we, in a society, can even begin to differentiate between different forms of recognition, we must recognize each other as human beings”.¹⁹³ Therefore, in Honneth’s view, this two-level conception of recognition, albeit the aforementioned ambiguities, must be maintained.

¹⁹² Varga, p. 23.

¹⁹³ Honneth, Jakobsen, and Lysaker, p. 165.

4. *Freedom's Right* and the 'Historical Turn'

To take a new step in reconstructing the unfolding of Honneth's thought, it is necessary to turn to the fundamental work published in 2011, *Freedom's Right*. This work contains numerous variations and represents a shift in the equilibrium proper to the Honnethian paradigm. In general, it more explicitly deals with contents and issues closer to political philosophy – such as the theory of justice and freedom, to the extent that one could say Honneth himself has changed his aims, moving from a theory of recognition to a theory of freedom,¹ outlining not a paradigm of social change, but one of social reproduction.² In my opinion, these expressions mark too sharply this change of perspective, which Honneth himself describes as a learning process of an almost implicit nature.³ This means that it is rather difficult to categorize his thought into distinct and different phases which would correspond to reconsiderations or explicit retractions; rather, it seems more useful to highlight the continuity of the evolution, contextualizing and characterizing the actual changes as the taking shape and unfolding of dimensions largely already present not only in *The Struggle for Recognition*, but even previous to the paradigm of recognition itself. In fact, it remains almost impossible, by Honneth's thought, to separate social reproduction and social change, just as freedom and recognition are deeply intertwined with each other, starting from the concept of self-realization.

However, Honneth certainly changes the infrastructure of his own thought, proposing what he himself calls a "historical transition":⁴ in exposing a social theory of justice referring mainly to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, the main focus shifts from the *practices* of recognition and the related moral grammar of conflict to the *spheres* of recognition and their institutionalized normative principles. As we have already seen – especially in the focus on 'Invisibility' – the definition of recognition practices requires a 'previous' dimension of reference, defined by Honneth as *second nature*. That is, a gesture of recognition 'receives' its own evaluative guidelines only within a normative, qualitative, social horizon, which also opens up the 'epistemological'

¹ Cf. Teixeira, 'The Sociological Roots and Deficits of Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition', p. 600.

² Cf. Teixeira, 'The Sociological Roots and Deficits of Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition', p. 605.

³ Cf. Axel Honneth and Morten Ruffnsøe-Møller, 'Freedom, Solidarity, and Democracy. An Interview with Axel Honneth', in *Recognition and Freedom. Axel Honneth's Political Thought*, ed. by Odin Lysaker and Jonas Jakobsen (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 260–82 (pp. 265–66).

⁴ Honneth, Jakobsen, and Lysaker, p. 166.

possibilities of such intersubjective practices. Certainly, this conceptualization is not absent in *The Struggle for Recognition*, a work in which, however, the action-theoretical approach leaves the institutional complex in the background, making recognition appear as an act that takes place exclusively between individuals. In this ‘new phase’ of his thought, on the other hand, closer to the positions of Siep, Honneth elaborates a theory of institutional spheres, whose already-given principles of recognition play a historicizing role on the entire paradigm of recognition, to sharpen the universalistic drifts and ambiguities of *The Struggle for Recognition* and *Reification*,⁵ which in turn are tied to the so-called anthropological justification. This shift can be grasped by referring to the following quotation from *Redistribution or Recognition?*

Before I can attempt to interpret distribution conflicts according to the “moral grammar” of a struggle for recognition, a short explanation is required of what it can mean to speak of capitalist society as an institutionalized recognition order.⁶

In other words, in order to analyze the normative and motivational logics that trigger social movements, i.e. the emancipatory drives that the critical theorist must be able to ‘unearth’, it would be necessary to focus on the set of normative principles within which these movements act. In fact, they perform both an informative function – that is, they necessarily form the expectations and aspirations for recognition, which can only be based on an already present ethical ensemble – and an emancipatory one – because their institutional realization can always be questioned and perfected ‘from within’.

Clearly, the extent of the matter at stake prevents a detailed analysis of all the issues, which can be addressed from multiple points of view. Rather, we will focus on the changes undergone by the paradigm of recognition, which is inevitably influenced by the enrichment of the normative-institutional framework that Honneth faces with greater determination.

In the first paragraph of this chapter, we will focus on *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom*, a text that gives us back the Spinoza Lectures held by Honneth in 1999. In a theoretical context similar to that outlined in *The Struggle for Recognition* and ‘Pathologies of the Social’, Honneth turns for the first time to Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, taking its first steps in structuring a theory of justice in terms of social freedom. Here, the analysis will focus on the characteristics of the social spheres of recognition – and in particular on the dimension of *education* (*Bildung*) – and on the concept of *right*, which clarifies the relationship between

⁵ Cf. Honneth and Marcelo, pp. 210–12; Honneth, Jakobsen, and Lysaker, pp. 167–68.

⁶ Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 137.

individual expectations and the principles of recognition – i.e. their justification, their ‘right to be’ (4.1).

The focus of the second paragraph is instead oriented on the exchange with Nancy Fraser contained in *Redistribution or Recognition?* The analysis of this text, rich in its implications, finds its fulcrum in the concept of *surplus of validity*, which effectively shows the change of emphasis of the Honnethian theory: the historically institutionalized principles of recognition would have a normative significance able to transcend the contingent, providing a new evaluation apparatus with respect to the claims of social movements, thus allowing an elaboration of an idea of progress that should not refer directly to an anthropological theory (4.2).

The last paragraph turns to *Freedom’s Right*, that is to say to Honneth’s attempt not only to ‘re-actualize’ Hegel, but to take up his theoretical challenge in the contemporary philosophical context. In this case, our attention will be drawn to recognition relations, whose specific characteristics seem at times generalized in the direction of a more neutral theory of intersubjectivity. In the course of this analysis, the two key concepts are certainly those of *normative reconstruction* and *social freedom*, which represent the aforementioned fulcrums of this ‘second phase’ of Honneth’s thought: the reconstruction of the recognition order and its institutionalized normative principles and an outline of recognition in terms that strongly distinguish Honneth’s theory from identity politics: the affirmation of the other through recognition does not concern already-formed cultural identities, but represents the mutual condition for the realization of freedom, that is, for being oneself with the other (4.3).

4.1 Ethical Life as ‘Place’ of and for Freedom

The Spinoza Lectures held by Honneth in 1999, then published under the title ‘Suffering from Indeterminacy’ (hereafter, we will refer to the 2010 edition *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom*),⁷ represent the first Honnethian attempt to deal with Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. And if, on the one hand, Honneth now states that even in this mature text we can find the original intention of the Jena period,⁸ on the other hand, taking this work as an object of confrontation inevitably alters certain

⁷ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*.

⁸ Axel Honneth, *The I in We. Studies in the Theory of Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), pp. vii–viii; Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, pp. 18, 50 ff.; Robert B. Pippin, ‘What Is the Question for Which Hegel’s Theory of Recognition Is the Answer?’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 8.2 (2000), 155–72 (p. 155).

aspects of Honneth's perspective.⁹ It is therefore useful not to take for granted this new subject of re-elaboration: in fact, if Honneth's view remains almost unchanged with regard to the assumption of suffering as starting point for critique, to the action-theoretical approach, and to the identification of the spheres of recognition as social condition for individual self-realization, the main focus seems to shift to a definition of the Hegelian enterprise as a theory of justice concerning freedom and a greater concentration on the structure of the social spheres. As Siep puts it, the interest that the Hegelian work can represent for contemporary thought is constituted by the fact that the theory exposed in the *Grundlinien* would harmonize a theory of *social differentiation* – suitable for interpreting the complexity of modern-contemporary societies – with a paradigm of *normative integration* – thus providing an alternative to systemic sociological views.¹⁰ By sharing this persuasion, Honneth states that the notion of *Sittlichkeit* would be capable: a) to provide a socio-ontological model for the coordination of anti-atomistic and anti-utilitarian *social action*; b) to describe its own *reproduction and development* as necessarily anchored to relationships of recognition; c) to develop – and this is the real novelty – a theory of justice deeply tied to the *diagnosis of time*,¹¹ according to which the normative guidelines of society (and of social theory) must be derived from the analysis of the conditions of the instantiation of *freedom*, which is in turn defined as leading an unharmed autonomous existence.¹²

In any case, it is important to underline that these lessons are precisely an internal and indirect comparison with the *Philosophy of Right*: in other words, it is difficult

⁹ For a detailed overview of the Honneth-Hegel relationship cf. Andreas Busen, Lisa Herzog, and Paul Sørensen, 'Mit Hegel Zu Einer Kritischen Theorie Der Freiheit. Eine Heranführung an Honneths *Das Recht Der Freiheit*', *Zeitschrift Für Politische Theorie*, 3.2 (2012), 247–70 (pp. 251–58).

¹⁰ Cf. Ludwig Siep, 'The Contemporary Relevance of Hegel's Practical Philosophy', in *Hegel. New Directions*, ed. by Katerina Delgiorgi (London - New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 143–57 (p. 144).

¹¹ Honneth explains in an interview that "a necessary first step" in the enterprise of drawing a theory of justice "is a diagnosis which informs us whether or not the understandings of freedom are somewhat justified, and in that sense I see a clear link between the two kinds of enterprise [...]. As long as the understanding of freedom is to some degree an incorrect one, a one-sided one, then the concept of justice, which is in a sense an expression of our search for freedom would not be sufficient; it would also be somewhat diminished. And only if we can get a clearer understanding of freedom, only then would our understanding of justice be sufficient. So in order to prove whether or not our understanding of freedom is correct, one has to undertake something like a time diagnosis [...]. I think the direction that such a diagnosis should take today would be to make clear that there are narrow understandings of what individual freedom means. There is, on the one side, a kind of legal understanding of freedom. There is, on the other side, a kind of romantic understanding of freedom in the sense of self-realization (*Selbstverwirklichung*), authenticity, and those understandings of freedom taken separately and only one-sidedly would lead to social pathologies."; Axel Honneth and Gwynn Markle, 'From Struggles for Recognition to a Plural Concept of Justice: An Interview with Axel Honneth', *Acta Sociologica*, 47.4 (2004), 383–91 (p. 384); cf. also Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel's Social Theory*, pp. 23–24, 49 ff.

¹² Cf. Deranty, 'Reflective Critical Theory: A Systematic Reconstruction of Axel Honneth's Social Philosophy.', pp. 65–66.

to distinguish the ‘inside’ of the reading of Hegel and the ‘outside’ of Honneth’s original intentions – as happened in *The Struggle for Recognition* and *Reification* – and also to understand which aspects of his ‘exegesis’ Honneth actually endorses in his own thought.¹³ Without entering in an intricate and potentially overwhelming confrontation between the two works, Honneth’s text can be summarized according to four subsequent steps.

First of all, Honneth proposes an ‘external’ access to the text, which derives from the refusal to use the *Logic* as a necessary presupposition for the structuring of ethical life and from its consequences on how the relationship between individuals and state is conceived, as well as the teleologically-oriented hierarchy between the different spheres.¹⁴ Already here is not difficult to see that Honneth’s intention is not to provide a faithful interpretation of the *Philosophy of Right*, but to ‘filter’ and re-propose those Hegelian elements that can play a significant role in the contemporary philosophical horizon.¹⁵

Secondly, Honneth sets the ambitious goal of defining a concept of objective spirit without resorting to the idea of spirit. This would imply the assumption according to which “all social reality has a rational structure” and that failures to fulfil this rationality in the carrying out of social functions would lead to detrimental effects on social life.¹⁶ Clearly, the idea at stake here is that of *misdevelopments* and *social pathologies*: more specifically, Honneth takes as a pivotal issue the concept of freedom, determining in its realization the criterion through which a theory of justice can be exposed: therefore, the lack of actual or realized freedom would lead to social suffering and in turn to an unjust society. Put in positive terms, Honneth maintains, Hegel’s aim would coincide with outlining a “general principle of justice that would legitimize those social conditions under which each subject is able to

¹³ Cf. Antti Kauppinen, ‘The Social Dimension of Autonomy’, in *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays. With a Reply by Axel Honneth*, ed. by Danielle Petherbridge (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 255–302 (p. 295).

¹⁴ Cf. Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, pp. 3–5.

¹⁵ Honneth is certainly neither the first nor the last in the contemporary context to defend such philosophical approach to Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*; cf., among others, Allen W. Wood, *Hegel’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Frederick Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory. Actualizing Freedom* (Cambridge - London: Harvard University Press, 2000). In the specific case of Honneth, the reason is not to be found exclusively in the rejection of Hegelian ontology or metaphysics, which are considered as no longer ‘usable’ and inadequate. The concept of spirit is put aside because its implications seem to lead to the undermining of the very purpose of outlining the actualization of individual freedom. Cf. Honneth and Markle, p. 386. Moreover, the idea that recognition relationships play a fundamental role in the *Philosophy of Right* is also echoed in contemporary literature: cf. Robert R. Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Robert R. Williams, *Recognition. Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

¹⁶ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 6.

perceive the liberty of the other as the prerequisite of his own self-realization.”¹⁷ In this context, as we shall see, how Honneth interprets the concept of *right* plays a central role.

A third step concerns the structure of ethical life. Having rejected the metaphysical foundation due to Hegel’s logical accounts, the institutional forms of ethical life are derived by Honneth – here the action-theoretical perspective comes into play – from the defective and realized modes of freedom described in the Introduction to the *Grundlinien*: in this way, the forms of *Sittlichkeit* are represented as institutional concretions (in the broad sense) of intersubjective attitudes concerning freedom. For our purposes, the description that Honneth proposes of the ethical spheres is of particular importance, the characteristics of which shed new light on the concept of recognition.

Finally, Honneth, in the light of his analysis, underlines the main limits of the Hegelian theory concerning the institutional spheres of *family*, *civil society* and *state*. Unsurprisingly, the main criticism is that of an *over-institutionalized* account of ethical life, with an overloaded role and scope assigned to the state that is: this shortcoming of the Hegelian theory results in each institutional concretion that makes up the *Sittlichkeit*. As far as the *family* is concerned, Honneth argues that the exclusion of friendship relationships from this sphere is due to an excessive consideration of the forms determined by the positive law. In other words, friendship - which according to its practical-communicative modalities and its being one of the more simple ways of ‘being with oneself in another’ could ‘rightly’ fall into this sphere of ethical life - is excluded because of the shaping role already granted to legislation in this sphere. Clearly, friendship could not be a legislative object, while the sphere of love is occupied by the bourgeois nuclear family.¹⁸ This would also imply a ‘devaluation’ of the first sphere, which would not receive its definition ‘from within’ – that is, from the practices that constitute it – but ‘from outside’, that is, from the framework predetermined by the state.¹⁹ The second set of consequences concerns the sphere of *civil society* and in particular the role assigned to corporations. The presence of this institutional form – besides representing a description that would be already badly adapted to the industrial development of Hegel’s time – determines the outline of a further practical mode within the second sphere than that of commodities exchange, which in turn implies the recognitional forms tied to individual rights. Hence this co-presence of two forms of intersubjective interactions unbalances the principle according to which each sphere is determined by a practical form, thus constituting its institutional

¹⁷ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 8.

¹⁸ Cf. Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, pp. 67–69.

¹⁹ Cf. Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 71.

concretion.²⁰ That this appears problematic in Honneth's eyes must not appear contradictory with what has been said about the sphere of love. In fact, contrary to the possible duplicity of the first sphere, which could 'accommodate' both family and friendship, the forms of recognition proper to the commodity exchange and corporations would respond to two different logics – which could be briefly explained from within the Honnethian perspective using the distinction between the second and third spheres contained in *The Struggle for Recognition*: legal respect and esteem as basis for cooperative interactions. It is important to underline here that Honneth is therefore sympathetic to the idea that each sphere corresponds to a single 'bundle' of practical modalities: not a single type of action, but a practical and meta-practical horizon, which concerns instrumental actions, linguistic relations and intersubjective relations of recognition.²¹ In this sense, the practical 'univocity' of each ethical sphere is not understood in exclusive terms, but rather on what practical forms could represent 'the essence' of a social context: clearly, family is constituted within a legal and cooperative context, but without love there would not be an identifiable institutional form, distinguished by others. Moreover, the limit of corporations strictly concerns the shortcoming of the third ethical sphere. In fact, even if we are to support Hegel's solution as it proposes a context of 'public freedom'²² for the individual that is able to stem the potentially disruptive aspects of the market and the exchange of goods for social life, the need that Hegel feels in inserting this dimension already in the second sphere derives, according to Honneth, from the fact that the sphere of the state turns out not to be able to fulfill such a task. In fact, sharing Siep's reservations,²³ Honneth argues that the idea that inside the sphere of the state the individual is raised "to its universality"²⁴ represents an unequivocal sign that "a horizontal relationship" – that of recognition – is replaced "by a vertical one"²⁵ – of subsumption. That would inevitably lead to a loss of individual autonomy and thus to a perspective that would 'betray' the original

²⁰ Cf. Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel's Social Theory*, pp. 75–77.

²¹ I therefore find it problematic to say, as Teixeira does, that in this text Honneth's idea of market becomes differentiated and can no longer be exhausted in its being normatively embedded. Cf. Mariana Teixeira, 'Can Honneth's Theory Account for a Critique of Instrumental Reason? Capitalism and the Pathologies of Negative Freedom', in *Axel Honneth and the Critical Theory of Recognition*, ed. by Volker Schmitz (Basingstoke - New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 173–205 (pp. 188–89). In any case, Honneth's idea of market will be approached in the next paragraph.

²² In order to comprehend the relationship between cooperative action and democracy within Honneth's perspective, numerous insights can be provided by the article (originally published in 1998) focused on Dewey's theory of social democracy: Honneth, 'Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation. John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today'.

²³ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth's Social Philosophy*, p. 232.

²⁴ Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. by Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 275, § 258.

²⁵ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel's Social Theory*, p. 78.

intention of determining a theory of justice that outlines the conditions for personal freedom – at least according to the liberal pre-comprehension of the idea, which Honneth does not intend to renounce. Instead of being a sphere of public freedom, the state represents a sphere of universal subsumption: therefore, Hegel seems compelled to throw back this essential dimension of actualized freedom in the ‘realm’ of civil society.

4.1.1 Justice as Non-Discursive Justification

Having briefly framed the different passages of the Spinoza Lectures, it is now useful to focus on the two cornerstones upon which Honneth builds his perspective.

[...] Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* represents a normative theory of social justice that, by reconstructing the necessary conditions of individual autonomy, tries to determine what social spheres a society must comprise or make available in order to give all its members a chance to realize their self-determination. In this program it is also easy to recognize the second intention that Hegel has kept alive since his youthful phase in Jena and revived in the mature shape of his practical philosophy: [...] the central intention of the *Philosophy of Right* is seen to be the development of universal principles of justice in terms of a justification of those social conditions under which each subject is able to perceive the liberty of the other as the prerequisite of his own self-realization.²⁶

Before we move on to analyze the link between the concepts of *justice* and *justification*, it is essential to address Honneth’s understanding of personal freedom – which is deeply related to these terms. This idea can be approached first of all through two specular criticisms addressed to Honneth’s account: on the one hand, it can be said that the Neo-Hegelian perspectives on freedom do not leave room for forms of emancipatory freedom, that is, for modes of dissent and critique as the basis for practical transformation.²⁷ On the other hand, Honneth’s interpretation is seen as inspired by an excessively individualistic reading of Hegelian thought, and thus proposes a surplus of indeterminacy.²⁸ In other words, founding personal freedom upon given ethical ideas would constrain individual freedoms – or their scope of possibilities – or, on the other end, a too individualistic description of social freedom would not be able to solve the problem of indeterminacy, that is, abandoning individual autonomy to itself, thus providing it with insufficient

²⁶ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 18.

²⁷ Cf. Brian O’Connor, ‘The Neo-Hegelian Theory of Freedom and the Limits of Emancipation’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 23.2 (2012), 171–94.

²⁸ Cf. Arne Johan Vetlesen, ‘Surplus of Indeterminacy. A Hegelian Critique of Neoliberalism’, in *Recognition and Freedom. Axel Honneth’s Political Thought*, ed. by Odin Lysaker and Jonas Jakobsen (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 124–46.

orientational and motivational grounds. One could say that these two critiques, at the same time, both hit and miss the target. For, as claimed in the *Zusatz* to § 7 of the *Philosophy of Right*, “freedom lies neither in indeterminacy nor in determinacy, but is both at once”.²⁹ Honneth proceeds once again negatively. Sketching on the Introduction of Hegel’s text he describes twopartial (because one-sided) modalities of freedom with which Hegel is confronted. On the one hand, there is a *negativistic* paradigm, while on the other hand an *optional* model.

According to the first, freedom would consist of the “exclusion of all specific inclinations or purposes,”³⁰ or a subject can be considered free “to the extent that there is a certain external space within which his activity can unfold without any interventions by other subjects”.³¹ Combining these two different characterizations, we arrive at the classic definition of *negative freedom* or freedom-from: autonomy is guaranteed when the subject is faced with an ‘empty space’ in which it can freely articulate its initiative, without being bound to ethical and social constraints.

The optional model concerns instead the so-called *positive freedom* or freedom-to – as traditionally defined by Rousseau or Kant. Its emphasis is on the reflexive dimension of autonomy, that is, on the subject’s ability to opt for reasons of action that are not in turn determined by desires, inclinations or impulses which “are themselves beyond the subject’s control”.³² As it is known, the central intuition here is that the individual could be considered autonomous only in so far as she is bound by moral laws which she has imposed upon herself.

The third mode of freedom is one that does not have to exclude otherness from its definition in order to articulate itself: to this mode Hegel assigns the famous definition “being with oneself in the other”. Honneth, resorting to the Addition of § 7, where Hegel speaks of friendship to explain this third form of freedom, interprets this definition in purely intersubjectivistic terms.³³ The doctrine of freedom does not therefore coincide with the analysis of an individual faculty or possibility, but with a normative social theory in which the communicative and social conditions that allow the subject to enjoy his/her own freedom are outlined: that would mean the realization or actualization of freedom, that is, its liberation from the solipsistic dimension that considers otherness as external. Given that the negative and the optional model concern the relation between subjects and reasons for action, the

²⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, p. 42, § 7 (Addition). Cf. Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, pp. 18–19, 25–26.

³⁰ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 11.

³¹ Axel Honneth, ‘Of the Poverty of Our Liberty. The Greatness and Limits of Hegel’s Doctrine of Ethical Life’, in *Recognition or Disagreement. A Critical Encounter on the Politics of Freedom, Equality, and Identity*, ed. by Katia Genel and Jean-Philippe Deranty (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), pp. 156–76 (p. 161).

³² Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 12.

³³ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth’s Social Philosophy*, p. 230.

‘actualization of freedom’ regards also the idea, as Robert Pippin underlines,³⁴ that only a communicative sphere would allow the person to recognize herself in her own desires and acts, providing her – so to speak – with a starting material for her own moral considerations and therefore with the capability to acknowledge her ‘accomplishments’ as hers; that is, enabling one’s reflective endorsement for the reasons of one’s own practical agency and the possibility that the externalization of acts would not coincide with alienation. Therefore, to participate in social institutions with ethical character has a *transformative* and a *formative* effect on the individual:³⁵ on the one hand, it allows the subject to transcend her own indeterminacy through acts that possess a ‘consistency,’ and on the other hand, the institutions educate the individual, allowing her to recognize the orientation of these acts as her own.

Therefore, the outlining of a social infrastructure would correspond with a theory of freedom: here, the concept of *right* plays a fundamental role and allows us to understand why the delineation of institutional forms of freedom can be considered a theory of justice. The issue can be dealt with in three steps.

First, Honneth links an action-theoretical approach with a social-ontological account, deriving the sections of the *Philosophy of Right* on Abstract Right, Morality and ethical life from the three forms of freedom mentioned above.

[...] in the course of the discussion, in parallel with the levels occupied by the different concepts of freedom, a sequence of action models, characterized by ascending degrees of theoretical complexity and social appropriateness, comes into being. [...] if the final aim is to bring together, under the concept of “ethical life,” the sum of communicative spheres characterized by specific forms of intersubjective action, it makes sense to carry out the analysis in action-theoretical terms right from the outset [...]. In addition, such a procedure offers Hegel a further advantage [...]: since the individual concepts of freedom are reconstructed in terms of a theory of action, the step-by-step argumentation can also be understood as an attempt to outline a kind of social ontology; with each element that is added to the initially primitive concept of action, in parallel with the increasingly complex models of freedom, the set of concepts used by Hegel moves closer to the point at which it can finally be employed to describe the complexity of social realities in a fully adequate way.³⁶

By doing so, Honneth proposes an account according to which social integration would possess a normative character and would be implemented on horizontal

³⁴ Cf. Robert B. Pippin, ‘Recognition and Reconciliation: Actualized Agency in Hegel’s Jena Phenomenology’, in *Recognition and Power. Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory*, ed. by Bert van den Brink and David Owen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 57–78.

³⁵ Cf. Robert B. Pippin, ‘Hegel and Institutional Reality’, *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 39 (2001), 1–25 (p. 8).

³⁶ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 32.

relations of recognition – thus excluding the ‘vertical integration’ proper to Hegel’s concept of the state. A concept of objective spirit (without spirit) would also be given: the spheres or dimensions of social life would relate with the normative core of freedom embedded in its practical-individual dimensions, thus providing rational standards within social reality itself: hence – put negatively – “social reality” would not be “indifferent to the use of those false or incomplete definitions of human existence”,³⁷ that is, of one-sided perspectives and practices concerning freedom. The idea of objective spirit corresponds therefore to the institutional and historical unfolding of that intersubjective form of freedom – being with oneself in the other – which alone would guarantee the realization of autonomy.

Secondly, as has already been seen in previous works, the ‘burden of proof’ rests once again on the emergence of negative phenomena within social life, i.e. social pathologies. Referring especially to the Additions of the *Philosophy of Right*,³⁸ Honneth highlights the profound link that Hegel establishes between his social theory of justice and a diagnosis of time. Thus - following in the footsteps of the Hegelian notion of disease in living organisms, according to which one organ “establishes itself in isolation and persists in a particular activity against the activity of the whole”³⁹ – he affirms that the autonomization of negative and/or optional freedoms would lead individuals to *suffer from indeterminacy*.⁴⁰ In a nutshell, the atomized subject, ‘left’ in the negative freedom of law or in the optional freedom of morality, would be deprived of an orientation-context and incapable of committing itself,⁴¹ thus remaining blocked in the mere possibility.

This idea of social pathology could be subject to a criticism similar to that applied to the idea of reification. On the one hand, if pathology is identified as a second-order disorder, that is, as a reflexive dysfunction experienced by social actors, one could charge that suffering from indeterminacy lies purely within psychological dimension. On the other hand, if we want to underline, with Honneth, that unilateralization of freedom in these ways represent “conflicting rationalities

³⁷ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 24.

³⁸ Cf. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, pp. 163–64, 185–86, 192–93, §§ 136, 141, 149.

³⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830). Vol. 2: Philosophy of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 428, § 371.

⁴⁰ Cf. Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, pp. 23–24, 44–45.

⁴¹ Cf. Max Pensky, ‘Social Solidarity and Intersubjective Recognition: On Axel Honneth’s Struggle for Recognition’, in *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays. With a Reply by Axel Honneth*, ed. by Danielle Petherbridge (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 125–53 (p. 140). Significantly, the only Hegelian criticism to the Kantian categorical imperative embraced by Honneth is precisely that of context-blindness; cf. Donald Loose, ‘Kantian Version of Recognition. The Bottom-Line of Axel Honneth’s Project’, in *Recognition—German Idealism as an Ongoing Challenge*, ed. by Christian Krijnen (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 165–89 (p. 179); Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, pp. 39–40.

embedded in society”,⁴² one could ask whether this idea does not represent a “reduction of the institutional to the moral,”⁴³ given that socially normative integration seems to be the only social-ontological model at stake. Considering what has been said previously about the difficulty of distinguishing the analysis of Hegel’s text from the actual evolutions of Honneth’s thought, it seems fruitful not to deal directly with these issues, which go to the heart of the social ontology possibly outlined by the author. However, it seems reasonable to me to embrace Deranty’s interpretation, according to which Honneth’s perspective settles at a radical level.⁴⁴ as Honneth repeats several times throughout the text,⁴⁵ the concept of justice he defends through the *Philosophy of Right* is strongly egalitarian and the ethical spheres would thus enable individual freedom at a cultural, psychological and material level.⁴⁶ Reducing, specularly, the social pathology of indeterminacy to only one of these dimensions would at the very least be a misreading of the text.

The third and final step explicates the idea of *right*. Through this concept Honneth intends to argue that the one presented in the *Philosophy of Right* is characterized as a theory of justice in so far as it proposes the ‘right to exist’ that certain practical modalities and ethical spheres possess within the social world.

[...] Hegel enlightens us about the exact position that legally and morally determined freedoms must hold in a comprehensive concept of modern justice, and he does so by diagnosing the negative effects that are bound to follow if either kind of freedom becomes detached from our social lifeworld.⁴⁷

In this sense, “the term *right* has the double meaning of a ‘necessary condition’ and a ‘justifiable claim’”:⁴⁸ therefore, the institutional spheres – as actual bearers of rights⁴⁹ – can or must occupy a certain position within the social world that is in harmony with a rational – that is, non-pathological – development of society. This also constitutes the previously mentioned link between *justice* and *justification*: the degree of ‘justice’ within a society depends on the latter’s justifiability (or not) in the eyes of the actors who inhabit it, which in turn relies on the capacity of institutional concretions – taken individually and in their mutual relations (i.e. in occupying their ‘right place’) – to provide actual conditions of freedom. It could be said, however, as Pippin does, that this concept of right is ill-suited to the idea of ethical life proposed by Hegel: in fact, the communicative spheres could not be subjected to

⁴² Honneth and Markle, p. 385; our emphasis.

⁴³ Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth’s Social Philosophy*, p. 235.

⁴⁴ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth’s Social Philosophy*, pp. 236–38.

⁴⁵ Cf. Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, pp. 15, 25–26, 46, 49.

⁴⁶ Cf. Kauppinen, ‘The Social Dimension of Autonomy’.

⁴⁷ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, pp. 30–31.

⁴⁸ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 15.

⁴⁹ Cf. Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 17.

processes of justification, precisely because one of their tasks is to form and transform the individual capacities useful in weighing if and how the institutions are justified.⁵⁰ In other words, what would be the ‘interlocutor’ “under an obligation”⁵¹ for the right-claim of the spheres, if they represent an unavoidable world of reasons for the social actors’ practical agency? Although *Redistribution or Recognition?* will provide us with more insights in this regard, I believe that this concept of right is to be read according to two conceptual cores.

The first concerns social ontology. The idea of ‘right place’ of ethical spheres concerns the need – perceived by Honneth – to avoid a non-normative premise to the provided social-ontological image.⁵² A non-normative assumption would in fact be incompatible with the conviction that in the Hegelian concept of *Sittlichkeit* social differentiation and normative integration are co-dependent, thanks to the evolution and expansion of relationships of recognition. Consequently, the resulting institutional concretions of these intersubjective practices must always be open to questioning.

This brings us to the second point, which concerns freedom, and more precisely the aforementioned critical alternative between determinacy and emancipatory freedom. I intend to argue that the concept of *right* outlined by Honneth has the dual task of describing, on the one hand, the establishment of a *recognition order* capable of ensuring an actualized freedom for all its participants and, on the other, to justify *critique*: in the balance between determinacy and indeterminacy is outlined that dimension that enables social actors to question and refine the principles underlying their social integration. In this sense, recognition orders and social struggles would not be in conflict – and would not represent the concepts around which Honneth constitutes two distinct phases within his thinking – but would ‘essentially’ depend on each other. Thus, excessive determination would not afford the communicative space in which normative principles can be questioned as to their realization and, possibly, reworked. On the other hand, excessive indeterminacy would lead to pathological outcomes for both society and individuals. As has already been said, the idea of *right* embraces the necessity of the ethical spheres as a normative, formative and orienting context which allows for the concreteness of freedom, but this concreteness is also realized in the freedom of critique, that is, in the possibility of overcoming the punctual realizations of the

⁵⁰ Cf. Pippin, ‘Hegel and Institutional Reality’, p. 11 ff.

⁵¹ Pippin, ‘Hegel and Institutional Reality’, p. 11.

⁵² Cf. Frederick Neuhouser, ‘Hegel on Social Ontology and the Possibility of Pathology’, in *I That Is We, We That Is I. Perspectives on Contemporary Hegel. Social Ontology, Recognition, Naturalism, and the Critique of Kantian Constructivism*, ed. by Italo Testa and Luigi Ruggiu (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 31–48.

principles institutionally realized – here, clearly, ‘right’ concerns the justifiability of the institutions.

4.1.2 Overlapping and Noncoincidence of Ethical Spheres and Practices

Since, therefore, the theory of freedom coincides with a theory of ethical life, it is now necessary to address briefly the characterization of the ethical spheres that Honneth extrapolates in his comparison with the *Philosophy of Right*. This proves interesting for two main reasons. First, as never before or elsewhere, Honneth encloses in a few lines the characteristics that must pertain to the ethical spheres; this might obviously be an advantage for the clarification of some aspects, but also a disadvantage for others: some elements seem to contrast with what will emerge in *Redistribution or Recognition?* and it is not clear if such differences represent an effective rethinking or if in *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom* Honneth’s intent is simply to interpret how a ‘purified-from-metaphysics’ Hegel could explain the nature of the spheres of recognition. Secondly, this definition of the spheres enlightens a second phase of reflection upon the concept of recognition, which has already been met in ‘Invisibility.’ It could be summarized under the title of ‘expressionist account’ and strongly connotes the Honnethian thinking of institutions.⁵³

There are four characteristics highlighted by Honneth.

If we are to list the conditions in brief key phrases, the sphere of ethical life must consist of interactional practices that are able to guarantee individual self-realization, reciprocal recognition, and the corresponding processes of education; and the three aims must be closely interwoven, since Hegel seems convinced that their relationship is one of mutual conditioning.⁵⁴

The first minimal condition of the ethical spheres concerns their accountability in terms of the *liberation* of individual freedom.⁵⁵ Sketching on Hegel’s account, according to which, in duty, “the individual liberates himself so as to attain substantial freedom”,⁵⁶ Honneth describes the ethical horizon as the necessary condition within which the three forms of freedom described in the Introduction find their ‘right place’ and concur to form the preconditional setting for individual

⁵³ Cf. Jean-Philippe Deranty and Emmanuel Renault, ‘Politicizing Honneth’s Ethics of Recognition’, Thesis Eleven, 88.1 (2007), 92–111.

⁵⁴ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 56.

⁵⁵ Cf. Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, pp. 43–49.

⁵⁶ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 192, § 149.

self-realization. Therefore, regardless of the specific recognitional *quid* of each sphere – be it love, right, or social esteem – what should connote the ‘ethical’ as such is its capability to relieve the social actors from indeterminacy, thus providing them the ‘tools’ or opportunities for seeing the actualization of their own freedom.

The second characteristic concerns the intersubjectivistic interpretation of Hegel’s “being with oneself in the other”. In a nutshell, if freedom can only be realized when the ‘other-of-freedom’ is also endowed with freedom, and if the free otherness is necessarily another subject with whom to enter into a relationship while keeping oneself, then it follows that the realization of freedom on an ethical level must – so to speak – run on intersubjective tracks.⁵⁷

The third condition that the ethical spheres have to satisfy “is that the intersubjective actions that constitute it should express certain forms of reciprocal recognition”.⁵⁸ If, on the one hand, there are no great differences with the definition provided in *The Struggle for Recognition*, because Honneth here defines recognition as “an effortless mutual acknowledgement of certain aspects of the other’s personality, connected to the prevailing mode of social interaction”,⁵⁹ a further element, the *behavioral* component of recognition, accounts for an ampliation of the concept already seen in ‘Invisibility’.

[...] mutual recognition means not only meeting each other in a certain affirmative attitude but implies, also and indeed above all else, treating the other in the way that the relevant form of recognition morally demands.

[...] The fact that reciprocal recognition has a behavioral dimension, and that implies a certain form of intersubjective treatment, does not mean that it is a special, free-standing type of action; rather, Hegel seems to assume that it is more like an extra dimension that certain actions have. Certain actions, that is, have recognition built into their character as the subject engaged in them relate to each other in such a way as to express a specific form of recognition.⁶⁰

In this sense, *recognition* is once again described as a *meta-action*, that is, as a stance within which and through which different affirmative gestures towards the other can be articulated *as* recognition; such gestures, in order to be classified as recognition, must be able to *express* evaluative qualities that are reflected in a context of values, to which Honneth gives the name of *second nature*. But these lines of thinking enlighten another facet of this perspective. In fact, not only can some gestures be acknowledged as gestures of recognition if they express certain qualitative instances, but their character of recognition would be identified in an

⁵⁷ Cf. Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 50.

⁵⁸ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 52.

⁵⁹ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 51.

⁶⁰ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 51.

extra-dimension that somehow goes beyond the particularity of the affirmations towards the other, showing itself within the behavioral intersubjective treatment.

This dependence of recognition acts on the surrounding value context leading us directly to the fourth characteristic of *Sittlichkeit*, that of education (*Bildung*). The concept of second nature is indeed adopted by Hegel to describe the necessary non-extraneousness that the ethical subject must live within its own impulses and desires for the purposes of the concreteness of freedom: in this sense, even the ‘starting material’ of moral considerations must not be considered as a pure datum – an objection that is wrongly made against Honneth as far as moral injury is concerned – but as a *quid* that is already culturally formed. Thus, the intersubjective gestures of recognition have to be “able to initiate processes of education that produce, for their part, the practical habits that constitute the foundations of the ethical life”.⁶¹

Therefore, there is a complex interweaving of recognition practices and their spheres. In fact, if recognition, in order to be articulated as behavior, needs to be informed by a second-nature evaluative horizon, the formation of such a horizon would belong precisely to the educational scope of the gestures of recognition. However, if the formation and transformation of needs is obtained through the broader dimension of ‘culture’, it is not clear what the relationship between the latter and the gestures of recognition would be: in other words, although Honneth grants recognition a further ‘shaping’ component, it is not clear how it relates to the totality of the institutionalized sphere. Despite the action-theoretical approach, according to which each ethical sphere is determined by its prevailing practical form, Honneth’s argument does not seem able – or willing – to provide an explanatory argument for the structuring of such spheres. Moreover, it is clear that the institutionalized dimension of the spheres represents a *context* of recognition practices, which always remains intersubjective. Institutions, thus, can be conceived as expressions, concretions or coagulations of recognition practices, but not as recognizable or recognized. However, the thesis according to which Honneth’s idea of social freedom could account for social, psychological and material conditions of freedom becomes problematic: the link between culture and recognition, and between the latter and the ‘materiality’ of institutions, that is their independence, remains unclarified.

But this refusal to consider the institutional world in its genealogical independence from intersubjective practices has to do also with a rejection of the hierarchy that the ethical spheres clearly possess in the *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel prioritizes the spheres in the name of their formative capacity – i.e. in accordance with the fact that “in each of the three partial spheres the subject undergoes an

⁶¹ Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 55.

enhancement of his own personality in proportion to the degree of the rational transformation of an initially inchoate, natural individuality”.⁶² Nevertheless, by rejecting the so-called ‘verticalization’ of recognition that is expressed in this dynamic of the universalization of the individual, Honneth seems to opt for de-hierarchizing the spheres, describing them as equally necessary conditions, quasi-sociologically identified,⁶³ for individual self-realization, social reproduction and the actualization of freedom. One could maybe argue that as far as a theory of justice is concerned – which is characterized as free access for all citizens to the social possibilities of the realization of freedom – the principle of *equity* (and therefore the relating sphere) has a certain priority, because it follows that each actor must be able to enjoy other forms of recognition in the same measure as others.⁶⁴ In any case, Honneth seems oriented – as we have seen in the previous criticism concerning the Hegelian over-institutionalization – to maintain the paradigm of *The Struggle for Recognition*, thus re-elaborating the principles of love, respect and esteem as plural and equally fundamental ‘goods’, which are articulated at the level of intersubjective practices and within spheres of recognition. In this way, the elaboration of a theory of justice could not be separated from an adequate paradigm of recognition and from a relating concept of ethical life.

In any case, the analysis of the 1999 Spinoza Lectures allowed us to get closer to three focal points on which the Honnethian reflection hinges and which open the doors to the so-called “historical turn”.

The first element is represented by a deeper conceptualization of the ethical spheres within which recognition practices take place – though, at the same time, the former would be shaped through and by the latter. The ‘how’ of such shaping represents one of the most controversial points in the whole Honnethian production and one of the major sources of misunderstandings, as will be seen in the next paragraph.

Secondly, the delineation of a theory of plural justice is configured as a *theory of justification* on the part of social actors of the historical and institutional instantiations; thereby, the principles of recognition through which the social actors are integrated in the lifeworld are ‘used’ as a criterion to evaluate the grade of justice realized in society. Thus, the relationship between recognition practices and principles (which in turn seem to assume a certain autonomy from the relative practices) takes on a fundamental role: that is, in this polarity, not only would the principles of recognition be a result of the practices, but these would be oriented with respect to the former. From this it follows that the principles are not completely

⁶² Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, p. 61.

⁶³ Cf. Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom. Hegel’s Social Theory*, pp. 56–57.

⁶⁴ Cf. Piromalli, pp. 116–22.

embedded in the intersubjective interactions, precisely because they are oriented by them: one could argue that there is an essential *irreducibility* of one to the other.

Finally – third – it is in this polarity between recognition practices and principles that the Honnethian elaboration of “being with oneself in the other” is to be understood, in my opinion. The individual possibility of freely orienting oneself practically by adhering to or distancing oneself from the principles that constitute the ethical horizon of the contemporary western social context is revealed according to a fragile balance between determinacy and indeterminacy. All this is translated into a paradigm of freedom in which the social conditions (determinacy) are shown as inescapable presuppositions for a free individual self-realization (indeterminacy).

These three conceptual guidelines represent a key to the debate with Nancy Fraser.

4.2 Surplus of Validity: from Interaction to Principles

The double exchange between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth contained in *Redistribution or Recognition?* encompasses a rich multiplicity of elements that make it difficult to reconstruct completely the subjects it deals with.

First of all, it is the comparison between two authors who see themselves belonging to the same tradition of thought: that of critical theory, and who more specifically consider Habermas as the inevitable starting point for the elaboration of a philosophical agenda that aims to question contemporary capitalist societies.⁶⁵

Given this common ground, however, the two authors seem to be enveloped in a series of mutual misunderstandings that compromise an effective ‘solution’ to the initial differences of perspective, leaving the debate open even today.⁶⁶ The point of greatest misunderstanding is precisely by how the concept of *recognition* is conceived.⁶⁷ On the one hand, Fraser’s view is strongly influenced by Charles Taylor, and thus relates, rather immediately, ‘recognition’ to the demands of ethnic-cultural minorities, i.e. in the framework of the problems of pluralistic societies and identities: hence, recognition is to be understood precisely as *recognition of*

⁶⁵ Cf. Nicholas H. Smith, ‘Recognition, Culture and Economy: Honneth’s Debate with Fraser’, in *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays. With a Reply by Axel Honneth*, ed. by Danielle Petherbridge (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 321–44 (pp. 323–29).

⁶⁶ Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 140; Honneth and Markle, p. 388.

⁶⁷ Cf. Nikolas Kompridis, ‘Struggling over the Meaning of Recognition. A Matter of Identity, Justice, or Freedom?’, *European Journal of Political Theory*, 6.3 (2007), 277–89 (p. 278); Susanne Schmetkamp, *Respekt Und Anerkennung* (Paderborn: mentis, 2012), p. 182.

difference.⁶⁸ On the other hand, the Honnethian paradigm, as we have seen, focuses on the constitution of practical identity and the normative fabric of the lifeworld in a more general sense. The different solutions that the two authors find – and the relative criticisms levelled at each other – can be said to spring from this unexplained fundamental difference.

Leaving aside an in-depth analysis of the numerous cues offered by the text, which range from political and social philosophy to critical thinking via moral philosophy and ethics – and on which critical literature is abundant –⁶⁹ we presently have three main aims: a) to re-propose the salient aspects of Fraser’s argument, in order to better contextualize Honneth’s positions; b) to illuminate the continuity and differences between the latter and *The Struggle for Recognition*, as well as the peculiarities of the so-called moral-theoretical monism; and c) to highlight the role of the discontinuities in our reconstructive path of the recognition paradigm.

Nancy Fraser’s core position derives from the persuasion that recognition theories such as Honneth’s cause an over-culturalization of redistribution issues; on the other side, focusing exclusively upon economic issues would prevent an adequate consideration of identity related matters. Synthetically, inequalities of an economic matter could and should not be reduced to social facts that instead concern cultural identity and vice versa. Hence the two issues – redistribution and recognition – though they can be strongly intertwined, cannot be assimilated.

They are intertwined, according to Fraser, because discrimination or social exclusion, as well as denigration, often bring with them economic inequalities. The most suitable example in this case is that of gender discrimination: the stigmatization of a slice of the population, or its labelling, entails an unequal division of labor, which in turn leads to economic dependence. Fraser hence pursues to avoid

⁶⁸ Cf. Christopher F. Zurn, ‘Identity or Status? Struggles over “Recognition” in Fraser, Honneth, and Taylor’, *Constellations*, 10.4 (2003), 519–37 (pp. 524, 531); Emil A. Sobottka and Giovanni A. Saavedra, ‘Die Debatte Um Den Begriff Der Anerkennung’, *Soziale Passagen*, 1.2 (2009), 193–207 (pp. 195–200).

⁶⁹ Cf., among others, Simon Thompson, *The Political Theory of Recognition: A Critical Introduction*; Simon Thompson, ‘Is Redistribution a Form of Recognition? Comments on the Fraser-Honneth Debate’, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 8.1 (2005), 85–102; Zurn, ‘Identity or Status? Struggles over “Recognition” in Fraser, Honneth, and Taylor’; Christopher F. Zurn, ‘Arguing Over Participatory Parity: On Nancy Fraser’s Conception of Social Justice’, *Philosophy Today*, 47.Supplement (2003), 176–89; Christopher F. Zurn, ‘Recognition, Redistribution, and Democracy: Dilemmas of Honneth’s Critical Social Theory’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 13.1 (2005), 89–126; Thomas McCarthy, ‘Review: Redistribution or Recognition?’, *Ethics*, 115.2 (2005), 397–402.; Saul Tobias, ‘Hegel and the Politics of Recognition’, *The Owl of Minerva*, 38.1–2 (2006–2007), 101–26; Terry Lovell, ‘Nancy Fraser’s Integrated Theory of Justice: A “Sociologically Rich” Model for a Global Capitalist Era?’, in *(Mis)Recognition, Social Inequality and Social Justice: Nancy Fraser and Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. by Terry Lovell (New York: Routledge, 2007); McNay, ‘The Trouble with Recognition: Subjectivity, Suffering, and Agency’; Lois McNay, *Against Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

both reductionisms (economicism and culturalism) by arguing that “every practice” is “simultaneously economic and cultural.”⁷⁰ On the other hand, misrecognition and injustice cannot be assimilated because they respond to two different logics, which have to be *analytically*, and not *substantially*, distinguished.⁷¹ The example given by Fraser in this case is that of the “skilled white male industrial worker who becomes unemployed due to a factory closing resulting from a speculative corporate merger.”⁷² In this case the loss of work is not the consequence of discriminatory gestures, but to a systemic logic concerning the capitalistic global market.⁷³

Fraser therefore proposes a *perspectival dualism*,⁷⁴ which would be in contrast to the monism advocated by Honneth. The former coincides with a bifocal standard that would dissociate from an analytical point of view the two types of (in)justice, which at a social level present themselves concomitantly. This would make it possible not to confuse and not to overlap the *perception of injustice* and *injustice*, so much as to avoid the reductions entailed in economicism and culturalism: considering the being intertwined yet distinguished of the cultural and the economic would lead neither to an “unbridgeable chasm”⁷⁵ between the two dimensions nor to their mutual assimilation.

This position would then guarantee a deontologically effective criterion for distinguishing between justified and unjustified social instances and demands: that is, the criterion would not be determined by subjective experiences of injustice, but by the identification of certain phenomena as obstacles or impediments to the aim of democratic societies, which Fraser calls *parity of participation*. As Fraser says, the “existence of either a class structure or a status hierarchy constitutes an obstacle to

⁷⁰ Fraser, ‘Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation’, p. 63.

⁷¹ Cf. Simon Thompson, ‘Is Redistribution a Form of Recognition? Comments on the Fraser-Honneth Debate’, p. 94; Nicholas H. Smith, pp. 330–31.

⁷² Fraser, ‘Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation’, p. 35.

⁷³ “This market order is culturally embedded, to be sure. But it is not directly governed by cultural schemas of evaluation. Rather, the economic logic of the market interacts in complex ways with the cultural logic of recognition, sometimes instrumentalizing existing status distinctions, sometimes dissolving or circumventing them, and sometimes creating new ones. As a result, market mechanisms give rise to economic class relations that are not mere reflections of status hierarchies. Neither those relations nor the mechanisms that generate them can be understood by recognition monism. An adequate approach must theorize both the distinctive dynamics of the capitalist economy and its interaction with the status order”; Nancy Fraser, ‘Distorted Beyond All Recognition: A Rejoinder to Axel Honneth’, in *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, 2003, pp. 198–236 (p. 214).

⁷⁴ Fraser, ‘Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation’, pp. 62–64.

⁷⁵ Fraser, ‘Distorted Beyond All Recognition: A Rejoinder to Axel Honneth’, p. 218.

parity of participation and thus an injustice.⁷⁶ From this principle of justice – which concerns the right and not the good and already presupposes a certain account of autonomy, for social participation is considered a consequence of the latter⁷⁷ – can be derived the objective forms of injustice that prevent social actors from being full-fledged members of society. This would make it possible to identify, without having to theoretically depend on further reductionism – the psychologization of injustice – which presents itself as an obstacle to a free form of life in contemporary societies, i.e. restrictions on individual freedom due to economic unavailability or ethnic-cultural denigration or segregation.

Even the very concept of recognition is to be thought of differently: Fraser indeed proposes to interpret *recognition as recognition of status*, which does not entirely depend on interpersonal relations,⁷⁸ but on the subject's belonging to social groups,⁷⁹ which can therefore be identified 'from the outside' depending on their positioning within the social totality.⁸⁰

The recognition dimension corresponds to the *status order* of society, hence to the constitution, by socially entrenched patterns of cultural value, of culturally defined categories of social actors – statuses – each distinguished by the relative respect, prestige, and esteem it enjoys vis-à-vis the others.⁸¹

To take up the example cited above, the skilled white male industrial worker belongs, independently of his effective interpersonal interactions of recognition, to a certain segment of society and holds a certain status, which, because of a hierarchical organization of society, guarantees him un-discriminated access to the public dimension. If so, his inability to participate equally in democratic life in a full-fledged manner depends on economic issues, but not on his ethnic-cultural affiliations. This concept of *status* is hence considered as the cultural counterpart of the social *class*, by which the decisive and essential aspects do not regard the economic condition, but the recognition (determinable at a general level) enjoyed in a given society. As has already been said, class and status are not to be

⁷⁶ Fraser, 'Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation', p. 49.

⁷⁷ Cf. Kauppinen, 'The Social Dimension of Autonomy', p. 294.

⁷⁸ Cf. Edoardo Greblo, 'Paradigmi Di Giustizia . Sulla Controversia Fraser - Honneth', *Ragion Pratica*, 39.1 (2009), 337–53 (pp. 340–41).

⁷⁹ Cf. Schmetkamp, pp. 180–81.

⁸⁰ Cf. Zurn, 'Identity or Status? Struggles over "Recognition" in Fraser, Honneth, and Taylor', pp. 522–23.

⁸¹ Fraser, 'Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation', p. 50.

distinguished from each other substantially, but – as Fraser herself states – “one cannot infer class directly from status, nor status directly from class.”⁸²

This brief summary of Fraser’s positions enables us to better understand Honneth’s positions, which seem to be in conflict in certain points, precisely because the two authors are seemingly addressing two different levels of inquiry. The nuclei to be highlighted in Honneth’s answers are substantially three: the phenomenology of social movements – whereby the core issue is represented by social reality’s accessibility for critical perspective – and the priority of good over right (4.2.1), the distinction between cultural and economic (4.2.2), and the justification of demands for justice (4.2.3).

4.2.1 The Unavoidability of Moral Experiences

As far as the phenomenology of social movements is concerned, Honneth believes that Fraser’s analysis is essentially flawed, because of its total reliance on a description of (American) ‘new’ social movements, which characterize our “post-socialist era.”⁸³ The errors inherent in this reading are three in particular. First of all, Honneth re-proposes what was already expressed in *The Struggle for Recognition* through the studies of Thompson and Moore: even the working class’s struggles of the 19th century were deeply characterized by instances of recognition. Distinguishing requests for justice from demands for practical identity would therefore constitute a “misleading – indeed false –”⁸⁴ historical reconstruction. Certainly, the increase in social conflicts over the ‘recognition of difference’ can be interpreted as a historical novelty that characterizes the contemporary occidental horizon, but that would, in Honneth’s eyes, more than deny the point, confirm it: what is at stake are “‘indivisible’ conflicts,”⁸⁵ where material and symbolic aspects cannot be distinguished.

Honneth’s second criticism concerns social movements as a given starting point for social critique: the mistake here lies in using as a starting point what is already the outcome of a certain process, without considering the process itself. In fact, the social movements to which Fraser refers are those that have already passed the filter of the ‘public’. This would imply, on the one hand, a certain unawareness of the

⁸² Fraser, ‘Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation’, p. 54.

⁸³ Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 124.

⁸⁴ Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 123.

⁸⁵ Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 120.

ideological components that may actually be at the base of the shaping of the public mind.

Today, such a – surely unintended – complicity with political domination can only be undone by introducing a normative terminology for identifying social discontent independently of public recognition.⁸⁶

Hence, on the other hand, this can lead to not considering those forms of opposition that do not have ‘sufficient strength’ to arrive at such a space of expression would represent an acute shortcoming for a critical theory *of the social*.⁸⁷ Such an approach would exclude basing the development of critical thinking on the *moral experience* of social actors, whose moral intuitions, injuries, and normative demands cannot simply be surpassed, on pain of the loss of adherence to social reality in all its complexity. One may indeed wonder what would be ‘critical’ about a social theory that appears disinterested in the experience of suffering,⁸⁸ thus proposing an ‘objectivist’ approach to social analysis.

If the adjective “social” is to mean anything more than “typically found in society,” social suffering and discontent possess a *normative* core. It is a matter of the disappointment or violation of normative expectations of society considered justified by those concerned.⁸⁹

It is clear that the criticisms of psychologization and idealism are directed at this renewed stance by Honneth – whereby critical theory cannot allow itself to abandon the social actors’ moral point of view in a fundamental way.

And it is precisely on this last point that the Honnethian argument of the priority of the good over the right is based. Taking the social partners’ moral experience as starting point would allow us to better understand, from within the lifeworld, the normative horizon upon which they move, act, and interact. Such a horizon, according to Honneth’s reading intersubjectively shaped, would be characterized by a plurality of ethical principles (love, equality, achievement or merit) that find their ‘right place’ in the name of their ‘ability’ to form and respond to the tendency towards self-realization. This last principle, conceived at a formal level – and therefore potentially open also to radical changes – represents the ambit within which various historically instantiated principles would find their justification, so that Honneth considers them as “‘quasi-transcendental interests’ of the human race.”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 125.

⁸⁷ Cf. Kompridis, ‘Struggling over the Meaning of Recognition. A Matter of Identity, Justice, or Freedom?’, pp. 281–83.

⁸⁸ Cf. Zurn, ‘Identity or Status? Struggles over “Recognition” in Fraser, Honneth, and Taylor’.

⁸⁹ Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 129.

⁹⁰ Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 174.

Clearly, the so-called anthropological justification still holds a certain priority in this work. However, from the point of view of the theory of justice, Honneth believes that a certain perspective on the good is at least inevitable, so much so that even the Fraserian principle of participatory parity is conceived by him in such terms:⁹¹ that is, even the deontological procedures of justification presuppose an ethical orientation that both precedes and informs the justifying procedure.⁹² Thus, even participatory parity could not actually boast of the aimed non-substantivity or non-sectarianism: it would represent a pre-figuration of the good as much as of the concept of individual self-realization, because it would presuppose a spectrum of values and images of individual freedom. In fact, that economic and cultural exclusion represent a hindrance to social participation cannot be stated without referring, even minimally, to social actors' moral experiences⁹³ – as Fraser argues –⁹⁴ and thus to a certain ethical good, which in turn forms the right.

Contra such a perspective, the theory of justice described here by Honneth is characterized accordingly with an embracing of the ethical good as object of the justification, which however does not constrain itself within the limits of a rational-argumentative procedure. The problem with this justification is that of not comprehending – and thus not entailing – the multiple dimensions at stake in the social world, which instead would be normatively permeated by expectations, demands and therefore by injuries and experiences of injustice. In other words, the “restriction to only a form of justification seems to entirely lose sight of the normative perspectives from which individuals decide how far they can follow the established principles of public justification in the first place.”⁹⁵ If therefore the aim is to develop a critical theory of contemporary society, it would be necessary to observe which principles have proposed themselves through its historical evolution, that is, which have such *validity* in the eyes of social actors that they can be considered as principal and effective goods in the framework of a theory of justice, precisely because “social injustice is experienced the moment it can no longer be

⁹¹ “Put in terms of an ethics of particular goods, Nancy Fraser defines the ‘why’ or ‘what for’ of equality with reference to the good of participation, whereas I understand this ‘what for’ as the good of personal identity-formation, whose realization I see as dependent on relations of mutual recognition”; Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 176. Cf. also Christopher Lauer, ‘Multivalent Recognition: The Place of Hegel in the Fraser-Honneth Debate’, *Contemporary Political Theory*, 11.1 (2012), 23–40 (pp. 27–29).

⁹² Cf. Jacob Held, ‘Axel Honneth and the Future of Critical Theory’, *Radical Philosophy Review*, 11.2 (2008), 175–86 (p. 82).

⁹³ Cf. Kompridis, ‘Struggling over the Meaning of Recognition. A Matter of Identity, Justice, or Freedom?’, p. 280.

⁹⁴ “One can show that a society whose institutionalized norms impede parity of participation is morally indefensible *whether or not they distort the subjectivity of the oppressed.*” Fraser, ‘Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation’, p. 32.

⁹⁵ Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 130.

rationally understood why an institutional rule should count on agreement in accordance with generally accepted reasons.”⁹⁶

As we already know from *The Struggle for Recognition*, these principles correspond to three spheres of recognition, which are distinguished respectively by the *practical modalities* of intersubjective interaction, by the *partners involved* in them and by the *personal dimensions* that are thereby affirmed or confirmed, according to the development of a practical, undamaged *practical identity*. However, Honneth does not leave unchanged the triad of principles described in the 1992 work. In *Redistribution or Recognition?* they coincide with *love, equality* and *accomplishment*. Synthetically, there are three aspects worthy of being noted.

The first is that Honneth’s attention, rather than being drawn to recognition *practices*, is focused on its *principles*. There is in fact no further account about intersubjective relations or what ‘recognition’ *is*, while the emphasis is placed on the definition of the principles that inform and guide such practices: as Honneth puts it, the aim of his interventions in the work is “to reveal the moral ‘constraints’ *underlying* social interaction”.⁹⁷ In other terms, the aim is to describe a plural theory of justice anchored on a *recognition order*.

Thus – secondly – contrary to *The Struggle for Recognition*, the principle of *love* is described as subject to internal progress, that is, to a process of reformulation and remodulation of the understanding of the principle itself, and therefore of its intersubjective practical realization. Although Honneth therefore speaks of a certain trans-historicity (“quasi-transcendental interests”) of the recognition principles, they are nevertheless considered fully historicized in their evolutions and instantiations.⁹⁸ Honneth makes therefore a step forward in the definition of the recognition principles: in *Reification*, the three forms of recognition were attributed a certain degree of cultural-historical substantivity (as opposed to ‘existential’ recognition), while here he is convinced that the dimensions of reference of the principles of love, equality and esteem have a scope wherein they are – to some extent – able to transcend historical punctuality. Though, such trans-historicity coincides with the historicity and the immanency of the realizations and

⁹⁶ Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 130.

⁹⁷ Axel Honneth, ‘The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to the Rejoinder’, in *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London - New York: Verso, 2003), pp. 237–67 (p. 249), our emphasis.

“‘Love’ (the central idea of intimate relationships), the equality principle (the norm of legal relations), and the achievement principle (the standard of social hierarchy) represent normative perspectives with reference to which subjects can reasonably argue that existing forms of recognition are inadequate or insufficient and need to be expanded. To this extent, unlike other structurally produced social relations in the new society, the three spheres of recognition form normatively substantive models of interaction in the sense that they cannot be practiced if their underlying principles are not somehow respected.” Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition’, p. 143.

⁹⁸ Cf. Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, pp. 138–41.

understandings of such principles, that is, with their substantivity. Clearly, the matter does not coincide with the realization of some ahistoric principle within history, but, on the contrary, with the possibility of discovering tendencies ‘from within’ social life in its different and open-ended trajectories. Hence, even the dimension of love would not be exempt from evolutions and changes.

Thirdly, the shift in the *third sphere* is significant: where in *The Struggle for Recognition* it was described through the concept of esteem, in this work such esteem is strongly tied to the principle of merit or accomplishment – which, even if it is almost always ideologically shaped, would not represent as such a ‘false’ principle.⁹⁹ This shift is to be understood according to two issues. On the one hand, according to Honneth’s aim to resolve the ambiguity present in the 1992 work, whereby the third sphere described esteem as regarding individual contributions in cooperative frameworks, but also cultural forms of life in the context of pluralism. Honneth therefore narrows the spectrum of this sphere, which previously covered an excessively wide range of phenomena: what is at stake in the third sphere is *labor*, the conceptualization of its normative boundaries, and the possibilities for individual self-realization in terms of their contribution to society. The second reason lies in the willingness to distance himself from Fraser’s perspective, in which recognition has a purely cultural matrix, and from identity politics in general. With respect to such conceptualizations, Honneth believes that those instances of social movements taken into consideration by Fraser can actually be included at a higher degree of abstraction through the principles of equality and merit: in this sense, “the overwhelming majority of demands now being made by means of” the identity-politics “formula do not really transcend the normative horizon of the dominant recognition order.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, even the consideration of the ‘new’ social movements would show that the experience of injustice and the required political changes were oriented towards the questioning of the normative constraints through which – taking as an example feminist instances – some performances were not considered as contributions to society (and therefore not worthy of merit) and, on the other hand, were not considered equal from a legal point of view.¹⁰¹ In this case, recognition is anything but ‘cultural’, if the term is understood to possess the meaning that Fraser endows it. Although Honneth admits a certain historical shift from conflicts oriented towards the ‘reconciliation’ of differences through equal treatment to those directed towards an equal ‘consideration’ of the difference itself, such a transition would not be sufficient to hypothesize a fourth principle of justice and a related fourth sphere of recognition. In the present context – which is not

⁹⁹ Cf. Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 148.

¹⁰⁰ Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 169.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, pp. 161–69.

extraneous or immune to possible evolutions – such instances can be traced back to the principles of equality and recognition of one’s contribution to the reproduction of social life.¹⁰²

4.2.2 Between Norms and Facts

We come therefore to the third general point of Honneth’s criticisms, that is, the distinction between economic and cultural dimensions – following (not sure what you mean here actually) the first two, the nature of social movements and the precedence of ‘good’ over ‘right’. First of all, Fraser’s dualism would not be able to comprehend certain dimensions that are fundamental to *our* conception of justice, such as rights and legislations, which can be reduced neither to the ‘economic’ nor the ‘cultural’.¹⁰³ The decisive issue is once again that of guaranteeing the critical thought’s possibility of unfolding, which would be secured by the depiction of an *anti anti-normativist perspective*.¹⁰⁴ And the target is precisely Fraser’s bifocal approach: indeed, if the distinction between matters of justice and issues of recognition were exclusively analytical – as Fraser argues – it would not be able to support the cogency it was meant to with respect to social reality.¹⁰⁵ Although Fraser understands her perspectival dualism as ‘mere’ interpretative distinction, that is, as analytical tool for distinguishing two dimension that are actually undivided and thus better formulating philosophical-political proposals, the distinction also suggests a difference *de facto* between economic and cultural facts, as if the first would coincide with an autonomous sub-system:¹⁰⁶ if this were not the case, Fraser’s distinction would be purely arbitrary.¹⁰⁷ The perspectival dualism, therefore, implies the decoupling of *systemic* and *social* integration. As her example of the white specialized worker shows, social reality would be constituted, on the one hand, through market logics that possess their own autonomy, thus avoiding being ‘at the disposal’ of individuals and operating at their back, i.e. being independent from individual choices (systemic integration); on the other hand, social reality would

¹⁰² Cf. Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, pp. 161, 169; Jakobsen and Lysaker, pp. 172–73; for an attempt to translate Honneth’s account into group-identity dynamics cf. Benno Herzog, ‘Recognition in Multicultural Societies. Intergroup Relations as Second-Order Recognition’, *Revista Internacional de Sociología*, 73.2 (2015), 1–12.

¹⁰³ Cf. Greblo, p. 340; William E. Scheuerman, ‘Recent Frankfurt Critical Theory: Down on Law?’, *Constellations*, 24.1 (2017), 113–25.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Nicholas H. Smith, p. 339.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Carl-Göran Heidegren, ‘Recognition and Social Theory’, *Acta Sociologica*, 47.4 (2004), 365–73 (p. 367).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Nicholas H. Smith, p. 332.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 156.

also be shaped by another domain in which the perspectives about values and norms, subjective and intersubjective praxis, as well as the moral expectations of individuals or groups play a fundamental role (social integration). It is therefore the Habermasian distinction between *system* and *lifeworld* that Honneth, as we have already seen, intends to question, if not even set aside. And such an account of social ontology concerns above all the possibilities of critical thinking.

What is rejected is the idea of a *norms-free system*,¹⁰⁸ precisely because the absence of a normative horizon would hinder the aims of critical thought. Fraser's shortcomings would therefore be twofold: at first, the breadth of recognition would be narrowed to a cultural matter and, consequently, this would leave economic issues without normative criteria for justification and critique. Hence Honneth does not reject the idea that the economic sphere somehow possesses some autonomous dynamic, but argues that normativity has a say also in that matter: that alone would show that 'system' cannot be explained just by referring to its self-sufficient logics. What Honneth rejects is precisely the idea that the economic system is to be conceived as norm-free, as oriented by self-sufficient logics: this, in his view, would not only respond to an inaccurate reading of social reality – since social actors in their moral facticity would be excluded from the focus of inquiry – but would risk placing the market beyond the range of critique. Conversely, the perspective introduced by Honneth is that of a “moral-theoretical monism.”¹⁰⁹

[...] it is not a matter of an external relation – of applying normative criteria to a theory-independent reality – but rather of revealing this reality guided by normative criteria [...]. The three-fold “point” of the category of recognition [...] should consist precisely in establishing such an internal connection: social reality is revealed (social theory) by means of the same conception that, owing to its normative content, can be used to evaluate social change (a conception of justice) in a way that allows the perspectives of those affected to be articulated (moral psychology).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth's Social Philosophy*, p. 420; Heidegren, 'Recognition and Social Theory', p. 367; Teixeira, 'The Sociological Roots and Deficits of Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition', pp. 597–99; Teixeira, 'Can Honneth's Theory Account for a Critique of Instrumental Reason? Capitalism and the Pathologies of Negative Freedom', p. 184. According to Thompson, Honneth's attempt to derive the normative role of recognition relations and principle from the dynamics of social integration would represent a logical shortcoming, for facts and values could not be tied necessarily one another; cf. Simon Thompson, 'Is Redistribution a Form of Recognition? Comments on the Fraser-Honneth Debate', pp. 99–100. However, even these two dimensions are certain mutually irreducible, one can wonder which form of 'ought' derives its features with no regard to an 'is': thereby there may not be any logical cogency, but even deontological principles cannot help to possess certain substantive contents.

¹⁰⁹ Honneth, 'Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser', p. 157.

¹¹⁰ Honneth, 'The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to the Rejoinder', p. 265.

Although there is some lack of clarity on Honneth's part it seems correct to me to argue that his aim is not to explain the constitution of contemporary societies through a single principle, as the term 'monism' could legitimately allow us to think. In the same way, the explanation (and the critique) of institutional formations could not be implemented by resorting to the idea of recognition alone. Two aspects need to be highlighted here.

First of all, Honneth points out that his account is to be understood in terms of a *moral, not cultural*, monism.¹¹¹ His theoretical proposal cannot therefore be regarded as an attempt to bring economic issues back to an indeterminate sphere of culture – a term that is used above all by Fraser and to which Honneth rarely resorts.¹¹² The idea is not to water down the specific characteristics of the market and its systemic functioning by use of the truism that every sphere of society is cultural. This alone would be enough to understand the 'external' character of the criticism of culturalism directed at him, precisely because Honneth does not provide any account of culture and does not seem to refer to any specific idea of it. Rather, greater difficulties arise in facing the more general criticism of 'idealism', according to which his approach would not be able to critically address the sphere of economics in itself. And it is here that the fluctuations in the Honnethian account highlighted by Christopher Zurn become problematic.¹¹³

The *moral* character of Honneth's monism – that is, the conviction that normative principles are immanent to every social sphere – would result phenomenologically from the analysis of social conflicts and would be also necessary in order to develop a critical thinking that sets itself in contact with the society's emancipatory drives. Consequently, a certain social-ontological view is at stake, in which *normative integration* precedes systemic integration. Certain moral principles, which are closely tied to the requests for recognition expressed in social conflicts, play a primary role in the contemporary differentiation in social spheres; in accordance with these principles themselves – which, it should be stressed, do not coincide with recognition, but represent its directions and respective 'contents' – it would therefore be possible to develop a theory of justice. Such priority of the normative over the systemic, besides unfolding the critique's possibilities, would also constitute a key to interpreting the social ontology of contemporary societies,

¹¹¹ Cf. Honneth, 'Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser', p. 157; Honneth, 'The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to the Rejoinder', p. 254.

¹¹² A quite misleading example is represented by the idea that the theory of justice would require an account of the cultural values that shape the economic sphere; cf. Honneth, 'Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser', pp. 155–56. However, the fact that Honneth acknowledges this – rather indisputable – point does not seem to me to serve as the main connotation according to which to interpret his monism.

¹¹³ Cf. Zurn, 'Recognition, Redistribution, and Democracy: Dilemmas of Honneth's Critical Social Theory', p. 113 ff.

whose constitution (and opportunities of progress) is presided over by certain normative principles, which in turn are at stake in intersubjective relations of recognition.

From the perspective of their members, societies only represent legitimate ordering structures to the extent they are in a position to guarantee reliable relations of mutual recognition on different levels. To this extent, the normative integration of societies occurs only through the institutionalization of recognition principles, which govern, in a comprehensible way, the forms of mutual recognition through which members are included into the context of social life.¹¹⁴

As long as we hold onto the idea of a normatively substantial social theory, we must always try to discover principles of normative integration in the institutionalized spheres of society that open up the prospect of desirable improvements.¹¹⁵

However, the lack of clarity begins just when one intends to detail the relationship between the normative and the systemic, that is, between the plural principles of justice and the mechanisms of the capitalistic market (but more generally of societal forces, such as media and power). On the one hand, in fact, this idea of normative integration could suggest that such principles represent an exclusive logic of social differentiation.¹¹⁶ The systemic aspects, apparently, would not play any role. Such a perspective, as Zurn argues, would be correct at a very high level of abstraction:¹¹⁷ it is indeed conceivable arguing that the social sphere can ultimately be traced back to the interaction between its actors and that the economy, as well as other institutional formations, could in the last instance be tied to an at least implicit consensus by the participants, which can be withdrawn potentially at any time.

It is true that some socially generalized media, like money or political power, can in fact coordinate social interaction relatively automatically, but even they depend on some belief in their legitimacy that can weaken or disappear altogether at any moment.¹¹⁸

In other words, a) social reality (and the market within it) would consist of an institutionalization guided by the core *principles* at stake in intersubjective relations of recognition; b) with respect to these principles social actors could or could not (ought or ought not to) give their consent to such social formations (*justification*);

¹¹⁴ Honneth, 'Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser', p. 173.

¹¹⁵ Honneth, 'The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to the Rejoinder', p. 254.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Nicholas H. Smith, pp. 341–42.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Zurn, 'Recognition, Redistribution, and Democracy: Dilemmas of Honneth's Critical Social Theory', p. 105.

¹¹⁸ Honneth, 'The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to the Rejoinder', p. 255.

and c) that such justification would have to be accomplished in accordance with those principles should result from their ethical *validity*; this, in turn, would emerge historically and with respect to their attainability concerning individual self-realization.

If this were to be understood as Honneth's idea, his account of institutional reality would precisely lack an adequate idea of *culture*: the description of social spheres as instantiation of principles would in fact require a wider *medium* than that which can be provided by the intersubjective interactions of recognition alone. Honneth had already hinted to the idea of such a medium in *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom*, adopting the Hegelian idea of *Bildung*, but even in that case it was not specified in detail. A thick account of culture is not in Honneth's interests, most probably because it could not be supported by the idea of recognition and because, as has been said, the reconnection of 'economics' to 'culture' would not represent anything but a truism – indeed a very abstract one.

On the other hand, Honneth, pressed by Fraser's criticism, seems to emphasize another possible view in his 'Rejoinder to the Rejoinder'. Here Honneth claims that his account has no "explanatory purpose"¹¹⁹ and that the immanence of the normative in the systemic is to be understood in the sense of the market's moral "constraints".¹²⁰

The first assessment would therefore mean that the social sphere's structuring would not be realized exclusively with reference to the relations of recognition and its principles: institutions, therefore, would not be exhausted in being concretions of practices, but would possess a certain consistency on their own. Hence the principles would be decisive not for a social theory aimed at reconstructing the constitution of contemporary societies, but for a *critical* social theory. From a social-ontological point of view the systemic character of the market would not be excluded, but it in turn would not represent a norms-free social realm. In fact, as Zurn underlines and we have already seen in *Reification*, legal arrangements would represent an essential precondition for the market itself: without that form of recognition relations, the sphere of the economic could not exist as it actually does, but that would not imply a reducibility of the latter to the former.¹²¹

However, everything is played out in how one interprets the term "constraints": in my opinion, these cannot be conceived as 'external', that is as mere boundaries, on pain of a return to the division between system and lifeworld that Honneth intends to bridge. Therefore, such constraints or preconditions must be conceived

¹¹⁹ Honneth, 'The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to the Rejoinder', p. 255.

¹²⁰ Honneth, 'The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to the Rejoinder', p. 249.

¹²¹ Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 134.

as limits of *justification*, which would possess a thin (but present) social-ontological role, and a thick (but not exclusive) critical and normative one.

In this matter the Honnethian interpretation of market as sphere of *labor* plays a decisive role. As the Hegelian Civil Society represents above all an ethical sphere of interaction among subjects – whereby the ‘invisible hand’ is surely at stake, but the fundamental and peculiar character of interactions is an ethical one – Honneth understands the economic sphere as labor sphere, where (systemic) facts and norms happen to be indissolubly intertwined one another. Albeit briefly, it is here noteworthy to mention Honneth’s ideal of social democracy. Honneth refers to Dewey as saying that the formation of a (healthy) democratic public sphere requires a just division of labor and that social differentiation and coordination proceed according to a certain learning process, in which differences among the participants would enrich the social problem-solving through multiple perspectives and approaches.¹²² While this latter point represents a first, partial hint on how recognition relations and institutionalization proceed on the same track, the main interest here is represented by the idea that economics is determined in the first place by the division of labor and that the latter contains normative indications. Therefore, the comprehension of the peculiar normative core of work experience would be decisive for the depiction of a social-political theory over democracy. To this aim, the Marxian anthropology would be of little use, because it is constrained by a narrow instrumental view of rationality.¹²³ Rather, social reproduction (and its evolution according to criteria of justice) would be made possible not by work intended as instrumental action, but by its social division, which would take place by following and expanding those normative criteria according to which subjects have been socialized. That would in turn clarify to what extent the intersubjective standards of justification shape the economic dimension, because the latter would be framed through normative perspectives regarding what counts as labor in the wider horizon of social reproduction. But this hypothesis, while allowing a better understanding of Honneth’s perspective, would seem to reinvigorate the reasons of those who criticize him for ‘idealism’, that is, of a one-sidedness by his considering only norms and not social functions.¹²⁴ Indeed, the assumption of the pervasiveness of normativity often brings Honneth’s attention away from the technical, instrumental and non-subjective elements of work,¹²⁵ as well as the systemic and impersonal components of the economy.

¹²² Honneth, ‘Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation. John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today’; Zurn, ‘Recognition, Redistribution, and Democracy: Dilemmas of Honneth’s Critical Social Theory’.

¹²³ Cf. Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 127.

¹²⁴ Cf. Teixeira, ‘The Sociological Roots and Deficits of Axel Honneth’s Theory of Recognition’, p. 598.

¹²⁵ Cf. Christophe Dejours and others, *The Return of Work in Critical Theory. Self, Society, Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), pp. 94–109, 137.

If, therefore, this second interpretation of monism – which would be mostly critical and partly explanatory – seems to offer a way out with respect to an excessive ‘burden’ that the concept of recognition alone would not be able to carry, it seems to presuppose and require social-theoretical explanations that Honneth does not seem intent on providing. Moreover, this interpretative hypothesis seems to be strongly in contradiction with the Honnethian definition according to which institutions *are* concretions of practices and expressions of recognitional acts.¹²⁶

In both cases, therefore, it seems to be a dead end. The first hypothesis – which could be defined as a *thick monism* – besides being partially abandoned by Honneth already in the same work, seems not to be able to bear the weight of its own aspirations, because it is not able to establish a persuasive explanatory link between principles of recognition and institutional formations. On the other hand, the *thin monism*, while being more convincing at first glance, strongly reduces the scope of Honneth’s thinking (could one even speak of monism?), leaving in any case its side uncovered with regard to an inquiry of market ‘as such’. Moreover, it seems to be in contradiction with a definition of institution that Honneth does not abandon in more recent works.

A double way out of this stalemate could be represented by the interweaving of these alternative hypotheses. On the one hand, it is necessary to interpret ‘monism’ as a *theoretical* necessity felt by Honneth in the problematization of the *possibilities* of critical theory: only in this framework does the rejection of the market’s conceptualization as a norms-free space become comprehensible and sharable. On the other hand, it is necessary to enrich from a social-ontological point of view the perspective according to which institutions are concretions of practices, that is – using the terms from the previous paragraph – it would be necessary to make more explicit how to outline a theory of the objective spirit without spirit.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Notably, Honneth underlines that “we also need to avoid Fraser’s repeated misunderstanding that I would claim that the institutionalized spheres always fall under just one principle of recognition. Just as today public schooling is normatively integrated by two competing principles of social recognition, the family has for good reasons long been governed not only by the normative principle of love, but also increasingly by legal forms of recognition.” Honneth, ‘The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to the Rejoinder’, p. 255. Therefore, the critique levelled at Hegel in *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom*, according to which one problem of the Civil Society would coincide with its institutional plurality has to be understood as an ‘internal’ critique; that is, Honneth is convict that according to Hegel’s premises, the ethical spheres should entail only and only one institutional formation, which in turn would be shaped by one and only one recognition principle. That the idea according to which institutions are shaped by multiple recognition principles is not a transition within Honneth’s thought is shown by his analysis of the family published in German in 1995; Honneth, ‘Between Justice and Affection: The Family as a Field of Moral Disputes’.

¹²⁷ Cf. Deranty and Renault.

4.2.3 Justification, Validity and Progress

The last step of the analysis concerns the ‘criteria of justification’, which opened the perspective on *Freedom’s Right*, but also on the implications for the concept of recognition contained in *Redistribution or Recognition?* For, as we have seen, Honneth intends a theory of justice as a theory of justification. The first way to deal with the issue is to answer the question: justification *of what?* Here the peculiarity of Honneth’s position emerges, interweaving multiple levels and aims.

First, at stake is the justification by social actors of current institutionalizations of the principles of recognition, that is, of the adequacy of punctual social realizations of love, equality and merit in comparison with the expectations of the participants of the respective spheres. From this point of view, proceduralist approaches’ flaw would be that of conceiving such evaluative processes as hinging on an argumentative-rational model, while the decisive role would be played by the more articulated complex implied by the concept of practical identity. Therefore, the legitimacy of the institutional order would be more effectively described through a reference to the normative expectations for recognition.

But ‘justification’ means also the justification of this first type of justification. In fact, given that Honneth intends to base his critical project (also) on the moral experience of the social actors, one issue that arises is that of which criteria the theory uses to discern justified social drives and demands from the unjustified ones. Clearly, not all requests for recognition, justice or identity can be considered on the same level: social theory must therefore let itself be informed by social actors’ strivings for ‘justice’, but it cannot let itself fade away in them. Rather it should possess a certain distance that would consequently enable the critical perspective.

Finally, ‘justification’ coincides with the justification of the recognition principles that represent the heart of Honneth’s plural theory of justice. Love, equality and merit must be put to a process of justification and continuous revision – implemented both by social actors and the theory.

What Honneth proposes and faces is therefore a complex theoretical framework that is articulated on multiple levels. For the aim is precisely not to apply an ‘external’ criterion to social reality and then establish procedures that can lead to ‘right’ outcomes, on the part both of social actors and social theory. Although in *Redistribution or Recognition?* Honneth reiterates his anthropological justification – that is, he once again claims that love, equality and merit manifest themselves as ‘goods’ for a theory of justice because of their capacity to respond to the quasi-transcendental interests of human beings with respect to their self-realization – it is rather interesting that he objects to Fraser ‘overloading’ the moral-psychological

account with excessive implications.¹²⁸ The social partners' experience of moral injury would indeed represent an essential point for critical theory, but 'only' as adequate access point to the normative horizon that constitutes the 'actual' fabric of social reality – and not a foundationalist starting point.¹²⁹ Since the latter is Honneth's real aim – because only a theory that has achieved this perspective can 'subsequently' exercise the critique of society itself – we assist in this work the emergence of a *historical-normative justification* alongside the anthropological one. Here, in the context of the threefold meaning of 'justification', the concepts of *surplus of validity* and *progress* play a pivotal role. While the former concerns the justifiability of principles in the eyes of the theory and of the participants in the social spheres, the latter concerns the justifiability of social movements and institutions in the eyes of the theory, as well as the adequacy of institutions to the requests for recognition.

The process of justification starts from the nexus between *genealogy and validity* that characterizes Honneth's perspective from the very beginning. In fact, it may be said that deriving the 'ought' from the 'is' represents a logical incongruence,¹³⁰ but that is precisely the core of the whole paradigm: there could be no access to normativity and no theoretical delineation of it except from the present.

In the heart of the triple plan of justification there is the concept of *surplus of validity* (*Geltungsüberhang*), which implies two issues.¹³¹

First, Honneth is persuaded that certain normative principles – love, equality and merit – have been able to show their centrality through the historical evolution of modern and contemporary societies. This priority of their validity would appear foremost with respect to the social actors, that is, as goods they have pursued and are still striving for: from this point of view, their validity would count as phenomenological and social-theoretical 'evidence'. On the other hand, that represents also a normative orientation for a theory that does not intend to embrace a deontological or proceduralist perspective. These principles would have proposed themselves with a certain forming (and formed) *normative authoritativeness*,¹³² both

¹²⁸ Cf. Honneth, 'The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to the Rejoinder', p. 258.

¹²⁹ Cf. Fraser, 'Distorted Beyond All Recognition: A Rejoinder to Axel Honneth', pp. 206–9; Kompridis, 'Struggling over the Meaning of Recognition. A Matter of Identity, Justice, or Freedom?', p. 284.

¹³⁰ Cf. Simon Thompson, 'Is Redistribution a Form of Recognition? Comments on the Fraser-Honneth Debate', pp. 99–100.

¹³¹ Cf. Honneth, 'Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser', pp. 186–87; Honneth, 'The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to the Rejoinder', pp. 263–64; Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Umverteilung Oder Anerkennung? Eine Politisch-Philosophische Kontroverse* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), pp. 219 ff, 302 ff.

¹³² Cf. Tristram McPherson, 'Authoritatively Normative Concepts', in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, ed. by Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 253–77; Titus Stahl, 'The Metaethics of Critical Theories', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory*, ed. by Michael J. Thompson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 505–22.

for the social actors and consequently for the social theorist. Honneth, therefore, evidently embraces a certain *value realism*, which derives from his Hegelianism and, respectively, from the need to conceive ‘second nature’ as an evaluative dimension and a condition of possibility for gestures of recognition.¹³³

However, this *retrospective* scope of the recognition principles’ validity does not extinguish what thereby is meant. For their acquired priority would also suggest a certain capability to transcend the punctuality of the historical context, that is, representing the *intramundane transcendence* that the tradition of the Left Hegelians has always identified as an essential concept for a conceptualization of progress. The current validity of the principles would be able to exceed (*surplus*) the prevailing normative horizon, even though it is bound to it: once again, recognition order and social change are presented as concomitant and mutually dependent.

[...] that this “transcendence” must be attached to a form of practice or experience which is on the one hand indispensable for social reproduction, and on the other hand – owing to its normative surplus – points beyond all given forms of social organization. [...] “transcendence” should be a property of “immanence” itself, so that the facticity of social relations always contains a dimension of transcending claims.¹³⁴

[...] each of the three recognition spheres is distinguished by normative principles which provide their own internal standards of what counts as “just” or “unjust.” In my view, the only way forward here is the idea, outlined above, that each principle of recognition has a specific surplus of validity whose normative significance is expressed by the constant struggle over its appropriate application and interpretation. Within each sphere, it is always possible to set a moral *dialectic of the general and the particular* in motion: claims are made for a particular perspective (need, life-situation, contribution) that has not yet found appropriate consideration by appeal to a general recognition principle (love, law, achievement). In order to be up to the task of critique, the theory of justice outlined here can wield the recognition principles’ surplus validity against the facticity of their social interpretation.¹³⁵

Thus, even if transcendence should be conceived as immanence’s germinal capability of overrun itself – then as an ‘over’ with respect to *a given* context, not to *the* contextuality itself – it results that the dialectic between generality and particularity depicts: a) a certain autonomy of the principles from the relative practices; b) a certain noncoincidence between the principles’ social value (*soziale Geltung*) and normative validity (*normative Gültigkeit*).¹³⁶ This is not, of course, intended to support a reciprocal detachment from each other – because principles

¹³³ Cf. Honneth, ‘Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions’.

¹³⁴ Honneth, ‘The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to the Rejoinder’, p. 244.

¹³⁵ Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, p. 186; our emphasis.

¹³⁶ Busen, Herzog, and Sörensen, p. 265.

exist only as they are instantiated in praxis. Yet they emerge as not totally assimilated to the latter and almost as condition of possibility, thus enabling not only social conflicts, but social critique – and *vice versa*. This guiding and informing role no longer allows principles to be interpreted as mere overflows that result from the affirmation of certain dimensions of individual practical identity.

Clearly, the idea of a surplus of validity proceeds together with a certain idea of *progress* that Honneth intends to defend. As we have already seen in *The Struggle for Recognition*, a *thin* concept of progress represents the key that the theory has to distinguish between justified (progressive) and unjustified (regressive) demands for recognition.

[...] the [...] theory of justice must be embedded within the comprehensive framework of a conception of progress that is in a position to determine a directed development in the moral constitution of society. Only on this basis can it be shown with more than a merely relativistic claim to justification to what extent certain social demands can be regarded as normatively justified.¹³⁷

However, there are three significant differences from the perspective outlined in the 1992 work. The first aspect, already mentioned, is the retraction of the idea that the sphere of love is not subject to progressive re-modulations and re-interpretations. This is because – secondly – progress was considered as the exclusive domain of the spheres of right and cooperative contribution, characterized respectively by the trajectories of universalization or generalization (of rights) and de-formalization (of the esteem attributed to the individual, and no longer to the group to which she belongs). Thirdly, this historical-social dynamic would find its anchorage, on an individual level, in the conflicting polarity between ‘I’ and ‘me’, that is, in the possibility of socialized subjects to creatively transcend their normative context.

From this perspective, Honneth tries to define a *logic* of progress that would be internal to the practices of recognition and in line with the characteristics of the respective principles. Its justification would not be ‘anthropological’ as in the ‘I-me’ case,¹³⁸ but could be defined as *normative*, for it is grounded on the principles’ surplus of normativity. That is, the instantiations of recognition relations run along

¹³⁷ Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, pp. 183–84.

¹³⁸ Even if, after abandoning the binomial ‘I-me’, Honneth focuses on the omnipotence-fantasies of the child as framework of justification for the individual tendency to conflict, it never represents how he intends to justify progress, that is the transcending of the given situation according to certain vectorialities and trends. Hence, what the ‘I-me’ represented – that is, the same basis for individual conflict and possibilities of progress – is somehow split here on a justification level. For what concerns the idea of child’s omnipotence, cf. Honneth, ‘Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions’, pp. 503–4; Honneth, ‘Rejoinder’; Axel Honneth and Joel Whitebook, ‘Omnipotence or Fusion? A Conversation between Axel Honneth and Joel Whitebook’, *Constellations*, 23.2 (2016), 170–79.

the axes of *individualization* and *inclusion*.¹³⁹ With these two terms Honneth sustains that historically the social formations of recognition have been able to include more and more subjects and different identities (similar to the idea of the universalization of rights) and to concern more and more aspects and facets of the person, thus becoming intrinsically more adequate and adherent to it (as well as to the de-formalization which would have made the relations of esteem progressively deriving from individual and not group characters). If, then, this aspect remains in reality almost unchanged with *The Struggle for Recognition* except for the terminological choices, what constitutes the greatest difference is that these dynamics represent an *internal criterion* to the recognition relationships and to the ongoing social re-elaboration of their principles: equality and merit, as well as love, in their institutional forms, would require an increasingly perfect (and always perfectible) ‘application’, which spreads along paths of inclusion and individualization. Once again, it emerges clearly that recognition order and social change are not in contradiction, but the former represents the condition of the latter, just as this brings up via remodulations a new institutionalization: for Honneth, “social recognition is never something merely given, but is always *won*” and struggled for.¹⁴⁰ And it is therefore clear that Honneth’s idea of progress has an extremely cautious teleological content, and for this reason his conception can be considered *thin*. The task of the theory, in this case, is not to prescribe aims (this belongs to social conflicts from time to time), and thus to endorse substantive societal goals, but to acknowledge that “social learning process”¹⁴¹ at stake in normative re-elaborations, to identify trends that can at most be projected as trajectories on the future of social conflicts. Thanks to these trends and trajectories, theory and social actors would be equipped with the (internal) criterion that enables them to evaluate and eventually justify struggles for recognition – and not others.

Before proceeding to the analysis of *Freedom’s Right*, we are interested in underlining that the concepts of surplus of validity and progress represent a *multiplicity* within the Honnethian monism. Although both can be traced back to recognition practices and cannot ‘exist’ ‘outside’ of them, they certainly stand as some form of *third instance* to the I-Thou polarity at stake in intersubjectivity. The exceeding and overrunning character of the recognition principles informs and shapes the relations – and vice versa – while the concept of progress signifies a possible threshold of historical justification for the institutionalizations of these principles, as of the conflictual requests. Thus, if in the first case, without the ‘acting’

¹³⁹ Cf. Honneth, ‘Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser’, pp. 184–86; Honneth, ‘The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to the Rejoinder’, p. 260.

¹⁴⁰ Lauer, p. 34.

¹⁴¹ Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 78.

validity of the principles, the gestures of recognition could not take place, in the second case, without the criterion of progress it would not be possible for the critique to derive an 'ought' from an 'is', that is, it would be impossible to depict a normative social theory as Honneth himself conceives it.

4.3 *Being with Oneself in the Other: Social Freedom in Modern Societies*

Freedom's Right (original German: 2011) represents certainly the second pillar of Honnethian thought as it has evolved to date: in addition to the impressive bulk of the text, what makes it the second "magnum opus"¹⁴² is the number of levels and issues that this work addresses from a normative, social-philosophical and philosophical-political point of view, as well as the resulting multiplicity of approaches that can be employed in dealing with it. Another aspect that contributes beyond doubt to the importance of the text is the numerous innovations it contains when compared to Honneth's previous works. They can be summarized according to three nuclei.

First of all, the focus is shifted from the practices and principles of recognition to those of *freedom*, whose link with the former is certainly present, but not so linear: this transition implies a disharmonious overlay between the social-institutional model presented in *Freedom's Right* and in previous works – above all *The Struggle for Recognition*.¹⁴³

Secondly, the critical-justifying approach seems to have completely changed. The normative principles in which the theory is rooted are not justified by their capacity to contribute to the constitution of an undamaged identity: no longer at stake is the so-called *anthropological justification*.¹⁴⁴ Rather, the method put in place by the author – the *normative reconstruction* – aims to provide an internal justification for the principles conveyed in and through the institutionalized practices of personal relationships, the market and the democratic public sphere. In other words, the whole question no longer concerns a formal theory of the good, but a historically informed theory of ethical life: in this shift from anthropology to normative history, the concept of self-realization is relegated to the background.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 155.

¹⁴³ Cf. Anita Horn, 'Anerkennung Und Freiheit: Subjekttheoretische Grundlagen Einer Theorie Demokratischer Sittlichkeit', *Archiv Für Rechts- Und Sozialphilosophie*, 104.1 (2018), 16–40.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Busen, Herzog, and Sörensen, p. 265; Freyenhagen, p. 140; Rutger Claassen, 'Social Freedom and the Demands of Justice: A Study of Honneth's *Recht Der Freiheit*', *Constellations*, 21.1 (2014), 67–82 (pp. 79–80).

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Honneth and Raffnsøe-Møller, pp. 265–66.

Finally – and almost as a consequence – this different methodological approach coincides with a shift from the analysis of experiences of injustice to a more general plane of historical-normative and socio-political investigation.¹⁴⁶ Thus the ‘great absences’ of Honneth’s text seem to be, precisely, misrecognition, moral injury, suffering experiences and social conflicts – in general (and at a first glance), the negative is apparently considered exclusively as pathological or as misdevelopment and no longer as ‘propulsive’ motility.¹⁴⁷

As we shall see, most of the criticisms are directed by the secondary literature at the last two of these three innovations, which are inevitably tied together: on the one hand, the normative reconstruction would present numerous limits and, after all, would not be able to provide any justification; on the other hand, the tone of Honneth’s work would be excessively affirmative,¹⁴⁸ leaving aside what should represent Critical Theory’s real object: structural relations of power and domination, social homogeneity, ideology and reification. In my opinion, most of these criticisms are flawed in extremizing the discontinuity of *Freedom’s Right* with respect to Honneth’s previous works: thanks to the just completed analysis of *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom and Redistribution or Recognition?*, we will be able to better contextualize these conceptual innovations, so as to better understand their scope and to address more precisely the critical aspects of the work.

However, the richness and size of the text prevent a detailed analysis, at least here. We will focus on the methodological approach of normative reconstruction and on the concept of social freedom (4.3.1), and on the three ethical spheres of freedom in their basic structure, trying to emphasize the (unsatisfyingly addressed) tension between mutual recognition relationships and institutional entities (4.3.2). Finally, it will be useful to address the (numerous) criticisms directed at Honneth’s methodological approach, which concern the identification of social freedom as “arch-value of modernity.”¹⁴⁹ On a general level, these criticisms concern a *justificatory insufficiency* and a *critical deficiency* of the accounts presented in *Freedom’s Right*. Furthermore, as in the previous chapters, we intend to critically examine some of the issues that concern the paradigm of recognition more closely: indeed, the very concept of recognition is apparently blurred in the direction of a

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Rutger Claassen, ‘Social Freedom and the Demands of Justice: A Study of Honneth’s *Recht Der Freiheit*’, *Constellations*, 21.1 (2014), 67–82 (p. 67); Thomas Nys, ‘Which Justice, Whose Pathology?’, *Krisis. Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, 1 (2013), 10–13 (p. 12).

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Teixeira, ‘The Sociological Roots and Deficits of Axel Honneth’s Theory of Recognition’, pp. 605–6; Luiz Gustavo Da Cunha De Souza, ‘Recognition, Disrecognition and Legitimacy: On the Normativity of Politics’, *Thesis Eleven*, 134.1 (2016), 13–27 (p. 23).

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Odin Lysaker and Jonas Jakobsen, ‘Introduction: Recognition and Freedom in Axel Honneth’s Political Thought’, in *Recognition and Freedom. Axel Honneth’s Political Thought*, ed. by Odin Lysaker and Jonas Jakobsen (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 1–16 (p. 9).

¹⁴⁹ Karen Ng, ‘Social Freedom as Ideology’, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 20.10 (2018), 1–24 (p. 7).

vaguer account of intersubjective interaction or collective action,¹⁵⁰ and one could be at pains unearthing the specificity of recognition in the revisited framework of ethical life here proposed by Honneth (4.3.3).

4.3.1 Normative Reconstruction as Critical Method

The first issue regarding *Freedom's Right* concerns undoubtedly its methodological approach, *normative reconstruction*, that is. Although Honneth dedicates the Introduction of the work to the depiction of this methodology, he also clarifies that the “premises of such an endeavor cannot be so easily justified in advance, rather they can only be revealed in the course of the investigation.”¹⁵¹ In other words, *Freedom's Right* does not itself represent the mere application of a given or pre-elaborated method, but rather its unfolding, as if a formal methodology could only be distilled *a posteriori*, thus not untying the latter and its content. This preliminary precaution is decisive to understanding Honneth's self-comprehension by the inquiry, and exposes its Hegelian soul. As it is well known, Hegel feels a certain unease – or even aversion – toward those philosophical approaches that consider their own operation as discernible from the respective objects they observe, almost as if methodologies were considered as self-standing ‘toolboxes’. To mention the (probably) most renowned example, Hegel, with a certain amount of irony, states in the Preface of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* that the existence of a preface to a philosophical work “seems not only superfluous, but in light of the nature of the subject matter, even inappropriate and counterproductive.”¹⁵² Honneth's adoption of such an approach clearly does not follow Hegel in its justification, which depends on the spirit's logical structure and ontological life, as much as on a clear conception of philosophy itself. A meaningful kinship is easily acknowledgeable however.

In fact, Honneth's efforts are directed to the outlining of a theory of justice which cannot be – on the one hand – confined by the abstractedness of pure normative theories or — on the other — exhausted by the hermeneutic acceptance of given moral facts. The *leitmotiv* is thus represented by the renewed attempt to posit critical theory's possibilities on a third path between Kantian proceduralism and communitarianism. By this philosophical intention, Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* would represent a noteworthy – and indeed unavoidable – resource for its capability to not falling prey of both positions' flaws.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Claassen, ‘Social Freedom and the Demands of Justice: A Study of Honneth's *Recht Der Freiheit*’, p. 77.

¹⁵¹ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 3.

¹⁵² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 3.

First – with respect to Kantian political theories – Hegel’s approach would re-harmonize theoretical elaboration and “analysis of society,”¹⁵³ that is, without decoupling normative principles and moral facts. Such theories would in fact run first of all into a certain *abstractedness* because of their persuasion that norms could be defined out of their immanence to the social world, and secondly into the difficulties of identifying an apt procedure for applying those norms to social reality, and, lastly, into a certain *superfluity* or redundancy. For, from a genealogical or hermeneutic point of view, it is clear that such normative principles are rooted in *certain* moral facts and are not purely intellectual or speculative matters. However, such superfluity is revealed only when – this is Honneth’s quite compelling claim – it can be shown that “the prevailing values are normatively superior to historically antecedent social ideals.”¹⁵⁴

Second, Honneth distances himself from communitarianism to the extent that the latter’s recourse to moral facts and social facticity would turn out to be unsuccessful. That is, by flattening the philosophical-political elaboration to a hermeneutics of the present and forcing the potential scope of the first to a mere contextualism, merging or even confusing the analysis of social reality with its justification. With respect to this second perspective, the Hegelian concept of ‘Right’ would indeed respond to the rational need for justification: as seen in *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom* and in *Redistribution or Recognition?*, Honneth uses this concept by translating it into the dynamics whereby historically contingent institutional realizations find their (eventual) justification in the comparison with the surplus of validity of the principles that these institutional spheres should instantiate. This type of internal justification – and critique – which takes into account the actual normativity expressed in institutional practices but requires a standard of rationality, is the heart of the normative reconstruction and, in fact, the real object of *Freedom’s Right*.

Given Honneth’s position – outlined in the introduction by only four methodological *premises*, and shown during the course of the work via his normative reconstruction – it seems useful to outline this methodology also making explicit some conclusions of the investigation, at least to give further indication.

The *first premise* states that the possibilities of succeeding in the project of integrating a theory of justice with an analysis of society depends on the assumption that “social reproduction hinges on certain set of shared fundamental ideals and values.”¹⁵⁵ Several implications are entailed by such a claim, but the major point is that social formations can reproduce themselves only if they are justified by social

¹⁵³ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁵ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 3.

actors with regard to the norms and values that the first should instantiate according to their supposed aims.

Such a “‘transcendental’ necessity of normative integration”¹⁵⁶ is a perspective which, on closer inspection, was already at the basis of the concepts of ‘moral grammar’ and ‘surplus of validity’. Since *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth believes that social conflict is triggered when social spheres of interaction are no longer able to respond adequately to the normative demands of their participants. In this sense, conflicts lead to the formulation of new instantiations oriented towards greater harmonization with respect to the principles by which the subjects themselves have been socialized – love, equity, merit. Moreover, already in *Redistribution or Recognition?*, rejecting functionalist views on norm-free sub-systems, Honneth had argued that even generalized media such as money, need, for their reproduction, a renewed assent on the part of social actors. The difference here is that Honneth does not focus on the moral experience of the participants to the interaction, but on the institutions themselves. And the idea that legitimization of these institutions represents social reproduction’s *conditio sine qua non* – as Laitinen points out – seems to be aligning with the collective acceptance approaches to social ontology of John Searle or Raimo Tuomela. Consequently, social participants are needed to be to a certain extent *clear-sighted* with respect to institutions’ normative contents and legitimacy: the participants’ assent to the institutions would indeed represent an intentional act. Honneth would (more or less implicitly) embrace a constructivist account, because the collective intentionality on the part of the subjects would possess some ‘foundational’ power concerning the institutions’ reproduction – and even existence.¹⁵⁷ Clearly, such an approach, if understood in such quasi-contractualist terms, would be rejected by Honneth. Rather, following Hegel, the aim is to conceive of the subjects’ ‘belongingness’ to social spheres as prior to their¹⁵⁸

With the intention of re-actualizing Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, Honneth does not intend to inherit the ‘logic of the concept’ and its various implications related to the ontological status of the *Geist*. However, he would not give up the idea that moral facts embedded in social reality entail a certain rationality. It is on such socially embedded rationality, in fact, that normative reconstruction hinges, but

¹⁵⁶ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Arto Laitinen, ‘Freedom’s Left? Market’s Right? Morality’s Wrong?’, in *Ethics, Democracy, and Markets: Nordic Perspectives on World Problems*, ed. by Giorgio Baruchello, Jacob Dahl Rendtorff, and Asger Sørensen (NSU Press, 2016), pp. 258–81 (p. 269); Andrew Buchwalter, ‘The Concept of Normative Reconstruction: Honneth, Hegel, and the Aims of Critical Social Theory’, in *Reconstructing Social Theory, History and Practice. Current Perspectives in Social Theory (Vol. 35)*, ed. by Harry F. Dahms and Eric R. Lybeck (Bingley: Emerald Group, 2016), pp. 57–88 (p. 59).

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 59.

even more profoundly it would be vital for the success of critical theory: indeed, an unearthed rationality would represent the *intramundane transcendence* that a critical theory of society must necessarily ‘feed upon’.¹⁵⁹ According to Honneth, a certain class of spiritual entities – norms and values – would be able to reshape social reality to the extent that the normative claims they entail are embedded in institutions and are refined through social conflicts.¹⁶⁰ The risk of an anachronistic idealism would be mitigated by the fact that this historical rationality is not the result of a spiritual self-movement, but of the continuous polar tension between institutions, norms and social actors. Thus, regarding the institutions’ rationality, the spirit is replaced by the actors’ involvement by means of critical justification.¹⁶¹ In this way, Honneth certainly departs from Hegel to the extent that reconstructive thinking does not play the decisive role that reflection has in constituting institutional rationality itself: in other words, normative reconstruction would not be the moment when the latter becomes ‘for itself’. However, I would argue that from that argument, we cannot draw the consequence that the philosopher plays the role of a simple external observer: certainly, the task of normative reconstruction is not to shape ontological realities, but finds itself (according to its own claims) on the same level as the emancipatory interests that it intends to make explicit and contribute to make clearer – this, according to the triple level of justification already explained with regard to *Redistribution or Recognition?*: of the institutions by the social actors, of the demands of the latter by the theory, and of the institutionalized norms by the former and the latter in the name of the surplus of validity.¹⁶²

The second aspect to be taken into account is the pragmatic matrix of such a perspective on social reproduction. Through the idea of normative integration, Honneth depicts a holistic account on social action, thus bridging the gap between praxis and ideals that would be involved in a functionalistic vision: conversely, praxis and ideals are in a reciprocal and dialectical relationship, where the latter would constitute reactions to the different structural changes (*Strukturwandlungen*)

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Piet Strydom, ‘Review Essay: Honneth’s Sociological Turn’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 16.4 (2013), 530–42 (p. 531).

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Axel Honneth, ‘Replies’, *Krisis. Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, 2013, 37–47 (p. 38).

¹⁶¹ Cf. Claassen, ‘Social Freedom and the Demands of Justice: A Study of Honneth’s *Recht Der Freiheit*’, p. 71.

¹⁶² My position in this case differs from that of Buchwalter and Pippin, who argue that Honneth’s reconstructive approach leads, respectively, to an external attitude on the part of the philosopher and to the impossibility of understanding the idea of a self-constituting collective subject. Cf. Andrew Buchwalter, ‘The Concept of Normative Reconstruction: Honneth, Hegel, and the Aims of Critical Social Theory’, in *Reconstructing Social Theory, History and Practice. Current Perspectives in Social Theory (Vol. 35)*, ed. by Harry F. Dahms and Eric R. Lybeck (Bingley: Emerald Group, 2016), pp. 57–88; Robert B. Pippin, ‘Reconstructivism: On Honneth’s Hegelianism’, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 40.8 (2014), 725–41.

that take place in social practices and vice versa.¹⁶³ This would be visible in the course of *Freedom's Right* through the use of the so-called “founding documents,”¹⁶⁴ that is, those intellectual and philosophical productions that conceptualize their respective ethical spheres, shaping and being shaped by the intersubjective practices realized within them. Thereby, the vitality of actors’ engagement with the institutions and their understanding of them would count as proof of their historical and normative relevance only if this holistic account on social action is accepted.¹⁶⁵ And only from such a perspective does Honneth’s idea of progress as *learning progress* become conceivable, precisely because interaction and action are not decoupled from their normative self-understanding. Thereby, Hegel’s ‘transcendental confidence’¹⁶⁶ in historical progress could be more aptly conceived of as a not-pre-written path, but rather as an always-to-write evolution that could result only *ex post*.

That being said, the next three premises qualify almost as consequences. The *second* is that the theory’s normative point of reference should draw on those values or ideals that “constitute the conditions of reproduction of a given society”.¹⁶⁷ According to Honneth – for the object of his reconstruction coincides with Western modernity – no value can compete with the role played by the concept of freedom. As a proof of its significance and generality, individual autonomy has been invoked by political perspectives often in contradiction among themselves and according to different meanings. It also plays such a fundamental role that any philosophical or political perspective on justice that did not take individual freedom into account would not be acceptable. Therefore, normative reconstruction must take into account the role played by freedom in social reproduction,¹⁶⁸ and the method can be further characterized as a hermeneutics of the ethical self-conception of modern societies.¹⁶⁹

The *third premise* concerns *where* ‘freedom’ has to be analyzed: via social analysis, those institutionalized spheres that, as a necessary feature, realize the idea of individual freedom must be addressed. Following the Hegelian model and their role played within social reproduction, these spheres are identified as personal relationships (friendship, intimate relationships, family), the market, and the democratic public sphere. Clearly, the reconstruction differs in several respects from

¹⁶³ Cf. Axel Honneth, Andreas Busen, and Lisa Herzog, ‘Die Rekonstruktion Der Freiheit’, *Zeitschrift Für Politische Theorie*, 3.2 (2012), 271–86 (p. 275).

¹⁶⁴ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 136.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Buchwalter, p. 68.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 59.

¹⁶⁷ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 15–19.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Honneth, ‘Replies’, p. 40.

the actual situations of these spheres, precisely because of its normative character, but on the other hand

The point is not simply to outline a certain desired state of affairs, and thus to follow a purely normative approach, but to examine contemporary reality in terms of its potential for fostering practices in which universal values can be realized in a superior, i.e. a more comprehensive and suitable fashion.¹⁷⁰

The aim of reconstructive analysis does not coincide with the outlining of pure normative structures, but, on the other hand, does not concern the evaluation of specific practices or values, but rather a critical investigation of the socio-structural (and intersubjective) conditions of their realization.¹⁷¹ If, therefore, the reconstruction of the spheres includes within itself the capability of outlining the possibilities of their development – that is, the conditions of possibility of a ‘better’ realization of freedom – it follows that the *fourth premise* concerns the critical nature of the project.

The point cannot be merely to uncover and reconstruct instances of already existing ethical life, rather it must also be possible to criticize these findings in light of embodied values.¹⁷²

It is hence clear that the critical potential disclosed by normative reconstruction lies in the *counterfactual dimension* provided by the distance between the principle of freedom and its instantiations.¹⁷³ Honneth’s *internal critique*¹⁷⁴ hinges on the idea that even when they do not exert an actual influence on the social spheres – say, the capitalist market – values and norms would represent a “counterfactual basis” of validity.¹⁷⁵ Thus, the assumption that freedom represents the ‘logic’ of social reproduction may not represent immediate evidence, and could therefore raise the suspicion that this is more of a methodological assumption.¹⁷⁶ However, according to Honneth, only once the values and norms by which social actors are socialized are understood, will it be possible to criticize the inadequacies and misdevelopments of the institutions, precisely in light of the normative promise of which those same

¹⁷⁰ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 8.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Busen, Herzog, and Sørensen, p. 267.

¹⁷² Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 9.

¹⁷³ Cf. Hans Arentshorst, ‘Social Freedom in Contemporary Capitalism: A Reconstruction of Axel Honneth’s Normative Approach to the Economy’, *Studies in Social and Political Thought*, 25.Special Issue: Pathologies of Recognition (2015), 132–51 (pp. 142–44).

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Honneth and Marcelo, pp. 216–17.

¹⁷⁵ Axel Honneth, ‘Labour and Recognition: A Redefinition’, in *The I in We. Studies in the Theory of Recognition*, 2012, pp. 56–74 (p. 67), cf. also ff.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. David A. Borman, ‘Bourgeois Illusions: Honneth on the Ruling Ideas of Capitalist Societies’, in *Axel Honneth and the Critical Theory of Recognition*, ed. by Volker Schmitz (Basingstoke - New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 97–124 (p. 114).

institutions should be the bearers.¹⁷⁷ As pointed out by Pedersen,¹⁷⁸ even if Honneth's reference to Habermas – above all for what concerns the sphere of democratic life – regards mainly the early work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*,¹⁷⁹ such a critical project does possess similarities with *Between Facts and Norms*, where the key of the critical method is identified in the “tension between the normative self-understanding” and “the social facticity.”¹⁸⁰ As already stated by the first methodological premise, the heart of the matter is precisely this *normative self-understanding*, upon the horizon of which the discrepancy between standards and facticity emerges. At closer look, this counterfactual method of criticism does not differ much from what Honneth said in ‘Pathologies of the Social’, where the possibilities of critical theory were anchored in the metaphorical binomial of *pathology and healthiness*. Unlike this juvenile text, however, the image of health evoked by social pathologies and misdevelopments is not, in *Freedom's Right*, related on a weak intersubjective anthropology, but on the principles that ‘govern’ social integration via institutionalized practices. Moreover, precisely because the institutionally instantiated principles represent the (counter)factual rationality, and therefore the foundation of the possibilities of critique and progress, Honneth argues that misdevelopments cannot be “engendered or promoted by the corresponding system of action.”¹⁸¹ If the structure of such institutional practices is in fact that of realizing principles whose counterfactually grasped ‘completeness’ represents the content of justice – thus the motivational source of social conflicts and the criterion of critique – the roots of misdevelopments are to be found elsewhere or *outside*. Contrary to ‘Pathologies of the Social’, therefore, Honneth distinguishes misdevelopments and social pathologies, which, as will be seen shortly, are characterized in line with *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom and Reification*: that is, as second-order disorders.

As it has been said, the other great methodological difference, which casts a shadow over the tone of the entire work, concerns negativity in general. Indeed, Honneth has used the pathology-healthiness metaphor to access the normative horizon through negativity. Even in the present analysis, the starting point was represented by misrecognition and reification, to then define recognition and the

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Busen, Herzog, and Sørensen, pp. 266–67.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Jørgen Pedersen, ‘Writing History from a Normative Point of View. The Reconstructive Method in Axel Honneth's *Das Recht Der Freiheit*’, in *Recognition and Freedom. Axel Honneth's Political Thought*, ed. by Odin Lysaker and Jonas Jakobsen (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 237–59 (pp. 239–45).

¹⁷⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991).

¹⁸⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), p. 288.

¹⁸¹ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 128.

related moral grammar or normative implications. As far as *Freedom's Right* is concerned, such access to the text would be difficult to defend. However, I argue that such a shift by Honneth, who embraces the affirmative aspect of a normative social theory, should be read in continuity with previous works. In fact, the negative experiences (moral suffering or social pathology) were already regarded as opening up an already present normative horizon, thanks to which the negative can emerge as such – and the critique exert its own aims. Honneth's interest, particularly in this text, is to make explicit such 'already present' for the absence of which the social actors suffer or feel misrecognized. Quite simply: if, for example, in *The Struggle for Recognition* the negative was the analysis' primary factor that revealed, afterwards, the antecedence of a moral grammar, in *Freedom's Right* the primary factor of the analysis coincides with this antecedence of the normative horizon.

Stressing one more time the matter, the methodological premises of *Freedom's Right* could be synthesized as follows: a) social reproduction is guided by social actors' normative assent to some institutions, in accordance with some ethical values; b) a theory of justice that is itself led by social analysis – thus avoiding formalism or contextualism – should orient itself to socially embedded, general values, that is, freedom; c) this embeddedness instantiates through and within certain spheres, which therefore are ethical: they coincide with the personal relations, the market, and the democratic public sphere; d) normative reconstructing of the 'history' of such institutions will highlight the tension between their self-understanding and their facticity, which presents certain misdevelopments: this gap represents the dimension proper to critical thinking.

4.3.1.1 *Three Modes of Freedom*

Since freedom's instantiations represent the object of normative reconstruction, it is first necessary to understand what is meant by 'freedom' or, better, what its multiple dimensions are. Again referring to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, Honneth's account possesses many similarities to what was already argued in *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom*. However, two differences are easy to notice. First, the attempt to 'de-psychologize' the idea of social pathology is evident, as result – I believe – of the exchange with Nancy Fraser: if in the Spinoza Lectures the focus was on suffering from indeterminacy and on the therapeutic task of ethical life, in *Freedom's Right* Honneth describes for the first time social pathologies as second-order disorders, i.e. as misunderstandings – at a reflexive level – of the norms of action, which may also not involve any suffering on the part of the subject who is 'inhabited' by such distortions; on the other hand, ethical life represents a more

jagged panorama compared to the text of 2001, not exempt from misdevelopments that counteract the realization of the 'Right'. The second difference consists in the fact that in *Freedom's Right* Honneth does not limit himself to dealing with the three modes of freedom from the point of view of a theory of action, but, in each case, extrapolates the connection that there is between a certain conception (eventually experienced) of freedom and a respective theory of justice.

The first mode of freedom that is depicted by Honneth is *negative freedom*, together with its parallel: *legal freedom*.

Referring also to Sartre and Nozick, Honneth points out that all the fundamental elements of *negative freedom* are already described by Hobbes, who identifies autonomy with the absence of external impediments. According to Honneth, the key of the attractiveness of this definition lies in describing "the purpose of freedom" as entailing "protected free-space for egocentric action, unimpeded by the pressures of responsibility towards others."¹⁸² In other words, the central idea of negative freedom is a sort of guarantee of the 'individuality of the individual', within which the subject is able to suspend moral relations with others, putting in parenthesis any type of constraint and any reference to a moral content.

Over and above the different contractual perspectives that modernity has provided, the figure of justice implicit in such an idea of freedom would, according to Honneth, be particularly evident in Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. According to Nozick, such a form of freedom is embodied in *individual rights*, which are so "far-reaching" – as the well-known opening sentence of the work says – "that they raise the question of what, if anything, the state and its officials may do."¹⁸³ Consequently, any contact, any interest, any approach that intercepts the 'pomerium' of individual freedom would represent, in fact, an abuse. With regard to the life-projects of others, therefore, an *epoché* must be performed, since no individual can afford to 'interfere'. In this sense, such individualism goes also along with a certain perspective over value pluralism, whereby the only criterion that regulates interpersonal relations is based on a principle of non-interference.

However, the limits of negative freedom are quite evident and coincide with the unavailability of resources useful for self-determination: excluding from its definition an analysis of the motives and moral directions of action, this form of freedom would be almost unable to express itself.¹⁸⁴

In the second section of *Freedom's Right* – 'The Possibility of Freedom' – Honneth considers the institutionalization of negative freedom which, as already explained through the reference to Nozick, concerns *individual rights* and the law

¹⁸² Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 23.

¹⁸³ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), p. ix.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 28.

system more in general. This institutionalized form would have precise consequences with regard to the modalities of intersubjective relations and would guarantee a peculiar self-relation.

Externally, [the sum of subjective rights] grants subjects a merely purposive-rational form of decision-making, while protecting their ability to ethically form their will all the more effectively. As individuals who encounter each other in legal relationships, they represent for each other subjects that are free to act 'at will' and thus in accordance with their individual preferences. But from the internal perspective of subjects whose motives remain opaque to each other, the rights they reciprocally grant each other represent a kind of protective shell behind which they can explore the depths and shallows of their subjectivity without fear of reproach.¹⁸⁵

With regard to the 'internal' self-relation, Honneth follows Hegel in identifying *property right* as the cornerstone that discloses certain possibilities. According to Hegel, the right to own external objects meets the human need to guarantee oneself consistency: in this way, the inconsistency of the will would find a way to express itself and thus gain continuity. Therefore, the role of private property would be that of granting the subject an objective expression (*Entäußerung*) before which she can ascertain and be certain of herself. Thanks to the ownership of external objects and through the "existential meaning" that they assume over time, the legal person has a criterion through which to question external relations and the different orientations of action.¹⁸⁶ Consequently, the private space guaranteed by the property would open the doors to a fundamental horizon of self-examination, self-problematization, self-exploration, and self-assurance.¹⁸⁷

Given this fundamental dimension of self-relation, the limits of legal freedom emerge in the type of intersubjective interaction it implies, symbolized by the contract. In fact, in the contract, two subjects meet recognizing one another with respect to their ability and capability to maintain contractual constraints and obligations – therefore according to the recognitive logic of respect. In this dynamic, however, motivations and goals remain in the background, only allowing the plot of interests strategically oriented to purposes to emerge. Thereby the "schema of behaviour thus imposed by the system of the law is that of isolated actors with ostensibly strategic aims."¹⁸⁸ The only normative obligation – in this case - required of the individual is not to infringe upon the rights of the other, which explicitly implies a certain type of recognition, beyond which, however, no other type of bond or cooperation is assumed and the subject is not required to justify or publicly

¹⁸⁵ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 73.

¹⁸⁶ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 75.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 76–77.

¹⁸⁸ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 83.

express their reasons. The *legal person*, therefore can be depicted as the isolated result of the “neutralizing effect of the law.”¹⁸⁹

And it is here that the main limit of negative/legal freedom emerges, that is, an insufficiency, which can be interpreted as a contradiction between the external relationship and the internal one guaranteed by rights. In fact, individual rights, because of their lack of concern for motivation and content – which conversely allows to emerge an instrumental depiction of individual’s motives – could not direct the ethical self-interrogation of which they themselves represent the possibility through private property. In this way, “legal relations enable a kind of freedom for whose successful exercise it cannot provide the basis.”¹⁹⁰

But – more important to Honneth – it is clear that legal freedom presupposes a) a form of mutual recognition (contract), b) a normative status that is mutually granted (contractual accountability), and c) a particular of individual relation-to-self (self-confirmation through the objects, private sphere).

This estrangement from the ethical horizon of negative/legal freedom is seen as the element that leads to the formulation of the *reflexive/moral* concept of freedom. If the previous notion of freedom was derived from (quasi-)physical determinations, this new articulation of the concept identifies the essential characteristics of autonomy – intentionality, self-determination and authenticity – through an investigation of the psychic dimension of the subject: “individuals are free if their actions are solely guided by their own intentions.”¹⁹¹ Reflexive freedom therefore does not concern first of all the relationship between social actors and deeds, but their self-relation. The search for inner contents that are not subject to any heteronomy suggests that this type of self-relation has in Honneth’s eyes some resemblance to the detectivist attitude outlined in *Reification*: the subject would have ‘unlimited’ access to their inner contents and would be able to discern ‘objectively’ which motives express it authentically and which instead would represent a submission of the will to external factors.

Honneth’s discourse is more complex here and is divided into two different concepts of reflexive freedom, namely the idea of *autonomy* (which responds to the Kantian tradition) and that of *self-realization* (which instead has in Herder and in the idea of authenticity its roots). In any case, according to Honneth, the modern ‘progenitor’ of such prospects would be represented by Rousseau, who places at the center of the analysis of freedom the concept of *free will*, and the contrast between the latter and passions, that is, the difference between *autonomy* and *heteronomy*.

¹⁸⁹ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 83.

¹⁹⁰ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 83.

¹⁹¹ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 29.

Thus he identifies in an uninterrupted continuity between will and action the free gesture: *self-legislation*.¹⁹²

Without retracing the various reconstruction steps proposed by Honneth, the first concept of reflexive freedom, focused on the idea of *autonomy*, can be explained in the trajectory that goes from Kant to Habermas and Apel. On the one hand, the subject's self-relation is conceptualized in relation to universal moral norms, through which the individual can orient her deeds and ask for reasons, as well as question the surrounding context about its correspondence with such universal maxims. Thus, emerging the centrality of the *moral justifiability*, relations with others are read on the basis of a form of respect which implies this moral judgment with reference to the universality of the norms.¹⁹³ And even if Kant's transcendental perspective of the subject historically fades, giving and requesting reasons would be fundamental for the communicative processes of collective *self-legislation*, as would be the idea of *equal respect* for each participant in an interaction, based precisely on their moral accountability.¹⁹⁴

The second current that stems from Rousseau is that which reads reflexive freedom in terms of *self-realization*, whereby Honneth sketches primarily from Herder. According to this perspective, freedom consists of articulating the will, so that our deeds would allow the expansion and deepening of the original core of the self, via a "diachronic process of self-discovery."¹⁹⁵ Freedom then represents the process and the end thanks to which the individual can realize her own most intrinsic nature, whereby the nexus with the idea of *authenticity* could allow speaking of self-realization in terms of self-actualization. Clearly, the contemporary deconstruction of the self as independent substance makes such an argument highly problematic: thus, if "there is no primal, 'true' self, then self-realization cannot be understood as a process of self-discovery, but only as an essentially constructive process that demands standards other than those of reflection or identity with oneself."¹⁹⁶ From this would derive a splitting of authenticity and self-realization, where the former would correspond to a closeness or 'familiarity' between the subject, its inner contents and its deeds, while the idea of self-realization would have to meet standards of biographical continuity – as Honneth takes up Harry Frankfurt's thought.

Trying to outline the implications of such reflexive concepts of freedom in terms of the theory of justice, Honneth insists first of all on the idea of self-determination

¹⁹² Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 30–31.

¹⁹³ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 31–33.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 34–35.

¹⁹⁵ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 35.

¹⁹⁶ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 36.

proper to the Kantian perspective. It would lead to a *proceduralist* vision, where justice would have to be found in the collective exercise of certain communicative processes of self-legislation, but whereby, on the other hand, the result of these processes would not be embedded within them, thus remaining external or posterior: “the substance of this system is not determined in advance, because for conceptual reasons the theory cannot anticipate decisions that autonomous subjects must make on their own.”¹⁹⁷

As for the reflexive freedom understood as self-realization, political theories are compelled to assume at least a certain type of knowledge or anthropological assumption on what or how the individual self-unfolding could be. In this case, Honneth identifies two macro-directions: one *individualistic* and one *collectivistic*. In the first case, the task of the state would be to provide the individual with the (material and cultural) resources necessary to freely articulate its own biographical path – and the exemplary case would be John Stuart Mill. On the other hand, the various collectivist perspectives could be interpreted as similar to Hannah Arendt’s or Michael Sandel’s liberal republicanism. In these theoretical proposals, the main idea is that the nature of the self is socially shaped in a way that an expression of one’s own nature, in order to be fruitful or free, could not exclude the collective dimension. Therefore, the individual could unfold its nature only in shared democratic practices oriented by a commonality of aims.¹⁹⁸

In contrast to negative freedom, which has been formalized throughout history through individual rights, reflexive freedom, being essentially a certain type of self-relation, results as *moral autonomy* in “a weakly institutionalized cultural pattern.”¹⁹⁹ However, even this kind of autonomy possesses certain characteristics that do not allow it to be reduced to a mere symbolic system of orientation.

Just like legal freedom, the institutionalization of moral autonomy is accompanied by certain practices of mutual recognition; here as well, subjects ascribe to each other a certain normative status and expect a specific individual relation-to-self. Just like the private autonomy guaranteed by the modern legal system, the principle of moral autonomy, which is also organized as a system of action, only enables freedom and does not realize it institutionally. Here as well, individuals are only given the opportunity, granted by the culture though not enforced by the government, to retreat from intersubjective obligations in order to then reconnect, in the light of a specific moral perspective, to a lifeworld previously experienced as divided.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 37.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 38–39.

¹⁹⁹ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 96.

²⁰⁰ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 96.

Thereby, Honneth highlights two major articulations of moral freedom. The first could be described as a *critical moral freedom*. In fact, the transcendental horizon of the norms allows each individual, regardless of his or her situation, to appeal to universal norms that guarantee him or her a perspective from which to question the social environment. The second aspect of moral freedom, on the other hand, is positive and more closely concerns the Kantian imperative: in the name of this access to transcendental norms, which does not represent some individuals' prerogative but is proper to every rational being, it follows that other human beings are due recognition as 'ends in themselves', according to a logic of respect. Therefore, individuals who emancipate from the laws of nature and from their ethical context via an appeal to universal norms are enabled, in the name of freedom, to assume a perspective from which they can critically oppose the existing norms and, at the same time, work constructively in favor of new normative systems through a rational self-legislation.

As a generally shared body of knowledge, moral freedom is relevant to every individual as an independent authority that grants individuals the opportunity to legitimately question given norms of action and, if necessary, to overstep them.²⁰¹

If, therefore, the legal person could ask for an external confirmation of its own identity thanks to a comparison with objects of its own possession, for the moral personality, this type of self-relation would be realized through cognitive reference to universal(izable) norms. Without focusing on Honneth's analysis of Dewey, Schiller, Korsgaard, and Habermas' reflections,²⁰² it is useful to underline one more aspect. That the consideration of every other individual as an end in itself can be based on human nature – that is, on the innate rational faculties that allow it to refer to a universal normative horizon – is a conceptualization strongly questioned by the last century and by the deconstructing of the modern subject. At the same time, it has become a highly problematic assumption that universal norms have their own consistency regardless of the socio-cultural perspectives in the field. Consequently, Honneth comprehends the contemporary contribution of such views mainly in Habermasian terms.

Exercising moral freedom means taking part in a sphere of interaction that has emerged on the basis of shared and internalized knowledge – a sphere that is regulated by norms of mutual recognition.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 105.

²⁰² Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 98–104.

²⁰³ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 105.

The dignity of the individual, in fact, although universal, always has a decisive link with his or her partners of interaction and with the culturally institutionalized forms that allow him or her to perceive themselves 'prior' to every role or social situation, and therefore with rational tools useful to their criticism. As in the case of legal freedom, therefore, moral freedom involves: a) certain practices of recognition (respect), b) a specific status granted to one another (dignity), and c) a particular form of self-relation (the cognitive possibility of referring to rules that are to some extent unrelated to the context).

Despite the significant contribution made by these forms of freedom, particularly with respect to the forms of self-relation which they disclose (the confirmation of oneself as independent from the social context and the possibility of questioning that context), the almost exclusively suspensive nature also indicates their main limit. Their "postponing and interruptive function"²⁰⁴ shows indeed their insufficiency. The limitations of legal and moral freedom could be therefore understood as a *genealogical inversion*, which causes a 'possibility failure'.²⁰⁵ Synthetically, these two forms of freedom are based on normative and intersubjective conditions that do not fall within their own definition. On the one hand, the legal or moral subject's freedom status depends on intersubjective relationships of recognition that are then suspended via ethical self-interrogation; on the other hand, the normative contents to which the latter refers cannot be the result of these forms of freedom. They therefore represent a fundamental possibility of 'putting the context in parentheses,' but, considered as self-standing, they can remain exclusively indeterminate, confined – and here Honneth follows Hegel – to a mere faculty or empty possibility.

However, it should be stressed that, according to Honneth's reading, these forms of freedom are not simply "ontologically tainted."²⁰⁶ They represent a fundamental contribution to the constitution of modern subjectivity and its institutionalized forms – moreover, the very form of ethical life would be unthinkable without such frameworks of legal and moral freedom, which essentially belong to ethical life,²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 94.

²⁰⁵ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 81–86, 104–13.

²⁰⁶ Joel Anderson, 'The Fragile Accomplishment of Social Freedom', *Krisis. Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, 2013, 18–22 (p. 20).

²⁰⁷ "Hegel obviously intends thereby to integrate the other two forms of freedom dealt with above into his system of ethical life [...]. They are intended as a supplement to the ordered system of ethical institutions, granting individuals the right to legitimately renounce the demands these institutions make, without representing the source of a new order. Whether Hegel would have been prepared to include the rejection of the system as a legitimate exercise of legal and moral freedoms, provided this renunciation is shared by a sufficiently large portion of the population, is an interesting question." Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 58; cf. also Honneth and Raffnsøe-Møller, pp. 262–63.

but do not possess the necessary ‘self-consistency’ to bridge the gap between self and other. For sure, Honneth does not sufficiently emphasize these elements,²⁰⁸ and does not provide an account of the necessary capabilities that a contemporary person would need in order to master such different and daily present modes of freedom,²⁰⁹ a fact which would justify the criticisms that have been levelled at him.²¹⁰ However, one could say that, following the first methodological premise, the existence of renewed consensus and assent to these ideas of freedom would to some degree justify their normative demand. To mention two examples of the relevance of such forms of freedom in the section on ethical life, it is enough to think of the normative meaning of labor contracts – which pertain properly to legal freedom – or of the critical attitude in general (both on the part of the theorist and on the part of social movements), which coincides with moral freedom’s stance, departing from the surrounding context to compare it with general norms. Conversely, their limits are to be interpreted in line with what has already been said by Honneth in *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom*: these forms of freedom are not self-sufficient and, even to express them according to their own characteristics, they need to be embedded in the broader horizon of institutionalized ethical life. On the other hand, in the event that such reconciliation does not take place, that is, when these norms of action autonomize themselves, social pathologies would onset.

In *Freedom’s Right* Honneth endorses for the first time the definition of social pathologies as second-order disorders, thus considering them social developments that significantly impair “the ability to take part rationally in important forms of social cooperation” and that “impact subjects’ reflexive access to primary systems of actions and norms.”²¹¹ Since these are impediments whose emergence is attested on a reflexive level, these phenomena are difficult to ascertain from a sociological point of view, which is why Honneth also resorts to aesthetic expressions.

This is the case of the first form of pathology of legal freedom, where the film *Kramer vs. Kramer* could be taken as an exemplary case of the *juridification* of relationships: in a dynamic similar to that described in *Reification*, the totalization of juridical claims would lead to forget the communicative dimension that the relationship with the other could have.²¹² The second pathology, instead – depicted by mentioning the novel *Indecision* – rather than finding its origin in the legal system and in the proliferation of legal forms of public interaction, would concern the very essence of the interruptive gesture that concerns the private sphere – and therefore

²⁰⁸ Cf. Buchwalter, p. 71.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Anderson, p. 20.

²¹⁰ Cf. Nys; Beate Rössler, ‘Kantian Autonomy and Its Social Preconditions. On Axel Honneth’s *Das Recht Der Freiheit*’, *Krisis. Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, 2013, 14–17.

²¹¹ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 86.

²¹² Cf. Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 88–92.

its 'emulation' within other social spheres of action. The suggestion that Honneth intends to offer is that the increasingly widespread perception that the maintenance of long-term obligations or commitments would be futile somehow hinges on the atomization of legal subjects. Within the private horizon obtained via the suspension of all intersubjective obligations, the self would not be provided with an apt horizon of motivation and aims of action: in other words, it would suffer from indeterminacy.²¹³

Honneth also identifies two different cases of the pathologies of moral freedom, where both derive from an autonomization of the bond between the individual and the moral norms to which it refers. If, on the one hand, there is the *rigid moralism* that derives from an insensitivity to the pre-existing context and bonds,²¹⁴ on the other hand, a certain *political absolutism* could be explained in the consideration of oneself as absolute (moral) lawgiver²¹⁵ – and here Honneth's depiction possesses many similarities with Hegel's account on Revolutionary Terror provided in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.²¹⁶ Such depictions are thus aimed at criticizing an agent-neutral morality,²¹⁷ so as a context-neutral one, whereby the implementations of moral values and norms are considered to unfold without any regard for each involved actor or situation.

Here it should be stressed that social pathologies do not constitute at all – as has already been said about *Reification* – psychoses, moral errors or rational defectiveness that depend on individual choices or personally grounded stances. Rather, Honneth leads a critique of certain socially established forms of life (which, in this case, coincide with different facets of individualist atomism) that social actors find themselves living (tendentially unaware), thus misunderstanding from the outset some norms of action and contributing to the social reproduction of distorted patterns. As grounding factor of social pathologies there is therefore a 'general' or socially widespread misunderstanding, which, to be defined as such, requires a definition of 'not-misunderstood' norms of action: otherwise, pathologies could be identified only on the basis of what are the majority values and norms within a given social environment, with ruinous consequences for critical theory's goals.

For what has been said, such 'not-misunderstood' norm of freedom must, like the two previous forms, include in its definition a) certain relations of recognition, b)

²¹³ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 92–93.

²¹⁴ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 114–18; Honneth, 'Decentered Autonomy: The Subject after the Fall'.

²¹⁵ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 118–20.

²¹⁶ Cf. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp. 339–47.

²¹⁷ Cf. Laitinen, 'Freedom's Left? Market's Right? Morality's Wrong?', p. 274.

specific normative statuses, and must enable c) peculiar modes of self-relation. Contrary to legal and moral freedoms, however, such freedom must entail in its own definition the respective orientative contents (remedying the ‘mere possibility’ character) and must not be subject to the logic of genealogical inversion (thus ‘remaining’ in the domain of its ‘phenomenological’ shaping, intersubjective relations that is). In other words, it must be a form of freedom in which ‘otherness’ does not represent heteronomy, but the objective dimension through which what, if considered only for part of the individual (free will) remains bound to the emptiness of possibility, can be comprehensively actualized. For Hegel, notoriously, the realization of freedom coincides with the experience of *being with oneself in the other*, which concerns not only a social dimension, but also the general level of subject-object polarity and the dynamics according to which the latter would become subject in turn, generating a dialectic identity between the two poles of cognition, traditionally separated by a hiatus. Honneth, clearly, attributes to this definition an intersubjective or relational character, translating this third model of freedom proposed by Hegel with the expression *social freedom*,²¹⁸ whereby the dimension of otherness in which one can be with oneself clearly has precise features: it consists of other persons or at least of the second nature. Thereby, such yet to clarify freedom would decisively not invert the phenomenological priority that intersubjectivity possesses before subjectivity.

Our dealings with others, our social interaction, necessarily precedes the act of detachment captured in relations of negative or moral freedom. Hence we must define that antecedent layer of freedom located in the sphere in which humans relate to each other in some way.²¹⁹

The central element for which this form of freedom should be ‘superior’ to the models illustrated above concerns the need for complementarity (*Ergänzungsbedürftigkeit*)²²⁰ that *acting* would require for its own being free: in order not to succumb to the indeterminacy of contents (legal freedom) or to the heteronomy not of intentions, but of acts (moral freedom), it is necessary to meet another “whose aims complement our owns.”²²¹ Now, such complementarity can be understood according to Honneth in a *weak sense*, whereby the first would constitute a horizon of conditions for the free expression of the individual, or in a *strong (ontological) sense*, according to which social objectivity itself is proposed as

²¹⁸ Cf. Neuhausser, *Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory. Actualizing Freedom*, p. 6.

²¹⁹ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 60.

²²⁰ Axel Honneth, *Das Recht Der Freiheit. Grundriß Einer Demokratischen Sittlichkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), p. 86.

²²¹ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 45.

‘identical’ – and not simply conciliatory – to the reflexive intentions of the self.²²² If, therefore, the idea that the interdependence of each person’s freedom should not coincide with an interdependence of aims can be read as a perspective belonging to the weak perspective,²²³ with the strong version of social freedom Honneth seems to tell that even the determined purposes of ego and alter must coincide, according to a much more demanding perspective: and this is where the concept of *mutual recognition* comes into play. In the logic of mutual recognition, in fact, subjects ‘meet’ by implementing an identical purpose: to recognize each other.²²⁴ Hence, those of mutual recognition are the norms of action that *should* inform social reality so as to realize social freedom.²²⁵

Given that social freedom in the strong sense can only result from – or even coincide with – recognition interactions, and provided the interest of normative reconstruction in not untying the elaboration of a theory of justice from a social analysis, Honneth provides a *thin concept* of institution that can match the intersubjective character of freedom practices.

For Hegel, institutions belong to the concept of freedom because the intersubjective structure of freedom must be relieved of the necessary task of coordinating subjects: In the routine practices objectified in an institutional structure, subjects can almost automatically recognize which contribution they need to make in order to realize their aims, which is only possible in concert [...]. The category of recognition, which for Hegel is the key to determining the intersubjective nature of freedom, is also the decisive foundation for his notion of institutions: Because such complexes of regulated behaviour must provide subjects with social conditions that allow the reciprocal realization of freedom, institutions must constitute congealed forms of mutual recognition.²²⁶

Institutions would then be considered as coagulations of recognition practices and, precisely because of the link between the latter and the former, they can be conceived as institutions that foster social freedom.

²²² Cf. Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 47–48.

²²³ Cf. Laitinen, ‘Freedom’s Left? Market’s Right? Morality’s Wrong?’, p. 271.

²²⁴ Although not mentioned by Honneth, it is difficult not to notice a similarity between this perspective and the *pure concept of recognition* outlined in the *Phenomenology*: “Each is the mediating middle to the other, through which each mediates itself with itself and integrates itself with itself. Each is, to itself, and in that of the other, an essence immediately existing for itself which at the same time is for itself in that way only through this mediation. They *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing each other*.” Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 110. As the Hegelian treatment of self-consciousness shows well, however, this ‘purity’ of recognition (and therefore, in the specific case of social freedom, the identity of the aims) represents a phenomenologically difficult case to find and a highly demanding theoretical standard.

²²⁵ Cf. Claassen, ‘Social Freedom and the Demands of Justice: A Study of Honneth’s *Recht Der Freiheit*’, pp. 69–70.

²²⁶ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 53.

It follows that the theory of justice relating to social freedom should result – as has already been said – from an analysis of intersubjective practices that are formed and form certain institutional spheres along lines of mutual recognition: personal relations, the market, and the democratic public sphere. The analysis of these spheres should provide internal criteria (i.e. concerning the ethical self-understanding of the spheres operating in the respective participants) to determine their correctness with respect to the principles that they should realize.

4.3.2 The Spheres of Social Freedom

In the exposition of the theory of justice that derives from the concept of social freedom, Honneth implements the normative reconstruction, that is, providing a counterfactual version of three institutional contexts that should realize – with respect to their own constitutive promises – their participants’ freedom through the recognition practices they inform. In other terms, Honneth presents the institutional spheres as *ideal actualities*,²²⁷ that is following Hegel in elaborating a social analysis which creates “an equilibrium between historical and social circumstances and rational considerations.”²²⁸ In this way, the reconstruction of institutional practices would not be flattened on historical analysis or context-determined values, but on the other hand the theory of justice could be articulated with respect to a sociologically distilled intramundane transcendence, which would therefore entail a precise criticism of the relative misdevelopments too. As already mentioned, they correspond (in broad terms) with the subdivision made by Hegel in his *Philosophy of Right*: personal relations, market, democratic public sphere. In considering such institutional frameworks, Honneth’s primary aim is not to define the latter’s function or functional structure, but to illuminate which forms of intersubjective freedom they could (or should) foster in order to be considered just.

The consequence of reconnecting freedom to institutions is that a conception of justice is based on the value of freedom cannot be developed and justified without simultaneously giving an account of the corresponding institutional structures. It is not enough to derive formal principles, rather theory must reach out to social reality; only there do we find the conditions that provide all individuals with the maximum individual freedom to pursue their aims [...]. To elucidate what it means for individuals to be free necessarily implies determining the existing institutions in which they can experience recognition in normatively regulated interaction with others.²²⁹

²²⁷ Cf. Ng, p. 14 and ff.

²²⁸ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 56.

²²⁹ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 65.

In fact, even though the increased ‘generality’ of Honneth’s perspective – which no longer focuses on the experience of individuals, but on social-political issues – is granted, this investigation of institutions does not concern what could be defined as their structural or ontological character: it does not analyze the ‘actual’ functioning of the market or the laws that regulate it,²³⁰ as well as the relationship between individuals and government, legislation, political power or the administration of justice, as well as schooling.²³¹ In other words, neither institutions as the term is usually understood nor the relationship between individuals and these social spheres considered as a whole are addressed.²³² Rather, Honneth does not abandon the action-theoretical approach that characterized his view since at least *The Struggle for Recognition* and considers intersubjective relationships that occur in second-natural contexts where subjects are led to assume certain attitudes toward each other. And it is precisely from within such perspective that the centrality of the idea of *collective action* takes its own importance for *Freedom’s Right* and hints are given about a somehow differently accentuated concept of recognition.

These systems of action [i.e. institutions] must be termed ‘relational’ because the activities of individual members within them complement each other; they can be regarded as ‘ethical’ because they involve a form of obligation that does not have the contrariness of a mere ‘ought’ [...]. The behavioural expectations that subjects have of each other within such ‘relational’ institutions are institutionalized in the shape of social roles that normally ensure the smooth interlocking of their respective activities. When subjects fulfill their respective roles, they complement each other’s incomplete actions in such a way that they can only act in a collective or unified fashion.²³³

The centrality of “role obligations” within the relational-ethical institutions shows once again and in an evident way – if needed – that, for Honneth, the definition of recognition cannot prescind from second-natural elements.

²³⁰ Cf., among others, Michael J. Thompson, ‘The Neo-Idealist Paradigm Shift in Contemporary Critical Theory’, in *Globalization, Critique and Social Theory: Diagnoses and Challenges*, ed. by Harry F. Dahms (Bingley: Emerald Group, 2015), xxxiii, 137–63; Michael J. Thompson, ‘Hierarchy, Social Pathology and the Failure of Recognition Theory’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2018, 1–17. These issues will be addressed in more detail in relation to the market and then regarding the more general criticisms to *Freedom’s Right’s* approach.

²³¹ Cf. Bert van den Brink, ‘From Personal Relations to the Rest of Society’, *Krisis. Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, 2013, 23–27 (p. 25). Honneth admits in his reply to van den Brink’s observation that he would entail an account about formal schooling – the lack of consideration of which in fact was already presented as a shortcoming of contemporary philosophical-political landscape – in an eventually new edited version of *Freedom’s Right*; cf. Honneth, ‘Replies’; Axel Honneth, ‘Education and the Democratic Public Sphere. A Neglected Chapter of Political Philosophy’, in *Recognition and Freedom. Axel Honneth’s Political Thought*, ed. by Odin Lysaker and Jonas Jakobsen (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 17–32.

²³² Cf. Horn, p. 29; Honneth, ‘Replies’, p. 42.

²³³ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 125.

4.3.2.1 Personal Relationships

In *Freedom's Right* Honneth proposes a more complex differentiation of the sphere of personal relationships than in previous works. If, in fact, friendship has always been mentioned, as well as sexual relations, the focus always seemed to be on the infant-caregiver relationship, which was one of the main axes of the anthropological and social-ontological priority accorded to intersubjectivity. Here, the latter relational form is almost absent and emphasis is placed on mutuality and equality within frameworks in which the involved partners are simultaneously recognizers and recognized, that is, able to assume and grant each other normative statuses and fulfil "complementary role obligations".²³⁴ Just as by legal and moral freedom, also this kind of social freedom a) depicts a kind of mutual recognition relations; b) exposes certain moral statuses that are reciprocally granted; c) discloses specific relations-to-self enabled by the partaking in the first.

The three relational spheres here considered by Honneth are *friendship*, *intimate relationships*, and *families*. For each of these institutions of recognition, which involve not only the logic of love or emotional support, but also mutual respect and esteem, Honneth highlights, through his normative reconstruction, a tendency to increasing 'purification' of the normative expectations from external motivations to their subsistence.²³⁵ Almost to underline the clear distance with the positions expressed in *The Struggle for Recognition*, therefore, progress in personal relationships is seen as one of the fundamental aspects that base their legitimacy in the eyes of the participants, so that forms of friendship, intimacy or family that find their motivation in reasons other than the relationship itself would no longer be acceptable. In other words, through such historical-normative reconstruction, Honneth claims to have distilled the implicit norms that participants share and through which these very relational forms could be (and are actually) evaluated: those historically emerging standards are, synthetically, an increased generalization or democratization, a finer differentiation in institutional roles, and an increasingly mutual and equal performing of the respective role obligations.²³⁶

As far as *friendship* is concerned, the central element would be the possibility disclosed by this type of relationship of entrusting a public space with the self-interrogation and self-exploration that legal and moral freedom confine in the private sphere. Through the medium of esteem, those involved in friendship would be free to share in a way that the absence of the other would prevent.

²³⁴ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 133.

²³⁵ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 134–38, 141–50, 154–62.

²³⁶ Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, pp. 174–76.

The complementary role obligations that define friendship today enable the mutual display of feelings, attitudes and intentions that would find no expression without a concrete other, and thus could not be experienced as something capable of being expressed. So much do we take for granted this experience of having our will ‘freed’ in friendly conversation and togetherness that we can hardly use the term ‘freedom’ to describe it, even though it is the only term that explains our primary interest in cultivating friendships, and that captures the place of friendship occupies within our social life.²³⁷

When it comes to friendship, being with oneself in the other means entrusting one’s own desires in all their diffuseness and tentativeness to another person without compulsion or fear.²³⁸

It is clear that in these cases ‘other’ does not represent a potential limit or obstacle, rather a condition of freedom, which concerns above all the possibility of entering into a relationship with oneself, thus expressing a greater familiarity with one’s inner contents. Besides a certain form of *expressionism* – according to which a non-reified attitude towards one’s inner contents consists in considering them as ‘givennesses’ worthy of expression²³⁹ – such types of relationality would favor forms of *ego-boundary dissolution* that are considered by Honneth as means and manifestations of inner vitality and freedom, rather than irrational regression.²⁴⁰ In general – one could say – at stake in personal relationships is the “balance between boundary-establishment and boundary-dissolution” at the heart of the relationship between infant and caregiver described in *The Struggle for Recognition*.²⁴¹ Hence, one could say that the key idea regarding social freedom within personal relationships is precisely disclosing one’s own frailty and vulnerability, thus ‘handing’ them over in the presence of another, thanks to whom the dissolution of egoic boundaries is not perceived as a potential threat. Therefore, the possibilities of self-relationship constituted by these forms of social freedom concern the ‘demolition’ of egoic rigidity and the acceptance of one’s own vulnerability or self-insufficiency, according to three dimensions: inner contents (friendship), corporeity (intimate relationships) and the finiteness of life (family).

Intimate relationships, which throughout history have been shaped by an ever-increasing unilateralization of affection as the basic reason for their existence – even though, unlike friendship, they are more consistently structured by a legal framework– are built on a ‘temporal community’ between two partners who can

²³⁷ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 139.

²³⁸ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 140.

²³⁹ Cf. Honneth, *Reification. A New Look an Old Idea*, pp. 67–75.

²⁴⁰ Cf. Axel Honneth, “‘Anxiety and Politics’”. The Strengths and Weaknesses of Franz Neumann’s Diagnosis of a Social Pathology’, in *Pathologies of Reason. On the Legacy of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 146–56.

²⁴¹ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 106.

identify with such a relational structure: “such a self-reinforcing history of a retrospective ‘We’” represents “a crucial element of love.”²⁴² However, the distinctive factor for which they can be considered a form of ethical life concerns the physical-sexual dimension.

What distinguishes love from all forms of friendship and what makes it a unique form of personal attachment is the mutual desire for sexual intimacy and the comprehensive pleasure in the other’s physicality. There is no other place, perhaps with the exception of the intensive care unit or rest homes, where the human body is so socially present in all its uncontrollable independence and fragility as it is in the sexual interactions of two loving partners.²⁴³

To be with oneself in another therefore means to regain, in the intimacy of love, one’s natural incompleteness through bodily communication, without having to fear that this could compromise or hurt us. The moral rules implicitly in force today in the loving relationship aim to guarantee mutual trust or confidence, which allows us to reveal ourselves physically in front of a concrete other. Also in this case, freedom from fear is the essential element of the ‘We’ of personal relationships: only trust in the other who encourages and approves allows one to expose oneself in all its most intimate vulnerability. Such depiction of the bodily dimension let us grasp the deep connection with *The Struggle for Recognition*: the specularity of love and physical violence.

Moving on to the third institutionalized context of intersubjective freedom, the first distinctive element in comparison to friendship and intimate relationships consists of the fact that “families represent triadic rather than dyadic relationships,”²⁴⁴ that is, the triangular relation parent-parent-child (or children).

Honneth argues that from the decay of the model centered on children’s obedience and on a rigid division of roles between parents, families today possess a degree of intersubjective discursiveness and equality no longer comparable with the image it offered at the beginning of modernity. Also in the relationship with children, an orientation towards confrontation, rather than control, becomes more and more possible. Honneth thus reads the formation of “multi-locational cross-generational families [*multilokale Mehrgenerationenfamilie*]”²⁴⁵ as result of the increasing divorces’ rates, in the continuity of natural relationships between parents and children even at the end of partnerships, and in the maintenance of ties between the generations even in geographical distance. Contrary to friendships and intimate

²⁴² Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 147.

²⁴³ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 147.

²⁴⁴ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 154.

²⁴⁵ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 162.

relationships, family relationships would show a ‘resistance’ to dislocations and temporality.

Parent-child relationships are not only legally and normatively interminable, in the last fifty years they have even undergone a process of ‘structural solidification’, making them the central focus of the life-long attentiveness and concern of the parents.²⁴⁶

The moral core of this institution must be grasped in the greater communicative understanding required by the relations, in the greater equality among its members and in the fact that the union is generated exclusively by an affection that does not require external factors to be realized. Honneth thus outlines a model in which conflict and power relations within the family seem to have no place, based on the persuasion that like never before families have become a free social concretion, both from the external point of view of the legal guarantees for different forms of family “(married/unmarried parents, biological/‘social’ children, heterosexual/homosexual parents)”²⁴⁷ and from the internal one of the confrontation of the various members, centered on the dedication to the other.

This position can, of course, be criticized in many respects. First of all, Honneth would fail to take into account the constitutive role played by socio-economic factors in the formation of contemporary families.²⁴⁸ The reference to time taken away from intimacy by work and school or the previous reference – with respect to intimate relationships – to the greater fluidity of relationships, due also to the logic of globalization,²⁴⁹ would not be sufficient to avoid a certain idealism, or at least a certain naivety. But more than this, Honneth does not seem to take into consideration that today’s families, rather than having become ‘pure relations’ justified only on the basis of mutual affection and care, would respond to logic certainly more subtle than in the past, but that would still be imposed on them in the process of their formation and children’s education. And it was precisely the first generation of the Frankfurt School that claimed that families had been disjointed and reformulated under the imperatives of a capillary domination.²⁵⁰ On the liberal side, proposing what seems a *certain* model of family would represent a to substantive account for a theory of justice.²⁵¹ Precisely because the one presented by Honneth is *a* family model, he would also exclude from normative reconstruction different types of family and therefore different modernities.²⁵²

²⁴⁶ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 163.

²⁴⁷ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 163.

²⁴⁸ Cf. Foster, p. 458.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 151–52, 163.

²⁵⁰ Cf. Michael J. Thompson, ‘Axel Honneth and the Neo-Idealist Turn in Critical Theory’, pp. 783–86.

²⁵¹ Cf. Piromalli, p. 275.

²⁵² Cf. van den Brink, ‘From Personal Relations to the Rest of Society’, p. 26.

As for the first criticism, an answer can be given by using the resources provided by Honneth explicitly in *The Struggle for Recognition* and – I argue – more implicitly in this text. The fact that the critical method is no longer justified in anthropological terms does not mean that the anthropological and phylogenetic contribution of recognition should be set aside – albeit always understood normatively. This level is simply left in the background in *Freedom's Right*, but it is not absent.²⁵³ In fact, the whole Honnethian discourse about personal relationships is centered on the vulnerability and inadequacy of the individual. Intersubjectivity's primacy over subjectivity cannot but result in a certain normative 'positivity' attributed to the phenomenological forms in which this antecedence manifests itself. Correctly, Thompson indicates the reference to Mead as the cause of a general disregard of the close interconnection between socialization and domination by the last generations of the Frankfurt School,²⁵⁴ whereby social integration could also be considered as 'homologation', but one that triggers the fundamental 'I-me' polarity and that represents an unavoidable condition of self-relation. From this point of view, however, the non-consideration of the infant-caregiver relation represents a shortcoming in *Freedom's Right*, where the relationship between parents and children is described in a more mutual way to avoid the difficult implications that the difference between symmetry and reciprocity pose to the concept of recognition itself. As far as the liberal criticism is concerned, the model offered by Honneth seems, on the one hand, to be sufficiently broad and comprehensive to be able to respond, first of all, to a sociological datum that is present in western societies and, on the other hand, capable of understanding other perspectives on the family. Moreover, he underlines that families do not represent "a biological constant of human history,"²⁵⁵ and therefore should be considered 'only' as institutional concretions, therefore 'porous' and open to further evolutions and modifications.

Beyond these considerations, the possibility of *being with oneself in the other* in the family relations thus configured would be articulated, once again, as overcoming of one's own boundaries. In particular, Honneth finds the distinctive element of family relationships starting from the centrality of the objectification of parents' love in the child and the possibility of the child to be reflected in them. Today more than yesterday, given the multigenerational permanence of these relationships, the "core of this mutual mirroring" would concern "the temporal dimension of human life, in its biological course as a whole."²⁵⁶ Moreover children and parents "reflect for

²⁵³ Horn, p. 27; Busen, Herzog, and Sørensen, p. 265.

²⁵⁴ Cf. Michael J. Thompson, 'The Neo-Idealist Paradigm Shift in Contemporary Critical Theory', p. 157.

²⁵⁵ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 155.

²⁵⁶ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 170.

each other the life phases that are either past or still to come,” thus gaining a sense “of the uncontrollable element of their own biologically determined lives.”²⁵⁷

But even if such experiences would be decisive, the ethical core, the experience of social freedom that is, of the family is represented by *play* and the related “experimental role-switching.”²⁵⁸

In both directions, this dedifferentiation at work not only in the family members’ imaginations, but also in their practical interaction with each other, represents a kind of emancipation, because it enables them to take a more relaxed perspective on the periodicity of our organic life and suspend it for the duration of their play with each other. In these moments, we can move forwards and backwards in our organic existence as if our external and inner nature imposed no limits upon us.²⁵⁹

It then clearly emerges that it is not enough to say that personal relations represent the possibility of expressing one’s inner nature,²⁶⁰ since such statements regarding playing and mutual mirroring of parents and children profoundly relate to the fading of ego’s boundaries into an approving intersubjectivity, also as far as organic life, loneliness and death are concerned.²⁶¹ Then, if “freedom signifies our experience of being free from coercion, of unfolding our personality,”²⁶² it emerges clearly that the very sense of social freedom emerges in personal relations’ depiction.²⁶³ In fact, here the coincidence between modes of relationship and self-relationship is almost without discontinuity – with the risk, on the other hand, of providing an all too idealized image. However, it is evident that in personal relationships it is only the presence of others that can satisfy the need to complement our actions and goals. And it clearly emerges that freedom coincides with the mutual satisfaction of inherent normative role tasks, which the involved subject must be able to master.²⁶⁴ Within friendship the individual can explore and express his or her inner contents, even the most indefinite; in love it is free because its own corporal vulnerability is exposed to the other without fear; within the family – and especially in the

²⁵⁷ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 170.

²⁵⁸ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 171.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 171.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, pp. 173, 186.

²⁶¹ “This is not to say that this caring return to the start of the parents’ life can remove the solitude and fear surrounding death, but perhaps this peculiar force of de-realization [*Derealisierung*] can create the healing and consoling illusion that our life within the circle of the family will return to its beginning and thus find a proper conclusion. If we see an element of freedom here, a measure of relief from the oppressive solitude and fear of death, then this is also due to the intersubjective practices that were initially institutionalized in the modern family. This has become one of the few places where subjects can receive secular consolation, since they are able, at least in their imaginations, to see themselves as a part of an eternal whole.” Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 172.

²⁶² Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 61.

²⁶³ Cf. Horn, p. 29.

²⁶⁴ Cf. Pedersen, pp. 253, 258–59.

relationship with children – the subject is freed from anguish in virtually transcending even its organic boundaries.

However, one problematic aspect is the fact that all these relations are *dyadic*. It is true that families are described in terms of triangular relationships, but the reduction of this institution to the parents-child(ren) polarity seems to make the ‘third’ collapse on the ‘I-Thou’. On the one hand, this would represent an *utopian deficit* on the part of Honneth, which would not consider present forms of non-monogamic love and relations.²⁶⁵ On the other hand, it is a *sociological deficit*, which in turn can be divided into two levels: first, he does not consider groups of friends, which are no less significant precisely because of the factors that Honneth himself highlights with regard to friendship. Secondly, the exclusive consideration of duality in personal relationships would prevent us from taking into consideration the role of the third point of view in the constitution of the social spheres and the socialization of the participants.²⁶⁶

4.3.2.2 *The Market (Society)*

Moving on to the second ethical sphere, which, following the model proposed by Hegel in the *Philosophy of Right*, is identified in the *market*, Honneth immediately raises the question of how it could be possible to pinpoint here a dimension of social freedom, given the evident distortions that the neoliberal global economy’s deregulation brings with it. Indeed, since its birth, the capitalist market has been considered a fierce promoter of negative freedom, and therefore a place of unbridled competition, whereby “exclusively purposive- rational, self-interested calculations seemed to free this system from any individual considerateness or value-orientations,”²⁶⁷ thus causing “a spreading intellectual disquiet about” its “social consequences.”²⁶⁸ Two particular problems seemed to occupy the understanding of the capitalist market during the 17th and 18th centuries: the ‘Adam Smith problem’ and the ‘Marx problem’. On the one hand, it must be explained whether and how the spontaneous harmonization of all individual aims according to the so-called ‘invisible hand’ model is possible; on the other hand, market seems a context in which not only social freedom, but also negative freedom would not be guaranteed, since workers, because of exploitation, low wages and so on, would not have genuine

²⁶⁵ Cf. M. T. C. Shafer, ‘The Utopian Shadow of Normative Reconstruction’, *Constellations*, 25.3 (2018), 406–20.

²⁶⁶ Cf. Strydom, p. 541.

²⁶⁷ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 179.

²⁶⁸ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 180.

contractual alternatives. The identification of areas of social freedom must therefore be able to answer this twofold question: how becomes market coordination conceivable and what standards should the latter respect in order to provide worthy conditions for its participants. The path taken by Honneth is defined *moral economism*.

Sketching on Hegel and Durkheim, he argues that systemic integration as described by Adam Smith would not be comprehensible without forms of normative integration, that is “without taking account of an antecedent class of non-contractual moral rules”²⁶⁹ that regulate the market and legitimize its interactions in the eyes of the participants. Not unlike what has been already claimed in *Redistribution or Recognition?*, Honneth binds the ‘economic’ to norms of (not only legal) recognition, which would be necessary for social actors’ considering themselves as “members of a cooperative community.”²⁷⁰ In other words, according to this view “an antecedent sense of solidarity,”²⁷¹ that is, an already ‘operating’ reciprocal recognition among the subjects, represents the central feature of market’s being an institutional actualization of social freedom.

There is an intrinsic connection between the conditions of competition on the market and the norms of the lifeworld, because market competition can only be viewed as legitimate and justified on the condition that it take these norms into account. [...] different markets must be able to reflect the rules prevailing outside the market to a certain degree in order to be able to fulfil their function of coordinating economic action. If this reflection on the prevailing, generally accepted norms no longer takes place, then we can expect not only a disruption of the market mechanism itself, but also a subtle or publicly articulated withdrawal of legitimacy on the part of the population.²⁷²

Via normative reconstruction, Honneth therefore pursues to unearth the stages through which and in which the idea has been affirmed on the part of the participants, that the market could (or should) represent “a suitable means for the complementary realization of their own respective purposes.”²⁷³ In other words, focusing on social contexts that are aware of the constitutive role played by antecedent non-contractual forms of recognition would allow to respond to the ‘Adam Smith problem’ and to the ‘Marx problem’. As for the first is concerned, the comprehension of the market as cooperative sphere on the part of participants would clarify how the individual purposes are harmonized; on the other side, if the market appears as a cooperative sphere, constituted by relations of solidarity (and

²⁶⁹ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 181.

²⁷⁰ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 182.

²⁷¹ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 182.

²⁷² Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 191.

²⁷³ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 192.

therefore of recognition), then such explicitly moral and social founded market would be able to guarantee contractual freedom and the right to ‘human’ labor. Honneth’s reconstruction takes into account the sphere of consumption and the labor market, rather than ‘the’ market in the strict sense. That is, the perspective of normative integration does not consist in focusing on how the economy actually functions, rather on the normative conditions that accompany (or constitute) its reproduction.²⁷⁴

As far as the *sphere of consumption* is concerned, Honneth draws his arguments on Hegel’s system of needs, thus insisting on the reciprocal interactions that are required between producers and consumers in order to make the market function. Hence, the aim is to find an answer to the ‘Adam Smith problem’, thus providing normative criteria that could clarify how individuals’ purposes find a coordination within the market. Through the reconstruction – which focuses primarily on protest movements and social conflicts, for example as bread riots – Honneth tries to show the dependence of the system on the lifeworld: more properly, he proceeds by identifying the limits that moral norms impose on goods exchange through *discursive communities* and *legal reforms*. Four normative criteria are then distilled in order to show the market’s non-independence on the non-contractual cooperative horizon.

First, “it is not at all self-evident which objects or services should be permitted to be exchangeable commodities at all.”²⁷⁵ Today, perhaps more than ever, there are many moral issues raised by the commodification of certain categories of ‘goods.’ In addition to the blatant cases of human trafficking or the organ market, surrogacy and prostitution often raise many issues, as they could not, or should not, represent something that can be bought. Beyond the commodification of the human being, the sale of products such as drugs, weapons and counterfeits is also strictly regulated by legal measures. Secondly, certain goods’ pricing is almost never abandoned to an absolute deregulation. Thirdly, Honneth argues that from different voices – religion, socialism, ecologism – is questioned “how extensive, luxurious or private the needs satisfied on the general market for goods should be.”²⁷⁶ Finally, in the nineteenth century, with the spread of cooperative systems, also the mode of purchase and consumption changed, because they were no longer conceived as the prerogative of the individual buyer, but of solidarity communities. Through these criteria, Honneth not only shows that all the elements of the demand and supply mechanism – products, prices, consumption, purchase – hinge on normative rules,

²⁷⁴ Cf. Arentshorst, ‘Social Freedom in Contemporary Capitalism: A Reconstruction of Axel Honneth’s Normative Approach to the Economy’, p. 140.

²⁷⁵ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 209.

²⁷⁶ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 209.

but he highlights that such limiting factors are determined through and within solidarity spheres of complementarity and recognition.

But the identification of such normative criteria also allows the critical detection of *misdevelopments* within this sphere of cooperation. Since the 1950s, an “increasing atomization of the consumer”²⁷⁷ made individuals more easily object of market imperatives through the imposition of pre-given models, disguised as means of greater individual freedom. In fact, this individualistic fragmentation prevents the development of discursive mechanisms, places of negotiation and spaces for discussion that already in the nineteenth century contributed to creating ‘oases’ of social freedom in the sphere of consumption. Nowadays, a “moralization of the market from below” is therefore almost unconceivable,²⁷⁸ since every possible area of cooperative coordination between consumers seems to have dissolved due to dynamics – that of market itself – that, however, have no room for justification in the text, and therefore remain as mere observations of fact. In fact, all what relates to the prevalence of systemic integration or strategic orientations seem to be generated by and within an indeterminate and unexplained sphere,²⁷⁹ which, for sure, stands outside that of consumers’ cooperation and also that of labor.

Labor market represents the second dimension analyzed by Honneth, by which the recognition principles of respect (labor contract) and foremost esteem (contribution) constitute a fundamental feature of social freedom. If the reconstruction of the consumption market has aimed at providing normative criteria through which it is possible to respond to the ‘Adam Smith problem,’ here the aim is to unearth resources to outline a theory of justice capable to answer to the problem posed by Marx – unjust labor and exploitation that is –, caused by “structural problems” and resulting in “social deformations.”²⁸⁰ Honneth’s reconstruction focuses precisely on such elements, depicting the discomfoting picture of workers’ conditions and counter-movements.²⁸¹ Conversely, the model proposed by moral economism would strongly insist on the institutionalization of cooperative entities and their normative role within the market. Honneth analysis then focuses on social concretions which possess many similarities with Hegel’s corporations.

[...] the establishment of social freedom in this sphere, that is, the expansion of the labour market into a ‘relational institution’, demands that it be institutionally equipped with discursive mechanisms that allow participants to influence the interests of the others and thus gradually give shape to the overall cooperative aims

²⁷⁷ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 212.

²⁷⁸ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 220.

²⁷⁹ Cf. Piromalli, p. 278.

²⁸⁰ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 223.

²⁸¹ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 223–29.

of the group. On both sides, wage labourers and employers, institutional rules must take effect that can anchor the social, cooperative meaning of economic activity in the minds of the participants.²⁸²

Honneth's reconstruction focuses then on social welfare measures aimed at improving workers' conditions, which were from the very beginning characterized by a certain ambiguity. If on the one hand they considerably improved the condition of workers from the point of view of working time and of the most basic forms of protection and guarantee, on the other hand the unilateralization of these measures in the form of individual legal rights has immediately compromised the possibility of realizing those relational areas of cooperative management that represent the nucleus of social freedom. The consequent individualization of the worker was exacerbated by Taylorism, production chains, and the emerging of the 'employee' as professional figure. In this context, trade unions have never succeeded in the task of labor's humanization, also because their role was seriously diminished by the increased intervention of state welfare: also after WWII, welfare weakened collective drives that could have achieved social freedom in work. Moving among the numerous events concerning the capitalist economy of the European West, Honneth identifies in the 'deregulation processes' the last stage of his normative reconstruction, which leads us to the analysis of the present time, which is clearly outlined as a *misdevelopment*.

Under the increasing pressures of globalization, political actors began to change their economic interpretations and policies, calling for lower taxes and fewer regulations on the financial markets; at the same time, the composition of the stock exchange was dramatically altered by the fact that a growing number of large institutional investors had taken the stage, marginalizing the more passive small investors and, with the aid of their widespread investments, pushing for rapid returns. Furthermore, intensifying sales competition on the world market drove many companies to restructure for the sake of maintaining their competitiveness, economizing on wages and production at the cost of the employees. Finally, the demand for company executives underwent a qualitative shift, placing less and less weight on a manager's experience within the company or on traditional management values, instead looking for purely 'objective' financial knowledge.²⁸³

The picture appears even more disconcerting when one considers the demands for biographical flexibility which push individuals to conceive themselves as isolated from each other and to reify themselves in the consideration of their own attitudes and characteristics. Yet, this condition, considered almost universally unjust, does not provoke collective indignation or widespread protests, which would virtually represent a first step to subvert these dynamics – and a clear emancipatory interest.

²⁸² Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 231–32.

²⁸³ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 245.

The absence of a conflict's public dimension would therefore represent the definitive eclipse – at least up to now – of the possibilities for the realization of social freedom in labor's world: over time, in fact, not only has the possibility of organizing production cooperatively been precluded, but the very self-perception of individuals seems to have been totally atomized:

Conscience seemed to dictate that the market should be understood as an institution of social freedom. If it is true, for which there are many indications, that over the last few decades the responsibility for success in the market economy has been strongly individualized, such that it is no longer 'we,' but *he* or *she* who is responsible for his or her own economic success, then this would suggest that precisely this background normative conviction has been abandoned.²⁸⁴

It therefore seems that a marked pessimism represents the inevitable downside of normative reconstruction, Honneth, however, as in *Redistribution or Recognition?*, underlines the submerged version that rejection of this state of affairs can take on in the contemporary context: the need to anchor critical theory to emancipatory interests must not be bound to their public manifestations.²⁸⁵ Nevertheless, this mention seems, more than an attempt to take moral suffering and 'hidden moralities' as founding factor for critique, the ascertainment of a misdeveloped outcome of the extreme individualization taking place in the neo-liberal labour market. But if normative integration were taken seriously, then also these singular gestures of rejection would already represent the germs delegitimization, even if minimal. More solid ground is identified by Honneth once again in cooperative forms of market limitation, namely "transnational unions and non-governmental organizations:"²⁸⁶ they represent a possible way through which conflict for the affirmation of social freedom in waged work can be articulated. Their attempt to affirm the justice of freedom in the context of globalization, however, is only a feeble hope.

A series of interwoven problems emerge as the critical potential of Honneth's proposal is focused.

First of all, the fact that Honneth does "not want to merely reduce the market to economic transactions in the narrow sense"²⁸⁷ would lead Honneth's critical theory not to consider the systemic factors that should be its actual targets. In other words, rather than being a criticism of the capitalist market and its global mechanisms, it seems the exposure of normative resources external to it. This would be evident in

²⁸⁴ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 250.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 247.

²⁸⁶ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 253.

²⁸⁷ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 202.

the fact that most of the phenomena described as causes or consequences of misdevelopments originate outside the discursive and cooperative contexts of social freedom. Strategic interests, productive efficiency, systemic mechanisms, economic hierarchies, financial capital and so on are taken into account by the normative reconstruction, but remain untouched as critical theme. In fact, unlike personal relationships, in which Honneth dealt with certain types of relationships and the rules within them that subjects must be able to master to live social freedom, as far as the market is concerned, the relationships considered are not economic, but of solidarity or esteem within certain groups.²⁸⁸ But then one could wonder: in what sense would the normative criteria and the norms of recognition be inherent to *the* market? It could be said: they are external to the market in the strict sense, but internal to a broad conception of it or, as Honneth himself says in a later interview, to the *market society*.²⁸⁹ In this way, Honneth's position would have the advantage of questioning the abstract view according to which the market is a sphere without agents,²⁹⁰ thus de-naturalizing and de-reifying its so-called laws.²⁹¹ Moreover, showing the market's embeddedness to a (phenomenological) priority of moral interactions between subjects would avoid proposing a 'miniature proceduralism', according to which the criteria of justification and criticism should be elaborated outside of the market and subsequently applied to it. That would impede an internal critique.

However, market's institutionalization would not per se represent a solution. That social critique's possibilities coincide, according to Honneth, with a re-inclusion of the market in social institutions reveals a further shortcoming, namely the lack of understanding of the fact that today the market is already strongly institutionalized,²⁹² both from the legislative and political point of view, and in terms of its pervasive influence in daily practices, models of life, etc.: in other words, due to its constitutive power.²⁹³ Faced with this criticism, Honneth would probably answer that it is not the dynamics of institutionalization itself that enables critical theory, but rather *certain* institutionalizations – those related to social freedom – would provide necessary anchors to emancipatory interests and thus to intramundane transcendence. The decisive issue, then, is that of the 'position' of social freedom within the market.

²⁸⁸ Cf. Pedersen, pp. 258–59.

²⁸⁹ Cf. Laitinen, 'Freedom's Left? Market's Right? Morality's Wrong?', p. 277; Honneth and Raffnsøe-Møller, p. 278.

²⁹⁰ Cf. Busen, Herzog, and Sørensen, p. 250.

²⁹¹ Cf. Arentshorst, 'Social Freedom in Contemporary Capitalism: A Reconstruction of Axel Honneth's Normative Approach to the Economy', p. 142.

²⁹² Cf. Foster, p. 460.

²⁹³ Cf. Michael J. Thompson, 'The Neo-Idealist Paradigm Shift in Contemporary Critical Theory', p. 154.

This further problem would not concern normative integration or the fact that the market owes – to some extent – its existence to norms and values. The point is: can we talk about the market as a sphere of social freedom? Even if taken by Honneth as model of moral economism, Hegel considers civil society as sphere of particular interests, where ethical life is essentially being removed.²⁹⁴ Moreover, corporations and the administration of justice represent forms of ethical life outside the market itself, whose purpose is precisely to limit the disintegration that would otherwise be inevitable. Following Honneth's terminology, the market would be a sphere of negative and moral freedoms, while social freedom could be attested only in subsystems that somehow interact with (or against) the economy. This description would fit perfectly with Honneth's analysis of consumer associations or trade unions: even if they belong to the market, their attempts are to limit market's logics.²⁹⁵ However – Honneth seems to tell us – the demands raised by such groups would reveal a certain understanding of the market on the part of its participants, which would have no reason to be if the market itself did not somehow reveal a normative 'promise' of social freedom. The very fact that protests about bread pricing and collective demonstrations about fair work take place would therefore reveal how the market should be, that is, its normative embeddedness. If there were no such (implicit) self-understanding, the emerging of these expectations would not be explainable. In order to consider justified the protests of those who have called for more social freedom within the market, one must consider the market – even to a minimal extent – as a possible source of social freedom. Otherwise, to give a rather trivial example, one could compare these normative demands to complaining that a goldfish does not speak three languages correctly, that is to say, attributing to it a deficit with respect to a standard that it is not in its potential to satisfy. If market is intrinsically unjust, why to protest expecting justice?

With respect to this position, two further problems arise. On the one hand, protests could be interpreted as a symptom of the injustice of the economic system, and not of its fundamental capability to respond to normative demands, i.e. to be a sphere of social freedom.²⁹⁶ The protests would therefore be motivated by the intrinsic defect of the market, which – in addition to generating systematic exclusion – would be essentially a sphere of instrumental reason alone. Moreover, the contents of the demands are all but 'economic', then it seems more plausible that they represent a limitation 'from outside' rather than an attempt to actualize

²⁹⁴ Cf. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, § 184.

²⁹⁵ Cf. Timo Jütten, 'Is the Market a Sphere of Social Freedom?', *Critical Horizons*, 16.2 (2015), 187–203 (pp. 194–96).

²⁹⁶ Cf. Borman, p. 116.

market's. 'inner nature.'²⁹⁷ On the other hand, social actors' persuasion that the market can represent a sphere of social freedom could be the result of ideological patterns.²⁹⁸ And because of that the related normative self-understanding should not represent a starting point for the social critical theory, but rather its object. In fact, how could the participants disagree with market's basic norms, if they are socialized through them?²⁹⁹

These two questions therefore concern how social freedom can be considered inherent to the market (and not a reaction to it) and whether the first premise of normative reconstruction can be taken into consideration. To make the problem even sharper, Honneth states in one passage that

[...] in modern Western European societies there has always been a confrontation between two views of the market, whose differences can be measured in terms of whether they grasp the market as a social institution that enables either the mutual satisfaction of interests or individual advantage.³⁰⁰

One could therefore wonder what instruments Honneth possesses to read the current neoliberal market as a misdeveloped sphere of social freedom and not as a full-fledged sphere of negative freedom and productive efficiency:³⁰¹ apart from an anthropological justification that poses social freedom's centrality because of its capacity, through relations of recognition, to meet individuals' need for complementarity, or an action-theoretical justification, according to which social freedom should be preferred over other forms due to its capability of actualizing autonomy, *Freedom's Right* does not seem to provide other justifying elements. The problem, as we will see at the end of the chapter, is that Honneth rejects both these possibilities, embracing a *sociological justification*.

4.3.2.3 Democratic Public and Constitutional Democracy

The last extended section of *Freedom's Right* is dedicated to the elaboration of a theory of democracy that can deviate both from the Hegelian state – thus opposing the aforementioned problem of the transition from horizontal to vertical relations and of the subject's subsumption into universality – and from those that are predominant in the contemporary scenario – that is, the various proceduralist

²⁹⁷ Cf. Jütten, 'Is the Market a Sphere of Social Freedom?', pp. 197–98.

²⁹⁸ Cf. Borman, p. 115.

²⁹⁹ Cf. Gregory R. Smulewicz-Zucker, 'Losing Sight of Power: The Inadequacy of Axel Honneth's Theory of the Market and Democracy', in *Axel Honneth and the Critical Theory of Recognition*, ed. by Volker Schmitz (Basingstoke - New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 125–44 (pp. 130–31).

³⁰⁰ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 249.

³⁰¹ Cf. Jütten, 'Is the Market a Sphere of Social Freedom?'; Busen, Herzog, and Sörensen, para. 261.

models centered on a liberal and deliberative paradigm. Honneth intends to differ from both these models through what one could call the ‘social proximity’ of the theory: the analysis of democracy is first of all an analysis of democratic *society*, which represents the first fundamental element of the third sphere. The second element appears – in Honneth’s view – as normatively subordinate to the first, that is, the constitutional democratic state should be dependent on democratic society. Such dependency of the state on society is also shown as dialectical relationship of this last sphere with the previous ones.

If the conditions of social freedom are not realized in personal relationships and on the market, then the social relations that enable citizens to take part in the process of democratic will-formation in an unforced and unrestricted manner will be absent. Therefore, in contrast to most contemporary theories of democracy, we should not view the political public sphere as a kind of supreme court, regulated by the rule of law, which freely determines the conditions to be established in the other two spheres. The relationship between these three spheres is far more complex, because the realization of social freedom in the democratic public sphere depends at the very least on the partial realization of the principles of social freedom in the spheres of personal relationships and the market. From the very beginning, therefore, deliberative will-formation in the many different forums of the public sphere is bounded; the latter can only live up to its principles of legitimacy if it learns, in a process of continuous debate over the conditions of social inclusion, the necessity of supporting struggles for social freedom in the two other spheres.³⁰²

Honneth’s aim is therefore to outline a theory of democracy that could be sufficiently abstract but not without grip with social life, suitable with respect to pluralism’s issues but not proceduralist, pre-institutional (according to the daily understanding of the term) but not unpolitical. In other words, a conception of democracy whose essential fabric is constituted of recognition and communicative relations. The dialectical relationship between the three ethical spheres is perhaps more immediately comprehensible with regard to the state’s initiative concerning economy and personal relationships – especially the family – via legislative measures. As far as the ‘opposite direction’ is concerned, one could first ask how the exclusive relationships characterized by affection can influence a democratic ethical life.³⁰³ On the other hand, Honneth is well aware of the correlation between economics and politics.³⁰⁴ In fact, besides the pivotal role played by Dewey, the

³⁰² Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 254–55.

³⁰³ Cf. van den Brink, ‘From Personal Relations to the Rest of Society’, pp. 23–24.

³⁰⁴ Cf. Smulewicz-Zucker, pp. 125–26. One could certainly discuss the alleged insufficiency of the Honnethian perspective with regard to the economic structures and power systems that are at work in them. And it could also be argued that the truly problematic element is the disregard of the formative power of such structures in relation to subjectivity. While I omit that such objections could be discussed in turn, I believe that the analysis of the democratic sphere is the one in which Honneth gives more

misdevelopments highlighted within the third sphere could be summarized under the common denominator of an interference of undemocratic structures in the sphere of peer debate. Both these relations – personal relations-democracy and economy-democracy – are issues that have engaged Honneth since *The Struggle for Recognition*.

Personal relationships enable a self-relation – self-confidence or inner freedom – which is perceived by Honneth as a necessary condition for the development of an undamaged practical identity. This would also reverberate in the public dimension, where persons could unfold freely and responsibly only to the extent that they live a certain security with regard to their own ‘consistency’, of which they can experience only thanks recognition relationships.³⁰⁵ In a nutshell, the relationship between individual and public life would not differ – with due proportion – from the experience of the child who can try her hand at playing only when by the awareness of a caregiver’s approving presence. It goes without saying that self-confidence is not the only condition at stake for public participation, but this role played by personal relationships also sheds light on the more general perspective about democracy described by Honneth: ‘person’ is always conceived as multidimensional, whereby the private level cannot be detached from the legal-political and the social ones.³⁰⁶

Concerning the relationship between economy and democracy, in ‘Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation’ (1998) Honneth identifies social division of labour as indispensable basis for formulating a model of democracy that is equally distant from republicanism and proceduralism. Perhaps more evidently than in *Freedom’s Right*, the ideal democracy proposed hereby represents principally a critique of liberal models, that is of their conception of autonomy and social deficiency. First, also in this text Honneth believes that the flaw of liberal perspectives consists mainly in the failure to realize that “it is only in the medium of an interaction free from domination that each individual’s freedom is to be attained and protected,”³⁰⁷ that is, in social freedom. Liberalism’s second problem, on the other hand, consists in its purely political description of democracy, which is read as an institutional set of procedural practices. The unavoidable issue that such theories face is then their

space to power systems of non-democratic matrix. The problem then becomes, if anything, how such systems can be included in his critical theory without re-proposing a Habermasian dualism – that is, as I see it, the main problem that arises in *Freedom’s Right*, also with regard to the sphere of market.

³⁰⁵ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, pp. 38, 107; Honneth, “‘Anxiety and Politics’. The Strengths and Weaknesses of Franz Neumann’s Diagnosis of a Social Pathology’; Honneth, ‘Democracy and Inner Freedom. Alexander Mitscherlich’s Contribution to Critical Social Theory’.

³⁰⁶ Cf. Odin Lysaker, ‘Institutional Agonism: Axel Honneth’s Radical Democracy’, *Critical Horizons*, 18.1 (2017), 1–19 (pp. 3–5).

³⁰⁷ Honneth, ‘Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation. John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today’.

inability to take into account the democratic participation's collapse, which is due to the increased social differentiation, ethical pluralism, and, more generally, the lack of aim-oriented coordination among subjects within wide cooperation contexts; thereby, the role of the state seems confined into that of a bureaucratic administrator.³⁰⁸

[...] under the conditions of complex industrialized societies, the revival of democratic publics presupposes a reintegration of society that can only consist in the development of a common consciousness for the prepolitical association of all citizens.³⁰⁹

Following Dewey, Honneth's attempt is to define a model of democratic state as reflexive body through which society faces collective problems, thus deriving the political from the social. The starting point of such perspective is a just division of labor, which obviously does not coincide with a reduction of social reality to production cycles, but rather with the consideration of those areas of social recognition related to individual contribution for all interaction partners' aims. Through an operation that could seem a reduction of the society (*Gesellschaft*) to the community (*Gemeinschaft*), Honneth intends to unearth the formal dynamics that could 'found' a formal and democratic (indeed social) ethical life, a theory of justice that is. However, it could be said that cooperation and division of labor, in order to be *just*, need a certain idea justice, which cannot be the result of the first.³¹⁰ For this very reason, I believe, Honneth underlines the dialectical relationship between the spheres and between the principles of justice and the relations of recognition: the link between theory and analysis of society prevents – one could say – from thinking of a 'first' element that founds everything else. Again sketching on Dewey, Honneth argues that the fact of cooperation represents a paradigm of joint problem-solving which, once extended, generalized, and formalized can outline a socially informed model of democracy. Conversely, such problem solving is not conceivable if not always already embedded in large societies.

By considering democracy as reflexive 'moment' through which public issues are addressed, two distinct needs are met: to entail citizens' participation and to outline a 'third way' compared to republicanism and proceduralism, also disclosing critical theory's possibilities. With regard to the first issue, and besides the personal

³⁰⁸ Cf. Zurn, 'Recognition, Redistribution, and Democracy: Dilemmas of Honneth's Critical Social Theory', pp. 94–95.

³⁰⁹ Honneth, 'Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation. John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today'.

³¹⁰ Cf. Alessandro Ferrara, 'Democrazia e Teoria Sociale: Un Ponte Ancora Da Costruire. Riflessioni Sul Saggio Di Axel Honneth «Democrazia Come Cooperazione Riflessiva. John Dewey e l'odierna Teoria Della Democrazia»', *Fenomenologia e Società*, 21.3 (1998), 28–36 (pp. 33–34).

integrity conditions ‘provided’ by recognition relations, the central matter is represented by what could be called *all-affected ‘principle’*.³¹¹

Social action unfolds in forms of interaction whose consequences in the simple case affect only those immediately involved; but as soon as those not involved see themselves affected by the consequences of such interaction, there emerges from their perspective the need for joint control of the corresponding actions either by their cessation or by their promotion. This articulation of the demand for joint problem-solving already constitutes for Dewey that which he will henceforth call “public”: [...] a “public” consists of the circle of citizens who, on the basis of a jointly experienced concern, share the conviction that they have to turn to the rest of society for the purposes of administratively controlling the relevant interaction.³¹²

In order to shape a meaningful connection between social cooperation and democratic self-determination, Dewey postulates the need for cognitive elements such that social actors are aware of their being affected by the consequences of decisions taken at the political level, even if they are not directly involved. In this way, the motivational prerequisite for democratic participation would be outlined. All potentially affected subjects would be encouraged to participate in democratic discussion, to the extent that it would be perceived as a collective problem-solving process.

If the difference with respect to proceduralism is clear – for already in social reality could be found justice criteria – what distinguishes such perspective from republicanism is more subtle. What Honneth criticizes about such theories is the fact that they at least implicitly prioritize ‘identity’ as exclusionary element before other identities. But same issue could – at first impression – appear by Honneth’s depiction of communities’ cooperation, which then would have to be problematically widened to the level of society, hence to ethical pluralism, among other complexity factors. But Dewey’s idea would consider plurality of point of views as enriching the collective problem-solving, also because the matter at issue do not concern determinate conception of the good life, but social coordination.

Although perhaps too strongly characterized by cognitivist views, the democratic form of life described in ‘Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation’ has first of all the aim of showing the emergence of the political from the social, from the interaction, from the mutual relations of recognition, confirmation, and esteem. Thus, to describe democracy as a solution to collective problems does not coincide with the simple expansion of an epistemic model: rather, Honneth’s aim is to outline a model of democracy in which the person can ‘know’ herself as already included member,

³¹¹ Honneth, ‘Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation. John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today’; Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*.

³¹² Honneth, ‘Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation. John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today’.

involved with respect to her responsibility and her capability to contribute to joint will-formation. Moreover, as Honneth pursues to demonstrate by his normative reconstruction, such collective will-formation processes would not be mere speculation, but possess historical grip, at least as normative promise entailed in the very concept of democracy.

And it is precisely by means of such conception of democratic public sphere that Honneth depicts the third ethical sphere of social freedom in *Freedom's Right*. Thereby, six conditions for being with oneself in the other of the social totality of citizens – the 'We' of democracy – are distilled and analyzed.

The *first condition* is represented by the legal measures that already from the eighteenth century are guaranteed for the formation of the bourgeois public sphere: rights of association, assembly and freedom of opinion and speech are indeed considered by Honneth as 'propaedeutic' and inherent to the political exercise. They indeed outline the domain of exchange and discursive confrontation with others within which persons can recognize each other as endowed with equal rights and dignity. Hereby the central issue is represented by the complementary roles of speaker and listener, who, recognizing themselves as such, together formulate opinions and judgments on what concerns them as citizens: democracy would then not be – at least in the first instance – a legislative-institutional structure, but lifeworld practice. Thus, the joint solution of collective problems would not represent the stylization of a technical problem-solving, but properly a judging and debating arena.

The *second condition* hence coincides with the democratization of this arena, which historically entailed the increased role of media and the widening of political rights to collective self-determination.

Dewey uses the term 'democratic public' to describe the totality of all the communicative processes that enable the members of 'large societies' with the help of the news media to take up the perspective of such a 'We' while judging the consequences of their actions. It constitutes a form of social freedom by enabling the individuals, in communication with all the other members of society, to improve their own living conditions.³¹³

In the course of historical evolution – Honneth observes –, the extension of the scope of affected persons was immediately disclosed by the idea of nation, which, despite its *ambiguity* due to its exclusionary asset, represented an undeniable "source of the sentiments of solidarity required to commit otherwise different citizens to the common task of public deliberation."³¹⁴ Such ambiguity, if not problematic nature, of the *demos* would be represented by the 1894 Dreyfus affair:

³¹³ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 274.

³¹⁴ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 266.

the idea of *Volk*, often fixed also in biological and not only cultural terms, constituted and offered polarized bonds of belonging such as to allow the perception of and the identification with a general and homogeneous ‘We,’ which in turn entails the determination of an ‘other.’ Nevertheless, Honneth does commit himself to take into account this ambiguity of the national conception, because not considering it would oversee its (controversial) contribution to the democratization of politics and abandon certain issues to their “nationalist instrumentalizations.”³¹⁵ One could say that the main issue Honneth faces in *Freedom’s Right* is precisely to formulate an alternative basis for joint commitment. One, that is, which could avoid the misdevelopmental elements that are seemingly equiprimordial to the concept of nation or *Volk*.

The *third condition* of social freedom is identified in “a highly differentiated system of mass media,” which “enables its audience to take part in informed processes of will-formation by providing enlightening information on the emergence, causes and possible interpretations of social problems.”³¹⁶ Honneth concerns originates on the basis of what has been noted by, among others, Dewey, Adorno and Horkheimer through the concept of cultural industry, Habermas and Arendt:³¹⁷ throughout history, the major information media – press, radio, television and, today, the internet –, as thrown into the framework of capitalist market imperatives and power mechanisms, have often not contributed to expressing democratic freedom, to put it mildly. Therefore, even if commercialized and politically oriented media have proven themselves as homologizing functions and domination apparatuses, social freedom instantiated within large societies cannot help but being informed through generalized media. For the latter represent a fundamental level upon which the joint will-formation can unfold, because of their role by the all-affected principle.

The *fourth condition* underlines the need to re-materialize the concept of the public sphere, from the point of view of the subjects actively involved in it. What Honneth intends to underline is the concrete dimension that symbolic communication within the democratic public sphere presupposes – if lively and capable of responding to its own promise of social freedom. Such collective will-formation is too often considered by the theory – Honneth says – according to the opposite poles of face-to-face verbal exchange or generalized media. Between these two extremes, however, there is the time, commitment and participation of those who contribute to actual discussions of general interest, so as pamphlets, flyers, posters and so on. In the course of the normative reconstruction, the explicit

³¹⁵ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 283.

³¹⁶ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 291.

³¹⁷ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 270–77, 281–86.

reference is to the student and feminist movements of the '60s and '70s, whose fundamental task has been to question the conformation of the public sphere, precisely through the means provided by it, although reformulated according to the modalities to which Honneth dedicates this fourth condition.³¹⁸

The *fifth condition* goes along with the last and regards the perceived necessity of a *background consensus* among the persons involved in democratic processes. Throughout the normative reconstruction, beside the centrality of the nation-determined social bonds as historically unavoidable 'viaticum' of such solidarity-based relations, another term that constantly occurs is *apathy*:³¹⁹ contrary to the spheres of personal relations and the market, participation in the third sphere is not simply due to socialization: one cannot be a passive member of the democratic public, at least not in the manner which could be conceivable for, say, family and goods exchange. We are not compelled by any natural drives to participate in social will-formation debates, and that would result in the increasing lack of involvement. Thus, the willingness to take part itself would need to be motivated.

Therefore, the existence of a political culture that nourishes and permanently enriches such feelings of solidarity is an elementary precondition for revitalizing the democratic public and even for bringing it about in the first place. If this sphere is not to remain an empty space, constitutionally guaranteed but left hollow by its members and unused for the purpose of expressing opinions, then the civil commitment of citizens is needed who, despite their unfamiliarity with each other, are certain of their political commonalities.³²⁰

Partaking would then represent the alternative to the trend of privatization and de-politicization of public life, which is highly interwoven with the widespread individualization of workers.

The *sixth* element of the normatively understood democratic public sphere represents, more evidently than the previous ones, a condition and an outcome of its existence. That is, the participants in the democratic public "must feel that the products of their will-formation are effective enough to be practised in social

³¹⁸ I therefore find it problematic to argue – as Jansen does – that Honneth pursues to depict a concept of undifferentiated *demos* and that this would consequently lead him to lose sight of the role played by excluded subjects (groups or individuals) in the democratic integration. If this second point is clearly addressed by Honneth through the mention of civil disobedience and social rights movements, as far as the first point is concerned, I believe that the misunderstanding is due to a misreading regarding the centrality that, in fact, the concept of nation carries out during the course of the normative reconstruction. Honneth does not intend to re-propose a undifferentiated *demos*: as the quick reference to Dewey has shown, even more so in *Freedom's Right* the central issue is that of unearthing those social drives that can 'take charge' of generalizing the solidarity bonds and social cooperation, without thereby depending on cultural belonging. Cf. Yolande Jansen, 'The "Us" of Democratic Will-Formation and Globalization', *Krisis. Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, 2013, 32–36 (p. 34).

³¹⁹ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 272–82.

³²⁰ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 292.

reality.”³²¹ The possibility of seeing the results of the problem-solving undertaken collectively certainly represents a further motivational push in an effort that would otherwise be sake in itself; but, then, this effectiveness represents above all the incidence of a democratic public aligned with the normative promises that characterize it, where the political dimension emerges from social cooperation. The fundamental trait of this sixth condition is therefore the permeability of society and state, so that the latter be a functioning and responsive constitutional democracy.³²²

However, historical circumstances are shown to be a progressive detachment of this two dimensions from each other: the analysis of the constitutional state is therefore the second object of normative reconstruction. The ineffectiveness of individuals’ opinion and contribution on the state can be considered the key through which Honneth interprets the contradictory evolution of the rule of law. Here Honneth provides some valuable insights into the method of normative reconstruction and its motivations. In fact, it is clear that for Dewey or Habermas, as well as for Honneth, the description of the democratic public does not correspond to “the actual behaviour of state authorities.”³²³ On the other hand, it would not be a mere idealization, but he expression of a certain self-understanding. However, one might ask whether it would not be more appropriate to take a more ‘realistic’ view, analyzing the contemporary state for what has turned out to be in different forms: a more or less administrative organism of (explicit and implicit) power, domination and violence. Honneth maintains two reservations with respect to this perspective, which finds in Foucault its clearest reference. On the one hand, in a later interview,³²⁴ Honneth expresses some perplexities regarding the possibility of conceiving the phenomenon of power as primary with respect to that of freedom: the perception of power (understood here more as domination, than as constitutive power) is in fact subordinate to an experience of freedom that must already have been given, so that the former manifests itself as coercion. This rather simple observation shows the origin of the criticism, according to which Honneth does not consider the formative role of the mechanisms and structures of power, that is, that the latter shape subjectivity from the beginning, also on psychological and emotional levels.³²⁵ The second element for which Honneth rejects a Foucauldian perspective also sheds light on the first point. In fact, to consider the power of the state as the result of a coherent evolution with respect to the mechanisms and logics

³²¹ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 304.

³²² Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 187.

³²³ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 306.

³²⁴ Cf. Honneth and Raffnsøe-Møller, p. 262.

³²⁵ Cf., among others, Petherbridge; Foster; Michael J. Thompson, ‘The Neo-Idealist Paradigm Shift in Contemporary Critical Theory’; Michael J. Thompson, ‘The Failure of the Recognition Paradigm in Critical Theory’.

intrinsic to it (and not as a misdevelopment), would prevent having the necessary normative criteria in order to criticize it. In other words, assuming power as starting point would allow a factual examination of the forms of domination, but would not disclose any critical possibility, since such power structures and authorities would not be confronted, “at least counterfactually,”³²⁶ with any claim of legitimacy: there would be no point of view from which domination could be defined as unjust. In this case, what appears as problematic is the very concept of misdevelopment that is implied by the idea of a primal legitimacy expectation: it would overlook the fundamental level of power, which would not represent a mere deviation, but – so to say – the path itself.³²⁷ If I correctly interpret the spirit of the Honnethian perspective, such power-centered theories, in order to criticize forms of domination regarding subjects’ constitution, would require a thick account on human nature or psychology, such as to allow the identification of their harmful distortion. If so, then there is no substantial difference with Honneth’s perspective except for the fact that Honneth seeks a greater formality: in any case, a normative criterion would be implicitly at work. Otherwise, they could be considered simply as factual elements of social integration. In general, therefore, Honneth believes that criticism can only unfold when certain factors of social life present themselves as not corresponding (or damaging) to ‘previous’ claims of legitimacy in some way intrinsic to those same factors. It is in this sense, I believe, that ‘negativity’ cannot be primary or total, for, if so, it would be impossible to identify structural elements as unjust(ified). This appears quite clearly concerning the normative reconstruction of the state.

If we take up the opposing, normative perspective and emphasize the modern state’s obligation to legitimate itself, then we cannot simply ignore the already mentioned characteristics of the one-sided exercise of force and control, but they do take on a different historical role and significance, because we no longer view these characteristics as indicators of an intrinsic tendency toward increasing power, but of an illegitimate, often interest-bound use of merely borrowed authority.³²⁸

By identifying the realization of social freedom as legitimate task of the state in the eyes of citizens, the theory holds that implicit and formal idea of ‘healthiness’ that lets consider misdevelopments and identify counterfactual gaps.

The elements that have disappointed legitimizing expectations, that have stifled the state’s potential to achieve social freedom are, together, historical phenomena and conceptual elements – according to the very ‘nature’ of normative reconstruction. And Honneth identifies three phases that could summarize the

³²⁶ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 307.

³²⁷ Cf. Smulewicz-Zucker, p. 127.

³²⁸ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 307.

relation between state and public sphere: the authoritarian, elitist, and exclusionary conduct of the nation-states and related social conflicts to widen democratic arenas; the crisis of the social bonds founded on the latter together with the very idea of *nation*-state after WWII, due to the establishment of supranational institutions and the end of colonialism; the crisis of political participation, interpreted by Honneth – beside the elements already highlighted by the analysis on the democratic public – as caused by the failure of political corporatism, the professionalism within political parties (and thereby their distance from the social in the direction of a more acute bureaucratization), and the individualization and privatization of citizens. Thereby, two major issues on which Honneth focuses his attention are the capitalist interferences and the role governments often assumed so as only serving the expansion of the market, and the disputes about the role that the concept of nation should play by conceiving the state – whereby the two positions confronting each other are nationalism and constitutional patriotism. It seems therefore unlikely to say that Honneth reduces politics to ethics, due the subsumption of democratic structures to normative values.³²⁹ But also concerning the state, such properly systemic elements that prevent the actualization of social freedom do not find a real justification and seem introduced from an under-investigated ‘outside’ of recognition relations, giving the impression of certain similarities with the Habermasian colonization thesis.³³⁰

The picture that emerges from the normative reconstruction is therefore rather discouraging: in fact, it does not seem that in modern history a form of state has become effective – even for a single moment – that would enable citizens to experience social freedom in the full sense. To that must be added the many shadows and few lights that arise in the current achievements of the sphere of consumption, the labour market and the democratic public sphere.

Given such situations, Honneth tries to identify germinating realities that may perhaps lead to progress in new forms of inclusive freedom, trying to ‘de-nationalize’ the idea of community and solidarity relations. Despite its ambiguity and all its contradictions, the concept of nation had allowed citizens to feel more united than alien in a cohesive democratic public sphere: however, the processes of delegitimization of the nation-state model, transnational markets and growing pluralism seem to have definitely undermined such a way of belonging to the social ‘We’. The viable alternative seems to be that of transferring the ‘public’ to a transnational level, in search of new foundations for a renewed ‘patriotism’.

³²⁹ Cf. Hans Arentshorst, ‘Towards a Reconstructive Approach in Political Philosophy: Rosanvallon and Honneth on the Pathologies of Today’s Democracy’, *Thesis Eleven*, 134.1 (2016), 42–55 (p. 45).

³³⁰ Cf. Arentshorst, ‘Social Freedom in Contemporary Capitalism: A Reconstruction of Axel Honneth’s Normative Approach to the Economy’; McNay, *Against Recognition*, pp. 145–47.

However, the failure of the European Community in this sense seems rather clear, for its inability to generate actual political integration and, to date, does not leave much room for Honneth's investigation.³³¹ He then turns to consider the example provided by transnational non-governmental organizations, which already exert an operating influence in the present, in the direction of curbing the deregulation of the market economy and to affirm social freedom on a global scale.³³² Consequently, as the nation-based public were informed by press, radio, and television, such transnational organizations couldn't have had the success they have without internet. The internet is certainly capable of overcoming national barriers, as it shows itself to be exponentially capable of structurally reconfiguring the characteristics of information exchange. However, Honneth does not fail to emphasize the radical fluidity and the deep unpredictability that is inherent to the size of the network and its uses. In the anonymity and distance that the use of the internet allows, often the presumptions of rationality that continue to characterize the mutual exchange of arguments with another concrete or traditional media are lacking. Moreover, the total absence of barriers that characterizes the internet often does not contribute to a constructive transnationality, but rather to the generation of "delocalized" communities:³³³ the world wide web represents a non-world which could promote not the overcoming of particularisms, but the homologation to a model of communication that remains within the medium. Nevertheless, transnational organizations and 'their' medium are seemingly unable to provide a renewed and transformed background consensus, that would be necessary for the establishment of a new transnational public sphere. And only at this point emerges an element that has almost remained in the background of *Freedom's Right*, though representing its *file rouge*: conflict.³³⁴ Under present circumstances, Honneth places his (feeble) hopes on the background consensus that can be provided in acknowledging a commonality in the struggles for freedom that have characterized European modernity. One could perhaps say that normative reconstruction is, in last instance, not a reconstruction of the achievements of social freedom, but of the uninterrupted conflict in order to experience oneself as such in the other. Despite its disappearing from present outcomes, or its never fulfilled promises, social freedom could be defined through the aspirations of subjects involved in conflicts aimed at progress.

Whereas the idea of constitutional patriotism remains too closely attached to the medium of law alone, the patriotism inherent in the European archive of collective

³³¹ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 327–28.

³³² Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 300.

³³³ Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 301.

³³⁴ Cf. Honneth and Raffnsøe-Møller, p. 280.

struggles for freedom aims to realize all the promises of freedom institutionalized in the various social spheres. At a time in which the defence of freedoms that have already been won and the struggle for those that have not yet been fulfilled need a transnational, committed public more than anything else, there remains little more than the hope that on the basis of this historical consciousness, we will see the development of a European culture of shared attentiveness and broadened solidarity.³³⁵

This final passage recalls that of *The Struggle for Recognition*, where Honneth expressed the need for the theory to take a step back from the formulations of the concept of solidarity that only social struggles could achieve. Here, in my opinion, we are also told something else, which concerns precisely the method of normative reconstruction, and especially the much discussed first premise. The fact that social reproduction is bound to always renewed legitimation implies conflict as response to perceived institutional illegitimacy, that is, to their unfulfilled capability to instantiate norms and values. If, therefore, the first premise is interpreted above all as a “status quo bias,”³³⁶ it represents, according to Honneth, also the motive of critical theory and social conflicts.

4.3.3 Some Open Issues: Immanent Critique, Recognition and the ‘Third’

The variety of issues addressed by *Freedom’s Right*, as well as the countless historical, sociological, philosophical and literary references, almost prevent a thorough discussion of every aspect. However, two issues seem more relevant to our purposes. The first, widely discussed by critics, is the methodological one concerning normative reconstruction and its suitability for a critical theory of society (but not only). The second, which has been rather overlooked, concerns a certain redefinition of the gestures of recognition, their relationship with social freedom and the ethical spheres.

Criticisms addressed to normative reconstruction are different and intertwined. For clarity’s sake, they could be summarized in five problem areas – some of which have already been mentioned at the end of the market analysis.

First of all, basing critique on already institutionalized norms and values, Honneth would take an excessively affirmative and retrospective attitude, thus somehow endorsing the present in a way that is ill suited to the tradition of the Frankfurt School and that leads him not to consider utopian and more radical

³³⁵ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 335.

³³⁶ Cf. Jörg Schaub, ‘Misevements, Pathologies, and Normative Revolutions: Normative Reconstruction as Method of Critical Theory’, *Critical Horizons*, 16.2 (2015), 107–30 (p. 125).

tendencies,³³⁷ so as the global scope of the matter.³³⁸ Moreover, also the motives of this retrospective view seem to lack of justification. Besides the reference to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, it is difficult to understand why Honneth identifies *certain* institutions – and not *other* – as areas in which social freedom should be instantiated. More specifically, it would be the very idea of elaborating a critical theory from socially consolidated elements that would weaken the project itself into a reformist point of view.³³⁹

Secondly, this would also affect the related concept of progress put forward by Honneth, which would precisely exclude transformative logics, to favor instead a more gradual perspective of changing institutions 'from within.' Even without considering the distinction subsequently proposed by Honneth between institutional and normative revolutions³⁴⁰ – that is, the possibility of a radical institutional change in the name of normative principles that they are no longer able to accomplish –, I do not believe that this point can be shown to manifest a shift within Honneth's thinking. Schaub argues indeed that in *The Struggle for Recognition and Redistribution or Recognition?*, for example, the shift to modernity would represent a normative revolution or even a misdevelopment, because the transition from class models centered on honor to greater social differentiation would coincide with a deviation from dominating values.³⁴¹ However, on closer inspection, this reversal was explained by Honneth through the idea of an institutional and normative reformulation of the principle of honor (and equity) through the guidelines of inclusion, generalization, individualization and so on. Also in that case, therefore, drastic paradigm changes were interpreted by Honneth as necessarily based on actual normative elements that were perceived as no longer adequate to the needs that they themselves had generated by socializing individuals. What within Honneth's thought allows the re-elaboration of fundamental values – without having to adapt to those that are simply affirmed by the majority – is the concept of *surplus of validity* and the consequent almost unbridgeable distance between normative promises and institutional realizations. This leads to the paradox – intrinsic in the very concept of *intramundane transcendence* – according to which the emancipatory interest should not justify its own existence according to criteria of shared establishment. In this regard, I argue, *Freedom's Right* does not present any particular difference.

³³⁷ Cf. Shafer.

³³⁸ Cf. René Gabriëls, 'There Must Be Some Way out of Here. In Search of a Critical Theory of World Society.', *Krisis. Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, 2013, 5–9.

³³⁹ Cf. Schaub; Freyenhagen, p. 107.

³⁴⁰ Cf. Axel Honneth, 'Rejoinder', in *Critical Horizons*, 16.2 (2015), 204–26; Axel Honneth, *The Idea of Socialism. Towards a Renewal* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

³⁴¹ Cf. Schaub.

A third problematic point is the relationship between the principles underlying social integration and the participants. First of all, the fact that Honneth considers normative integration as *the* fundamental level would leave a certain social-theoretical idealism to be glimpsed:³⁴² on the one hand, the role played by micro and macro systems in social integration is lost in sight and, on the other hand, Honneth would not consider that precisely these values and norms are results of social integration, not the basis for it. This overseeing would have in turn two consequences. First of all, Honneth would not consider the fact that ‘behind’ the legitimizing assent of the participants ‘hidden moralities’ and moral suffering could be at stake, themes on which he focused in his first writings, at least up to *Reification*.³⁴³ Moreover, that the subjects legitimize institutions (especially if such assent is to be considered not as active involvement) could be more easily read as the result of individuals’ being socialized in them, rather than of their justice. By being socialized according to certain principles, subjects would in turn be objects of ideological integration, that is, embedded from the outset in a context capable of shaping needs, directions, horizons and identities. Assuming the ethical dimension as social integration’s basis would be then problematic both on the level of social ontology and on that of a subjectivity theory: on the one hand, a model would be proposed that considers almost exclusively the superstructure and not the structure – to simplify with Marx’s words – or ‘ideal actualities’ rather than actual institutions,³⁴⁴ and, on the other hand, such ethical values and norms would be placed as ‘at the disposal’ of the subjects, and not rather as having a shaping role in the ideological sense. From this would follow the idea of a certain independence of the ethical spheres of recognition, which would coincide with a sort of oasis of freedom, while capitalist imperatives, commercialization of the media, state’s authority would originate outside of such mutual and free relations.³⁴⁵ What the normative reconstruction highlights, especially in the market, are only the moral constraints tentatively imposed by cooperative and solidarity realities, but the relationship between the two realities (the ‘narrow market’ and the ‘broad’ market society) seems to be posterior their being structured.

A fourth problematic issue concerns the identification of social freedom as the principle proper to the institutions taken into account. Considering above all the pessimism concerning the analysis of the market and the democratic state, one might ask what empirical relevance this idea might have, given that these

³⁴² Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, pp. 202–5.

³⁴³ Cf. Borman, p. 102 ff.

³⁴⁴ Cf. Ng.

³⁴⁵ Cf. Michael J. Thompson, ‘The Neo-Idealist Paradigm Shift in Contemporary Critical Theory’, p. 147 ff.

institutional spheres have historically evolved almost as the opposite of social freedom actualizations. The question could be summarized according to the issue that Zurn calls *alternative teleologies*.³⁴⁶ Even if one grants the centrality of normative principles in social integration, could it not be said that the evolution of the market and of the state are presided over by other principles or by different principles at the same time? For example, in the market, competitiveness, negative freedom and merit? On what is based the need to characterize the current institutional configurations as misdevelopments of an unrealized but essential principle, rather than the complete realization of other principles?

This opens to the last and most fundamental point, that is, the identification of social freedom as hyper-value of modernity. The reconstruction proposed by Honneth is considered as unable to provide any justifying argument in this regard, according to three orders of questions. First of all, it is not clear how is justified the assumption according to which contemporary institutions represent the most advanced ones, which would exempt the theory from the necessity of a constructivist approach, that is of founding theoretically its justice principles and then applying them to social reality.³⁴⁷ But, on closer inspection, Honneth disseminates the analysis of the democratic public with statements that would provide some kind of justification for that such institutional structure would represent – *to date* – the most ‘evolved’ one, and that from a self-understanding perspective. Without dwelling, they concern the greater degree cooperation, communication, discursive exchanges, and reflexivity that democratic institutional relations imply in their own concept.³⁴⁸ That is, their greatest degree of social freedom – which represents also the criterion for the criticism of the nationalistic reduction of the state, for only by showing “the dependence of” the democratic sphere “on communicative practices reveals its current deficits.”³⁴⁹ A second problem is that Honneth’s reconstruction, considering almost exclusively social actors’ perspectives and values inherent to actual institutions, would not possess any general justification criterion, thus condemning the whole theory to a contextualism of certain degree. Even from within a reconstructive approach, the issues emerges that Honneth, by ruling out the logic of the spirit at the basis of institutional evolution, could no longer justify the identity between freedom, self-actualization

³⁴⁶ Cf. Christopher F. Zurn, ‘The Ends of Economic History: Alternative Teleologies and the Ambiguities of Normative Reconstruction’, in *Die Philosophie Des Marktes – The Philosophy of the Market*, ed. by Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2016), pp. 289–323.

³⁴⁷ Cf. Claassen, ‘Social Freedom and the Demands of Justice: A Study of Honneth’s *Recht Der Freiheit*’.

³⁴⁸ Cf., above all, Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 260, 263, 268–74.

³⁴⁹ Honneth, *Freedom’s Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, p. 255.

and justice that Hegel founds onto-logically,³⁵⁰ as well as to the *norm of truth* provided by the spirit's rationality and dialectical reflexivity.³⁵¹ The problem would be to find an extra-context reference that would allow to evaluate the elements proper to the context, thus distinguishing misdevelopments and developments. As Honneth already proposed before *Freedom's Right*, such a justification – which by the way would open up further related problems – could be provided, for example, by anthropology or, at least, a certain conception of human flourishing.³⁵² The latter is abandoned in *Freedom's Right* as justificatory means, but it is not completely absent. It could indeed be said that the primacy of social freedom is due to its capacity to correspond to the need for complementarity proper to (historically understood) human beings and inherent to the very idea of freedom – for only if the latter includes 'otherness' within its concept then it could be actualized. Finally, however, even not employing such a solution, Honneth's approach in *Freedom's Right* would represent a concealed constructivism: rather than identifying social freedom's centrality in social reality, Honneth would have elaborated this principle philosophically and then applied it to social reality.³⁵³ Otherwise, without an argumentative criterion prior to social analysis, misdevelopments could not be qualified as such, but should be considered as intrinsic progressive dynamics or coherent evolutions.

With regard to these criticisms, which go to the heart of the Honnethian approach, I propose two possible answers, which do not claim to close the debate, but to enlighten some elements that Honneth himself proposes as possible answers.

First of all, the characterization of state and market as spheres of social freedom responds to the need to elaborate an immanent critique and, together with the first premise of the normative reconstruction, to 'pose' normative promises at the base of the spheres of interaction themselves, so that also the participants' expectations would be inherent to them. This solution would make it possible to avoid a proceduralist approach and thus overcome a Habermasian dualism. But if that, from a conceptual point of view, offers considerable advantages, it seems ineffective for the results of the reconstruction: above all, it does not seem that cooperative associations and the democratic public can include in their concept *the* market and state power, both understood in the strict sense. The risk, therefore, is to re-propose a 'mitigated dualism', whereby the opposites are not system and lifeworld, but cooperative subspheres of social freedom that act in their respective macro-spheres.

³⁵⁰ Cf. David N. McNeill, 'Social Freedom and Self-Actualization: "Normative Reconstruction" as a Theory of Justice', *Critical Horizons*, 16.2 (2015), 153–69 (pp. 156–58).

³⁵¹ Cf. Buchwalter, p. 63.

³⁵² Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 195.

³⁵³ Cf. Rutger Claassen, 'Justice: Constructive or Reconstructive?', *Krisis. Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, 2013, 28–31.

In such a distinction, the conception of institutions that characterizes Honneth's thought – concretions of practices – plays a significant role. Such a perspective based on an action-theoretical account seems to be able to grasp only the normative dimension of the institutions, and not what Strydom calls *cognitive* dimension.³⁵⁴ If I correctly grasp what is thereby meant, this dimension would coincide with institutions' socio-ontological elements, with the related structures, mechanisms, and apparatuses that are *de facto* independent from criteria of legitimacy and that represent an essential dimension of their reproduction and consistency – aspect that, despite all criticism, is addressed in *Freedom's Right* in such a way as in any of the previous major works. Clearly, Honneth's aim is to deny such independence from normative horizons and expectations, for the aforementioned reasons. The impression is that only a more in-depth discussion of the institutions' onto-normative status can settle the issue.

The second element concerns the identification of the principle of freedom as the arch-value of modernity and the suspicion of a silent constructivism. With respect to this objection, Honneth himself claims to have based his persuasion on sociological sources, finding in participants' self-understanding 'documents' the conviction that spheres themselves should realize the principle of freedom, above all else. Therefore, *Freedom's Right* can be thought as a "hermeneutics of the ethical self-conception of modern societies,"³⁵⁵ whereby Honneth provides a normatively oriented *sociological justification*. Also in this case, the theoretical motive behind this methodological approach is quite clear: the need, in the last instance, is to legitimize conflict, which, on closer inspection, constitutes the leitmotif of *Freedom's Right*. Without normative claims' immanence to the spheres to which the first are addressed, the reasons for conflict would be external to the latter and, so to speak, proceduralist themselves: if that were the case, then even if critical theory were immanent to social reality, emancipatory interests would not be. Honneth himself admits that such an approach may not convince, but it seems that the only way to contradict the theory on this fundamental core would be to elaborate an alternative normative reconstruction, able to show the centrality of other principles or to entail a multiplicity of them.³⁵⁶

The issue concerning institutions leads us to the second aspect, which is generally not addressed by critics: in *Freedom's Right*, Honneth reviews the relationship between recognition gestures, principles, and spheres in a rather significant way, so as, to a certain extent, their very concept.

³⁵⁴ Cf. Strydom, p. 541.

³⁵⁵ Honneth, 'Replies', p. 40.

³⁵⁶ Cf. Zurn, *Axel Honneth. A Critical Theory of the Social*, p. 193; Honneth, 'Replies', p. 40.

First, the continuity outlined in *The Struggle for Recognition* between modes of recognition and ethical spheres is being definitively abandoned. *Freedom's Right* outlines respectively three modes of recognition, five spheres of recognition and three ethical spheres,³⁵⁷ which intertwine with each other in ways that are summarized in the following table.

Modes of Individual Autonomy				
Negative/Legal Freedom	Reflexive/Moral Freedom	Social Freedom		
		Spheres of Ethical Life		
		Personal Relations	Market	Democratic Public
Depend on Modes of Recognition				
		Love		
Respect				
		Esteem		

From that also follows the non-identity of recognition and social freedom. On the one hand, not all relationships of recognition can generate social freedom. Those that underlie negative and moral freedom – based on the logic of respect – constitute reciprocal normative obligations that are too weak to lead to the experience of being with oneself in another. On the other hand, saying that not all ‘cases’ of social freedom are bound to recognition relationships is more problematic. To understand how this can be said, it is necessary to return briefly to the definition of recognition and social freedom. In *Freedom's Right*, Honneth defines recognition for the first time as *mutual ascription/perception of normative statuses*,³⁵⁸ which lead to or coincide with complementary role obligations. On the other hand, social freedom would be represented by a ‘commonality of aims’ that allows the fulfilment of the need for complementarity – need proper to individuals and to the very concept of freedom. Clearly, the two concepts are closely related to them, so much so that it can reasonably be said that recognition and social freedom represent, for

³⁵⁷ Cf. Axel Honneth, ‘Réponse’, in *Axel Honneth. De La Reconnaissance à La Liberté*, ed. by Mark Hunyadi (Lormont: Le Bord de l’eau, 2014), pp. 109–29 (p. 126); Honneth and Raffnsøe-Møller, pp. 276–77.

³⁵⁸ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 96, 107. Honneth later says also that recognition can be conceived as “reciprocal acknowledgment of normative statuses which entitle individuals to specific sets of actions”, Honneth, ‘Replies’, p. 41.

each other, *condition*, *equivalent* and *consequence*, whereby the central element of both concepts is represented by the idea of *complementarity*. However, when dealing with the concrete matter of social freedom, a greater gap between the two concepts is to be noted: the rather evident cases are those of play – a fundamental practice of social freedom as far as the family is concerned –, of work and of the democratic public sphere. As far as the latter two are concerned, Honneth's emphasis is on the possibility of co-determination and collective self-regulation, which would presuppose the recognition of the other as an appropriate partner for this purpose. However, the realization of social freedom itself is not such a mutual ascription/perception of normative statuses, but the joint action of collective self-determination. It seems that from Honneth's account an idea of *joint commitment* emerges, which in turn *presupposes* recognizing the other as partner but, although such recognition must span co-determination's unfolding, the latter and the former cannot be considered in the same way, since they have different objects and purposes.³⁵⁹ As far as the case of play is concerned, instead, the intersubjective practice that allows one to overcome one's own finiteness is hardly conceivable in terms of recognition, even though playing entails interactivity and roles assignment: what remains unexplained by Honneth is which normative statuses are reciprocally ascribed in this case. Including playing in the definition of recognition would, in principle, lead seemingly to entail in the concept any intersubjective interaction that provides for the assignment or interpretation of reciprocal roles. This possibility, which could be detected perhaps in the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, is not, however, compatible with Honneth's paradigm, in which recognition relations should represent the bundle of practices that enclose a certain normative 'perfection'. Equating reciprocal ascriptions of normative statuses to the interactive polarity of social roles would therefore greatly weaken the critical potential of the concept.

Finally – and in continuity with *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom and Redistribution or Recognition?* – in *Freedom's Right*, the spheres of recognition play an indispensable role by the conceptualization of recognition gestures. It is the fact that subjects are socialized in the second-natural world oriented by certain principles to constitute the horizon of recognitional norms, with their respective expectations, needs and modalities. One could say, therefore, that the need for

³⁵⁹ Here the expression 'joint commitment' is to be understood in general terms, but well expresses the complementarity of aims proper to social freedom. In this case, I relate mutual recognition and joint commitment in a slightly different way from Gilbert. Clearly, mutual recognition coincides with a joint commitment on the part of the partners, but in turn, co-determination implies a further undertaking of shared responsibility. Cf. Margaret Gilbert, 'Mutual Recognition and Some Related Phenomena', in *Recognition and Social Ontology*, ed. by Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 271–86 (p. 276 ff.).

complementarity at the basis of social freedom finds its foundation in spheres where social freedom is already realized, as well as, say, friends' gestures of mutual recognition can only be such because the subjects involved have been socialized in a normative horizon where 'friendship' essentially entails certain complementary obligations, which the subjects must be able to master. As we have seen, Honneth maintains that institutions' 'task' is to favor a *smooth interlocking* by social action, *relieving* the actors from having to coordinate each time their aims again: rather, they find themselves sharing certain social contexts according to certain roles that allow them to complement each other (quasi-)automatically.³⁶⁰ It is therefore clear that the relations of recognition – which for Honneth remain exclusively intersubjective – are not conceivable as decontextualized I-Thou polarity. Rather, social analysis outlined in *Freedom's Right* offers a rich second-natural scenario that informs the relationships and normative obligations that individuals must be able to comply with: a recognition order at the basis of potential progressive changes. Without a contextualizing 'third', recognition relationships would be devoid of the *why* and the *what-for* that define them. However, such a 'third' seems to be in turn dispersed in the relations themselves, precisely because institutional reality is dealt with almost exclusively from a normative point of view, which falls within the relations of recognition.

³⁶⁰ Cf. Honneth, *Freedom's Right. The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, pp. 53, 125.

5. *Anerkennung*: from Affirmation to Mutual Authorization

In *Freedom's Right*, therefore, recognition is defined as a differentiated intersubjective praxis that takes place within pre-defined relationship horizons – which in turn are crystallizations of those relations: this would entail in the very concept related role obligations, adding to the previous inquiries a greater emphasis on the normativity of the mutual dimension. However, it has also become clear that not all forms of recognition coincide (derive from or are at the basis of) the spheres of ethical life; rather, this second element is tied to and requires a thick conception of complementary aims, so that the intersubjective acts-coordination can lead to being with oneself in the other.

In the 2018 text *Anerkennung: Eine europäische Ideengeschichte*, Honneth further addresses the issue of recognition, this time from a more theoretical perspective, thus providing a more in-depth depiction than the ones proposed so far. The purpose of this last chapter is to address the author's latest reflections on the concept of recognition, which, however, have their roots in a debate left open since 2002, when *Inquiry* published an issue focused on the Honnethian concept of recognition. The first paragraph will therefore focus on the issues that emerged there and on Honneth's response – 'Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions' – which was subsequently inserted as an afterword to *The Struggle for Recognition*; the current attempt in this exchange coincides above all with defining what recognition is and how it is configured with respect to the traits of the person it affirms (or accepts and expresses): it is the distinction between attributive or receptive model (5.1).

The second paragraph focuses instead on 'Recognition as Ideology: The Connection between Morality and Power' (original German: 2004). This article, then collected in *The I in We*, represents one of the few cases in which Honneth directly addresses the issue of power within recognition relationships and the risk contained in entrusting such practices with an exhaustive outline of normative horizons (5.2).

The third paragraph will focus precisely on *Anerkennung*: here Honneth takes up precisely the problems opened in the two writings just mentioned, contextualizing them in a history of ideas that tries to place the different meanings that recognition assumes in three traditions of European thought: French, English and German. Without dwelling too much on the many historical inquiries and comparisons

carried out by Honneth, our aim here will be to distil the image of recognition that thereby emerges (5.3). Then we will pull the strings with respect to this last chapter, emphasizing the evolutions undergone by the concept of recognition (5.4), and finally, we will try to provide a general perspective on the reconstruction carried out so far, relaunching the theoretical discussion of the second section (5.5).

5.1 'Grounding Recognition': *Response, Actualization, and Progress*

In order to better understand the issues dealt with in *Anerkennung*, it is useful to take a step back to 'Grounding Recognition'.¹ In this article, in fact, Honneth, prompted by the observations by Carl-Göran Heidegren, Heikki Ikäheimo, Arto Laitinen and Antti Kauppinen,² lays many foundations for what will be his later elaborations. This text could rightly be considered a watershed that deserves considerable attention, if the aim is to reconstruct Honneth's thought in its developmental parable. This relevance can be traced back to three main points. First, Honneth expresses more clearly the reasons that lead him to move away from Mead, as well as from an anthropological justification of 'recognition practices' normativity. Secondly, he provides, as never before, a formal definition of recognition, tentatively able to entail the multiple tensions that we have seen characterize the concept. Thirdly, he clarifies the relationship between such recognition practices, their normative character, and the concept of progress; in this sense, the link between the I-Thou relations and the concept of second nature becomes clearer.

Here, we shall focus on these three issues, leaving aside what Kauppinen addresses, that is, the 'position' of the concept of recognition within social criticism's broader aims. In fact, the accounts provided as response by Honneth are significantly consistent with what has been seen throughout the last chapter. That is, the aim to develop a social-critical theory that is not trapped by cultural relativism has to be developed through the reference to implicit norms of interaction (i.e. of recognition), unearthed via reconstruction. The non-relativistic character of a so-conceived theory would hinge on a sufficiently strong conception of progress that has its roots in the idea of surplus of validity (*Geltungsüberhang*): the internal character that the critique must possess in order to fulfil its aims relies not only on

¹ Cf. Honneth, 'Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions'.

² Cf. Carl-Göran Heidegren, 'Anthropology, Social Theory and Politics: Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition', *Inquiry*, 45.4 (2002), 433–46; Heikki Ikäheimo, 'On the Genus and Species of Recognition', *Inquiry*, 45.4 (2002), 447–62; Arto Laitinen, 'Interpersonal Recognition: A Response to Value or a Precondition of Personhood?', *Inquiry*, 45.4 (2002), 463–78; Antti Kauppinen, 'Reason, Recognition, and Internal Critique', *Inquiry*, 45.4 (2002), 479–98.

the (manifest or counterfactual) contradictions between norms and their instantiations, but on an internal logic of refinement of recognition practices, due to their intrinsic moral character.³

This last point can be better understood once we move to the further analyses Honneth carries out about recognition itself, engaging Ikäheimo and Laitinen's proposals, which in turn could be summarized as follows.

Heikki Ikäheimo outlines his article as a proposal for further developments within the groove traced by Honneth. He then concentrates his efforts on clarifying the concept of recognition and reformulating the relationship between it and the related dimensions of personhood.

Ikäheimo's starting point is represented by the lack of clarity that often characterizes the use of the term recognition, which possesses a certain polysemanticity. His efforts are therefore oriented to 'distil' a general definition of the *genus of recognition*, i.e. the basic practical logic of different intersubjective attitudes that can be traced back to the specific categories of love, respect, and esteem. The claim is that recognition could be conceived as complex of practical gestures, whereby one finds her own intentionality mediated by another. Such 'encounter' would be able to shape a space of reasons within which the intentions of both partners are habituated and informed by reciprocal mediations. Here, the underlying practical logic, that is, the genus of recognition, is defined as a case of *A taking B as C in the dimension of D, and B taking A as a relevant judge.*⁴ According to this definition, A would be the recognizer, B the recognizee, "C the attribute attributed to B in A's attitude,"⁵ and D the dimensions of the recognizee's personhood that are at issue.

Ikäheimo then reformulates C and D, using different terms as those used in *The Struggle for Recognition*. With regard to the dimension of love, the 'attribute attributed to B' would be that of being someone whose happiness or well-being is important to A (C1); the second species of recognitional attitude concerns having rights or being entitled to *x* (C2); and finally C3 coincides with B's being worthy of esteem. Conversely, the dimensions of personhood taken in consideration by those recognitional attitude are re-termed as *singularity* (D1), *autonomy* (D2), and *particularity* (D3).⁶ Once adopted and clarified this terminology, Ikäheimo's major efforts are aimed at questioning the close correlation postulated in *The Struggle for Recognition* between C and D, i.e. between the modes of recognition (and their

³ Cf. Honneth, 'Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions', p. 513 ff.

⁴ Ikäheimo, 'On the Genus and Species of Recognition', p. 450.

⁵ Ikäheimo, 'On the Genus and Species of Recognition', p. 451.

⁶ Cf. Ikäheimo, 'On the Genus and Species of Recognition', pp. 451–52.

instantiations) and the personal dimensions affirmed through them.⁷ But, since we have already seen that Honneth himself depicts – quite evidently in *Freedom's Right* – a certain discrepancy by the interplay of C, D, and institutional (ethical) spheres, we would briefly focus on three further points.

First, Ikäheimo underlines that recognition could be fruitfully analyzed only for what concerns *intersubjective relations*: the risk at stake by considering such normative attitudes as concerning groups or institutions would be, according to him, that of reifying them; in other words, it would be needed a more in-depth social-ontological inquiry in order to comprehend how or to what extent an institution, as such, could be comprehended as recognizer,⁸ that is, as intentionally mediated actor.

Secondly, if recognition is constituted by attitudes and judgments – that is, by one's attitude toward another, who in turn 'accepts' or not such attitude as suitable –, ⁹ than the naturalistic vocabulary inherited from Mead would not be appropriate.¹⁰ The normative horizon entailed by the genus of recognition would not be explicable through terms like 'urges' or by the concept of 'I', or through a narrative which hinges on the internalization of external demands, because such accounts provide a too thin background to place recognitional relations within a space of reasons.

The last point concerns the distinction made between *recognitional attitude* and *recognition*.¹¹ On the one hand, recognitional attitudes can be defined as that class of gestures through which B is attributed some attributes by A. In this sense, Ikäheimo would describe recognition in exclusively attributive terms, as Honneth will then point out. However, recognitional attitudes are not a sufficient condition to speak of recognition. What constitutes the latter is the second practical 'movement', whereby B takes A as a relevant judge, thus accepting the related recognitional attitudes (C). Without such a judgment towards A one cannot speak of recognition and, on closer inspection, the fact that the recognizee considers the recognizer as an adequate judge represents the most fundamental – perhaps even transcendental – level of mutuality that a normative concept of recognition must entail.

⁷ Cf. Ikäheimo, 'On the Genus and Species of Recognition', pp. 452–58.

⁸ Cf. Ikäheimo, 'On the Genus and Species of Recognition', p. 451.

⁹ "...recognition is a process where a person attributes in her attitudes certain relevant attributes to another person – whether in explicit speech acts, or implicitly in her overall orientation in the shared world – and the other person has a positively evaluative attitude towards the attribution, or 'accepts' it." Ikäheimo, 'On the Genus and Species of Recognition', p. 456.

¹⁰ Cf. Ikäheimo, 'On the Genus and Species of Recognition', pp. 456–57.

¹¹ Cf. Ikäheimo, 'On the Genus and Species of Recognition', p. 450.

Also Arto Laitinen conceives his article as a possible contribution or refinement to a theory of recognition inspired by Honneth's account. Contraposed to other conceptions of recognition, Laitinen describes Honneth's as *multidimensional* (a), *practical* (b), and *strict* (c).

First (a), it is clear that Honneth's account entails multiple recognitional attitudes and various related dimensions of personhood. Even if they are in turn oriented to the overarching concepts of self-realization or freedom, the specificity of love, respect, or esteem is not to be confused or overlapped.

Second (b), it is also clear that recognition represents a *practical* attitude. Maintaining Ikäheimo's iteration, one could say that recognition happens when A *treats* B as C in the dimension of D, and B *treats* A as a relevant judge. Such perspective does not coincide, for example, with Fraser's, whereby practical gestures not necessarily accompany *symbolic* recognition – whose accent is consequently posed on cultural patterns and not on its normative relevance.¹²

Finally (c), Laitinen defines Honneth's paradigm of recognition as *strict* – contraposed to *broad* –, and draws four conditions to distinguish strict and broad conceptions. The first two conditions characterize recognition as *interpersonal* matter. First, only persons can be *recognizers*. Laitinen justifies this assumption referring to experiences of misrecognition. Misrecognition happens only when a certain degree of insult is felt: not every kind of injustice or misfortune can be characterized in such 'social terms' – therefore, 'recognizer' could be determined only as 'equal and countervailing' to a misrecognizer, i.e. as human being. However, this argument exposes itself to the rather simple observation that one can feel insulted (and therefore misrecognized) even by institutions or even cultural models. In this case it seems more successful to take into consideration Ikäheimo's argument that the lack of clarity about *how* institutions can be considered recognizers suggests the opportunity to deepen the research, in order to avoid reifying formulations or excessive simplifications. In any case, it is true that *certain* normative demands to be recognized are suited to obligations that only human actors can meaningfully fulfil. Consequently, the second condition is that only persons can be *recognizees*. Recognition does not coincide with any consideration, statement or expression of value. There are considerable differences between affirming the value of an object or the value of another person. The type of recognition that Honneth considers, clearly, involves human recognizees. Third, recognition requires a (public) *expression* of the other's 'cognized' traits, and – fourth – those traits have to be *evaluative*: recognition does not concern, for example, persons' physiological traits, unless they historically assume a certain cultural-qualitative dimension. Quite

¹² Cf. Laitinen, 'Interpersonal Recognition: A Response to Value or a Precondition of Personhood?', p. 465.

trivially, it is not a matter of recognition how tall a person is,¹³ but rather which qualities she expresses that manifest her status as a person, generically conceived. Honneth's (and Laitinen's) idea of recognition is then multiple, practical, and strict, which in turn means interpersonal, expressivist, and evaluative/normative.

In addition to several elements that we will not dwell on, Laitinen's article is particularly noteworthy for the meta-ethical distinction he proposes between two models of recognition, which addresses the concept's ambiguity: that is, its oscillation between *knowing*, i.e. the mere attestation of personal characters, and *making*, which would coincide with the social constitution of the latter.¹⁴ Laitinen names these two alternative models *generational-model* and *responsive-model*.¹⁵

According to the first perspective, gestures of recognition would represent the area of formation and emergence, or better the acts which generate persons' new characters, moral obligations and so on. For example, granting rights to another provides her with a disclosed set of possibilities that could not have been approachable before that specific act of recognition. In other words, the generation-model would underline recognition's constitutive contribution in the formation of normative and social statuses, to the extent that Ikäheimo's lexical choices suggested: recognition would be a matter of attributing attributes to another. Almost the opposite, the response-model argues that recognition is characterized as response to evaluative features that (somehow) precede it. To this extent, recognitional gestures' fundamental dimension would be that of knowing, that is, of unveiling those value-based characters that *ought* to be recognized as worthy of public affirmation and expression.

Both these models, when exaggerated in their polarity, possess inherent problems. On the one hand, generative model's constructivist approach would lead to a certain arbitrariness and contextual relativism: for example, on a conventionalist basis, it could be agreed to accord human features to inanimate objects, since recognizing the latter as persons would not require any effective reference to the recognizees' characteristics – or, more problematic, to label human beings as inhuman. On the other hand, the response-model would provide more criteria to determine the adequacy of recognitional acts from a normative point of view – adequate, that is, would be those gestures that are consistent with another's evaluative features. However, such value-based perspective, if excessively flattened on the pre-existence of what is to be recognized, would annul the role of recognition

¹³ Cf. Laitinen, 'Interpersonal Recognition: A Response to Value or a Precondition of Personhood?', pp. 465–67.

¹⁴ Cf. Patchen Markell, 'The Recognition of Politics: A Comment on Emcke and Tully', *Constellations*, 7.4 (2000), 496–506 (p. 496).

¹⁵ Cf. Laitinen, 'Interpersonal Recognition: A Response to Value or a Precondition of Personhood?', p. 467 ff.

by the shaping an undamaged self-relation, as well as its contribution to the unfolding of individual autonomy.

Precisely for this reasons, Laitinen embraces a median path: the evaluative features to which recognition ‘bends’ – as in the responsive-model – and from which it ‘receives’ its normative orientation would establish themselves on a *potential* level, whose *actualization* would be set in motion by recognitional attitudes. Terms such as autonomy or moral responsibility would be proper to the person as such only potentially, while they would find full expression only if recognized and, consequently, interpersonally or socially oriented. Thus, recognition would be both a response to evaluative features and a precondition of persons’ personhood.¹⁶

Honneth’s proposals in ‘Grounding Recognition’ mainly focus on the alternative proposed by Laitinen – but they range also over the relationship between anthropology, social theory and critical theory, which precisely why this paper might represent *the* transition from the model presented in *The Struggle for Recognition* to the writings addressed in the last chapter.¹⁷

The starting point is once again the diverse meanings that the concept of recognition assumes in different traditions of thought, also depending on nuances that the term possesses in different languages: in fact, if in English ‘recognition’ has a certain closeness to the idea of repetition of a cognition (*Wiedererkennung*), this idea is excluded from the German *Anerkennung*. In any case, Honneth outlines four points, also shared by Laitinen and Ikäheimo, which can represent a basis for the formulation of a “*systematic* meaning” of the concept.¹⁸ First, recognizing coincides with affirming qualities of human beings or groups – it has still, according to Honneth, strong interpersonal features though. Second, recognition is a certain *attitude*, whereby symbolic or verbal expressions could play only a complementary role: recognition is a matter of acts and hinges on how qualities are practically *treated*, rather than merely *affirmed*. Thirdly, recognitional acts cannot be thought of as consequences or side-effects of other attitudes: they can be determined only as explicitly aimed at recognizing the other person, so that they are transparent with their purpose. Thus, recognition cannot be confused with those positive attitudes that, for example, accompany almost every sort of cooperative action: if our aim is

¹⁶ Cf. Laitinen, ‘Interpersonal Recognition: A Response to Value or a Precondition of Personhood?’, pp. 473–75.

¹⁷ Heidegren provides a quite detailed depiction of Honneth’s thought until 2002, and of the relation of the connections between these three areas of inquiry, proposing to conceive them as a (more or less) coherent constellation; cf. Heidegren, ‘Anthropology, Social Theory and Politics: Axel Honneth’s Theory of Recognition’. What is at stake in ‘Grounding Recognition’ is precisely the reformulation of Honneth’s conceptual constellation.

¹⁸ Honneth, ‘Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions’, p. 505.

to undertake any activity together, a certain degree of esteem or respect could be implied. But that is not the case of recognition, where the only aim that defines our actions is to recognize each other. The fourth premise is that recognition is a genus which possesses different species. Love, respect, and esteem would represent different facets of treating the other as person, affirming her qualities. Thus, given these first premises, it could be said that “recognition is to be conceived of as the genus comprised of three forms of practical attitudes, each reflecting the primary aim of a certain affirmation of the other.”¹⁹

Honneth then tries to determine the ‘generic’ case of recognition, that is, regardless of the specific kind of practical engagement with the other, but as to the “cognitive relation to those with whom we interact”.²⁰ Here, he reformulates the distinctions made by Laitinen, but interacts also with Ikäheimo. On the one side, there is the *attributive* or generative model, which underlines the constitutional role that recognition possesses with regard to personhood – the attribution of attributes. On the other side, if recognition is conceived as a *responsive* attitude, then its role with respect to the qualities it perceives is to be thought as that of an interpersonal means of their unfolding, or actualization. In other words, recognition could be conceived either as forming new normative statuses, or as accepting and making explicit pre-existing ones – even though such alternatives, as Laitinen points out, do not rule out each other completely. In fact, it seems difficult, even from within Honneth’s theory, i.e. from the multiplicity of forms of recognition, so as from the evolution that the concept undergoes in *Freedom’s Right*, to adopt only one of these alternatives.

However, Honneth believes that if a *normative* concept of recognition is to be obtained, only the *receptive model* provides criteria to ‘assess’ the correctness or adequacy of recognitional gestures, so also to distinguish them from misrecognition. The attributive model, on the contrary, would not be able to provide any element that can ‘interface’ with demands for recognition or that could determine recognitional gestures as response to moral injuries. In this sense, the attributive model would lend itself more easily to a translation of the recognition lexicon into domination and power terms, because if it is true that recognitional acts alone determine the recognizee’s features – so as by attributive gestures –, then there could be no ‘point of reference’ that could be appealed for an eventual emancipation from such sort of labelling. With Honneth’s words, “if the recognitional attitude were merely to attribute positive qualities to the other subject, we would no longer have an internal criterion for judging the rightness or appropriateness of such

¹⁹ Honneth, ‘Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions’, p. 506.

²⁰ Honneth, ‘Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions’, p. 506.

ascriptions.”²¹ In such depiction, however, Honneth does not consider the second part of Ikäheimo’s sentence, that is, that an attribution can be considered recognition only if the recognizee considers the recognizer relevant judge. Even if that does not completely rule out the possibility of power relations, it implies a certain transparency for what concern the capacity, of both interaction partners, to refer to the objects addressed by recognition: only if the recognizee can somehow consider, within her own self-relation, the recognized traits, can she judge the recognizer’s acts as adequate.

On the other hand, the risk of adopting the receptive model is that of excessively flattening normativity to ontological assumptions about human nature. In other words, what nature would such features have, if they somehow exist before interpersonal interaction? The issue at stake, if we consider *The Struggle for Recognition* and the relationship between infant and caregiver, lies in the possibility of conceiving at least a nuclear self that precedes sociality or not – so moving towards a *strong* anthropology, rather than the weak one Honneth pursued. Even if such traits of personhood were – as Laitinen claims – *evaluative* and not ontological, their pre-existence would lead to a *value realism* that seems highly incompatible with many aspects of Honneth’s theory.

This unfortunate situation changes, however, once we admit the possibility that these values represent lifeworld certitudes whose character can undergo historical change; then the evaluative qualities that we would have to be able to perceive in order to respond ‘correctly’ to them in recognizing a person or group would no longer be immutable and objective but rather historically alterable. To be halfway plausible, however, the picture just outlined would have to be supplemented with a further element: the social lifeworld would have to be conceived of as a kind of ‘second nature’ into which subjects are socialized by gradually learning to experience the evaluative qualities of persons [...].²²

In this way, the concept of *second nature* would allow to outline a *moderate value realism*, that is, a mutable pre-existing horizon, but sufficiently consistent to allow the recognizer to ‘welcome’ and express the traits of the other according to a shared understanding of values – thus Honneth draws here a very similar idea of recognition as that depicted one year earlier in ‘Invisibility’. This leads to further define recognition as that intersubjective means through which some features of personhood – mainly, self-relation and autonomy – that per se are conceivable in their potentiality can unfold into their actuality.

[...] in our recognitional attitudes, we respond appropriately to evaluative qualities that, by the standards of our lifeworld, human subjects already possess but are

²¹ Honneth, ‘Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions’, p. 507.

²² Honneth, ‘Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions’, p. 508.

actually available to them only once they can identify with them as a result of experiencing the recognition of these qualities.²³

So, using again Ikäheimo formulations, recognizing would be a matter of *A treating B as C letting the dimension D actualize*, whereby treating C represents a correct attitude if it aligns with the shared determination of D that takes place in a second-natural lifeworld. Two problems emerge. First, Honneth does not consider B's taking A as relevant judge – thus ruling out what was labeled as the most fundamental level of recognitional relationships' mutuality. Second, if recognitional attitudes are determined for what concerns their normativity by the lifeworld, then the arbitrariness proper to the attributive model seems to appear again. In fact, the problem with the attributive model was that it did not possess any normative criteria useful for the distinction between recognition, misrecognition, and domination. But if the values that precede recognition do not have a self-standing status, but represent the outcome of the ethical 'bargaining' proper to lifeworld, then once again such criteria seem to be confined within the limits of a cultural relativism. This can be avoided, according to Honneth, with a sufficiently strong conception of *progress*. It would represent a "directional index",²⁴ whose developments are, on the one side, always lifeworld-situated, but, on the other, (quasi-)transcendentally determinable. Two are the points claimed by Honneth – which coincide with the depiction provided in *Redistribution or Recognition?* First, progress within recognition relations could be indicated through a development in individualization and social inclusion, that is – always keeping Ikäheimo's iteration – by a broadening of D's scope in social terms and concerning B's self-perception. Secondly, progress would be made explicit not only by the fact that "*de facto* practices and social order contradict their implicitly practised ideals"²⁵ – which eventually leads to struggles for recognition. Rather, the surplus of validity (*Geltungsüberhang*) of recognitional norms would call for their always better instantiation, even if the gap between facts and norms would not be so evident as to trigger social conflicts.²⁶ To this extent, the surplus of validity would represent an internal criterion of development and – on the other side, but consequently – the means of an internal critique of society. Thus, progress does no longer represent a criterion to judge rightful claims of recognition, but becomes an essential component of the concept of recognition itself, because 'second nature' in turn hinges on it.

Such account on the correlation between recognition and second-natural norms and values brings with it two main consequences. First, Honneth addresses to what

²³ Honneth, 'Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions', p. 510.

²⁴ Honneth, 'Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions', p. 509.

²⁵ Honneth, 'Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions', p. 517.

²⁶ Cf. Honneth, 'Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions', p. 517.

extent recognitional acts can be considered *moral*. A first step concerns recognition's being mediated by evaluative reasons, but the moral connotation of such interactions can be understood as tied to Kant's definition of *respect*: "[r]espect is properly the representation of a worth that infringes upon my self-love".²⁷ Thus, recognition's morality is due not only to its being determined by (generical) values, but by *those* values or worthiness that can we recognize in the other, which are not determined by our own aims.²⁸ In other words, Honneth makes clearer that the moral dimension of recognitional gestures hinges not only on outlining conditions for an undistorted practical identity, but above all that recognition itself represents, on the part of the recognizers, an "*attitude that goes beyond an immediate concern with their self-interest in being responsive to the needs of others.*"²⁹

Defining in such terms recognition's morality also allows to avoid its *functionalist understanding*, that is, conceiving its role in actualizing human potentialities as mere means for the other to 'gain' a full-fledged practical identity. Honneth's starting point does not coincide with an analysis of the "functional demands of human nature", but rather is determined by "aspects of the value of human persons, aspects that have become differentiated as the result of a historical learning process",³⁰ that is, as results of a progress-oriented second-natural lifeworld. To recognize is therefore not only to instrumentally 'allow' the other to develop an undamaged self-relation, a condition or a precondition of autonomy; but it coincides with treating her morally according to those values that emerge as worthy according to shared normative understandings. So, what lets another's autonomy unfold is treating her morally. Moreover, only thanks to the other's presence, when our aims are somehow disrupted in their autonomous projections, we become aware of those socially instantiated norms, thus mastering them,³¹ thus becoming proper recognizers and recognizee, capable of being committed to the related role obligations. Even at this point, it is clear that 'Grounding Recognition' represents the very transition from – simplifying – *The Struggle of Recognition and Freedom's Right*. In fact, recognitional practices are no longer defined – even concerning their moral dimension – *directly* by human demands for self-realization. Rather, recognition receives its connotations *indirectly* from second-natural norms and principles, which in turn preside over human demands for self-realization via persons' socialization.

²⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 14.

²⁸ This point was made clear already in 1997, cf. Honneth, 'Recognition and Moral Obligation'.

²⁹ Bert van den Brink and David Owen, 'Introduction', in *Recognition and Power. Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory*, ed. by Bert van den Brink and David Owen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 1–30 (p. 6).

³⁰ Honneth, 'Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions', p. 513.

³¹ Cf. Honneth, 'Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions', p. 515.

Phenomenologically speaking, demands for self-realization emerge always as first matter, but Honneth deepens the role their second-natural constitution.

Such transition concerns mainly George Herbert Mead and the related account on progress. In 'Grounding Recognition', progress finds its dynamical logics neither in the 'I-me' polarity, nor – consequently – in the continuous tension between internalized norms – the generalized other's behavioral patterns – and the self's singularity – the I, with its drive-related indeterminacy and indeterminability. Rather, progress is to be conceived as learning process that takes place within the lifeworld. But above all, Mead's account now seems inadequate to develop the close connection that Honneth intends to propose between recognition practices and second nature. If progress has to be conceived as internal to recognitional attitudes for what concerns the twofold criterion of individualization and social inclusion, then that Mead disregards the modes of the "reactive behaviour of the two participants",³² and only focuses on the cognitive processes of assuming the other's point of view, appears incompatible with a normative account of social integration. Moreover, Mead's cognitivist perspective about the I brings with it several problems, which could lead to confuse a normative account on the person and her social integration via values and principles – on which Honneth from now on focuses – and a depiction of unconsciousness and drives. In other words, because progress is founded on the "inner negation of internalized norms, rather than by means of judgments regarding 'objectively' given standards of action",³³ Mead's account on second nature and progress results unsuited for a *normative* paradigm of recognition.

But what about conflict? The abandonment of Mead pushes Honneth to rule out the justification of social conflicts rooted in the 'I-me' polarity. The risk contained in such a move is that of losing the instance of singularity of the self, who, socialized in second-natural contexts of values and principles, might not possess the resources to overcome them, if not those provided by the context itself in the form of surplus of validity. Honneth is therefore led, with reference to Daniel Stern, to hypothesize a nuclear self whose *anti-social* drives of control over otherness could lead to the tendency to struggle established settings. However, even this solution seems to bring with it the already mentioned irreconcilability between normative arguments concerning moral injuries and a more psychoanalytically oriented drive-theory, risk that Honneth is aware of. Moreover, this solution has the disadvantage, compared to the model sketched from Mead, of allowing an almost exclusively negative,

³² Honneth, 'Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions', p. 502.

³³ Honneth, 'Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions', p. 503.

contrastive connotation of the conflict: it would represent a negation of intersubjectivity, rather than a creative reformulation of it.³⁴

In ‘Grounding Recognition’ Honneth hence states that recognition has to be conceived as an adequate-responding attitude that contributes by the unfolding of other’s evaluative features that are perceived as worthy of consideration within a second-natural context. Such conclusions – whose consequences were already dealt with from ‘Invisibility’ onward – are to be explained, in my view, on a different accent that Honneth poses: what is at stake is not the experience of *being recognized*, so as in *The Struggle for Recognition* or, by the experience of being with oneself in the other, in *Freedom’s Right*. Rather, the focus is shifted in better understanding what *recognizing* properly is – without decoupling it from the first leg of this distinction though. And precisely this theoretical need for clarification has to lead us in the following paragraphs.

5.2 ‘Recognition as Ideology’: Is there a Way Out?

But what if the second-natural horizon by, through, and within which the person’s evaluative features are shaped is ideological? Or, more precisely: what if, through relations of recognition, the addressee is – without coercion or repression – subjected rather than freed? This is the question posed in ‘Recognition as Ideology’³⁵ (original German: 2004).

The theoretical interlocutor is in this case Althusser, who affirms – following the triad: interpellation, recognition, guarantee – that individuals are *subjected* by being confirmed in their subjectivity.³⁶ The case made by Althusser is quite simple, but poses different issues for recognitional theory in general, but above all for a critically-oriented one. Whenever an individual is (re-)cognized on the street and interpellated by an acquaintance or a friend, their ritual gestures of greeting and shaking hands represents their mutual confirming and guaranteeing each other as subjects – that is, they recognize one another. Now, their being subjects is considered – mostly drawing on Lacan and Foucault – as an ambivalent ‘status’, rather represents individuals’ being *determined* in their possibilities: ‘subject’ is always already *subjected*, because practices and systems of subjectivation are those through which it is subjugated. One becomes subject only to the extent she becomes

³⁴ Cf. Honneth, ‘Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions’, pp. 504, 518; Axel Honneth, ‘Facets of the Presocial Self: Rejoinder to Joel Whitebook’, in *The I in We. Studies in the Theory of Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), pp. 217–31.

³⁵ Axel Honneth, ‘Recognition as Ideology: The Connection between Morality and Power’, in *The I in We. Studies in the Theory of Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), pp. 75–97.

³⁶ Cf. Althusser.

subjected to a system of rules that was determined ‘behind her back’, that of *social identity*. If so, mutual recognition would coincide with mutual confirmation of a subjection-status – confirmation that happens, moreover, following modes and rituals that are predetermined themselves. And therefore, reciprocal guarantee instantiating in gestures of recognition would produce nothing but the reproduction of unjust production relations, through what Althusser calls the mirror-structures of ideology.³⁷ Long story short, recognition would represent a means for conformation, homologation, and domination.

Confronted with such challenges, Honneth first tries to show how difficult it could be to determine ideological forms of recognition; second, attempts to define what characters they should possess, and finally sketches a criterion thanks to which they could be identified, that is, distinguished from genuine recognition.

Dealing with the first issue, he considers the matters at stake by once again trying to identify with the subjective experience of those who are supposedly affected by ideological forms of recognition. If, in fact, such intersubjective practices are repression-free, they cannot be merely equated with acts of misrecognition or non-recognition.³⁸ Thus, the complexity of the matter consists precisely of identifying a pathological social pattern without pathological outcomes on the part of the affected. The examples proposed by Honneth spotlight such difficulties. For Uncle Tom – the ‘good’ slave and servant –, a ‘good’ housewife, ‘keeper of the hearth’, or an heroic soldier who volunteered, how is it possible to discover and experience that the relations through which they are affirmed, esteemed and confirmed – insofar they are who they are, expressing a certain social role – are, in truth, reproducing their subjection?

The choice of examples itself, indeed the very way they are described, is the result of a moral judgement that can be made only from the perspective of our morally advanced present. Because we live in an epoch that regards itself as being morally superior to past ages, we are certain that the esteem enjoyed by the virtuous slave, the good housewife and the heroic soldier was purely ideological. Yet if we put ourselves in the past, it becomes much more difficult to distinguish between a false, ‘ideological’ form of recognition and one that is correct and morally imperative, because the criteria of which we were so convinced suddenly become uncertain.³⁹

³⁷ Cf. Althusser, pp. 268–70.

³⁸ The identification of ideological forms of recognition poses a difficult task to critical thinking, because of their being systems of domination that remove their repression-appearance. It is therefore wrong, as Worsdale does, to connect ideological recognition with misrecognition or psychological suffering (cf. Worsdale, pp. 6-7.) One has to deal with repression-free, (supposedly) symptoms-free relations, yet claiming their being profoundly unjust.

³⁹ Honneth, ‘Recognition as Ideology: The Connection between Morality and Power’, p. 77.

The step taken by Honneth clarifies that ideological forms of recognition can be identified only to the extent that we possess a different moral perspective from that of the second-natural environment in which they take place. But even not considering the historical distance to such relations, other examples show us that it is properly a *moral* distance that allow us to consider a form of recognition as ideological. Think of the teenager pawing his way into the neighborhood gang, or the members of a radical sect. Both enjoy esteem within a *certain* environment, letting themselves into a context without apparent way out. Thus, to assume – as Althusser does – that “intrinsically positive and affirmative practices in fact bear the negative features of an act of willing subjections”⁴⁰ would be in need to demonstrate – without any form of paternalism or universalism – that the context in which such acts of subjection are instantiated is structurally unjust even if ‘asymptomatic’. To assume that for the whole society, in all its forms, is far from being to be taken for granted, no matter how ‘suspicious’ we are. In fact, that being confirmed as subject would coincide per se as being subjected would imply that social reproduction itself is unjust or wrong. Here, the bear of proof lies on which moral criteria we let into play, because we have to show that *that* kind of reproduction is detrimental, otherwise we could not use the term ‘ideological’ with full reasons. In other words, one cannot simply decouple *moral validity* and *social validity*.⁴¹

Honneth therefore claims that such normative-historical perspectivism is necessary to unveil the ‘other side of the coin’, also because the idea of recognitional gestures he proposes is the same as that exposed in ‘Grounding Recognition’: recognitional stances are to be conceived as “bundle of habits linked to the revisable reasons for the value of other persons” which hinge on a second-natural horizon.⁴² Thus, they depend – for their objects and their modalities of expression – on the context they inhabit. On the other side, their general moral character would not be extinguished by their being situated, on their being receptive, rather on the fact that they let themselves “be determined by the value of other persons”.⁴³ However, this general level is not to be found as such, and that is why Honneth specifies that what is at stake is generic ‘interpersonal recognition’, but *institutional recognition*. Using this concept, Honneth does not intend to describe institutions as recognizers/ees, but only to make explicit a step that we have already taken in *Freedom’s Right*. Recognition becomes at best conceivable as taking place within institutional spheres, which in turn “can be understood as embodiments of the specific form of

⁴⁰ Honneth, ‘Recognition as Ideology: The Connection between Morality and Power’, p. 78.

⁴¹ Cf. Axel Honneth, Amy Allen, and Maeve Cooke, ‘A Conversation Between Axel Honneth, Amy Allen and Maeve Cooke, Frankfurt Am Main, 12 April 2010’, *Journal of Power*, 3.2 (2010), 153–70 (p. 166).

⁴² Honneth, ‘Recognition as Ideology: The Connection between Morality and Power’, pp. 82–83.

⁴³ Honneth, ‘Recognition as Ideology: The Connection between Morality and Power’, p. 85.

recognition that subjects accord each other on the basis of specific evaluative qualities.” In this sense, by conveying certain principles about individuals’ evaluative features, institutions “do not intentionally accord recognition”, yet “can be understood as crystallizations of patterns of recognition”.⁴⁴ This specification has considerable weight. That, say, the state *recognizes* rights to citizens can only be said, according to this perspective, in an *indirect* sense. Alznauer speaks in a similar way when he describes how Kant conceives property rights: it can be said that the state ‘recognizes’ my right of ownership only because it compels my consociates to recognize me as owner.⁴⁵ The state is therefore not the recognizer, if not indirectly: it grants me features that bind others to recognize me according to them. Therefore, the second-natural character of institutional recognition outlines the individual’s immanence to a context in which certain personal features emerge (more or less formally and rigidly) as potential cognitive object. What appears valuable in such ethical horizon is defined by Honneth ‘principles of recognition’ – love, equality, merit. And since ideological recognition does not present itself as misrecognition or non-recognition, it would seem that it is with respect to their relation with such principles – and the consequent modes of self-relation – that it is possible to exercise criticism.

If this is the case, given the aforementioned decisive historical-normative distance, a further difficulty emerges, namely the role of the concept of progress. Already in *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth had stated that this concept represents a fundamental criterion for evaluating different forms of recognition or, better, of the principles they hinge on. Here, however, also this idea seems to yield.

[...] the more we become aware of the fact that relations of recognition have been transformed, expanded and improved historically by means of new accentuations of general principles, the more difficult it becomes to identify merely ideological forms of recognition. Who can tell us for sure that an apparently functional, ideological evaluation is not just one of those shifts in accentuation by means of which the struggle for recognition unfolds historically? The issue is simple only in cases where the concerned parties actually resist new forms of evaluative distinction. Here we have at least an initial reason to question changed forms of recognition and to suspect that a mere ideology could be at work. But in the absence of such protest, where individuals seem to attain a stronger sense of self-respect through a new form of recognition, we initially lack all criteria for distinguishing between ideological and justified shifts in accentuation.⁴⁶

Take the case of the ‘good housewife’. Given such historical malleability of the forms through which the principles of recognition instantiate, the identification of

⁴⁴ Honneth, ‘Recognition as Ideology: The Connection between Morality and Power’, p. 84.

⁴⁵ Cf. Mark Alznauer, *Hegel’s Theory of Responsibility* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 90.

⁴⁶ Honneth, ‘Recognition as Ideology: The Connection between Morality and Power’, p. 89.

that situation as an ideological horizon of beliefs becomes evident only when such status is disputed through social conflicts, which in turn revolves on a better application of the same ground principles by which the first could have been supported in the first place. But, even more significantly, such centrality of the historical modifiability of principles' instantiations makes the question even more problematic: what *today* seems *to us* to be a form that functionalizes subjects to the reproduction of the dominant order could instead represent a decisive step for a refinement of the institutional concretions of recognition. It is not a question of justifying teleologically the possible subjection of today in view of tomorrow: rather, if progress is conceived as an open-ended learning progress, we do not dispose, now, elements that could tell us definitively what forms the tension between institutionalized forms and surplus of validity will take.

Precisely this point helps us in understanding the second step in the inquiry, that is, describing the features ideological recognition must possess according to its own concept.⁴⁷ First, the principles affirmed in such patterns of recognition have to give public expression to the value of a subject or a group; thus, say, discrimination does not fall into the concepts we are dealing with. Otherwise, ideological recognition would coincide with misrecognition, thus 'triggering' social conflict, or at least resistance. Second, the affirmation thereby conveyed has to be credible in the eyes of the addressees. And third, such kind of recognition has to be "contrastive", namely not simply normalizing. These conditions are meant to express that "ideological forms of recognition operate within an historical 'space of reasons'":⁴⁸ they must be rationally credible for the people who experience them – and pass them on –, otherwise they could not crystallize into institutional forms, they would be simply refused. And they have to be positive and contrastive, that is, putting the addressee somewhat in the foreground – and not simply normalizing (like Althusser's case) – so that subjects *feel* effectively recognized. These passages contain all the difficulty that Honneth's paradigm is compelled to deal with when faced with such issues, since such connection between institutions, principles and social actors make explicit the reasons of the criticisms that his later normative reconstruction will rise. Moreover, the concept of progress does not seem to be able to provide external support in their evaluation: the lack of an explicit emancipatory interest on the part of social actors prevents a simple recourse to it, unless one calls on thick teleological implications.

Honneth is therefore faced with the need to find an *internal* criterion that can help us distinguish ideological forms from genuine ones – and that is his third step. The example taken in analysis is that of the 'entreployees'

⁴⁷ Cf. Honneth, 'Recognition as Ideology: The Connection between Morality and Power', pp. 86–88.

⁴⁸ Honneth, 'Recognition as Ideology: The Connection between Morality and Power', p. 88.

(*Arbeitskraftunternehmer*): such labelling “asserts that every qualified member of the labour force is capable of planning his or her career path as a risk-filled enterprise, requiring the autonomous application of all of his or her skills and abilities.”⁴⁹ This idea is revealed in its pathological consequences according to the elements already highlighted by Honneth in ‘Organized Self-Realization’ (*supra* 3.1): under the promise of greater freedom and possibilities for self-realization, the regulatory conditions are increasingly thinned, under further pressure to develop identities capable of adapting elastically. What would constitute the ideological element derives precisely from the fact that ‘recognition’ cannot be reduced to a merely symbolic form. Rather, it coincides with a certain way of *treating* another: going back again to the example, the public esteem entailed in the very term ‘entployee’ should be accompanied by regulatory and redistributive measures. Simply said, the praise of the worker who embraces his or her career as a ‘risk-filled’ challenge is not supported by the sharing of the material consequences that would be conceivable if the role of the employee were really considered to be comparable to that of the entrepreneur.

[...] the deficiency by which we might recognize such ideologies could consist in their structural inability to ensure the material prerequisites for realizing new evaluative qualities.⁵⁰

Such internal criterion comes very close to a straightforward idea of immanent criticism, where the terms of comparison are the content of the promise and its fulfilment. Some evaluative features are affirmed, but the conditions for living them out are not assured.

However, as Amy Allen argues, not all cases of ideological recognition can be identified with a failure to increase the addressees’ material conditions. Through an example now well known in the debate, Allen intends to show that recognition and domination are closely intertwined. Elizabeth, a child educated according to traditional perspectives on femininity and women’s role in society, in order to be addressed with affection and recognition, behaves at least passively towards the models of subordination proposed by her parents.⁵¹ The case described by Allen is so, that it becomes very difficult to speak of familial love as a mutual recognition. Quite on the opposite, caregiver-child relations could be described as mutual in a very thin sense, which would not add very much to the mere concept of ‘relation’. Once again, the tensions between mutuality, reciprocity, and symmetry emerge.

⁴⁹ Honneth, ‘Recognition as Ideology: The Connection between Morality and Power’, p. 91.

⁵⁰ Honneth, ‘Recognition as Ideology: The Connection between Morality and Power’, p. 93.

⁵¹ Cf. Amy Allen, ‘Recognizing Domination: Recognition and Power in Honneth’s Critical Theory’, *Journal of Power*, 3.1 (2010), 21–32 (pp. 25–26).

According to Allen, the parent-child relationship would be so asymmetric, that the child's attachment would not convey a greater equality within the relations – as claimed by Honneth regarding the principle of love. Instead, attachment would open the doors to forms of subordination about which the child has no say because of her physical dependence from the parents. Therefore, vulnerable and exposed, Elizabeth would be socialized according to cultural patterns that undermine her possibilities for emancipation even as an adult, thus reproducing the ideological element, that is the concealment of domination itself.⁵² And finally, in a case like Elizabeth's, the material criterion would do no use, because it is precisely through her being subjected that she is addressed with family care – or rather, the two things would collapse on each other.⁵³ In other words, Honneth's claim according to which ideological recognition operate within an historical space of reasons would imply a degree of autonomy and transparency on the part of the subject that is always already undermined by its being socialized.

These issues seem to exacerbate the difficult position in which the recognition paradigm finds itself when confronted with a productive and not repressive idea of power. And it is precisely on such questions that many of the efforts of the last text that we are facing in our historical reconstruction are concentrated. Before moving on to *Anerkennung*, however, it seems useful to clarify in a different light the material criterion mentioned by Honneth at the end of 'Recognition as Ideology'. With this concept, not merely a greater equity from a distributive point of view can be meant: what is *materially* lacking in the case of the entrepoyee concerns the *imbalance* between risks and sharing of consequences. He is promised – and must take over – flexibility and responsibility in the elaboration of her 'work biography', but, then, her actual situation coincides with a greater exposure, in which such idea of authorship fades away and plays very little role. Here too, in my view, criticism is thought of by Honneth as unfolding from the counterfactual gap between principles and practical concretions: if this were not the case – and we reduce the material criterion to distributional issues –, the example of the heroic soldier would cease to be ideological if he were generously rewarded, which, evidently, is not a satisfying solution.

In any case, the question for a critical theory based on the concept of recognition is: *is there a way out?* On the one hand, the use of moral criteria that go beyond social validity would coincide with a universalism that seems reasonable to reject. But on the other hand, linking recognition practices to the concept of second nature appears to give us a static image according to which the individual is bound to merely repeat the rules according to which he or she has been socialized. And if these

⁵² Cf. Amy Allen, 'Recognizing Domination: Recognition and Power in Honneth's Critical Theory', p. 28.

⁵³ Cf. Amy Allen, 'Recognizing Domination: Recognition and Power in Honneth's Critical Theory', p. 30.

rules are ideological, then she will be forced to live in ideology, thus subjected. The normative perspectivism suggested by Honneth seems, once again, to give priority to the concept of progress and suggest that philosophy can only come into play after history. But the impression one gets is that the very potential of criticism is sharply diminished.

5.3 *Anerkennung: from Affirmation to Authorization*

The two previous paragraphs provided the necessary preconditions to aptly approach the issues discussed in Honneth's last monograph: *Anerkennung: Eine europäische Ideengeschichte* – having in mind two main issues.

First, the book itself faces the complexity of meanings that the term 'recognition' takes on in various philosophical, but also socio-political discourses. This polysemy was already traced by Honneth in 'Grounding Recognition' back to different nuances that the terms *Anerkennung*, *reconnaissance* and, indeed, recognition possess, even in their everyday use. The attempt is therefore to reconstruct, through a history of ideas (*Ideengeschichte*) – in quasi Weberian tones – the elective affinities between certain thinkers and the historical-cultural context they inhabit, which dialectically (i.e. in a process that cannot be interpreted as unilaterally oriented) would constitute different strands, or traditions of thought. Rather than reconstructing different *Volksgeister*, Honneth measures itself with such different philosophical outcomes with regard to the concept of recognition and tries to illuminate the red threads of their origins – in France, England and Germany, respectively.⁵⁴ Our first aim is to retrace the essential features of such reconstruction, focusing mainly on the conceptual nodes that are decisive for Honneth's discourse itself. Nor the historical-exegetical correctness of Honneth's readings of the respective authors will be focused, nor the connection he hints between their elaborations and their social context – in both cases, Honneth himself does not raise the claim of an exhaustive investigation. (5.3.1).

Rather, our aim is to analyze the developments of the Honnethian account of recognition, given all the issues emerged in 'Grounding Recognition' and 'Recognition as Ideology', which show the necessity and the risk that the concept of second nature represents for the very idea of recognition. On the one hand, recognition practices always have a *where* – the institutionalized spheres – and a *for-what*, i.e. the evaluative features at stake in the affirmation of the other, and which can only emerge by virtue of a broader framework than a single practical interaction.

⁵⁴ On the methodological premises of Honneth's inquiry cf. Axel Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2018), pp. 13–23.

On the other hand, the suspicion that arises is that the potential of such practices is exhausted into the context to which they belong – and that, indeed, their only potential is that of reproducing it, thus renewing structures of domination. Honneth’s attempt is to harmonize (if and where possible) those different traditions, so that a greater clarity to the concept of recognition could be gained. Our aim in this case will be to see above all how by such an attempt – and throughout the whole work – Honneth himself significantly reformulates his perspective on recognition, while not changing the foundations of his own paradigm (5.3.2).

5.3.1 *One Word, Different Concepts*

The history of ideas proposed by Honneth begins in France through a comparison with Rousseau and Sartre, whose perspectives – despite the countless differences between the two authors – could be summed up thanks to these passages of the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*.

[...] the savage lives in himself; the man accustomed to the ways of society is always outside himself and knows how to live only in the opinion of others. And it is, as it were, from their judgment alone that he draws the sentiment of his own existence.⁵⁵

Such view on sociality would find its fulcrum in the concept of *amour propre*, that is, that second-natural (therefore somewhat artificial) need that would push individuals to an almost compulsive search for social consideration, in an attempt to be, or simply to appear, above others. This desire, placed in the *social* nature of every man, would thus imply a felt need to consider one’s own characters according to the judgment that others might have of them. In other words, social beings would not simply *act* – as the non-social do – but always do so with concern for the effects or repercussions that their actions might have on the social consideration they eventually enjoy.⁵⁶ Thus, writes Honneth, one can speak of a co-originality between adopting the social perspective and craving for/being addicted to prestige (*Gleichursprünglichkeit von sozialer Perspektivübernahme und Geltungssucht*):⁵⁷ so,

⁵⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, ed. by Donald A. Cress and James Miller (Indianapolis – Cambridge: Hackett, 1992), p. 70.

⁵⁶ “I say that in our primitive state, in the veritable state of nature, egocentrism [*amour propre*, T.S.] does not exist; for since each particular man regards himself as the only spectator who observes him, as the only being in the universe that takes an interest in him, as the only judge of his own merit, it is impossible that a sentiment which has its source in comparisons that he is not in a position to make could germinate in his soul”; Rousseau, p. 90; cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 40.

⁵⁷ Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 43.

‘entering’ society, humans stop to behave and start to *behave (!)*, because of the need not only to be socially appreciated, but preferred. By projecting out – into social milieus – the (moral) observer of one’s actions and being motivated by the *amour propre*, the individual would simulate a certain acting *plasticity* in order to adapt to the socio-cultural conditions that surround her – precisely because in them resides the criterion of judgment. This dynamic would imply, according to Rousseau, a loss of self (*Selbstverlust*).⁵⁸ But such loss is not only moral or political, it does not regard what one might call a certain (compelled) inauthenticity of our actions alone. Not only *what* I do is affected by outsourcing my perspective, but *who* I might be and am. As Honneth points out, there is a cognitive difficulty (*kognitive Schwierigkeit*) with regard to the self-knowledge (*Selbsterkenntnis*):⁵⁹ the individual would be robbed of the “sentiment of his own existence”, as the *Discourse* reads, since social recognition would impose a heterogeneous perspective on him. In other words, having to constantly tailor my actions and my person to social criteria that could guarantee me recognition, I would fall into the impossibility of knowing who I really am, either because I would not be able to know if the characters exposed publicly are actually mine – or only the standardized outcome of emulations and fictions – or because my attitudes are always considered having the other out of the corner of my eye as my authoritative judge: an *inner* access to my *inner* dimension would therefore be precluded.⁶⁰

Such cleavage of self and self-perception is at the center of the second author Honneth considers, Jean-Paul Sartre. Given the due weight to the differences from Rousseau, also in *Being and Nothingness* others’ presence does not represent the ‘original’ situation: the phenomenological-subjectivist approach implemented by Sartre compels him indeed to justify the existence of others, so as its influencing the consciousness’ field of experience.⁶¹ As the well-known example of the keyhole shows, the appearing of the Other in the horizon marks the passage through which

⁵⁸ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 45 ff.

⁵⁹ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 53–54.

⁶⁰ “Weil die Subjekte kraft ihrer *amour propre* dazu getrieben werden, den jeweiligen Mitmenschen gegenüber die faktische Existenz ihrer Eigenschaften unter Beweis zu stellen, geraten sie über kurz oder lang in die Verlegenheit, sich in sich selbst nicht mehr auszukennen; denn es wächst mit jedem Versuch einer solchen Bezeugung der eigenen Personalität die Ungewissheit darüber, wer nun die Autorität über die Zuschreibung der ihnen Zukommenden Attribute und Fähigkeiten tatsächlich besitzt – die öffentliche Meinung oder sie selber, die sich doch gleichzeitig jener gegenüber zur Rechenschaft gezogen fühlen. Aus diesem epistemischen Verwirrspiel entwickelt Rousseau dann das innere Drama [...]: Das einzelne Subjekt, hin- und hergerissen zwischen der eigenen und der fremden Beurteilung seiner personalen Identität, weiß am Ende nicht mehr, wer es *wirklich* ist”; Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 60.

⁶¹ Cf. Manfred Frank, ‘Against a Priori Intersubjectivism: An Alternative Inspired by Sartre’, in *Critical Theory after Habermas. Encounters and Departures*, ed. by Dieter Freundlieb, Wayne Hudson, and John Rundell (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2004), pp. 259–79.

the subject, through being-for-Other, can know his being as his own object. Peeping through a keyhole, suddenly, I am 'lost' in the world, my "consciousness sticks to my acts, it is my acts", living the "free project of my possibilities," an *unreflective consciousness*.⁶² But as one sees me, I am frozen, the Other's gaze fixes me to certain traits, crystallizing me as object; and indeed by reflecting this gaze consciousness would cease to be *unreflective*; thus, "the person is presented to consciousness *in so far as the person is an object for the Other*."⁶³ The only existence of the Other, and his gaze, would allow that objectification that makes it possible for me to have me, not only to be me; but, on the other side, such gaze would represent the *solidification* and the *alienation* of my possibilities, which were not constrained until that 'encounter'.⁶⁴ So it is clear why such moment is described by Honneth as a recognition (*Anerkennung*) that is *simultaneously* misrecognition (*Verkennung*), recognition which is reification.⁶⁵ So, by directing his gaze at my physical being and acting – so that I can become aware of it –, the Other would fix my possibilities by 'tracing' them back to my concrete (petrified) shape: "If I am to be able to conceive of even one of my properties in the objective mode, then the Other is already given."⁶⁶ Perhaps playing with the suggestions that the identified link between Rousseau and Sartre evokes, one could even say that it is no coincidence that such

⁶² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (Ergodebooks, 1994), p. 259.

⁶³ Sartre, p. 260.

⁶⁴ It is worth quoting these passages from *Being and Nothingness*. "When I am alone, I can not realize my 'being-seated;' at most it can be said that I simultaneously both am it and am not it. But in order for me to be what I am, it suffices merely that the Other look at me. It is not for myself, to be sure; I myself shall never succeed at realizing this being-seated which I grasp in the Other's look. I shall remain forever a consciousness. But it is for the Other. Once more the nihilating escape of the for-itself is fixed, once more the in-itself closes in upon the for-itself. But once more this metamorphosis is effected *at a distance*. For the Other *I am seated* as this inkwell *is on* the table; for the Other, *I am leaning* over the keyhole as this tree *is bent* by the wind. Thus for the Other I have stripped myself of my transcendence. This is because my transcendence becomes for whoever makes himself a witness of it [...] a purely established transcendence, a given-transcendence; that is, it acquires a nature by the sole fact that the *Other* confers on it an outside. This is accomplished, not by any distortion or by a refraction which the Other would impose on my transcendence through his categories, but by his very being. If there is an Other, whatever or whoever he may be; whatever may be his relations with me, and without his acting upon me in any way except by the pure upsurge of his being—then I have an outside, I have a *nature*. My original fall is the existence of the Other. Shame—like pride—is the apprehension of myself as a nature although that very nature escapes me and is unknowable as such. Strictly speaking, it is not that I perceive myself losing my freedom in order to become a *thing*, but my nature is—over there, outside my lived freedom—as a given attribute of this being which I am for the Other. I grasp the Other's look at the very center of my *act* as the solidification and alienation of my own possibilities." Sartre, pp. 262–63.

⁶⁵ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 68–69; cf. also Axel Honneth, 'Erkennen Und Anerkennen. Zu Sartres Theorie Der Intersubjektivität', in *Unsichtbarkeit. Stationen Einer Theorie Der Intersubjektivität* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), pp. 71–105.

⁶⁶ Sartre, p. 270.

upsurge of the Other causes *shame* and *pride* as primary reactions.⁶⁷ But Honneth emphasizes that the heart of the matter is represented by the *becoming addressees* of another intentional being, thus going to characterize the matter at the level of a purely ontological occurrence (*rein ontologisches Geschehen*).⁶⁸

In any case, it is important to underline that both Rousseau and Sartre conceive recognition almost according to a model of propositional statements or of assertions of facts (“*nach dem Muster eines prepositionalen Feststellens oder einer Tatsachenbehauptung*”)⁶⁹ which are accordingly aimed at personal (*external*) features. Be it that these features are explicitly *attributed* or *perceived* by others (but the latter always show a certain generative power on the first), be it that they actually ‘belong’ or are simply pretended by the addressee, the latter would find himself in a situation of unbridgeable discontinuity between what he *is* and what he *sees* whether he looks himself being, therefore thrown either in an insecurity about his true nature (Rousseau), or in a limitation of his freedom as ontological dimension, a limitation of his being free from any conditioning (Sartre). Briefly, that the other knows me, unveils me, coincides with my being veiled.

But also in the philosophical developments that took place in France as reaction to the centrality the subject as structuring factor – i.e. Poststructuralism – a negative accent is maintained with regard to the concept of recognition. Clearly in this case ‘recognition’ is not and cannot be conceived as an encounter between two concrete subjects, but precisely as the functioning-mechanism (*Wirkmechanismus*) and sets of systemically organized practices (*Bündel von systemisch organisierten Praktiken*) through which certain attributes are assigned (*zuerkannt*) to subjects.⁷⁰

Taking briefly into consideration first Althusser and then Lacan, Honneth shows their rejection of the being-for-itself of the subject described by Sartre: the upsurging of the other and his gaze would not reify or destabilize an already-given subjective core; rather, it is only the call of the other that generates the subject in its functions. As already seen with respect to Althusser, recognition would have no moral character, it would not concern the consciousness’ experience of being recognized, and would not coincide with an epistemic act of (*un*)*veiling* personal

⁶⁷ “In short there are two authentic attitudes: that by which I recognize the Other as the subject through whom I get my object-ness—this is shame; and that by which I apprehend myself as the free object by which the Other gets his being-other—this is arrogance or the affirmation of my freedom confronting the Other-as-object. But pride—or vanity—is a feeling without equilibrium, and it is in bad faith. In vanity I attempt in my capacity as Object to act upon the Other. I take this beauty or this strength or this intelligence which he confers on me—in so far as he constitutes me as an object—and I attempt to make use of it in a return shock so as to affect him passively with a feeling of admiration or of love.” Sartre, p. 290.

⁶⁸ Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 71.

⁶⁹ Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 70.

⁷⁰ Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 73.

features. That of recognition is a dynamic of attribution of required characteristics in order to secure domination (“*die eines herrschaftssichernden Zuschreibens von geforderten Eigenschaften*”).⁷¹ The mutual confirmation that is realized through gestures of recognition would concern participants’ being *subject(ed)* to social identities that are (pre)defined and (pre)determined by the Subject. The reciprocity of the subjects would coincide, therefore, with an equal submission to a systemic order which is imposed on them, that interpersonal mutuality would instrumentally and non-coercively reproducing. For Honneth’s purposes, it is important to underline that such mutual recognition would be an act of attribution of personal features whose definition is over-individual and over-practical, found elsewhere, scattered in reproduction systems of domination. On the part of the subject one can only expect to adapt to such features, passively constituting its identity through being integrated by and within institutional models (the school, for example).

With Jacques Lacan, the matter gets even more acute. Briefly said, Lacan, by analyzing subjectivity’s process of constitution highlights the centrality of submission of the child’s impulses. Our drives are shaped (*Triebformation*) by and through a foreign element – the linguistic order (*Sprachordnung*) – that is introduced by the caregiver in the attempt of interpret and respond to them. The child would then henceforth be bound to articulate her urges according to a verbalization that was imposed on her. Thus language would simultaneously reveal and hide her drives: it would constitute subjectivity itself by ‘granting’ it shape – as Sartre already said: “I *am* language”⁷² – but can never coincide with the impulses themselves. Such split (*Spaltung*) opened by impossible ‘meeting’ between verbalization and drives would emerge particularly in the psychoanalytical process, in the *labour* of analysis, as Lacan calls it.

Does the subject not become engaged in an ever-growing dispossession of that being of his, concerning which [...] he ends up by recognizing that this being has never been anything more than his construct in the imaginary and that this construct disappoints all his certainties? For in this labour which he undertakes to reconstruct *for another*, he rediscovers the fundamental alienation that made him construct it *like another*, and which has always destined it to be taken from him *by another*.

This ego, whose strength our theorists now define by its capacity to bear frustration, is frustration in its essence.⁷³

The subject *is* frustration not because its desires are prevented from coming true, but because, as the mirror stage shows, ego can never coincide with the

⁷¹ Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 76.

⁷² Sartre, p. 372.

⁷³ Jacques Lacan, ‘The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis’, in *Écrits. A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London - New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 23–86 (p. 32).

representation it constructed of itself by the ‘help’ of another, who linguistically bridged the hiatus between *me* and my reflected *image*.

Be it that my search for social consideration makes me a stranger to my attitudes (Rousseau), or that the Other’s gaze binds me to my object-ness by the free unfolding of my possibilities; be it that the other greeting me does nothing but confirming the reproduction of my (being subjected to a) social identity, or that the Other – language – constitutes a pervasive order that leaves in shadow the ‘most original’ dimension of the ‘self’ – in all these cases, Honneth argues, one can speak of a co-originality of recognition and loss of self (*Gleichursprünglichkeit von Anerkennung und Selbstverlust*).⁷⁴ ‘Recognition’ would therefore be conceived in the French tradition primarily as acknowledgment (*Zurkenntnisnahme*) of (authentic or fictitious) characteristics that subjects possess, or finds themselves possessing. That this perspective is more epistemological than normative in character would be apparent from a lack of graduation (*Graduierung*) that pertains the act of recognizing. Recognition can be an effective or failed knowledge, the other’s gaze sheds light (or not) on object-like features (*»objektiven« Gegebenheiten*): it sees me peeping through the keyhole *or not*. Thus the person would be helpless exposed (*hilflos ausgesetzt*) to the other, to society. But, driven by the desire to participate in it, she would be forced to adapt to typified standards that would not be hers in the first place. Then, one could say, the epistemic character of recognition would not to be conceived in contemplative terms; rather, it concerns the attribution (*Zuschreibung*) of personal features that guarantee social acceptance – causing a hiatus within the person. Intersubjectivity is always connected with the risk of losing oneself (*Gefahr des Selbstverlustes*) or with the occasion for subject’s splitting (*Spaltung des Subjekts*): recognition would be the moment when the self loses the authority of the first-person perspective (*Autorität der Ich-Perspektive*). This is because – it is good to repeat it – either the subject finds herself in the vortex of social consideration, or precisely because the first-person perspective itself dissolves, as origin, into the other’s otherness.⁷⁵

In the English scenario dealt with by Honneth the terms at stake are similar as those used by the French thinkers we have just seen, but their evaluation significantly changes. Honneth, now considering Hume, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill, opens a new direction of research as far as the recognition studies are concerned, focusing on a domain which tended to be not considered, but which reveals itself of great meaning both for the influence exerted on Kant, and for the

⁷⁴ Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 77.

⁷⁵ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 183–88.

closeness between how recognition is thereby conceived and the daily use of the term: in fact, it is understood first and foremost as *praise*, opposed to *blame*.

The Honnethian reconstruction could be summarized according to four main conceptual steps.

First of all, both Hume and Adam Smith give a central role to *sympathy*, conceived as that naturally delivered, affectively loaded capability to access another's mental states and to co-experience them (*nacherleben*), thus sharing their unfolding (*Mitvollzug*).⁷⁶ Such capability to jointly feel (*Mitempfinden*) would not represent an anthropological invariant character alone, but would provide us with certain implicit normative criteria to evaluate our consociates' actions.⁷⁷ In other words, we would tend to positively evaluate those traits (*Charaktereigenschaften*) manifesting in another's behavior (*Verhalten*) that provoke sympathy in us.⁷⁸ It is useful to highlight two aspects already. Clearly, we have not defined an act of recognition yet because, says Honneth, the moment when a certain authority (*Autorität*) is granted to the other is missing; however, such affective attunement (*affektives Einschwingen*) seems to be a necessary precondition for any recognitional act. Interestingly, Honneth here refers to *Reification*⁷⁹ – the conceptualizations outlined there, then, did not properly define 'recognition', but a dimension of *Erkennen* that every *Anerkennen* must entail, which is to be conceived in holistic and participatory terms and not, as certain accents of the French tradition leave, purely cognitive ones. So, to say that sympathy is a necessary presupposition for every act of recognition seems to implicitly affirm that at least one flaw of the French tradition was to think of recognition taking a subjectivist-cognitivist perspective as starting point – which would rule out this basic sympathy that characterizes (certain) human interactions. The second aspect concerns the *object* of such sympathy, that is: the attention has shifted from (attributed) personal characters to other's actions or, better: the latter – by revealing the personality 'behind' it – would be the evaluated object.

However – and this is the second step – it would be wrong to make moral judgment and sympathy coincide, both because we do not in fact feel the same degree of sympathy towards all our consociates, and because it would seem unjustifiable to leave moral evaluations in general prey to our inclinations. The solution proposed by Hume and Smith is that of a *cognitive operation*, through which the adequacy of our moral criteria would be entrusted to the corrective role of an external observer (*der korrigierenden Rolle eines »Zuschauers«*), which, provided

⁷⁶ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 88.

⁷⁷ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 106–8.

⁷⁸ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 89.

⁷⁹ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 90 note 14.

with normative authority, would free our judgment-formation from inconsistencies and personal preferences. Such objectivation-via-externalization of the normative criteria would then make it possible to judge our moral reactions depending on the possible agreement (or disagreement) of an external observer. This normative judge would result through a rational process of generalization of the multiple perspectives that could eventually come into play by observing an interaction: thus, guaranteeing normative authority to such observer would coincide with granting it potentially to any member of the social community.⁸⁰ According to Hume, generalizing our perspective would inform our *moral sense*, thus enabling us to distinguish sympathy and respect. The issue would be slightly different for Adam Smith, who actually identifies two forms of recognition. The first being sympathy – which is no longer regarded as presupposition alone –, also Smith is on the search for a more general normative criterion for our moral evaluations. He understands the rational process of perspectives’ generalization as effective to the extent that such generalized observer is then internalized in the figure of an *inner judge*. Only internalized, such observer/judge would be able to inform us about the adequacy of our moral reactions, thus harmonizing it with the whole community. It is in this sense that Honneth speaks of a shift (*Verlagerung*) of the second-person perspective into one’s own self.⁸¹ If, therefore, sympathy directly addresses the interaction partner in the form of a reaction, this (properly normative) second form of recognition would require the inner judge as instance of moral *mediation*, thus considering the other person only indirectly.⁸² The inner judge would address directly our moral reactions, which are in turn directed by others’ behavior. We would praise another if the judge informs us about the adequacy or the value of that person’s behavior we are reacting to.

The third step concerns the *motivation* for recognition, which would essentially coincide with the desire to be considered as members of the community we are in. But contrary to Rousseau, being a member of society would not make us hostages (*Geisel*) of its moral judgment: rather, for these English thinkers this coincides with

⁸⁰ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 91–93, 109 ff.

⁸¹ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 208.

⁸² “Daher hält Smith gewissermaßen eine zweite Stufe der Anerkennung für erforderlich [...]; diese neue Form [...] besteht darin, durch die Internalisierung möglichst vieler anderer Blickwinkel in sich die Stimme eines unparteilichen und wohlinformierten Richters zu erzeugen, dem die Autorität zugestanden wird durch Billigung und Tadel die eigenen Gefühlsregungen sukzessive mit denen aller Anderen zu harmonisieren. Ist die erste emotionale Form der Anerkennung direkt auf den anderen Menschen bezogen, dem dasselbe Bedürfnis nach einem kommunikativen Mitfühlen unterstellt wird, so ist diese zweite Form der Anerkennung nur mittels des generalisierten Anderen, also indirekt, auf den Mitmenschen ausgerichtet”; Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 114–15.

being players (*Mitspieler*) in a community.⁸³ The generalization and internalization of normative criteria would make ‘recognition’ *multidirectional*, avoiding the unilaterality proper of the French authors we considered, who mainly focused on being recognized, whereby the addressee had no say about the aptness of the recognition she was addressed. In the ‘English paradigm’ to *be recognized* would coincide with being regarded as *actors*, that is able to morally judge – and possibly control – one’s actions according to the criteria provided by the generalized other. If one does so, if he or she ‘listens’ to the inner judge, then her acts would be in accordance with a community-shared perspective, and thus worthy of praise. On the other hand, this normative authority would also be at work by *recognizing*, sifting of our moral reactions in front of the other. What motivates being recognized and recognizing would then be the desire for praise (*Lob*) and the fear of blame (*Tadel*), or, as John Stuart Mill says, of disapproval (*Mißfallen*). But even in this case Adam Smith would add one more element: what would motivate us to recognize and be recognized is not only the desire to be addressees of praise or affection, but rather to be *worthy* of praise and affection (*Lobenswürdigkeit, Zuneigungswürdigkeit*).⁸⁴ It would not be enough for us to be attributed with *any* personal features or to be addressed by *any* attitudes: they must be perceived as *pertinent* to our person. Then, to the extent that we depend on other people and that we desire to be appreciated by them, we would feel driven to evaluate our actions from the perspective of the other (be it concrete or ideal), and to harmonize the first – and not just to fictitiously ‘tailor’ them, as in Rousseau – to the latter’s criteria, so that we are enabled to consider ourselves ‘part of the game’, full-fledged members of the social context we inhabit. ‘Recognition’ would therefore result in the individual willingness to self-control, motivated by the desire to consider oneself a *legitimate* member of the community.⁸⁵

The fourth and last aspect mentioned by Honneth is that precisely this idea of recognition is actually the one closest to the daily use of the term: it responds to what

⁸³ “»Anerkennung« heißt daher hier derjenige soziale Akt einer moralischen Zustimmung zum eigenen Verhalten, den ein Subjekt in sich imaginieren können muss, um überzeugt zu sein, als legitimes Mitglied seiner Bezugsgemeinschaft gelten zu dürfen”; Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 186.

⁸⁴ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 112.

⁸⁵ “Ein Individuum, dessen Wunsch nach sozialer Mitgliedschaft nur dadurch Befriedigung erfahren kann, dass es sein moralisches Verhalten und Urteilen im Lichte der verinnerlichten Normen seiner Bezugsgemeinschaft selbst gutheißen kann, sieht sich dadurch permanent zu einer normativen Kontrolle der eigenen sozialen Praktiken angehalten. Daher wird in dieser Tradition mit dem Faktum der intersubjektiven Begegnung zwischen Subjekten beinahe automatisch die positive Wirkung verknüpft, dass das Individuum lernt, sich in seine Bezugsgemeinschaft einzupassen; die Anerkennung, die ein Subjekt bei sozial angemessenem Verhalten von seinem »inneren«, die Gesellschaft repräsentierenden Beobachter empfängt, steigert seine Bereitschaft zur moralischen Selbstkontrolle”; Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 189.

could be defined as a *reward-logic*, according to which the one worthy of appreciation and praise is a person able to meet the evaluative standards of the social context within she acts. Although it is true that a certain multi-directionality is at stake in the English tradition, even in this case the recognitional gesture itself is conceived *unilaterally*. A praises B and B accepts such praise as pertinent to her acts: what changes from the French tradition is that B would now be (reasonably) sure of the pertinence or adequacy of A's judgement – thus not undermined in her self-certainty – and, above all, that also B can judge A's attitudes. But such evaluations are at best temporally discrete and alternative, there is no real mutuality; and this is why Honneth argues that in such cases one should simply speak of *recognizing reactions* (*aner kennende Reaktionen*) and not of recognition.⁸⁶ It is not difficult to see – having just read the debate 'Grounding Recognition' responded to – a certain similarity between such recognizing reactions and Ikäheimo's perspective, whereby B's role was identified only in recognizing A as a proper judge, thus outlining a depowered mutuality.

Only with the German tradition – which runs from Kant to Hegel, passing through Fichte – would it be affirmed that *mutuality* necessarily pertains to the very concept of recognition.

Honneth's analysis starts with Kant and with the role the concept of interpersonal respect (*Achtung*) plays in solving the difficulties of grounding moral action. In short, once the categorical character of moral law (*Sittengesetz*) has been 'codified', Kant would find himself in the impasse of having to explain what would push subjects to submit to it without recurring heteronomous motives, i.e. not determined by reason itself. As Honneth illustrates,⁸⁷ the solution proposed by Kant in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Moral* would reconcile a double necessity. On the one hand, an *epistemological* issue, that is the need for a certain kind of objectuality that can be discovered by our cognitive faculty (*Anschauung*) as moral law's embodiment. On the other hand, a *practical* issue, namely how such an object of knowledge would be able to elicit a motivation for moral action.⁸⁸ As is well known, the encounter with another person – that is, the object embodying moral law – would 'spark' *Achtung* as motivating emotional reaction. It is worth reading some passages from the footnote on which Honneth's reconstruction focuses.

It could be objected that I only seek refuge, behind the word *respect*, in an obscure feeling, instead of distinctly resolving the question by means of a concept of reason. But though respect is a feeling, it is not one *received* by means of influence;

⁸⁶ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 194–95.

⁸⁷ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 143–44 note 11.

⁸⁸ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 136–42.

it is, instead, a feeling *self-wrought* by means of a rational concept [...]. What I cognize immediately as a law for me I cognize with respect, which signifies merely consciousness of the *subordination* of my will to a law without the mediation of other influences on my sense. Immediate determination of the will by means of the law and consciousness of this is called *respect*, so that this is regarded as the *effect* of the law on the subject, and not as the cause of the law. Respect is properly the representation of a worth that infringes upon my self-love. [...]. The *object* of respect is therefore simply the *law*, and indeed the law that we impose upon *ourselves* and yet as necessary in itself. As a law we are subject to it without consulting self-love; as imposed upon us by ourselves it is nevertheless a result of our will [...]. Any respect for a person is properly only respect for the law [...] of which he gives us an example. Because we also regard enlarging our talents as a duty, we represent a person of talents also as, so to speak, an *example of the law* (to become like him in this by practice), and this is what constitutes our respect.⁸⁹

Thus, respect for others would represent first of all a cognitive performance (*Erkenntnisleistung*): we discover the other *as worth*, she is the example of moral law. Secondly, this knowledge would have an effect on our empirical motivational system (*Wirkung auf unser empirisches Motivationssystem*), precisely because the perceived worth would depend on the other's submission to moral law.⁹⁰ What would infringe upon our self-love would be acknowledging the worth that consists in submitting to the moral law. And in turn such perception would motivate us to give priority to the moral law over our self-centered interests.

In this way, Honneth continues, the concept of respect would decisively lay the foundations for how recognition is conceived both by Fichte and Hegel, who will explicitly use the term: at the center is not the demand or craving to be recognized, but the recognition that we owe (*schulden*) to others. At the same time, the spectrum of motivations would not concern a 'psychological' necessity experienced by the person, but rather the 'spiritual' (*geistig*), that is, rational dimension of the subject.⁹¹ From these two observations would follow the two central elements of the German tradition of recognition: mutuality (*Wechselseitigkeit*) and freedom. Again, respect would coincide with that emotional attitude that accompanies the acknowledgment of the other as the personification of the moral law. Now, given that *every human being* represents such embodiment of the moral law and that, on the other hand, *every human being*, by means of her rational capabilities, would be compelled to perceive another as such embodiment, it would follow that everyone must consider each other in her being an exemplification of the *Sittengesetz*, thus forming an interpersonal net of mutual respect. Secondly, since such recognition would concern the intimate connection between the individual person and moral law, it follows that

⁸⁹ Kant, p. 14.

⁹⁰ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 146.

⁹¹ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 149.

the true object of respect is other's *freedom*, which would coincide with his or her capability to self-determination by submitting to moral law.⁹²

However, this perspective would entail an intrinsic ambiguity. On the one hand, *Achtung* would concern an *empirical* event, the perception of an object with human features; on the other, a rational *moral obligation*. On the one side, an obvious dynamic, characterized by a certain automatism,⁹³ because it supposedly accompanies every interpersonal encounter. But, on the other, the other person could be comprehended as a moral being only by virtue of a peculiar form of our judgment (*Urteilstkraft*)⁹⁴ – because, put bluntly, such act of knowledge would bridge the gap between the two *Critiques*.⁹⁵

Faced with such an alternative between empirical and intelligible dimensions, both Fichte and Hegel opt to root recognition within a rational domain. However, Honneth points out, the rational drive (*Antrieb*) underlying the moral dimension of interpersonal relations must be repositioned in the broader persuasion regarding the rationality of the real (*Vernünftigkeit des Wirklichen*): 'recognition' would then concern our nature, not according to Rousseau's or Adam Smith's use of the term though, but to the extent that our nature expresses itself in our spiritual activity (*geistig[e] Aktivität*). Even in a detranscendentalized framework – as Hegel's – our motives to moral (inter-)action could not be conceived other than flowing (*entspringen*) from our rational nature.⁹⁶

Fichte's considerations take their move precisely from the interpersonal encounter between two rational subjects, which would open with an invitation or exhortation from one to another. Contrary to Althusser's interpellation, according to which being approached would fix the addressee to her own social identity, such an invitation (*Aufforderung*) would have to be characterized as invitation (*Einladung*) to undertake something: it would therefore constitute neither an order nor a demand. Also in his second step Fichte follows the Kantian model, taking into account the outcomes of such an encounter. If by Kant recognizing the other as an example of moral law would provoke respect, Fichte focuses on the interpretative performances (*Interpretationsleistungen*) of the addressee. In fact, Fichte points out that the reasons for action (*Veranlassung*) do not follow the same rules as natural causality (*Naturkausalität*), which responds to cause-effect binomials. So, respect cannot be merely *caused*. Rather, the invitation outlines the framework for a second

⁹² Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 150.

⁹³ Cf., for example, Timothy L. Brownlee, 'Alienation and Recognition in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit', *Philosophical Forum*, 46.4 (2015), 377–96.

⁹⁴ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 151–52.

⁹⁵ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 147.

⁹⁶ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 153–54.

form of causality, which is based on the capability to understand (*Verstand*): the invitation reveals the other as a rational being, able to understand the communicative content addressed to her, and therefore to respond. Approaching the other could not then coincide with a mechanistic attribution of some features: it asks for an answer *from freedom* (*aus Freiheit, aus freien Stücken*), precisely because the answer – both for what regards its modes and its contents – cannot be conceived as a reflexive mechanism. But if the invitation awaits a response from freedom, then the respondent, in responding, is aware that the other has already limited his or her own freedom. By exhorting B, A leaves room for her freedom, limiting her own; and B knows that.⁹⁷

Thus the relation of free beings to one another is necessarily determined in the following way, and is posited as thus determined: one individual's knowledge of the other is conditioned by the fact that the other treats the first as a free being (i.e. limits its freedom through the concept of the freedom of the first). But this manner of treatment is conditioned by the first's treatment of the other; and the first's treatment of the other is conditioned by the other's treatment and knowledge of the first, and so on *ad infinitum*. Thus the relation of free beings to one another is a relation of reciprocal interaction through intelligence and freedom. One cannot recognize the other if both do not mutually recognize each other; and one cannot treat the other as a free being, if both do not mutually treat each other as free.⁹⁸

The step took by Fichte is decisive. The mutuality of recognition would not be realized in B's response, in the consideration of A as an adequate judge of B's traits (*Ikäheimo*). Rather, *Wechselseitigkeit* would consist in the mutual self-limitation (*Selbstbeschränkung*) that underlies, as condition of possibility and necessary presupposition, any communicative interaction between rational, that is, free beings. One could say, however, that *Aufforderung* constitutes an 'igniting' gesture and that B's eventual response realizes mutuality only at a second moment, *after* the invitation. If so, however, one should ask why A does not invite *in the same way*, say, a stone or a chair as he invites another person. Fichte is telling us that, in order for A to *treat* B in C, mutual recognition is already necessary: the invitation itself results from a self-limitation that implies a *prior* recognition of the other as being able to respond freely. Thus, recognition would be implicit in any linguistically mediated interaction, because it would coincide with a mutual self-limitation that leaves room for the other to invite and respond. Communication partners' mutual recognizing each other would therefore coincide with their mutual recognizing as capable of

⁹⁷ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 157–60.

⁹⁸ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. by Frederick Neuhouser, trans. by Michael Baur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 42.

understanding and (possibly) of responding, that is, as *rational* beings, i.e. *free* beings. And precisely such communicative interaction would mark the passage from the ‘spontaneous’ freedom to structure one’s own world rationally, to the *realization* of freedom: my capacity for self-determination would gain consistency and reality through its mutual confirmation.⁹⁹

However, Fichte’s scheme would be limited by a serious ‘worldlessness’ and he would find himself in difficulty in making plausible such idealizing characters of recognition having to do with lifeworldly actions (*lebensweltlich[e] Handlungsvollzüge*).¹⁰⁰

That is why Honneth identifies Hegel’s merit with having carried out a detranscendentalization (*Detranzendentalisierung*) of the Fichtean model. Hegel would not be interested in identifying invariant structures of social interaction – such as those conditioned by the anthropological constant of *amour propre* or the Fichte’s transcendental encounter. Rather, he intends to identify *historical configurations* of intersubjectivity in which the dynamics described by Fichte can actualize and instantiate themselves. Speaking of *Anerkennung*, then, he would mean *institutionally coagulated* forms of communication in which the involved subjects a) complementarily limit themselves with regard to their aims and freedom, b) act expressively towards each other, thus *manifesting* a certain attitude, and c), by fulfilling these first two points, mutually recognize each other in their self-being or self-determination.¹⁰¹

These three conditions – complementary self-limitation, the centrality of expressive gestures, and mutuality in being confirmed with regard to one’s own worth as rational/free being – would be *findable*, according to the young Hegel, in love relations, which would then constitute a form of *being by oneself in the other*. On the one hand, being recognized (*Anerkanntsein*) would coincide with a confirmation of one’s self-being, since the self-limitation of the other would let the normative validity (*Geltung*) of one’s capability to self-determination emerge. Only to this extent freedom would not be mere arbitrariness, but ‘objective’, because, within the relationship, it has received a *social space*, its right to exist. On the other hand, recognizing (*Anerkennen*) would not mean attributing any features to the addressee, but first and foremost self-limiting oneself, thus granting the other that

⁹⁹ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 161–67.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 167–68.

¹⁰¹ “Es muss sich um institutionell geronnene und in dem Sinn »wirkliche« oder »objektive« Formen der menschlichen Kommunikation handeln, in denen Subjekte ihre jeweiligen Selbstinteressen komplementär einschränken, indem sie auch nach außen »expressiv« kundtun, dass sie sich wechselseitig in ihrem Selbstsein oder in ihrer Selbstbestimmung als Gleiche anerkennen”; Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 173.

space-for-freedom in which she can determine herself without coercion (*ungenzwungen*).¹⁰²

Such perspective would reach its full-fledged dimension only with the elaboration of theory of objective spirit. Thus, the worth that the other embodies would not depend on individual preference (*Vorliebe*) as by love, but would express the historically situated *social* order of preferences (*gesellschaftliche Präferenzordnung*). Those facets of subjectivity that are worthy of recognition and of which one demands recognition would emerge only through and within a second-natural institutional framework (*das zur »zweiten Natur« gewordene Institutionengefüge*). Secondly, because of their being socially and institutionally embodied, such acts of recognition would also constitute the spark for social conflict.¹⁰³ The demand intrinsic to any recognition relationship would not – and here Honneth criticizes Kojève’s reading –¹⁰⁴ be a generic desire of the other, any anthropological craving, or a psychological drive: rather, demanding recognition coincides with demanding for the possibilities of realizing one’s own rationality, namely one’s freedom.¹⁰⁵ As we have seen, such realization could be articulated only through the mutual outlining of a detranscendentalized space-for-freedom. If thus freedom can actualize itself only socially, the absence or narrowness of such a space, if perceived as unjustified given the social order of preferences, would give rise to social conflicts.¹⁰⁶

Before going any further, it is essential to highlight two nuances of the concept of freedom. First of all, Kant’s influence would be manifested in the idea that freedom deeply linked to *norms* of action, and to the *authorship* that subjects would possess in elaborating them. To be free means first of all to act according to norms considered as rational. From this it follows, secondly, that both Fichte and Hegel conceive the demand to be free that inhabits recognitional relations as a demand to

¹⁰² Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 169–72.

¹⁰³ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 174–75.

¹⁰⁴ So far as I know, these are the only passages in which Honneth argues looking at the Phenomenology of Spirit except for an other text, focused precisely on the demand for recognition; Cf. Axel Honneth, ‘From Desire to Recognition: Hegel’s Grounding of Self-Consciousness’, in *The I in We. Studies in the Theory of Recognition*, 2012, pp. 3–18.

¹⁰⁵ “Das »Bedürfnis« nach Anerkennung ist für [Hegel] das Verlangen, unsere auf freien Vollzug hin angelegte Fähigkeit zur vernünftigen Selbstbestimmung zu realisieren”; Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 178.

¹⁰⁶ Here Honneth provides us with the best synthesis of his own view: “Begegnen sich zwei Subjekte in den institutionell geregelten Anerkennungsverhältnissen, die sich in den modernen Gesellschaften dank eines historischen Prozesses des »Fortschritts im Bewusstsein der Freiheit« herausgebildet haben, so bringen sie sich allein schon deswegen jeweils eine je besondere Form der Achtung wechselseitig entgegen, weil sie es aufgrund ihrer Sozialisation gelernt haben, sich an die Normen zu halten, die der jeweiligen Sphäre zugrunde liegen; und werden diese gegebenen Anerkennungsverhältnisse einmal von den Subjekten als zu eng, als zu einschnürend oder als zu ungleich erfahren, so sorgt, wie Hegel überdies glaubt, die stete Kraft unseres vernünftigen Willens zur Selbstbestimmung dafür, dass sich Kämpfe für neue, erweiterte Formen der Anerkennung entladen”; Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 179.

express one's own nature of *being rational*. In the German tradition recognition is hence conceived as the way through which individuals grant each other the possibility to be guided by self-imposed norms (*selbstgetzt[e] Normen*). Freedom simultaneous narrowing and broadening on both sides (*simultan[e] Freiheitseinschränkung und Freiheitserweiterung auf beiden Seiten*) that recognition *is* would therefore allow the realization of one's own possibilities to self-determination, namely to rationality. This, in Hegel's view, would coincide to (inter-)act according to norms provided by social context, which however have to be justified with regard to their being actual condition of one's rationality's unfolding.¹⁰⁷

5.3.2 An Attempt at Harmonization

The three traditions Honneth has dealt with provide us with a contrasting scenario. In the French paradigm, the constitutive dependence on recognition would coincide with a risk for authentic access (*authentische Zugang*) to one's self; the British authors, on the other hand, share the idea that intersubjective recognition represents a chance for self-control (*Selbstkontrolle*) and communal refinement of moral practices; finally, the German tradition would consider intersubjective recognition as the condition for the unfolding of our capability to self-determination.¹⁰⁸

Such a diversity of meanings that one can legitimately wonder whether they refer to the same phenomenon. Even the distinction between positive (Taylor, Honneth) and negative (Sartre, Althusser, Butler) recognition theories, now in use in literature, would seem to ignore an acute difference. On the one hand, French tradition considers recognition as an act of attribution without normative connotations. On the other hand, the paradigm of Fichte and Hegel would coincide – here the first decisive step of Honneth – with praxis of *moral authorization* (*moralische Autorisierung*). The alternative, as now perceived by Honneth, is therefore no longer, as in 'Grounding Recognition', between attribution or perception-expression of evaluative features, but between (quasi-ontological) attribution of traits, and mutual, normative authorization.¹⁰⁹

An attempt at harmonization, Honneth continues, would not to be ruled out though. The matter would not be letting the different theories assimilate each other in order to derive a homogeneous concept: rather, the operation undertaken in the

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 184–87, 189–90.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 182.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 191–93.

last chapter of *Anerkennung* consists of two steps. First of all, putting in brackets the different methodological approaches and the historical distances at play would be necessary to identify which of the three paradigms could represent an apt starting point. Then, in a second step, the other two could be integrated in the attempt of bridging the possibly emerging gaps of the first model. Both the first and the second step would aim at a description as plausible as possible of our social form of life as a whole (*unsere gesellschaftliche Lebensform [...] als Ganzes*), since, in one way or another, this is the common object of every single idea of recognition we have encountered so far.¹¹⁰

It is hardly surprising that Honneth's choice falls on Hegel, but the reasons justifying such decision allow us to understand a further evolution in his thought. Keeping in mind that we are pursuing to better comprehend and represent our social form of life, Hegel's paradigm would appear to be the most appropriate starting point – that can integrate the others, but not vice versa – basically for three reasons. First of all, only Fichte and he would explain what it means for us men to live in a *spiritual world* (*geistige Welt*), that is, a world in which we orient ourselves according to shared norms (*geteilte Normen*) or, as 'Recognition as Ideology' reads, in a *space of reasons*. This perspective further accentuates the normative character of the recognition always defended by Honneth, in a direction whereby the *deontological influence* of Brandom, Pinkard and Pippin – explicitly mentioned in a footnote¹¹¹ – is hardly negligible. According to these authors, the shift, by Hegel, from first to second nature would coincide precisely with the entry into a normatively characterized world.¹¹² That the German tradition takes such normative dimension into account would not play an indifferent role, if the aim is to understand 'recognition' in the wider horizon of our form of life. In fact, we can explain properly our living together (*Zusammenleben*), Honneth says, if we conceive a practice in which we recognize each other as co-authors (*Koautoren*) of the norms regulating our (inter-)practices – the complementary role obligations of *Freedom's Right*.

Secondly, the translation into intersubjective terms of the Kantian model operated by Fichte and Hegel would illuminate the communicative conditions (*komunikative Bedingungen*) that all other traditions also presuppose, both on an 'ontological' and above all on a normative level. That the other is present to me

¹¹⁰ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 197.

¹¹¹ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 199 note 5.

¹¹² "...recognition is a *normative* attitude. To recognize someone is to take her to be the subject of normative statuses, that is, of commitments and entitlements, as capable of undertaking responsibilities and exercising authority. This is what it means to say that as reciprocally recognized and recognizing, the creatures in question are *geistig*, spiritual, beings, and no longer merely natural ones"; Brandom, 'The Structure of Desire and Recognition: Self-Consciousness and Self-Constitution', p. 35.

communicatively is quite evident, but it is significant that he or she is always seen as entitled of a right to a say on the formation of the shared life practice (*Mitsprache über die Gestaltung unserer gemeinsamen Lebenspraxis*). Arguing that such normative-communicative condition is valid even in Rousseau's thought seems to imply that even if we understood sociality in a 'negative' way, i.e. as power or domination, the subjected person recognizes the other's authoritative faculty on the norms of *our* – hers and mine – acting. Honneth seems to maintain that even in such a case we are always communicative *co-authors* of the norms that regulate our (inter-)acting, perhaps with differences of potential. Also in this sense, I think, Honneth speaks of a *graduation* that pertains to the concept of recognition: not every recognitional concretion realizes such co-authorship in equal terms, as the idea of mutuality would let suppose. Anyway, Fichte and Hegel show that what would constitute our societies *as* spiritual world is a practice in which subjects mutually recognize each other as co-authors of the norms they follow.

Finally, Hegel – more than Fichte – would be the author to take into consideration because he understands such mutual *authorization to authorship* not only as a condition for the existence of social norms, but comprehends such praxis as lifeworldly rooted and institutionally framed one (*lebensweltlich verwurzelte und institutionell gerahmte Praxis*). The detranscendentalization would allow us to understand the spiritual world not in an idealistic way, but, again, as historic space of reasons, as second-natural ethical life.¹¹³ Therefore, Hegel's theory of recognition would represent the most appropriate model because it includes the second-natural and communicative conditions that allow us to shed light on our shared world in accordance with its peculiarity: to be inhabited by *actors* endowed with statuses, responsibilities and commitments. He would be the only one who would historically consider our (inter-)acting according to norms, and consequently to conceive recognitional practices as *mutual self-limitation that authorizes the emergence of a space-for-freedom for questioning such norms*.

Now, the confrontation with some aspects of the other two traditions will allow Honneth to refine this definition and to recall (or specify) recognition's 'place' with respect to most of the different issues we have encountered during our reconstruction – from social reproduction to social pathologies, from social conflict to interpersonal and systemic power dynamics.

The major contribution provided by the English tradition would consist in a more refined explanation of our moral customs' second-naturality (*Zweitenaturhaftigkeit*). As seen, Hume, Smith, and Mille outline a certain harmony

¹¹³ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 197–204.

(*Gleichklang*) between interactional norms and social habits, by means of which we are enabled to express blame or praise; and that would represent a pattern of how institutional standards are taken on by subjects in the process of socialization. Hegel's shortcoming would be in this case to explain such second-naturality exclusively through the Aristotelian concept of *habitus*, thus through mechanistic terms, leaving the intra-psychic processes (*innerpsychische Vorgänge*) in the shade.¹¹⁴

Contrary to that, the English paradigm would offer a decisive contribution precisely in conceiving the socialization process with a certain degree of complexity – and in proper *normative terms*. The starting situation is set with regard to the motives that would drive us to recognize and being recognized. First of all, Honneth is not persuaded by Fichte and Hegel's idea that the demand for recognition would be grounded in a 'drive' to unfold one's rationality. This way too idealistic depiction could have its 'lifeworldly side' (*lebensweltliche Seite*) in the account according to which our motives to act morally have to be rooted in a strive to be members of a community (*Streben nach Mitgliedschaft*). What would motivate us to act in accordance with the norms of a community would be the expectation of approval (*Zustimmung*) from its members.¹¹⁵ A clear risk of a conformist or conventionalist explanation of socialization must be immediately mitigated in two ways. First of all, Honneth is not denying that the element at stake in recognition relationships is individual autonomy: he is objecting to the idealism that characterizes the Hegelian perspective. Let's take a step back. Faced with the ambiguity intrinsic to the idea of *Achtung* – half empirical act of knowledge, half moral obligation – both Fichte and Hegel gave priority to our rational nature, grounding moral acting in general and recognizing/being recognized on human beings' drive to unfold their rationality. Opting for an 'English solution' Honneth is trying to bring the motivational horizon back to an 'empirical' level. The *desire* to be considered legitimate members of a community would motivate gestures of recognition, which in turn do not simply represent the means of persons' being *assimilated* into society. Rather, by virtue of recognition, people who strive to take part to the space of reasons are *included* in it.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 204–5; clearly, Honneth here refers to the paragraphs of the *Encyclopaedia* on habits, where Hegel explicitly talks of second nature in mechanistic terms; cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830). Vol. 3: Philosophy of Mind*, ed. by M. J. Inwood, trans. by W. Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 131–36, §§ 409–410; However, connecting these passages with other Hegelian accounts on *Bildung* and culture could do a better justice to the author – thus providing us with a dialectical account on individuals' integration within second-natural horizons; cf. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, specially pp. 224–36, 290–304, §§ 187, 270; cf. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, above all pp. 356–65, (*BB*) c. *Dissemblance*. It is true though, that when Hegel has to tell us precisely *how*, pragmatically, our spiritual dimension would assume second-natural features, the mechanistic accent of 'habit' plays a major role. However, I argue, Honneth's disregarding the *Phenomenology* shows here its consequences.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 205–6.

Being a member of our ‘spiritual world’ means being entitled with those statuses and commitments that make us co-authors of the norms we ourselves instantiate in acting, that is, it means exercising freedom. This brings us to the second point, that is, the continuity that one must acknowledge with *Freedom’s Right*:¹¹⁶ freedom, according to Honneth, is such only if it is *social*. So being with another in a community would be a necessary precondition to be with oneself by it, that is to be free. I can be with myself in the other, only if there are for me reasons to share with the other norms that guide our action, therefore only if I participate in spheres of social action. Entering the spheres of freedom means entering social, historically given spheres.

But how does one actually enter these spheres of freedom? Generally speaking, the matter is that of the individual’s integration into society, that is, into the horizon whereby moral actions coagulate into second-natural configurations. Here, the main advantage provided by the English tradition would be offered by the concept of the *inner observer* (*innerer Beobachter*), which is grounded on our strive to appropriate (*Aneignung*) social moral norms in order to be considered legitimate players, and, more importantly, *mediates* our acting and social standards, constantly ‘informing’ us about the latter. Contrary to the Hegelian concept of moral consciousness (*Gewissen*), which remains (intentionally) bound to a certain fixity, the inner observer should be conceived as a *psychic representative* (*psychische Repräsentanz*) of a progressively *generalized other’s* virtually comprehensible moral reactions. To this extent, our inner life could be represented as *concert of different voices*, as dialogue between different instances that internally reproduce our lifeworld’s communicative structure.¹¹⁷ The brief reference made by Honneth to

¹¹⁶ Some important clarifications about the connection between social freedom and joint norms-authorship are offered in *The Idea of Socialism*; cf. Honneth, *The Idea of Socialism. Towards a Renewal*.

¹¹⁷ Although Honneth believes that Plessner’s thought is flawed by a marked solipsism (cf. Axel Honneth and Hans Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*, trans. by Raymond Meyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 84 ff.), and given that their theoretical interests are certainly directed elsewhere, it is difficult not to find here a certain legacy from the German anthropological philosophy, which certainly shaped Honneth’s first elaborations at least. The perspective according to which inner life can be represented in the form of a *dialogue between instances* (cf. also Honneth, ‘Postmodern Identity and Object-Relations Theory: On the Seeming Obsolescence of Psychoanalysis’) is here reformulated rather clearly according to the idea that (moral) persons represent triadic structures, which reproduce the triadic structure of our spiritual world or shared world. If in the second case there is me, the other and the generalized other, in the case of the person it is easy to distinguish the mediation operated by the ‘third’, the inner observer, between me and my moral reactions. Both the shared world and the person would then constitute We-forms that cannot be reduced to I-Thou polarities. Cf. Helmuth Plessner, *Levels of Organic Life and the Human. An Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology*, ed. by Phillip Honenberger (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), p. 280 ff.; and, on the triadic structures of our *Mitwelt* and our persons, cf. Hans-Peter Krüger, ‘Die Verantwortlichkeit in Der Exzentrischen Positionalität. Die Drittheit, Das Dritte und die Dritte Person als Philosophische Minima’, in *Philosophische Anthropologie Im 21. Jahrhundert*, pp. 164–83; Hans-Peter Krüger, *Homo*

Freud's Super-Ego as the 'inner concretion' of social normative standards further clarifies what is at stake. In *The Struggle for Recognition* the role of Winnicott and especially Mead had been to justify the emergence of the *intra*-psychic processes starting from *inter*-psychic interactions: play, game, and vocal gestures were conceived there as the 'third' element mediating I and me. But, as we have seen in 'Grounding Recognition', Mead's view was rejected by Honneth for its psychologist approach, namely a functionalistic reduction of self-relational instances, so as of individual socialization.

The elements at stake in this new explanation of socialization, however, are similar: the inner observer, that is, the concretion of social norms, the generalized other, would 'witness' my capability to consider myself reflectively – better, to consider myself according to a *second-order reflectivity*, because I relate to myself according to what I expect the others expect (*Erwartungs-Erwartungen*).¹¹⁸ And even more so, such an inner dialogue would reproduce the structure of an intersubjective relationship, which would always be articulated through the mediation of the generalized other. The extra step that Honneth seems to take appealing to the inner-observer account is that of trying to translate what he inherited from Mead into normative terms: the *I-me* polarity outlined in *The Struggle for Recognition* is proposed anew but with regard to motives and reasons to actions, not psychological functions or anthropological structures. However, as the mention to Freud shows, that does not mean that Honneth completely abandons any psychological or anthropological explanation.

The integration of the two paradigms would therefore lead to the following depiction. On the one hand, Hegel, with his model of mutual recognition and the related conflictuality, would allow conceiving our lifeworld in normative terms, since it outlines social contexts of articulation and questioning of norms. On the other hand, Hume and Smith would provide the means to *anchor* such interactions to the individual motivational system (*Motivationssystem*): the desire to be free and to be co-author of the norms that guide my actions cannot be thought of as disarticulated from my desire to be part of a social context. However, Honneth points out, the role of social approval (*Zustimmung*) boils down exclusively to this motivational scheme, since mutual *recognition* and *recognizing reactions* cannot coincide: they remain too one-sided and too dependent on the lifeworld in its

Abconditus. Helmuth Plessners Philosophische Anthropologie Im Vergleich (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), p. 86 ff.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Gesa Lindemann, 'Die Dritte Person – Das Konstitutive Minimum Der Sozialtheorie', in *Philosophische Anthropologie Im 21. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Hans-Peter Krüger and Gesa Lindemann (Berlin: Akademie, 2006), pp. 125–45.

current configuration to be a satisfactory model.¹¹⁹ In other words, recognizing reactions are useful to the extent that a complex – namely mediated, triadic – understanding of them would provide us with a more refined account on the normative socialization of the individual, the process through which we *become* legitimate members of a given second-natural world. But they would fall short when it comes to explain what it would be *being* legitimate members, which entails the capability to reformulate the rules.

As far as French tradition is concerned, Honneth's operation is twofold, because Rousseau and Althusser illuminate two different aspects that can interact with the Hegelian theory.

Regarding the Genevan, a point of contact could be represented by the theme of *social pathologies*. As we have seen, Rousseau believes that the strive for social affirmation would push individuals to display (*Zurschaustellung*) certain (real or fictitious) characters or qualities, the recognition of which would then jeopardize their possibilities to access their true self. One could also say: since public space is dominated by the recognition of *simulated* attitudes, thus representing a masquerade (*Maskerade*), the subject would be prevented, in *foro interno*, to get access to who he or she actually is. Honneth maintains that such are the pathological reactions (*Reaktionsbildungen*) described by Hegel regarding those who are excluded from corporations, who would “accordingly try to gain *recognition* through the external manifestations of success”.¹²⁰ Such individuals, not being recognized as members of a social context, not being included within the ethical fabric of a cooperative space-for-freedom (*Freiheitsspielraum*), would react by developing eye-catching attitudes oriented at stimulating approval.¹²¹ Rousseau's and Hegel's descriptions of, respectively, recognition and reactions to non-recognition appear alike. The outward self-displaying – and the consequent inward estrangement – would therefore be caused by a still ‘unripe’ broadening of the norms inherent to recognition which are instantiated only in *some* institutional concretions. The lack of democratization of co-authorship and co-authority could push – Honneth seems

¹¹⁹ “Nach dem soeben skizzierten Bild würde sich das Verhältnis zwischen den beiden Verständnisweisen in etwa so darstellen, dass Hegels Begriff die elementaren Bedingungen einer wechselseitigen Anerkennung bestimmt, unter denen eine sich ständig wandelnde Lebenswelt überhaupt als normativ reguliert aufgefasst werden kann, während der auf Hume und Smith zurückgehende Begriff die Praktiken sozialer Zustimmung und Affirmation benennt, mit deren Hilfe jene kooperativ erzeugten Normen jeweils im individuellen Motivationssystem verankert werden. Im ersten Fall ist mit dem Terminus »Anerkennung« die Praxis einer wechselseitigen Autorisierung zur Normerzeugung und Normüberprüfung gemeint, im zweiten Fall hingegen nur die affirmative Reaktion einer normativ bereits konstituierten Gemeinschaft auf das moralische Wohlverhalten des einzelnen Gesellschaftsmitglieds”; Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 209–10.

¹²⁰ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 272, § 253.

¹²¹ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 212–17.

to tell us – to a distorted adaptation on the part of the excluded ones, who would actually remain so inasmuch as they would never really participate in the communicative, norm-elaborating processes which regulate the relations in which they are. Thus, Rousseau’s description would not concern ‘recognition’ but precisely non-recognition’s social consequences, which depend on political, economic, and institutional settings. Before in the book, Honneth has read in the same way the well-known master-slave dialectic: in this figure of the *Phenomenology*, recognition’s failure would be due to the social norms the participants inhabit, to the second-natural structures in which the relationship is implemented, which would prevent an effective sharing of normative tasks.¹²² Only changing – through conflict and renewed norms of recognition – the frame of authorization could allow a wider and more inclusive recognition between persons.

The relationship between recognitional interactions and socio-cultural background is at the center of the comparison with Althusser and Butler, whereby Honneth attempts to clarify further his position before the ideological dimension that recognition can take on. The position of the so-called ‘negative theories’ of recognition could be summed up with this main idea: interpersonal confirmation of roles and social identities would convey, through a positive self-perception gained within and thanks to the relationship, forms of domination and submission without repression. Butler’s focus on family and gender roles would highlight that the very affection that characterizes such contexts, as well as the natural dependence of children on caregivers, would open the door to a voluntarily embraced subordination through recognition. One adapts to, gets inscribed in a state of affairs that is thus imposed. Clearly, some elements are similar to Rousseau, but it seems useful to highlight the properly ideological component taken into consideration by this second account, which acts behind the backs of all the actors involved: here there is not at stake the desire to belong to certain groups and the consequent modulation of one’s own features or skills. Rather, social relationships themselves (perceived positively by the actors) would inevitably do nothing but reproduce patterns that pre-outline, thus determining, the possibilities of those who are socialized into them.¹²³ In this case, ‘recognition’ would mean little more than that (more or less statalized) institutions provide individual or collective actors with

¹²² Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 175–76.

¹²³ “How is it that the subject is the kind of being who can be exploited, who is, by virtue of its own formation, vulnerable to subjugation? Bound to seek recognition of its own existence in categories, terms, and names that are not of its own making, the subject seeks the sign of its own existence outside itself, in a discourse that is at once dominant and indifferent. Social categories signify subordination and existence at once. In other words, within subjection the price of existence is subordination”; Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 20; cf. also Kristina Lepold, ‘Die Bedingungen Der Anerkennung’, *Deutsche Zeitschrift Für Philosophie*, 62.2 (2014), 297–317.

socially typified features, which induce them to unforcefully fulfil pre-assigned roles (*auf gewaltlose Weise zur Erfüllung der ihnen zugewiesenen Rollen*).¹²⁴

Hegel actually shows that not every relationship he describes as ‘recognition’ is emancipated from domination, dependence and repression (*Herrschaft, Abhängigkeit, Unterdrückung*).¹²⁵ It would be the case of the woman in the *Philosophy of Right*. According to Hegel, marriage represents a “free surrender”¹²⁶ of one’s own *atomistic* individuality, hence an ethical sphere of being with oneself by the other oriented by the recognitional norms of “mutual love and support”,¹²⁷ as well as the satisfaction of sexual needs. According with the definition of recognition, both partners should be endowed with the possibility to question their (inter-)practices by resorting to motives and reasons that appear legitimate within the normative horizon of those very practices. In other words, both partners could always resort to the norm of mutual care, reformulating it and adapting it to needs experienced from time to time. However, that Hegel for example argues that a “girl’s vocation [*Bestimmung*] consists essentially only in the marital relationship” and his general conception *the* feminine and *the* role of women in the household raises, euphemistically, serious doubts about the *parity* of such relation, that is, the actual possibility in recurring freely to those norms.¹²⁸ How is it possible that women freely (*aus freien Stücken*) accept such subordination?¹²⁹ One could simply reply that that idea of marriage per se, for its institutional configuration, would not support any form of equality, on the contrary: it is pure domination conveyed by ideological recognition. But Honneth decides once again to start from the involved actors’ point of view, who would actually live and experience equality in affection and freedom in being with each other. He proposes again a methodological historical-hermeneutical perspective as in ‘Recognition as Ideology’: even with all the criticism that *we* can *now* address to the idea of marriage that Hegel describes, it would be almost undeniable that precisely this relational form would be experienced as an ethical good by the subjects involved, as a condition to good life. And if this experience of those involved is not taken seriously into consideration, the risk is to lose grip on social reality, which is so decisive for critical theory. It is important here to briefly repeat what the problems of a perspective that is disengaged with the participants’ experience would be. Using Habermas’ terms the problem with third-person perspectives is that they “get at the meaning of behavior through the

¹²⁴ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 218.

¹²⁵ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 227.

¹²⁶ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 207, § 168.

¹²⁷ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 204, § 164.

¹²⁸ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 206§ 164 (Add.); cf. also §§ 166-167, pp. 206-207.

¹²⁹ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 218–20.

functional role that it plays in a system of modes of behavior,”¹³⁰ without supposing in the involved beings the same access to meaning. Now, implementing radically such an approach with regard to *human* beings would entail either universalism or ethical paternalism, because it would disregard or dissolve participants’ normative status, agency and capabilities in getting access to the meaning (good life) of their living. Then, instead of the third-person perspective, Habermas and Honneth – not without differences – choose for a second-person approach, which would take seriously into account the participants view on their normative experience. Such an approach increases the burden of opacity that the theory is supposed to bear, due to its historical and experiential setting – thus making it more difficult to distil a concept of ideological recognition without expiring critical thinking into contextualism.

The first step to untangle these difficulties is that Hegel describes women’s subordination as grounded *outside* the norms of care and their space for interpretation (*Interpretationsspielraum*). Such ‘outside’ (*Außerhalb*) would be precisely represented by a certain idea of *nature* that influences and unbalances the whole recognition relationship. It would be the ‘feminine nature’ itself that determines certain roles and social collocations, which defines women’s *Bestimmung*. Clearly, Honneth’s interest is not to underline the conservative side of Hegel’s depiction, or his being ‘son of his own time’: rather, it is for him noteworthy that, by describing ethical forms of a *spiritual* world, ‘nature’ in this case appears as a completely unmediated element. Within second nature, the first one rises again – but, *for us*, clearly as product of the second. On the one side, there would be the mutual authorization that marriage *is*, but some personal features of the participants do not derive from the outlined ethical space-for-freedom. Rather, they appear as unchangeable matters, coming from outside our spiritual world. That would imply that mutual authorization to examine the use (*zur Prüfung des Gebrauchs*) of a shared norm – love and support – could not give any clue about what reasons are actually available (*zur Verfügung*) to the participants. For, evidently, what can be challenged by the participants in order to reformulate their intersubjective practices must be considered *changeable* from their point of view. For example, a different division of domestic work could be discussed by virtue of the partners’ mutual authorization if the first is considered by them as matter that falls within the space of reasons they disclose for each other, thus not determined by ‘nature’. The *scope* of the space of reasons, on which an objection to the shared norm’s practiced interpretation can be based, is not determined by the fact that the participants grant each other the same right to take a stand and criticize (*Stellungnahme und Kritik*)

¹³⁰ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2, Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*.

alone. Rather, the domain of the available reasons would be circumscribed and informed by world views and systems of interpretation (*Weltbilder und Interpretationssysteme*) that project themselves from outside into the relationship of recognition (*von außen in das Anerkennungsverhältnis hineinragen*). Such worldviews would therefore operate a breach between what would be *geistig* and what would have no normative value – nature indeed – thus subtracting it from possible discussions and reformulations. And the larger is the domain of given facts (*Bereich von Gegebenheiten*), the smaller is the scope of reasons (*Umfang der Gründe*).¹³¹

It would be this blind point of Hegel's theory of recognition to allow a dialogue with Althusser. If certain institutional arrangements would prevent some elements to be object of mutual authorization, then recognitional relations, that in principle would guarantee freedom from domination (*Garant von Herrschaftsfreiheit*) could represent the settings for perpetuating domination. For, from above, another type of recognition (*von oben ein Anerkennungsgeschehen anderer Art*) forces the participants to perceive their own features as immutable, as natural elements (*Bestandteile*). If, however, Honneth argues that given that the issue regards what elements are taken away or in the first place not available for the recognition relations itself, it would be misleading to describe such ascriptions using the term recognition. Clearly, such ascriptions – which, again, come from above or from outside the interpersonal dimension – would shape and condition to a large extent the relationships of recognition, the ethical contexts in which they happen, their modalities, their contents; but they still do not coincide with the mutual acts of recognition, that is, with the self-limitation that gives space to other's freedom to express, jointly or individually, normative considerations. To consider some features as one's own and as immutable, therefore not available to normative evaluation, could instead be conceived as the looping-effect of a politically instrumentalized classification practice (*Klassifikationspraxis*). Or – second hypothesis – as the outcome of a socially hegemonic linguistic practice (*Sprachpraxis*), aimed at maintaining economic and political privileges.¹³²

The example given in 'Recognition as Ideology', that of Uncle Tom, perhaps makes us better understand what Honneth's proposal is. While it is possible to grant – not undoubtedly – a sincere esteem from the master towards his 'good servant', it is clear that such an attribution would not coincide with recognition, according the new emphasis placed on the concept. An attribution of esteem, a confirmation of socially and publicly displayed qualities, the reception of certain evaluative features – which for example could help a slave trader to distinguish a 'good' slave from a

¹³¹ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 221–23.

¹³² Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 224–26.

‘bad’ one, is not sufficient to define recognition. Such an evaluation could very well coincide with a reification – in a literal sense – of the other. At most, one could speak of the esteem for the good slave as a really thin recognizing reaction, which in fact unfolds as one-sided attribution. That would not coincide with recognition because the space-for-freedom to which Tom is authorized is non-existent and – above all – one can well imagine that he does not exercise any kind of demand about a widening of that space. His answer to the master’s *Aufforderung* would be confined to mere acceptance and how he is being addressed would not be mediated by his own freedom. Accordingly, that the slave accepts such state of affairs would not to be derived from recognitional relations themselves. Rather it would be due to the ideological influence that certain classification and linguistic practices have in shaping those features, for which an actor perceives herself as a *non-actor*, that is, as not being legitimated to be a player (*Mitspieler*) of the social space, endowed with capabilities of co-authorship. Since gestures of recognition concern the cooperative delineation of spaces-for-freedom, confusing such interactions with the attribution of characteristics that effectively exclude from such spaces would bring very few advantages. The only one – minimal according to Honneth – would be to clarify to a certain extent how intertwined and simultaneous attraction and constriction, luring and fixing could be (*Lockung und Festlegung, Anziehung und Einschnürung*).¹³³ One could make a rather trivial example. Certainly, short-sightedness considerably affects the ability to see, altering it, indeed shaping the conditions of possibility to see. The scope of my vision is then determined by my short-sightedness, but myopia and sight are not the same matter. Similarly, says Honneth, the space of reasons for recognition is shaped by conditions that are different from it – and it is good to keep this distinction clear.

The point should be clarified in terms of possibilities (of self-realization) gained by the participants within the relationship: both in the marriage and in the master-slave examples, it is clear that the imbalance between the relationship’s poles consists in the potential difference that concerns the *actual* use of freedom that is mutually granted. One could almost say that Honneth here renews the material criterion of ‘Recognition as Ideology’ in normative terms: the ‘genuineness’ of recognition can be detected if its expressive acts are accompanied by the effective authorization to reshape the relationship itself by authoring its governing norms – then, only *ex post*.

The two branches of the French tradition would therefore not deal with recognition, but with non-recognition or dysfunctional recognition, thus outlining two faces of *exclusion*. On the one hand, social pathologies that are instantiated in

¹³³ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 226.

mystifications of one's own traits and qualities would be the result of social exclusion (*soziale Schließung*). On the other hand, the potential of mutual recognition would be eroded by a argumentative exclusion (*argumentative Schließung*): the space of reasons is subtracted 'from under the feet' of the participants through the naturalization of certain traits, by means of classification and linguistic practices. Such reified personal features can therefore no longer be resorted to as arguments for questioning the norms governing the relationships.¹³⁴

In this context, two aspects are fundamental. First, the concept of graduation (*Graduierung*), used in some passages by Honneth, especially at the beginning of the comparison between the three paradigms.¹³⁵ Given the porous correlation between systems of interpretation and relationships of recognition, the connection between space of reasons and 'areas of facts' cannot be conceived except dialectically and always to be discussed. To this extent, norms are never completely disjointed from facts. Precisely Hegel's merit, detranscendentalization, is supposedly what leads him to describe relational configurations as contaminated by non-recognition, by fixations of personal features. From this point of view, then, the spaces-for-freedom delineated by mutual authorization are always *gradual*, since they are never free from unfinished discussions on the margins of such spaces, on their inclusiveness, and on correlation that conflicting norms should assume before each other – for example, legal forms and emotional ties in the family.

This brings us, secondly, to the concept of *conflict*.¹³⁶ In fact, says Honneth, such relationships of recognition cannot be conceived as always already institutionalized, as accomplished in themselves and not in need of reformulations; in the same way, their normative contents would not only be already routinized individual practices (*zu individuellen Gewohnheiten gewordene Handlungsroutinen*). Rather, recognition relationships would always be controversial (*umstritten*) and conflictual. This would derive first of all from the fragility of their constitution (*Fragilität des Stoffs*): if they are shaped but nothing than institutional norms, the use and interpretation of which depends on a right to have a say (*Mitspracherecht*) that subjects grant each other, and if this practice is always placed in an 'outside' that erodes (or hinders right away) their potential, then it is clear that both the scope of their field of application (*ihres*

¹³⁴ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 227–29.

¹³⁵ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 183–85.

¹³⁶ I think Honneth owes something to Bertram and Celikates, for the conflictual perspective they endow to normative relations of recognition, so as emphasis on recognition as mutual granting of 'leeway'. Anyway, Honneth underlines that proper conflict regards more the *scope* of the space-for-freedom and its participants than the interpretation of single norms; cf. Georg W. Bertram and Robin Celikates, 'Towards a Conflict Theory of Recognition: On the Constitution of Relations of Recognition in Conflict', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 23.4 (2015), 838–61.

Anwendungsfeldes) and the circle of people who can participate in them is always under discussion.¹³⁷

5.4 Some Open Issues: a Spatial Account of Recognition

This chapter has provided an overview of three main issues that have accompanied us since the beginning of our reconstruction of Honneth's elaborations: the nature of gestures of recognition, their mutual character and the tension between recognition and power – already prompted by the criticism addressed to Honneth of psychologization and culturalization of justice (cf. *supra* 1.3).

In 'Grounding Recognition' Honneth outlines four general features a 'general' definition of recognition should entail. First, recognizing has to do with affirming or confirming certain qualities of human beings or groups. Second, recognition is a certain *attitude*, whereby symbolic or verbal expressions come down to a certain point: recognition is a matter of acts and hinges on how those qualities are practically *treated*, rather than merely *affirmed*. Thirdly, recognitional acts cannot be thought of as consequences or side-effects of other attitudes. Fourth, 'recognition' is to be conceived as genus which entails different species, namely love, respect, and esteem.

Taking these characters into account, Honneth opts in a second step for a receptive model, according to which recognition would represent a moral stance which adapts itself to the evaluative features of the other, which in turn emerge thanks to second-natural standards. Thus, recognition, by expressing them publicly, 'allows' their actualization. Precisely such letting oneself being determined by the other with regard to one's features, namely the adequateness of my stance and acts to them, would represent the moral element of recognition. One could then add: only once affirmed in the public space would these characters have such a consistency as to enable the recognizee to relate to herself according to them.

However, taking into account *Anerkennung*, such a definition per se could end up coinciding with recognizing reactions. But, on the other hand, the rather evident developments implemented in Honneth's latest monograph do not go in the opposite direction. The remarkable gain for the concept of recognition is that of clear, indeed considered as necessary, *mutual framework*. If, in fact, the receptive model proposed in 'Grounding Recognition' is conceived in truly bilateral and reciprocal terms – i.e. not relegating mutuality to B's judgement on the correctness of A's recognition – one obtains nothing but the mutual authorization to the

¹³⁷ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 229–32.

normative tasks described in *Anerkennung*. Thanks to the idea of authorization, Honneth is able to fully conciliate the two emphasis we encountered so far: recognition as affirming reception and as chance for freedom and joint commitments. One can further clarify such continuity by merging the respective terminologies. Authorization means that recognition is a mutual self-limitation of freedom that *coincides* with the reception of others' evaluative features, because – as we have seen by Fichte – I limit myself only before a free being. Other's features are hence not to be thought of as mere attributes (according to the Aristotelian idea of the term), but properly as an actor's possibilities, capabilities, and entitlements: as a normative status, whose granting accompanies any self-limitation. And such normative capabilities, which would in theory be proper to each actor as such, can only be expressed, i.e. actualized, by means of a previous co-authorization to co-authorship.

The advantage of the strong mutual implications that the idea of authorization possesses would be that of being able to more sharply distinguish the lexicon of recognition from that of power. Three aspects would mark recognition before subjecting gestures – the ascriptions of features, whose dominating consequences are not completely alien to one-sided recognizing reactions.

First, a more pre-Hegelian description of being with oneself in the other. Freedom that pertains to recognition relations would not coincide with complying with the different role obligations alone, with being member of an ethical sphere. Honneth here emphasizes that social freedom is such *only* if the ethical-social norms to which we 'submit' can be traced back to our authority, that is, to our being (co-)authors of them. If not, that would be a sign of ours not being considered full-fledged actors, namely at least to some extent addressee of argumentative or social exclusion.

To this – secondly – is related what could be called the more Habermasian tones by which the conceptualities put in place by Honneth are nuanced. The mutual authorization to be full-fledged actors *is* reciprocally granting each other the *right to have a say*: recognition would open – and coincide with – those *communicative* spaces of negotiation of the norms that guide our action. The spheres of recognition do not only represent contexts in which the person is enabled to develop an undamaged self-relation, or domains in which she can be free by experiencing a satisfaction of her need for complementarity alone. These two dimensions would find their 'fulfilment' and actualization in communicative practices that regard *joint commitments to (co-)authorship* among the participants: "Each person participates

in the role of co-legislator in a *cooperative* enterprise.”¹³⁸ This would be a decisive element, useful for distinguishing between practices of power and practices of recognition, as it would provide a criterion for ex-post evaluations with regard to persons’ *normative performing*: from our historical point of view, one could assess the genuineness of certain institutionalizations of recognition from the ‘quality’ of the normative powers granted to participants. But from a general point of view, what determines recognition as recognition is not the species it assumes, but precisely an unimpaired access to normative formulations, accorded intersubjectively.¹³⁹

The third aspect hence concerns the space of reasons or, better, its unclear relationship with recognition interactions. On the one hand, the first would coincide with a second-natural horizon which, in turn, does not coincide with recognition relations: rather, the latter ‘inhabit’ it and are informed by it. On the other hand, the mutual gestures of recognition themselves outline the space-for-freedom, that is, the space of reasons. Recognition draws spaces-for-freedom, and it is drawn by them. This apparent overlapping does not regard a mere chicken-egg problem, but precisely concerns the difficult relationship between sociality and society that we have seen throughout the whole reconstruction, which can be translated into the already encountered terms of intersubjectivity and system. It is, one might even say, the problem of the beginning that every account on society inspired by Hegel has to face.

I believe that this spatial concept of recognition can be deciphered by taking into account three aspects – which in turn possess a certain degree of problematicity. The first is related to the very concept of second nature. The latter should be conceived as intrinsically *dialectical*, i.e. at the same time condition and outcome of recognitional gestures, and to this extent always susceptible of modification and (mis-)developments. In this sense, not only is society a condition for the existence

¹³⁸ Jürgen Habermas, ‘A Genealogical Analysis of the Cognitive Content of Morality’, in *The Inclusion of the Other. Studies in Political Theory*, ed. by Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), pp. 3–46 (p. 31).

¹³⁹ “Since communicative processes and forms of life have certain structural feature in common, [the participants] could ask themselves whether these features harbor normative contents that could provide a basis for shared orientations. Taking this as a clue, theories in the tradition of Hegel, Humboldt, and G. H. Mead have shown that communicative actions involve shared presuppositions and that communicative forms of life are interwoven with relations of reciprocal recognition, and to this extent, both have a normative content. These analyses demonstrate that morality derives a genuine meaning, independent of the various conceptions of the good, from the form and perspectival structure of unimpaired, intersubjective socialization”; Habermas, ‘A Genealogical Analysis of the Cognitive Content of Morality’, p. 40.

of sociality,¹⁴⁰ since our interpersonal relationships are always informed by contexts that precede and go beyond them. But sociality is, in turn, a condition of society, since our form of life, normatively understood, could only express itself in a space of reasons that is intersubjectively articulated.

However – in the second place – this conception implies outlining two spaces: the *space of reasons* and its *outside*. Such perspective, elaborated to describe the reciprocal intertwining and mutual distinguishing of domination practices and gestures of recognition, seems almost a re-proposal of the Habermasian *colonization thesis*. This, besides exposing Honneth's theory to solutions that certainly do not fall within his intentions, exacerbates the hiatus already perceived in *Freedom's Right*, for example in the difference between market society and market – more generally, between cooperative spheres of freedom and the context they inhabit, between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. I don't think that this impression is only due to unfortunate consequences of the spatial lexicon, which in *Anerkennung* takes on a greater specific weight than the previous idea of recognitional spheres. The difficulty consists precisely in having to identify through a moral-theoretical monism, within one practical form of (inter-)action, two matrixes of acts (inside and outside), that at the same time are informed by the context and shape it. Honneth's theory, considered in its social-ontological elements, does not seem to possess the tools to address such 'outside', if not as entering, colonizing element.

This leads us to the last point, namely *conflict*. In *Anerkennung* it is conceived by Honneth as the means of broadening of the space of reasons before the domain of facts – in the terms of *Redistribution or Recognition?*, *social inclusion* and *individualization*. Besides the concept of surplus validity – which we must consider in the background – it is noteworthy that the greater weight given to the dialogical-communicative dimension, to the idea that recognition does not concern the affirmation of traits, but the mutual willingness to include the other in the reformulation of the respective roles, is accompanied by the identification of a *fragility* of the related normative arrangements. Individuals' vulnerability and indeterminacy would therefore not be solved and resolved by and within ethical life, filled with content and therefore immobilized. Rather, the spheres of recognition would delineate those spaces in which the burden of being free can be shared by being freed. In this sense, recognition and conflict would not represent alternative, mutually exclusive moments: rather, simultaneously, they would continuously outline our lifeworld, that is, its very reformulation. The co-legislation disclosed by and coinciding with mutual recognition would be conflictual to the extent that it

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Volker Schürmann, 'Der/Die Oder Das Dritte?', in *Theorien Des Dritten. Innovationen in Soziologie Und Sozialphilosophie*, ed. by Thomas Bedorf, Joachim Fischer, and Gesa Lindemann (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2010), pp. 73–89.

draws argumentative practices carried out in the historical opacity of institutionalized contexts.

5.5 Sediments of Reconstruction

Our reconstruction of Honneth's thought had opened with some perplexities and criticisms from different angles towards him.

First, that Honneth assumes as his starting point the subjective experience of moral injury, as well as the role of the pathology/health simile in dealing with society's misdevelopments raises some doubts with regard to a certain *psychologizing* attitude. To this first issue must be added that several features of self-realization are drawn by Honneth in mainly psychological terms.¹⁴¹ Such a psychological approach would turn out to be deficient to the extent that it would fail to address the dynamics of injustice that fall outside the horizon of reflexive personal experience. This, on the one hand, would lend itself to an inability to unmask the ideological forms of recognition and, on the other, would confuse injustice with what is simply felt as such.

The same lack of objectivity is claimed by those who charge Honneth of an excessive *culturalization* of (in)justice. The clearest example of this criticism is carried out by Nancy Fraser, according to whom the Honnethian monism would reduce critical theory's scope. All in all, a recognition paradigm is allegedly well suited for addressing pluralism, identity conflicts, the balance or agonism between ethnic-cultural groups and their social standings, as well as hierarchical cultural structures. This would imply that the material-systemic factors of injustice (even if they emerge in the experiential-reflexive horizon) are not adequately taken into account by Honneth, while Fraser's bifocal approach would do so.

These two criticisms are articulated with reference to Honneth's anthropological 'phase', but find greater resonance in what could be considered their reformulations that in turn emerge with the shift to the historic-normative 'phase' – namely, above all with regard to *Freedom's Right*.

This is the direction of the criticism, carried out mainly by Thompson, according to which Honneth's proposals represent an *idealistic drift* of critical theory. Here, rather than subjectivism, the problem would be intersubjectivism, which would make Honneth's theory rely on an a-contextual dynamic, untying critical social

¹⁴¹ Cf. above all Axel Honneth, 'Postmodern Identity and Object-Relations Theory: On the Seeming Obsolescence of Psychoanalysis', *Philosophical Explorations*, 2.3 (1999), 225–42; Axel Honneth, *Reification. A New Look at an Old Idea*, ed. by Martin Jay (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Axel Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason. On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, trans. by James Ingram (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

theory from social reality's being-product and constituted by relations and systems that cannot be reduced neither to the I-Thou polarity, nor to normative integration.¹⁴² This issue could to a certain extent be translated with the classical distinction between base and superstructure. What is read critically, that is, is not simply that intersubjectivity represents a starting point – also because, in Honneth's own theory, recognitional relations are always conceived as situated in a second-natural horizon. Rather, the problem would lie in not adequately implying systemic factors (not only productive, but mediatic, bureaucratic, juridical, institutional etc.) that *form* and contribute to crystallize the normative principles whose instantiations and evolutions constitute, according to Honneth, the fabric of the social. Honneth's position would therefore be idealistic in that it would confuse a product with the actual given, in the same way as “*the Fruit*” elaborated by speculation replaces the individual material apples, pears, strawberries and almonds – as outlined by Marx and Engels in *The Holy Family*.¹⁴³

The criticism of idealism is therefore not unrelated to that of *constructivism* (addressed here in 4.3.3 together with its correlates). In fact, the retrospective approach adopted by Honneth especially in *Freedom's Right*, would be warped by an a priori assumption, freedom's central role that is, an operation that enables *one* reconstruction among the many possible, among the alternative teleologies of which Zurn speaks.

The last criticism concerns precisely an overly pronounced *teleologism*. On the one side, as mentioned in 1.3, this issue concerns Honneth's prioritizing the good (and its achievement) over the right (and its procedures). But this charge possesses another, more deep facet. In this second case, the problem would not concern Honneth's reconstructive approach, the identification of certain trends or tendencies, or describing the instantiations-conflicts dialectic as a learning progress. Rather, what appears problematic is that developments and misdevelopments are identifiable, according to Honneth, only to the extent that we dispose of a ‘contrast material’, the idea of healthiness that is. Nonetheless, this contrast material does not seem subject to the same becoming undergone by the social facts it allows to evaluate. For sure, both the concept of self-realization and the normative principles of recognition go through reformulations and refinements: they historically become. But the structures of weak anthropology, as well as principles' integrative function and surplus of validity do not yield their quasi-transcendental position with

¹⁴² The same criticism is moved to Searle's theory of institutions. If their constitution cannot be reduced to cognitive-linguistic processes, this also applies for recognitional relations and principles; cf. Michael J. Thompson, ‘Collective Intentionality, Social Domination, and Reification’, *Journal of Social Ontology*, 3.2 (2017), 207–29 (p. 225).

¹⁴³ Cf. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 4 (1844–45), p. 57 ff.

respect to social reality. In this sense, Honneth's teleologism would instantiate in not fully detranscendentalizing the theoretical perspective itself with respect to the surpluses of validity identified as the immanent root of emancipatory transcendence.

From this brief overview of the major criticisms that emerged during the reconstruction of Honneth's thought it is quite clear that the bone of contention is not the concept of recognition itself, but rather the role attributed to it by interpreting social reality and positing critical theory's possibilities and aims. More specifically, the greatest perplexities concern the presumed *self-sufficiency* of the recognition principles, i.e. the moral-theoretical monism proposed by Honneth. While Fraser argues that it cannot be the only criterion for assessing the hindrances to parity of participation, and Thompson believes that such a monism cannot take into account social facts as products of complex dynamics, the perplexities voiced by Ludwig Siep are quite insightful.¹⁴⁴ For they come from an author who greatly contributed to bring 'recognition' back into the limelight, and because they stress the necessary situatedness (and therefore partiality) of recognition and its principles. Indeed, while Siep stresses mutual recognition's relevance as practical modality of interactions, he detects its inability to determine its own contents and contexts.

The first issue regards *distributive justice*. On the one hand, here mutual recognition – even understood in immediate terms as oriented by equality and generalized respect – can play a fundamental role by the *modes* of distribution, shaping their fairness. But, Siep argues, it is the goods 'themselves' that to a certain extent frame their own distribution, rendering the related demands or struggles justifiable, or not – according to Walzer's distinction of different spheres of justice. For example, struggles for civil and political rights, for access to education and so on are also justified by the generalizability of the respective cases. While more 'particularistic' goods, such as citizenship or access to social welfare and assistance, scholarships, would more hardly justify claims by groups and individuals 'outside' their spectrum – which of course can be expanded, and reformulated, but hardly universalized. For sure, access to health care seems in principle a universal right, but treatment depends on the respective diagnoses. Clearly – and this is a second indeterminacy of recognition – to say that the goods 'themselves' can frame their own distribution coincides to say that goods' 'goodness' and 'distributability' are matter addressed through and within a shared evaluative horizon that can hardly be enclosed by the modes of mutual recognition. The second limit identified by Siep concerns *pluralism*, with respect to whose challenges it does not seem sufficient to

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Ludwig Siep, 'Mutual Recognition: Hegel and Beyond', in *Recognition and Social Ontology*, ed. by Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 117–44 (pp. 136–39).

outline a model in which the different perspectives on the good or the different groups recognize each other. Or rather, this would only become possible in the name of a shared perspective on a well-ordered society – sketching on John Rawls’s model. Certainly, one could say that a well-ordered society is one where everyone recognizes each other. But in order to gain greater concreteness – thus avoiding purely proceduralist perspectives – such a dynamic must each time enter into the merits of the ‘proposals’ made by individuals and groups to the social community. And actually, Honneth’s paradigm of recognition finds its anchorage and unfolding point in a more general idea of ethical life, oriented by the principle of self-realization or by the plurality of principles of recognition which – it is good to underline it – do not coincide with the logic of reciprocal recognition. And he requires a certain idea of progress and material criteria to distinct progressive and regressive, genuine and ideological struggles and modes of recognition. Siep seems to tell us: that e.g. freedom can be considered the pivotal principle of Western societies, even if its instantiations involve struggles for recognition and relational institutionalizations, does not derive from reciprocal recognition alone, but requires other factors too. The third shortcoming would then be that recognition provides few elements regarding the relationship between man and nature – understood in general terms as a dimension not completely produced by and not completely available to humans’ purposiveness. Siep mainly mentions bioethical issues (self- and social relations to bodies), and the relationship with animals. The main problem seems to me though that mutual recognition offers few possibilities to outline ecological accounts without anthropomorphizing nature itself. For sure, Honneth addresses the relation with one’s own and others’ body mainly in *The Struggle for Recognition* with the binomial violence-love. And *Reification* provides some elements with regard to natural objectuality, but ‘care’ and mimetic reasoning do not fully coincide with the idea of mutual recognition that he defends more clearly in other works. Even in this case, therefore, recognition seems to offer many cues to outline an ethical way of ‘dealing with’ the other, but it is lacking in content to understand what the other is.

Honneth’s rejoinder would likely concern the ‘whence’ of the normative criteria involved in each of these criticisms. Where do they come from? What immanence do they possess with respect to social reality and action? How can they avoid universalistic implications? For the division between issues of distribution and issues of recognition, as well as the delineation of a well-ordered society or consensus about values and goods, fall within normative criteria that cannot be disjointed from social (inter-)action – from which the Honnethian paradigm draws its lymph. In the same way, the relationship with nature (under its different guises) can hardly be disconnected from that way of knowing-treating which we can call ‘recognizing’ –

not symmetrically understood though. And finally, as far as the being-product of social relations and recognition themselves are concerned, the issue is not foreign to Honneth, who indeed includes genealogical methodologies among the necessary tools of critical theory.¹⁴⁵ Returning with the mind to *The Struggle for Recognition*, it is easy to see how Honneth derives from historically situated anthropological forms the access point for the spheres of social action, but above all for the readiness to overcome and reformulate them.¹⁴⁶ Equally, principles' surplus of validity represents nothing but the theoretical formalization of what comes to the surface through the upheavals of institutional concretions as *desideratum*, as projection of emancipatory interests. The focus on recognition relations does not represent for Honneth an all-encompassing hypothesis that explores the formation and reproduction of social reality, but rather a theoretically perceived necessity useful to delineate the normative structure, the moral grammar, the innovative reproductions of social reality.

Since, after all, the aforementioned criticisms aim at Honneth's *monism*, it seems necessary to go back to it trying to illuminate its all too often misunderstood porosity and encompassiveness. How, in fact, can a monism be reconciled with what was said a few lines back, namely that self-realization and the principles of recognition, the material criteria and those of progress do not coincide with the relationships of recognition? It might seem that recognition relationships and ethical life do not coincide. Saying this is both true and false.

It is true to the extent that the concept of ethical life represents the framework of instantiation and source of criteria for recognition relations: thus, the former performs *quasi-transcendentally* with respect to the latter. Moreover, ethical life, namely second nature inhabited and delineated by normative principles, differs from mutual recognition to the extent that theory itself derives from the former criteria for evaluating the latter (to say whether recognitional forms are progressive or regressive, ideological or freedom's realizations) – which by the way shows that Honneth also has regressive or harmful forms of recognition in mind. Because if recognition were considered positive *per se*, it would not be necessary to adopt these 'external' criteria for justifying or criticizing it. And, finally, the lack of coincidence between modes and spheres of recognition that has become quite evident in *Freedom's Right* makes it clear that not every form of freedom and every form of

¹⁴⁵ Besides *The Struggle for Recognition* and *Freedom's Right* cf. Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power. Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. by Kenneth Baynes (Cambridge - London: The MIT Press, 1991); Axel Honneth, 'Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso. On the Idea of "Critique" in the Frankfurt School', in *Pathologies of Reason. On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, 2009, pp. 43–53.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Carl-Göran Heidegren, 'Anthropology, Social Theory and Politics : Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition', *Inquiry*, 45.4 (2002), 433–46 (p. 437).

recognition is ethical, as well as that not every concretion of ethical life (family, market society, public sphere) fully actualizes freedom and recognition.

It is false to the extent that recognition relationships are the tangible structure of the formal concept of ethical life: thus, the first is the *reality* of the second. Moreover, inclusion and individualization (i.e. the trajectories of progress identified by Honneth) and the material criterion represent nothing but mutuality's actualizations, its refinements and broadenings. Therefore, the 'external' criteria to evaluate recognition are considered by Honneth as the distillate of the norms that flow through relationships of recognition. And, finally, the lack of coincidence between modes and spheres of recognition, the actual non-adherence of forms of freedom and recognition to the actual spheres of social action shows precisely the very immanence of the norms, which can be evoked by the participants to criticize their insufficient or detrimental institutionalizations.

This scenario of coincidence and non-coincidence shows a *dialectical monism*, which articulates itself in practices and norms, which in turn, while co-implicating each other, can to a certain extent be disjointed. In this sense Honneth speaks of progress as a *learning process*, since the concretions of recognition practices allow the thematization of their own norms on the part of the participants, representing a starting point for new forms. That this monism is dialectical also implies a distinction between interpersonal interaction in general and recognition – which is too often overlooked. Within Honneth's monism, the principles of recognition are not the only ones underlying normative integration or interactions among persons. If this were the case, one could not understand social pathologies and forms of misrecognition, reifying attitudes and organized self-realization, social freedom's actual narrowness despite institutional normative promises, and the 'outside' at stake in any recognition relationships. Mutual recognition is to interpersonal interaction and social spheres as *grammar* is to the speech acts and language: the logic underlying the articulation of symbolic contents cannot replace them and does not coincide with a self-standing rationale that allows the expression of meaning. But it is fundamental in order to judge the correctness of a sentence, to justify it, to criticize it.

In my view, therefore, the fundamental question is not about determining the self-sufficiency or the insufficiency of mutual recognition – since evidently the monism itself, the normative grammar proposed by Honneth cannot make all-encompassing and explanatory claims. Not without ambiguities, indeed, Honneth develops his theory and describes the social as articulating itself on a dialectical game between relationships, principles, and second nature that lets the non-self-sufficiency of recognitional interactions emerge, if under the last concept we understand a purely I-Thou affirming exchange of treatments. In order to fully

grasp and further develop the pivotal role that the concept of recognition already possesses in social, political, and practical philosophy, the fundamental question regards the necessity to delineate a concept of recognition that can be enough porous and non-exclusive with respect to other logics of action and non-normative dimensions that characterize our lifeform and lifeworld. Only in this way will it be possible to understand the moral and critical specificity of mutual recognition, and, consequently, its role for social reality and theory. But at this juncture a number of other problems arise, precisely because most of the issues we have encountered in the course of the reconstruction of Honneth's thinking and of the confrontation with his critics stem from a substantial non-clarity about what 'recognition' is.¹⁴⁷ The following table – subject to due simplifications – already shows that, even within Honneth's paradigm, it is difficult to distil *one* concept of recognition. An issue that discloses our endeavors for the last chapter of this work.

<i>Work</i>	<i>Core Idea of Recognition</i>	<i>Modes of Recognition</i>	<i>What is Recognized</i>	<i>For What is Condition</i>
<i>The Struggle for Recognition</i> (1992)	<i>Reciprocal affirmation</i>	<i>Emotional support, cognitive respect, social esteem</i>	<i>Needs and emotions, moral responsibility, traits and abilities</i>	<i>Undamaged self-relation, self-realization</i>
<i>'Invisibility'</i> (2001) & <i>Reification</i> (2005)	<i>Meta-actional stance, expression of underlying relationality</i>	<i>Identification, imitation, attunement</i>	<i>Human features</i>	<i>Non-reification</i>
<i>Redistribution or Recognition?</i> (2003)	<i>Reciprocal affirmation</i>	<i>Love, respect, esteem</i>	<i>Needs; responsibility; contributions</i>	<i>Surpluses of validity's refined instantiations</i>
<i>Freedom's Right</i> (2011)	<i>Instantiation of complementary role obligations</i>	<i>Love, respect, esteem</i>	<i>Normative statuses within the relational contexts we inhabit</i>	<i>Social freedom (both as ego-boundaries dissolution and as cooperative self-determination)</i>

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Sobottka and Saavedra; Giovanni Giorgini and Elena Irrera, 'Recognition: A Philosophical Problem', in *The Roots of Respect*, ed. by Giovanni Giorgini and Elena Irrera (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), pp. 17–38.

<i>'Grounding Recognition' (2002)</i>	<i>Actualization of evaluative features</i>	<i>Non-epistemic reception and public expression</i>	<i>Evaluative features</i>	<i>Actualization of individual potentials</i>
<i>Anerkennung (2018)</i>	<i>Mutual authorization</i>	<i>Granting of possibilities; joint outlining a space-for-freedom</i>	<i>Normative capability to self-determination</i>	<i>Joint normative (re-)formulations</i>

6. Recognition Between Actuality and Potentiality

Reconstructing the concept of recognition in Honneth's works – and its multiple roles in delineating the possibilities of a critical theory of society – has revealed the need to acquire greater clarity on the concept itself, so central but so ambiguously interpreted in contemporary debate, philosophical and otherwise. Taking some but decisive steps in this direction is the task of this concluding chapter. To do this, it is necessary to keep in mind that a paradigm of recognition inspired by Hegel must move between different levels, which characterize Honneth's thought in a decisive way. In fact, for both Hegel and Honneth recognition represents an empirical-social fact, a practical-evaluating norm, and a hermeneutical-critical criterion.¹ Such polyvalence is strongly implemented by Honneth's approach – which has now become familiar to us – to the extent that the normative dimension and the functional dimension of the social to collide and coincide in recognitional practices.²

Maintaining this theoretical framework, the first step of our analysis is taken by recollecting four ideas of recognition put in place – critically or positively – by Honneth, and by explaining four major perplexities about its paradigm. In other words, the issue is to give voice to some unresolved knots, especially regarding the relationship between recognition and identity (6.1). Then, three macro-meanings of 'recognition' are distinguished, which prove to be useful in throwing analytical clarity on the contemporary debate on recognition, which is too often inhabited by inexplicit positions. Distinguishing between re-cognition, acknowledgement, and mutual recognition, the aim is to spotlight a set of practical modes – linked together by a thin action-theoretic thread – that is complex and holistic, which hardly lends itself to unilateralizations (6.2). The following steps embrace Honneth's emphasis on detranscendentalization as Hegel's key operation, strengthening the bond of recognition with our lifeform, thus acquiring elements to delineate the specificity of interpersonal recognition (6.3 and 6.4). The decisive focus of this chapter consists in analyzing the confession-forgiveness dialectic depicted in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Through this analysis, it becomes possible to place the concept of mutual recognition in Hegel's broader action-theoretical account, which is articulated between the dialectical poles of expressive identity and necessity of the finite (6.5).

¹ Cf. Siep, 'Mutual Recognition: Hegel and Beyond', p. 135.

² Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth's Social Philosophy*, p. 274.

From these elements, I outline a generative account of mutual recognition, which stands in discontinuity with the crystallizing role to which it is often confined. I argue that, as a fluidifying We-form, mutual recognition can represent a peculiar and specific critical criterion aimed at identifying emancipatory and reformulating interests (6.6).

6.1 Interpersonal Recognition: Four Different Ideas

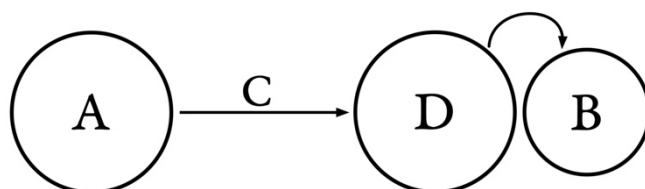
In the course of our reconstruction of Honneth's works, and especially in the course of the last chapter, we came into contact with four main ideas of interpersonal recognition: they differ from each other not just in their respective objects, which can for the moment be generically summarized under the equally generic appellative of 'the other' – but already here, it is difficult to find a unified view of *what* of the other is or should be recognized. The greatest differences emerge as we begin to describe the nature and logic of recognition, which can be understood as an epistemological act or moral attitude, as primarily addressing deontological or axiological features, as unilateral or reciprocal, as asymmetrical or symmetrical, as morally characterized by equality or dissymmetry, and so on. In a word, it is not clear what is recognition or what we should understand, among all the forms of human interaction, as species of this conceptual genus.

But, even more so, such a lack of clarity can be exacerbated when one agrees that a certain ethical-moral and politico-social role is immanent to the concept itself. And a further set of questions opens up as we attempt the difficult process of defining which are the principles of recognition – or at least the most significant ones. The purpose of this chapter is precisely to provide some additional elements in relation to these two sets of problems by clarifying the concept of recognition and the specificity of mutual recognition.

A first, preliminary step is therefore represented by outlining the main features of the four recognition ideas we came in contact with.

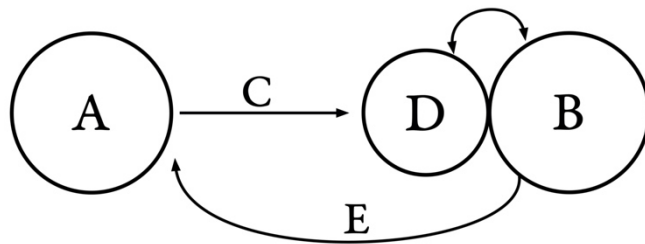
Recognition as attribution of personal features. To interpret recognition as an ascription carried out monologically by A towards B would entail three main implications. First of all, the elements at stake by, within and through recognition relationships would not provide by themselves any (evident) criteria for assessing the *adequacy* of the recognitive acts. The latter would have no evaluation 'counterweight', because their content would be determined exclusively by the recognizer. So, if 'recognition' represents a pure attributive act, then recognizing, say, rights to someone does not in principle hinge on any view about her being a person, i.e. a rights bearer entailing and expressing dignity. Secondly, from this

follows that the recognizee would find herself to a certain extent passive towards those features attributed by others, which would represent, so to speak, an encumbrance around which she would have to carve out her own person – so as we have seen, for example, in Rousseau and Sartre. To this is connected – thirdly – the epistemological matrix focused on by Honneth in *Anerkennung*: other’s gaze would shed light only *some* sides of me, inevitably leaving others in the shadows, giving space to an inevitable irreconcilability between *self* and ‘*public*’ *self*. Both from a normative point of view and from a more ontological one, therefore, the recognizee would find herself described by the (to some extent) arbitrary recognizing gestures of another, but never fully coinciding with such description: A recognizes/discovered (C) the trait D, which determines/covers my (true/authentic) person (B).



It is no coincidence that, as we shall see, most criticisms concerning the relevance of the concept of recognition for a social-critical theory, as well as regarding the concept itself, derive from this perspective, or from a reversal of the following one.

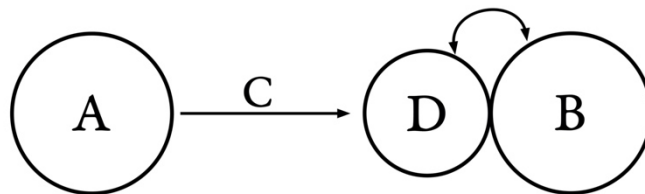
Recognition as praise. This second account is closer to the daily use of the term, which gives a certain priority to those other’s traits that provoke moral reactions in me such as sympathy, respect, esteem. Therefore, recognition would not coincide with me granting the other any attributes that stand somehow juxtaposed to her person, but rather it concerns the fact that some of her features publicly emerge as *worthy* of consideration, virtually exemplary, explicitly normative. Setting aside the consequences that such a perspective would imply on the harmonization of social actions – which represent Honneth’s focus on *Anerkennung* –, it is clear that this model outlines a *receptive* account of recognition. B’s trait (D) manifests itself to A, who reacts (C) by recognizing, expressing, and affirming it. Thereby, B’s selfhood would be gain in consistency through the confirmation of her trait (D), the relation with which is not one-sided or arbitrary, rather represents a fundamental step for personal integrity.



Both these models do not require any reciprocity, symmetry or even mutuality in the strict sense to define ‘recognition’, which could therefore be articulated as a monological phenomenon, carried out by one of the partners towards its addressee. What distinguishes them from another is the precedence that, alternatively, is given either to the gesture of recognition or to its object, that is, recognition is conceived *either* as a response *or* as a ‘creative’ act. Thus, also B’s relationship with her recognized features is read in a profoundly different way. In the first case, once discovered by A, they would cover B’s more proper dimension, to the extent that those traits exert a certain power over the person. In the second case, the evaluative qualities that are the object of recognition would represent a non-problematic expression of B’s own personhood, which can allegedly unfold only through such ‘external’ confirmation.

We have seen also two slightly, but decisively, different accounts on mutuality that stem from the receptive account.

Recognition as appropriate judgement. We have met such view as synthesized by Ikäheimo’s contributions,³ whereby a *thin* mutuality is outlined. Proper recognition would necessarily entail B’s judgement (E) as to whether the recognizer (A) represents a competent judge of the first’s features (D) – which obviously implies whether A’s judgment (recognition) is adequate or not.

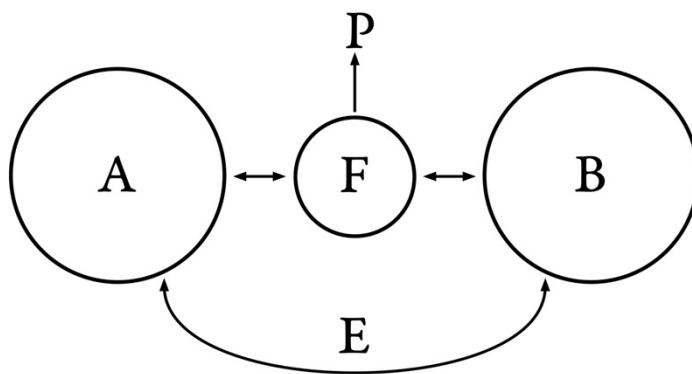


³ Cf. Heikki Ikäheimo, ‘On the Genus and Species of Recognition’, *Inquiry*, 45.4 (2002), 447–62; Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen, ‘Analyzing Recognition: Identification, Acknowledgement, and Recognitive Attitudes towards Persons’, in *Recognition and Power. Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory*, 2007, pp. 33–56.

The adequacy-issue to be assessed by B is twofold: the judge's adequacy would be indeed expressed in the perceived adequacy of her judgment, but the first cannot be reduced to the latter, and *vice versa*. Let's say I did an impeccable test. After observing it, a fellow student recognizes that, thus making a judgment appropriate to how the test looks. Then, after examination, the professor expresses the same judgment. Clearly, in the eyes of all the participants, the professor is a more competent judge, although he makes exactly the same judgment as my classmate and myself. It is therefore likely that the 'impact' of the professor's recognition in terms of affirmation and confirmation will be greater than my classmate's one: judge's recognized competency for recognition matters. Considering the second side – the adequacy of the judgement itself –, there would be no recognition if A and B did not in some way agree on the *content* of or *object* addressed by recognition, if the recognized traits were not perceived by the recognizee as expressive of her own person, or simply affirmed in a proper way. Thus, this form of mutuality would guarantee a further limitation of the recognizing expressions' possible arbitrariness, implying a non-passive stance on the part of the recognizee, so as a certain transparency between the latter and her own traits. With regard to the first side – judge's adequacy –, it would imply a certain parity among the participants. Taking both sides together, we have a thin mutuality, which instantiates *diachronically* and that can consequently entail a certain *asymmetry*. Even more, precisely such asymmetry could be constituent of the *relationship* itself, so as by student-professor, patient-doctor, customer-mechanic, and so on. But from these examples it emerges that a substantially asymmetrical relationship requires reciprocal and structurally symmetrical *acts* of recognition with regard to the acceptance by both of their respective roles. We need therefore to determine at what level (structural or normative) mutuality 'in the strict sense' is established and what connection there is between *relationships* of recognition and *acts* of recognition. I believe that most of the ambiguities in the contemporary debate arise from the failure to detect this double distinction.

Recognition as mutual authorization. With *Anerkennung*, Honneth unties the concept of recognition from the lexicon of affirmation, both in its attributive and the receptive matrixes: at the center are not other's personal (evaluative) features, rather her freedom, not her capacity for self-determination, rather the context for its unfolding. In this sense, recognition *relationship* would represent a *We*-structure characterized by the joint action of self-limiting one's freedom, which may be followed by the joint action in a strong sense of discussing the norms that regulate the relationship itself. That would imply a *thick* mutuality and symmetry of the normative status that the participants grant each other by means of the self-

limitation – thus, not only the respective recognizing acts are structurally symmetrical, but also the relational poles themselves. Recognition would therefore coincide with a ‘passive’ involvement (authorization) of the other, properly a letting-space into a sphere of co-authorship about the normative directions of *our* actions. Schematizing: A and B jointly outline a space-for-freedom (F) on the basis of and fostering the mutual consideration (E) of their status, thus disclosing possibilities (P) for the (re-)formulation of normative standards.



With respect to these four models, Honneth’s attempt is to assign the title of mutual recognition exclusively to the fourth, on the basis of the *normative specificity* that a relationship outlined in this way would possess: to disclose intersubjective spaces-for-freedom. As we have seen, the phenomena described by the first model are excluded by Honneth from the concept of recognition: rather, they would be better described taking into consideration the linguistic-classifying practices carried out by and through hierarchical power mechanisms. The second model would instead revolve around (mis-)recognizing reactions as blame and praise, not mutual recognition. Limiting such accounts’ virtual contribution for a normative paradigm of recognition, Honneth between the lines considerably narrows the scope of *his* account, especially with regard to recognition’s role by individual socialization and social reproduction. For he rather clearly argues that not every interpersonal interaction should be considered as a recognitional interaction, but only that specific kind oriented by and to a certain *equality* among the participants, which results in the mutual delivery of a right *to have a say*. The other side of the coin is precisely an implicit denial of a totalizing view of his own moral-theoretical monism, since the *outside* of recognition would play a fundamental role by social integration and second nature’s instantiating.

The main problem is, briefly said, that by defending a strong concept of mutual recognition, Honneth does not grant other practical forms the ‘legitimacy’ to be named recognition. But keeping the focus on ‘what is recognition’, it emerges that, by stating a respective incompatibility of these models, an opportunity to address two fundamental questions is missed.

Why should recognition be conceived exclusively as interpersonal practice? Honneth’s argumentative approach in support of the intersubjective character of recognition, both in ‘Grounding Recognition’ and *Anerkennung*, revolves around the nuances of meanings that distinguish *anerkennen*, which would imply a strong intersubjective connotation, and the terms derived from Latin (recognize, *reconnaître*, *riconoscere*), which instead etymologically would emphasize a kind of ‘knowing-again’. From this would follow the distinction between the epistemological dimension underlying above all the French tradition and the purely normative character of the Hegelian paradigm.

However, one cannot overlook that in the common use even a situation, an error, or an opinion can be correlated of *anerkennen*. Not only the recognizee can be a non-human, but also the recognizer: *anerkennen* can also concern the relationship between states, institutions and so on, without implying a too reifying view on these realities’ structures and functions. This is exactly the point defended by Laitinen, who opts for an *adequate regarding-insight* against a *mutuality-insight*.⁴ The latter would stand for the idea that recognition can only concern *recognizers* who relate to each other: *the relationship of recognition is either reciprocal or not*. There would therefore be an “objective character of the logic that imposes itself on those who are confronted”,⁵ emerging primarily as underlying mediating middle, and eventually as explicit factor of the practitioners’ second-order experience.⁶ The adequate regard-

⁴ Cf. Laitinen, ‘On the Scope of “Recognition”: The Role of Adequate Regard and Mutuality’.

⁵ Lucio Cortella, ‘Freedom and Nature: The Point of View of a Theory of Recognition’, in *I That Is We, We That Is I. Perspectives on Contemporary Hegel. Social Ontology, Recognition, Naturalism, and the Critique of Kantian Constructivism*, ed. by Italo Testa and Luigi Ruggiu (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 169–80 (p. 173).

⁶ The distinction between these two levels, between the *logic of reciprocity* and the *experience of mutuality*, is what Ricoeur focuses on in his analysis of the practices of giving and giving in exchange, and related aporias. On the one hand, the third party (either as medium or as context) would impose a logic of exchange on the interactions of donor and recipient. An example of such self-transcendent level, according to the well-known Mauss’s study, would be represented by the Maoris identifying the *hau*, that is the power attributed to the gift itself to compel the recipient to give something back. Such perspectives, even once disenchanted and demystified, would according to Ricoeur overlook that for the participants the initial gift always represents a risky imbalance, a decentralization whose consequences would not be existentially reducible to an economic equation, if not by an external observer, at the end of the circle. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. by David Pellauer (Cambridge - London: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 225 ff.; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift. The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. by W. D. Halls (London - New York: Routledge, 2002). For a throughout analysis of the relation between gift and recognition cf. Thomas Bedorf, *Verkennende Anerkennung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), para. 2.6. For a synthetic and accurate analysis of

insight instead represents an *unrestricted* normative account on recognition, which basically coincides with a active responsiveness to other's normatively relevant features. Therefore such 'adequately taking notice' is usually considered as unveiling relevant reasons for acting accordingly, for *treating* the other accordingly. What is more important, however, is that such a definition of recognition would make it possible not to fall into a loop so that if A recognizes B, but B does not respond in the *same* way, then A's gesture would not count as recognition either. That is to say, we are not forced, trivially, to declassify the gestures of recognition of a person towards her pet, of a caregiver towards his or her newborn, of a healthcare assistant towards an unconscious patient. To free 'recognition' from a strict logic of mutuality and symmetry would then allow to take into account all those cases, which are given in our social life, in which *giving* and *getting* recognition implies and requires an imbalance between the participants.

Honneth approached these issues in *Reification*, portraying a two-levels account on recognition, the first normative and the other more epistemological, 'originary', related (or even coincident) to our openness to the world. There, recognition was described as an attitude that preceded mere knowledge (*erkennen*) also with regard to object reality and one's inner contents: a mode of apprehension before any subject-object fixating polarization, thus a disobjectifying mode of objectification.⁷ This hypothesis, however, besides being sidelined, did not fully account for that every recognizing entails a 'cognizing', which stands for *how* the recognizee appears to me, whatever it may be. Keeping the matter at on the interpersonal plane, in order to recognize the other (authorize her) I have to recognize (encounter) her as free being. Only given such (re-)cognition, I can self-limit my freedom, adapt my stance to the evaluative traits I discover as characterizing the other. This detail already illuminates the complexity of recognitional gestures, which cannot be reduced to a single logic of action.

I therefore intend to argue that the nuances of different languages do not follow different practices – as Honneth argues instead, distinguishing between proper (mutual) recognition, recognizing reactions, and classification/attribution –, but that such variety is due to stratifications of meaning that legitimately pertain to 'recognition', that co-belong to each other according to non-causal degrees of derivation: above all epistemological and normative dimensions, which Honneth has endeavored to distinguish, depend on each other. And, in fact, he himself has

the 'gift' as third domain between utilitarian and normativist approaches in sociology cf. Frank Adloff, 'Beyond Interests and Norms: Toward a Theory of Gift - Giving and Reciprocity in Modern Societies', *Constellations*, 13.3 (2006), 407-27.

⁷ Cf. Lucio Cortella, 'Originarietà Del Riconoscere. La Relazione Di Riconoscimento Come Condizione Di Conoscenza', *Giornale Di Metafisica*, 27.1 (2005), 145-56 (p. 152).

argued in favor of such a correlation implying that the second-natural horizon grounds the *appearing* of certain traits as worthy of recognition.⁸ In other words, Honneth's intention to distinguish recognition from power practices, to untie normatively, morally, emancipatively loaded intersubjective *relations* from eventually asymmetrical interpersonal *acts* should not lead us to overlook that 'recognition' describes a certain way of 'knowing', a certain way in which certain features of an unspecified 'other' present themselves to me thus inviting me to assume a practical stance before them – and that is the core of the receptive account embraced by Honneth himself: a passively involved, not detached, letting the other space to appear. One cannot, in order to give precedence to recognitional *relations* over *acts* of recognition, and to prioritize *anerkennen* over *erkennen*, suppress that kind of *erkennen* inherent to every *anerkennen*. Taking this into account, it is clear that this type of 'knowledge' cannot be limited to the interpersonal dimension.

The second, related question would thus be: *Why should recognition be conceived exclusively as mutual practice?* This question takes us back to the theoretical tensions that accompany us from *The Struggle for Recognition* between reciprocity, mutuality, symmetry, and asymmetry. Clearly, understanding recognition as a practice that is not exclusively interpersonal would also allow to widen the meshes of a symmetry that, especially in *Anerkennung*, is reinforced by Honneth as an antidote against the assimilation of recognition to power relations. Such a strictly normative connotation, motivated by socio-critical aims, cannot, however, completely erase the possibility of describing, to take a notorious example, the master-servant relationship described by Hegel in the *Phenomenology* as one where recognition plays a significative role, even though the latter does not bring the relationship itself to an emancipated equality. For precisely the existence itself of such a relationship presupposes a mutual recognition of the respective roles – playing with the terms, a *symmetrical recognition of asymmetrical roles*. But the same would regard Honneth's taking the caregiver-child relation as a recognitive one, which has been sharply criticized. That one-sidedly one emphasizes either only the asymmetrical 'status' of the participants or solely their symmetrical reciprocally interacting seems to me grounded both in missing the distinction between *acts* and *relationships* of recognition, and in not detecting the two different planes *reciprocity* and *mutuality* necessarily refer to, whereby the latter does not necessarily accompany the first. In fact, the exemplary case of master and servant shows that structurally identical subjective acts can occur in and lead to an unequal relationships, and that this is *allowed* by both taking each other as one's *alter*. The

⁸ Cf., above all, Axel Honneth, 'Invisibility: On The Epistemology of "Recognition"', Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume, 75.1 (2001), 111–26; Axel Honneth, 'Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions', Inquiry, 45.4 (2002), 499–519.

whole issue revolves around the fact that the mere participants' recognizing each other in a 'neutral' way does not lead to what seems to deserve the title of 'recognition relationship' in which Honneth identifies sources both for social emancipative interests and, consequently, for critical theory. Clearly, a certain autonomization of the normative dimension pursued for equity of the participants' sake implemented in *Anerkennung* leads Honneth to focus on *mutual relations* of recognition, rather than on *recognitional acts*, which, as Laitinen shows, can be carried out properly even without involving two full-fledged recognizers.

In view of these two fundamental questions and given Honneth's tendency to render his concept of recognition stricter and stricter,⁹ it is now necessary to deal with two fundamental criticisms to the concept of recognition in general, not only as it is outlined by Honneth. I am talking about two major issues moved, respectively, by Patchen Markell and Thomas Bedorf. Both, in different ways, deal with the ambivalences that characterize recognition, underline its reifying potentialities, and both take into account a certain degree of skepticism or untransparency regarding personal identity. What is particularly interesting is that all these issues are addressed from a standpoint similar to Honneth's to the extent that 'recognition' *qua* epistemological act is either the aim of criticism (Markell) or bracketed (Bedorf).¹⁰ However, both conceive it as *addressing* the other, thus shaping its being *as* other,¹¹ and make 'recognition' revolve around its strong connection with the concept of *identity*.

⁹ Here I am using the term according to the meaning given by Laitinen, mentioned in the previous chapter; cf. Arto Laitinen, 'Interpersonal Recognition: A Response to Value or a Precondition of Personhood?', *Inquiry*, 45.4 (2002), 463–78.

¹⁰ Even though this holds true, one can nonetheless notice similarities to the two forms of pessimism towards 'recognition' identified by Smith. The first – "pessimism from certainty" – would point to the derived nature of personal identity, which would make it impossible to recognize the other because this other would be, in essence, a product of its context and history. The second pessimism – "from uncertainty" – would instead revolve around the more classic skeptical argument about the inaccessibility of other minds. Cf. Adam Smith, 'The Turn to Acknowledgment in Recognition Theory', *Constellations*, 24.2 (2017), 206–18 (p. 207).

¹¹ Bedorf stresses that the concept of recognition implies that the priority given to *alter's* initiative and demands represents a constitutive element of the experience in general (*Vorgängigkeit einer Forderung als Strukturmoment von Erfahrung*); Bedorf, p. 137. Removed the Fichtean logic, according to which the *Aufforderung* is already conditioned by the other's being free and capable to understand, it is not difficult to grasp the connection between the act of addressing and a gesture of power, understood primarily as a delimitation of other's possibilities. That is to say, 'taking the floor' would be a power (first of all meaning '*I can*') that is not available to those who have to respond. Whoever responds could never 'speak herself', but is from the beginning bound to a heteronomous situation – generalized, we, as humans, are structurally in such a condition. Cf. also Norbert Ricken, 'Anerkennung Als Adressierung. Über Die Bedeutung von Anerkennung Für Subjektivationsprozesse', in *Selbst-Bildungen. Soziale Und Kulturelle Praktiken Der Subjektivierung*, ed. by Thomas Alkemeyer, Gunilla Budde, and Dagmar Freist (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), pp. 69–99; Kristina Lepold, 'Die Bedingungen Der Anerkennung', *Deutsche Zeitschrift Für Philosophie*, 62.2 (2014), 297–317.

The first critique, elaborated by Markell in *Bound by Recognition*, concerns the connection between recognition, identity, and agency. The most problematic aspect of identity politics would be to conceive ‘identity’ as *fait accompli*, as antecedent given from which acting derives. In this sense, identity would be conceived as a “rule”¹² because it determines agents’ courses of action, fixating the latter to the alleged fixity of identity itself. Recognition comes into play when such a monolithic identity collides with other interests, directions of action, social actors: demanding recognition would therefore derive from the impossibility of articulating monologically our own sovereignty as actors, from our vulnerability. A second aspect of Markell’s critique – decidedly fascinating – is that the purpose of politics of recognition does not seem to be a reformulation of ‘the political’ taking seriously into account such vulnerability, but rather to merely restore the ‘lost’ *sovereignty*. This would manifest itself in the fact that the demands for recognition virtually compel “that others recognize us as who we *already* really are”.¹³ Recognition’s principal shortcoming would therefore derive from a distorted depiction of identity as a (more or less) substantial unity from which action flows, rather than the other way around. This misunderstanding is further enhanced by conceiving recognition as cognitive act aimed at discovering the object (identity) supposed to be just ‘out there’. In this way, political measures are meant to reestablish sovereign agency, giving identities what they are *due*.

Clearly, the first target of such criticism is Charles Taylor, who raises certain perplexities in this regard when he for example describes identity as “the background against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense.”¹⁴ Or when, more generally, he conceives ethnic-cultural groups as an already formed ‘whole’ grounding political demands.¹⁵ It is less immediate to identify a connection with Honneth. For, Markell admits, he describes the binomial identity-recognition in *provisional* terms,¹⁶ stressing that conflict emerges precisely for the need of a continuous reformulation of social reality and practical identities. However, as we have already seen in the second chapter, Markell expresses reservations about the Honnethian conception according to which recognition shapes identity by actualizing its potential features.¹⁷ But even though it holds true that for Honneth ‘identity’ does not stand for a static object – also because

¹² Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 186.

¹³ Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, p. 14.

¹⁴ Charles Taylor, ‘The Politics of Recognition’, in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. by A. Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 25–74 (pp. 33–34).

¹⁵ On this aspect also Bedorf, but not only him, criticizes Taylor for a certain naivety with which the concept of culture is treated; cf. Bedorf, pp. 41–42.

¹⁶ Cf. Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, pp. 15–16.

¹⁷ Cf. Markell, ‘The Potential and the Actual: Mead, Honneth, and the “I”’.

recognition is not a mere perception of it –, this would not change Markell’s main criticism, because the actualization of identity, the formation of an undamaged practical identity would in any case be prior and proper condition to authentic agency. To this can perhaps be added that the concept of co-authorship outlined in *Anerkennung* reveals Markell’s criticism as well suited. The impression is that, in Honneth’s view, domination can be overcome only through a (intersubjectively gained and implemented) sovereignty of action.

Of Markell’s alternative proposal, which consists of shifting the focus from recognition to *acknowledgment*, it seems to me necessary to retain three fundamental aspects.

The first is drawn from Cavell’s distinction between knowing and acknowledging in response to the skeptical objections that other’s mental states are, in principle, inaccessible. The other person’s suffering would remain unknown to me because I can’t suffer the same pain. I can possibly say: “I have been through the same”, but that pain is not *the same*: it is at most similar, but according to judgment criteria (yours and mine) that escape a true comparison. The question that Cavell poses is, briefly, this: are we sure that when faced with the other’s utterance: “I am in pain”, the most appropriate response is to be implemented as (impossible) knowledge of this state of pain? Rather, the demand involved in saying: “I am in pain”, is not to be known better, but to be *treated accordingly* to what is expressed through behavior.

[...] your suffering makes a *claim* upon me. It is not enough that I *know* (am certain) that you suffer—I must do or reveal something (whatever can be done). In a word, I must *acknowledge* it [...].¹⁸

What matters in our relation to another is not, says Markell, “knowing him (his pain, pleasure, humanity, character, or very being)”, so as if we have to reach out through cognition to other’s identity “once and for all”, but “*what we do* in the presence of the other, how we respond to or act in the light of what we do know”.¹⁹ The matter does not consist in perfecting a (impossible) knowledge of the other, but in embracing the *practical finitude* that distinguishes us humans, exercising an *epoché* with respect to any claim to sovereign action. Two important elements derive from this.

First, acknowledgment is “self- rather than other- directed”.²⁰ By acknowledging another, what counts is not primarily looking at the her and discovering who she has already been, but orienting our way of acting with respect to what the other

¹⁸ Stanley Cavell, ‘Knowing and Acknowledging’, in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays*, ed. by Stanley Cavell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 220–45 (p. 243).

¹⁹ Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, p. 34.

²⁰ Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, p. 38.

expresses to us: what matters is the *stance* we assume in relation to the other, not how the latter determines my action, not how B's already-given identity compels A to re-act. This criticism of the receptive model should not be understood as a relapse into the arbitrariness of the attributive model: rather, it underlines that claiming that our action is to be entirely plotted by what we perceive is unfounded. Rather, given the derived, constructed, fluid and multiple character of identity, it is necessary for us to address the latter in an appropriate way, whereby the appropriateness is instantiated in taking into account the intrinsic *partiality* of our doings. We acknowledge the other not by virtue of *knowing* her, but because we are *acquainted* with her.

The second decisive aspect is that acknowledgment would be able to emancipate itself from a certain *economic* logic that can be found in recognition practices, whereby granting more recognition to subordinated groups does not differ so much from redistributing a certain good. And the problems emerge here in the many implications of conceiving identity and agency as goods that can be distributed. But establishing the matters at this level would, according to Markell, make us overlook a more fundamental kind of (in-)justice, which is *nondistributive*. Taking again into account Cavell's case and Honneth's starting point in *The Struggle for Recognition*, suffering, one can legitimately wonder whether recognition as 'giving back' *what is due is enough*. Taking his cue from Hannah Arendt, Markell wonders, that is, whether the fundamental expectation that inhabits requests for recognition does not find a more genuine satisfaction in being *welcomed* than in being the recipients of the distribution of a certain good.²¹

While not exempt from possible criticism – especially for the unrefined concept of recognition he discusses – Markell's criticism focuses on two elements that seem to me essential. First, they help us recover the role of recognition in delineating non-legal forms morality (Wildt; cf. here § 2.1). Second, the imbalance that follows, besides questioning whether reciprocity itself represents a moral criterion and bringing with it possible ambivalences, helps us to focus again on the recognizer's act of recognizing, on its motivational ground, on its moral structure. In fact, as Markell says, to "welcome someone says more about the welcomer than the welcomed".²² Since the issue is not knowing an identity understood in objective and fixed terms and giving her what is due with respect to who another is, the primary plane of morality shifts accordingly from the correctness of recognition to the personal position I assume by interacting with the other. Consequently, the welcomer's stance would be characterized by an awareness of practical finitude

²¹ Cf. Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, pp. 179–81.

²² Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, p. 180.

deriving from the indeterminateness proper to other's and one's identity, which emerges retrospectively in our (inter-)acting, not before it.

Thomas Bedorf, in *Verkennende Anerkennung*, goes one step further. While it is difficult to do justice to Bedorf's excellent inquiry, some essential elements of his analysis are particularly fruitful at this point of this work.

First of all, while Markell's criticisms revolves around an epistemological conception of recognition, Bedorf makes it clear that recognizing is not a matter of knowing, but a way of treating, which, however, cannot be conceived unrelated to such knowing. Secondly, while the proposal to shift the focus from recognition to acknowledgment highlights the need to take into account our practical finitude, and the opacity of many terms that are often taken for granted in the current debate on recognition (and on identity politics in particular), Bedorf problematizes precisely the ambivalent relationship between what Markell calls recognition and acknowledgment, between *erkennen* and *anerkennen*.²³

But that recognizing does not coincide with knowing is not simply justified by a consideration of the value of the prefix 'an-' in '*anerkennen*', but rather by a reflection on the doubling of identity (*Verdopplung der Identität*) that necessarily accompanies recognition. This doubling is due to the fact that 'recognition' represents a *confirmation* of identity, not a creative act, nor an unveiling gaze. It would therefore be necessary to imply two moments or degree of personal identity. On the one hand, a 'minimum' of identity expressing itself in the act of posing and expressing the demand for recognition – if we hold on the receptive model, what presents itself as worthy of recognition. On the other hand, we have a 'second degree' of identity resulting from and emerging with the confirmation, the public and symbolic expression of recognition. Accordingly, if we shift the focus from 'being recognized' to 'recognize' such doubling of the recognizee would prevent from thinking of 'recognition' according to dyadic structures that respond to the formula: A recognizes B. Instead, it is necessary to think of recognition always in reference to a third term – meaning by that not solely context, content, or medium of recognition, but *also* its inner logic or structure. Recognition means: *A recognizes B as C*, where C does not stand for the personal feature of B that is addressed and affirmed, but as the emerging identity of B by such affirmation, as B's 'other' ego.²⁴ Bedorf therefore finds in this *triadic* structure recognition an uncertainty similar to Rousseau's with respect to the 'who' of personal identity, defining it in more

²³“Zunächst ist es offenkundig, daß Erkennen mit .Anerkennen nicht identisch ist. Es geht – wie in den genannten Beispielen – nicht darum zu wissen, *wer* jemand oder eine Gruppe ist, sondern *als wen* man ihn oder sie *behandelt*. Damit ist doch noch keine Aussage darüber getroffen, wie sich das Wer der Erkenntnis zum Wen der Anerkennung genaueren verhält”; Bedorf, p. 127.

²⁴ Cf. Bedorf, pp. 118–26.

structural terms: neither the ‘minimum’ nor the ‘second degree’ of identity is ‘I’, I *cannot* be neither the addressee of recognition nor the recognizee – I am somewhat between these two poles.²⁵ The issue is slightly, but decisively, different from those dealt with by Honneth in *Anerkennung*. In fact, it is not about dealing with the individual’s entry into society, as for Rousseau or Sartre, or about deconstructing the recognitional interactions in their socially constructed origin, as for Althusser and partly Butler.

Rather, the heart of Bedorf’s argument is to question the transparency of the concept of identity implied, as we have seen, by both thin and thick perspectives on mutuality. That ‘identity’ does not stand for ‘unity’ – which after all does not differ so much from the Meadian distinction of ‘I’ and ‘me’ –, that the first emerges as concretion of un-stabilizable processes of identification-with, that thus identity is non-identical with itself (*Nicht-Identität der Identität*) would lead to the structural notion of *unconiliated recognition* (*Unversöhnte Anerkennung*).²⁶ One could say, that is, that recognition comes too late with respect to who I already am, and too early with respect to who I emerge as being by virtue of it – thus *unenabled* to come full circle.

But identity’s provisional character (*Vorläufigkeit*) is to be read as intrinsically related to the dependence on the context (*Kontextgebundenheit*) from which and in which recognition is articulated – a connection made evident by Honneth too, for person’s evaluative features emerge only by virtue of their situatedness in a second-natural framework. One could therefore say that the triadic structure stressed by Bedorf is mediated by a threefold ‘third party’. In fact, ‘A recognizes B as C’ implies that the ‘C’ of identity is in fact brought to light by the two elements that qualify its related *as*: the instantiating context, which functions as *situated apriori* through which I can ‘see’ the other, and our interaction medium, i.e. symbolic expressions – understood at this level indifferently both as spoken word and as gesture.²⁷ The

²⁵ “Die Dreistelligkeit der Anerkennung bedeutet, daß sich stets ein Riss im Selbstverhältnis auftut, der nicht zu schließen ist. Derjenige, als der ich anerkannt werden kann, bin ich ebensowenig wie derjenige, der ich bin, in der intersubjektiven Relation abgebildet zu werden vermag.” Bedorf, p. 125.

²⁶ Cf. Bedorf, para. 2.1.

²⁷ This perspective clashes with three of the six distinctions put forward by Ikäheimo in defining the concept of mutual recognition. The first, posed by Siep, is that between vertical and horizontal forms of recognition; with the second, purely intersubjective recognition on the one hand and institutionally mediated recognition on the other are distinguished; the third distinction concerns the norms of recognition, finding its poles in the non-institutionalized norms that regulate the intersubjective dyad, and in the norm-systems of ‘proper’ institutions that regulate institutionally mediated recognition, which implies a third instance, autonomous from the actors. Bedorf’s perspective differs to the extent that it considers the recognition relationship, being it always contextualized, as always entailing a vertical dimension, thus not being purely intersubjective, rather mediated, i.e. always referred to, shaped and informed by a third instance. Clearly – especially with respect to the first and third distinctions – Bedorf and Ikäheimo’s accounts are articulated on slightly different levels. Cf. Heikki

structural impossibility of ‘A recognizes B’, i.e. the non-unmediateness of every act of recognition leads to an equally structural conclusion: every recognition is a *misrecognizing* recognition (*Verkennende Anerkennung*). The fundamental aspect is that this ambivalence would establish itself not on a normative level, as if every ‘treating the other appropriately’ can possibly result in misunderstandings and moral injuries – this is certainly a possibility, which allows, indeed, attempts to improve the quality of our interactions. Rather, the issue regards primarily the pre-normative level of opacity related to the situatedness of our form of life. Here, misrecognition and recognition cannot be mutually exclusive, since a ‘pure misrecognized’ could not represent an element of experience and a ‘pure recognized’ could not appear as otherness.²⁸

The opening recollection of the four models of recognition was followed by four related issues that must accompany us in the process of clarifying the concept.

The first two problems concern interpersonality and mutuality of recognition. Both of these issues call into question different evolutions of Honneth’s thinking, which can be summed up in a twofold key. On the one hand, the shift from the anthropological justification based on vulnerability to the historical-normative one based on principles of recognition and their institutionalizations coincides with a shift of emphasis from the motivational binomial misrecognition-conflict to the depiction of the recognition order that characterizes modern (Western) societies. To this is connected a gradual shift from the centrality of being recognized to the investigation of recognizing, from the import of the intersubjective conditions for an undamaged practical identity oriented towards self-realization to the complementary normative obligations of such relationships oriented by freedom’s surplus of validity. Both these shifts of emphasis – it would be incorrect to speak of ‘phases’ in the strict sense – lead Honneth to ground the recognition’s critical potential not so much on its outcomes with respect to personal integrity, but on its internal structure – conceived more and more in deontological terms, meaning participants’ reflexive capability to jointly orient their agency actualizing shared freedom. If therefore, for example, in *The Struggle for Recognition*, the plain asymmetry between caregiver and child does not hinder conceiving such relation as

Ikäheimo, ‘Hegel’s Concept of Recognition—What Is It?’, in *Recognition—German Idealism as an Ongoing Challenge*, ed. by Christian Krijnen (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 11–38.

²⁸ “Das bedeutet, daß jede Anerkennung den Anderen *als* Anderen notwendigerweise erkennt, weil sie ihn >bloß< als diesen oder jenen Anderen in das Anerkennungsmedium integrieren kann. Das >bloß< hat hier keinerlei normativen Sinn und zeigt keinen Unwillen an, den man bei >richtigem< Umgang mit dem Anderen korrigieren könnte, sondern unterstreicht, daß Verkennung ausweichlich ist. Die *verkennende Anerkennung* ist weder reine Verkennung, weil man sich zum völlig Verkannten gar nicht verhalten könnte; noch ist sie reine Anerkennung, weil sie ohne die Differenz nicht zu anerkennendem Verhalten zu motivieren wäre.” Bedorf, p. 145.

effective condition by the latter's self-realization, in *Anerkennung* the same asymmetry is subtracted from the concept of mutual recognition. The only example made with regard to the parent-child relationship is meant as explanation of conflict's nature. In the particularity of the example – which can be by the way quite easily generalized in political terms –, the struggle for recognition would concern the parents' eventual discussions about whether or not the children should be involved in the active decision-making processes regarding family's orientations, about the 'aptness' of authorizing co-authorship: that is, a *removal* of the asymmetry indeed.²⁹ In this view, that the other becomes partner, *player*, coincides with a substantial equality (with regard to principles and norms prevailing in each sphere of recognition).

Both of these issues call into question different evolutions of Honneth's thinking, which can be summed up in a twofold key. On the one hand, the shift from the anthropological justification based on vulnerability to the historical-normative one based on principles of recognition and their institutionalizations coincides with a shift of emphasis from the motivational binomial misrecognition-conflict to the depiction of the recognition order that characterizes modern (Western) societies. To this is connected a gradual shift from the centrality of being recognized to the investigation of recognizing, from the import of the intersubjective conditions for an undamaged practical identity oriented towards self-realization to the complementary normative obligations of such relationships oriented by freedom's surplus of validity. Both these shifts of emphasis – it would be incorrect to speak of 'phases' in the strict sense – lead Honneth to ground the recognition's critical potential not so much on its outcomes with respect to personal integrity, but on its internal structure – conceived more and more in deontological terms, meaning participants' reflexive capability to jointly orient their agency actualizing shared freedom. If therefore, for example, in *The Struggle for Recognition*, the plain asymmetry between caregiver and child does not hinder conceiving such relation as effective condition by the latter's self-realization, in *Anerkennung* the same asymmetry is subtracted from the concept of mutual recognition. The only example made with regard to the parent-child relationship is meant as explanation of conflict's nature. In the particularity of the example – which can be by the way quite easily generalized in political terms –, the struggle for recognition would concern the parents' eventual discussions about whether or not the children should be involved in the active decision-making processes regarding family's orientations, about the 'aptness' of authorizing co-authorship: that is, a *removal* of the asymmetry indeed.³⁰ In this view, that the other becomes partner, *player*, coincides with a

²⁹ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 232.

³⁰ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, p. 232.

substantial equality (with regard to principles and norms prevailing in each sphere of recognition).

However, the now evident polysemy of ‘recognition’ requires us to explore its different variants, also in search for an identification of the specificity of the interpersonal dimension. To this is connected the multiplicity of levels on which asymmetry and symmetry, reciprocity and mutuality are intertwined, which must be followed by an identification of the normative specificity of the relationships of recognition. For, as we shall see, reciprocal recognition and reciprocity in general cannot be confused.

Moreover, outlining a normative concept of recognition cannot fail to take into account the issues raised by Markell and Bedorf. That is, it cannot help but consider the *unconclusiveness* of the identity-agency relationship and problematize the self- and other-directed character of the meta-attitude of recognizing, as well as delineate its ambivalent and aporetic character without expiring into a skepticism that would jeopardize a normative conceptualization of (inter-)acting – depriving critical thinking of its pre-theoretical sources.

Before attempting this, it is necessary to step back and gain some clarity about the multivalent meanings of ‘recognition’.

6.2 *What is Recognition?*

To try to delineate the meaning of ‘recognition’ – which could be further outlined in the nuances involved in ‘recognizing’ and ‘being recognized’ – it is necessary to address (quasi phenomenologically) the use of the word, with the aim letting such praxis emerge from *our* complex form of life. Taking this as a starting point, the *meaning* of recognition emerges as not reducible to symmetrical interpersonal relationships. Rather, with this concept is meant – in different Western languages – a broad scope of human (inter-)actions that shows itself complex and holistic, characterized by different levels analytically distinguishable, but practically connected to each other according to non-causal logics. For the clarity’s sake, three species can be discerned which refer to the term ‘recognition’.³¹

³¹ The finest analysis of the vast diversity of meanings of the term is offered by Ricoeur in the Introduction to his *The Course of Recognition*, through the recourse of several etymological dictionaries of the French language. Clearly, the same spectrum of meanings has not been established in every language. Besides the peculiarity already highlighted by Honneth concerning ‘*Anerkennung*’, the most peculiar case of discrepancy seems to me to be that of the Italian and French participle adjectives *riconoscente* and *reconnaissant*, which stands for being thankful and showing gratitude – in other words, *recognizing* that ‘I owe you one’. Because of such polysemy, philosophical inquiry has, on the one hand, the difficult task of working its way through nuances that are possibly undetected even for native speakers themselves, and, on the other, of not depending totally on lexical analysis. A good example of

Re-cognition. It is the normatively most neutral meaning, since it indicates a certain cognitive attitude: it is about identifying something *for what it is*. As ‘identification’ already makes clear, this attitude does not coincide with an attributive act, since other’s qualities that I encounter are supposedly not ascribed, but rather ‘received’ by the knower.

I chose ‘re-cognition’ for two main reasons. First, both Ricoeur and Ikäheimo and Laitinen define this level of recognition with the term ‘*identification*’. While there is clearly a link between the two terms, avoiding flattening the former on the latter can prevent us from falling into some risks (made explicit by Markell and Bedorf) entailed in the relation with the concept of ‘identity’ – recognizing x as *that* x does not merely mean identifying it: there is something more. The second reason concerns the prefix ‘re-’, as opposed to the prefix ‘an-’ of *anerkennen*. The first is rightly understood by Honneth – and not only him –³² as implying a repetition, so that ‘recognizing’ could be considered as equivalent to ‘knowing again’. But it is apt to recall that in Latin the prefix ‘re-’, denotes first of all a *backward movement*, or a return to an anterior state, and only in the third place a repetition.³³ A particularly well suited example is that of *respicio*, which shares its root with *respectus*, respect. *Respicio* does not mean ‘looking again’, but refers to what we do when we turn or take a step back *in order to* look – meanings maintained in ‘regard’, *regard*, *riguardo*, *Rücksicht*. Who is respected, regarded, considered is not merely looked at again, but instead either, being she a ‘distinct person’, others would turn around to look at her, or respect would be implemented in a certain ‘keeping the distance to better watch’: this second meaning is rendered by the duplicity of the German *Achtung*.³⁴

Re-cognizing therefore does not only mean ‘knowing again’, that is, recalling something already known: rather, it more deeply indicates that moment of discontinuity in which we *become aware* of *what* something is, being it something that was already present in our sphere of experience, but somehow undetectably or anonymously. Such ‘becoming aware’ is certainly enabled by certain traits or

this is provided by the distinction between *identification*, *acknowledgment* and *recognition* proposed by Ikäheimo and Laitinen. Cf. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, Introduction; Ikäheimo and Laitinen, ‘Analyzing Recognition: Identification, Acknowledgement, and Recognitive Attitudes towards Persons’.

³² Cf. Cortella, ‘Originarietà Del Riconoscere. La Relazione Di Riconoscimento Come Condizione Di Conoscenza’.

³³ Cf. Alfred Ernout and Alfred Meillet, *Dictionnaire Étymologique de La Langue Latine. Histoire Des Mots*, ed. by Jacques André (Paris: Klincksieck, 2001) s.v. re-, red-.

³⁴ By reversing the dynamic of re-garding – that is, giving more emphasis to ‘being-recognized’ than to ‘recognizing’ – it becomes possible to describe recognition as a form of ‘passive power’, that is, as the ability to attract recognition. It seemingly represents a fruitful alternative to think of the connection between recognition and power out of a domination-determination framework. Cf. Italo Testa, ‘Recognition as Passive Power: Attractors of Recognition, Biopower, and Social Power’, *Constellations*, 24.2 (2016), 192–205.

elements that favor the identification of x, such as the physiognomy of the supermarket customer, whom I recognize as my primary school friend, the scar that reveals the identity of Ulysses on his return to Ithaca,³⁵ the peculiar style that allows me to guess the author of a painting, or the melody that distinguishes the song broadcast in a waiting room. These traits, one might say, allow us to relate the singular quality with the ‘whole’ of x’s identity – an identical scar, on another person, would not reveal Ulysses’ identity, but another’s. And that this relating can be fallacious – a misrecognizing re-cognition – derives in the first place from the dialectic relation between x’s identity and its features: Patroclus who is recognized by all as Achilles because of his armor, or the passer-by who, because of her backpack and her hair, is exchanged for a friend, but is in the end a stranger.

So far, however, the meaning of re-cognizing does not differ much from that of identifying – and in fact in many of these cases we are still within the *erkennen*. The slight and at times elusive difference is that a certain normative dimension – even if minimal – cannot be ruled out, since apperceiving something for what it is would somehow entail an invitation to assume *certain* (and not other) attitudes towards it. The daily use of the term can help us again. I recognize myself in the mirror, and I can fix my hair or, recognizing someone on the street, I can decide whether to greet them or lower my gaze: both these possibilities are *enabled* by recognizing. The same holds true even if recognizee and recognizer are not persons. I recognize the situation of being late and therefore I speed up the pace;³⁶ two states recognize each other and do not cross the respective borders, or do so. Or, I recognize the no entry sign, and stretch my route. Even, I recognize that what I have in my hand is a pen (and not a pencil), so I do not underline the book I borrowed, as I was about to do. As I see it, this level of recognition comes very close to the *antecedent recognition* depicted by Honneth in *Reification*, even if his interpersonal approach was still stronger than the matters at hand. Taking into account the most borderline case addressed in the debate following Honneth’s Tanner Lectures – slavery –, our survey on the meaning of ‘re-cognition’ arguably allows us to say that even this case implies minimal, but decisive, normative dimensions. Reifying a slave implies recognizing them as human being. For in order to have a reification process we need a non-thing that is objectified: one cannot reify a stone, if not in a very poetical

³⁵ Cf. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, pp. 72–75.

³⁶ “It isn’t as if being in a position to acknowledge something is *weaker* than being in a position to know it. On the contrary: from my acknowledging that I am late it follows that I know I’m late (which is what my words say); but from my knowing I am late, it does not follow that I acknowledge I’m late”; Cavell, p. 237. Although the term ‘acknowledging’ brings with it several implications, it seems to me useful to point out that already at the level of re-cognizing there is a difference with bare knowing and, therefore, with identifying – a difference in which re-cognizing seems in many cases to have a genetic and categorical priority, recalling *Reification*.

sense. So, the atrocity of slavery derive precisely from this minimal level of recognizing. Here we can also grasp the usefulness of distinguishing this first form of recognition, which would show itself as underlying even moral wrongs.³⁷ And this hinges on what Bedorf underlines: one cannot misrecognize what is already fully misrecognized, thus not appearing in our field of experience as the *x* it is.

From the variety of these examples we can sketch five fundamental elements. First of all, re-cognizing corresponds to an attitude of *becoming aware* of what stands before oneself for what it is. Second, of course, such ‘what it is’ is always *contextualized*, eventual, and therefore potentially problematic and questionable. Third, from such becoming aware it would be reasonable to expect one to *act accordingly*: saying this does not imply that the content of recognition *causes* certain reactions, but that it informs our actions. It is important to underline that by recognizing we are invited to take on a certain stance: not every cognitive performance or identification implies that, whilst re-cognition apparently does. Fourth, re-cognizee and re-cognizer can be *non-human*. Finally, such stance, if interpersonal, can – but not must – be reciprocal, according to different degrees. Two acquaintances who meet on the street re-cognize each other as human beings, but it may be that only one of them recalls (knows-again) who the other is. In any case, the *minimal normative indication* already consists in re-cognizing the other as a human being, which prevents me, for example, from trying to find a door handle on her shoulder, but it does not prevent me – indeed it *enables* me – to insult her or treat her badly, for instance.

Acknowledgment. This second nuance of meaning alludes to the stance one assumes when one accepts the other for what it is, *expressing a confirmation of such acceptance*. The subtle distinction with re-cognizing would consist in the greater degree of active, *voluntative* involvement on the part of the acknowledger,³⁸ who would not only adapt her acting to other’s features, but would also *perform* gestures that show that. That this can coincide with attributive utterances or gestures, however, is not to be understood as something arbitrarily at disposal of the acknowledger, since those expressions are mostly experienced by the participants as an (adequate) response to the other as it presents itself: acknowledgment is a matter of accepting and expressing, confirming the other with regard to what is perceived *to be due* to it. A more normative horizon is therefore embedded in this kind of (inter-)actions, for they represent a *responsive process of evaluation*. For example, a judge acknowledges a certain petition submitted to her as conforming to the legal code, or a poet is considered as unjustly unacknowledged by his contemporaries. On the first page of a text – ‘acknowledgments’ – thanks are made public to those who

³⁷ Cf. Butler, ‘Taking Another’s View: Ambivalent Implications’; Geuss.

³⁸ Cf. Wildt, “‘Recognition’ in Psychoanalysis”, p. 191.

contributed to its drafting. The acquaintance I met on the street is sad or upset, and I acknowledge it by asking her how is she doing. Also in this case the dynamic is not to be limited to the interpersonal sphere. It can be said that the *law* acknowledges the validity of a claim, the government acknowledges an emergency, and that the court acknowledges the constitutionality (or otherwise) of a bill. Indeed, acknowledgment is rarely understood as *directly* addressed to *x*, but rather, and above all, to *certain traits* of *x*, her efforts, status, role, truthfulness, validity, or performances. For instance, acknowledging what has been said is not primarily assessing its being pronounced, but it regards its being true or false, appropriate or not, insightful or misleading. Returning to the example of the no entry sign can help us to further understand this factor with respect to the difference emerging with recognition: I *re-cognize* the no entry sign, I *acknowledge* that norm's validity and that crossing, given the circumstances, is wrong, so I walk away. So, as Markell stresses, what matters in acknowledging is not so much knowing, but what we do given and in front of what we experience.

Also these examples inform us with regard to five elements. First, acknowledging coincides with accepting something *as* something, giving public expression to the content at stake, thus confirming and admitting it. Secondly, also in this case, the correctness of the acknowledgments is all but obvious. Third, such adequacy has to be evaluated on two sides. For both apperception and response can fail, because 'accepting' and 'admitting' have a twofold nature, allude to a holistic fashion of gestures that are both passive and active in principle. I can truly appreciate my coworker's contributions (thus acknowledging them), but do not express it during a meeting (thus not acknowledging them). Fourth, acknowledger and acknowledged can be *non-human*. Finally, I think, within an interpersonal relationship acknowledgment in the most cases outlines precisely the thin, diachronic mutuality we have seen in *recognition as appropriate judgment*: the master can acknowledge that the servant has done a good job, and the second the first as his master, so as appropriate judge expressing an appropriate judgment. But that would be the case even of school grades: the teacher evaluates the students' performances as expressing some of their traits and efforts, expressing such evaluation through the grade she attributes to their tests. The evaluation is considered an 'acknowledgment' if respects two conditions: first, if the students in turn acknowledge the teacher's role, for a note written on the same test by a classmate would only be a number; second, if it is perceived as fitting to one's performance, thus accepting the grade. This set of practices is therefore strictly normative in so far as it consists of evaluative (inter-)actions. But from this does not necessarily derive a particular

moral standard for the gestures that the participants address each other, i.e. the instantiation of *personifying* practices – as in the case of master-servant.³⁹

Mutual recognition. This third meaning is described by Honneth as exclusively interpersonal, mutual, and symmetrical. Hereby, it is fundamental to notice that the focus shifts on recognition *relations*, whose characterizing *gestures/acts* would possess a certain specificity. For they would not simply address other's features, nor her performances. Rather, Honneth argues, the heart of mutual recognition would be the participants' mutual authorization to take part in a space-for-freedom, which is accompanied by both taking on a co-authoritative status. This status would neither be granted to nor apperceived in the other, but would emerge as authorization's side-effect. The fundamental step, therefore, is for Honneth to untie recognition from the lexicon of identity: the matter at stake would not be who or what the other *is*, rather our being a 'We' by drawing together our freedom.

It is important to stress here that recognition relationships do not depend on *exchanges* of different recognition gestures. Let's say, for example, that I have a rather strict routine for going to university: on the train, I always prefer to get in the same carriage and try to sit in the same place. Then, when I am about to take the subway, I head to the point of the platform that is most functional for getting out quickly from the arrival station, and so on. After a while, I notice that another person has similar habits: after all, it is quite common for commuters. With time, we re-cognize each other more and more readily, sometimes we even chat and are so used to seeing each other, that it becomes easy for both to acknowledge if the other is tired, relaxed, stressed, and so on. Do we share, for this reason, a relationship of mutual recognition? Not necessarily: the experience of mutuality that this concept seems to presuppose does not seem to derive from the sum of individual gestures of reciprocity that we can exchange. And in this experience of mutuality, *continuity* – which certainly represents one of the elements of the recognitional spheres' institutionality described by Honneth – plays a decisive role. One element determining this discontinuity between gestures and relationships is therefore represented by the fact that a relationship of mutual recognition certainly depends on the acts of recognition that the participants exchange with each other, but at a more fundamental level by the second-order awareness with which they experience such interactions: only at this level can one speak of a relationship.

Clearly, re-cognition, acknowledgment, and mutual recognition overlap semantically and practically, making any rigid separation almost impossible.

³⁹ Cf. Ikäheimo, 'Hegel's Concept of Recognition—What Is It?'; Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen, 'Esteem for Contributions to the Common Good: The Role of Personifying Attitudes and Instrumental Value', in *The Plural States of Recognition*, ed. by Michael Seymour (Basingstoke - New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 98–121.

However, I believe it is possible to identify non-causal derivative connections, i.e. modes of co-implication between these practical forms, which can also be described respectively as *apperception*, *acceptance/admission*, and *authorization*. First of all, mutual authorization implies that participants apperceive each other as human beings and accept each other as free beings. Mutual recognition cannot be seen as disconnected from these first two ‘steps’. However, it itself would represent also the condition of new forms of acknowledgment, since only from within and starting from the mutual authorization the participants can acknowledge each other as players of the cooperative (re-)formulations of the norms governing their acting. Secondly, these three levels do not necessarily have to proceed in agreement. Let us think of the case of marriage described by Hegel, as it is taken by Honneth, where equal access to the space-for-freedom would be prevented by the pervasive images on *the* female nature. In this case, one could say, the two participants re-cognize each other as human beings, and as those specific individuals who are, respectively, each other’s spouse. Given that, in principle, they should mutually recognize each other as members of the sphere that they share as equals, i.e. their own marriage. However, the husband does not *acknowledge* the wife – and the latter, having internalized this judgment, herself – as capable of acting normatively, as he supposedly does. Leaving aside the historical-cultural causes of this and how the participants could become aware of that, we are for the moment interested in highlighting that certain modes of acknowledgment would undermine the quality of mutual recognition, or even prevent it. If sharing such second-order ‘We’ of recognition – as marriage – does not guarantee an emancipatory relationship because of the ways of acknowledgment, it is clear that recognition relationships can provide a normative resource if they meet certain, further, conditions. They do share a ‘We’, but they do not acknowledge each other as equals. Plainly, the concept of mutual recognition needs to be clarified further.

6.3 A Detrascendentalized Account: Limitation and We-Structures

This brief overview of the meanings of ‘recognition’, which can be divided into the three connotations of apperception, acceptance/admission, and authorization, has, if possible, made the picture even more intricate. However, we have gained three key elements.

The first concerns the specificity of recognition as practical form. Although they differ in terms of objects, modes of execution, logics of action, actors at stake, all the above mentioned examples concern a particular practical form in which the agent ‘allows’ herself to be informed by otherness’ features, marking a practical

discontinuity with the previous state of affairs. In recognizing, in any of its forms, a certain awareness rises, whereby *alter's* priority somewhat leads our doings. This also applies to views that conceive recognition more in terms of 'rewarding', as in the case of Elizabeth exhibited by Amy Allen.

Secondly, shifting the focus to mutual recognition, we have seen how it moves (at times ambiguously) between two levels, which Ricoeur distinguishes as *logic of reciprocity* and *experience of mutuality*. The pervasiveness of the logic of reciprocity, which essentially concerns every interaction, is what leads, in my view, to the confusion of recognition and intersubjectivity. Clearly, also according to Honneth the intersubjective formation of the person plays a fundamental role. For it justifies human vulnerability as normative starting point and helps in outlining the basic elements of the coordination of social action. But this cannot lead us to superimpose a normative concept of mutual recognition on any socially contextualized interaction. Or, better: any interactions imply a fundamental level of reciprocity, normative to the extent that their participants know their acting as bound by (even thinnest) role obligations. But, first, this can be almost devoid of ethical-moral connotations. For even revenge responds to such a logic of reciprocity, trading deed for deed.⁴⁰ Second – and above all – the division of role obligations represents a side-effect with reference to a third instance, the cause or purpose for which we find ourselves in relation. At this level, reciprocal recognition and social integration can be actually superimposed, since, precisely, every social interaction requires this level of reciprocity. Things would be different as far as the experience of mutuality is concerned, which represents a specific second-order awareness on the part of the participants, so that the distance between the complementary obligations and the third instance to which they refer is narrowed almost to the point of disappearing: as Honneth says, recognition cannot be understood as a side-effect, as the non-thematized acceptance/admission of my chess opponent's skills that accompany our playing.⁴¹ From this it would follow that mutual recognition requires extremely specific standards, summarized by Hegel with his definition of the pure concept of recognition: "They *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing each other*."⁴² It is not enough for me to recognize you as my partner for the purpose *x*. Nor would it be enough for both of us to recognize ourselves as fundamental for the joint realization of our we-intention. The relationship of mutual recognition is a relation

⁴⁰ Cf. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, pp. 227–28; J. M. Bernstein, 'Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel's Poetics of Action', in *Beyond Representation. Philosophy and Poetic Imagination*, ed. by Richard Eldridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 34–65 (p. 59).

⁴¹ Cf. Honneth, 'Grounding Recognition: A Rejoinder to Critical Questions', p. 506.

⁴² Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 110, §184.

in which actors are primarily aware of their reflexive comprehending themselves as a 'We'. I will return to this.

Thirdly, since, as Honneth stresses in *Anerkennung*, mutual recognition represents a detranscendentalized interaction, that is, proper to our lifeworld, it emerges as not decouplable, among others practical forms, from re-cognition and acknowledgment. But precisely in *Anerkennung* – contrarily to *Reification* and 'Grounding Recognition' – Honneth lacks to emphasize that a full-fledged mutual authorization can only occur if it relies on appropriate forms of apperception and acceptance/admission. The normative interpersonal dimension cannot be disjoint from the first two (broadly understood) epistemological ones. If one does not want to discard the term 'recognition' in its specificity, some elements have to be said with regard to the difficult matter of how – in both meanings of 'under what conditions' and 'with what features' – the other appears to me. Without at least some hints in this direction, the risks are to de-detranscendentalize the discourse on recognition, to empty the term of its semantic content and to fail to justify why the morality proper to recognition would become to be grasped only in a mutual and interpersonal sense – thereby depowering its critical potential. In Laitinen's words, in order to defend a paradigm oriented by the mutuality insight it would be necessary that specific elements come into play at the level of adequacy regarding among persons.

If, in fact, the concept of recognition responds to different practices, but if, on the other hand, these share, as defining element, a certain priority given to the other that informs our consequent acting, a first way to distinguish *mutual recognition* without decoupling it from *re-cognition* and *acknowledgment* is to take as a starting point the peculiarity of the recognized object, that is, another human being. To this extent, it does not seem enough to argue that recognition among humans is related only our *second nature*. For our being human has to do also with our *first nature*.⁴³

⁴³ It is no coincidence that Hegel, in describing mutual recognition, starts from a reflection on life, and on that peculiar lifeform that the human being is. With respect to this issue, which I must leave open cf. Italo Testa, 'Naturalmente Sociali. Per Una Teoria Generale Del Riconoscimento', *Quaderni Di Teoria Sociale*, 5 (2005), 165–217; Italo Testa, *La Natura Del Riconoscimento. Riconoscimento Naturale e Ontologia Sociale in Hegel (1801-1806)* (Milano - Udine: Mimesis, 2010); Italo Testa, 'How Does Recognition Emerge from Nature? The Genesis of Consciousness in Hegel's Jena Writings', *Critical Horizons*, 13.2 (2012), 176–96; Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp. 103-06, §§ 166-73; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830). Vol. 3: Philosophy of Mind*, ed. by M. J. Inwood, trans. by W. Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 152–62, §§ 424-437; Ikäheimo, 'Hegel's Concept of Recognition—What Is It?', p. 13. In this sense, it seems reductive to describe the spiritual dimension as exclusively normative, as a mere departure from the natural. In the same way, to disqualify certain Hegelian perspectives (e.g. on the relationship between states) as characterized by the presence of 'too much nature' somewhat misses the target (cf. Patrice Canivez, 'Pathologies of Recognition', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 37.8 (2011), 851–87). The process of mediation of natural immediacy – in *this* consists its sublation – does not fall into a transcendentalism, in fact, only if, even considering the fundamental role of *Bildung* and habits, this process is always to be reformulated. In other words, the objective spirit keeps on being bound to

Observing this, of course, does not coincide with the intent to propose a physiologist or biologist reductionism, since the access to our ‘first’ nature we are endowed with can be found from within the second.⁴⁴ In the same way, it is not intended to make the discourse on mutual recognition coincide with a paradigm of onto- and phylogenetic processes, since, as we have seen, the former and social integration, although intertwined, differ.

In trying to take a step forward in understanding what is specific to recognition among human beings, I believe that a fundamental element is placed by Wildt through the distinction between *propositional* and *personal recognition*.⁴⁵ With the first expression Wildt indicates what we referred to using re-cognition and acknowledgment, i.e. a more or less affirmative attitude through which one takes notice and accepts the most varied phenomena ‘for what they are’, be it a situation or a problem, practical norms or state laws, down to one’s own faults. What would distinguish such forms from *personal* recognition would be a different experience of *limitation* that ‘encountering’ another person would imply. Recognizing the other person represents a *discontinuity* that I cannot come to terms with as easily as when I stumble upon an object: the other is *alter*. To say this does not coincide with re-proposing an atomistic perspective on the individual, so that we would fall back into the modern idea of a subject already formed before entering the world, regarding identity as a *fait accompli*. Instead, I argue that such limitation is to be understood in phenomenological terms, then similar to Heidegger’s, as a *disruption of reference*: the other appears as always posing to me a *certain* – in some cases merely potential – unhandiness and unusefulness, which to a certain extent puzzles me.⁴⁶ Think of the transition from *Begierde* to Self-Consciousness described by Hegel precisely in terms of the inability to nullify the self that appears before me;⁴⁷ or of the caregiver’s *obstinacy* before the aggressive gestures of the child described by Winnicott and taken up by Honneth in *The Struggle for Recognition* – which plays a decisive role by developing the ability to stay by oneself without fear.⁴⁸ Or, again of what has been said about *respicio* and *Achtung*. Synthetically, *alter* is limit for me in a way that an

human needs and natural resources; cf. Siep, ‘Mutual Recognition: Hegel and Beyond’, p. 127. For a different view on the relation between nature and spirit, and more precisely on subject’s animality cf. Luca Illetterati, ‘Nature, Subjectivity and Freedom: Moving from Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature’, in *I That Is We, We That Is I. Perspectives on Contemporary Hegel. Social Ontology, Recognition, Naturalism, and the Critique of Kantian Constructivism*, ed. by Italo Testa and Luigi Ruggiu (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 183–201.

⁴⁴ Cf. Krüger, *Homo Absconditus. Helmuth Plessners Philosophische Anthropologie Im Vergleich*, pp. 90–95.

⁴⁵ Cf. Wildt, “‘Recognition’ in Psychoanalysis”.

⁴⁶ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), para. 16. Most of Heidegger’s examples are by the way very similar to the basic form we described as re-cognition.

⁴⁷ Cf. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp. 103–8.

⁴⁸ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, p. 101 ff.

object cannot be – and vice versa. Focusing on these modes of manifestation avoids the assumption of an undisputed image of human nature, but allows to access to some basic peculiarities of the human living being, which are well reconciled with the perspective of Honneth taken as a whole, especially with his early writings. In fact, in presenting itself as limitation, the other appears first of all as body and voice, but, above all, as intentionally projecting itself, as *acting* being, that is, as fundamentally decentering itself.⁴⁹ In this way, *alter* ‘invites’ me to attitudes of *self-restriction* – that must not be morally loaded – in which reside *minimal normative indications*.⁵⁰ From this follows that the threshold of such modes of other’s manifestation should not be thought of as a transcendental framework, if one equates ‘transcendental’ with ‘ahistorical’. Rather, it is transcendental to the extent that it provides legalities, but it is historical to the extent that the *a priori* is already *a posteriori* qua social, cultural, historical context: a *detranscendentalized* second nature, an enabled enabling condition.

Emphasizing that the other appears in its being limitation to and for me does not mean landing onto forms of atomism, whereby human interaction’s aim would be to bridge an unbridgeable gap between *ego* and *alter*. In this sense, taking as a starting point – as Honneth does – forms of interaction and spheres of social action, this limitation instantiates not just in an interruption of multi-personal forms, i.e. as it is by misrecognition or nonrecognition. Rather, it means taking seriously the *opposing tendencies*,⁵¹ the ambivalences that characterize human interaction and recognition among persons – an aspect to be re-evaluated of the negative theories of recognition. Thus a mimetic misinterpretation of ‘being with oneself by the other’ can be avoided, hence not forgetting the first leg of the expression, underlying that every *inter*-relation is *tension* between ego-boundaries and ego-dissolution, *balance* between determinacy and indeterminacy. That such mutual boundaries are not liquefied is also decisive to avoid equating our dependence on ‘recognition’ with the

⁴⁹ Cf. Volker Schürmann, ‘Positionierte Exzentrizität’, in *Philosophische Anthropologie Im 21. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Hans-Peter Krüger and Gesa Lindemann (Berlin: Akademie, 2006), pp. 83–102; Axel Honneth, ‘Decentered Autonomy: The Subject After the Fall’, in *Disrespect. The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), pp. 181–94. While Honneth’s theory certainly derives a number of advantages from taking as its point of departure the negative of misrecognition and, more generally, the unbalance of the individual on otherness – vulnerability, moral injury, decentered and social freedom –, this element is almost always framed from a first-person perspective. The other is rarely described as vulnerable or decentered. I believe that it is useful – also to illuminate the motivational horizon of recognition – to underline that these are structural elements that also pertain to the other I meet, whom I am invited to recognize.

⁵⁰ These elements – insightfully highlighted by Berendzen – are particularly evident in the only Honnethian analysis of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. Cf. Honneth, ‘From Desire to Recognition: Hegel’s Grounding of Self-Consciousness’; Joseph C. Berendzen, ‘Reciprocity and Self-Restriction in Elementary Recognition’, in *Axel Honneth and the Critical Theory of Recognition*, ed. by Volker Schmitz (Basingstoke - New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 13–39.

⁵¹ Cf. Wildt, “‘Recognition’ in Psychoanalysis”, p. 195 ff.

compulsion to live in the eyes of others.⁵² In other terms, a distinction between recognition and empathy has to be drawn, which consists precisely in the fact that our need for complementarity (*Ergänzungsbedürftigkeit*) is fulfilled via acts of self-limitation towards the other, thus outlining a more complex image of *unity*. A unity – that of mutual recognition – which is not homogeneous indeterminacy, but the determinacy of you and me disclosing to *us*.

If it is true, then, that mutual recognition requires as its moments re-cognizing and acknowledging, re-cognition and acknowledgment alone are not sufficient to have mutual recognition. Keeping that the dimension of re-cognizing is seemingly not under question, some issues emerge if one sticks to the moment of acknowledgment alone. In particular, we have already encountered four risks during our reconstruction.

First, the fact that I acknowledge the other does not in any way prevent me from subjugating her. On the contrary, taking notice of the other as limit can be precisely the motivational and social ground for an asymmetrical relationship. Moreover, even if I ‘knew’ the other in an unquestionably positive way, there would be no inner logic that could guarantee the relationship from being ideological – in the sense of Honneth’s account on ideological recognition.⁵³ Secondly, the very fact of encountering the other could be correctly perceived as a determination of her possibilities, just as she is of mine. From here to a (constitutive) power relation the step would be short.⁵⁴ For emerging under other’s gaze assumes the traits of a structurally misrecognizing over-determination, since we are already posed in *certain* (and not other) conditions by the other. Third, if such ‘evaluative knowledge’ widens to the point of coinciding with individual socialization – meaning ‘recognition’ as subject(ificat)ion – then it is difficult to overlook the homologating and levelling power of such acts, at least as viaticum of pre-formed ethical-cultural patterns: the “subjection of desire”, once internalized, would lead to the “desire *for* subjection” in terms similar to Elizabeth’s example.⁵⁵ The fourth and last risk

⁵² Cf. Wildt, “‘Recognition’ in Psychoanalysis”, p. 205; Frederick Neuhouser, ‘Rousseau and the Human Drive for Recognition (*Amour Propre*)’, in *The Philosophy of Recognition. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch and Christopher F. Zurn (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), pp. 21–46.

⁵³ This helps to consolidate the persuasion that a recognition paradigm is not self-sufficient if it is understood to be relevant to the intersubjective dyad alone; cf. Siep, p. 135 ff. As has already been shown, however, Honneth (more or less explicitly) refers to triadic forms, both to justify the forms of recognition and to explain their formation.

⁵⁴ Cf. Lepold.

⁵⁵ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection*, p. 19. “What is it, then, that is desired in subjection? Is it a simple love of the shackles, or is there a more complex scenario at work? How is survival to be maintained if the terms by which existence is guaranteed are precisely those that demand and institute subordination? On this understanding, subjection is the paradoxical effect of a regime of power in which the very ‘conditions of existence,’ the possibility of continuing as a recognizable social

coincides with an extreme generic idea of ‘recognition’, characteristic of a certain *automatism* that pertains to the Kantian account on respect.⁵⁶ Thereby, ‘recognition’ would concern *any* interaction among humans merely because the participants are aware that they are dealing with persons, and the specificity of the concept risks to be lost in a misleading coincidence with reciprocity in general.

Such perspectives’ shortcoming would then not be, as Honneth maintains, that they confuse recognition with pathologies of recognition or with classifying linguistic practices, but that they make mutual recognition coincide with acknowledgment, namely with that practice, at most thinly reciprocal, symbolically expressing and confirming personal traits by means of taking notice of their doings, achievements, performances. In other words, they cannot account for the specificity of the experience of mutuality, since they basically disregard the second-order *We-forms* implied in the very concept of mutual recognition.

In order to better grasp the two levels at stake – and their inevitable practical interweaving – it is useful to have recourse to Michael Quante’s reading of the opening sentence of the section A. of the chapter on Self-Consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁵⁷

Das Selbstbewußtsein ist *an* und *für sich*, indem und dadurch, daß es für ein Anderes an und für sich ist; d. h. es ist nur als ein Anerkanntes.⁵⁸

Self-consciousness is *in* and *for itself* while and as a result of its being in and for itself for an other; i.e., it is only as a recognized being.⁵⁹

According to Quante, the fact that Hegel specifies that recognition takes place according to an *indem and* to a *dadurch, daß* would make it possible to identify two different logics at stake: those of a *when-relation* and a *by-relation* (in Pinkard’s translation: ‘while’ and ‘as a result’). The latter would insist on the *causal* character of recognition gestures, in which the self-consciousness B would be structured *as a result* of A’s recognizing it. This dimension would in turn be divided into two subclasses, which Hegel inherits from Fichte. The first is *diachronic* and *asymmetric*, that is, it coincides with the one-sided *Aufforderung* of a temporally prior self-

being, requires the formation and maintenance of the subject in subordination.” Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection*, p. 27.

⁵⁶ Cf. Timothy L. Brownlee, ‘Alienation and Recognition in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit’, *Philosophical Forum*, 46.4 (2015), 377–96.

⁵⁷ Cf. Michael Quante, “‘The Pure Notion of Recognition’: Reflections on the Grammar of the Relation of Recognition in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit”, in *The Philosophy of Recognition. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch and Christopher F. Zurn (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), pp. 89–106.

⁵⁸ Hegel, *Phänomenologie Des Geistes*, Werke in Zwanzig Bänden (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), iii, p. 145.

⁵⁹ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 108, § 178.

consciousness that puts into play the elements necessary for a (more or less active) *individual-genetic* process on the part of B. The second, instead, would shed light on the *motivational* side of recognition relations. Here, both A's invitation and B's eventual response are conceived as being mutually *conditioning* each other: A treats B having already recognized her as free being, having already experienced her being a limit for him – and vice versa as far as B's answer is concerned. Even if that happens in discreet moments between them, both the invitation and the answer imply a prior recognition of the other that conditions the modalities and motivations of the reciprocal approach, according to a hypothetical game of mutual conditioning that could continue *ad infinitum*.⁶⁰ Although synchronic and symmetrical, this dynamic would still be characterized by a certain dichotomy of first- and second-person perspective: the relationship does not overcome the singularities of the intentions at stake. If we take a closer look, both the four risks mentioned above and the criticisms made by Markell and Bedorf move within this perspective, thus still tied to an analysis of individual *acts* of recognizing.

This singularity would instead be overcome in an when-relation, with which we can see a shift from the first and second person to the first person plural: “*I* that is *we* and the *we* that is *I*.”⁶¹ Here, more than on individual acts of recognition, the emphasis is on the *qualitative* difference that *structures* the relationship. The relationships of mutual recognition would shape and, *at the same time*, be instantiated in and through We-structures in which “the contemporaneity of two actions” is comprehended by the participants as “constitutive for one another in the sense that being moments of an overall structure is part of their identity conditions as individual doings.”⁶² Thus, the key to understand the distinction between acknowledgment and mutual recognition would not become identifiable just in the diachronicity or simultaneity of A or B's gestures. Neither can we understand the issue taking symmetry as our polestar, since it also instantiates in the bad reciprocity of revenge or in patterns of purposive functionalization of the other into logics *à la do ut des*. Rather, the specificity of mutual recognition emerges by the *becoming shared of the first-person perspective*, so that there are no discreet I and you, but *us*. My acting can instantiate only through *our* acting, whereby the coordination of our doings does not merely represent an aim or an achievement, but the condition of possibility of *our being actors*.

⁶⁰ Cf. Fichte, p. 42.

⁶¹ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 108.

⁶² Quante, “‘The Pure Notion of Recognition’: Reflections on the Grammar of the Relation of Recognition in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit”, p. 102.

6.4 A Demanding Concept: Sketches for a Generative Account

With this further clarification, we have brought into play the last element of the demanding concept of mutual recognition that we are looking for. Summing up, it has to meet six conditions.

First, it must embed the *complexity of its own moments* – identifiable, but essentially holistic in their actualization: re-cognition, acknowledgment, and mutual recognition. What we are looking for is a complex practical bundle that is articulated on several levels, all dialectically concurring and occurring in shaping ‘recognition’. That is to say, we have to take into account both the when- and the by-relation in their mutual intertwining, still being able to distinguish them, thus not making them collapse on each other.

Second, we are on the search of a paradigm that outlines the movement of mutual recognition as *non-automatic*, i.e. as not resulting from the mere fact that two human beings encounter each other. From this would also follow that ‘recognition’ cannot draw its features exclusively from the context in which it take place – it is not enough to say that, for example, two coworkers recognize each other by merely taking each other as coworkers. Consequently, but maintaining the differentiation between by-relation and when-relation, it will be useful to underline the necessity of such automatism which pertains to the logic of reciprocity, but which does not allow to overcome interactional forms oriented by and to legal-economic logic of exchange. In this context, the peculiarity of mutual recognition is precisely that of instantiating *non-legal forms of morality and modes of relation* (Wildt), which disclose *thicker* modes of respect than the Kantian one.⁶³

Recognition must therefore – third – be distinguishable, by virtue of its specificity, from individual socialization and reciprocity in general, without abandoning its constitutive connection with sociality and social reproduction. ‘Recognition’ is not simply matter of being humanized, even if it certainly possesses a humanizing role, with regard to all the nuanced levels that ‘human’ entail. The usefulness of pursuing a diversified paradigm of recognition would consist in showing its irreducibility to an act of imprinting – be it biologically, psychologically, or culturally conceived. In this sense, it can be said that recognition represents an ‘inclusion in personhood’,⁶⁴ but not every inclusion in personhood is recognition.

In the same way, the following account on mutual recognition distances itself from the lexicon of identity. Besides rejecting a one-sided idea of attribution, what we must distance ourselves from is the idea that ‘recognition’ coincides with an

⁶³ Cf. Arto Laitinen, ‘Hegel and Respect for Persons’, in *Roots of Respect. A Historic-Philosophical Itinerary*, ed. by Giovanni Giorgini and Elena Irrera (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), pp. 171–86.

⁶⁴ Cf. Heikki Ikäheimo, ‘A Vital Human Need: Recognition as Inclusion in Personhood’, *European Journal of Political Theory*, 8.1 (2009), 31–45.

heteronomous constitution of personhood; an idea that, after all, make the concept being permeated and even assimilated with reifying or labelling gestures – and what would distinguish Honneth’s view from, say, Althusser’s seems a prior choice about whether is positive or negative that humans are social animals. However, it is necessary to avoid the opposite drift as well, that is to describe an intersubjective practice that is unrelated to the structuring of the individual’s practical identity, which would then be, so to speak, abandoned to a fluid indeterminacy without anchorage points to unfold a biographical path. The distinction between acknowledgment and mutual recognition as moments of ‘recognition’ allows us to distance ourselves equally from the risks of *indeterminacy* and *over-determinacy* regarding the person. With Hegel, we will see that “the most profound form of recognition has little to do with the problematic of identity”, rather its “true meaning” is *reconciliation*.⁶⁵

Fifth, it is necessary to shed light on mutual recognition’s as *inner* logic of progress, one able to avoid the ‘bad infinity’ involved in the succession of fixation and unfixation.⁶⁶ Honneth’s theory attracts most criticism, after all, because it attributes the ‘emancipatory tasks’ to conflict, not to recognition. In spite of *Anerkennung*’s attempt to stress the fragility and provisional character of the recognitional forms, the basic idea seems to remain that the latter play a crystallizing role. The institutional contexts in which such (inter-)actions take place are indeed nothing but coagulations of the (inter-)actions themselves. If on the one hand there is coagulation, on the other hand the task of fluidification is assigned to conflict. But then, if structurally one cannot reach a state of peace (as Ricoeur would like), because this would coincide with theoretically implying an annulment of both surplus of validity and progress, from this follows that every form of recognition is a misrecognizing recognition. Otherwise, what would be the motivations for social conflicts’ rising? Only the insufficiency and the perceived narrowness of the actual forms of recognition can justify struggle. Then, one would almost find oneself, accepting Honneth’s social-normative theory, in the paradoxical situation of rejecting his concept of recognition; for it, by being a crystallized step in the learning progress of social history, has to be structurally fluidified by struggle. It is possible to come out of this impasse if recognition and conflict are not conceived as two alternative moments,⁶⁷ that is if we re-evaluate the *generative capability* of mutual recognition, in terms of its capability to release forms of discontinuity.

⁶⁵ Canivez, pp. 867–68.

⁶⁶ Cf. Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, p. 183 ff.

⁶⁷ Cf. Georg W. Bertram and Robin Celikates, ‘Towards a Conflict Theory of Recognition: On the Constitution of Relations of Recognition in Conflict’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 23.4 (2015), 838–61.

Finally, it is necessary to consider the specificity of our lifeform. This becomes possible, thanks to Hegel, by thinking mutual recognition in relation to a broader theory of action and the medium of language.

6.5 Back to Hegel: Recognition and Forgiveness

It will not come as a surprise that this generative account will be outlined with the help of Hegel. But it may raise eyebrows that this reference is articulated in an analysis of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and, more specifically, of the narrative on confession and forgiveness placed at the end of the ‘Spirit’ section.

Indeed, two criticisms can already be aimed at this choice. The first, shared by Habermas and Honneth, is that in the *Phenomenology* Hegel abandons his previous intersubjective and social-ontological approach in favor of a philosophy of consciousness, a “monological concept of spirit”⁶⁸ that would be little suited to contributing for a post-metaphysical social philosophy. From this would follow that the shadow cast over the whole narrative by the last section – Absolute Knowing – would seem to thwart any attempt to mediate the ‘cumbersomeness’ of a metaphysical ‘end of history’, even more that in the *Philosophy of Right* and in the *Philosophy of History* themselves. In other words, this repressed intersubjectivity would not only undermine the role of reciprocal recognition, but teleologically functionalize it, unbalancing the dialectic between particular and universal.⁶⁹ Secondly, even if one wanted to refer to the *Phenomenology* in order to investigate ‘recognition’, the best place from which to draw elements would be the section on Self-Consciousness – the pure concept of recognition, the struggle for life and death, the master-servant dialectic. These elements would not be equally available in parable on forgiveness, which after all would merely concern the reintegration of the individual into the ethical community, the first adjusting to the latter. For it is difficult to overlook that this whole narrative can stand for nothing but the integration of the “outsiders” into the community⁷⁰ – thus not differing so much

⁶⁸ Honneth, *The I in We. Studies in the Theory of Recognition*, p. viii.

⁶⁹ Besides what has been said by Ludwig Siep with respect to this issue cf. also Jürgen Habermas, ‘From Kant to Hegel and Back Again - The Move towards Detranscendentalization’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 7.2 (1999), 129–57; Michael Theunissen, ‘The Repressed Intersubjectivity of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right’, in *Hegel and Legal Theory*, ed. by Cornell Drucilla, Rosenfeld Michel, and Carlson David (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 3–63.

⁷⁰ Ludwig Siep, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by Daniel Smyth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 200. Siep obviously sketches a more Hegelian scenario to the extent that such integration cannot be one-sided, meaning it ‘un-dialectical’ – but the impression persists that forgiveness is nothing more than a subjection of the confessing conscience.

from what is addressed in *Anerkennung* with the idea of classifying linguistic hierarchical practices.

Clearly, these two objections pose very broad issues about Hegel's thinking in general and its relevance to contemporary debates. And this difficulty is compounded by the multiplicity of starting perspectives with which we approach both the concept of recognition and Hegel himself: ethical-moral, social-ontological, political, critical-normative, and so on. It is therefore equally clear that this is not the place to definitively settle these interpretative issues on the *Phenomenology*. Many of them are to be left open. However, being our aim a deeper understanding of 'recognition', I believe that some elements may provide a framework in which it becomes possible that the two objections mentioned above will not undermine our attempt.

The first question concerns the choice to refer to the *Phenomenology* rather than to the *Philosophy of Right*, which is usually preferred in the contemporary debate on recognition. The decisive element in the first text consists in its narrative structure, which provides for the coexistence and distinction of two perspectives: consciousness' *experience* and the *for us* of the philosophical gaze. If we do not want to reduce this 'for us' to an ahistorical eye, it is easy to find in this doubled view one of the classical themes of critical theory, so decisive for Honneth: theory's attempt to identify with social actors, to let the emancipatory interests set the theoretical agenda. Certainly, identifying this nexus requires not only not to reduce 'for us' to an ahistorical eye, but to grant a certain 'autonomy' to the various figures of the *Phenomenology*, without dissolving their peculiarity in their supposed end point. In other words, it is a question of taking seriously the concept of *experience* (*Erfahrung*), the gestation and the work of the negative that characterize this text in a peculiar way. It is a matter of conceiving the 'for us' as a hermeneutical vanishing point – i.e. as a third dimension's emerging –, not as an element that functionalizes to itself its self-generated moments. As far as the question of recognition is concerned, the advantage offered by taking this twofold perspective into account is to have leeway in order to place Ricoeur's distinction of logic of reciprocity and experience of mutuality. That is, to outline the contours and the meaning of the *between* of the relationship between A and B, to better understand the role of symmetry and asymmetry in the relationships of recognition. Thus, moving between these two levels makes it possible not to get totally unbalanced either on what the participants experience or on what happens behind them. For, after all, this twofold perspective draws our attention on those moments of the *Phenomenology* in which it is no longer twofold, but the 'for us' of theory becomes the 'for us' of experience.

The second issue regards the choice of the Spirit section, rather than the seemingly more natural option offered by that on Self-Consciousness. This focus is motivated by the fact that in this section, Hegel brings many of the consciousness' experiential steps previously outlined into the historicity and sociality proper to our lifeform and lifeworld. In particular, a significant relevance is covered by the detranscendentalization of action-theoretical elements depicted in the subsections B and C of 'Reason' (especially paragraphs b. 'Law-Giving Reason', and c. 'Reason as Testing Laws'). In the same way, many questions left open by the evident gap between the 'pure concept of recognition' and the struggle for life and death, on the one hand, and master-servant dialectic, on the other, find their place in the context of our being-in-recognition, rather than in the struggle for it. In other words – said in more Honnethian terms – the discussion on recognition is here dealt with starting from our second-natural world, already inhabited by normative orientations and promises instantiated within relational and institutional frameworks. Evidently, here Hegel does not distinguish the spheres of recognition, but outlines a properly objective phase of spirit. In this sense, starting from 'Spirit' rather than from 'Self-Consciousness' makes it possible to remove the *Phenomenology's* account on recognition from the misunderstanding that usually affects it, being it often "misconstrued as a dialogical interaction between subjects rather than as the dialectical development of a social world through the interaction of subjects with their natural, cultural, institutional and political environments".⁷¹

Thirdly, the choice to focus on paragraph 'Conscience; the Beautiful Soul, Evil, and its Forgiveness' of the Morality section is mainly motivated by two elements. First, by the fact that, given the thrift with which Hegel uses the term *Anerkennung* in the *Phenomenology*, it is not difficult to notice that its recurrences are concentrated in section B 'Self-Consciousness' and in the paragraph previously mentioned.⁷² The difference between the two episodes is, however, abysmal if we consider that the first, a proto-historical narration, in fact, does not lead to a relationship of recognition in the strict sense, while the second, which bears all the historical-social evolution that precedes it, represents a 'point of light' in the succession of failures, self-deceptions and denials of which *Phenomenology* is interwoven: it *can* lead to a relationship of mutual recognition – in a way and in a sense yet to be seen. What has been outlined in the pure concept of recognition is not fully realized nor in the *antagonistic relation* between desiring self-

⁷¹ Tobias, p. 115.

⁷² Cf. Siep, 'Recognition in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Contemporary Practical Philosophy', pp. 108–9.

consciousnesses, nor in the master-servant relationship,⁷³ but has ‘to wait’ for its actualization until the experience of mutual forgiveness.⁷⁴ Secondly, there is literally a world that separates the struggle for life and death and forgiveness. However, it is easy to see that it is the second episode that helps us most in delineating a normative (demanding) concept of mutual recognition. First of all, the starting situation of the two consciousnesses at stake is oriented by their moral acting, rather than by *Begierde*: conflict is therefore not engaged with sword or spear, but is a verbal conflict, a struggle of arguments. The poles are in fact mediated by language, speech (*Rede*) rather than by the desire to assert oneself against the other. The emergence of unity, not only for us, but also for the participants, from the “aporetic experience of conflict” instantiates in the fact that consciousness “learns to *relativize* its worldview, to see it as *one of many* perspectives.”⁷⁵ It learns that is to include the other in its view, to distance oneself from a coincidence with one’s own acts. What Hegel describes through the binomial confession-forgiveness is the actualization of a relationship in which the participants conceive themselves as such, recognize themselves as mutually recognizing each other – which cannot be implied as second-order awareness neither by the struggle, nor by the master-servant relation.⁷⁶

6.5.1. Guilt as Finitude and Being-For-Others

⁷³ This statement may be questionable especially if one considers the description proposed by Hegel in the *Encyclopaedia*, where the master also exercises duties of care towards the servant, thus in some way reciprocating the work of the latter. Cf. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)*. Vol. 3: *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 152–64, §§ 424–37; Ikäheimo, ‘Hegel’s Concept of Recognition—What Is It?’ The whole question is how to conceive of the *quality* of the necessary and sufficient conditions for a mutual recognition relationship – what we have tried to clarify by distinguishing between acknowledgment and mutual recognition, and between by- and when-relation. If it is certainly true that the master is such only *when* with the servant (and vice versa), one may wonder if here there is a ‘We’ at all.

⁷⁴ Cf. Robert Sinnerbrink, ‘Recognitive Freedom: Hegel and the Problem of Recognition’, in *Contemporary Perspectives in Critical and Social Philosophy*, ed. by John Rundell and others (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2004), pp. 271–95 (p. 276).

⁷⁵ Cortella, ‘Originarietà Del Riconoscere. La Relazione Di Riconoscimento Come Condizione Di Conoscenza’, p. 153, our translation. Here Cortella is not talking explicitly about the experience of forgiveness, but is describing the emergence of self-consciousness by replacing the medium of the struggle with that of the word. The result of this modified description, however, is very similar to the closing of the Morality section, further evidence of the close link between the two passages.

⁷⁶ In what follows I will resort above all to Bertram and Brandom’s interpretations, because they seem to me well suited to illuminate how Hegel can offer a contribution to the issues that have arisen. Cf. Georg W. Bertram, *Hegels »Phänomenologie Des Geistes«*. *Ein Systematischer Kommentar* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2017), chap. 7; Georg W. Bertram, ‘Hegel Und Die Frage Der Intersubjektivität. Die “Phänomenologie Des Geistes” Als Explikation Der Sozialen Strukturen Der Rationalität’, *Deutsche Zeitschrift Für Philosophie*, 56.6 (2008), 877–98; Robert B. Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel’s Phenomenology* (Cambridge - London: Harvard University Press, 2019), chap. 16.

In order to frame the complexity of issues addressed by Hegel in ‘Spirit’ and how these lead to ‘Morality’, a good starting point seems to me a quotation from Habermas, whereby the relationship between normativity and social reality that distinguishes also Honneth’s theory is described in a nutshell.

[...] every moral system provides a solution to the problem of coordinating actions among beings who are dependent on social interaction. Moral consciousness is the expression of the legitimate demands that members of a cooperative social group make on one another. Moral feelings regulate the observance of the underlying norms.⁷⁷

In this sentence, even with all the precautions of the case, one can find Honneth’s persuasion that experiencing moral injury would reveal social coordination’s misdevelopments. In this ‘moral grammar’ then reside the motives for struggle, which in backlight would unveil the ethical fabric of social reproduction and integration, the normative structure underlying the interactions among persons. The latter, on the other side, would be articulated through and within spheres of recognition via the participants’ taking on complementary role obligations that instantiate surpluses of validity.

These conceptualities are put into play by Hegel in the ‘Spirit’ section, which presents itself as the reconstruction of the historical and dialectical tensions between different normative horizons, acting directions, and modes of knowing whereby the self increasingly considers herself as opposed against the ethical life she lives within, thus being actually reliant on it. Overcoming the obstacle that the apparent ‘subjectivist’ approach may represent, one can realize that Hegel continuously puts forward failures and self-deceptions by the coordination of social action, which is always questioned again and again by its own, inevitable, emerging historical fragility. For the rupture of the ethical community and the progressive self-consciousness’s individualization would dialectically lead to an ongoing co-dependence between acting and its descriptions. Thus, Hegel exposes some fundamental elements of a *theory of action*, investigating historical-conceptual figures in which the unstable balance between rule-following and actors’ singularity, between freedom and its process of externalization (*Entäußerung*), between self-reflexivity (being-for-itself) and heteroriflexivity (being-for-others) by justifying and criticizing norms of actions and worldviews, resides and emerges. In other words, Hegel faces the restlessness of the acting consciousness that finds itself being conditioned *and* unconditioned, who strives to *break* free, but cannot help realizing its being *here and now*.

⁷⁷ Habermas, ‘A Genealogical Analysis of the Cognitive Content of Morality’, pp. 16–17. Here, Habermas engages in dialogue with Allan Gibbard and Ernst Tugendhat.

In this complex scenario, ‘recognition’ shows different facets which can be dealt with through the different meanings hinted above, and posits itself as hosting elements sketched both by the ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ theories that characterize the contemporary debate. Nonetheless, the major role is played by *mutual* recognition, which appears in its specificity as elusive reconciliation by means of which the reflexivity aimed at justifying (and therefore criticizing) action is widened and shared. On the slippery ground Hegel deals with, between individual and social action, norms, laws, and historical trends, an important role is given to the concept of *guilt*, which, significantly, is placed at the beginning and at the end of the narrative on Spirit. In this term, all the levels mentioned are condensed. ‘Guilt’ indicates that, by acting, self-consciousness actualizes its completeness and incompleteness, that is, its independence and insufficiency, its untying itself from the determinacy of context to find itself again entangled in it.

Through the deed, [self-consciousness] abandons the determinateness of ethical life, of being the simple certainty of immediate truth, and it posits a separation of itself within itself as that between what is active and what is for it the negative actuality confronting it. Through the deed, it thus becomes *guilt*, since the *deed* is its own doing, and its own doing is its ownmost essence. [...] *Guilt* is not the indifferent, ambiguous essence; it is not as if the deed, as it *actually* lies open to the light of day, might or might not be the guilty self’s *own doing*, as if something external and accidental could be attached to the doing which did not belong to it and according to which the doing would therefore be innocent. Rather, the doing is itself this estrangement; it is this positing of itself for itself and this positing of an alien external actuality confronting itself. It belongs to the doing itself that such an actuality is, and it only is through the act. Hence, innocence amounts to non-action, like the being of a stone, not even that of a child.⁷⁸

It is essential to emphasize two aspects. First, acting, by instantiating a discontinuity with respect to the world ‘as it is’, is distinguished from the latter’s immediate determinateness, that is, from the ethical community’s irreflexive homogeneity. As opposed to it, it is *undetermined*. But, *being acted*, actualized, the act turns out to be determined, that is to say, reasons, norms, aims, and effects pertain to it. This discrepancy between what the agent thinks of her doing and what this turns out to be is the starting point of the confession-forgiveness binomial. Secondly, Hegel does not exclude that ‘guilt’ may coincide with crime or moral wrong, namely with acts that explicitly disrupt moral evaluative coordination. But he does not reduce it to them. Rather, ‘guilty’ is the acting consciousness to the extent that it acts. I do not think that the matter at stake should be considered as

⁷⁸ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp. 270–71.

‘sin of existing’,⁷⁹ although finitude plays certainly a role in Hegel’s considerations. That acting and guilt are considered as coextensive means that guilt and *responsibility* are coextensive.⁸⁰ In the ‘Spirit’ section we witness the *reflexive* emergence of such guiltiness, the becoming self-aware of acting’s referability to the agent, that is, that *agency* and *imputability* comes to coincide.⁸¹ Through this essential connection, Hegel implies that every acting embeds a claim to justifiability, which can only find proper satisfaction via mutual recognition, thus abandoning one-sided approaches.

Before moving on to analyze the last part of the section, it is useful to sketch some features of the theory of action proposed by Hegel – which is usually dealt with by the secondary literature with respect to the *Philosophy of Right*, but, as we shall see, plays a fundamental role also in the following passages of the *Phenomenology*.

The fundamental issue is represented by the Hegelian distinction between action (*Handlung*) and deed (*Tat*) spotlighted by Quante.⁸² With this conceptual distinction, Hegel actually intends to bring three elements into play. In fact, both action and deed refer to an *act-event*, i.e. an individual and identifiable event that can be *described* as flowing from a will in a narrow sense. An act-event implies by its ‘essence’ an act-description which consists in the imputability of the first to an agent. That a stone, to take Hegel’s example, does not act becomes evident primarily because the individual events that concern it – its being distinct, in itself, its rolling down the hill – cannot be described in terms of intentionality. But act-descriptions in general are not unitary: not everyone evaluates, or can evaluate, the same gesture in the same way. In this sense, Hegel distinguishes with *deed* that act-event referring to an act-description that does not involve the perspective of the agent, while with *action* he means the act as it is described by the latter. In a different manner Pippin

⁷⁹ Cf. Jacques Derrida, ‘To Forgive. The Unforgivable and the Imprescriptible’, in *Love and Forgiveness for a More Just World*, ed. by Hent de Vries and Niels Schott (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 144–81 (pp. 171–72).

⁸⁰ Cf. Mark Alznauer, *Hegel’s Theory of Responsibility* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), chap. 2.

⁸¹ There are, I think, no better words than Ricoeur’s for describing such coincidence: “The experience of fault offers itself as a given to reflection. It gives rise to thought. What is first offered to reflection is the designation of the fundamental structure in which this experience comes to be inscribed. This is the structure of the imputability of our actions. [...] imputability is that capacity, that aptitude, by virtue of which actions can be held to someone’s account. This metaphor of an account constitutes an excellent framework for the concept of imputability, one that finds another fitting expression in the syntax common to languages that employ the modal verb ‘can’: I can speak, act, recount, hold myself accountable for my actions—they can be imputed to me. Imputability constitutes in this respect an integral dimension of what I am calling the capable human being. It is in the region of imputability that fault, guilt, is to be sought. This is the region of articulation between the act and the agent, between the ‘what’ of the actions and the ‘who’ of the power to act—of agency.” Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Plamey and David Pellauer (Chicago - London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 460.

⁸² Cf. Michael Quante, *Hegel’s Concept of Action*, trans. by Dean Moyar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

talks of this distinction between *Handlung* and *Tat* as the first being “a deed that can be attributed to me”, and the second “something that happened because of me” but “which cannot be attributed to me as something for which I bear responsibility or Schuld.”⁸³

Leaving open the possible interpretative debates, it is important to hold still that Hegel has in mind a much more complex relationship between identity and agency than the one Markell imputes as implied by politics of recognition. And this issue, as Pippin underlines,⁸⁴ concerns both the *Philosophy of Right* and chapter V of the *Phenomenology*, Reason. We can synthesize it as follows. First of all, Hegel’s critical objective is exactly ‘will’ conceived as causal medium between acting identity and acted act. And this is because – second – the outcome of my acting, i.e. the act I perform, is not simply the result of an encounter between the (active) will, my intention, and the (passive) matter that I shape or resist. So that if I attempt something, but do not accomplish it, my intention keeps on being ‘intact’ as my inner content. Rather, the act-event that I put into the *medium of being*, as action and deed, as being-for-me and for-others is able to shed light on the ‘truth’ of my purposes, as well as on their abstractness, emptiness, one-sidedness, and so on. So it can be that the unintended consequences of my doings reveal who I am and was, what my purpose was – ‘I did not want to hurt you, but I did: I see it now’. One cannot therefore speak of identity as preceding agency, precisely because the externalization that action represents constitutes a fundamental element for the self-acknowledgement of identity with respect to its own intentions: the *process* of acting unveils identity. But settling here the issue would be just as one-sided as thinking that identity determines agency. And in fact, thirdly, Hegel says that Oedipus “cannot be accused of parricide”.⁸⁵ That is, he should not be held responsible for a deed that is not his own action. His action was, yes, a murder, but in which the victim was an unknown bystander. The distinction between these two act-descriptions means a dialectical relationship between my *right of knowledge*, that is, the fact that I can be held responsible for the foreseeable consequences with respect to the knowledge available to me, and the unpredictable or unknown consequences of my deeds. For, actually, Laius was killed.

On the one hand, therefore, Hegel rejects a concept of will that does not consider the consequences of action, thus the very process of acting, but, on the other, is aware of the risks involved in extending the concept of responsibility *ad infinitum*.⁸⁶

⁸³ Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy. Rational Agency as Ethical Life*, p. 166.

⁸⁴ Cf. Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy. Rational Agency as Ethical Life*, chap. 6.

⁸⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. by Allen W. Wood, trans. by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 144, § 117, Addition.

⁸⁶ “The maxim [*Grundsatz*] which enjoins us to disregard the consequences of our actions, and the other which enjoins us to judge actions by their consequences and make the latter the yardstick of what is

How do we get out of this (apparent) contradiction? Hegel, once again, starts from our lifeform, characterized by the “*necessity of the finite*”⁸⁷: “It is true that I cannot foresee those consequences which might be prevented, but I must be familiar with the universal nature of the individual deed.”⁸⁸ In other words, acting – and in particular acting responsibly – cannot be based on an exact knowledge of all the possible consequences that may arise from it. But, being finite action, it is placed in a world and in a context in which what the act itself is not exclusively dependent on what was intended of it: it is not only *action*, but *deed* as being and being-for-others, as exposed to the (normative and causal) legalities that pertain to the environment in which it is performed. Acting responsibly has to embed an *acquaintance* with that, namely with the very nature of acting itself.

Given these action-theoretical elements, we are ready to deal with the last paragraph of the Morality section – which concerns in the first instance the dialectical relation between action and deed. As often happens in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel opens the paragraph with a formal picture of the episode that will unfold. And as it is well known, in the case of ‘Conscience’ the critical objects are the Kantian concept of duty and the related idea of moral subject, split between “arbitrary free choice” and “the contingency of his unconscious natural being”.⁸⁹ Moral conscience, in its capacity to rationally refer to the universal of duty, would be absolutely free, that is, unconditioned by any heteronomy, capable of acting *normatively*, that is consciously. As Brandom says, conscience means a “metanormative conception” according to which my attitude of acting under a norm ought to “be authoritative for” those “who *assess* the correctness of what” I do.⁹⁰ Since my action flows from the universality of duty, also the others should acknowledge its falling under the norm. However, Hegel observes, such pure referentiality to the norm is, *in fact*, conditioned in four senses. First, conscience is a *natural being*. This implies that its acting cannot be oriented solely by reference to norms: rather, by its agency comes into play the satisfaction of needs useful for survival and reproduction, as well as motives, attitudes, stances and aims. Secondly, even if one were to consider the form of action that flows ‘directly’ from duty, conscience would find itself having to deal with ‘contents’ of duty, namely with one’s

right and good, are in equal measure [products of the] abstract understanding. In so far as the consequences are the proper and *immanent* shape of the action, they manifest only its nature and are nothing other than the action itself; for this reason, the action cannot repudiate or disregard them. But conversely, the consequences also include external interventions and contingent additions which have nothing to do with the nature of the action itself.” Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 145, § 118.

⁸⁷ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 145, § 118, Addition.

⁸⁸ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 146, § 118, Addition.

⁸⁹ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 372.

⁹⁰ Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel’s Phenomenology*, p. 588.

ends: it is therefore clear that “each content bears the flaw of determinateness in itself”.⁹¹ Duty is always *my* duty, and always *this* duty. Thirdly, this would be due to the fact that consciousness moves in a *lifeworld*, whereby “what counts is not universal knowing but rather conscience’s acquaintance with the circumstances”.⁹² Our way of acting is bound to a way of being in the world that does not unfold according to intellectual knowledge, but rather according to the proximity to multifaceted and complex circumstances, from which we derive elements for a determined action. So far, Hegel’s objections relate to the ‘necessity of the finite’, i.e. the *first- and second-natural determinacy of our agency*. It is with the fourth objection that the difference between action and deed, so as their dialectical relation with individual identity, come into play. Indeed, our agency cannot be understood simply through the coincidence of conscience with duty, it cannot be thought of as immediate expression of self’s identity, because, being in the world, our deeds acquire consistency in a *shared* world: they are not only for me, but being-*for-others*.

That this right, what conscience does, is at the same time a being for others means that an inequality seems to have been introduced into conscience. The duty which it fulfills is a *determinate* content, and that content is indeed the *self* of consciousness, and in that respect, that content is its *knowing* of itself, its *equality* with itself. But when it is fulfilled, when it is placed into the universal medium of *being*, this equality is no longer *knowing*, is no longer this differentiating which just as immediately sublates its own differences. Rather, in being placed into [the sphere of] *being*, the difference is posited as stably existing, and the action is a *determinate* action, unequal to the element of everyone’s self-consciousness and thus is not necessarily recognized.⁹³

6.5.2 Confession and Forgiveness, Acknowledgment and Mutual Recognition

Being the deeds in the public eye, imputability emerges: this is why Hegel imagines the splitting of this figure of the *Phenomenology* into two consciousnesses. On the one side, the acting conscience, persuaded to act according to duty; on the other, the universal or judging conscience, who, having avoided all action, witnesses other’s deeds. The dynamic that takes place in the ‘encounter’ between these two consciences can be read as a conflict for the *validity* of action, a conflict of arguments. By putting itself in the field in this linguistic confrontation, the acting consciousness offers the validity that it acknowledges as pertaining to its doings to the evaluation of the other. At the center of the encounter between the two

⁹¹ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 373.

⁹² Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 374.

⁹³ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 375.

consciences is thus a *claim to validity* exercised in two opposite ways, which are intertwined on the different planes implied by the distinction between action and deed, and between self-acknowledgment and being acknowledged. On the one hand, the acting conscience knows itself as recognized conscience, being it exposed through its deeds to the judgement of others – but considers the acts themselves (and therefore, by virtue of imputability, their contribution to its identity) as inessential with respect to its reference to duty. It does not acknowledge its actions as ‘independent’ source for self-acknowledgment. On the other hand, the judging conscience, refusing to enter the medium of being through its acts, does not expose itself to recognition and to the necessity of the finite, considering itself self-sufficient, beautiful soul.

[...] language emerges as the mediating middle between self-sufficient and recognized self-consciousnesses, and the *existing self* is immediately universal, multifaceted, and, within this multifacetedness, it is simple recognition [*Anerkanntsein*]. The content of conscience’s language is the *self knowing itself as essence*. This alone is that to which it gives voice, and this giving voice is the true actuality of the doing, is the validity of the action. Consciousness gives voice to its *conviction*, and this conviction is that solely within which the action is a duty. It also solely *counts as duty* as a result of its having *given voice* to the conviction, for universal self-consciousness is free from action that is only existent determinate action. To itself, the *action as existence* counts for nothing. Rather, what counts is the *conviction* that the action is a duty, and this is actual in language.⁹⁴

It may puzzle, after what has been said, that Hegel argues that in language conscience knows itself as essence by pronouncing the true actuality of action, which is not the ‘innerworldly’ deed itself, but its normative validity. This is because the four objections, as well as the difference between action and deed, begin to emerge *for us* and *for others*, but not for consciousness itself. These discrepancies open Hegel’s reflections on *hypocrisy*. For hypocrisy does not merely stand for the incontinency of conscience’s claims, but represents precisely the divergence of how she and others describe her doings. The judging conscience, confronted with other’s deeds, cannot help but notice the hypocrisy of *alter*, its inability – an almost structural impossibility – to actualize its duty, *imputing* the action to motives other than duty: it “spins” other’s “action off into the inward realm, and explains the action according to an intention and a self-serving motive which is different from the action itself.” The judging conscience is such precisely because it traces the deed back to its supposed and inferred *motives* and *ends*, along the imputability track and with reference to gains and consequences: “If the action is accompanied by fame, then it knows this inwardness to be a *craving* for fame.”⁹⁵ Thus, it explains other’s

⁹⁴ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 377.

⁹⁵ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 384.

“actions in terms of nonnormatively characterized motives (attitudes)”,⁹⁶ showing in any case the other side of the coin of human agency, since it is impossible for us humans to always act in agreement with norms. But this entails two flaws. The first is to reduce other’s doings and motives in a way that would coincide with accusing Oedipus of parricide: if the access point provided by the deed represents the last word on one’s doings, our imputing judgment takes on the features of an alienating assertion. Secondly, the beautiful soul does not realize that in so doing it is actualizing a position structurally identical to the one it criticizes, hypocritical to the extent that true duty, is *its* duty: actually, an inner law of action *acknowledged* as duty. Moreover, by criticizing the validity of other’s deed, it implicitly acknowledges the existence of several norms of action, thus revealing that “what it called true duty and which is supposed to be *universally* recognized, is *what is not universally recognized*”.⁹⁷ Here, in addition to the various planes at stake, there is also the double level of acknowledgment, which corresponds to nothing but the ambivalence of affirmation: to criticize, to misrecognize, to not affirm something presupposes affirming it at least not only as being, but as *that* particular being with *those* characteristics. In order to misrecognize a norm of action, I must have already recognized it as a norm of action.

The hypocrisy of both consciences is due to the profound dissimilarities that occur between act-events and act-descriptions – the difference between actuality and speech –, as well as between the different act-descriptions – the different claims to validity.

In both of them, the aspect of actuality is equally distinguished from that of speech; in one, through the *self-interested ends* of action, and in the other, through the *lack of action* at all, action of which the necessity lies in talking about duty itself, for duty without deeds has no meaning at all.⁹⁸

Being the one exposed to its being-for-others, it is the acting consciousness that first takes a step beyond hypocrisy. With its confession (*Eingeständnis*, and not *Beichte*, the religious confession), with its *admission* and *avowal*, the acting consciousness *acknowledges*. What? We can identify two subsequent (not chronologically) contents. First, it admits its hypocrisy, seeing that its doings belong to the necessity of the finite, exposed to other act-descriptions and unintended consequences, moved by particular ends and motives: to this extent, acknowledgment is self-directed. But, most important is the second object of this acknowledgment, namely its equality with the other, who is hypocritical and

⁹⁶ Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel’s Phenomenology*, p. 591.

⁹⁷ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 383.

⁹⁸ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 384.

subjected to finitude too: only by virtue of the first, self-directed acknowledgment, the acting consciousness can glimpse in the other the same, structural human condition. And, in turn, dialectically, the first self-directed acknowledged is allowed only by seeing the other as similar to me: only through the other I can become aware of my condition, of the fragility and intrinsic inconsistency of my claims. In this sense, one can say that admission *realizes recognition*, because judging conscience's standpoint is recognized as structurally shared by the acting conscience and, in these particular standpoints, they *reflect* the conditions of recognition in their equality,⁹⁹ to the extent that they recognize themselves as mutually recognizing each other, each considering other's acting, being posed one before the other.

Intuiting this equality and *giving voice* to it, he *confesses* this to the other, and he equally expects that the other, just as he has in fact placed himself on an equal plane to him, will reciprocate his *speech* and in that speech will pronounce their equality so that recognitional existence will make its appearance. His confession is not an abasement, nor a humiliation, nor is it a matter of his casting himself aside in his relationship with the other, for this declaration is not something one-sided through which he would posit his *inequality* with the other, but rather it is solely on account of the intuition of *his equality* with the other that he gives voice to himself, that in his confessions he gives voice on his own part to *their equality*, and he does this because language is the existence of spirit as the immediate self. He thus expects that the other will contribute his own part to this *existence*. But following on the admission of the one who is evil – *I am he* – there is no reciprocation of an equal confession.¹⁰⁰

I do not think that Pinkard's translation does justice to the content of the admission: *Ich bin's*. For sure 'It's me' may stand for 'it's me, at the door', thus not differing from '*I am he*, the evil one'. But in this case the ambivalence of the German *es* can indicate a more profound '*I am it, this is me*': the acting conscience indeed admits its being conditioned, its determinacy, its being evil: namely, its guilt, its responsibility, its being *actor*. He identifies with its own doing comprehending it as action and deed. And, in fact, for the first time its deed (confession) and its speech *reflexively* coincide: by admitting hypocrisy, it sublates it. Paradoxically or, better: dialectically, admitting one's determinacy would free from being tangled by it. Thus conscience knows itself in its essence, namely that of being agent. Recognizing the determinacy of the deed as one's own means that it does not take place 'behind the back' of conscience, but becomes itself reflexive content.

Synthetically, the act of confession has three elements that it is essential to emphasize, to better understand the *recognitional existence* that would hereby emerge. First, surprisingly – if we consider the terms we have used previously –, this

⁹⁹ Cf. Bertram, *Hegels »Phänomenologie Des Geistes«*. *Ein Systematischer Kommentar*, p. 244.

¹⁰⁰ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 385.

expression of acknowledgment is articulated neither as an attribution, nor as an affirmative gesture addressed at the other. Rather, A says *herself*, she communicates her reflexively gained status as an actor. The acting conscience does not assert itself posing again an inequality, but gives voice to the intuited equality: the language of confession *means* to reveal “what is shared *as* shared”, thus replacing the “language of conviction”.¹⁰¹ This stands in a dialectical, non-causal relation with the second acknowledgment, whereby A recognizes its equality with B. The content of speech does not directly refer to *alter*, but rather on A’s own being reflexively aware of its condition, enabled by encountering the other as other, as limit: “the speech is the assurance of spirit’s certainty in its inward turn”.¹⁰² Third, by communicating herself, she expects, invites the other to do the same, as if to say: confession is a by-relation that requires, that asks for a when-relation. Recognition here is realized only as *Aufforderung*: reciprocal on a first level and *for us*, but not mutual on the second-order one, that is for the participant. The acting conscience can only hope for mutuality – that *its* equality with the other becomes *their* equality.

Though such admission, which relies on the acknowledgment of the equal guiltiness, i.e. agency, of mine and other’s, would represent a first step out of duty and deed’s being opposed to each other, this very deed is still being for others, exposed to their questioning. That it represents a form of acting consciously can be criticized, thus not reciprocated by the judging consciousness, which therefore does not sublimate the *limitation* that each represents for *alter*. Admission may not be reciprocated, it may be followed by the *hard heart* of the judging conscience, who “rejects any continuity”¹⁰³ with the other. Freedom is not only the outcome or the very existence of mutual recognition: the latter flows *from freedom*,¹⁰⁴ and consequently it may not even take place.

What is posited here is the highest indignation of the spirit certain of itself, for, as this *simple knowing of the self*, this spirit intuits itself in others, namely, it does so in such a way that the external shape of this other is not [...] the essenceless itself, not a thing.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Bernstein, ‘Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel’s Poetics of Action’, p. 44. With respect to the fact that not every language is the language of and for mutual recognition cf. Francesca Menegoni, ‘Hegel’s Theory of Action: Between Conviction and Recognition’, in *‘I That Is We, We That Is I.’ Perspectives on Contemporary Hegel. Social Ontology, Recognition, Naturalism, and the Critique of Kantian Constructivism*, ed. by Italo Testa and Luigi Ruggiu (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 147–56.

¹⁰² Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 388.

¹⁰³ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 386.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Georg W. Bertram and Robin Celikates, ‘Towards a Conflict Theory of Recognition: On the Constitution of Relations of Recognition in Conflict’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 23.4 (2015), 838–61.

¹⁰⁵ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 386.

Re-cognizing and acknowledging the other as ‘not a thing’, as the same as myself, *should* be enough to affirm my continuity with her, that is, the discontinuity with respect to our being limit for each other. But this may not be the case, since the specificity of mutual recognition is attested in its being *contrastive*¹⁰⁶ with respect to the relational or social concretions that precede it, even with the related modes of acknowledgment. Re-cognition and acknowledgment are not sufficient conditions to reach the We-form the acting conscience ‘asked for’ by confessing, because they do not provide sufficient elements to treat the other as value, to significantly change my ‘hard heart’, my stance in front of her, i.e. treating her as *equal to me*. This does not coincide with saying that re-cognition and acknowledgment are not necessary conditions, as it is clear that they provide *normative indications* to the extent that the “moment of apperception in each, each being bound to enter ethical life through their individuality, itself becomes the source of what is shared or common or universal between them.”¹⁰⁷ The point is that the logic of reciprocity involved in any human interaction (which requires acts of re-cognition and acknowledgment in order to articulate itself) does not necessarily lead to the experience of mutuality. According to Hegel it *should*, but it *must* not: mutual recognition proceeds from freedom, it is not an outcome of a given knowledge – and this is why it happens so rarely, while re-cognition and acknowledgment are always at stake in our lifeworld. The issue becomes even more problematic when one considers that, in the face of guilt, not granting forgiveness can be considered a form of acting accordingly to other’s features: in fact, forgiveness can be asked for, but not demanded. Indeed, we are here in front of an “*asymmetrical recognitive relation*”,¹⁰⁸ which makes us grasp though that in face of our actions’ fragility and our vulnerability, the expectation of being truly recognized is not satisfied by a pre-existing logic of exchange, by a payment in kind, by the binomial action-*reaction*.¹⁰⁹ “It is not just a prize to be won, but a gift that grows each time it is offered.”¹¹⁰ Here lies the difference between forgiveness, pardon, and amnesty: the first is unsuitable to institutionalizations.

From this follows that forgiveness possesses an enigmatic nature, which is shown by the following quotations. Here Hegel describes the shift from the ‘hard heart’ to forgiveness, i.e. the emergence of spirit as dimension of reconciliation – as mutual recognition.

In that way, the hard heart shows itself to be the consciousness forsaken by spirit, the consciousness denying spirit, for it does not recognize that in its absolute

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Honneth, ‘Recognition as Ideology: The Connection between Morality and Power’.

¹⁰⁷ Bernstein, ‘Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel’s Poetics of Action’, p. 43.

¹⁰⁸ Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel’s Phenomenology*, p. 592.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Bernstein, ‘Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel’s Poetics of Action’, pp. 46–49.

¹¹⁰ Christopher Lauer, ‘Multivalent Recognition: The Place of Hegel in the Fraser-Honneth Debate’, *Contemporary Political Theory*, 11.1 (2012), 23–40 (p. 37).

certainty of itself, spirit has a mastery over every deed and over all actuality, and that spirit can discard them and make them into something that never happened.¹¹¹

The breaking of the hard heart and its elevation to universality is the same movement which was expressed in the consciousness that confessed. The wounds of the spirit heal and leave no scars behind; it is not the deed which is imperishable, but rather the deed is repossessed by spirit into itself; the aspect of singular individuality, whether present in the deed as intention or as existing negativity and limitation to the deed is what immediately vanishes.¹¹²

The word of reconciliation is the *existing* spirit which immediately intuits in its opposite the pure knowing of itself as the *universal* essence, intuits it in the pure knowing of itself as *singular individuality* existing absolutely inwardly – a reciprocal recognition which is *absolute* spirit.¹¹³

Spirit, which has its existence in language, would have the capacity to discard the act in its particularity, in its obstinate opposing itself as individuality, to include it again in itself – reconciliation, forgiveness. According to Brandom, such capacity is to be understood as a work of *recollection*, as interpretative practice carried out via *speech acts*, through which the single deed is included in a cooperative and open-ended *learning process*, in which every attempt, in its finiteness, would find its place.¹¹⁴ Forgiveness would therefore coincide with fully embracing the imputability-relation between agent and deed, showing the latter's by its contextual validity, thus overcoming the moral consciousness's sclerotization between being conditioned and unconditioned: they both can become *familiar* with the universal nature of the individual deed, can intuit that *acting normatively has to be contextual in order to be moral*. Besides, the act of forgiveness, as well as confession, is not to be conceived primarily as one-sided act of granting or bestowing something to the other. Instead, it "is the renunciation of itself, of its *non-actual* essence" on the part of the judging consciousness, who "lets go of" the "difference between determinate thought and its determining judgment".¹¹⁵ Forgiveness structurally coincides with confession as a linguistic act in which, so to speak, form and content no longer differ from each other and in which the self abandons the absoluteness of duty in order to be able to reflexively embrace its true essence, that of responsible agent. By forgiving, the forgiver can finally be who she is, sublating hypocrisy: "this self has no other content than this, its own determinateness, a determinateness which neither goes beyond the self nor is more restricted than it".¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 386.

¹¹² Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 387.

¹¹³ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 388.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology*, p. 600 ff.

¹¹⁵ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 388.

¹¹⁶ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 388.

At this point, Hegel bewilders us by saying that A and B “are still different”,¹¹⁷ not only for us, but also for them themselves, who acknowledge themselves to be opposed in their concepts and perspectives. And shortly afterwards he concludes:

The reconciling *yes*, in which both I’s let go of their opposed *existence*, is the existence of the *I* extended into two-ness, which therein remains the same as itself and which has the certainty of itself in its complete self-relinquishing and in its opposite.¹¹⁸

This is only an apparent contradiction. The two-ness of ego (We) is not realized as immediate integration, and therefore dissolution of the self, which would supposedly be encompassed in a somewhat ontological meta-subject. Instead, it is the *mediated* permanence of both participants in mutual recognition. What was formally posed with the pure concept of recognition, it is now clear not only for us, but for both consciousnesses.

What will later come to be for consciousness will be the experience of what spirit is, this absolute substance which constitutes the unity of its oppositions in their complete freedom and self-sufficiency, namely, in the oppositions of the various self-consciousnesses existing for themselves: The *I* that is *we* and the *we* that is *I*.¹¹⁹

Confession-forgiveness represents a complex intersubjective practice that is articulated on several levels. First of all, respectively, A and B are not just their determinacy, but acknowledge it: it is accepted as a dimension of one’s self-relation, and to this extent sublated. If I acknowledge something, than it is *other* to me. This *can* enable A to acknowledge itself as equal to B and vice versa, that is as *agents*. Both these acknowledgments would be made explicit through the medium of language, which, as conditioned unconditionality, universal that is spoken here and now, discloses a further reflexive possibility, that of mutual recognition. The latter, however, is a possibility that *can* happen, which has no necessity derived from the given context or nature of the participants. This coming-from-freedom means that even meeting the conditions of both acknowledgements by both subjects may not be sufficient – as the hard heart shows. The We that emerges instead with forgiveness is the *becoming shared* of the first-person perspective that leaves its poles intact, in an enigmatic way – as Hegel’s quotations testify.

6.6 Conclusion: Generativity as Critical Criterion

¹¹⁷ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 388.

¹¹⁸ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 389.

¹¹⁹ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 108, § 177.

This chapter was opened with four main issues, that have certainly found in the Hegelian depiction concluding the Spirit section a valid ground and framework for their answering.

The first question that was asked was: why should recognition be conceived as an exclusively *interpersonal* practice? The point that Hegel himself makes us understand is that recognition *can*, but *must not*, be interpersonal. Or, better: interpersonality is always at stake only at a very general level, because all our actions are, to a certain extent, also interactions. Thus, the fact that the acting consciousness acknowledges its own determinacy or the fallibility of its normative acting cannot be realized except within its being-for-others, besides its being already 'immersed' in otherness, in a shared world. This does not preclude that specific objects of recognition and acknowledgment can be non-human – as the uses in the different languages considered here suggest. In the relationship between these various forms of recognizing and those of knowing, the former's peculiarities do not simply consist in the more active involvement on the part of the recognizer than of the knower: rather, the emphasis should be placed on the normative indications that, on different degrees, the respective givens offer us, similar to an invitation to act in a certain way. Invitation, which raises a certain awareness. By re-cognizing and acknowledging we become aware of (and possibly have to beware) something that was already there, but somewhat veiled, concealed. Thus, the specificity of interpersonal recognition hinges on the peculiarity of the object that presents itself to me, which has the qualities of a non-object, and which therefore always – albeit in minimal terms – invites me to act taking into account its non-objective features, to assume a dis-objectifying attitude towards my non-objectual object. Even moral wrong, reification, and power necessarily fall within modes of *interhuman* action.

The second question asked at the beginning of the chapter was: why should interpersonal recognition be conceived in terms of *mutual* recognition? Why can it not be thought of as *adequate regard*? The answer to this question is twofold. First of all, also in this case it is good to underline that 'recognition' *can*, but *must not*, be mutual. On a first level, certainly, it must be *reciprocal*, since it concerns *interpersonal interaction*. By necessity, therefore, any gesture of A's cannot be conceived as unilateral but must be thought of as already conditioned by B's personhood. However, this first level of reciprocity does not give us many indications with respect to the various normative-moral criteria we have encountered in our path, that is, the binomials symmetry-asymmetry, equality-inequality, and so on. A profoundly reciprocal relation, such as between master and servant, can be profoundly asymmetrical and unequal. On the one hand, a greater 'substantialization' of the reciprocity-criterion – which therefore ceases to be mere *logic* of interaction – seems to be a good antidote against relational-agonic forms of

power. On the other hand, such substantialization risks not giving many indications about the ‘goodness’ or morality of the interactions at stake, since the risk of *economizing* the exchange of gestures is always just around the corner. A higher degree of equality-symmetry does not provide us, *per se*, with a significant normative concept. The second leg of the answer, instead, starts from the fact that, certainly, recognition *can* be – ‘above’ the logic of reciprocity – one-sided: Hegel’s depiction of confession-forgiveness is filled with examples. Then are we inclined to conceive recognition as an adequate regard? Without wiping out the value of such recognizing forms – which constantly instantiate in our lifeworld –, with the confession-forgiveness binomial Hegel clearly tells us that to be treated properly, for what is *due* to us, is not enough: he describes a form of mutual recognition that escapes from the logic of merit that has imposed itself with the struggle for life and death. Forgiveness, that is, requires us to think of an answer to the demand for recognition that exceeds the scope of the demand itself: it is not a distributive practice, but a *restorative* one, which concerns reconciliation. In this sense, Hegel refuses to describe ‘adequate’ in the terms of ‘due’ proper to exchange. Thinking about recognition besides of the so-called mutuality-insight seems to make us slip back into the logic of ‘due’ and that seems to lead us to a dead end.

The way out is offered by the fact that the *We*-form Hegel outlines in the when-relation of mutual recognition is not characterized by a plain symmetry. Rather, the core of mutual recognition is the *self-reflexivity of recognition* (*Autoriflexivität der Anerkennung*).¹²⁰ Indeed, the pure concept of recognition does not suggest that mutual recognition coincides with two subjects that merely recognize each other. Instead, the criterion Hegel provides us with at the beginning of the Self-Consciousness section is to look for, during consciousness’ experience, moments or figures where two subjects *recognize* themselves *as mutually recognizing each other*. This self-reflexivity coincides with what Ricoeur calls the *experience of mutuality*, which does not simply coincide with identical doings on the part of the participants, but with the fact that they recognize their acting as emerging from and finding place in a reflexive *We-ness*.

From this it follows that the account that we are outlining thanks to Hegel is more sensitive to the criticism levelled by Markell. Indeed, Hegel’s account at the end of the Morality section is principally aimed at deconstructing the “modern fantasies of self-sufficiency”,¹²¹ sovereign, purely normative agency. With this in mind, Hegel conceptualizes a dialectical relationship between identity and agency, which cannot be thought of as following one another, but which co-imply and refer each other

¹²⁰ Cf. Bertram, ‘Hegel Und Die Frage Der Intersubjektivität. Die “Phänomenologie Des Geistes” Als Explikation Der Sozialen Strukturen Der Rationalität’, p. 887.

¹²¹ Pippin, ‘Recognition and Reconciliation: Actualized Agency in Hegel’s Jena Phenomenology’, p. 76.

within the complex lifeworldly condition of the human being, between will, responsibility, and the necessity of the finite. If there can be a purely normative orientation of action, there can be no purely normative action. In this sense, recognizing cannot clearly be thought of as knowing an object out there – identity – precisely because identity is ambivalent with respect to every acting, it is both its source and its outcome. What matters, in front of the other, is *what we do*, and that the “recognitional existence”¹²² is both, *at the same time*, self- and other-directed. I, thanks to the other, can acknowledge my finitude and my non-mastery over my deeds, *and* only by virtue of this acknowledgment can see that the other is the same as me. By bringing these three steps together, it will become clear that mutual recognition does not consist of a sum of different acts carried out by identities towards each other. The reconciliation that mutual recognition enables *and* is, does not represent just a mode of “setting the other free”,¹²³ but a way of *setting ourselves* so that *we* can be free. Being with oneself by the other emerges through and as a “reconciliation by mutual renunciation,”¹²⁴ whereby what is renounced, the first-person authority over my act-descriptions, is not merely abandoned, but *shared*. Retrieving Honneth’s conceptualities, it can be said that the authorship over the norms that regulate our (inter-)acting must be *co-authorship* – since a proper act-description cannot be carried out monologically – and has to take into account the fragility and vulnerability entailed in our being exposed to the non-mastery that characterize our individual condition.

The last, and most challenging issue is the one posed by Bedorf – which can be broadened in the terms used by Amy Allen. That recognizing always entails misrecognizing can, in fact, mean both a structural dynamic that establishes itself in the complex intertwining of identity and interaction, and the possibility of ideological recognition, which also embeds the constitutive role of power. On two different levels, both accounts aim at undermining recognition as critical concept to the extent that they show its *determining power*, which binds individuality to identity, possibility to subjectivity. On the pre-normative level outlined by Bedorf, this determination is to be understood as structurally missing its aim, since ‘identity’ would actually be a more fluid and lively being than the fixation of it that recognition represents: the non-identity of identity undermines recognition’s possibility. On the normative level dealt with by Butler, Allen, Lepold, and – to a certain extent – Markell, recognition shows itself in its deceptive features to the extent that, somewhat in empowering and rewarding disguise, it binds human life to possibilities

¹²² Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 385.

¹²³ Canivez, p. 855.

¹²⁴ Siep, ‘Recognition in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit and Contemporary Practical Philosophy’, p. 114.

that narrow from the outset individual self-determination. In these terms, then, the main criticism levelled at recognition coincides with its being an heteronomous source of individuation, which, by virtue of internalization, shapes identity.

This issue arises in problematic terms for Honneth's theory, which in fact reveals three different approaches. Indeed, Honneth's thinking lays itself open to such criticisms when he – to mention two pivotal examples – describes the recognitional gestures and spheres as antidote to the modern and post-modern suffering from indeterminacy (*Suffering from Indeterminacy*) and as ensuring a smooth interlocking of participants' respective activities (*Freedom's Right*). The general problem is namely that of the role assigned to recognition by society's normative integration. But taking this as unilateral depiction, secondly, would overlook that Honneth himself employs a more refined idea of the relation between determinacy and indeterminacy – a legacy due to his Hegelianism – that also allows him to oscillate, on a justice-theoretical level, between liberalism and communitarism. This not naive image is to be found above all in the description of interpersonal relationships as tension and balance between ego-boundaries and ego-dissolution, which, translated in terms of personal freedom, finds its seminal depiction in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*.

In this determinacy, the human being should not feel determined; on the contrary, he attains his self-awareness only by regarding the other as other. Thus, freedom lies neither in indeterminacy nor in determinacy, but is both at once.¹²⁵

The whole issue – Hegel seems to tell us – is not 'opting' for indeterminacy *or* for determinacy. Since human condition (and our brief excursus on Hegel's theory of action has given us a good picture of it) is articulated in having to deal with the co-existence and co-extensiveness of these two dimensions, and with the related consequences in terms of personal responsibility. The key to understand freedom – and recognition, in which the first manifests itself – consists in *those* forms of determinacy in which the individual *should not feel over-determined*, bound to its determinacy: being with oneself by the other. Concrete freedom is to inhabit a world in which we can reflexively acknowledge ourselves as being 'home', *familiar* with the universal nature of the individual deed. But what is imputed to the concept of recognition and to the Honnethian theory is precisely the shortcoming of not considering the ambiguity of 'not *feeling* determined'. Honneth himself admits the difficulty of assessing, from within the recognition relationship, the justifiability or otherwise of the relational form itself, for example when dealing with the Hegelian description of woman's role in marriage.¹²⁶ As we have seen, this problem has always

¹²⁵ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 42, § 7, Addition.

¹²⁶ Cf. Honneth, *Anerkennung: Eine Europäische Ideengeschichte*, pp. 218–23.

posed itself for Honneth, who since *The Struggle for Recognition* states between the lines that interpersonal self-realization cannot be the unique criterion of critical evaluation. In fact, how can the quality of a relationship be evaluated if it itself forms evaluation criteria? The solution is to refer to a *third* criterion, i.e. not immediately coinciding, even if not unrelated, with the relationships of recognition. This is the case of the material criterion¹²⁷ and of the means provided by the concept of progress to discern progressive or reactionary forms of conflict,¹²⁸ so as of the surplus of validity. The solution presented by Honneth – the concept of progress as open-ended learning progress – presents however a further, major problem on which the viability of mutual recognition as critical concept depends. The problem is that Honneth more or less implicitly *decouples* recognition and conflict for what concerns their roles by social integration and differentiation.¹²⁹ Recognition in fact appears as instantiating dynamic of its own principles, through second-nature's self-generating dialectic. The role of conflict is instead that of fluidification and reformulation of such second-natural relationships and contexts, it represents the means of a situated overcoming, which broadens and refines its own premises. This 'division of tasks' between fixation and unfixation, which is persuasive and successful from many points of view, however, fails to deliver a progressive logic inherent the relationships of recognition themselves, which thus are left with their determining role, while to conflict a indetermining and creative role is assigned.

So we are apparently back to the starting point, where the major perplexities about the concept of recognition revolve around its over-determining power. As I see it, a solution to these concerns lies in the threefold operation carried out in this chapter, which makes it possible to identify progressive and unfixing tasks entailed in mutual recognition relationships, understood as *generative movement*.

First of all, the identification of the *different meanings* of 'recognition' makes it possible to accommodate different concepts and practical levels involved in human (inter-)action, without having to opt unilaterally for one perspective rather than another – for a 'positive' or 'negative' account on recognition. This allows a first analytical understanding of a holistic phenomenon – that of recognition – which within it presents clearly ambivalent normative logics. This also means embracing and radicalizing Honneth's pluralistic approach, subdividing not just three modes of interpersonal-mutual recognition, but a complex variety of 'recognition' that precede such subdivision itself.

The second fundamental step coincides with the distinction, within interpersonal recognition, between *by-relation* and *when-relation*. The first concept allows to

¹²⁷ Cf. Honneth, 'Recognition as Ideology: The Connection between Morality and Power', p. 93.

¹²⁸ Cf. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, pp. 168–69.

¹²⁹ Cf. Bertram and Celikates, pp. 4–6.

highlight the reciprocal conditioning that every human interaction seems to imply, which, even when conceived outside diachronic and asymmetric patterns, does not seem able to escape from the economic logic of exchange. The delineation of this first fundamental level – meaning both its being basilar and significance –, which can and in most cases happens ‘behind’ its participants, sheds light on the oscillation between pre-normative, normative, and moral planes. Going back to the notorious example of master and servant, it can be said that such relation is certainly normative – for both implement role obligations –, reciprocal, but amoral. But identifying this level of *reciprocity* helps us above all to understand the different degrees involved by Hegel in defining the ‘mutuality-rule’ of the pure concept of recognition. In fact, explicitly in the *Encyclopaedia*, even the master is described as carrying out duties of care towards the servant, aimed at ensuring the continuity of latter’s services.¹³⁰ Service and ‘care’, as acts respectively implemented by each, are to a certain extent symmetrical and complementary. But such symmetry is asymmetrical and abstract – it is not part of the second-order horizon embedded by the participants’ reflexive understanding of the relationship itself. Or, if so, solely to the minimal degree implied by the functionalization of the other in one’s own purposive projections. That is why it is so difficult for us to speak of the interactions between lord and bondsman as emerging from and within a recognitional *relationship*, since they consist, at most, in reciprocal exchanges of recognitional *acts*. Conversely, the practical forms described under the title of *when-relation* indicate a mode of experiencing a relationship that reflects participants’ mutual recognizing each other. They namely instantiate the reflexive awareness that their acts do not simply represent complementary intertwining *I-mode* expressions, or a collective intentionality aimed at a common purpose. As is already clear, the coordination of social action in recognition relationships cannot be thought of as a mere sum and harmonization of particular intentions expressed with the first person singular. There is indeed an “irreducibility of we-mode states”¹³¹ that cannot be misunderstood as outcome of mine and your intentions or efforts: the when-relation is not the result of (even only logically) subsequent by-relations. For the first keeps a *qualitative* difference with respect to the latter. However, mutual recognition and “plural subjecthood are not coextensive”.¹³² Equating the We-forms of mutual recognition to *forgroupness* – the second-order awareness of being an indivisible *group* – or to plural subjects in general entails, among other eventual unclarities, the

¹³⁰ Cf. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)*. Vol. 3: *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 160–61, § 434.

¹³¹ Raimo Tuomela, ‘Joint Intention, We-Mode and I-Mode’, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 30 (2006), 35–58 (p. 50).

¹³² Arto Laitinen, ‘Recognition, Acknowledgement, and Acceptance’, in *Recognition and Social Ontology*, ed. by Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 310–47 (p. 320).

twofold risk of making the concept of mutual recognition slip back onto a one-dimensional concept of group-identity and of losing the tracks for what concerns the reciprocity-rule, bringing into play a vertical notion of recognition between ‘the’ group and its members. The issue is not belonging to any groups, since the We-form of mutual recognition concern a dialectical concept of unity, reconciliation as described by Hegel through the confession-forgiveness binomial – where the I is “extended into two-ness” and the two poles are still different from each other.

The third passage, the analysis of Hegelian narration in the *Phenomenology*, has provided us with fundamental elements to clarify mutual recognition’s normative and critical specificity. To fully understand it – thus concluding our account –, it is useful to divide this last step into three moments.

First, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of *forgiveness*. In the Hegelian account, it constitutes the moment where a recognitional *existence* emerges – a recognitional existence that entails the multiple levels that have been indicated with the different meanings of recognition and with the distinction between by-relation and when-relation. In a nutshell, the moment of the hard heart shows the insufficiency of relational forms that do not go beyond the intertwining of distinct I-modes as reciprocal conditioning. That is to say: the *underlying* unity and equality intuited and admitted by the acting conscience – and already *underway* in the We-structure of *speech* – must become explicit, self-reflexive for both of them. But what is this unity and *continuity* that the beautiful soul rejects? And that forgiveness should reconcile? On a first level, it is the unity that they share because both are *not a thing*: they, as humans, do not merely are, but *act*. This shows that the emergence of mutual recognition is deeply intertwined with the human lifeform as *normative agency in a shared world*. From this follows that the particularity of meaningful action is *guilt* in two overlapping meanings. On the one hand, since it is exposed to the *world*, namely subject to the necessity of the finite, incapable of entailing in planning and decision making the totality of the possible consequences. On the other hand, since it is exposed to the *shared* world as being-for-others, from which emerges the argumentative conflict regarding the possible configurations of conscientious acting.

From these two partly overlapping meanings of guilt it is possible to derive two similarly partly overlapping meanings of forgiveness. The latter coincides with that interpersonal movement that does not make action collapse on deed, but allows to comprehend the two act-descriptions as complementary: to this extent, as *recollection*, namely as discursive tracing-back of motives and reasons, it first liberates agency from the burden of mechanistic causality and of the inevitable non-coincidence between what one can and duty. And secondly, it discloses the *relativization* of both I-mode act-descriptions, which was already abandoned on the

part of the acting conscience by admitting the finitude of its doings. Thus forgiveness coincides with the participants' "constant mutual release from what they do can" by means of which "men remain free agents".¹³³ To this extent it would have, according to Hannah Arendt, a productive potential for social coordination on an equal footing with promises, that is role obligations – so decisive for Honneth's paradigm of recognition. Overcoming doings' finitude, forgiveness can namely disclose a creative potential that allows us to 'move on', showing its social-political relevance. Such potential coincides with forgiving's capacity to *alter* the normative situations that come with guilt, the obligations under which the 'wrongdoer' falls, as for instance showing will-to-change and repentance.¹³⁴ This dynamic concerns the most disparate cases, from two people apologizing to each other because they got in the way at the entrance to the subway, to the deepest wounds that can affect public spaces. Here, forgiveness reveals itself as the mediated interruption of the immediate bad reciprocity of revenge. Being it a self-directed stance in the first place, it implies and requires a *change of heart* that cannot be demanded, and in most cases not even asked for: there are, in most cases, no sufficient external reasons for forgiving, which brings with it that, conversely, we may well forgive, but then realize that we had not. This is why it seems so difficult to explain 'good reasons' and 'institutional settings' for forgiving.

This brings us to the second moment, which concerns mutual recognition – and its representing a *discontinuity* from what precedes it. That forgiveness releases from what persons *can* means that it alters the situation emerging with the admission. As we have seen, the admission-hard heart binomial is inhabited by a double level of acknowledgement. On the one hand, the acting conscience acknowledges the imputability of its deeds, admitting its finitude and to this extent acknowledging the equality with the other. On the other hand, the judging conscience paradoxically acknowledges that the other shares humanity with him, since both can trace any 'what' of deed back to an acting 'who', but rejects such equality, thus *mis*acknowledging it. If we were to linger at this (diversified) level of acknowledgment there would be no relationship of mutual recognition, no We-form, but only asymmetrical acts of conditioning, which exhaust their dynamics in the respective roles' reciprocity and fixity. The alteration brought about by forgiveness is to be explained as an *unconditioned* moment (*ein unbedingtes Moment*),¹³⁵ for forgiveness itself cannot find its sources in the forms of (mis-

¹³³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 240.

¹³⁴ Cf. Christopher Bennett, 'The Alteration Thesis: Forgiveness as a Normative Power', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 46.2 (2018), 207–33.

¹³⁵ Bertram, 'Hegel Und Die Frage Der Intersubjektivität. Die "Phänomenologie Des Geistes" Als Explikation Der Sozialen Strukturen Der Rationalität', p. 883.

)acknowledging interactions that fix the imputability-nexus, that tend to make action collapse on deed, that hinge on a bare exchange of gestures. The *aporetic character* of mutual recognition that Hegel depicts expresses itself in two facets.

The first side of the issue concerns the reasons or motives to recognize – which is actually an issue in Honneth’s paradigm. Why should we recognize another, or vice versa? Why, in other words, should humanity intuited also by the judging conscience lead him to a change of heart, to embrace the continuity with the other? Honneth’s theory finds an answer in the reference to the spheres and principles of recognition, which would shape relationships according to the different matters respectively at stake: in love, right, or cooperation, we find ourselves together before a *third instance* which informs and shapes our joint and complementary acting – the *why* and *what-for* of recognition. This reference to a third instance is fundamental to understand any interaction, but represents a way too general level, thus proving incapable of providing ‘good reasons’ for mutual recognition – it indeed describes the fundamental form of (inter-)action. The answer that Hegel proposes with the emerging recognitional existence via confession-forgiveness is that adequate reasons for recognition always come *too late*,¹³⁶ because the sole reasons for recognizing and being recognized are to be found in an already shared recognition, in the already continuous We made explicit at a second-order level.¹³⁷ It would seem that the conditioned, rather than the unconditioned, character of mutual recognition prevails. However, such conditioning would not fall under the succession of by-relations, and under the circle of misrecognizing recognition in its two meanings. On the contrary, the picture is reversed: in order to acknowledge each other, we must *already inhabit* a relation of mutual recognition. Indeed, the judging conscience’s rejection consists precisely in this: it fails to acknowledge other’s admission *because* it has *already* refused the We-form that *enables* such acknowledgment. It is not aware that other’s being not a thing represents a ground of continuity.

The moment of forgiveness – as moment where mutual recognition reaches existence – makes explicit the second facet of its aporetic character, which hinges on the *quality* of the We-form we inhabit together. As we have already seen, the first level of reciprocity that any interaction entails “imposes itself as an objective logic,”¹³⁸ which can even disregard the participants embracing it or not. It happens for and by inter-acting. Such first level of interaction both presupposes and shapes

¹³⁶ Cf. Bernstein, ‘Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel’s Poetics of Action’, pp. 48–49, 54.

¹³⁷ This being-constituted of the constituting-being is a peculiarity that a Hegel-inspired thought of social forms must maintain and emphasize, also at the general level of institutions. Cf. Vincent Descombes, ‘The Problem of Collective Identity: The Instituting We and the Instituted We’, in *Recognition and Social Ontology*, ed. by Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 373–89.

¹³⁸ Cortella, ‘Freedom and Nature: The Point of View of a Theory of Recognition’, p. 173.

a reciprocal taking on of roles on the part of the practitioners that acknowledge each other in their respectively acquired statuses, capacities, and obligations. The unconditional moment of forgiveness is realized when both lift the “metonymic shift”¹³⁹ of admission: *Ich bin’s*, where agent and deed come to coincide in the awareness of the partiality of action – a metonymic shift that the hard heart does not intend to move. Such acknowledgment – *Ich bin’s* –, which fixes the agent to the deed, is altered by forgiveness, to the extent that it unfixes the identity acquired by the identification with the act. So, if on the one hand Bedorf showed us that recognition always comes too early or too late with respect to identity, we can also say that identity comes too early or too late with respect to mutual recognition. Put another way: the identity acquired and expressed through action, the awareness of finitude, and the speech act of admission is fluidified, recollected and relativized. From the *I am it* of admission we shift to *I’s two-ness* of mutual recognition, that is, to the moment in which other’s perspective is *authorized* to enter the reflexive understanding of my condition: still different, we are continuous. Just as the intuited equality dialectically (not mechanically) enables the admission, the sublation of hypocrisy, so forgiveness allows one to understand the argumentative conflict in different terms: in terms of *reconciliation*. Reconciliation is the becoming shared of the first-person perspective, through which we can remain agents and judges arguing about what deserves to be considered acting consciously. But we have meanwhile become familiar with the universal nature of individual action, mediating between action and deed, between necessity and autonomy, *taking into account* all these elements. The authoritative point of view on the act-descriptions is not mine *or* yours, but *ours*. Such a reconciliation is not an outcome of my self-acknowledging or your acknowledging me: rather, it is the condition for the formulation of new forms of acknowledgment, for more *qualitatively* demanding forms of interaction, in which the relativization of my perspective does not simply derive from a logic that imposes itself on the subjects, but can be object of *gratitude*, since the widening and inclusion of more points of view enriches my *familiarity* with our world. In this sense, it becomes clear that ego’s coming into the We of mutual recognition does not coincide with an annulment of the former in a subordinating homogeneity, or with flattening all differences in the name of a ‘legal-economic’ reciprocity. Rather, Hegel invites us to think of the We as plurality of I’s which are in themselves plural, as they embed ‘We’ in their individuality.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Bernstein, ‘Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel’s Poetics of Action’, p. 60.

¹⁴⁰ As shown by Samonà, such a perspective makes it possible not to sharply disjoin an intersubjectivistic perspective and the Hegelian concept of spirit. Namely, it makes it possible to not employ the Hegelian criticisms against the abstract universal to criticize his own concept of absolute. Cf. Leonardo Samonà, ‘The Community of the Self’, in *I That Is We, We That Is I. Perspectives on Contemporary Hegel. Social*

In a nutshell, mutual recognition can be explained as a *generative movement* because the We-form that instantiates in, through, and by it cannot be considered a consequential outcome of the interactive forms that precede it. Rather, the latter represent fundamental but not sufficient steps, since mutual recognition proceeds from freedom, like a change of heart that gives voice to the underlying continuity between you and me, which allows us to treat each other differently from reciprocal conditioning and exchange. The conclusion I come to in encountering, or better: clashing with the shared world, the realization that my deed ‘has something to say’ about my action, is de-absolutized and overturned by forgiveness, by the fact that these two descriptions become interdependent, thus disclosing the possibility of being with oneself by the other – not only intersubjectively understood, but as a way of inhabiting the world.¹⁴¹ And this means that I can live *by* my being-for-others, decentered in it, but not overcome by it.

The third and concluding moment of our analysis coincides with the explanation of the critical import of such account on mutual recognition. If forgiveness coincides with the mutual release from the metonymic shift from deed to agent, of the expressive self-assertion and of identity’s fixation, this leads to decisive repercussions for the critical role of the concept, since it allows to think otherwise the relationship between recognition and conflict. In fact, that in the end Hegel tells us that, in reconciliation, the acting and the judging consciences are still different makes clear that the participants no longer experience the argumentative conflict at stake as a ‘*against each other*’ (*ein Gegeneinander*) but as a ‘*with each other*’ (*ein Miteinander*).¹⁴² By inhabiting a space-for-freedom, we can welcome *our* perspective as authoritative with respect to my and your condition – that is, without the demand of homologating the other to my point of view. That mutual recognition discloses different modes of acknowledgment, not deriving them from the logical level of reciprocity, means, however, that recognition itself is set free from the fixing task to which the recognition-conflict pendulum seemed to have confined it. For Hegel invites us to conceive reconciliation and conflict not as two alternative phases, but as dialectically co-present moments. In this way, the critical-normative criterion provided by recognition coincides with its generativity, that is, its capability to mark discontinuity with the fixities of reciprocally interacting roles. Clearly, this criterion is always *local*, as it is always empirical and difficult to outline a priori. In this resides the cross and delight of a properly Hegelian social theory, which leaves the priority

Ontology, Recognition, Naturalism, and the Critique of Kantian Constructivism, ed. by Italo Testa and Luigi Ruggiu (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 286–98.

¹⁴¹ Cf. C. Fred Alford, ‘Forgiveness and Transitional Space’, in *D. W. Winnicott and Political Theory. Recentring the Subject*, ed. by M. Bowker and A. Buzby (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 185–201.

¹⁴² Cf. Bertram, *Hegels »Phänomenologie Des Geistes«*. *Ein Systematischer Kommentar*, p. 252.

to social's unfolding, keeping the pace by trying to unearthing the eventual emancipative interests. This account represents a normative criterion for evaluating institutional and relational forms, since this definition of mutual recognition does not reject, but rather accentuates the detranscendentalization highlighted by Honneth in *Anerkennung*. Nor does it reject the possibility of a normative reconstruction oriented by centrality of freedom in modern Western societies. However, a generative account of mutual recognition offers the possibility of focusing on the emancipatory role of recognition itself, rather than that of the struggle for recognition. For the role of mutual recognition is to indetermining, but not undermining, the determining by-relations of acknowledgment. That is to say: it certainly enables the actualization of personal potentialities, but most of all allows actuality's potentiality. In this way, the difference between the logic of reciprocity and the experience of mutuality becomes itself a possibility to de-reify the institutionalizations of acknowledgment, since the happening of mutual recognition itself represents the latter's aporetic overcoming.

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