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(Article begins on next page)

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Recognition as Passive Power.
Attractors of Recognition, Biopower, and Social Power

(post-print)

The notion of recognition plays a prominent role in different families of contemporary critical social philosophy as regards the characterization of its basic tenets. Here a peculiar oscillation is manifest. On the one hand, recognition is appealed to by different authors in the task of normative justification, for instance of a discursive ethics (Jürgen Habermas), of a theory of justice (Nancy Fraser), and of a theory of ethical life (Axel Honneth) respectively. On the other hand, such a notion very often also plays a descriptive role, which has to do with the way social subjects are constituted through mechanisms of socialization, as is the case with Habermas's functionalist theory of individualization through socialization, with Honneth's understanding of the struggle for recognition as constitutive of personal identity, and, on another side, with Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation, and with Judith Butler's theory of subjection. Such an oscillation, which lies at the core of the exchange on recognition between Honneth and Fraser¹, reveals to my mind something deep about recognition and cannot be stabilized until such time as when the ontologically constitutive role this notion already implicitly plays, is not explicitly captured by the critical theorists who adopt it. A wider scope of this article is then to offer a socio-ontological grounding for critical social philosophy, which can be obtained by a novel characterization of recognition as a capacity having both an active and a passive side. Such an understanding could also be relevant for political theory insofar as it may enlighten some aspects of power which are usually not adequately taken into consideration. There is a striking correspondence between the way normative approaches seem to get only the active, attributive side of recognition, and the way political theory seems to consider mostly the active side of the

¹ For instance, when Fraser reproaches Honneth for oscillating between a normative understanding, and a psychological understanding of recognition (see N. Fraser & A. Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003).

notion of power. My approach to recognition as some kind of power, should here offer some tools not only to bridge the gap between the theory of recognition and the theory of power, but also to get the passive side of both power and recognition right. This could provide a more plausible and phenomenologically adequate understanding of both, and be useful to help capture and read anew within a recognitive grounding of critical theory some aspects of the contemporary debate on biopolitics.

1. Four ways to understand the relation between recognition and power

In their introduction to the collection *Recognition and Power*, Bert van der Brink and David Owen identify two species of the relation between recognition and power:

1. according to the first one, forms of power may “guide and circumscribe the interpretation of principles of recognition”².
2. according to the second one, “the emergence and the demarcation of the principles of recognition [...] may themselves be the product of power relations”³.

In both cases, the relation between recognition and power is understood in terms of the relation that subsists between recognitive normative principles and power relations, where the latter are understood in the first option as external conditions of interpretation and application of independently given normative principles, and in the second option as conditions of emergence and individuation of such principles, which are finally revealed as mere derivations or ideological concealments of power relations.

I would now like to identify a third option in the way the relation between recognition and power may present itself. Accordingly,

3. recognition may be a constitutive aspect of some kind of social power.

² Bert v. den Brink, David Owen (eds.), *Recognition and Power. Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 20.

³ *Recognition and Power*, 21.

I think this is one possible way the notion of ‘rational form of ideological recognition’ Axel Honneth introduces in *Recognition as Ideology* may be interpreted⁴. Both justified (appropriate) and unjustified (not appropriate because lacking material fulfillment of the symbolic premises and expectations on which they rest) ideological forms of rational recognition, are related to what Honneth calls “regulative power”. Regulative power is here understood as a kind of “ability to engender modes of behavior by promising the advantage of an increase in self-esteem and public affirmation”⁵. Being attributed, or perceived as having some positive evaluative qualities, makes it possible for some agents to draw to themselves such positive qualities in a way that expressively confirms and actualizes them, and thus empowers their identity. Here recognition is understood as a constitutive element of a power – of a regulative power – but is not yet framed as a power itself. One can grasp the notion of recognition without using the notion of power, whereas some forms of power – those that are recognitively constituted – cannot be grasped without referring to the notion of recognition. In fact, recognition seems here to be constitutive of a power insofar as it is the element that puts some normative constraints on power. Regulative power constituted through recognition is here understood as a normative social power: a power that empowers the agents through the normative affirmation of positive evaluative qualities of such agents. Recognition is constitutive of social power insofar as its normative structures “might in fact bring about an increase in regulative power”⁶; normative principles of recognition, while constraining, restricting or limiting our behavior under some aspects, also positively enable us to act, insofar as they increase under some other aspects our regulative power. This third option of conceiving the relation between recognition and power has been further developed by Titus Stahl in his article on *Institutional power, collective acceptance, and recognition*⁷. Here recognition is meant to be a constitutive element of an institutional power. Institutional power is understood by Stahl as a species of sanctioning social power which ontologically depends on the acceptance, by those who are subjected to it, of the possibility of being evaluated and sanctioned. And recognition – understood as being mutual, symmetrical, and recursive – is here the normative

⁴ See Axel Honneth, “Recognition as Ideology”, in *Recognition and Power*, 323-347.

⁵ Honneth, *Recognition as Ideology*, 342.

⁶ Honneth, *Recognition as Ideology*, 347.

⁷ T. Stahl, “Institutional power, collective acceptance, and recognition”, in *Recognition and Social Ontology*, H. Ikaeheim, A. Laitinen (eds.) (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2011), 349-372.

constituent of such an acceptance. Here again, the normative characterization of the principles of mutual, symmetric and recursive recognition, by constituting the acceptance that is needed for there to be institutional power, puts some constitutive normative constraints – that is both limiting and enabling ones – on such a power. Recognition is first conceived as a normative principle, which can be grasped without referring to the notion of power, and then such a principle is used to specify some aspects of a form of social power.

I would now like to explore a fourth option in the way the relation between recognition and power may be conceived. Accordingly,

4. recognition, at least some species of it, can be directly defined in terms of power both in the general sense of power and in the restricted sense of power, that is both as a capacity and as a specific social power.

According to this option, you do not move from a normative characterization of principles of recognition, and then try to specify, and put some limits (as happens with option 1) – even constitutive ones (as happens with option 3) – to some sort of social power by means of those principles. But rather you move from an understanding of recognition as a species of power – and not just as something apparent, ideologically concealing some other power relations (as happens with option 2) – and then try to reconstruct the emergence of normative structures from within such a power.

2. Recognition as a capacity

First of all, one could say that recognition is a power in the wider sense of the term, where power is a sort of causal capacity: which seems *at first* to consist in the capacity to produce some effects, to bring about some state of things, to initiate chains of events. Such an understanding of recognition as some sort of capacity – understood as a kind of *doing* – is generally implicitly presupposed by theories of recognition. And please note that such a characterization in terms of capacity is rather independent from the way the act of recognition is specified by different theories (is it mainly an identifying, an

evaluative, an attributive, or a normative attitude?). Let's take for example Honneth's characterization of the main features of recognition⁸. Accordingly, recognition: i) is an affirmation of positive qualities of evaluative aspects of individual subjects or groups; ii) is relative to intersubjective action (it is a stance, "an attitude realized in concrete action"); iii) should be contained in the main scope of such an action, and not just be a secondary or unintentional scope of it; and iv) is a genus containing different species. One can easily see that recognition is here understood as a capacity that enables us to do something (to affirm some qualities, to attribute value...), to act in some specific ways.

2.1. Active and passive power

Yet, this sense of power as a capacity of doing something, even if specified in an action-theoretical perspective as a capacity of doing what one wants do to⁹, is still a rather general one, where power just means a causal power of producing some effects, bringing about some state of things. Furthermore, such an understanding of recognition as a capacity of doing something, which seems to be implicit in the way recognition is often conceived, may be somehow misleading and distort the phenomenon it should clarify, because it proceeds from an unilateral notion of capacity/power understood as something active – a kind of *doing* – and neglects the fact that power can mean also the capacity of undergoing something – a kind of *becoming* and *being*. Powers are to be understood not only as active but also as passive powers: and I think that, once we take into account such a distinction, then the phenomenon of recognition, as we shall see, can be seen in a novel light.

The distinction between active and passive power is basically the distinction between the power of initiating, producing a change, and the power of undergoing a change. Active powers and passive powers of living beings include both non-intentional (or pre-intentional) activities and changes (such as causal functions, vital operations), and intentional activities and changes (such as mental activities and states), that is, activities and states intentionally directed at particular objects or states of affairs in the world (I will call *intentional* such activities and states characterized by *directedness* or *aboutness*, which are identified by the determinate contents of the corresponding

⁸ Honneth, "Recognition as Ideology", 329-330.

⁹ See for example Joseph Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms* (London: Hutchinson, 1975), 98: "Power in all its forms is related to the possibility of realizing one's wishes".

intentional states – believing, desiring, intending – be it complete propositional contents or else something less organized). Furthermore, both active and passive powers include both non-deliberate and deliberate activities and changes. They include activities and changes that are exercised and happening unwillingly, be it because they are happening spontaneously – as when I happen to see something or to be seen, although I didn't intend to look at that or to be looked at – or else because they are induced or forced; but they also include activities and changes that are deliberately, willingly, intentionally exercised or happening (which I will call *intentional2*, meaning activities and changes that are intended, as when I intend to go to a movie, or I intended to be looked at by someone else).

Such a distinction between active and passive powers goes back at least to Aristotle, who in his *Metaphysics* introduced the categorical distinction between active potentiality (*dynamis*) – in the entity initiating change – and passive potentiality – in the entity undergoing change¹⁰: all movements occur at the interaction of these two potentialities, seen as different categorical aspects of one and the same process. Such a distinction applies to all living processes, from vegetative, to reproductive, including human non rational and rational activities and experiences. We can find an analogous distinction between active and passive power (*potentia*), that is between the object as “principium agendi in aliud” and the object as “principium patendi ab alio” in the *Summa Theologiae*¹¹. In the modern empiricist tradition such a distinction is renewed and connected directly to the English word “power” by John Locke, according to whom “Power thus considered is two-fold, viz. as able to make, or able to receive any change: The one may be called Active, and the other *Passive Power*”¹². Such a two-fold notion of power is connected by Locke to the notion of “agency” – whereas powers are understood as possessed by agents – and appears for example in a different theoretical context in Leibniz's affirmation that “the very substance of things consists in a force for acting and being acted upon”¹³. Along this line Steven Lukes, in the context of the elaboration of a theory of social power, has understood ‘passive’ powers’ as powers

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 9.1, 1046a.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.25, a.1.

¹² John Locke, *Essay on Human Understanding*, Book II, chap. XXI, § 2.

¹³ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *De Ipsa Natura*, sec. 8, translated in Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (eds. and trans.) *Leibniz: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1989), 159.

“where the agent ‘receives’ rather than ‘makes’ changes, experiencing rather than bringing about the outcome”¹⁴

2.2. Active and passive cognitive power

One can easily see that the phenomenon of recognition satisfies such a definition of both active and passive power. This is already testified to by the verbal form, which includes both the active form – ‘recognizing’ – and the passive form – ‘being recognized’ – and could be further developed by looking at the way the different meanings that the term has in ordinary language and in scientific languages relate sometimes to the active form and sometimes to the passive form. Recognition consists not only in the power of recognizing, but also in the power of being recognized. One may say that recognition is both an active power – a power of doing something, that is of recognizing – and a passive power: a power of undergoing something – that is of being recognized.

As is the case in general for active powers and passive powers, it is also true for both active and passive cognitive power that they may be both *non-intentional1* and *intentional1*, *non-intentional2* and *intentional2*.

As for *intentionality1*, there are forms of both active and passive recognition through which we respond to the world – including other cognitive beings – or are responded to, and that are *non-intentional1*, that is, that are not about (referred to) a determinate content. This may be the case, for example, of neural functional mechanism of action recognition, or else of pre-intentional forms of acquaintance or attunement to the world – think of human infants who smile at their caregivers – where we do not respond to others, or are responded to, as to something determinate – where we do not recognize something “as something” or are being recognized as “something”, qualifying what is being recognized in some respect. And of course there are *intentional1* exercises of both active and passive recognition, where we recognize something “as something” or are recognized “as something” (as in when we respond to someone, or are being responded to, as to a valuable human being, friend, comrade...).

As for *intentionality2*, some authors would like to restrict recognition to actions which contain it as the main scope of the action¹⁵, but I would like to present some arguments

¹⁴ S. Lukes, *Power, A Radical View*, 2nd edition (Houndmills Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), 71.

to loosen such a restriction. In fact, recognitive power may be exercised actively by performing some acts at will (as for example when I recognize you as being a good student by saying to the rest of the class that you are a good student, or by giving you a good mark). But active recognitive power may be exercised also *non-intentionally*², that is in a non deliberate way: for example, as an unintentional outcome (a side effect) of some other acts of ours, be they *intentional*¹ (as happens in the master-slave dialectic with the master, who somehow unwillingly recognizes his servant by subjugating him, by becoming dependent upon his service) or *non-intentional*¹ (as happens with human infants who recognize their caregivers by the somehow mechanical, and not directed at a determinate intentional content, activity of suckling).

Let's now come to the case of passive recognitive power and how it relates to *intentionality*². As previously stated, the power of being recognized is a power which can be held, and actualized, passively. First, one does not necessarily need to act – in some cases, you don't need to do anything in order to be recognized in some aspect (for example, in a public space you can under some circumstances happen to be recognized – being identified, or acknowledged, or respected, or esteemed, and the like – by strangers with whom you have never had the opportunity to interact with). And deliberately not to act could be a way of gaining more recognition, of having more recognitive power on others. The actualization of the passive power of being recognized does not even need to be accompanied by intentional deliberation of not acting in order to be recognized, that is it may be actualized in a *non-intentional*² way, irrespective of our will, as happens in some cases of deference (and it seems that those who, because of some status they hold, do not need to act at all in order to be recognized, are thus the most powerful ones in this respect).

2.3. The power of being recognized

Of course recognitive processes occur at the interaction of these two potentialities, which may happen in different subjects – where someone is being recognized while the other subject is recognizing them – but also as categorical aspects of the same subject – who may be recipient under some aspect – subjected to recognition – and agent under some other aspect – subject of recognition; acting under some circumstances, and being

¹⁵ See for example Honneth, "Recognition as Ideology", 330.

acted upon under different circumstances. Notwithstanding such an intertwining, there are many reasons in favor of the priority of the passive power over the active one in the way we are to understand the phenomenon of recognition.

First, whenever we recognize, we are in some sense moved by recognition: it is the passive power of being recognized of the recognizee that somehow (in a non-deterministic way) moves, inclines the recognizer, attracting her recognition: in this sense, even the recognizer is characterized by some degree of passivity, since she is undergoing a change, where her active capacity of recognizing is being actualized by someone else and is as such a sort of response to that. Thus, the act of recognizing is a responsive act. Which means that the passive power of being recognized, that is of attracting recognition, implies a corresponding passive power of being moved by it, that is of being attracted by recognition, which can be located in the other or in oneself as other.

Such a reciprocal correlation between being attractors of recognition and being attracted by recognition is implied also by the “doubling [*Verdoppelung*]”¹⁶ thesis underlying the Hegelian constitutive model of recognition, according to which the “movement of recognition [*Bewegung des Anerkennens*]” constitutive of self-consciousness is reconstructed as something that happens in the same way on both sides of the interaction and also within each side (that is both inter-subjectively and intra-subjectively). Once we leave aside the “act [*Tun*]” jargon that in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* sometimes affects Hegel’s account of such a movement, we are ready to realize that the underlying doubling process of recognition within the form of life that is being described regards what we might call ‘attracted attractors of recognition’ (to be distinguished from mere ‘not attracted attractors’), a genus whose relevant species is here that of those attracted attractors which are attracted by other attracted attractors.

Secondly, if we follow the broadly Hegelian socio-ontological model of cognitive constitution, being recognized is the conceptual condition of the possibility of recognizing: the active power of recognizing is constituted in the mutual process of being recognized. Which in a genetic perspective means that I can develop and acquire as an interactive habit the active capacity of recognizing by way of being recognized by others (including myself as other). Having the power of being recognized and of being

¹⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit [PS]*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), § 178, 111 (*Gesammelte Werke [GW]*, Hamburg: Meiner, 1980, 9, 109).

attracted by recognition, and also having been de facto recognized and attracted by recognition at some point – if one accepts a habit account of recognition – is a necessary condition for becoming and for being a recognizer, even if not a sufficient one, because to become and to be a recognizer one further needs to have the appropriate functions, to meet appropriate circumstances, to be recognized in appropriate ways. A recognizer is finally somebody who can recognize others because his passive capacity has been actualized by others in an appropriate way.

I think this is the reason why Hegel, when he develops systematically for the very first time in his 1805-6 *Realphilosophie* his notion of recognition as the basis of his understanding of ‘Spirit’ (*Geist*), on the one hand he introduces from the very beginning, analyzing the ‘Concept of Spirit’, the notion of ‘being recognized’ (*Anerkanntsein*) as the conceptually most primitive one – what he names “immediate being recognized”¹⁷. On the other hand, when he develops his genetic account of spiritual forms of life, he moves from a ‘natural’ immediate form of being recognized – which is manifested in phenomena such as intercourse, care and love. Such ‘natural’ phenomena manifest our being bearers of a form of life, of a *Gattung* whose structure is recognitive¹⁸. In this sense Hegel writes: “Such recognition is to come about. There must become for them what they [already] are in themselves. Their being for one another is the beginning of it”, and spells out this kind of recognitive passive biopower this way: “The individuals are *love*, this *being-recognized* without the opposition of the will”¹⁹.

Furthermore, Hegel understands the upper, institutionalized levels of Spirit as interactions where the phenomenon of ‘being recognized’ is reconstituted in its immediacy through the mediation of more complex and ‘universal’ forms (such as language, right, work, market, civil society, and State) of social and historical mediation. To sum up, Hegel identifies the conceptual and genetic role that the passive capacity of ‘being recognized’ plays within recognitive constitution.

¹⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6)*, in Leo Rauch (ed.), *Hegel and the Human Spirit: A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6) with Commentary* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 120 (GW 8, 224).

¹⁸ See on this Italo Testa, “How does Recognition Emerge From Nature? The Genesis of Consciousness in Hegel’s Jena Writings”, *Critical Horizons* 13, 2 (2012): 176–196.

¹⁹ Hegel, *The Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6)*, 114 (GW 8, 218).

The one who is recognized is recognized as *immediately* counting as such [*geltend*] through his *being* — but *this being is itself generated from the concept*; it is a recognized being [*anerkanntes Seyn*]. Man is necessarily recognized and necessarily gives recognition. This necessity is not his own, not that of our thinking in contrast to the content. As recognizing, man is himself the movement [of recognition], and this movement is what negates [*hebt auf*] his natural state: he is recognition; the natural merely *is*, it is not the *spiritual* aspect²⁰.

Hegel understands here the development of the active power of ‘recognizing’, of being *aner kennend*, as something that develops from the dynamics of being recognized that manifests itself already in our natural individual form of life, and that moves from unqualified, immediate forms of being recognized towards the spiritual, that is the more and more qualified, determined, universal forms of being recognized. Even the activity of recognizing finds its full accomplishment insofar as it is recognized (by others and oneself as other), and thus actualizes the power of being recognized, which is both at the beginning and at the end of the process of recognition that is being described (“There must become for them what they [already] are in themselves”). That’s why Hegel affirms here that “*being-recognized* is the spiritual element”²¹, that is, is the fundamental structure of *Geist*.

Such a priority of the notion of being recognized over the notion of recognizing does not mean that the passive capacity and active capacity are separate phenomena. As is already clear from what I have said, for the individual bearers of our form of life the capacity of being subject to recognition and passive in respect of it, is part of a larger process, whereby the recognizee can (even though this may never happen because of some circumstances) become the active subject of recognition. That is to say that such a passive power is proper of living beings as individual bearers of our form of life, that is of a form of life where such power can normally develop into an active one. Which does not mean, as I will argue later, that such a capacity of being recognized cannot be at some point detached from the very possibility for individual living subjects to develop the active capacity of recognizing, and be transferred either to inorganic subjects (such

²⁰ Hegel, *The Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6)*, 111 (GW 8, 215).

²¹ Hegel, *The Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6)*, 173 (GW 8, 278).

as collective subjects, institutions), or else to objective beings (such as norms) who behave differently – some of them are not possible active subjects of recognition – and nonetheless maintain some features of the capacity of being recognized, and in particular the capacity to elicit a recognitive response.

2.4. Attractors of recognition

So far, I have made explicit the primary role of the phenomenon of being recognized by way of the notion of passive power. Furthermore, I have tried to make it clear how the power of being recognized does in some sense elicit recognition. And I have already labeled such a feature as the property of being an attractor of recognition. I would now like to dwell a little more on that.

In this sense, recognitive beings are first of all *attractors of recognition*: even when they eventually come to develop the active power of recognizing (which may never be the case for some), they can do that by way of having had, of maintaining and actualizing the passive power of being recognized. And if we assume that we are endowed with natural functions that predispose the bearers of our form of life to develop recognitive attitudes through social habituation, then we are dealing with something that may be called a basic passive recognitive biopower of attracting recognition and, according to the ‘doubling’ thesis underlying the constitutive model, of being attracted by recognition: a two-fold passive power of recognition (which consists in being an attracted attractor) out of which active recognitive powers develop, and in which they have to find their accomplishment in order to be constituted as such.

Let me add some details about ‘attractors’. Here it may be helpful to have a look at how the notion of ‘attractors’ is used in the theory of dynamic systems. An attractor is “a set of states (points in the phase space), invariant under the dynamics, towards which neighboring states in a given basin of attraction asymptotically approach in the course of dynamic evolution”²². This may help us to grasp the fact that recognitive attracted attractors not only exert a sort of a pull on neighboring states of the system under consideration, but also induce similar states on what is attracted. Thus, attracted attractors of recognition do not just trigger active recognitive acts: what they tend to do

²² See for example: <http://mathworld.wolfram.com/Attractor.html>. See also *The SAGE Handbook of Innovation in Social Research Methods*, M. Williams, W.P. Vogt (eds.) (Los Angeles, London: Sage, 2011), 124.

is to induce in the other the passive power of being attracted – and consequently the active power of recognizing as a way to possibly respond to the other’s passive power of attracting recognition. By that they finally induce and implement in the other the power of being an attractor of recognition. Attracted attractors of recognition tend to attract other attracted attractors of recognition, which brings us back to the ‘doubling’ thesis.

Along these lines one could give a novel reconstruction of the rationale that could have moved Hegel to apply the notion of *Begierde* in order to describe some aspects of the cognitive process. In his Jena writings he introduced “being recognized [*Anerkanntsein*]” as the most primitive notion to be used in order to grasp the phenomenon of *Anerkennung* and its constitutive role for Spirit. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* he then further developed his analysis of “being recognized” by introducing the notion of ‘appetite’ (*Begierde*), what is usually called, with a term that I think is less appropriate, “desire” for recognition²³. Here the very notion of appetite for recognition captures exactly some aspects of the attractiveness exerted by the power of being recognized that is primarily connected with those individual “living beings” (“the object of immediate appetite is a living being”²⁴) that are bearers of our form of life, of our “*Gattung*”²⁵. The appetite for recognition is the fundamental drive that moves those natural beings that have not yet culturally developed the full capacity of actively and deliberately (self-consciously) recognizing, but that are already attracted by other individual living bearers of their form of life as by attracted attractors of recognition. Such an appetite cannot be satisfied by just any object, but only by an object that is itself moved by the appetite for recognition. An object that has both the passive capacity of being recognized and the passive capacity of being attracted by recognition, and as that only as such can give satisfaction to its appetite: a satisfaction which would finally consist in being recognized. In this sense for Hegel self-consciousness is already in ‘itself’ a capacity of being recognized – it holds the passive power of being recognized even before having developed into an active recognizer – and has to become ‘for itself’ “something recognized [*ein Anerkanntes*]”: that is, it has to develop itself into a form of life that can be recognized by others (and by itself as other) as a recognizer, what I will

²³ PS, § 174, 109 (GW 9, 107).

²⁴ PS, § 168, 106 (GW 9, 104).

²⁵ PS, § 173, 109 (GW 9, 107). See on this also Italo Testa “Second Nature and Recognition. Hegel and the Social Space”, *Critical Horizons*, 10, 3 (2009): 341-370

later call an acquired, higher form of the capacity of being recognized (“Self-consciousness exists *in* and *for itself* when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged”²⁶). Thus, the constitution of active self-conscious recognizers finds its accomplishment in *being-recognized*, since it is only by being recognized as recognizers by others (and by themselves as others) that are themselves attracted attractors of recognition (hence moved by the appetite for recognition), that they can become recognizers²⁷.

The phenomenon of ‘being recognized’ is in this sense both at the beginning and at the end of the movement of cognitive constitution that Hegel reconstructs. The appetite for recognition is the desire for being recognized that drives those that are attracted attractors of recognition: an interaction that Hegel describes firstly at a level which already takes place in a *non-intentional1* and *non-intentional2* manner, in a rather undetermined, spontaneous and somewhat causal form (and this is another reason to prefer the translation of ‘*Begierde*’ with ‘appetite’), and that he captures with images that refer both to mirroring mimetic processes (“each [...] therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same”²⁸) and to the interplay of physical forces (“play of Forces [*Spiel der Kräfte*]”²⁹), which makes it explicit, with its reference to gravitation, that what is happening is somehow a phenomenon of reciprocal attraction between attracted attractors.

But what does it mean exactly that the passive power of being recognized is a capacity which can be held without being exercised actively? Let me say first of all that of course one can always actively and deliberately promote (by means of physical force, coercion, manipulation or influence) the passive power of being recognized (as happens, for example, with those that follow some advice to enhance their Klout score), but what is being actualized through some other activity is still the passive power of being recognized. Secondly, the fact that the passive power of being recognized can be held without being exercised actively – even in an indirect way – has to do with the fact that to have the power of being recognized is the same as to be an attractor of recognition.

²⁶ PS, § 178, 111 (GW9, 109).

²⁷ In this sense one may argue that, whereas Aristotle affirms the conceptual priority of active power over passive power (*Metaphysics* 9.1, 1046a11-13), Hegel’s reconstruction of the process of recognition seems on the contrary to be based on the primacy of passive power.

²⁸ PS, § 183, 112 (GW9, 110).

²⁹ PS, § 184, 112 (GW9, 110).

Attractors of recognition can elicit cognitive responses even without necessarily intending to do that, just because of being attractors, and this is also true both for not attracted attractors and attracted attractors (but of course this happens in various forms and degrees, since the property of being an attracted attractor of recognition seems to be universally but not equally distributed within our form of life for both natural and historical reasons). In this sense attractors of recognition seem to play some sort of causal role – triggering, eliciting, or inducing some kind of responses – which cannot be easily analyzed as, or reduced to, a normative role. And this is one of the reasons that will lead us later to understand recognition not only as a power in the general sense of the term, but also as a specific form of power in the restricted sense of social power.

As we have already said, being an attractor of recognition is a power that consists in a capacity which can be held without being exercised, even if this disposition may be in some cases the result of a previous exercise: but not in all cases, since it must be assumed that there might be cognitive attractors that haven't yet developed the power (for example, human infants) – and who in fact may never develop the relevant active powers of recognizing and be recognized on the basis of that. This is also the reason why having the passive power of being an attractor of recognition is a property that in some occurrences can be detached from both the property of being attracted by recognition, and the property of possibly being a recognizing subject: even though individual bearers of our form of life are attractors of recognition that are also attracted by recognition, and can consequently in the normal case develop into recognizing subjects, it can be the case that in social and institutional contexts attractors of recognition subsist – that is objects with the passive power of being recognized – that aren't associated with the power of being attracted by recognition, and that can't possibly develop into recognizing subjects. This is what happens with some social statuses and some institutional norms, which are instituted by recognizing subjects, but have cognitively attractive properties which continue to exist independently of these subjects.

To sum up: we have introduced the ontological notion of “attractors of recognition”. The genus of attractors of recognition includes at least two species: not attracted attractors (such as objects which elicit recognition), and attracted attractors (which both elicit and are elicited by recognition). Individual living members of our form of life are

by default attracted attractors attracted by other attracted attractors. The fact that within our form of life the elementary form of attracted attractors is bound up with our biological form, does not mean that attractors of recognition cannot be socially constituted. This means first of all that the aspects by which individual living members of our form of life attract, and are attracted by recognition, can be the result of a process of social determination. If we assume that the socially articulated form of being recognized has the structure 'being recognized *as* X', here the *as* clause expresses the process of social specification of the content X. Hence, the fact that some aspects under which individual agents are recognized are socially constructed – let's take for instance gender or racial traits – is fully compatible with the notion of passive power, since through the social determination of the 'X' I acquire the passive power of being recognized *as* X, that is, the passive capacity is being actualized in a determinate way.

The socio-ontological constitution of recognition can involve the constitution of higher order, extended attractors of recognition. These are attractors of recognition which work within our form of life but whose constitution detaches them from the primary biological form of individual living members of it. This is the case of socially constituted attractors of recognition such as statuses, norms, groups, and institutions. Since higher order attractors seem to work within our form of life, one can say that their cognitive properties, even if detached from the biological form of primary attractors, are still to be understood as somehow derived from them.

Such socially constituted attractors of recognition can be both not attracted attractors, and attracted attractors. For instance, statuses and norms seem to behave mostly as not attracted attractors, insofar as they are social objects which can attract recognition from individual subjects, groups, or institutions (but if one admits that norms, or systems of norms, tend to attract recognition from other norms, or systems of norms, then one should allow for norms to be somehow subjective attracted attractors). As for groups and institutions, they are more obviously attracted attractors of recognition (think, for instance, of groups or states who reciprocally recognize themselves). Whether groups and institutions are mere objective attracted attractors, or can be characterized also as subjective attracted attractors, depends on the position one assumes as for the possibility and the status of plural subjects or collective entities, and on the different circumstances in which they operate. One important thing to note here is that the notion of attractors of

recognition can illuminate some important aspects of the social constitution of social groups and institutions. Recognitive powers are constitutive of groups and institutions, even though they may come in different forms and degrees. Not only for there to be groups and institutions, these must have the capacity of being recognized as such. But having the passive capacity of being attracted attractors (attracted by individuals, other groups or institutions) seems to also be a constitutive feature of groups and institutions. Finally, there can be groups and institutions which manifest not only the passive capacity of recognition, but which are endowed with an active subjective capacity of recognizing, and are thus in a more fully-fledged sense to be understood as recognizing subjects³⁰). In this sense the conceptual apparatus of recognitive attractors can be a useful tool to differentiate and characterize socio-ontologically different forms of social groups and institutions.

2.5. Relational power

A further specification that we should give to recognitive powers, is that they are to be understood not just as powers, but as relational powers. In fact, they consist not only in producing effects, of bringing about some state of things in the world, but they also consist specifically in producing effects on other attracted attractors of recognition. If one accepts the possibility of framing this within an action-theoretical perspective, then such a relational power affects the attitudes of other agents – which is directly implied by the same structural relation that subsists between recognizing and being recognized.

3. Social power

So far, we have been talking about recognition as a power in the general sense of the term (meaning power as some sort of causal capacity). But now I would like to frame recognition in the restricted sense of power as a social power. Recognition is a relational

30 This could give a recognitive basis to the distinction, traced by Maurice Hauriou, between ‘*institutions-choses* (things institutions)’, such as marriage and property, and ‘*institutions-personnes*’ (persons institutions) like associations and corporations, which accede to some sort of subjective personal dimension. See M. Hauriou, “La théorie de l’institution et de la fondation” (1925), in *Aux sources du droit: le pouvoir, l’ordre, la liberté* (Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen, 1986), 96-97.

social power in the restricted sense of power³¹. Social power may be understood as being a relational power to induce some effects on other agents, whether they want to or not.

Please note that a social power may affect other agents both in a negative and in a positive way. Such effects on others may negatively limit their agency, putting constraints on their free action, or else they may positively empower their agency – their capacity of doing what they want to do – and thus enable them to pursue novel courses of action. Both ideas are contained in the very notion of recognition, since other agents are here understood not only as being external limitations of the exercise of our free agency, but also as a genetic and conceptual condition of the possibility of the development of our recognitive powers (and thus of free agency itself, if one assumes, as happens in the Hegelian model of the constitution of self-conscious freedom, that recognitive powers are constitutive of free agency). And it is just because of its productive – and not merely repressive – side that recognition is the social power it is, since it is by enabling and empowering other subjects that recognition may induce them not only to unwillingly do some things, but also to willingly do some things (be it to follow some behaviors, or to have some beliefs, desires or preferences that conform to the recognitive patterns promoted by that power) that may be contrary to their rational interests, as happens in the cases of voluntary servitude.

3.1. Is there anything specific in recognitive social power?

Once we conceive of social power in the restricted sense as making others do (or not do) something, whether they want to or not, we should further ask whether recognition can add something to the picture of social power. Is there a form of social power that is in some sense specifically recognitive? This would make sense if we could find some specifically recognitive way of making others do things through specific recognitive mechanisms.

We could gain such an insight if we reconsider the fact that recognition is not just the power of actively doing something, but also, and foremost, the passive power of undergoing something, that is of being recognized. Such a passive power is the power

³¹ On the restricted notion of power as social power see Lukes, *Power*, 73: “In this more restrictive but widespread understanding, ‘power’ is explicitly relational and asymmetrical: to have power is to have power over another or others”.

held to some degree (which may vary from case to case and lead to different levels of ‘recognitive force’) by attractors of recognition. But attracting recognition is something that affects the behavior, the agency of others, since it is both their recognitive acts and their recognitive passive power that are thus attracted (and maybe also empowered). In this sense, having the passive power of recognition is already a specific way of making or letting others do or undergo something. Just because of its reflectivity (attracting recognition is something that induces recognition: it’s a power that induces the same kind of power in the other on whom it is exerted), the passive power of recognition is already a form of relational social power.

Once we consider the peculiar relation that subsists between passive and active powers of recognition, and how the priority of the first over the latter constitutes the property of being an attracted attractor of recognition, then we can come to see that recognitive power is a kind of authority whose first and most primitive instance is constituted by the passive power of being recognized. It is first of all a passive authority to attract recognition, and because of that it can develop in an active authority to produce recognitive acts, an active authority which is in itself related to the passive power of being attracted by recognition – since, as we have already seen, it is responsive to it – and which cannot be constituted without being recognized by others.

Recognitional authority, thus, can be grasped at a level which is not yet a normative one, nor an institutional one. In its simplest form, recognitional authority is to be understood as the kind of authority held by those biological beings who are socially attracted attractors of recognition, and as such presuppose some degree of acceptance by others: a sort of acceptance which at this basic, ‘background’ level³² is not yet collective acceptance mediated by social norms, as is the case for institutional acceptance³³, but rather much more a sort of mimetic acceptance held by those that, being to some degree attracted by the passive recognitive capacity of the other, respond to it in a positive way. As such, recognitional authority in its most simple case is rather a form of background social biopower, which can be characterized independently from other forms of authority. Let’s consider the Weberian distinction between traditional, charismatic,

³² For a socio-ontological reading of recognition in terms of background practices, see 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

³³ For a detailed analysis of forms of institutional recognitive acceptance, see in particular Arto Laitinen, “Recognition, acknowledgment and acceptance”, in *Social Ontology and Recognition*, 309-347.

legal-rational, and persuasive rational (that is, authority as rational autonomy) forms of authority: one can see that recognitional authority, as we have characterized it, is held to some degree also by those who are not charismatic, and is not only a feature of traditions, or of individuals invested by traditions; furthermore, recognitional authority does not need to be related to legal and rational norms, nor to be autonomously exercised, because it may be held also passively by simple natural recognizing beings. Recognitional authority at its simplest form is not per se bound up with any particular determinate content: it is a kind of *pre-intentional* (and 2) authority others have on us (and we have on others), and which is not dependent on any peculiar feature we may attribute to them³⁴.

Making or letting others recognize or be recognized, is thus a specific form of social power. It is not only an occurrence of social power, but also an occurrence which is characterized by specific cognitive means, since the mechanism that lets other recognize is itself based on a cognitive property, that is the property of being an attractor of recognition. Of course there may be more active and deliberate ways of

³⁴ An anonymous referee observed that the notion of ‘authority’ doesn’t fit very well with the not normative characterization and the language of causation that the idea of passive power as triggering or eliciting recognition seems to involve. First, let me note here that in the literature on authority (see T. Christiano, "Authority", in E.N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013 Edition), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/authority/>) it is common to distinguish between descriptive notions of authority (authority *de facto*) and normative notions of authority (authority which is morally or politically legitimate, which regards some sort of normative relation between such authority and those who are subjected to it). It is interesting to note that, even those who, such as Joseph Raz, think that authority *de facto* always presupposes normative authority, and then understand authority as an essentially normative notion, argue that the legitimacy of normative authority always depends on a not normative fact, that is the “fact of being recognized as legitimate” (see J. Raz, “The Problem of Authority: Revisiting the Service Conception”, *Minnesota Law Review*, 90 (2006): 1003-1044), where “being recognized” is interestingly listed as a not normative state of those who have the power of undergoing it. If we now go back to the Weberian distinction between charismatic, traditional, and legally rational forms of authority, one can see that not only is charismatic authority not essentially normative, but also that traditional authority can be based on customary patterns which may not be essentially constituted by rules or norms. And in some sense, cognitive authority may well be understood as consisting of a sui generis form of charisma, a sort of threshold capacity which is universally widespread, even if at different degrees – different grades of ‘cognitive force’ – by those who qualify as individual members of our form of life, and which can also be conferred upon and exerted by extended, higher level cognitive attractors. I think we can better comprehend the not normative aspect of authority if we understand the latter as some sort of influence, that is, as a capacity to condition the will of others, to induce them to do or not do something. Now influence is a form of power which can be exercised in different ways. For instance, Lukes (see “Potere” in *Enciclopedia delle scienze sociali* (Rome: Treccani, 1996: 722–45) distinguishes between three forms of influence: rational persuasion, manipulation, and authority. Not all of these forms of authority are normatively structured (consider manipulation and different instances of authority, including charismatic and mimetic influence). Finally, if we understand recognitional authority as a power of influence, then we can also better see why there is a not eliminable causal aspect in it. Authority, as a form of power, is a capacity to induce something in other agents, that is, to produce some sort of causal effects in them: this may be mediated by normative elements, but remains a causal relation.

letting others recognize and be recognized, that is by using coercive mechanisms (a threat of physical force, sanction, manipulation or intentional forms of influence): but already the most simple case of just being an attractor of recognition enables us to some degree to let others recognize or be recognized, and thus is a kind of social power.

Such a background power of letting others recognize and be recognized can be held whether they want to or not: this means that it may be held both in cases where it limits the volition of others, and in cases where it is willingly accepted by others (including cases of voluntary subjection), which does not mean that no power relation subsists. Furthermore, such a power of letting others recognize or be recognized can be both *non-intentionally*² and *intentionally*². The social power of recognition is the power of, willingly or not, letting others recognize and be recognized whether they want to or not. Such a power can be held even without having the intention to hold it, that is in a non deliberate way – an aspect which is strengthened by its intimate connection with the passive power of being recognized and the kind of attraction that such a passive power may elicit.

Furthermore, it should be added that such a power to let others recognize or be recognized whether they want to or not, can be held reflexively (directly by individual subjects, but also indirectly by groups, collective subjects, and institutions, or else by social objects such as statuses and norms), that is as a way of letting others recognize oneself or be recognized by oneself. But such a power can be held also transitively, as the power of letting others recognize and being recognized by others (other subjects, or else other objects, such as social norms, institutions), where it is exactly the attractive power of recognizers that is being transferred.

If we now go back to Honneth's characterization of the 4 main features of recognition, then we see that, once we understand recognition as a power which is not only active but first and foremost also passive, and once we use such an understanding to grasp a specific notion of social power, then this has some consequences first on the way we should conceive feature number 2) – that is the idea that recognition should be restricted to intersubjective action, and understood as a stance, “an attitude realized in concrete action”. The action-theoretical perspective, in fact, cannot exhaustively characterize the phenomenon of recognition, since it seems to grasp it mainly from the perspective of

intentional active ‘agents’ of recognition – i.e. from the perspective of recognizers, performers of active powers of recognition – and cannot give an adequate account of the perspective of ‘recipients’ of recognition – of the constitutive role that the passive power has for there to be attractors of recognition, and consequently recognizers. All of which implies that the extension of the action-theoretical perspective should be limited, and not considered identical to the domain of recognition theory. This is due to the fact that recognition is a condition of intentional agency – a genetic and conceptual condition for there to be intentional agents: for intentional agency to emerge, maintain itself, and be conceived – and thus cannot be wholly grasped with the conceptual tools of the action-theoretical perspective (of course the whole story should be told anew if one were keen to extend the notion of agency beyond the domain of intentionalist action theory, applying it even to vital, *non-intentional1* and *non-intentional2* processes, that is to all processes that can initiate and undergo movement³⁵, even without being about determinate contents, or directed by deliberate reflection).

Secondly, feature 3) should be discharged – that is we should discharge the criterion stating that for there to be recognition in a specific sense, then recognition should be contained in the main scope of an action, and not just be a secondary or unintentional scope of it. This is due to the fact that recognition may be both *non-intentional1* – it may not always be referred to, and be identified by, a determinate intentional content – and *non-intentional2* – may not always be the result of a willing, deliberate *intention to action* or *in action*³⁶. From this point of view, the tendency, typical of most theories of recognition, to characterize such a phenomenon from the outset in exclusively intentional terms, and to relate it exclusively to the level of an already constituted personhood, and to the field of action theory, underestimates the extent to which cognitive powers work as sub-personal mechanisms, on a level beneath intentional consciousness and higher personal structures, even though they may play a role in their emergence.

4. *Biopower and biopolitical power*

³⁵ For a compelling strategy on how to extend the notion of agency to vital processes, and beyond the scope of action theory, see M. Thompson, *Life and Action. Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

³⁶ For such a distinction between prior intentions and intentions in action, see John Searle, “The Intentionality of Intention and Action”, *Inquiry* 22, 1-4 (1979): 253-280.

I have tried to understand some aspects of recognition in terms of social power. I have tried to conceive of the simplest case of cognitive social power at a level which is not yet intrinsically intentional and normative. Furthermore, I have tried to grasp the simplest and primary case of cognitive power at a background level which is not intrinsically institutional, that is at the level of the bio-social power of being attractors of recognition. This does not exclude, as we have seen, that such a power can be transferred to social objects, groups, and collective institutional social subjects.

Let's recap what I have been arguing so far. Being provided with cognitive powers means not only being able to perform cognitive acts, but first of all being a center of attraction of recognition, which is a constitutive condition for us to possibly develop and consolidate the capacity to actively perform cognitive acts. Cognitive capacities are first and foremost passive powers, that is to say powers that in some circumstances may not require activity to be held. Being provided with cognitive capacities implies being potential attractors of recognition, namely to be centers of cognitive authority. In some sense, all those individuals who, within our specific form of life, are biologically equipped with cognitive functions and develop them through habituation in cognitive abilities, are centers of authority, although in varying degrees of cognitive force, the latter being distributed asymmetrically. Such a passive cognitive power can be activated as a subpersonal (*non-intentional1*, pre-cognitive, pre-intentional) mechanism and is not necessarily held or exercised in a deliberate, thoughtful, reflective, *intentional2* manner, as the result of a deliberate choice (the voluntary choice to let someone else do or undergo something, to force or coerce him to act or not to act in a certain sense). As such, cognitive power may be characterized and reconstructed in some sense as a form of biopower, that is as a form of power that is constitutive of our form of life.

The characterization of recognition as biopower grasps the categorical structure of our form of life, the form which structures our individual bios and which constitutes its elementary ontological structure, which is presupposed by and plays a primary role also in the constitution of higher levels of the social world. Secondly, the characterization of recognition as biopower and the articulation of it as passive power, enlightens the subpersonal level of cognitive processes. In this sense, ontogenetic analysis of the

development of recognitive capacities such as Hegel's, Mead's and Honneth's, need to introduce a notion of recognition as passive biopower, since the process of becoming an active recognizer, the constitution of recognizing subjects through recognitive interaction, presupposes that at least the passive power of being recognized is given as an elementary form even before fully-fledged personhood is developed. Finally, it is important to understand recognition as biopower because such a characterization grasps not only the *bio-*, living form of recognition, but also because it gets its *power* aspect, that is its proper connection with the phenomenon of social power.

4.1. Precursors

Such a connection between power, life and recognition has already been noted in the history of the theory of recognition: Rousseau, for example, noted in his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* that in the state of nature the origin of social relations of power lies in the different ability to attract looks – some, *intentionally*¹ and/or *intentionally*² or not, are less able to attract the gaze of others, whether they would like to or not. And Hegel himself, in his *Self-consciousness* chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, seemed to assume that recognition is possible not only within the free, reflexive and deliberate relations between equal agents whose *intentional*¹ and *intentional*² self-consciousness are already fully constituted and institutionally articulated, but also within asymmetrical power relations that emerge from pre-intentional biological natural life. There is a whole story to be told here, but for present purposes I won't undergo such an enterprise and I will mainly concentrate on how the relation between recognition understood as biopower and contemporary biopolitical theories may be understood.

This requires us to distinguish more accurately between 'biopower' and 'biopolitics'. Under recognitive 'biopower' I have meant so far the elementary recognitive capacities with which individual members of our social form of life are by default endowed. I propose now to use the adjective "biopolitical" to characterize those dynamics where such individual biopowers are intertwined with recognitive processes which involve higher order, extended attractors of recognition. This analytical distinction is needed first because it is only within a form of life characterized by biopower that extended

forms of recognitive attractors can be constituted. Secondly, because extended recognitive attractors – statuses, norms, groups, institutions – themselves play a constitutive role in the social determination of the contents of our individual biopowers, as we have seen with the case of social specification the passive power of being recognized *as X*.

4.2. Recognitive biopower and the power of socialization

Foucauldian theories of power and biopolitical theories tend to conceive of social power as being something anonymous, widespread, and pervasive. This model covers both the microphysics of power – the power relationship between individuals – and its macrophysics – social power held and exercised by discursive orders, disciplinary practices, and institutions, on individuals and on other orders, practices, and institutions. Biopolitical theories, in this sense – as noted by John Searle³⁷ – tend to consider the power of socialization as a Background power – then as a power mostly held and exercised at the *non-intentional(1 and 2)* or pre-intentional level of capacities, dispositions and functions that operate beneath our daily practices.

But please note that contemporary theories of recognition (such as Mead's, Habermas', and Honneth's) tend to think of the recognitive constitution of intentional subjects and of their personal structures on the model of socialization in sociological terms, that is on the basis of the model of individuation through socialization. Along this model recognizing capacities, and the practices to which they give rise, then, must be thought of as constitutive aspects of the power of socialization. Hence, the characterization of recognition as biopower developed so far may be an adequate tool to grasp the background structure of the power of socialization in such a way that captures both its recognitive and its biopolitical structure, thus enabling us to bridge the gap between these two critical-philosophical traditions.

We have to think not only that there is a level of subpersonal recognition (in addition to the personal, interpersonal, and institutional levels), connected with some recognitive biopowers, but also that there is a biopolitical dimension of recognition (distinct from

³⁷ John Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 155ff.

the axiological and from the deontic dimensions of recognitive powers)³⁸ that operates at the subpersonal and impersonal levels (as is the case in many aspects of the socialization process)³⁹. The introduction of the biopolitical dimension of social recognitive power is particularly useful in order to understand an aspect of recognitive phenomena that might otherwise escape the theoretical model. So far, I have construed recognition as biopower mainly at the level of dyadic relation. But in social practice such a relationship often, if not always, involves a third party – thus it is a triadic one – involving a *We* which mediates the relationship between ego and alter: *I that is We, and We that is I*, to quote Hegel’s plastic formulation of this subject matter. The fact is that several recognitive phenomena are about already institutionally mediated relations between individuals, or about relations between individuals and institutions, if not about relations between institutions and other institutions (understood in a broad sense, which include informal and formal institutions). Here the characterization of biopower as a power of attracting and being attracted by recognition can be fruitfully extended to the biopolitical dimension, that is those social processes where norms, groups and institutions are involved, and whose dynamics manifest peculiar recognitive traits.

4.3. Institutional recognitive macropowers

Certain social practices and institutions are recognitive subjects which attract and perform recognitive acts: in the sense of both providing recognition; of claiming to be recognized by the people who are subject to them; and of having the power to let themselves be recognized and to let others recognize or be recognized. In this sense they are endowed with recognitive authority. But the way in which those powers are held and exercised by recognitive institutions is rarely active, explicit, personal, discreet, deliberate, and instead is mostly passive, anonymous, distributed, and pervasive. Furthermore, the relationship between individuals and the social practices and institutions having recognitive powers tends to be vertical rather than horizontal, and

³⁸ On the distinction between personal, interpersonal, and institutional *layers* of recognition, and between the axiological and the deontic *dimensions* of recognition, see Heikki Ikaheimo, “Recognizing Persons”, *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 14, 5-6 (2007): 224-47.

³⁹ For a different way to develop the idea that there is an ‘impersonal’ aspect of institutional recognition, see also Heikki Ikaheimo, Arto Laitinen, “Recognition and Social Ontology: An Introduction”, in *Recognition and Social Ontology*, 10, where the ‘impersonal’ side of institutional recognition is understood as responding to someone as a bearer of a role or a position, and contrasted with the ‘personal’ way of responding to someone as an irreplaceable person.

implies an asymmetry of distribution of recognitive authority. These institutions are endowed with recognitive powers in the restricted sense of social powers, insofar as they tend to let people do or undergo things whether they want to or not: they tend to let themselves be recognized by others, whether they want to or not, and to let others recognize and be recognized by certain things. Holding or exercising the social power of recognition is not identical either to physical force, or to coercion, that is to the intentional and active exercise of a power based on the explicit threat of physical force or sanctions. These are rather special cases of social power. The way such institutions exercise their socializing power over individuals or over other institutions, is much more a *non-intentional* way of enjoying a passive power of being recognized, a kind of (asymmetrically distributed) recognitive attractiveness they have accumulated and which elicits recognition.

4.4. Social pressure and the microphysics of recognition

But the biopolitical model is also useful to help us rethink the recognitive inter-individual relation and the role it plays within the model of individuation as socialization, in contexts where the inter-I-you relation is already mediated by institutions. In the process of recognitive constitution of social self-consciousness, in fact, each individual, being equipped to some extent with recognitive powers, and therefore with recognitive authority, is a social ‘administrator’ of recognitive power firstly because she is a social ‘attractor’ of recognition⁴⁰. That is, each individual is potentially placed in front of other people as an attractive representative of the recognitive community (and in some cases as a representative of some of its institutions). This is the phenomenon of social pressure that each individual, as holder of the power to let others recognize and be recognized, that is as an attractor of social recognition, voluntarily or otherwise has, and possibly actively exercises on other individuals.

⁴⁰ Whereas Robert Brandom seems to understand the “authority” of the “administrators” of recognition on the basis of an autonomy based model of “authority” – understood basically in intentional, active, deontic terms as being the “author of” something (paradigmatically a norm) – I propose to understand their being authoritative as administrators as having a foothold on their being attractors of recognition (which means that such an authoritativeness does not per se imply their being “authors of” anything). See Robert Brandom, “Some Pragmatic Themes in Hegel’s Idealism: Negotiation and Administration in Hegel’s Account of the Structure and Content of Conceptual Norms,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 7, 2 (1999): 164–189.

Recognitive power is an asymmetrically widespread power that everyone may have and possibly exercise over anyone, insofar as they have some sort of recognitive authority. This way we can manage to re-describe background biopolitical power (with its anonymous, pervasive traits) in recognitive terms. In this way we not only manage to re-describe recognitive relations – between individuals and individuals, between individuals and institutions, and then between institutions and institutions – as power and authority relations. But most of all we manage to characterize the notion of power in specifically recognitive terms.

4.5. Conclusion: some consequences of the model of recognitive attractors for the analysis of social phenomena and social criticism

The recognitive constitution of subjectivity and intersubjectivity implies that the recognitive power is not only a power in the general sense – a capacity to produce some state of things in the world – but that it also works as a social power in the restricted sense (a capacity to induce some state of things on other agents, whether they want it or not). We have thus obtained the characterization – through the conceptual tools of contemporary theory of recognition – of what with the conceptual tools of Althusser’s and Foucault’s theory would lead to the description of socialization practices as practices of subjectivation through subjection to a normalizing power. The notions of ‘attractors of recognition’ and ‘recognitive passive power’ prove therefore to be helpful in bridging the gap between contemporary biopolitical theories and recognition-based critical theory. On the one hand, they enlighten the biopolitical role played by recognition in the process of socialization. On the other hand, such notions allow for a critical reading of the categories of contemporary biopolitics. If we take for instance the later Foucauldian model, then one can observe in it some sort of gap between the notion of “biopower”, and the notion of the reticular and circular structure of power relations, analyzed at the microphysical level of inter-individual embodied relations, understood as irreducible (for instance, to economical or legal models of power), and characterized in terms of force⁴¹. The notion of biopower⁴² is somehow connected to individual bodies and the constitution of their subjectivity, but is mainly defined in terms of

⁴¹ M. Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry*, 8, 4 (Summer, 1982): 777-795.

⁴² M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, Trans. G. Burchell, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 1.

institutional mechanisms (hence understanding “biopolitics” as a manifestation of biopower, a certain style of its government)⁴³. Here, the irreducible character of the circular and reticular structure of power can be better understood if we grasp it in terms of cognitive relations and the dynamics of their circular attracted attractors rather than in terms of sheer force. Here the notion of cognitive power specifies a sui generis inter-individual form of force, which is less undetermined than the vague and ambiguous notion of Foucault – in the end modeled on war and thus on sheer physical force – and which may be characterized as ‘cognitive force’. Moreover, the cognitive analysis, combined with the notion of cognitive biopower, could better grasp the individual aspect of that power’s embodiment. Furthermore, the way in which individual biopower and social biopolitical dynamics of cognitive constitution are intertwined, could better account for the subjectivation role played by reticular and circular power once the latter is understood as background power of socialization, characterized by cognitive interplay between extended attractors and primary attractors. And if we now consider the biopolitical model involved by the Althusserian notion of interpellation and its reprise by Butler’s foreclosure model⁴⁴, one can easily see that the circularity that subsists between interpellation and subjectivity – where the subject is constituted by the institutional mechanism of interpellation but at the same time is presupposed by it – has no other explanation save for the fact that the passive power of attracting recognition is presupposed by the process of the social constitution (through subjection) of fully-fledged subjectivity.

If we now look at the contribution that the model of cognitive attractors could make to the analysis not only of conceptual frameworks, but also to the description, explication, and criticism of social phenomena, the following aspects need to be underlined. First, such a model may be useful to avoid the trap into which much of critical social philosophy falls, and that consists in the attitude of seeing exclusively the active agentive side of social practices, thus overlooking their passive recipient side. Second, this model can render explicit the cognitive role that some social objects, structures, and plural subjects can play in the process of socialization and constitution of individual

⁴³ P. Rabinow & N. Rose, “Thoughts on the Concept of Biopower Today”, *BioSocieties* 1 (2006): 195–217).

⁴⁴ L. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London, Verso: 1970); J. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

subjects. This model can enlighten and differentiate the structural way in which habitualized patterns, default positions, statuses, symbolic capitals, norms, groups or institutions can work as cognitive attractors: sometimes merely passively, as mechanisms of cognitive attraction, sometimes as attracted attractors, sometimes as more active recognizers. Thirdly, the model of the constitution of higher order, extended attractors, could also be useful for critical social philosophy to avoid the bifurcation between agency accounts and structure accounts of sociality (and of recognition). Since it allows us to see how cognitive dynamics can switch from the agential side to the structural side, and vice versa (for instance, when agential individual powers are transferred to extended attractors which work as cognitive structures that exert cognitive power and authority, but in some cases can accede to some sort of extended cognitive agency). And finally, this model can make a fruitful contribution to social criticism insofar as it can allow us to detect those often not visible forms of domination which are exercised mostly passively, by means of the capacity of attracting recognition.

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