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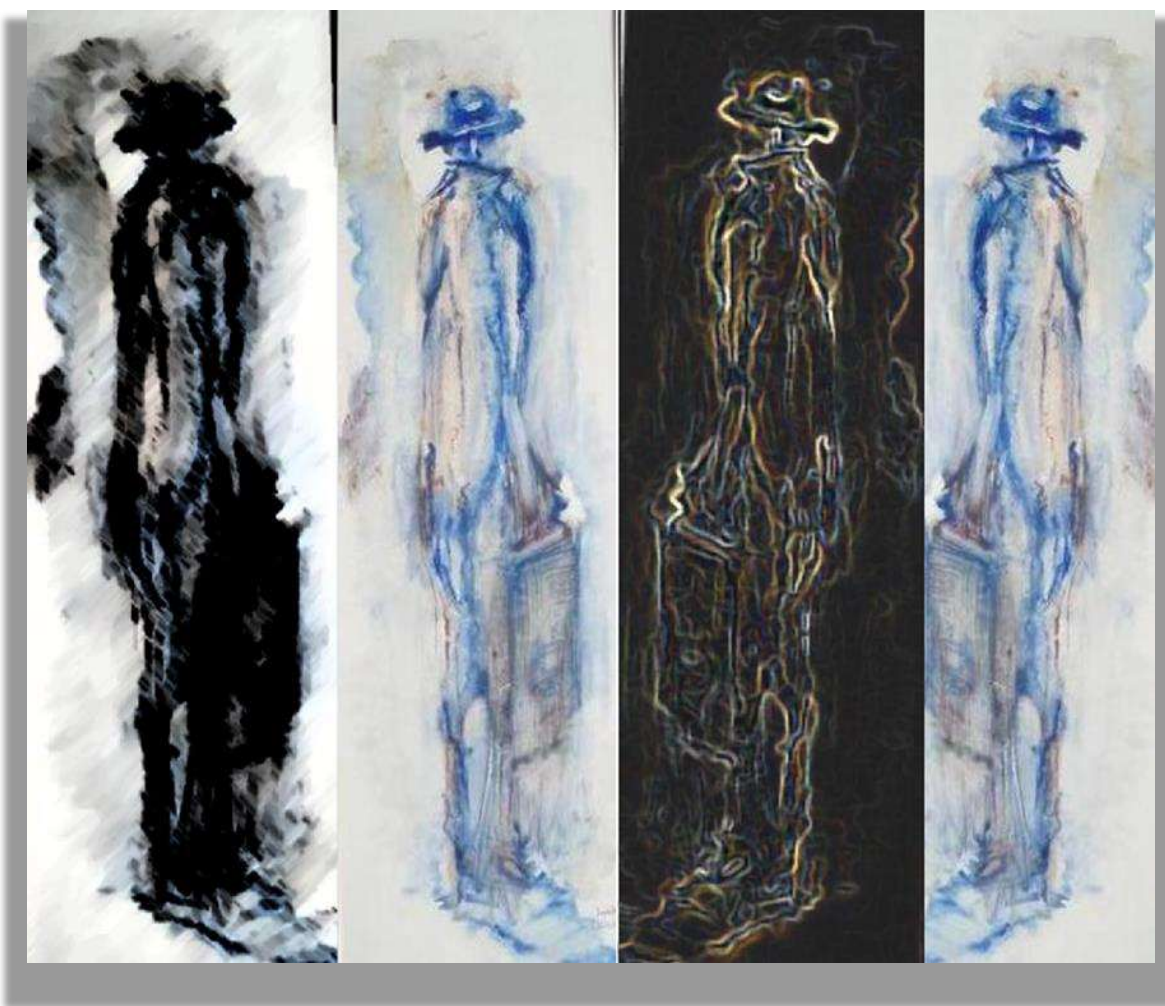
Honneth as a Reader of Sartre. On the Limits of the Honnethian Interpretation of Sartre's Paradigm of Recognition

Honneth como lector de Sartre. Sobre los límites de la interpretación honnethiana del paradigma de reconocimiento de Sartre

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Resumen

Después de trazar el modo en que Honneth interpreta la teoría sartreana de la intersubjetividad y ver cómo se basa esencialmente en la consideración del *El ser y la nada*, este artículo se propone discutir algunas de las tesis del paradigma sartriano del reconocimiento que emergen en la *Crítica de la razón dialéctica*, en particular las relativas al "*groupe en fusion*" que escapan a la interpretación de Honneth. Puede concluirse que la obra filosófica final de Sartre resulta decisiva en el esfuerzo para conceptualizar el reconocimiento, porque ofrece una comprensión más compleja y articulada del mundo de vida social.

Palabras claves: Honneth, Sartre, teorías del reconocimiento, filosofía social

Abstract

After tracing the way in which Honneth interprets Sartre's theory of intersubjectivity and seeing how it is essentially based on the consideration of *Being and Nothingness*, this article aims to discuss some of the theses of the Sartrian paradigm of recognition that emerge in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, in particular those relating to the "*groupe en fusion*", that elude the Honnethian interpretation. It can be concluded that Sartre's last philosophical work is decisive in the effort to conceptualise recognition, because it offers a more articulate and complex understanding of the social world.

Keywords: Honneth, Sartre, Theories of recognition, Social Philosophy

Confrontation with twentieth-century French philosophy and sociology has always played a major role in the development of Axel Honneth's theory of recognition. Not only is this clear from a reading of his intellectual biography, which shows the centrality of authors such as Foucault, Bourdieu, Lévi-Strauss, Lyotard and Derrida[1], but it is Honneth himself who discusses the influence of French thought on his writings in an interview published in 2012 and recently reissued.[2] Among these thinkers, a prominent role is given to Jean-Paul Sartre, whom he considers as the most important post-war French writer for his own work.[3] Sartre's presence in his texts is indeed obvious: Honneth extensively discusses the foundations of the Sartrean conception of intersubjectivity, both in his major monographs and in many of his articles.[4] However, contrary to what might be expected given Honneth's interest in intersubjective social dynamics, he almost never confronts with the Marxist phase of Sartre's thought, which led to the redaction of his last philosophical work, the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, the first volume of which is devoted precisely to establishing a "Theory of Practical Ensembles".[5] On the other hand, an almost exclusive emphasis is put on *Being and Nothingness*.[6] In the followings article, we will first review the main stages of Honneth's interpretation of Sartre's reflection on intersubjectivity, to see how Sartre's influence has crystallised in his thinking, and then turn to a study of some of the theses of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* concerning the nature of intersubjective relations. Our general aim is not only to try to focus on the differences between Honneth and Sartre's paradigms of recognition, but also to counterbalance the

Honnethian position in order to restore the importance of Sartre's last philosophical work in the effort to conceptualise recognition.[7]

Honneth's interpretation of Sartre

To understand the Honnethian interpretation of Sartre's paradigm of recognition, it is necessary to review, albeit schematically, the main arguments that characterise this confrontation. We can identify three moments in these arguments, each corresponding to the following works: *The Struggle for Recognition* (1992), *Reification* (2005) and *Recognition: A Chapter in the History of European Ideas* (2018).

In Honneth's first major work, *The Struggle for Recognition*, the reference to Sartre (as well as to Marx and Sorel) allows Honneth to set his theory of recognition conflicts against the predominant social theory based on the Hobbesian model of struggle as mere competition between individuals to secure their existence. In opposition to this, Honneth takes up Hegel's early writings —*System of Ethical Life* (1802-1803) and *First Philosophy of Spirit* (1805-1806) in particular— read in the light of G. H. Mead's empirical discoveries on child development, in order to develop a theory of social conflict that finds its main explanatory motif in the concept of recognition, to be understood as the moral instance that shapes all subjectivity, at various stages of individual development and social organisation. Through the prism of the normative principle of recognition, Honneth is able to argue that social conflicts are not essentially motivated by material interests, but by moral feelings of injustice.

For Honneth, Sartre is part of an alternative tradition to both Hegel and Hobbes, anchored in the "idea of tracing social conflicts to the violation of implicit rules of mutual recognition" (Honneth, 1995a, p. 160). However, Sartre does not go so far as to articulate the normative implications of his thesis, making it irrelevant to social science, which more often than not continue to conceive social phenomena from a positivist matrix. Thus, despite the importance of his alternative theory of conflict to that of Hobbes and Machiavelli, the main limitation denounced by Honneth is that he did not draw sufficient attention to the "moral infrastructure" (Honneth, 1995a, p. 144) of conflicts of recognition for his interpretation of the social world.

It is interesting to remark that Honneth distinguishes in this study a first phase of Sartre's theory of recognition[8], properly "negativist" in *Being and Nothingness*, in which reciprocal reification represents the only modality of intersubjective exchange, engendering a conflictuality between consciousnesses that cannot be overcome; and a second phase, which began with *Anti-Semite and Jew*, where the struggle for recognition "came to be interpreted as a phenomenon that is caused by an asymmetrical relationship between social groups and is, in principle, open to being overcome" (Honneth, 1995a, p. 157). The social experience of anti-Semitic contempt suffered by the Jew, as well as the interactions of domination between the master and the native in the colonial system, represent an asymmetrical relationship historically situated where the dynamics of recognition are shown in all their ambivalence: contempt is always accompanied by a certain recognition on the part of the master or anti-Semite of the human condition in the partner with whom he interacts. As Honneth points out, "master has to both recognize and disrespect the native as a human person in just the way that the latter is forced into 'laying claims to and denying the human condition at the same time'" (Honneth, 1995a, p. 157). However, in Honneth's view, the new Sartrean theory of recognition and conflict after *Being and Nothingness* is incapable of elaborating "what is actually supposed to make human beings worthy of recognition (Honneth, 1995a, p. 158), and hence "to provide a systematic justification for the normative presuppositions that had to be employed in viewing conflicts from the moral standpoint that is based on the reciprocity of relationships of recognition" (Honneth, 1995a, p. 158). The general conclusion that Honneth reaches is that Sartre, in his later philosophical writings, can "find a normative conception of mutual recognition frequently hinted at but never developed to the level of explication that would have been required for its precise use in analysing events of the day" (Honneth, 1995a, p. 158).

A text that preceded the publication of *The Struggle for Recognition* by a few years, entitled "The Struggle for Recognition: On Sartre's Theory of Intersubjectivity" (Honneth, 1995b), offers further valuable insights into how Honneth interprets the development of Sartrean thought at this stage. He puts forward the "strong thesis" that Sartre's theory of intersubjectivity after *Being and Nothingness* "followed the productive path of a gradual historicizing of the negative. Sartre gradually reworks his conception by increasingly historicizing and socially contextualizing the conditions for the

strategic distortion of human interaction, that is, for the reifying effect of communication" (Honneth, 1995b, p. 166). As Honneth argues here:

> The second stage of this transformation of an ontological negativism of interaction into a historically circumscribed negativism of interaction is then represented by the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* in which the fact of a lack of actual possibilities for the satisfaction of human needs is taken to be the cause for the relations of competition among humans. (Honneth, 1995b, p. 166)

As we shall later see, competition is not the only way of understanding collective forms of interaction in this work. Although in *The Struggle for Recognition* his judgement of Sartre seems less abrupt, since he is able to admit the moral significance of Sartre's theses, the fact remains that Honneth did not attempt to deepen the Sartrean theses elaborated in this second phase of his thought. In Honneth's later writings, the confrontation with Sartre will take the form of a critical and analytical commentary of *Being and Nothingness* exclusively.

Indeed, it is from the reformulation of the theses of the part three of *Being and Nothingness* (dedicated to the existential category of "being-for-other") that, in *Reification*, another aspect of the Sartrean paradigm of recognition is mobilised: that which concerns the epistemological significance of recognition. This argument derives from the essay "Erkennen und Anerkennen" (Honneth, 2003) published a few years earlier, which clarifies the theses implicit in the volume on reification concerning the reading of Sartre. In this essay, Honneth examines in depth Sartre's response to the problem of the existence of others, and in particular his opposition to the solution offered by the intellectualist paradigm (*das Erkenntnismodell*) based on the premise that "relations between subjects can only be understood in terms of the model of relations between objects"[9]. As Honneth clearly shows, Sartre's response is based on a conception of recognition as an existential category other than mere cognition, which makes it possible to "experience" (*des Erfahrens*) the other through his or her gaze. It is because we are intimately affected by the other that his or her existence is certain and unquestionable. While the other remains fundamentally "incomprehensible" (*unerfaßbare*), his existence is confirmed by the modification that his presence (ideal or real) engenders in my own being, and which the dynamic of recognition expresses.

These premises form the backdrop to *Reification*. Honneth maintains the thesis of the priority of recognition over the reifying attitude towards the other in general, be it the other subject, the world or the self. Sartre is also mentioned for having laid the foundations of a conception of intrapsychic and intersubjective recognition rooted in the existential dimension of consciousness. However, Honneth does not fail to underline the main limitation of the Sartrean conception, namely the denial of the "therapeutic" value of recognition, unlike Cavell who bases his reflection on the same Sartrean premises (Honneth, 2007, p. 50). Since Sartrean recognition is subject to the guiding principle of his ontology, namely the free transcendence of consciousness, the presence of the other can only constitute an obstacle to its free unfolding because of its reifying power.[10]

In a completely different sense —not necessarily incompatible with the one we have just outlined— goes the interpretation of Sartre in the last work we are interested in, *Recognition: A Chapter in the History of European Ideas*. In this text, Honneth describes the failure of French social philosophy (notably from Rousseau, Sartre, Althusser and Lacan onwards) in its attempt to found a genuine theory of recognition of a normative or ethical form, whereas the English (with Mill, Hume and Smith) and German (with Kant, Fichte and Hegel in particular) traditions make social recognition the true condition of a moral, rational and autonomous subjectivity within society.[11] Returning to the scene of the intersubjective encounter set up by means of phenomenological reduction in the third part of *Being and Nothingness*, Honneth seeks to assess the reifying effects on the two subjectivities resulting from reciprocal recognition. In this case, the central question that Honneth attempts to elucidate is no longer the ontological and epistemological standing of recognition in Sartre, but the implications of Sartre's theory of intersubjectivity for a normative theory of recognition. As Honneth reconstructs it, after the encounter with another subject and for a "fraction of a second" (Honneth, 2020, p. 43), mutual recognition occurs between the two subjects as an "ontological realization that I exist among others and that we always already 'recognize' each other as free subjects is supposed to take place solely in this brief moment, before the consequences of the first subject's encounter come to pass" (Honneth, 2020, p. 43). But this moment immediately leads to the dramatic situation in which the subject:

After all, as soon as this first subject feels itself observed by another subject in the process of a given activity (Sartre uses the example of peering through a keyhole), it will suddenly feel itself robbed of its entire "being-for-itself". The observation of the other inevitably commits the subject to certain characteristics, thus turning it into a being "an sich", to an "être-en-soi". According to Sartre, the drama of the subject that experiences itself as free consists in the fact that it can only experience the other as a free, undetermined subject with an open future if it reciprocally and simultaneously sees itself reduced to a mere thing. (Honneth, 2020, pp. 43-44)

Honneth considers that the Sartrean approach (in analogy with Rousseau's) "grasp the type of recognition accorded to individuals as a kind of propositional cognition or factual claim, rather than as an act of moral consideration or respect" (Honneth, 2020, p. 45), insofar as the existence of the other manifested through the dynamic of the gaze is not qualified normatively but "as a mere cognition of the existence of another person, which causes the latter to lose its being-for-itself" (Honneth, 2020, p. 46). Devoid of any moral connotations, recognition is here identified with the act of attributing or fixing ontological properties, which translates, in Sartrean terms, into the destitution of the subject's free transcendence, or "being for-itself", and its reduction to the rank of the thing, or "being in-itself". Now, this form of "cognitivist one-sidedness" (Honneth, 2020, p. 45), which consist of seeing "recognition primarily as a cognitive act in which we take note of personal attributes, an act that thus has no moral qualities (Honneth, 2020, p. 46), represents the real deficit in Sartre's (and Rousseau) approach to recognition. For these reasons, when at the end of his book Honneth attempts to synthesise the three European traditions into a unified model, he refrains from including the Sartrean theory of recognition from *Being and Nothingness*[12]: not only would its differences in method render it irreducible to the others, but its inability to include the values of reciprocity and respect uniquely cognitivist and reifying character of recognition, would cancel all its relevance. Nevertheless, he gives Sartre's and Rousseau's model a place alongside the two other models, the English model and the German model, which means that in a way, although Sartre's recognition is stripped of any ethical dimension, according to Honneth, it can however be useful for a theory of recognition.[13]

For different reasons, this conclusion seems to be similar, to some extent, to that of *The Struggle for Recognition*, except that here it is not the insurmountable conflict between consciousnesses that is problematic, but rather the intrinsic value of intersubjective exchange. This point places Sartre's theory of *Being and Nothingness* at the other extreme of Honneth's model of recognition. Yet this Honnethian interpretation merely confirms his general interpretation of Sartre's philosophy: from *The Struggle for Recognition* (where Honneth characterised Sartre's proposition as the bearer of a kind of moral negativism, as we have seen) to the most recent texts, Honneth considers that Sartre's theory of intersubjectivity is devoid of any moral positivity.

After this overview, we can try to characterise Honneth's general assessment of Sartre's theory of intersubjectivity. In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth focuses on the evolution of Sartre's thought, highlighting the shift from a structurally and irremediably conflictual conception of intersubjectivity to the possibility of overcoming this conflict through historicization and sociologization of reification, emphasising at the same time that Sartre's interest will be that of considering pathological and asymmetrical forms of interaction between social groups, without going so far as to make recognition the pivot of a normative or ethical theory. Secondly, in the context of his reflection on reification as "forgetfulness of recognition" (Honneth, 2005, p. 52), the theoretical dimension of recognition is brought to the fore, in order to reflect on the status of affective and existential subjectivity. Finally, in his most recent work, the emphasis is put on assessing the "cognitivist" limits of recognition, which deprive it of a moral-practical value. Despite the variations that characterise one or other of these interpretations, the unchanged aspects of Sartre's conception that Honneth highlights concern the inability of his theory of recognition to grasp the ethical and normative significance of recognition, or to put it another way, to finally resolve the conflict in a new, stable ethical perspective. As we have seen, this overall judgement is still based almost exclusively on reference to the third part of *Being and Nothingness*, and fails to take proper account of the subsequent development of Sartre's theses on intersubjectivity, which will find its ultimate articulation in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.[14]

In our approach, we want to take step aside from Honneth's interpretation, and try to show how Sartre defends in this book a conception

of intersubjectivity able to offer interesting paths for a theory of recognition. What Sartre brings to the fore are precisely the practical stakes (linked to the *praxis* of individuals) of mutual recognition, going so far as to define the features of an ethical model of recognition[15] capable not only of going beyond reification (as in the case of the "*groupe en fusion*" that we are going to analyse), but also of taking full account of the weight of material and social determinations.[16] We will now take a brief look at the significance of these aspects, through a more complete and descriptive reading of Sartre's approach.

Intersubjective relations in Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*

Without detailing the context of the publication of the first volume of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* in 1960, we should at least remember that this unfinished work is the result of Sartre's efforts to merge the existentialist project with Marxism.[17] The novelty of this work lies in a new conception of subjectivity resulting from Sartre's confrontation with the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, which is articulated around two fundamental instances that make it possible to think about the social and material dimension of consciousness: the notion of *praxis* and the "practical-inert". *Praxis* denotes the action of a subject (individual or collective) in a specific material environment, through the realization of a project freely chosen. Initially motivated by the need to produce and reproduce one's life, *praxis* is defined by the organization of behaviour and the material environment in pursuit of an established aim, a process that Sartre calls *totalization*. However, by its own constitution, all human *praxis* is destined to reify itself in matter: in this way the practical-inert is generated, the instance that constitutes the reverse side of *praxis*, as a kind of inertia that can reverse on it by diverting its initial finality. With the concept of the practical-inert, Sartre does not simply indicate a form of inertia immediately indexed on the incorporation of human activity into matter, as in the case of labour products, but more broadly, extends it to human products such as language, habitus, institutions, etc. Each human being realises himself through his action in this common world built by his equals before him, through a movement of synthetic totalization of the diversity of his perceptive field, guided by his free project. In this new ontological universe, intersubjective relations are the result of mediation between individual praxis and the various sectors of materiality. Sartre shows that, at their first level, intersubjective relations are regulated by relations of reciprocity, that is, by "lived relations whose

content is determined in a given society, and which are conditioned by materiality and capable of being modified only by action" (Sartre, 2004, p. 109). Reciprocity represents the transhistorical condition of social interactions, historical formations and material productions, but it is at the same time immanent to them and is always realised as socially and historically determined "concrete reciprocity" or "mutual recognition":

> It is the individual's *praxis*, as the realization of his project, which determines his bonds of reciprocity with everyone. And the quality of being a *man* does not exist as such: *this* particular gardener recognises in *this* particular road-mender a concrete project, which is expressed in his behaviour and which others have *already recognised* by the very task which they have set him. Thus everyone recognises the Other on the basis of a social recognition to which his clothes, his tools, etc., passively bear witness. From this point of view, the mere act of speaking, the simplest gesture, and the elementary structure of perception (which, moving from future to present, from totality to particular moments, discloses the behaviour of the Other) imply mutual recognition. (Sartre, 2004, p. 110)

Each individuality is thus free to constitute itself in its own project, while being conditioned by the materiality in which the relationship of reciprocity is contained. According to Sartre, however, what makes these relationships of practical reciprocity specific is that they are embedded in a material environment marked by the "scarcity".[18] It is scarcity that structures reciprocal relations, transforming the other human being into a threat to my existence, in what Sartre calls a "*contre-homme*". Sartre writes:

> In pure reciprocity, that which is Other than me is also the same. But in reciprocity as *modified by scarcity*, the same appears to us as anti-human in so far as *this same man* appears as radically Other —that is to say, as threatening us with death. (Sartre, 2004, pp. 132-133)

Since man is the historical product of scarcity (for Sartre, history is a succession of struggles against scarcity), any relationship of reciprocity is transformed into a relationship of opposition. As a result of scarcity, we are confronted with the re-emergence of the problem of reification, which is now configured as a direct effect of scarcity due to rivalry for consumption and the monopolization of resources, which directly affects intersubjective relations and transforms human relations of reciprocity into inhuman relations of subjugation and violence. Conflict seems once again to be the

inevitable outcome of any intersubjective relationship, a conflict generated by the need to appropriate resources whose causes are now to be found outside consciousness, in the material structure of reality.[19] Nevertheless, as Christian Lazzeri has already observed, this situation of conflict does not affect the reciprocity between its protagonists; on the contrary, it "presupposes the existence of the original relationship of recognition in order to produce the reification that inverts it while preserving it" (Lazzeri, 2014, p. 252). If the new problematization of recognition still has a conflictual and negative arrangement that seems to renew the Hobbesian anthropological framework, it nonetheless proceeds to an important inflexion of the theses of *Being and Nothingness* that directly affects the status of reification, and by extension, of recognition in intersubjective relations: whereas in *Being and Nothingness* reification represented the inevitable outcome of any intersubjective relationship, and took place through the gaze of others, in the new ontological framework of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, reification (as the degradation of human relationships into inhumanity) is a secondary moment in relation to the mutual recognition (or practical reciprocity) of the *praxis* of the other, whose origin is essentially external to the intersubjective relationship.[20] Indeed, according to Sartre, "man becomes a *thing* for the Other and for himself only to the extent that he is initially posited as human freedom by *praxis* itself" (Sartre, 2004, p. 110). In other words, recognition and reification are not identical processes. Given the priority of the relation of recognition, it is possible to consider the reification as a possible expression of a primary form of recognition.

From this point on, a new thesis, unprecedented in relation to *Being and Nothingness*, emerges, which posits an ethically positive variation of recognition, as well as an overcoming, albeit temporary, of reification. This variation emerges in the transition from individual to collective *praxis*, when Sartre discusses the social formations of "collectives" and "groups". "Collectives" represent the most elementary form of human gathering, the nature of which can be summed up by the property of "seriality": each individual remains separate and independent from the others, and no collective action is involved (the classic example is represented by a number of people waiting for the bus: the end that unifies their action, taking the bus, remains external to each person's individual project). As Sartre notes, we are dealing here with "reciprocal isolations, as the negation of reciprocity" (Sartre, 2004, p. 257). In opposition to the "collective" (but based on this),

the "group" is formed, defined as a gathering capable of integrating each of its members by eliminating any form of inertia or passivity. This is possible when confronted with the need to deal with a common threat or danger: when a common, shared objective is given, individuals emerge from their serial nature to become a group in which each member freely and jointly aims for the same practical totalization of the other (the same project).

The group assumes many forms, the analysis of which occupies a large part of Book II entitled "From Group to History", of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (volume 1). The first group formation after the collectives is the "fused group" (*groupe en fusion*).[21] To explain its nature, Sartre uses the political case of the resistance of the French people against monarchical rule during the events leading up to 14 July 1789. Sartre's fascinating description, which combines historical rigour with narrative bite, shows that the key to understanding the nature of the fused group lies in the figure of the "third party". This concept was already employed in *Being and Nothingness* to articulate the problem of the constitution of *Mitsein* (of "being-with"), the modality of "being-for-others" that made it possible to pose the problem of the communal experience of individuals, in other words the constitution of a veritable "we". However, in contrast to *Being and Nothingness*[22], where the "we" was constituted in opposition to an external third actor, confirming the reifying nature of intersubjective exchange[23], in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* the third actor is both an immanent operator in relation to the group as a constituted totality, and transcendent in relation to the group, the object of its constitutive totalization.[24] In others words, in the group, each individual is a third party in relation to the group and the others that constitute it, so that the figure of the third party is integrated, on the level of immanence, into the action of each member of the group, while remaining the only unifying centre of its own transcendence. To this alternation of immanence and transcendence that characterises the figure of the third party, we can also add its circulation within each member of the group. As Sartre writes:

> the individual, *as a third party*, is connected, in the unity of a single *praxis* (and therefore of a single perceptual vista), with the unity of individuals as inseparable moments of a non-totalised totalization, and with each of them *as a third party*, that is to say, through the mediation of the group". (Sartre, 2004, p. 374)

Thus, Sartre concludes, the other, as a third party and through the mediation of the group "is neither the Other nor identical (identical with *me*): but he comes to the group as I do; he is *the same* as me" (Sartre, 2004, p. 377). The ternary relationship makes it possible to account for the dyadic relationship of reciprocity, realising between each individual *praxis* a form of "mediated reciprocity" where the action of each is the same as that of the other, and where each act as a third party mediator between himself and the others within the group, being the foundation of this mediation. This allows the realization of a genuine symmetry in the reciprocal relationship, without crushing the difference of each member of the group, according to paradigm of "the same" (*du même*) seen in the dyadic relationship of the "anti-human". Above all, through this triangulation of the intersubjective relation, at the same time as each person interiorises his own being-object for others, recognising himself as a third party in relation to a dyad of persons, he recognises the freedom of others as identical to his own:

> This has nothing to do with the radical transformation of freedom as individual *praxis*, since the statute of this freedom is to live the very totality of the group as a practical dimension to be realised in and by its individuality. But it is true that there is a new relation between freedoms here, since in every totalization of the group, the freedoms acknowledge themselves to be *the same*. This relation, which differs from ternary relations of reciprocity and from third-party relations, is a reciprocal recognition between third parties in so far as it is mediated by the developing totalization of all the reciprocities; and this recognition is neither contemplative nor static: it is simply the means required by a common emergency (Sartre, 2004, p. 403).

The Sartrean scheme makes the third person the regulator, both the condition for the immanent integration of each individual into a common project (the realization of which depends on the equal, symmetrical and reciprocal recognition of the freedom of the other) and the condition to maintain the distinction between individual consciences.

This rapid overview of Sartre's theses in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* sheds new light on his theory of recognition: not only recognition of the freedom of others is to be considered as the foundation of any intersubjective relationship, but, as the theory of the group shows, it is also to be considered as the foundation of a common action (of the constitution of a veritable "we"), which, although always contained with the frame of

scarcity, conflict and conditioning materiality, can succeed in producing the transformation of pre-existing conditionings, through a collective action which finds its foundation in the mutual recognition of freedoms. It is precisely in the possibility of mediating the relationship between consciousnesses through a common project that they are prevented from remaining systematically antagonistic and solitary. The case of the *groupe en fusion* thus represents the archetype of this symmetrical and positive dynamic of mutual recognition between consciences, opening the horizon towards a form of ethical recognition, whose object is the realization of freedoms and whose stakes are the change of pre-existing conditions.

The issues at stake in the paradigm of recognition, which emerge from a reading of these passages in the *Critique* have yet to be fully explored. From this brief study, it is nevertheless possible to draw some lines of thought beyond Sartre's Honnethian interpretation. Three points seem important to underline: firstly, the centrality of the material dimension in the structuring of any intersubjective relationship, through the notion of *praxis* and its correlation with the practical-inert; secondly, the ontological centrality of the instance of need, which motivates the conflicts of recognition, making it possible to understand these conflicts beyond the opposition between material interests and moral interests; finally, the understanding of recognition as an ambivalent dynamic, because there is always a residue of negativity and antagonism in intersubjective relations in the pursuit of each person's free project, as the reflection on the triangularity of the relationship helps to show. If Sartrean recognition does not hold the key to a transparent and reconciled intersubjectivity, as Honneth rightly asserts, it does seem to us to allow us to grasp more fully than the Honnethian paradigm of recognition what Barbara Carnevali defines as the "dark side"[25] of intersubjective relations. It shows that recognition, which is the foundation of collective action, is also the foundation of competition, inauthenticity and reification. In this sense, through the prism of recognition, Sartre's reflection in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* seems to offer a more articulate and complex understanding of the social world than Honneth seems to believe.

Notes

[1] Moreover, this confrontation with French thought is still going on extensively today, through the interdisciplinary convergence of Honnethian theory of recognition with critical sociology (Boltanski, Tavenhot), the anti-utilitarian current of the philosophy of the gift (Caillé, Hénaff) and the theories of justice (Lazzeri), the rich debate with contemporary critical theory (Rancière, Renault, Deranty, Fischbach, Haber, Genel), which is also developing in the framework of a dialogue with Dejours' psychodynamics of work (on this topic, see our latest monograph edit by Cukier, A., Genel, K., Rolo, D., Dejours, Ch., Honneth, A. & Whitebook J. (2022). *Le sujet du travail: théorie critique, psychanalyse et politique*. Presses Universitaires de Rennes). The extent of this debate is so vast that it is difficult to summarise.

[2] A first English version of this interview is Bankovsky, M., & Honneth, A. (2012a). The Relevance of Contemporary French Philosophy for a Theory of Recognition. In Bankovsky, M., & Le Goff A., *Recognition Theory and Contemporary French Moral and Political Philosophy: Reopening the Dialogue* (pp. 23-38). Manchester University Press. A version of this interview is also available in French: Bankovsky M., Honneth A. (2012b). L'apport de la philosophie française contemporaine à la théorie de la reconnaissance: entretien avec Axel Honneth. In Bankovsky M., Le Goff A. *Penser la reconnaissance. Entre théorie critique et philosophie française contemporaine* (pp. 32-50). CNRS Ed. Finally, the updated version of this interview to which we refer here was published on the occasion of the publication of the English translation of Honneth's monograph *Recognition: A Chapter in the History of European Ideas* and contains new reflections about Rancière, Bourdieu, Boltanski and Thévenot (Bankovsky, M., & Honneth A. (2021). Recognition Across French-German Divides: The Social Fabric of Freedom in French Theory. *Critical Horizons*, *22*(1), 5-28. https://doi.org/10.1080/14409917.2021.1886668).

[3] Honneth & Bankovsky (2012a, p. 10). Here is the full citation:

> Of all the post World War II French writers, Sartre is still the most important for my work. For almost thirty years, his work has been of extreme importance for me. Indeed, I continue to rework my views on Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. (2012a, p. 10)

[4] Monographs in which the confrontation is massive and direct include: Honneth, A. (1995a). *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Polity Press. (Original work published in German in 1992); Honneth, A. (2007). *Reification: A Recognition-Theoretical View*. Oxford University Press. (Original work published in German in 2005); Honneth, A. (2020). *Recognition: A Chapter in the History of European Ideas*, Cambridge University Press. (Original work published in German in 2018). The articles that Honneth has dedicated explicitly to Sartre

(although references to Sartre are disseminated in many other works of his production) include: Honneth, A. (1987). Ohnmächtige Selbstbehauptung. Sartres Wef zu iner intersubjektivistischen Freiheitslhere. *Babylon. Beiträge zur Philosophie und Wissenschaften*, 2, 82; Honneth, A. (1995b). The Struggle for Recognition: On Sartre's Theory of Intersubjectivity. In A. Honneth, *The Fragmented World of the Social* (pp. 159-167). State University of New York Press. (Original work published in German in 1990); Honneth A. (2003). Erkennen und Anerkennen. Zu Sartres Theorie der Intersubjektivität. In A. Honneth, *Unsichtbarkeit: Stationen einer Theorie der Intersubjektivität* (pp. 71-105). Suhrkamp. It is on these studies that we will focus in what follows. For the purposes of this study, Honneth's and Sartre's citations are taken from the English versions of his texts, unless otherwise indicated.

[5] The first volume entitled in French *Théories des ensembles pratiques*, preceded by *Questions de méthode*, was published in 1960 (in English in 1976). The second volume, entitled *L'intelligibilité de l'histoire*, remained unfinished and was published posthumously in 1985.

[6] Honneth himself explains in the above-mentioned interview that he did not use Sartre's last philosophical work in his theory because the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* lacks the existential dimension capable of grasping the effectivity of subjects in their relation to the social world that marks the investigation of *Being and Nothingness* (Honneth & Bankovsky, 2021a, p. 11). Honneth's choice not to use the *Critique* is, however, remarkable given the very limited general reception of this work in Europe. We will not dwell here on the origins and reasons for this lack of reception, which goes well beyond our analytical framework and would be the subject of a study in its own right. However, it is interesting to note how contemporary Sartre studies in France, are moving towards an unprecedented rediscovery of this work. See for example: Barot, E. (2000). Sartre: de la réification à la révolution, *Marx 2000* (pp. 143-154). PUF. https://www.contretemps.eu/sartre-revolution-reification-alienation/; Caeymaex, F. (2010). Vie et praxis: le statut de l'organisme dans la *Critique de la Raison dialectique. Bulletin d'analyse phénoménologique*, 6(2). https://popups.uliege.be/1782-2041/index.php?id=360; Barot, E. (2011). *Sartre et le marxisme*, La Dispute; Collamati Ch. (2016). Alienation between the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and the *Critique of Economic Reason*: Sketch of a Materialist Ethics. *Sartre Studies International*, 22, 83-98. (A French version of this article is avaible here: https://marx.hypotheses.org/311).

[7] There have been many attempts to reread Sartre from and above Honneth, among the most recent see: Le Goff A. (2012). Conflit, reconnaissance, réification: figures de la réciprocité chez Sartre. In Bankovsky M., Le Goff A., 2012b, pp. 91-113;

Herrmann, S. (2021). Misrecognising Recognition. Foundations of a Critical Theory of Recognition. *Critical Horizons*, *22*(1), 56-69. https://doi.org/10.1080/14409917.2021.1886670.

8 The part in which Honneth discusses Sartre extensively is Chapter VII, entitled "Traces of a Tradition in Social Philosophy: Marx, Sorel, Sartre" (pp. 156-159).

9 Here is the complete passage: "Insofern versperrt die Prämisse, die Beziehungen zwischen den Subjekten nur nach dem Muster des Verhältnisses von Gegenständen aufzufassen, jede Möglichkeit, das Problem der Fremdexistenz anders als auf erkenntnistheoretischem Wege zu lösen" (Honneth, 2003, p. 78).

10 However, what Honneth does not seem to take into account is that in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* this principle changes status: if individual freedom remains a form of transcendence, what counts is its practical manifestation subject to the foundations of the new ontological universe articulated in this work.

11 According to Honneth:

> At any rate I have found enough evidence to dare to make the claim that French philosophy has a tendency to view intersubjectivity as a problem rather than as an opportunity for individual subjects. Certainly, there are a few French thinkers who saw matters differently and thus pose an exception to the rule, for example, Durkheim and Mauss, whom I mentioned earlier, as well as Montesquieu. Nevertheless, on the whole we find sufficient evidence to claim a certain cultural bias. (2020, p. 53)

12 Honneth thus questions in a systematic perspective the legitimacy of the various evolutionary sequences:

> We will see that some approaches in the traditions of thought I have dealt with here can be more easily integrated into a coherent understanding of our dependence on social recognition. For example, right away we will see that Sartre's ontological analysis of the necessary transformation of every experience of recognition into a state of reified obligation is hardly reconcilable with positive assessments of the effects of being addressed by another person. In this case, the odd and oft-criticized presuppositions in Sartre's concept of human subjectivity are what make it impossible to bring his approach into line with other ways of describing the act of recognition. The example of Sartre shows just how difficult it is to theoretically integrate our three different ideas of recognition; we are dealing not only with merely apparent irreconcilabilities with regard to the essence and effects of recognition, but also with starkly contrasting methodological approaches [...]. (Honneth, 2020, p. 146)

[13] Later in the essay, Honneth discusses the importance of post-structuralist thinkers Althusser and Lacan for the French recognition theory, as a kind of "radicalization" of Sartrian thought (cf. Honneth, 2020, p. 48): not only the recognition is stripped of all moral connotations, but it is no longer even identified with a mere cognitive act. Recognition is now identified with an unconscious act of ascribing certain characteristics through the internalization of a symbolic order that makes the process of subjectivation possible, but at the same time reproduces the system of domination (p. 48 and following).

[14] Except in *The Struggle for Recognition*, on the question of social esteem, where he mentions the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and the "fused group" (Honneth, 1995a, p. 196, note 67). It is therefore possible to acknowledge a certain influence of this work in the development of the Honnethian concept of social esteem.

[15] There are already several attempts to read the Sartrean paradigm in terms of an "ethic of recognition", in particular the contribution by Alice Le Goff mentioned above, in which she takes up Anderson's theses on the transition from an ethics of authenticity to an integral ethics (Anderson, T., 1993. *Sartre's Two Ethics. From Authenticity to Integral Humanity*, Open Court). Similarly, Christian Lazzeri in his study "Le 'contre-homme': reconnaissance et réification chez Sartre" (2014. In Chanson, V., Cukier, A., Montferrand, F. (Eds.), *La réification. Histoire et actualité d'un concept critique* (pp. 235-273). La Dispute) speaks of a "conflictual ethics of recognition" in Sartre as "a kind of unfinished historical project because there is no definitive victory against reification" (Lazzeri, 2014, p. 237).

[16] J.-Ph. Deranty has already indicated the relevance of the Sartrean concept of *praxis* posited in the *Critique* for a materialist reformulation of the Honnethian theory of recognition. See: Deranty, J.-P. (2005). Les horizons marxistes de l'éthique de la reconnaissance. *Actuel Marx*, *2*(39), 159-178.

[17] For a reconstruction of the historical-philosophical context of those years, as well as of the controversial and changing relationship between Sartrean materialism and existentialism, see Feron, A. (2021). *Le moment marxiste de la phénoménologie française: Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Trần Đức Thảo*. Springer; Cabestan, Ph. (2021). De *L'Être et le Néant* à la *Critique de la raison dialectique*: le tournant "marxiste" de Sartre, *Alter*, 29, 85-100. https://doi.org/10.4000/alter.2322; Iofrida, M. (2021). Phénoménologie, existentialisme et marxisme dans la France de l'après-guerre: Enjeux philosophiques et politiques. *Phénoménologie et marxisme: Perspectives historiques et legs théoriques* (pp. 13-40). ENS Éditions. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.enseditions.16904.

[18] Sartre states:

It would be quite wrong to interpret me as saying that man is free in all situations, as the Stoics claimed. I mean the exact opposite: all men are slaves in so far as their life unfolds in the practico-inert field and in so far as this field is always conditioned by scarcity. In modern society, in effect, the alienation of the exploited and that of the exploiters are inseparable; in other societies, the relation between master and slave —though very different from what Hegel described— also presupposes a reciprocal conditioning in alienation. (2004, p. 332)

[19] For a discussion of the different dimensions of the meaning of reification in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, see Lazzeri (2014).

[20] As Lazzeri points out (2014, p. 249), the priority of recognition is not to be understood historically or ontogenetically, but analytically: it is because we have begun by recognising others as free to constitute themselves in their project that the reification of their freedom in social relations can occur (a type of reification which, according to Sartre, takes multiple and historically variable forms such as the constraint of slavery and colonization, the constraint of the wage contract in capitalist society, social atomization in mass society, all forms of "serialities" in "collectives").

[21] The eponymous part on the fused group can be found starting on p. 345.

[22] See Sartre, 2021, from p. 543 (Part Three, Chapter III, 3, "Being-with" (*Mitsein*) and the "we").

[23] Here, the situation of the "we-subject", characterised by the common belonging of individuals with the same project and the same ends, would perhaps seem to offer a positive path to the encounter with others and thus to the establishment of a certain reciprocity. Nevertheless, Sartre is clear on this point: this kind of unification is nothing more than a psychological experience, not an ontological one, because ontologically no real unification can take place between ontologically separate selves. The *Critique of Dialectical Reason* will make its turn precisely on this point, with the study of the collective and the group as a genuine we-subject mediated by the third party.

[24] The work of Hadi Rizk, which we follow here, has clearly grasped the full scope of the function of the third party in Sartre's enterprise. See in particular: Rizk, H. (1996). *La constitution de l'être social: le statut ontologique du collectif dans* La Critique de la raison dialectique. Kimé; Rizk, H. (2014). *Individus et multiplicités: essai sur les ensembles pratiques dans la* Critique de la raison dialectique. Kimé; Rizk, H. (2011). *Comprendre Sartre*. A. Colin.

²⁵ Carnevali, B. (2020). Grandeur et misère du social. L'itinéraire philosophique d'Axel Honneth. *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 105, 85-108. https://doi.org/10.3917/rmm.201.0085

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