

**‘Struggling for Recognition’ – Towards a Dialectical Perspective
on Identity and Discourse**

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Abstract

Our article develops and speaks for a dialectical perspective on the process of identity building in relation to discursive practices. It is based on concepts that combine processes of recognition and disrespect with that of identity building and of developing self-consciousness. For this, we firstly fall back on aspects of G.W.F. Hegel's philosophy and of G.H. Mead's social psychology. At second, we support our argumentation by contributions of the German sociologist and philosopher Axel Honneth. Against this backdrop we conceptualize the relationship of identity and discursive practices in the perspective of a “struggle for recognition”. We argue that these concepts can avoid shortcomings resulting from a poststructuralist ‘framing’ of identity and discourse and open up paths for a normative evaluation and political reflections about ‘struggles for identity’.

Keywords: recognition, identity, discourse, Hegel, Mead, Honneth

Introduction

Throughout a number of years, the relation of identity, language and discourse has become a focal figure of discussion in the fields of organizational discourse (e.g. Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000; Oswick et al., 2000; Hardy, 2004), organization theory (e.g. Godfrey and Whetten, 1998; Knights and Willmott, 1999; Putnam and Fairhurst, 2001; Hatch and Schultz, 2004) as well as in different areas of social sciences in general (e.g. du Gay, 1996; Keupp et al., 2002; Kaufmann, 2005; Ricœur, 2006). The major strands of the discussion about identity in relation to discourse and organizations are framed by a constructionist and poststructuralist point of view. So, on the one hand, ‘identities’ of people, organizations or ‘things’ are conceptualized as construed by organizational discourses and language, for example through narratives, stories or talk (e.g. Rhodes and Brown, 2005). On the other hand, the poststructuralist and postmodern strand of discussion in organization theory induces the rejection of the ‘modern’ idea of an unitary and stable subject and advocates a fluid, open und negotiated ‘nature’ of identity and the subject (e.g. Knights and Willmott, 1985, 1999; Dunn, 1997; Callero, 2003; Linstead, 2004). In terms of a critical perspective on organizational language and discourse, pervasively influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, these constructionist and poststructuralist points of view lead to significant insights into the day-to-day processes of domination, subjugation, and of efforts to turn ‘individuals into subjects’ (Knights and Willmott, 1989; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). As some critics argue, the ‘negative paradigm of subjectivication’ and, the refusal of the ‘modern’ or ‘enlightenment’ idea of a unitary, self-reflexive and moral self results in a theoretical silence about agency (Newton 1998, Reed 2000) or its reduction “to discursive resistance, counteraction and transgression” (Caldwell, 2007: 789). As Fairclough notes, this approach of thinking involves the danger to collapsing ontology into epistemology (Fairclough, 2005: 917). Caldwell states, that “without a translation of the subjectivity of subjugated selves into ‘agency’, moral and political action becomes problematic – if not impossible.” Caldwell, 2007: 784).

We want to contribute to this 'translation' by introducing and discussing the concept of "recognition" and the "struggle for recognition". Moreover, we think that the ideas of reciprocal recognition and the struggle for recognition can probably deal as a frame for the relation of identity, discourse and organization, especially through its addressing of identity in relation to disregard and recognition and the relevance of biographical experience, feelings, reflexivity, self-consciousness and finally agency. Considering this assumption, we refer to concepts that combine the ideas of recognition with identity-building and the development of self-consciousness. These ideas include the classical formulations in the "Phenomenology of Mind" by Hegel (1949, orig. published in 1807), "Mind, Self and Society" by Mead (1934) and the recent update of the concept of recognition in "The Struggle for Recognition" by Honneth (1994).

Our paper is structured in two major parts. In the first one we characterize the main ideas of the works of Hegel, Mead and Honneth contributing to our interests. First, we describe the programme of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Mind" and his considerations on the development of self-consciousness or the self-reflexive "I". Here, the development of self-consciousness and self-assurance is bound to the active interplay with the "Other". Second, we present Mead's analogous concept of identity. Mead discusses the development of personal identity as interrelation of the "self" with the "generalized other". Axel Honneth modified this mutual concept of identity as related to reciprocal recognition between the very "selves" in order to explain social conflicts in modern societies. Hence, we will deal with his ideas, finally.

In the second part, we will argue for an updating and assignment of Hegel's, Mead's and Honneth's ideas in order to understand the relationship of discourse and identity. The Hegelian discussion of the development of self-consciousness as well as Mead's relation of the "self" and the "generalized other" can be conceptualised as interplay and interrelation of individuals or selves with discursive practices. Furthermore, the idea of reciprocal recognition implies, that the "I" or the "self" is able to act and to react on the present discursive

production of recognition. This capability of agency derives from biographical and actual experiences of recognition and personal harm which are linked to reflexivity of the “self”. On this premise, the “self” or “I” is able to deal with and react on the discursively produced recognition or disregard the idea of reciprocal recognition. By this argumentation discursive practices can be seen in the perspective of a “struggle for recognition” (Honneth, 1994).

In the following abstracts of the article, we will come back to recent theoretical strands in the field of organizational discourse and examine the potential contribution of our meta-theoretical framework to avoid a number of ‘shortcomings’ in recent discussions on identity.

Hegel and the Dialectics of Self-Consciousness and Recognition

Due to the aim of our paper, we will not discuss the Hegelian Philosophy in a systematic way. We confine ourselves to chapters of the “Phenomenology of Mind” (Hegel, 1949), esp. to the reflections on the development of “self-consciousness” and the “fight for recognition”. In the “Phenomenology” Hegel claims to show the development and the dialectical stages of the so-called “Geist” (spirit or mind). This progress is the way of the “spirit” from its low developed to its high developed phenomena, finding its end in the “absolute knowledge” (“absolutes Wissen”). This development can be described as a process of differentiation and an increase of complexity. At the same time, and mediated in a dialectical sense, this way is “the history of the process of training and educating consciousness itself” (Hegel, 1949: 136). In other words, the “Phenomenology” is the “Science of the Experience of Consciousness” (Hegel, 1949: 144). Dialectical progression of experience therefore is more than a ‘simple’ scientific or epistemological process. It marks the development of “mind” and “reason” in history under the necessary condition of the development of “consciousness”. The essential driver of this process is the dialectical mediation of the subject (i.e. consciousness) and object (i.e. culture or society) (Bloch, 1985; Siep, 2000). In its development, the “mind” or subjectively spoken the consciousness brings phenomena (“objects”) into being. Those phenomena appear as

being outside of the consciousness. In its movement the “consciousness” continues to pick up/keep (i.e. “aufheben” in its double meaning) this “otherness”. At the subjective level of the experience of consciousness this picking up/keeping means to get “back to itself from this state of estrangement” (Hegel, 1949: 96). For Hegel, this “work of negativity” has to last as long as a state of “otherness” comes to consciousness. Consequently, this “work of negativity” is the way of the “Phenomenology of Mind”.

The end of this development is described as reconciliation, a final picking up and keeping of the estrangement. In a sociological interpretation the difference of subject and object, the difference of the individual and the society is picked up. In reference to Hegel's “Differenzschrift” we can describe the idea of reconciliation with the formula of “identity of identity and non-identity”. In our interpretation, this idea bears the conception of a true society (a kind of “We”) which does not negate the individual (the “I”). That negation can mean either a simple identification of the individual with the society or a state of permanent estrangement. In difference, the idea of a true society keeps individual's peculiarity (Adorno, 1966; Marcuse, 2004a). However, the realization of this idea is bound on precise conditions, as discussed in the next section.

From Consciousness to Self-Consciousness – the Importance of Recognition

The fourth chapter of the “Phenomenology” is one of the prominent and well discussed aspects of Hegel's philosophical work (e.g. Kojève, 1975; Höslé, 1988; Benjamin, 1990).

According to Kojève, to get conscious of oneself is the moment when people say “I” for the first time (Kojève, 1975: 20). Consciousness recognizes that the explored rules of the world, i.e. of the “objects”, are not qualities of the objects themselves. They rather are products of consciousness. That means, consciousness recognizes itself in this rules – it becomes self-conscious. The state of self-consciousness at this moment is that of desire, a state of animal existence. Self-consciousness is empty and tries to assimilate the objects, which are now

recognized as devoted to the self. However, at this stage of the subject-object relation, self-consciousness gets no real satisfaction. The movement of desire – assimilation – short satisfaction – new desire can be described as an infinite circle. This animal “I” depends on and is derived from the negated object. Therefore, it is an object in itself. The negation of the object leads only to a feeling of the self (“Selbstgefühl”). As Hegel argues, the truth of self-consciousness is bound to another free object, that is another self-consciousness: “Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.” (Hegel, 1949: 226; Höhle, 1988; Schnädelbach, 1999)

In addition, Hegel links the idea of reconciliation to a reconciled intersubjectivity, meaning a succeeding unity of the particular selves. In other words, the work of negation, the way of the experience of consciousness, comes to an end:

“A self-consciousness has before it a self-consciousness. Only so and only then *is* it self-consciousness in actual fact; for here first of all it comes to have the unity of itself in its otherness. [...] Ego that is 'we', a plurality of Egos, and 'we' that is a single Ego.” (Hegel, 1949: 227)

The “Ego that is 'we', a plurality of Egos, and 'we' that is a single Ego” is the end of the anticipated development. At present, consciousness recognizes for itself that it needs another self-consciousness to satisfy itself. This condition needs to get recognized:

“Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or recognized.” (Hegel, 1949: 229)

In general, recognition overcomes the state of being only certain about itself for itself. Being recognized means to be assured from outside (in itself). For this process consciousness needs the other self-consciousness. The necessity of this other part is precarious in a latent or essential way. Potentially, the other self-consciousness for itself can be as brittle or resistant as the “I”. According to Höhle the experience of the “other” is both “irritating and liberating at

the same time” (Hösle, 1988: 372, own translation). The subject or self-consciousness realizes that it is not the only one who ‘rules’ or dominates the world. The subject sees itself as being expelled from itself and finds and sees itself in the “other”.

The desire of the self-consciousness is to pick up/keep the other in its independence and, consequently, again gain self-certainty by being recognized/accepted by the other. In remembering the potentially brittle or resistant “I”, both obviously have to recognize the very selves. In consequence, a recognition which can be described as succeeded is a reciprocal recognition: “They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another.” (Hegel, 1949: 231) In a kind of extrapolation, this process of reciprocal recognition can be understood as directed to the formula of reconciliation, which is “Ego that is 'we', a plurality of Egos, and 'we' that is a single Ego”. Therefore, an increasing number of subjects or “I’s” can take part at the general or “We” without neglecting their “I” in an ongoing and progressive recognition of this *process of reciprocal recognition*. It is important to point out, that this process of recognition is exceedingly characterized by combining intersubjectivity and reflexivity (Hösle, 1988: 373) as well as highlighting the role of vulnerability of a self-relation. Mutual recognition does not mean a mode of tolerance towards the other. Rather, both sides have to accept the *process* of recognition as mode of intersubjectivity. Consequently, both ‘sides’ should recognize that their selves are also situated in the other. Altogether, this idea of a successful reciprocal recognition can be used as a kind of regulative or normative idea in the process of recognition.

In returning to self-consciousness trying to get back self-certainty through the recognition of the other, the ‘solution’ at this stage of the “Phenomenology” is far from being a success in the described manner. On the contrary, Hegel diagnoses a situation where both self-consciousnesses are “opposed to one another, and of which one is merely recognized, while the other only recognizes.” (Hegel, 1949: 231) This is the result of the so-called life-and-death-struggle, leading to the dialectical relationship of lordship and bondage. This

asymmetric situation is caused by the attempt of the very selves to get recognition only for itself without recognising the other one.

For our purposes, the ongoing relationship of lordship and bondage has to be realised as not being able to lead to a situation of reciprocal recognition. The bondsman gave up his fight for recognition, demotes to an “object” and works for the lord. On the other hand, the self-consciousness as lordship neglects to recognize the bondage, because of this demotion. In conclusion, it is clear that the lordship can get no real recognition in this un-equal relationship. The recognition of the lordship through the bondsman can be said to be somehow embarrassing for the lord (Hösle, 1988: 377). The bondsman or slave finds his truth through the process of human work, as prominently picked up in the Marxian tradition (e.g. Marx, 1844; Kojève, 1975; Marcuse, 2004b).

In his further considerations, Hegel did not follow the path of intersubjectivity in an explicit way. At this stage of the “Phenomenology”, intersubjectivity leads not to a successful reciprocal recognition, not to self-certainty of the self-consciousness and finally not to a successful identity-building-process. However, we will fix and later return the regulative or normative idea of reciprocal recognition as well as the idea of reconciliation, as expressed in the ‘formulas’ of “identity of identity and non-identity” and “Ego that is 'we', a plurality of Egos, and 'we' that is a single Ego”.

G. H. Mead's Framework of the Identity Building Process

Similar to Hegel, Mead binds the constitution of self consciousness and identity to the interaction and the recognition between human subjects. In “Mind, Self and Society” (1934) he refers - differently to Hegel - to very concrete situations of interaction. Based on anthropological, evolutionary and biological theories he develops ideas of the conditions and the development of interaction in the early history of humans and human society. Based on these ideas, he further explains the relationship between interaction and identity-building

processes taking place in modern society. So Mead attaches great importance to the evolutionary development of language and derives from this evolution his idea of the process of symbolic interaction resp. “taking the role of the other”. He explains symbolic interaction or “taking the role of the other” as the elementary mechanism to build self-consciousness and identity. ”Taking the role of the other” determines the development of the two identity components “I” and “Me”. Following Mead's concept, building an identity gains importance for the interaction partners, to generate relatively stable interaction patterns and to reduce uncertainty about social successful behaviour and actions. Against this whole backdrop Mead assumes the “reciprocal recognition” between the interaction partners as necessary to create a subjectively satisfying identity. In the following abstract Mead's ideas which contribute to our purpose are explained in more detail (see also Stryker, 1980; Habermas, 1988; Dunn, 1997; Joas, 2000).

Symbolic Interaction and “Taking the Role of the Other”

Mead considers symbolic interaction as constitutive to the development of self-consciousness and identity. He emphasizes that only the process of interaction confronts a person with response to the own actions. Hence, a human being experiences his- or herself as somebody who acts and whose actions have a certain influence on others exclusively in social interaction. Herein, Mead sees the elementary mechanism to develop self-consciousness.

He argues that successful interaction, e.g. a cooperative working process, is bound to the shared knowledge about the meaning of individual actions. By knowing what the own action means to the other, the other's reaction can be estimated. Thus, it is possible to influence the other's actions purposefully by own actions and therefore to control the interaction to a certain degree. To sum up, the interaction partners have to share the same symbols to interact in a successful manner (Mead 1934: 42 pp. and 253 pp.). At the same time this is the necessary

condition and the first step to build relative stable interaction patterns and, accordingly, society.

Against this backdrop Mead's idea about the process of “taking the role of the other” emerges. As outlined, a successful interaction depends on the knowledge of the intersubjective meaning of certain actions, enabling a person to estimate probable responses to her/his own actions. This circumstance implies that the interaction partners have to judge or to interpret their intended actions through the partner's eye. Hence, a person has to put his- or herself in the interaction partner's position to influence them in a purposeful manner. Mead calls this “taking the role of the other” and argues that this is the core mechanism to create individual identity. Thus, he adopts this idea to describe socialisation processes in modern society. Similar to Hegel and his description of the development of the “Spirit”/consciousness, this course can be interpreted as an increase of complexity and as a process of ongoing differentiation. According to Mead, a person learns to take the role of an increasing number of interaction partners (e.g. interaction in the family, than in school, working life, etc.) in this progression. A person learns step by step to interpret the own intentions and actions via social responses to the own behaviour. These experiences about oneself get synthesized, incorporated into the self and constitute individual identity. In doing so the person experiences how the entire social group – Mead uses the term “generalized other” – responds to him or her:

“[T]he attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community.

Thus, for example, in the case of such a social group as a ball team, the team is the generalized other in so far as it enters - as an organized process or social activity - into the experience of any one of the individual members of it.” (Mead, 1994: 154)

That means, the “generalized other” represents the generalized social values and norms of the prevailing social group (Habermas, 1988: 219). Thus, “taking the role of the other” entails

that one gets to know oneself as a certain kind of person, particularly as somebody who meets social expectations in a certain way.

The Identity Components “I” and “Me” and Reciprocal Recognition

“Taking the role of the other” induces the development of the two identity components “I” and “Me” (Mead, 1934: 173 pp.). The “Me” is progressively constituted out of the experiences made in the socialisation process. It represents the knowledge about the social values and norms, the resulting interpretation of oneself, and is therefore the subjective conceivable component of the own identity. The “Me” entails the longlife experience about oneself made in social interaction which gives subjective security in judging own and others' actions in reference to oneself (Mead, 1934: 192 pp.). The “I” is the unpredictable, dynamic component of individual identity. It stands for creativity and spontaneity of behaviour and actions, ideas, wishes, and feelings (Mead, 1934: 173 pp.). In this way the “I” shapes the thoughts, the behaviour, and the actions of a single person. The social responses to these attitudes get then – as experience about oneself – incorporated into the identity component “Me”. So, the “I” is the component which potentially causes the development and changes of the individual's identity and in this way the surrounding social structures. Mead summarizes:

“Both aspects of the 'I' and 'Me' are essential to the self in its full expression. One must take the attitude of the others in a group in order to belong to a community; he has to employ that outer social world taken within himself in order to carry one thought. (...) On the other hand, the individual is constantly reacting to the social attitudes, and changing in this co-operative process the very community to which he belongs.” (Mead, 1934: 199)

Mead assumes that a positive reference to the own identity resp. to the “Me” is of elementary importance for a single person. He uses the term “self-respect” to describe this relation (Mead, 1934: 204). Thereby, the process of “taking the role of the other” implies that judging

oneself is exclusively possible on the basis of social response to the own attitudes. In turn, a positive reference to oneself depends on the positive social response from at least one significant area of interaction. That interdependence implicates the necessity to accept and adapt the norms and values of this interaction group or at least not to challenge its notions in a fundamental way. A single person has to recognize the norms and values of a social group to be recognized by this group and to develop “self-respect”. This “reciprocal recognition” determines the development of a subjectively satisfying identity (Mead, 1934: 200 pp.; Taylor, 1993). Furthermore, self-respect increases as much as the social recognition to a person is individualized, that means as much the person can feel as individual. Mead declares:

“There are various ways in which we can realize that self. Since it is a social self, it is a self that is realized in its relationship to others. It must be recognized by others to have the very values which we want to have to belong to it. (...) But that is not enough for us, since we want to recognize ourselves in our difference from other persons.” (Mead, 1934: 204)

Nevertheless, in wide parts of his contribution Mead seems to underestimate the potential of the single person to “defend” or “fight” for its felt identity. In reference and in contrast to Mead, Honneth puts the focus on this aspect.

The Concept of the “Struggle for Recognition” by Axel Honneth

Honneth seeks to develop the fundamentals of a normative theory of society, in which the “struggle for recognition” of the society members plays a crucial role for the progress of social structures (Honneth, 1994; Fraser and Honneth, 2003; van den Brink and Owen, 2007). In reference to Hegel and Mead, he centrally contributes to the field of identity as he considers the human demand for recognition to develop a subjectively satisfying identity as driving factor for social change. This demand follows from a fundamental vulnerability of the human subjects, due to “the fact that they can construct and maintain a positive self-relation

(*Selbstbeziehung*) only with the help of agreeing or affirmative reactions on the part of other subjects” (Honneth, 1997: 23). More specifically, “[h]uman subjects can develop an intact self-relation only by virtue of the fact that they see themselves affirmed or recognized according to the value of certain capabilities and rights” (ibid: 29). In consequence, the characteristic feature of moral injuries is the disregard of aspects of a positive-self relation. At first sight, disregard leaves the individual with a feeling of personal harm. However, these feelings function as affective impulse which allows a cognitive or reflexive access to these moral injuries, i.e. the neglected moral claims (Honneth, 1994: 219 pp.). This reflection can lead to agency and (political) action. Thus, social progress grounds on social groups pushing through their demands of recognition, a procedure including conflicts. This view aims at a reinterpretation of traditional theoretical approaches to social conflicts. In the utilitarian tradition of Hobbes as well as in some traditions of Marxian thought, social conflicts are motivated by different (material) interests between individuals or social groups. For Honneth, such “atomistic premises cannot account for human beings’ constitutive dependency on non-instrumental social relations for the many aspects of their identities and agency that touch upon their integrity as *moral subjects and agents*” (van den Brink and Owen, 2007: 3). In difference, Honneth generally describes social conflicts as consequences of felt exclusion and disrespect and – in this way – conceptualizes them as morally motivated (Honneth, 1994: 256 pp.). In other words, the interests of individuals and social groups are reconstructed as moral identity-claims (Honneth, 1994; Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 129 pp.).

Forms of Recognition

Beside this fundamental reformulation of social conflicts as morally motivated, Honneth’s theory is marked by differentiating between three forms of recognition which affect different dimensions of identity resp. different steps of identity building or practical self-relations in modern societies (Honneth, 1994; van den Brink and Owen, 2007: 9 pp.). These forms are

love, legal rights and solidarity. Their respective modes of recognition are emotional support, cognitive respect, and social esteem. Honneth argues that these three-fold set of forms of recognition are a result of long-lasting historical and cross-generational moral learning processes. “Love” means the emotional care between human beings in primary social relations of love, friendship or family. “Legal justice” is the cognitive respect between interaction partners as they recognize each other as members of the same community having equal rights. Finally, “solidarity” describes the recognition of regarding each other as persons with different but worthy characteristics, competences, and social contributions to the society. As noted, these three forms of recognition correlate with different forms of self-relation resp. reference to the own identity. A loved person develops trust in the own feelings of physical and emotional needs. Loving care and friendship therefore fosters the self-confidence of individuals. Having equal rights assures a person or a social group to be morally responsible. It fosters a persons’ self-respect. A socially high regarded person or group can develop a positive reference to the own characteristics which are different from other persons or groups, delivering self-esteem. These forms of recognition correspond to forms of disrespect or moral injuries as ‘drivers’ of “struggles for recognition”. In the case of emotional support, Honneth discusses abuse and rape as forms of disrespect which threatens the physical integrity of a person. In terms of legal relations, the denial of rights and social exclusion leads to an injury of social integrity, whereas in the case of solidarity denigration and insult threat honour and dignity of one’s person. The next figure combines and compares the three forms of recognition and their characteristics:

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Referring to the “struggle for recognition”, love, legal justice, and solidarity are characterized by being of different importance for triggering social relevant conflicts. The missing

recognition in the sphere of love is not enough to arouse long reaching social conflicts as this form of recognition is taking place in a smaller group of human beings only (family, friends, intimate relations) (Honneth, 1994: 260). Only conflicts about legal rights and social high regard can develop to social relevant conflicts – those that possibly lead to the change of social structures in terms of generalization of legal rights or individualization *and* equalization in reference to solidarity. Both fields of an assumed social progress pay reference to Hegels idea of reconciliation and Meads subjectively satisfying identity. Beyond Hegel and Mead, Honneths social theory offers first a number of analytical distinctions to make the “moral grammar” of social conflicts visible. At second and beyond the Hegelian monism and Meads’ harmonious tendencies, Honneths theory contains a practical or political perspective. As Deranty puts it, the theory of recognition “empowers individual and groups fighting against all forms of domination since it shows how the normative resources that are necessary for critique and the practical attempts at emancipation are to be found nowhere but in the very experience of those who suffer from ... the existing order” (Deranty, 2004: 313 pp.). However, Honneth is also aware about the ideological use of recognition, wherein “publicly displayed recognition often bears the marks of mere rhetoric and has the character of being a mere substitute” (Honneth, 2007: 323). In some kind of reference to Althusser and Foucault, Honneth states that it is possible, that “practices of recognition don’t empower persons, but subject them.” (ibid.). It can be said that, grounded at the ‘very experience of those who suffer’ and its relationship to a cognitive or reflexive access to these moral injuries, Honneth is optimistic about a persons or group ability to decide whether to accept or denial offerings of recognition. In addition he states that the individual acceptance of socially given recognition, its potential to solve morally motivated conflicts, and the correlating positive influence on the identity of a person depends on the felt credibility and – referring to the own identity – progressive character by the addressed person or group (Honneth 2007). The credibility of recognition depends on two factors. 1) The given recognition refers to characteristics of

persons or groups which are felt as really existent by these persons. That means, someone will only accept recognition for a certain characteristic if he or she believes to bear this characteristic. 2) Recognition will only be accepted if it is in line with the present normative state of reciprocal recognition. Besides the credibility, Honneth defines the progress of recognition as further condition of the acceptance of recognition. Thus, the given recognition has to refer to a so far disregarded facet of identity of the addressed person.

Against this backdrop and in reference to Mead, previous, lifelong experiences about oneself again have to be emphasized as influencing the felt credibility of recognition and its progressive character. So, previous experiences of recognition influence the development of the individual demand for recognition and the triggering and content of struggles for recognition. Hence, offers of social recognition, which perfectly fulfil the stated conditions, can have different importance to the identity-building processes of the addressed persons. Altogether with his insistence on moral agency, their vulnerability, reflexivity and finally their capability to struggle for moral identity-claims, Honneths work marks another starting point for a re-examination of the identity-discourse relationship.

“Reciprocal Recognition” as Discursive Practice

In our framework, we follow an understanding of discourse as social practice and especially the conception of discourse as dialectical relationship, as advocated by critical discourse analysts (e.g. Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 2003, 2010; Wodak 2001). Fairclough and Wodak see discourses as social practice which “implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it.” They explain that a “dialectical relationship is a two-way relationship: the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but

it also shapes them” (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258). This dialectical relationship implies that people or subjects and their capacities for agency are socially produced and the subject to change on the one hand but to possess real power to challenge and to change those social and discursive structures on the other hand (Fairclough 2005). In that way “CDA [critical discourse analysis] oscillates ... between a focus on structures ... and a focus on strategies of social agents, i.e., the ways in which they try to achieve outcomes or objectives within existing structures and practices, or to change them in particular ways” (Fairclough, 2010: 233). Starting from these assumptions, we hope to shed a distinct light at the character of this dialectical relation by its conceptualization in terms of a “struggle for recognition”.

We develop this perspective as follows: First, at a common level we use Hegel's, Mead's and Honneth's understanding of self-consciousness, identity, and recognition to re-frame the relation of the “self” to discursive practices. Secondly, we sketch a number of consequences of such a translation in reference to three aspects. These are the basic ideas of a fundamental reflexivity as result of moral injuries, the importance of biographical experience and the normative notion of a successful identity building process in relation to social progress.

Basically, it seems possible to translate and conceptualize the Hegelian discussion of the development of self-consciousness as well as Mead's ideas about the relation of the “self” and the “generalized other” as linked to discursive practice(s) (see also Perinbanayagam, 1991; Dunn, 1997). That means that the development of self-consciousness and identity is bound to an active interplay with discursive practices. In Hegelian terms, discourses can be re-interpreted as the “other”, the self-consciousness, is confronted with. On this general level, which has much in common with the process of socialisation as described by Mead, the “self” is confronted with the pre-existence of discursive practices. For example, these discursive practices can exist at a familiar, at an organizational or at a societal level. In other words, the self-consciousness recognizes that it is not the one who ‘rules’ the world. On the contrary, these discursive practices produce and formulate claims at the “self” in terms of its behaviour

and its identity. Similarly, discourses have much in common with the “generalized other” as discussed in the work of Mead. Thus, discourses represent and transport the social values and norms of the prevailing social group or institution. On the institutional or organizational level we can speak about the confrontation of the individual with systems or “orders of recognition” (Ricœur, 2006: 253 pp.). In reference to Honneth, different areas of interaction (intimate relation, community with shared rights, community with shared values) can be found producing different forms of self-reference and recognition as well as different pre-conditions for struggle and resistance. In extension to Honneths general notion of interaction, we can understand these areas are interspersed with distinct discursive practices, with “pre-existing cultural discourses” (Ezzy, 1997: 440) about love, family, human rights and last but not least about management and organizations (e.g. Barley and Kunda, 1992, Abrahamson, 1997).

At this general level, that analytical point of view seems to have much in common with a deterministic perspective on the relation of identity and discourses. That is, the confrontation of the “self” with the discursive practices leads to an adaptation according to the expected behaviour, agency or pre-existing identity-patterns. As Alvesson and Deetz note in their discussion of postmodern strands in organization theory, “each person is born into ongoing discourses.” (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996: 205). Furthermore they argue: “The position of the ‘person’ follows directly from the conception of discourse. Postmodernism rejects the notion of the autonomous, self-determining individual with a secure unitary identity as the centre of the social universe.” (ibid.: 206). In terms of our philosophical and theoretical framework, the first part of this assertion is truly right. However, the presented ideas in terms of identity and agency differ from the postmodern strands of discussion.

Neither Hegel nor Mead or Honneth advocate an autonomous, self-determining individual. On the contrary, they present a kind of de-centred concept of subjectivity as a consequence of their focus on reciprocity and interaction. However, they do also appreciate a concept of

agency, originating in (personal) experiences, vulnerability, reflexivity and moral claims. In returning to the confrontation of the “self” with the discursive practices we have to take a closer look at the consequences for and the content of this agency according to this interrelation. As discussed above, the fundamental mechanism to understand the development of “self-consciousness” (Hegel) or “identity” (Mead) is that of recognition. The process of recognition is important to be remembered as a reciprocal or dialectical one. So, on the one hand, discourses can produce and transport as well as neglect recognition, e.g. by disregard, communicative deprivation or silence. On the other hand the addressed subject in its reflexive capability does not necessarily accept the given or refused recognition and therefore the consequences in relation to his or her “identity”. As Hancock and Tyler put it: “[S]ubjectivity ... is neither a passive reflection of social structures or discourses of power/knowledge, nor an autonomous creation that transcends its external environment” (Hancock and Tyler, 2001: 580). This fundamental reflexivity as well as the result of this reflection and the possible actions in relation to discourses depends on the biographical experience, including its moral injuries and their reflection as well as bygone personal and societal “struggles for recognition”

As Mead argues, successful interaction is bound to shared knowledge and symbols about the meaning of individual action, i.e. to recognize each other. That means, both interaction partner have to recognize the other, regardless of any asymmetrical power-relation. The questioning of knowledge and symbols in terms of their status of telling the ‘truth’ about the individual opens up a space for 1) reflexivity about the very identity claims and 2) possible resistance. According to Mead, we can talk about the biographical experience of the “self” represented in the identity component “Me”. Hence, the “self” is able to reflect critically the present discursive production of recognition in reference to its biographical experiences. In other words, the addressed subject asks itself: Does this recognition (or its refusal) have something to do with my previous experiences and does it reflect and recognize those experiences? Similarly Honneth remarks, that someone will only accept recognition for a

certain characteristic if he or she believes to bear this characteristic (Honneth, 2007). More fundamental, Honneth systematically insists on the experience of moral injuries and personal harm beneath the threshold of communicative or discursive structures. He “takes into consideration the, partly pre- or extradiscursive, subject-constitutive dimensions of bodily and social experience” (Deranty, 2004: 300) which allows to avoid a discursive determinism by differentiating between personal experience and discursively articulated identity claims. According to Hegel and Honneth those experiences themselves are results of “struggles for recognition”. The experience of recognition as well as disregard leads to reflexivity and builds up lifelong experiences which are preconditions for actions in direction of a discursive and social change. In historical dimensions, these experiences are, however ‘small’, part of a long-lasting moral learning process. For historical evidence, Honneth refers to the works of Edward P. Thompson (1980), Barrington Moore (1982) or Avishai Margalit (1997). Taking a present example, reconstructing the discourse about the practices in Guantanamo after 9/11 in terms of recognition could be fruitful. The practices of disregard in all three areas of recognition led to ongoing protests and beared the potential to de-legitimize the discursive construction of a permanent “war against terrorism”, which constructed the prisoners as subjects, as ‘combatants’ without any rights. As Honneth states, recognition will only be accepted if it is in line with the present normative state of reciprocal recognition. The addressing of so-called ‘western values’ as individual freedom or democracy collides with the present state of the prisoners in Guantanamo (Wilson, 2005). The historical struggles for recognition and its outcomes in terms of legal rights and solidarity leads to empathy with the prisoners and therefore to social protest. At all, the demand for recognition to build up a successful identity and self-consciousness, as addressed by all three authors, is linked to reflexivity and a notion of identity which process and push forward “struggles for recognition”. This “struggle for recognition” can lead to a number of phenomena’s as even discussed in the literature: resistance, strikes, misbehaviour, cynicism, or exit (e.g. Jermier et al., 1994, Ackroyd and

Thompson, 1995, Fleming and Spicer 2007). Out of these struggles, the “self” or the self-consciousness in its very identity as well as collective action can possibly try to change or to adjust those discursive practices. However, a more or less systematic reconstruction and a phenomenology of “struggles for recognition” in the context of organization are still to be done.

Finally, we want to address the idea of a “successful identity”. In our view, the analysis of the interrelation of discourse and identity has to be aware of the idiosyncratic moment of the “self” or the “I”. The Hegelian self-consciousness is conceptualized as particular and moreover as demanding recognition for its particularity. The “I” in the concept of Mead is directed to recognition of its difference to others as well. That means that a successful “identity-building process” depends on the recognition of the very individuality of the “self” in relation to other selves, groups etc. Mead uses the term self-respect to describe this idea. Self-respect is as higher as much more the recognition is individualized. The critical value of this description will be supported if this thesis is linked to the Hegelian programme of the “Phenomenology”. The dialectical way of the consciousness/”Spirit” is one of a growing differentiation and complexity - from the sense-certainty to the absolute knowledge. In our view, we can adapt this perspective and propose that the reflections and the actions of the self-consciousness or the “self” in terms of reciprocal recognition can be understood as directed towards a growing differentiation. In addition, that means a more complex recognition of its individuality. Similarly, Honneth defines a specific form of progress as condition for the acceptance of recognition meaning the recognition of new facets and sides of identity. For example, on this background a discourse dealing with racial arguments can be interpreted as a relapse and de-differentiation according to the construction of “identities” and the concept of recognition. In reverse, the subjects can refuse such archaic or simple world-views in dependence to their reflexivity, experience and their idiosyncratic awareness. Related to the Hegelian philosophy, this refusal can be interpreted as an act to overcome a situation of

estrangement. In dialectical terms, the “work of negativity” has to overcome such archaic discursive practices. Moreover, the recognition of the very individuality and a process of growing differentiation can be said to point to the idea of reconciliation. That is the “Ego that is 'we'”, a plurality of Egos, and 'we' that is a single Ego”. Although both Mead and Honneth do not explicitly share such a point of view, their conceptualization of self-respect (Mead) and the conditions of reciprocal recognition (Honneth) bring in the same direction of a successful “identity-building process”.

Towards a Conclusion

Finally, we will come back to recent discussions in the field of organizational discourse. As we argued in the introduction, the discussion about identity in the context of organizational discourse is commonly connected to a constructionist point of view. In following a poststructuralist or post-modern point of view, it seems a common point to address the ‘death’ of the subject. That is, to neglect the idea of a stable or unitary subject and to advocate for the openness and fragile ‘nature’ of the subject. Of course, it is possible to accept this and to see this as a kind of liberation from the project of ‘modernity’ (e.g. Linsteadt, 2004). However, we argue that this position is not satisfying especially for a project of critical science and the idea of emancipation and social change (Caldwell, 2007). For example, David Knights reflects this problem in one of his contributions about Michel Foucault by referring to the idea of autonomy:

“Elsewhere ... I have argued that while a defence of autonomy is problematic in that it reflects and reinforces a discourse of individualism, it is dangerous to be against autonomy *per se*, for some semblance of autonomy is necessary in order to criticise precisely those discursive practices of autonomy that are individualistic in their effects. So just as Foucault ... was ambivalent in his

relationship to Enlightenment reason, we might be best advised neither to absolutely for nor against autonomy.” (Knights, 2004: 25)

In our view, a position of theoretical and critical ‘ambivalence’ is not very satisfying. It leads back to the problem of a conception of identity which is potentially able to transcend a point of view where identity is a (simple) product of discourses, language or narrations. With the introduction of the concept of recognition it seems possible to avoid an ‘agentless’ conception of discourse and power. Irrespective of the differences, Hegel, Mead and Honneth address the dangers of a kind of voluntaristic or agency-centred approach to explain the social fabric and its conflicts. However, the exclusion of the level of conscious intention or decision bears the danger of a “backdoor determinism” (Reed, 1998: 209) which means to fall back into a crude social-behaviourism. That is, the sensible de-centering of the person can lead to a theoretical silence in conceptualizing the subject itself:

“As a result, the potential for people to influence, much less control, the construction and reconstruction of the discourses which define *their* lived realities, identities and potentialities is virtually extinguished by a *sui generis* process of discursive reproduction in which they become the biological or cultural ‘raw material’ to be ‘worked on and through’ by the latter’s constitutive practices.” (Reed, 1998: 209)

In that way, Axel Honneth warns of confusing the social pressures and restrictions on identity and the self with the fundamental need for identity as discussed in the framework of recognition (Honneth, 2003; similar Ricœur, 2006).

We think that the conceptual frame of recognition can show a way between the Scylla of a deterministic view on the subject and the Charybdis of the construal of a heroic, self-determined subject. In this way, the key-words are vulnerability and reflexivity, self-consciousness, (biographical) experience and the struggle for (reciprocal) recognition. We are aware that the addressed aspects and consequences of the reformulation of aspects of the works of Hegel, Mead and Honneth need further reflection and empirical research. However,

we hope that we were able to articulate the potential strength of such a reformulation. We think that this reformulation has the potential for a better understanding of the relation of subjectivity, identity, and discourse and that it can deliver a critical perspective for a discussion of discursive practices and enrich a dialectical perspective of identity and discourse.

Finally, our impulse was to strengthen discussions about the role of subjectivity, consciousness and identity in relation to discursive and social practices. We think that there is still the danger to underestimate the subject in the field of organizational discourse and to collapse ontology into epistemology. We are aware that the ‘problem of the subject’ as a kind of ‘missing link’ is addressed by a number of critical scientists. Moreover, this problem is not an exclusive problem of reflexive science. Rather, it is a problem of practice and the standpoint of science as practice according to it (Adorno, 1966). Alvesson and Deetz address this in their discussion of postmodern conceptions of the subject. The post-modern “view of the human subject however creates difficulties in developing political action” (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996: 206). To this effect, the discussion has to continue.

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Appendix

Mode of recognition	Emotional support	Cognitive respect	Social esteem
Dimension of personality	Needs and emotions	Moral responsibility	Traits and abilities
Forms of recognition	Primary relationships (love, friendship)	Legal relations (rights)	Community of value (solidarity)
Developmental potential	–	Generalization, de-formalization	Individualization, equalization
Practical relation-to-self	Basic self-confidence	Self-respect	Self-esteem
Forms of disrespect	Abuse and rape	Denial of rights, exclusion	Denigration, insult
Threatened component of personality	Physical integrity	Social integrity	‘Honour’, dignity

Table: Honneth (1994), p. 111, translation following Van den Brink and Owen (2007), p. 11.