

On Dynamics of Power and Social Recognition.

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1. Introduction

As we can experience every day we are living in a world full of conflicts, wars, warlike struggles and terrorism, of transformation in the relations of politics and economy, of changes in industrial relations and the appearance of new or renewed social, cultural and religious movements. So, social theory is faced with the challenge to develop appropriate concepts and categories to analyse and understand these processes and changes.

In this paper, I deal with the importance of power and social recognition as dynamic forces in the processes of generation and transformation of social structures. I pick up the threads of two recent theories of human sociality which have reached a high degree of elaboration in social theory and social philosophy: the Structuration Theory of Anthony Giddens and the Theory of Social Recognition of Axel Honneth. Giddens aims at overcoming the dualism of agency and structure and, thus, provides new insights into the reproduction of social practices and institutions. Honneth takes up the term “social recognition” from Hegel’s early writings, clears it from its metaphysical premises with the help of George H. Mead’s social psychology and accentuates its sociological content (c.f. Honneth 1994, 107-125).

As for the organisation of my paper, I shall begin by presenting some thoughts about a theory which can be termed a Theory of Social Practices (2). The central idea is to base structuration of human action (conceived by Giddens as the centre of the social) on processes of social adjustment and co-ordination and to develop a concept of social practice which can be extended into a system theory. Then, I shall move on to outline the notions of social power (3) and social recognition (4). The core aspect of the power concept developed here is that power is seen in close connection with dependence and the arrangement of appropriate structural elements. Social recognition is conceptualised as a counter concept to power. Whereas power means that people are focused on their own interests, social recognition means that attention is drawn to the interests of other people. After that I shall discuss social dynamics inherent in power relations and the claim for social recognition (5). Finally, I shall treat the consequences to changes of social structure (6).

2. Society as a system of social practices

To start sociological theorising by questioning how people adjust their activities to one another or, in other words, to co-ordinate them, means, in some sense, to be in accordance with the tradition of sociology. However, this questioning fell into disrepute in more recent theories because the answers given by traditional theories (functionalism, structuralism, interpretative approaches, rational-choice theory) did not turn out to be satisfactory as they led to a dualism of the social world: to a world of agency and a world of structure, that is to say, the problem of social adjustment had been solved either in favour of acting individuals or of super-individual structures. Giddens made important steps to overcome the dualism of agency and structure by introducing the concepts of structuration and the duality of structure (cf. 1979, 1986, 1993), but he gave up the category of social adjustment and so the question why social structuration, the central social process in Giddens, takes place. By focusing the relation of agency and structure he neglected as well the issue of society as a social system in so far as he did not elaborate a concept of how practices are connected.

In what follows I pick up the thread of Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, but I rather shift the emphasis on adjustment processes in society and on the generation of social practices as the basic elements of social systems.

The integration of adjustment into social theory is able to provide two important things: social adjustment can be regarded as the source of structuration processes and as the ground why society is the performance of acting individuals. However, in order to avoid falling back into dualism we must not follow traditional agency theories which consider individuals as socially independent actors entering into social relations only in a self-reflexive process. Instead we need to pursue an inter-subjective approach conceptualising individuals as social beings who associate with one another spontaneously and develop their acting within social relations. The advantage of elaborating a conception of social practices in this way is that we gain basic elements towards a theory of social systems.

Adjustment process

In the process of social associating the members of collectivities influence one another and need, therefore, to adjust their activities and intentions to each other to some extent. We can identify several kinds of adjustment problems:

- *Living together in partnerships, families, friendships*: What is addressed here is the arranging of day-to-day activities, free time and common recreation, the mutual

satisfaction of emotional and sexual needs, education of children, support in the case of illness and psychic crises etc.

- *Negative external effects*: The acts of one person undertaken for his or her own advantage can interfere with the interests and intentions of others, and cause harm and disadvantage to them. Examples are the production of waste, sewage, and noise, not only in the sphere of manufacturing goods but also in the sphere of living together. Possible solutions are prohibition or regulation by law, compensation for damages or impeding, contracts and agreements.
- *Individual use of a common resource*: Several persons or a large number of people use a common resource for their individual purposes. Examples are living together in a flat, using the road network, attending school or university. Rules of use have to be established so as to prevent collisions.
- *Access to private goods*: Property rights limit the use of goods to the owner. Access to them for other persons is possible via gifts, gift exchange or sale and purchase as it is the case in commodities and workforce.
- *Common use of joint resources*: In this case people pool together resources to pursue common purposes. Examples are companies owned by several people, productive and consumers' co-operatives, clubs and associations, pressure groups and lobbies. They need rules for decision making and the use of the resources according to their purposes.

Adjustment requires from actors to be aware of what they themselves will do next and intend to do and it requires from them a number of interpretation performances: to interpret the activities and intentions of the other participants as well as the situation they are in. And adjustment requires from them the readiness to modify their conduct or intentions in responding to the behaviour of others. So we can say that in so far as actors are able to adjust and co-ordinate their actions they have got stocks of knowledge¹ about social interaction and a set of social attitudes to answer others' actions. The knowledge actors have needs to be shared by them to enable them to communicate and reach a common interpretation of their situation and mutual intentions. And actors must have social empathy, that is, they have to participate in the attitudes others carry out in interaction. In accordance to Giddens (cf. 1979, 65-68 and 1986, 17-25) who picked up this concept from Wittgenstein and Winch, we can say

¹ I do not go into distinctions between different kinds of knowledge relevant to the control of action. Giddens e.g. distinguishes „tacit stocks of knowledge“, which is activated in the form of „practical consciousness“, and „knowledge which actors are able to express on the level of discourse“ and which operates as „discursive consciousness“ in the process of acting (c.f. Giddens 1979, 5).

that actors follow certain rules in adjusting their conduct to one another. As noted by Giddens rules relevant to social action have two aspects: they constitute meanings of situations and activities, in other words, they signify them, and they sanction social conduct as right or wrong. The rules actors follow are part of their “mutual knowledge”; the knowledge aspect of signifying interaction is called “interpretative schemes”, the aspect of sanctioning is called “norms”.

It is easy to see that there is a connection between adjustment on the one hand and interpretative schemes and norms on the other hand. Actors control their actions mutually by producing meanings and by sanctioning conduct; they signify their interpretations in communication processes. In such processes actors formulate the rules they rely on in their interaction. Although adjustment takes place on the basis of rules which have been developed in the past, adjustment is not a process totally determined by rules but a performance which individuals achieve in the course of their interaction. In the process of coordination individuals shift their attention to various details, observing others’ conduct and monitoring their own behaviour, selecting and testing different interpretations. Uncertainty is an inevitable characteristic of interpretation if a number of people interact. Communication interrupts acting to clear and prepare the way for its continuation. A great deal of social situations is indefinite and open in respect to their continuation and is determined by actors just in the course of action. An example of this is the planning of cooperation processes; in this case the goals and contributions of partners are not determined *ex ante* but have to be specified by communication.

Let me illustrate the adjustment process and its constitutional elements by using the example of road traffic. Road users co-ordinate their moving by perceiving different situations and interpreting them as a crossroad, a pedestrian crossing, a car coming from right or left, traffic lights, and so on. Further, road users have a set of attitudes which are connected with these situations: they stop at a crossroad if there is a car coming from the right side or if the traffic light is red and so on. They expect this conduct from other road users and regard deviant behaviour as wrong. In situations when road users are not sure what others will do next, or when they want to indicate to others what they intend to do, then they use horns, blinkers or gestures as means of communication.

Social practices

Certainly, the term “social practices” belongs to Giddens’ sociological vocabulary but he has not paid much attention to the elaboration of this notion and to its status within the theory of structuration. I think that such an elaboration is of great importance to show the connection of rule-oriented action and adjustment processes, to build a solid foundation for grasping society as a social system and, last but not least, to gain a concept of power relations.

Rule-oriented action means that actors’ knowledge contains action schemes which are activated in interaction for interpretation, communication and adjustment. Activation of *action schemes* structures action and constitutes it as a *social practice*, that is, as action with routinised elements which serves certain purposes in connection with problems of co-ordination. The action schemes are embedded in the bodies and minds of the actors, their structuring effects are observable as regular courses of acts. So we can say that practices have a structure which, following Giddens, has the dimensions of signification and legitimation consisting in the universe of meanings and norms belonging to those practices.

The realisation of action schemes, however, needs an additional factor, namely, that actors have access to suitable material resources. According to Giddens, in the context of agency, resources are not only the material objects we use but indicate their “transformative capacity” in a material sense. It is this meaning which is of crucial importance in the theory of action. Resources are the “material levers of all transformations of empirical contents” (cf. 1979, 104). In contrast to Giddens, however, I do not equate the transformative capacity of resources with power. I prefer to reserve the term “power” to characterise the relationships of actors in adjusting and coordinating their activities (see below). Giddens emphasises that rules and resources are dimensions of agency which always operate in conjunction and can be separated only analytically, nevertheless he assigns the notion of power to that of resources. Such a conception neglects that rules of constituting meanings and norms are also included in power relations and can be even more important in some cases of exerting power than resources.

Giddens differentiates between two types of resources: allocative resources and authoritative resources. He defines allocative resources as such which “refer to capabilities (...) to generating command over objects, goods or material phenomena” while “authoritative resources refer to types of transformative capacity generating command over persons or actors” (1986, 33). I reject the notion of authoritative resources in the form as Giddens defines

it because we cannot separate these two types of resources. What Giddens calls allocative resources can also be used (and is used usually) to generate command over persons as I will show below. The reason of this conceptual confusion is Giddens' equating of transformative capacity and power, so he has to differentiate between two types of resources: one type which constitutes power over objects and another type which constitutes power over persons. I think we cannot assign power to one structural dimension only, but power is based on the combination of all structural components which form together the transformative capacity of action. I suggest to conceptualise power as a category for describing a certain kind of social relations in which, of course, resources are involved but the other structural components as well.

The term "allocative" is a needless adjective for resources understood as transformative capacity of action². Allocation means to move transformative capacities to certain applications and purposes, so, all resources are allocative. In respect to practices, however, the following differentiation of allocation is central: In social acting, on the one hand resources are used to produce a certain outcome (e.g. goods, music, trips) and, on the other hand, they are used to adjust and co-ordinate the activities of participating actors (e.g. organisation, traffic, information and communication). Thus, practices as reproduced social actions have an *allocation structure* which indicates the use of resources between those two possibilities. According to their allocation we can speak of outcome-oriented resources and co-ordination-oriented resources.

Social practices are connected with social positions. A social position is defined by a specific combination of rules and resources. Such combinations create typical potentialities to act within a practice and put actors in social relation to one another. The social rules governing conduct do not relate to how actors arrange their individual actions but concern their mutual conduct. Social acting does not mean that the actors involved do the same but that their different actions relate to one another. So, the rules an actor follows in his/her interpretation and attitudes, refer not only to his/her own conduct but take into account also the actions of the other participants. It is this how the process of adjusting and co-ordinating is provided. From the point of view of adjustment, the positions belonging to a social practice are reciprocal. Lets go back to the example of road traffic: a road driver arriving at a crossroad and seeing a car coming from the right knows that he has to stop while the driver of the

² However it doesn't matter to use it. The same goes for the characterisation of resources as power over objects.

second car has the right of way and can go on. The same goes for the other driver. In a similar way, the actors can have – and have actually very often - different resources which both enable and constrain their actions. The differences between actors in being equipped with resources do not only concern their outcome-oriented resources but also their co-ordination-oriented resources. As for the example of road traffic, cars and lorries are different outcome-oriented resources, passengers have only their bodies as resources; streets, traffic lights and road signs are common co-ordination-oriented resources, whilst horns, blinkers and arms are co-ordination-oriented resources privately owned by the actors.

Summarising we can say that actors draw upon action schemes formed by rules of constituting meanings and norms as well as upon resources as transformative capacities allocated to producing outcome and to providing co-ordination. In doing so actors interpret and communicate, they sanction and they activate transformative capacities. In this way they structure their activities and reproduce them as social practices which may be modified in the adjustment processes. Practices reproduced show certain structures. The term “structure” means that rules and resources are “recursively organised” as “sets of transformation relations” (c.f. Giddens 1986, 25). Structures have three dimensions. With regard to two dimensions I can follow Giddens’ conception: The set of rules constituting meanings and norms form the structure dimensions of *signification* and *legitimation* (cf. Giddens 1986, 29). For the reasons mentioned above, I disagree with Giddens concerning the third dimension which he calls domination. The third dimension as I see it is the *allocation of resources* to the production of certain outcomes, on the one hand, and to co-ordinating actions on the other hand. The order of signification rules and norms may be called immaterial structure, while the allocation of resources build up the material structure of practices.

Every practice is not only a production mechanism, that is, a procedure to produce some outcome, but also a *distribution mechanism*, that is, a procedure to distribute the outcome among participants of practices and other members of society. People pursue diverse intentions by acting, they adjust their intentions to one another within the framework of practice with the effect of a certain outcome. The outcome may be material resources as in economy, or the change of place as in road traffic, it may be rules of signification as in scientific practices, or norms (laws) as in political practices. The distribution of outcome among the participating actors and other members of society is also a result of the adjustment and co-ordination processes.

Taking into account that practices are both production and distribution mechanisms, we can say that adjustment has two results: it provides the co-ordination of the production of outcomes and it provides the distribution of outcomes. In so far as the results of practices are deliberately intended we can speak of purposes or intentions.

Table 1 illustrates the categories relevant to practices with the help of the examples of road traffic and labour in capitalism.

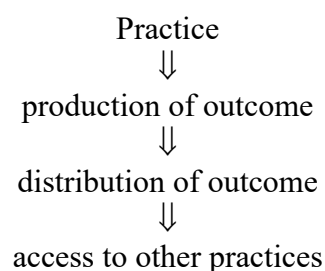
Table 1: Categories of Social Practices

Categories	Road Traffic	Labour in Capitalism
Results/purposes concerning production concerning distribution	co-ordination of movement in space egalitarian distribution of movement	co-ordination of production processes (goods and services) profit and wages
Co-ordination problem	individual use of a common resource (road network) concurrently with others	co-operation of work: Who, when, what, with whom, with what means
Rules of signification	definitions, such as crossroad, meanings of road signs and of traffic lights	workplace, organisation, investment, costs, profitability, wage and profit
Norms	traffic regulations	property rights organisational rules labour laws wage agreements
Resources outcome-oriented co-ordination-oriented	road network, motor vehicles traffic lights, signs, horns, blinkers	labour force, equipment and machines, buildings information technology, administration means
Social Positions	pedestrian, motorised road user, police, ambulance, fire engine, tram, biker	Owner, investor, manager, superior, subordinate, worker
Contents of Communication	change of direction via blinkers, stop via lights, warning via horn	instructions, work schedules, gestures, wage negotiations

Finally, I would like to make some remarks to the relation of practices and social systems. Practises as developed in this conception are the simplest entities of social activities and relations and are the basic elements of social systems. The difference between practices and system is not quantitative, that is, that usually a system would consist of more than one practice, but rather qualitative. Let me elaborate on this point somewhat.

As explained above, every practice distributes its outcome among the participating actors and other members of society. The distribution of outcome, however, conditions the access to other practices where that outcome serves as a resource. This is how practices are connected (c.f. Table 2).

Table 2: Effects of Practices



An example: Economy gives income to workers and enable them to buy a car and to attend a driving school; the driving school fits them with the knowledge of the traffic regulations and with some initial driving experience so that they can participate in road traffic.

The other way round, the precondition to realise a specific practice is that the resources and rules required are produced somewhere and distributed among people. So, a particular practice needs other practices which provide these preconditions. Returning to our example: Road traffic needs an economy which provides income to the people, and, more specifically, needs a car industry, a road construction industry, and driving schools etc.

Now we can define what a social system is: a social system is a set of practices comprising all those practices

- which allow to produce all resources and rules required for this set of practices, and
- which allow to distribute the resources and rules required and, in this way, to regulate the access of actors to them.

As I see it, it is the feature of comprising all practices and mechanisms which produce all structure components and distribute them among actors, which allows us to speak about social systems as self-organising systems.

3. The concept of Power

There are some problematic points in traditional power approaches such as “one-sidedness” and “imbalance”. These approaches take into account only the powerful persons and their chances to push through their interests, but ignore the counterpart, ignore the weaker people, and do not discuss reasons and circumstances why their resistance is weak. Max Weber’s definition of power is of this kind (c.f. 1972, 28).

Peter Blau’s (c.f. 2002) and Richard Emerson’s (c.f. 1962) power concepts do not have that deficiency. Within the framework of their exchange theory they hold the opinion that the basis of power is depending on resources: those who need certain resources but do not possess them are dependent on those who dispose of them. Those who possess them have to some degree the chance to define the conditions under which they make their resources available for those who are depending on the resources. So, Blau and Emerson propose to analyse the circumstances which make people dependent if we want to find the basis of power. In this conception power is seen as a kind of social relation but the authors reduce social relations to exchange relations of individuals who possess resources and act rationally in the sense of rational-choice theory (weighing up costs und benefits against one another). In this sense power is a relation between people who are dependent on each other in so far as they need the resources which are possessed by the respective other. Corresponding with that, power is the possibility of a person to set conditions for letting his/her resources to other persons.

According to Emerson the degree of dependence of a person is linked to two factors (c.f. 1962, 32):

- To the *emotional investment* of the person into the goals for which he or she needs the resources: if one can abstain relatively easy or change to other goals, dependence is rather low, if one is fixed to goals it is high.
- To the *availability* or *exclusivity* with which the resources needed are distributed in society: if there is a large number of suppliers the dependence is low, if the resources are concentrated only in one hand the dependence is high.

Three critical objections can be raised to Blau’s and Emerson’s power conception:

- As explained above, exchange marks only one of five adjustment problems of social action so it is a strong restriction to relate power merely to exchange processes.

- As I have stressed discussing Giddens' notion of power, power should not be limited to resources, but we should also include social rules, that is, the structural dimensions of signification and legitimation.
- Of course, dependence is an important condition for power because it ties down the parties involved to one another: it enables the one side to set conditions, and it makes the other side accepting them. However, to set conditions is not enough. As Michel Foucault stated (1977), power has to be exerted by producing the structural prerequisites and arrangements which enable the actors to realise the conditions they have mutually set by virtue of their positions.

From the point of the theory of social practices, power and dependence are features inherent to the process of adjustment and co-ordination. They correspond with the social positions (the combinations of rules and resources) actors assume in practices. Social positions create typical potentialities to act and set actors in power relation to one another. The resources enable and constrain an actor in pursuing intentions. The rules of signification influence the meanings of his/her perceptions and communication processes, and the norms affect his/her behaviour. In sum, the social position of an actor determines his/her potentiality to influence the other participants. There are two aspects involved in his/her power potentiality:

- *The attractiveness for other participants:* attractiveness is both the basis of dependence of others, and it allows setting conditions to them in the process of social adjustment. In this sense, power and dependence are reciprocal between actors. The person setting conditions to others is interested in other people's resources and, therefore, depends on them. That is why we can say that in social relations nobody is completely without a certain potential of power.
- *The use of his/her position to exert power:* This aspect involves all activities which influence the arrangement of adjustment and co-ordination processes. These activities comprise all three dimensions of social action: activating rules of interpretation to define relevant situations and influence communication, activating norms to evaluate alternatives of action in moral terms, and activating co-ordination resources which serve as media of spreading certain signification and legitimation schemes and serve as power technologies in the sense of Foucault (1977, 169) making sure that the other side meets the conditions set.

Power and dependence are features inherent in all social relations and they are reciprocal relationships. Reciprocity, however, does not mean that dependence and power are distributed equally among the members of society; normally, the distribution of dependence and power potentials is asymmetric. As far as I see it, there are two factors leading to asymmetric power relations:

- *Delegation of co-ordination tasks* to certain actors or groups of actors, e.g. in dangerous, risky or critical situations or in order to increase effectiveness and efficiency in production. In this case, asymmetry is the consequence if a counter position is not institutionalised towards the group of actors to whom co-ordination is delegated.
- *Power-oriented action*: this means action which is oriented towards accumulating power potential and to improve power technology on the one hand or to reduce dependence on the other hand. This way of gaining power will be discussed below (c.f. section 5).

The distribution of social positions belonging to a practice forms the *structure of domination* of this practice. In this connection, the rules which serve the signification and legitimation of co-ordination processes, and power technologies are of crucial interest. Domination structure has the tendency to stabilise or even to increase the imbalance of positions because use of power has the consequence that an actor is able to influence interpretation schemes, norms and outcome in his own favour, and these results reinforce the dependence of the other side.

4. The Concept of Social Recognition

The term “social recognition” refers to Axel Honneth, who worked out this concept and its importance to social relations some years ago (c.f. 1994). He picked up the term from Hegel’s early writings and George Herbert Mead’s social psychology (c.f. 1967).

Honneth’s notion of social recognition can be characterised as follows: The members of a community or a society take a favourable attitude towards each other in respect to their claims to self-realisation and to become full members of community or society. “Favourable attitude” means that the claims mentioned are considered legitimate, and that actors confirm each other in actualising them. The essential point is: If we socially recognise individuals we do not only tolerate their claims, but perceive them in a positive sense or, perhaps, are even willing to support them.

Social recognition can be regarded as the pendant to power-oriented action. Whereas in the case of power actors are interested in their own benefit they look after interests of others in the case of recognition. A look at our experience shows that the notion of social recognition is not an idealistic illusion. Parents, for example, look after their children and spend a lot of money on education and training and eventually support them to find an autonomous conduct of their life. Other examples are the political and social rights citizens have in democratic countries. Even if social security contributions may be low and actual political influence may be distributed unequally among citizens, the mere existence shows that people look upon each other as bearers of certain rights. It may well be that the social classes which have powerful and influential positions pursue strategic goals when accepting those rights (e.g. advantage of social peace), however the democratic *legitimation* of governance is based on the recognition of equal political rights which have been gained in a historical process of several hundred years.

Modifying Hegel's and Mead's concepts Honneth differentiates between three spheres of social recognition (c.f. Table 3 and Honneth 1994, 148-211). The criteria of distinguishing the spheres are explained in the text below.

Table 3: Structure of social recognition

Criteria	Spheres of Social Recognition		
	Love	Law	Solidarity
Affective mode of recognition	emotional affection	cognitive respect	social esteem
Dimension of personality recognised	basic needs	moral responsibility	abilities and performance
Kind of social relations	basic relations (love, friendship)	individual, political and social rights	Values community solidarity
Potential for further development	social empathy	generalisation, materialisation	Individualisation
Self-relation initiated	self-confidence	self-respect	self-esteem
Kind of possible disdain	Maltreatment and rape	Deprivation of rights and exclusion	degradation and humiliation
Component of personality in danger	Physical and psychic integrity	social integration	Social dignity, reputation

(Source: Honneth 1994, 211; modified and translated by F. O.)

One of the criteria to distinguish the spheres is the affective mode of sympathy we have with the claims of others ("affective mode of recognition"). As for this criterion we get a group of recognition forms which are based on *emotional affection* like that between parents and

children, between those who love one another and between friends (“kind of social relations”). Individuals in such relations recognise each other as beings with different needs (vital goods, emotional warmth, material and psychic support), but also with the claim to have a certain degree of autonomy in respect to life style (“dimension of personality recognised”). It is especially the latter which often is a delicate point in close relationships. Mutual recognition on the basis of emotional affection can be regarded as the basis for the development of empathy which is needed in all social relations (“potential for further development”). Being recognised in such a way gives the individual the feeling of being worth to be loved and the feeling of self-confidence (“self-relation initiated”). Maltreatment and rape disdain personal integrity and damage the feeling of self-confidence.

The second sphere of social recognition is constituted by the granting of equal rights to the members of society. As Honneth explains in accordance with Thomas H. Marshall, the starting point of modern legal relationships were the *liberty rights* which protect the individual person from encroachments from the part of the state or from other people, and guarantee citizens free conduct of their lives³ (c.f. Honneth 1994, 173-195). As far as citizens mutually grant individual liberty rights (these rights were long restricted to men and only granted to women at the beginning of the twentieth century in the industrialised countries) they respect one another as beings who are able to act with responsibility towards society, that is, they recognise each other as morally responsible persons. Marshall describes the 19th century as the period where, in addition to the negative liberty rights, *political rights* were fought for. The latter consist in the right of citizens to participate in the use of political power as voters and as members of political authorities (c.f. Marshall 1992, 40). *Social welfare rights* are a third class of rights. They were introduced in the industrialised countries after the Second World War and guarantee the provision of basic goods and services (c.f. Marshall 1992, 40). Economic security, so Honneth’s argument goes, supports the participation of citizens in political affairs insofar as individual existential fears do not dominate their decisions concerning the common interests. Moral responsibility is the core of legal recognition and based on “cognitive respect”, as Honneth calls it, and it is as well the foundation of self-respect. Someone’s self-respect is eroded if certain rights are deprived because this means that he/she loses the moral responsibility to make decisions for himself/herself or the community.

The third sphere of social recognition is termed *social esteem* by Honneth (c.f. 1994, 196-210). In this sphere a person is regarded as a member of a values community on account of his/her capacities to make contributions to common goals. Honneth describes the historical development of this kind of recognition from the period of corporative societies to the modern post-traditional societies. In corporative societies, the addressees of esteem were not the individuals but the estates: their social states formed a hierarchical order, the individuals showed their belonging to an estate by a certain life style and got so the collective esteem of their estates. This kind of collective esteem was called honour. In modern societies a process of individualisation of social esteem has taken place. The occupational and professional groups permanently compete with each other for their social states by pointing to their importance in society, but within the professional status there is a wide range of opportunities to individuals to acquire prestige and standing on account of their performances. Via social esteem people can gain positive self-esteem which means that they feel as valuable members of society.

5. The dynamics of power and social recognition

The starting point for the following thoughts is the “normal case” of asymmetric power relations. As mentioned above, asymmetry arises if co-ordination tasks are delegated to specialised actors without installing enough rights to supervise them or if some actors pursue power-oriented actions. Asymmetric power relations enable the individuals in powerful positions to force weaker individuals to some degree to accept certain adjustment conditions and to adapt to the organisation established. However, asymmetric power relations are unstable because they lead to social conflicts and struggles for two reasons:

- *Discrimination* in respect to the outcomes of practices in the form of cheating, exploitation, restriction of freedom of choice;
- *violation of social recognition* in the form of neglect of: needs, performance, the ability to responsible conduct of life, equality regarding political participation.

Consequences of Asymmetric Power Relations

Hence social conflicts have two aspects: They are conflicts of interests concerning the distribution of outcome and they are moral conflicts, that is, conflicts concerning the social value of individuals, groups, countries or cultures. This second aspect of conflicts is hardly

³ The most important liberty rights are liberty of person, liberty of worship, of thought, of expressing and publishing opinions, of property and contracting, the right to a legal proceeding (c.f. Marshall 1992, 40).

present in public discourses; the aspect of outcome distribution dominates the public perception.

Social conflicts have an important dynamic influence on social processes and can lead to social relations which are more satisfactory in respect to social recognition. Due to their dependence, weaker actors may take the conditions dictated but they may not feel that they have agreed out of their own free will and so they feel humiliated. To the weaker party, the moral aspect of conflicts is, thus, a basis to legitimate to feel morally not committed to the conditions they have accepted. That is why asymmetric power relations are unstable in the long run and stimulate individuals over and over again to improve their positions and social recognition. There are two types of relevant activities:

- *Opportunistic behaviour*: It means that weaker individuals try to take “opportune chances” to compensate for their discrimination. There are a lot of variations how they can do this: by toadying to actors in powerful positions, by flattering them, by submitting themselves in the hope to get a better position later on or by offering one’s services to control the weaker side. A second way to compensate for discrimination is the attempt to do damage to those in powerful positions, such as in the field of labour relations by shirking from work or stealing material from the employer. Motives of compensation of disadvantages and the feeling of being released from morality are probably involved in all kinds of offence.
- *Balancing strategies*: Whilst opportunistic behaviour does not change the difference between the power levels of those involved, balancing strategies aim at raising lower power potentials to the level of the powerful counterpart. According to the power concept developed above, every actor has a certain potential to act and hence a minimum of power potential within his/her social relations.

We can identify the following strategies to balance power relations. Actors may aim at decreasing their own dependence for increasing their power potential in this way, or they may aim at increasing the dependence of their counterpart in order to weaken his/her power potential. Moreover, by each of these two possibilities one can try to influence the emotional investment into goals or the availability of resources. So all in all we get four basic strategies to balance power relations (c.f. Emerson 1962, 35-37):

- (1) The actor changes the structure of his/her needs aiming at reducing his/her dependence on the counterpart. Examples of this strategy are “dropping out” of consumerism, shifting

one's interests to a field with weaker dependence (sublimation), abstaining from career ambitions. An example from the area of politics is the attempt of a country to cut itself off and to restrict its economy to its own resources.

- (2) The actor extends the circle of potential partners to enlarge his/her choice and to reduce his/her dependence on his/her partners so far. In this way he/she can better his/her chances to influence the co-ordination conditions by initiating competition between the potential partners. Mobility, for example, can enhance employees' chances to find a more satisfactory job. The abolition of national restrictions to transfer capital as well as the globalisation of communication enables companies to relocate production plants and put governments and unions under pressure.
- (3) The stimulation of needs and desires in others creates dependence if one at the same time has the capacity to meet those needs and desires. Advertising draws upon this strategy. Technical development is a process permanently creating new needs via new products. Vocational specialisation and acquisition of expert skills belong to this kind of strategy, too. In the field of politics populism is an example going with this.
- (4) *Forming a coalition* is one of the socially most important balancing strategies. It is a collective strategy consisting in individuals joining together, co-ordinating their conduct towards their powerful counterpart and pursuing common goals. In this way they can face the powerful counterpart as if they were one actor reducing his/her alternatives to choose other interaction partners and increasing his/her dependence. So, coalitions can influence the co-ordination process and reach more favourable solutions. Precondition for forming a coalition is that the actors can find a broad basis of common interests and do not need to put too many of their individual interests last.

It is obvious that forming a coalition is, in the original meaning of the word, a political way of gaining power positions and maintaining them towards other actors. There are two functions coalitions have in building social structures: on the one hand they create new rules and resources in their inside, among its members, and on the other hand the coalition partners attempt to change the rules and the allocation of resources which have characterised their interaction so far with their counterpart. Additionally, social recognition is of central importance to coalition forming. The members of a coalition attune their conduct to common goals und esteem one another in so far as they contribute to realise the goals, that is, they show solidarity.

Processes of forming coalitions give a fresh impetus to social relations established. The increase of power encourages the former weaker side to get involved in confrontation for material advantages and in a “struggle for social recognition”. The way this struggle takes – if it will be peaceful or violent – depends on what dominates in interaction: power-oriented action or social recognition.

The powerful side has diverse alternatives to react to the increasing power potential of coalitions:

- (1) It can also use the strategy of forming a coalition to strengthen its own power potential. The consequence is the increase of the power level and the beginning of a “power spiral” if the weaker side responds again by enlarging its own coalition. The establishment of employers’ associations follows the forming of trade unions, for example. Political parties can be understood as coalitions consisting of diverse interest groups, which can be observed as “wings” in the public sphere. Coalitions are a usual thing in international politics: governments make defence pacts, come to agreements on their common voting in international organisations, take joint action in placing sanctions on third parties, joining together to free trade areas by distancing themselves from other countries, and so on.
- (2) A second alternative to react to balancing strategies is social recognition. This way consists in the powerful side to regard the dissatisfaction and the claims of the weaker party as legitimate, to enter into negotiations and to be ready to balance the interests. We can find a lot of examples for settling conflicts in this way in the day-to-day life of families, associations, organisations and economy.
- (3) The third alternative of the powerful side is protecting its position by establishing supervision and surveillance arrangements or by building up means of violence. With the help of supervision and surveillance arrangements, the powerful side intends to reduce unwelcome opportunistic behaviour (offence and crime) and to further welcome opportunistic behaviour (subservience, toadying, and collaboration). Means of violence should prevent opponents from forming coalitions or developing other kinds of resistance. Power relations protected by such organised resources are called *domination*. Armament is a strategy which can be pursued by the weaker side, too. In this case, the consequence is a “spiral of violence” and an increasing probability of violent conflicts. Violence does not solve conflicts but suppresses them.

The relationship between Power, Violence and Social Recognition

There is a significant difference between violence and power. Power relations enable both sides to influence adjustment and co-ordination processes, albeit to different degrees in the case of asymmetric power potentials. The weaker side can, due to his/her power potential, see to it that his/her interests are taken in consideration to some degree. Power is a reciprocal relationship. Compared with this, violence is a one-sided relation where the one side takes something away, or threatens with taking something away from the other side without acceptance of the latter: by destroying his/her physical or psychic integrity (maltreatment and rape), by destroying his/her social integrity (individual and social rights), by destroying his/her social esteem (slander, defamation, ignorance of performance). As we can see from that, there is an inverse relationship between violence and social recognition: violence consists in the violation of social recognition.

Although there is a significant difference between power and violence the occasion to use violence is inherent in asymmetric power relations. Exerting power is always characterised by force and constraints to some degree, as it consists in setting conditions and applying power technologies so that the other side is faced with the choice either to accept or to opt out. However, exerting power becomes violence if two prerequisites are met: the conditions and constraints the powerful side stipulates violate social recognition, and the dependence of the weaker side is so great that he/she is forced to accept those conditions and constraints. If in a certain society power potentials are asymmetrically distributed and organised as violence potentials, then we can speak of *structural violence*, picking up this term from Johan Galtung⁴ (1997, 475-479). In such a society certain practices are characterised by the threat or the actual use of violence. Structural violence involves all three dimensions of social structure: signification as the definition of situations and practices, in which violence is used, legitimisation as justifying the use of violence, and allocation as making available certain resources to exert power.

Concerning the functions violence has in social relations, we can differentiate three kinds of violence (c.f. Table 4):

⁴ However, I do not agree with Galtung's strict separation of personal violence intended by actors and structural violence. Of course, there are individual acts of violence motivated by the "heat of the moment", but there exists no violence within social structure unless there are individuals who act violently by drawing on those violent structural elements. If we do not accept this we fall back into the traditional theoretical dualism of agency and structure which has been overcome by Giddens' structuration theory.

- (1) *Suppression* consists in the use of violence on the part of the powerful side to protect its superiority against unwelcome opportunistic behaviour and balancing strategies. Drastic examples of suppression are foreign occupation troops and dictatorial regimes.
- (2) *Defence/Resistance* is the kind of violence used by the suppressed side to fight for its interests and social recognition. Examples are resistance against dictatorship and defensive wars.
- (3) *Preservation of peace* serves to prevent violence and to intervene in the case where violence was used. It is established in societies where social recognition is realised in principle but where, nevertheless, exists a certain probability of violation of peace for different reasons (e.g. disadvantaged minorities, lack of social integration of certain social groups, existence of extremist groups, and a low threshold of eruption of violence because of sorrowful experiences in the past). Examples are the police of democratic countries and the deployment of UN-troops for peace keeping.

Table 4: Kinds and functions of violence potentials

Designation	Function	Examples
Suppression	protection of asymmetric power relations	occupation troops dictatorial regimes
Defence/Resistance	fight against suppression	partisan warfare defensive war
Preservation of peace	prevention and intervention (peace keeping)	police in democracies UN-Troops

6. Concluding remarks

The dynamic capacity of power and social recognition consists in their influence on constituting and changing social structures:

- *Power* is based on the positions taken by the actors in the processes of adjustment and coordination. In these processes, actors can define, corresponding to their power potentials, conditions on which they are willing to participate in interaction. The structuring capacity of power gets obvious particularly when power positions are distributed asymmetrically in society. In this case, structure elements are marked by the conditions and constraints powerful actors set in interaction processes, by the employment of power technologies as well as by the existence of violence potentials.
- *Social recognition* influences interaction processes in a different way. It is characterised by people taking favourable attitudes towards one another in respect to their claims to self-realisation and membership in communities and society. Hence, conflicts are handled by

communication and negotiations and by the attempt to come to agreements by balancing the interests involved. The solutions are realised in the forms of arrangements, contracts, pacts, laws.

Asymmetric power relations and the use of suppressive violence lead to social conflicts for reasons of material injustice and violation of social recognition. So, social conflicts are not only conflicts of interests but also moral conflicts. However, the weaker party cannot improve its situation unless it increases its power level. Balancing the power levels gives the weaker side the chance to force the powerful side to reshape the relation. That is why social conflicts have the form of struggles *against* power and *for* social recognition. Such struggles tend to show the following course:

- (1) At first, material disadvantage and the disdaining of social recognition induce operations to balance the existing power differences. The common experience of disadvantage enables the individuals to form a coalition, that is, to join together by co-ordinating their conduct towards the powerful side and the application of their resources.
- (2) In this way, the members of the coalition develop solidarity and establish new rules: they create a specific language to describe their situation und goals, they establish relevant norms for their mutual behaviour in the coalition and for their struggle, and they accumulate resources to finance their common activities.
- (3) If the coalition gains enough power there are two possibilities for further development: the one is evolution, the other is revolution. In the case of evolution, the coalition can reach new arrangements with the formerly powerful counterpart, which improve the exchange relations and include social recognition. In the case of a successful revolution, the past system of rules is substituted by a system of new rules defined by the coalition without considering the counterpart. In both cases, evolution and revolution, new rules and a new allocation of resources are established.

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