

Marx and Recognition

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Introduction

An account of Marx and recognition starts with a disadvantage. Owing to deeply entrenched stereotypes, the notion of *recognition* has an “unmarxist” ring. At most, recognition may be considered whilst discussing Marx on alienation. More generally, the term subsists (if subsists it does) on the outermost edges of Marx’s claims.

Our discussion dispenses with stereotypes and moves ‘recognition’ to the centre of Marx’s theorising. The notion of recognition is, we argue, one which pervades Marx’s writings and draws together often-discussed themes. Far from being unmarxist or inessential, the notion allows us to see how passages in Marx’s “earlier” and “later” writings interrelate. An intending reader of Marx may, perhaps, hold the following preconceptions: in Marx’s writings, alienation and recognition are “soft” or merely “cultural” topics – in contrast to the “hard” and “political” topics of property, exchange and class. Our paper argues that such preconceptions miss the mark. It contends that, when recognition is seen as a pivotal issue, the radicality of Marx’s views on *class* and *exchange* and *property* appears.

At this point, and before embarking on our discussion proper, an observation regarding context may be made. In recent years, scholarly discussion of Marx and the notion of recognition has increased.¹ This increase is welcome, not least because it casts stereotypes aside. It has a drawback, however: in much of the discussion, ‘recognition’ is understood in an unhelpful and (for Marx) inappropriate way. The conception which we deem unhelpful is that associated with Axel Honneth. In a moment, we shall explain where our disagreement with Honneth lies. Here, we summarise our paper’s position in a phrase: Marx is through and through a theorist of recognition, but not in Honneth’s sense.

1 See, for example, A. Chitty ‘Recognition and Social Relations of Production’ *Historical Materialism* No. 2 (1998); D. Brudney ‘Producing for Others’ in H.-C. Schmidt am Busch and C.F. Zurn (eds.) *The Philosophy of Recognition* (Plymouth: Lexington Books 2010); M. Quante ‘Recognition as the Social Grammar of Species Being in Marx’ in H. Ikäheimo and A. Laitinen (eds.) *Recognition and Social Ontology* (Leyden: Brill 2011); A. Chitty ‘Recognition and Property in Hegel and the Early Marx’ Vol. 16., No. 4 (2013); M. Quante ‘Recognition in *Capital*’ *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* Vol. 16, No. 4 (2013); J.-P. Deranty ‘Marx, Honneth and the Tasks of a Contemporary Critical Theory’ *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* Vol. 16, No. 4 (2013); E. Renault ‘Three Marxian Approaches to Recognition’ *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* Vol. 16, No. 4 (2013). Note that this list of papers is not exhaustive – and that not everything in it is discussed here. In the light of what we go on to say about Honneth’s influence, it is worth adding that by no means all of the papers listed take Honneth as a point of departure.

Discussion in our paper falls into a number of sections. In section 1, we comment on ‘recognition’, and – by way of background – contrast “Hegelian” and “Honnethian” ways in which recognition can be seen. Section 2 turns to Marx, and suggests that Marxian communism and Hegelian mutual recognition are linked ideas. For Marx, we suggest, ending contradictory recognition and achieving mutual recognition is revolution’s aim, indeed its rationale. Sections 3 and 4 turn to specific writings by Marx – especially his ‘Comments on James Mill’ (1844), *Grundrisse* (1857-8) and *Capital* Vol. 1 (1867). In Section 3, via an exploration of recognitive themes, we argue that Marx is a critic not just of private property but of property *per se*. Marx’s break with the natural law tradition, to which both liberalism and social democracy are heirs, is highlighted. Again in the light of recognition, Section 4 focuses on exchange, clarifying Marx’s ‘immanent critique’ of capitalism. Section 5 turns to Marx’s view of hitherto existing society. Here a new interpretation of Marx’s notions of class and the proletariat is proposed. In the closing section 6 we underline the revolutionary implications of the contrast between contradictory recognition and mutual recognition.

1. *Recognition in Hegel and Honneth*

The aim of this section is to supply background. This background concerns Hegel (who is frequently the starting-point of Marx’s discussion) and current disagreements about how Hegel is to be read. Hegel’s different works present different conceptions of ‘recognition’. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), which breathes the atmosphere of the French Revolution, a ‘new world’² of non-alienated recognition is foreshadowed. By contrast, his *Philosophy of Right* (1821) makes its peace with a world divided into ethical powers and spheres; such recognition as is defended is recognition that ethical powers provide. This difference is, we claim, central to an understanding of Marx and recognition. In Marx’s work, recognition as seen in the *Phenomenology* – as distinct from recognition as seen in the *Philosophy of Right* – has a central and continuing place.

One reason for drawing attention to such differences is present-day scholarship’s interest in Hegel’s various works. During the 1960s and 1970s, when critical theory and Left Hegelianism flourished, interest in the *Phenomenology* was widespread. In more recent years, attention has shifted to the *Philosophy of Right*: Honneth’s writings view recognition and immanent critique through the *Philosophy of Right*’s lens.³ To the shift in emphasis from the *Phenomenology* to the *Philosophy of Right*, a corresponding change in views of recognition has taken place. In the political theory of the late 1960s and 1970’s, the notion of recognition had something of an outsider

2 G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1977) p. 7.

3 A. Honneth *The Struggle for Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1995); *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom: Hegel’s Social Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2010); *Freedom’s Right* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2014).

status: in part owing to the recent translation of Kojève's lectures,⁴ 'recognition' – as a term and as an issue – had a revolutionary ring. In present-day discussion, 'recognition' has come in from the cold. It has found a place in political theory – but at a price. Its revolutionary wings have been clipped.

With these general comments in mind, we embark on the present section's discussion. In what follows, we distinguish between (a) recognition as understood in the *Phenomenology* – the view of recognition which we ourselves favour, and which Marx employs – and (b) recognition as seen in Honneth's *Philosophy of Right*-influenced terms. Our aim in drawing this distinction is to make clear, for a reader, what our paper does and does not claim.

(a) Recognition as seen in Hegel's *Phenomenology*

An account of 'recognition [*Anerkennung*]' in Hegel's *Phenomenology* is difficult to give without drawing on a galaxy of themes. Such an account must refer to issues which cannot be discussed adequately here. This said, it is important to locate 'recognition' in the argument which the *Phenomenology* presents.

This argument concerns history. For the *Phenomenology*, history is a *history of recognition*: it is a history of the patterns which, over time, recognition has formed. This history opens with the struggle which results in the 'one-sided and unequal' recognition which characterises Mastery and Slavery; it ends with the French Revolution.⁵ During the course of history, or in other words during the millennia between Mastery and Slavery and the Revolution, recognition takes contradictory – self-undermining or "alienated" – forms. History ends only when, in and through the French Revolution, uncontradicted or non-alienated recognition obtains. What form or pattern of recognition counts as uncontradicted? The *Phenomenology's* answer to this question is uncompromising: only *mutual* recognition – recognition whose to-and-fro dynamic is unimpeded – is recognition in a self-consistent and uncontradicted way.⁶

A further clarification of these comments requires in-depth discussion of mutual recognition – and thence of issues which, again, cannot be fully explored here. One feature of mutual recognition has already been touched on: its to-and-fro dynamic points to its equal and reciprocal character. The same dynamic means that mutual recognition is *interaction* which respects no pre-given structures and which follows only goals which it prescribes to itself. A further feature of mutual recognition is its close relation with *freedom*. Recognition *counts as such*, for Hegel, only if it is freely given; conversely, freedom *counts as such* only when it is recognized or seen. In the historical argument of the *Phenomenology*, freedom and recognition stand or fall

4 A. Kojève *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (New York: Basic Books 1969).

5 For 'one-sided and unequal' recognition, see Hegel *Phenomenology* p. 116; for the French Revolution, see *ibid.* pp. 355-63.

6 For mutual recognition, see *Phenomenology* p. 112; also – on the social world that the French Revolution has brought into existence – pp. 388, 394, 396 and 408.

together: *what* is recognized, if recognition is present, is individuals' free and self-determining action – and unrecognized freedom is a contradiction in terms. Freedom and recognition flourish together, in a non-alienated fashion, only if mutual recognition obtains.

A final feature of *Phenomenology*-style recognition must be mentioned, if only in passing, because it is essential to recognition's and freedom's interrelation. As a number of scholars have noted, the term 'recognition' has, for Hegel, not merely a *cognitive* but a *constitutive* force.⁷ (Whereas *cognitive* recognition acknowledges that such-and-such an object is a familiar item, *constitutive* recognition makes the object what it is.) The distinction is important here because it shows how, for the *Phenomenology*, an individual can be free and self-determining and, at the same time, a member of a mutually recognitive group. If recognition is *constitutive*, individuals can be free not *despite* other individuals but *in and through* the recognition of freedom that others afford. Because recognition is constitutive, mutually recognitive individuals can 'enjoy perfect freedom and independence'.⁸ If one were to summarise the notion of mutual recognition in a phrase, a reference to individuals who *enjoy freedom through interaction with one another* would go to the heart of the issue.

From mutual recognition, we turn to the darker side of the *Phenomenology's* picture. If mutual recognition flourishes after history's end, so contradictory recognition – alienated recognition or, so to say, recognition-contradicted – obtains throughout history's course. In one way or another, equality and reciprocity and freedom (the categories important for mutual recognition) are denied or impoverished. The *Phenomenology's* discussion draws attention to two forms of contradictory which have been widespread and pervasive. One has been mentioned already: in a Master-Slave situation especially, but also in history more generally, recognition is 'one-sided and unequal'. One-sided and unequal recognition is *contradictory* recognition because, for reasons which are evident, notions of equality and reciprocity are cast to the wind. Generalising beyond the letter of Hegel's discussion, we may say that *hierarchical* relations turn on contradictory recognition: 'one-sided and unequal' recognition manifests itself in a *cascade of contempt*⁹ – whether the cascade be steep or shallow.

The second form of contradictory recognition to which the *Phenomenology* draws attention is, although important, difficult to name: we shall refer to it as role-definitional or institutional recognition. The difficulty arises from the circumstance

7 See A. Chitty 'Recognition and Relations of Production' *Historical Materialism* Vol. 2, No. 1 (1998) p. 61; H. Ikäheimo and A. Laitinen 'Analysing Recognition: Identification, Acknowledgement and Recognitive Attitudes towards Persons' in B. van den Brink and D. Owen, eds., *Recognition and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007) pp. 34-6. Kojève's example of an 'enemy's flag' (*Introduction* p. 6) underlines the same issue.

8 *Phenomenology* p. 110.

9 See G. Lefebvre *The Coming of the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1967) p. 47: during the *ancien régime*, 'officeholding and the professions established among them [the French bourgeoisie] a hierarchy of which they were exceedingly jealous, and which engendered "cascades of disdain" as Cournot put it'. This passage may be set alongside the *Phenomenology's* treatment of the same period.

that, when Hegel introduces the notion, he is thinking metaphorically: whilst discussing European history, he apparently changes subject and refers to ‘the universal elements of Air, Water, Fire and Earth’.¹⁰ As the passage proceeds, the significance of the apparent change of topic becomes evident: just as we encounter in nature the natural masses of Water, Earth, etc., so in society (or in history) we encounter ‘spiritual masses [*geistige Massen*],’¹¹ – or, in a word, social institutions. The point of Hegel’s comparison is to suggest alienation: in the same way as natural masses have natural inertia, so social masses (or social institutions) have a quasi-natural inertial weight. Like natural masses, social institutions stand over against individuals. Where does recognition enter this picture? If we remember that social institutions involve role definitions, just as (for example) *universities* involve the role definitions of *student* and *lecturer*, we can understand that, when social existence is institutionally arranged, recognition takes a role-definitional form. Why should role-definitional recognition be *contradictory* recognition? Our answer is that, in recognition which is couched in terms of role definitions, only the *universality* of an individual is acknowledged; his or her *particularity* falls out of account. A *student* (for example) is recognized only as a student; he or she is seen in a divided and, moreover, incomplete way. The same point can be expressed by drawing on Hegel’s *Science of Logic*: a role-definitional term (such as “student”) is an *abstract universal*.¹² Such a term *abstracts from*, and *applies alike*, to a range of different individuals. Our point is that, if recognition goes forward in terms of abstract universality, incomplete and thereby contradictory recognition results.

Having introduced role-definitional alienation through his metaphor of ‘Air, Water, Fire and Earth’, Hegel underscores its historical significance. In the French Revolution, the event through which Hegelian history ends, ‘the essence of all the spiritual masses [*geistige Massen*] of the real as well as well as the supersensible world’¹³ is dissolved into free interaction.

Here, for two reasons, we stress the notion of contradictory recognition that takes a role-definitional or institutional form. First, it is a notion which (together with ‘one-sided and unequal’ recognition) features in Marx’s discussion. And second, a clear focus on the notion allows a confusion – better: a blind spot – to be avoided. In recent discussions of ‘recognition’, it is sometimes assumed that a situation where individuals *recognize one another as bearers of role definitions* is a situation where mutual recognition obtains.¹⁴ The assumption is a tempting one because, between two

10 *Phenomenology* p. 360.

11 *Ibid.* (translation slightly altered).

12 On universality and particularity, see G.W.F. Hegel *Science of Logic* (London: Allen and Unwin 1969) p. 604; *The Logic of Hegel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1892) pp. 291-7 [*Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* Vol. I paras. 163-5].

13 *Phenomenology* p. 356 (translation slightly altered). The passage’s reference to the ‘supersensible’ world is, we may note, to be explained as follows: for Hegel, the period between the fall of Ancient Rome and the French Revolution is characterised by an alienating division between *this* world and a notional *beyond* (*ibid.* p. 295). The passage quoted treats the *beyond* as one inert ‘mass’ among others. In the French Revolution, where ‘heaven is transplanted to earth below’ (*ibid.* p. 355), the alienating division is abolished.

14 See, for example, discussion arising from C. Taylor ‘The Politics of Recognition’ in A. Gutmann, ed.,

individuals who recognize one another's social roles, equality (of a sort) may be present.¹⁵ Above, however, we have referred not merely to *equality*, but to *reciprocity* and *freedom*, as dimensions of a mutually recognitive relation; and, in a role-definitional situation, the channels in which recognition flows are restricted. *Reciprocity* falls short of unconstrained interaction and *freedom* is limited to what the role definitions concerned permit. Finally, the *equality* of individuals who are seen as bearers of role definitions is formal and abstract and – in a word – incomplete. The individuals are seen as equal *in virtue of their universality*; their particular being – to employ a term from Max Stirner, their *uniqueness* – is passed over in silence. In a society which turns on role-definitional recognition, an individual is a fragment of his or her many-sided self.

In closing our all-too-schematic presentation of *Phenomenology*-style recognition, we underline what we see as its central feature. At the core of the *Phenomenology's* discussion is a distinction between contradictory (or contradicted, or alienated) recognition and recognition which is uncontradicted and which flourishes on its own terms. Uncontradicted recognition is, for the *Phenomenology*, mutual recognition. Contradictory recognition may come in a range of versions but chiefly, where the *Phenomenology* is concerned, in 'one-sided and unequal' and in role-definitional forms. Our broad claim regarding Marx is that, in his writings, the *Phenomenology's* conception of recognition is at work.

(b) Honneth, recognition and the *Philosophy of Right*

The chief aim of our remarks on Honneth is disambiguation. From the 1990s onwards, Honneth's writings have influenced discussions of 'recognition'. Our view of recognition – the view which we ascribe to the *Phenomenology* – and Honneth's view are, however, fundamentally different. Unless a reader of our paper has a sense of where this difference lies, misunderstanding is inescapable.

As mentioned in our introductory remarks to the present section, Honneth's writings view recognition through the *Philosophy of Right's* (rather than the *Phenomenology's*) conceptual lens. This circumstance has more than a bibliographical significance: the *Philosophy of Right* is, we have suggested, a text where Hegel makes his peace with –

Multiculturalism (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994). Honneth's remarks on mutual realisation and mutual recognition (*Freedom's Right* pp. 53, 128) turn on the same idea.

15 At this point, a comment on K. de Boer 'Beyond Recognition? Critical Reflections on Honneth's reading of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*' *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* Vol. 21, No. 4 (2013) can be added. In many ways, her critique of Honneth's view of Hegel and our own runs parallel. However, her reliance on a contrast between 'asymmetrical' and 'symmetrical' recognition ('Beyond Recognition?' pp. 3, 12-3 [page nos. are those of online edn.]) seems inadequate. This is so for two reasons: (a) recognition may, surely, be 'symmetrical' *and still be contradictory*. This is so when what we have termed role-definitional recognition obtains – as when individuals who exchange commodities recognize one another as "proprietors". And (b) the notion of 'symmetry' may be understood in more than one fashion: for symmetry to be present, is it sufficient that individuals equally recognize one another's *different* role definitions? Or is it necessary that each individual has *the same* role definition (as in the case when individuals engage in commodity exchange)? Our contrast between *contradictory* recognition and mutual or *uncontradicted* recognition avoids the difficulties and the conceptual uncertainties that a distinction between 'asymmetrical' and 'symmetrical' recognition invites.

or ‘reconciles’ himself to¹⁶ – a world divided into ethical spheres or ethical powers. It is a text where (to borrow a term from the *Phenomenology*) Hegel makes his peace with a world where *geistige Massen* are the order of the day. If the *Phenomenology* links recognition to unstructured recognition, or to interaction which prescribes its own goals, the *Philosophy of Right* makes its appeal to an institutional realm. In saying this, we do not (we hasten to add) disregard the evidence of the scholarship which has traced ‘recognition’ as a theme in Hegel’s later writings – the *Philosophy of Right* included.¹⁷ But we point out that its transformation to an institutional setting makes a difference to the way ‘recognition’ is understood. This transformation blurs the distinction between what we have termed *contradicted* and *uncontradicted* recognition. More than this, it turns a blind eye to role-definitional alienation. A recognition which flows in institutional channels is no longer a recognition which brings ‘spiritual masses’ to their end.

At this point in our discussion, we turn to Honneth’s texts. Our first task is to indicate the closeness with which Honneth follows the *Philosophy of Right*’s scheme. In his *Struggle for Recognition* (originally 1992), the three-part structure of family, civil society and state – the three-part structure which the *Philosophy of Right* employs – is seen as present in Hegel’s early writings.¹⁸ The same structure underlies Honneth’s own distinction between ‘patterns’ of recognition.¹⁹ In his *Pathologies of Individual Freedom* (originally 2001), the *Philosophy of Right* is read as a ‘draft’ of a ‘normative theory’; the theory points to ‘spheres of reciprocal recognition’ – or ‘interactional patterns’, or ‘intersubjective practices’ – that ‘constitute the moral identity of modern societies’.²⁰ Honneth reads the *Philosophy of Right* as a work whose family/civil society/state distinction is capable of further ethical development. In ‘Redistribution as Recognition’, Honneth’s chief contribution to his dialogue with Nancy Fraser, the notion of ‘spheres of recognition’ is foregrounded – the spheres concerned being ‘love’ and ‘law’ and ‘achievement’.²¹ Honneth emphasises that his own work and the *Philosophy of Right* share ‘the same basic idea’.²² In his recent *Freedom’s Right* (originally 2011) the indebtedness to the *Philosophy of Right* is still more striking. There, the *Philosophy of Right* is taken as a point of reference and its conception of society as a ‘layered arrangement of recognitional relationships’ is praised.²³ Honneth’s distinction between ‘the “we” of personal relationships’, ‘the “we” of the

16 For ‘reconciliation [*Versöhnung*]’, see G.F.W. Hegel *Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1952) p. 12. Hegel’s notion of ‘reconciliation’ is discussed in G. Lukács *The Young Hegel* (London: Merlin Press 1975). Questions remain, of course, about *what* Hegel reconciled himself with – and how much approval ‘reconciliation’ involves. The later Hegel was, as Beiser comments, a ‘liberal reformer’ – F. Beiser *Hegel* (London: Routledge 2005) p. 216 – rather than a defender of out-and-out reaction.

17 See – to cite one text amongst many – R.R. Williams *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1997); likewise Honneth’s *Pathologies of Individual Freedom*. The notion of ‘recognition’ appears at, for example, *Philosophy of Right* p. 48 [para. 57 Zusatz].

18 *Struggle for Recognition* p. 25.

19 *Ibid.* ch. 5. The patterns concerned are those of ‘love’ and ‘rights’ and ‘solidarity’. Honneth describes the patterns as ‘spheres of interaction’ which may be traced back to ‘different patterns of mutual recognition’ (*ibid.* p. 95).

20 *Pathologies* pp. 5, 46, 50; for similar or equivalent phrases, see pp. 17, 19, 45, 46, 51, 52, 54, 72.

21 N. Fraser and A. Honneth *Redistribution or Recognition?* (London: Verso 2003) pp. 138-43.

22 *Ibid.* p. 144.

23 *Freedom’s Right* p. 46.

market economy' and 'the "we" of democratic will-formation'²⁴ broadly reflects Hegel's family/civil society/state distinction. More than this: in *Freedom's Right*, Honneth orders discussion in a way which takes the *Philosophy of Right* as its basis.

This said, Honneth by no means merely repeats Hegel's conclusions. His concern is to carry forward a programme of 'normative reconstruction'²⁵ – a programme which, in his view, Hegel set in motion but left in an unsatisfactory state. Hegel was too ready to equate patterns of recognition with existing social conditions: his approach was 'overly institutionalist',²⁶ and his comments on ethical powers represent 'vague sketches'.²⁷ The task (as Honneth sees it) is not to follow the *Philosophy of Right* slavishly but to identify the 'surplus of validity',²⁸ or 'promise of validity',²⁹ that existing conditions contain. If this is so, should we withdraw the charge that Honneth blurs interactive and institutional considerations? Should we acquit him of making peace with an institutional world?

Sadly, no such acquittal is in order. This is so for two reasons, one of which is a matter of emphasis whilst the other concerns recognition itself.

The point of emphasis turns on the notion of immanent critique – a notion to which our discussion returns. In *Freedom's Right*, the term which does duty for immanent critique is 'normative reconstruction': following a programme of normative reconstruction, a theorist shows, or attempts to show, 'which aims subjects should ideally pursue under given conditions'.³⁰ (In Honneth's view, the *Philosophy of Right* adopts normative reconstruction as its 'methodological procedure'³¹ but does not sufficiently carry the procedure through.) The difficulty with Honneth's idea is that the 'aims' which subjects pursue 'under existing conditions' remain tied to an existing order of things. In the aims which are found rationally appropriate, the outlines of existing reality appear. In Honneth's writings, as in the *Philosophy of Right*, the ethical spheres of existing society are assumed – rather than being subjected to critique.³² One way of formulating our point is to say that Honneth's endorsement of three, sphere-specific patterns of recognition stays *too close to the surface* of existing relations for critique – at least, revolutionary rather than reformist critique – to get under way. Another way is to make the notion of emphasis explicit: in Honneth's work, immanent critique is *so* immanent that critique all but disappears.

24 Ibid. ch. 6.

25 Ibid. p. 56 and *passim*.

26 *Pathologies* p. 7.

27 *Freedom's Right* p. 127.

28 *Redistribution or Recognition?* p. 174.

29 *Freedom's Right* pp. 46, 177, 330, 335.

30 Ibid. p. 57.

31 Ibid. p. 56.

32 As Emmanuel Renault expresses the point: 'the theory of modernity [as found in Honneth] assumes that our society is rational in its general structures and in its main normative principles, so that political struggles have to restrict themselves to the achievement of what the actual social order promises us': E. Renault 'The Theory of Recognition and the Critique of Institutions' in D. Petherbridge, ed. *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays* (Leiden: Brill 2011) pp. 215-6.

The point concerning recognition picks up on the issue of institutions. We have suggested that, in outline, Honneth endorses the spheres or institutions – in the *Philosophy of Right's* terms, the ethical powers – of the existing world.³³ But there is more: by viewing recognition in an institutional perspective, Honneth alters what the term ‘recognition’ means. In the *Phenomenology*, we have argued, mutual recognition is a realm of free interaction: nothing compels recognition to flow in pre-given channels, and self-determining freedom exists through recognition’s play. When Honneth equates ‘mutual recognition’ with ‘complementary role obligations’³⁴ a different picture is given: the mutuality is the reciprocity of interlocking role-expectations. Interlocking roles are, for their part, located in ‘institutional complexes’.³⁵ It is in each of the three ‘recognitional’ spheres – the sphere of intimate relations, the sphere of the economy and the sphere of will-formation – that interlocking role-expectations are to be found. Our suggestion can be summed up in the form of a contrast: the notion of recognition, which remains wild in the *Phenomenology*, becomes disciplined and domesticated in Honneth’s work. In Honneth’s usage, the notion of mutual recognition ceases to exist out ahead of institutions; it becomes channelled into what the *Phenomenology* terms *geistige Massen*. The distinction between contradicted and uncontradicted recognition disappears.

As stressed above, our aim in the foregoing comments is disambiguation. If a reader of our paper thinks of ‘recognition’ in a Honnethian fashion, most of what we have to say will be unintelligible. For Marx, the *Philosophy of Right* moves in a realm of bewitchment and mystification. The *Phenomenology* is the place where Marx’s account of recognition begins.

2. Communism as mutual recognition

Our claim is that recognition is by no means a marginal concern for Marx. On the contrary, recognition is fundamental to everything he says. Once Honnethian or *Philosophy of Right*-style recognition is set aside, and *Phenomenology*-style recognition is brought into focus, it becomes possible to see recognition as Marx’s overarching concern. In the present section, we point to the argument on recognition which, we consider, runs through Marx’s work.

Our starting point is the passage in Marx’s 1844 *Manuscripts* where communism is described as ‘the real *appropriation* of the *human* essence by and for man’.³⁶ As is

33 A troubling example of this endorsement may be given: Honneth refers to ‘the promise of freedom inherent in the modern market economy’ (*Freedom’s Right* p. 177). Is it the case that the ‘market economy’ contains such a promise? Honneth assumes, rather than argues, that it does. We do not, here, discuss Honneth’s preference for Durkheim over Marx and his endorsement of the “moral economy” tradition; however, we note that Marx as discussed below raises relevant points and issues.

34 Ibid. p. 128.

35 Ibid. p. 127; see also p. 125.

36 K. Marx and F. Engels *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart 1975) Vol. 3 p. 296.

frequently the case in Marx's unpublished writings, a good deal of precise content is packed into a colourful piece of text. Let us start with 'man': elsewhere in the *Manuscripts*, Feuerbach is praised for making 'the social relationship of "man to man" 'the 'basic principle' of theory'.³⁷ Human existence is, for Marx, intrinsically social – to the point that an individual's sensuousness 'exists as human sensuousness for himself through the *other* man'.³⁸ When Marx says that communism is, or involves, the appropriation of 'man', what he has in mind is, we propose, man's – or humanity's – social existence.

From 'man' we turn to 'the *human* essence'. By this phrase, Marx understands humanity's 'species being'. The term 'species being' is, no doubt, capable of various interpretations but, here, we take our clue from Marx's declaration that

man is not merely a natural being: he is a *human* natural being. That is to say, he is a being for himself. Therefore he is a *species being*...³⁹

A being counts as a species being when it is aware of itself – and of what, through its awareness, it may become. This *active becoming* is essential to species being, in Marx's estimation: a merely natural being (such as an animal) 'suffers',⁴⁰ or is passive, whereas a species being 'sees himself in a world that he has created'.⁴¹ An animal 'is immediately one with its life activity' whereas man, as a species being, 'makes his life activity the object of his will and consciousness'.⁴² in virtue of this non-coincidence with himself, 'man' may be a 'free being'.⁴³ We may sum up this line of thought by saying, that for Marx, 'man' is self-determining.

With these explanations in place, we may read or re-read the passage that is our starting point: if communism is 'the real *appropriation* of the *human* essence by and for man', it is the appropriation of man as a self-determining and social being.

Let us agree that this is the case. It may be asked, however: how can human being be *both* self-determining *and* social? If an individual is seen as social, are there not limitations – so to say, communitarian limitations – on what he or she may think and do? If an individual is seen as self-determining, are social limitations not thrown to the winds?

If mutual recognition in the *Phenomenology's* sense is brought into play, this last trace of the dichotomy between social and individual existence is surpassed. For the *Phenomenology*, as we have seen, individuals amongst whom there exist mutual

37 Ibid. p. 328; see L. Feuerbach *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill 1966) p. 71 [para. 59].

38 *Collected Works* Vol. 3 p. 304.

39 Ibid. p. 337.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid. p. 277.

42 Ibid. p. 276.

43 Ibid. p. 275.

recognition ‘enjoy perfect freedom and independence’.⁴⁴ Conceptually, what allows the *Phenomenology* to see beyond a social-versus-individual dichotomy is the *constitutive* dimension of Hegelian recognition: because recognition is constitutive, individuals may be seen as free through the recognition that others give. In addition, the ‘perfect freedom’ which individuals enjoy is *freedom as self-determination* – rather than freedom understood in a merely “freedom from” or “negative” sense. This is so because, where mutual recognition obtains, *what* is recognized is the self-determining action that individuals perform.

At this point in the discussion we may stand back. Our line of thought has lead from Marx’s 1844 passage to the *Phenomenology*’s terrain. Our conclusion may be sharpened by saying that, for Marx, a communist society and a society where there is mutual recognition are one and the same. The passage which refers to ‘the real *appropriation* of the *human* essence by and for man’ treats communism (on the one hand) and mutual recognition (on the other) as two terms for the same thing. This “sharpened” version of our conclusion can, indeed, be carried a stage further: it is, for Marx, *because* communism and mutual recognition are the same that communism is valuable – in human and social and political terms. It is *because* communism is ‘the real *appropriation*’ of socialised humanity that communism is important. In Marx’s view, mutual recognition is *in the last instance* communism’s rationale.⁴⁵

Here, a reader of our paper may raise an objection: perhaps communism is seen by Marx as mutually recognitive – but why should mutual recognition take a communist form? Why should mutual recognition and private property be incompatible? Our response is to ask our reader for patience. It is true that we have so far said nothing about where such an incompatibility may lie. In sections 3 and 4, however, we show that, for Marx, property and mutual recognition are antithetical terms. At this preliminary stage in our argument, a consideration which supports Marx can indeed be indicated. Above, we have linked mutual recognition to free interaction. If interaction flows in pre-given channels, the interaction is (we have suggested) unfree. An interaction that is confined to property-based channels, and which sanctions the role definition of “proprietor”, is – so we now propose – an interaction that denies itself. Property is a social institution (a ‘spiritual mass’) which contradicts interactive freedom. For Marx, recognition is contradicted when property appears.

A reader to whom we have counselled patience may raise a further objection. He or she may point out that, so far, our communism-as-mutual-recognition interpretation rests on a single passage – the 1844 passage from which our discussion set out. Are there further passages in Marx which adopt a similar position?

44 *Phenomenology* p. 110. Are the individuals ones amongst whom mutual recognition exists? We reply that they are: the same passage refers, famously, to an ‘I that is We and We that is I’ – in other words, to mutual recognition.

45 Our use of the phrase ‘in the last instance’ is intended to guard against a misunderstanding. In stressing the centrality of mutual recognition, we do not attempt to downplay (or claim that Marx attempts to downplay) more specific social and political goals. No doubt, it may be asked whether such a goal is a *precondition* of mutual recognition or a part, so to say, a “moment” of mutual recognition itself. We do not discuss this issue here.

We think there are. A number of them can be indicated here. First, Part One of Marx's 'On the Jewish Question' (1844) ends with an invocation of what is, in effect, mutual recognition. For Marx, an emancipated society is one where an individual is not an 'abstract citizen'; instead, the individual is a '*species being* in his everyday life'. In such a society, powers are directly 'social'. The individual 'no longer separates social power from himself'.⁴⁶ When Marx rejects abstract citizenship, and when he attacks powers that stand over against individuals, he turns to a pattern of social existence in which *species being* (or in other words self-determination) may thrive. How may *social* existence be *self-determining* existence? Each may exist through the other if mutual recognition obtains.

Next, we turn to Marx's 'Comments on James Mill' (1844) – a text which we shall explore in some detail later. Here, we note only that the text envisages a situation where each individual affirms 'himself' and 'the other person' in his production. On the one hand, the individual experiences his own 'personality' as 'objective' and 'visible to the senses': he sees himself as others see him, and in the eyes of others is 'confirmed'. On the other hand, the individual addresses 'the need of another'. The relation between *the individual who acknowledges* and *the individual who is acknowledged* is, as Marx says, reciprocal or mutual. In this striking passage, Marx allows himself to use the term 'love'.⁴⁷

Moving forward in time, two well-known passages may be considered. In the *German Ideology* (1845), Marx looks towards a condition where I may 'do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever being hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic'.⁴⁸ The sting of this passage is in its tail: Marx does not, here, attack the notion of a *technical* division of labour (he allows that hunting and fishing and so forth are distinct occupations) but is concerned with the role definitions – those of, for example, "hunter" and "fisherman" - which a *social* division of labour entails. The passage does, to be sure, picture a technical division where occupations circulate swiftly – or more swiftly than is currently the case. The main thrust of Marx's words is, however, on role definitions as an issue. He anticipates a world where, in effect, role-definitional alienation is ended. Stated differently: he anticipates a world where mutual recognition is in play.

The second of the well-known passages refers to mutual recognition in all but name. In the closing sentence of *Communist Manifesto* Part II, Marx describes post-revolutionary society as 'an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.⁴⁹ Such a description envisages a condition where each is free *through* (and not *in spite of*) their relations with others.⁵⁰ It pictures

46 *Collected Writings* Vol. 3 p. 168.

47 *Ibid.* pp. 227-8.

48 *Collected Works* Vol. 5 p. 47.

49 *Collected Works* Vol. 6 p. 506.

50 Or does it? Marx says that the *free development of each* is the condition for the *free development of all*. Can this proposition be reversed? Can we be sure that, for Marx, the *free development of all* is the condition for the *free*

emancipation as mutual recognition.

In his subsequent writings, emancipation continues to be linked to an image of intersubjective existence. In *Capital*, Marx looks beyond commodities to ‘an association of free men’⁵¹ – one where ‘the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle’.⁵² For the *Grundrisse* manuscripts of 1857-58, emancipation comes into being when ‘communal production [*gemeinschaftliche Produktion*]’ – indeed, ‘communality [*Gemeinschaftlichkeit*]’ – prevails.⁵³ The themes of ‘On the Jewish Question’ and the 1844 *Manuscripts* are recapitulated. Regarding humanity’s social existence: in an emancipated world, an individual’s labour is mediated to society not through market exchange but directly, through the individual’s ‘immediately general’ or ‘social’ activity.⁵⁴ Regarding what in 1844 Marx terms *species being*: self-determination re-enters the picture in Marx’s account of free production. Such production is ‘the development of all powers’; as such, it cannot be measured on ‘a *predetermined* yardstick’. It reproduces human being not ‘in one specificity’ but in its ‘totality’.⁵⁵ Passages such as these carry forward, and restate, Marx’s earlier views. Tacitly or explicitly, they draw upon mutual recognition as a theme. There is, in our view, no reason whatever to see Marx as turning against *Phenomenology*-inspired ideas.

Once again, we may stand back from our discussion. Our overall suggestion is that Marx’s thought turns on a contrast between contradicted and uncontradicted recognition. This contrast serves as, so to say, an armature around which his more specific theorising is arranged. Sometimes this armature is referred to explicitly. At other times, it is tacitly assumed. Whichever is the case, it is present – and gives discussion a political edge. Proletarian revolution is, for Marx, a break from one-sided and/or role-definitional recognition; it is a venture into a mutually recognitive realm.

We are under no illusion that the above remarks resolve all germane issues.⁵⁶ On the contrary, we are aware of the incompleteness of what has been said. Besides questions about revolution,⁵⁷ questions arise concerning the shape and character of

development of each? Given Marx’s hostility to monadological or “atomic” individualism, it seems reasonable to see him as endorsing the following position: the *free development of each* and the *free development of all* presuppose one another.

51 K. Marx *Capital* Volume One (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1976) p. 171.

52 Ibid. p. 739.

53 *Grundrisse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1973) p. 172; K. Marx *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag 1974) p. 88; *Marx-Engels Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag 1956-1990, hereafter MEW), vol. 42, p. 104.

54 Ibid. p. 832.

55 Ibid. p. 488.

56 We discuss some of these issues in our ‘Recognition Contradicted’ *South Atlantic Quarterly* Vol. 113 No. 2 (2014); see also our ‘Occupy as Mutual Recognition’ and ‘Hierarchy or Horizontalism? - Critics of Occupy’ Heathwood Institute and Press (www.heathwoodpress.com) 12 November 2013 and 31 January 2014.

57 For Marx, we have claimed, recognition has a mutually recognitive aim. In our work for Heathwood Institute and Press (see previous footnote), we have linked the notion of such a revolution to two issues. First, we have argued that ‘instrumental’ thinking can lead such a revolution to lose its way. Second, we have argued that a revolution which aims at mutual recognition may – perhaps must – have a prefigurative tinge. We debate neither of these issues

Marx's work. We return to these questions in a moment. Before doing so, we draw attention to a still more dramatic sense in which our discussion is incomplete.

Our comments so far cast only part of Marx's argument into relief. What we have said about mutual recognition highlights the emancipation which he seeks rather than the misery and mystification which he strives to overcome. In the passage from the 1844 *Manuscripts* which has served as a starting point of our discussion, Marx (as we have argued) describes communism in terms where mutual recognition is entailed. A few lines later, he refers to the 'entire movement of history' – his claim being that this history is communism's 'act of genesis'.⁵⁸ Here, two points may be made. One is that the formulation mirrors the *Phenomenology's* conception of history.⁵⁹ The other is that, according to the line of argument that we have been pursuing, the 'history' concerned is – for Marx and Hegel alike – a history of contradiction. More specifically, it is a history of contradicted or contradictory recognition. Are we correct in summarising Marx's conception of history in this way? In sections 3, 4 and 5 we argue that we are.

Regarding the implications of our discussion for the shape and character of Marx's work: we end the present section by contrasting two opposing views. According to one, Marx is above all the theorist of 'base' and 'superstructure': from changes in the economic base, changes in the legal and political and ideological superstructure arise.⁶⁰ Around the base-and-superstructure image, a Marxist orthodoxy has arisen.⁶¹ Here, we do not discuss the image – save to note an incoherence that it contains: in picturing an economic base, so-to-say "superstructural" elements are already present. Regarding the orthodoxy, we offer an observation: despite its incoherence, the model of base and superstructure is widely (if tacitly) employed. All too frequently, an understanding of Marx relies *sotto voce* on a diluted version of the base-and-superstructure model.

What should be put in place of a base-and-superstructure interpretation? The second of the opposing views is that which our article favours. Instead of thinking of Marx as

here. On the issue of prefiguration, two passing observations can be made. One is that, in the *German Ideology*, Marx envisages a communist society as one where an individual may 'do one thing today and another tomorrow' and, a few pages later, declares: 'communism is not for us a *state of affairs*...We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things' (*Collected Works* Vol. 5 pp. 47, 49). On the face of it, the passages contradict one another – but this contradiction vanishes if Marx is thinking of the 'real movement' in prefigurative terms. The second observation is that Marx describes the Paris Commune as 'the glorious harbinger of a new society' (K Marx *The Civil War in France*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House n.d., p. 91. Should we conclude from this that Marx pictured the Commune in prefigurative terms? See, for brief but suggestive discussion, R. Zibechi *Territories in Resistance* (Oakland and Edinburgh: AK Press 2012) p. 48.

58 *Collected Works* Vol. 3 p. 297.

59 R. Gunn 'History's Beginning and History's Ending in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*' published in Turkish translation in *Baykus* No.2 (May 2008) p. 162. In English: in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel 'thinks of history as a long and arduous "work" through which recognition that is "one-sided and unequal" is transformed into recognition that is mutual' (see <http://www.richard-gunn.com/hegel.html>).

60 See, for the classic statement of the base/superstructure distinction, K. Marx *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (London: Lawrence and Wishart 1971) pp. 20-1.

61 In his Introduction (*Contribution* p. 16), Maurice Dobb observes: 'by many' the base-and-superstructure passage 'must be known almost by heart' (*Contribution*, Introduction, p. 16). At the time when Dobb was writing, this was undoubtedly the case.

a theorist of base and superstructure, we should (we propose) think of him as a theorist of recognition. At this stage, a note on our own thinking may be helpful: here and elsewhere,⁶² we have favoured what Honneth terms a “normative monism” of recognition⁶³ – the recognition concerned being very different from the recognition that Honneth has in mind. In our view, social relations are relations of recognition; recognition (by which we understand *Phenomenology*-style recognition) goes, socially, *all the way down*. If our views are endorsed, recognition (which is not, and cannot be, merely economic) explodes the base-superstructure model. Here, we stress that reliance on the model becomes not merely conceptually impossible: in addition, it becomes redundant. Once *Phenomenology*-style recognition is placed at the centre of Marx’s work, and allowed to pervade his discussion, a definitive break with base-and-superstructure thinking can be achieved. *Sotto voce* and semi-acknowledged dependency on the model of base and superstructure become a thing of the past.⁶⁴

Is a remodelling of Marx and Marxism along the lines that we have sketched plausible? We close our section by noting a history-of-ideas consideration which suggests that it is. When Hegelians in the decades after Hegel’s death divided into Left Hegelian (or Young Hegelian) and Right Hegelian (or Old Hegelian) schools,⁶⁵ the *Phenomenology*’s notion of mutual recognition became an image of emancipation among Young Hegelians. Edgar Bauer, for example, looked towards a ‘free community’ which was self-conscious and, at the same time, ‘beyond the state’.⁶⁶ Max Stirner’s *The Ego and His Own* championed a ‘new freedom’ which encompassed particularity and which involved more than “freedom from”.⁶⁷ Our suggestion that Marx models his notion of an emancipated society on Hegel’s notion of mutual recognition fits in directly with the spirit of the young Marx’s times. Marx started as a Young Hegelian and, despite his exile to London, remained faithful to his earlier ideas. He is famous for having broken with Young Hegelianism. He should, instead, be famous for having consistently upheld Young Hegelian and Left Hegelian emancipatory ideas.

62 See R. Gunn and A. Wilding ‘Revolutionary of Less-than-Revolutionary Recognition?’ Heathwood Institute and Press (www.heathwoodpress.com) 24 July 2013.

63 *Redistribution or Recognition?* p. 3.

64 In his ‘Recognition and Relations of Production’, Chitty rightly argues that a focus on recognition upsets a base-and-superstructure reading. Our suggestion is that, if Marx is understood in terms of recognition, the justification for a base-and-superstructure reading disappears.

65 The lengthy literature on Hegelianism in the years after Hegel’s death includes S. Hook *From Hegel to Marx* (Michigan: Ann Arbor 1962), D. McLellan *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (London: Macmillan 1969) and J.E. Toews *Hegelianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1980). E. Renault’s ‘The Early Marx and Hegel: The Young-Hegelian Mediation’ (paper given to the Marxism and Philosophy Society’s 2012 conference) offers a fresh consideration.

66 E. Bauer ‘Critique’s Quarrel with Church and State’ in L.S. Stepelevich, ed., *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983) pp. 273-4.

67 M. Stirner *The Ego and His Own* (London: A.C. Fifield 1915). Relevant passages are excerpted at *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology* pp. 339, 343.

3. *Contradictory recognition and property*

We have argued for an interpretation of Marx as a critic of contradictory recognition and an upholder of mutual recognition. So far, our discussion has focused on Marx's general position. But does our recognition-centred interpretation hold good where specific themes are concerned?

We believe that it does. In this and the following sections, we maintain that the issue of contradictory-*versus*-mutual recognition is central to Marx's handling of pivotal topics. The topics that we have chosen – property, commodity exchange and class – are designed to illustrate what we regard as a fundamental claim: for Marx, recognition is not a merely “ideological” issue but one that remains fundamental throughout. There is, for us, *nothing* in Marx which does not turn on recognition – by which we understand ‘recognition’ in the *Phenomenology's* sense.

In the present section, we explore Marx's conception of property. In section 4, we discuss Marx's account of exchange. The main claim which sections 3 and 4 set out to defend is that, for Marx, property and commodity exchange are *rooted in* and *constitute* contradictory recognition. As we shall discover, recognition – indeed, a bewitched or diabolically “inverted” conception of mutual recognition itself – is present in property relations. But this presence in no way softens Marx's critique. Quite the contrary: it brings the *sense in which Marx is a critic of all property relations* into full and explicit light. Marx's critique is not softened but strengthened once we see that the *recognition presupposed by property* is, throughout, recognition of a contradictory (or, better, a contradicted) kind. Not until property relations are ended may uncontradicted recognition – mutual recognition in, so to say, a non-diabolical form – obtain.

(a) *Marx on property*

In regard to Marx's understanding of property, a very general but, at the same time, telling observation can be offered: in both his early and his later writings, Marx thinks of property not as an object but in terms of the relation between human individuals. This understanding of property in terms of social relations deserves emphasis and, before embarking on textual discussion, we offer three comments.

First: a discussion of property *in terms of social relations* is far from uncontroversial. For example, property is seen in recent liberal political theory as something – some *object* – which may be owned individually, or distributed or carved up. A difficulty with thinking of property *as an object* is that it is, so to say, a “social” rather than a “natural” object: to think of property as an object is to picture it as something which may be used and owned in this or that socially specific way.

Second: if property is viewed not *as an object* but *in terms of social relations*, an

evident question arises about relations between individuals are to be seen. Our proposal is that social relations are to be seen as *relations of recognition* – whether contradictory or non-contradictory. Marx construes contradictory recognition as property-based, and non-contradictory (or mutual) recognition as recognition which stands out ahead, and which escapes property's reach.

Third: these observations notwithstanding, there is a sense in which Marx pictures property as an object. When, however, Marx pictures property in this way, the object concerned is – in conformity with the notion of contradictory recognition – one that is bewitched and mystifying and already “social”. The notion of property as a *bewitched object*, which underlies Marx's well-known passage on fetishism,⁶⁸ can be developed in a number of directions: not least, the *situation in which such a bewitchment takes place* can be indicated. For Marx, the situations are ones where a produced object has been lost or expropriated (as in scenarios of exploitation) and where ‘labour produces itself and the worker as a *commodity*’.⁶⁹ Or the notion can be generalised: in Marx's view, conceptions of *objects* are to be approached through analysis of social relations. Human sensuousness, and thus conceptions of objectivity, exist ‘through the *other man*’.⁷⁰ Tempting though these avenues of discussion are, they are not explored further here. We mention the notion of property as a *bewitched object* merely to indicate that it underlies part of our own discussion.

We launch this discussion by reminding a reader of our general observation: Marx thinks of property as a relation between individuals. Which individuals does he have in mind? Those whom he pictures are, first, the producer – private property ‘results by analysis from the concept of *alienated labour*’⁷¹ – and, second, the owner. In both instances, property involves a lessening or diminution of human aptitudes. In the case of the producer: property involves being on, so to say, the receiving end of a relation of exploitation – and the ‘one-sided and unequal’ recognition (Hegel) that exploitation entails. For the producer, moreover, *being exploited* is an experience that intensifies over time: ‘the more powerful labour becomes, the more powerless becomes the worker’.⁷² To employ the terminology used in *Capital*: the rate of surplus value increases. The point is vital to our discussion because, as the power which stands *over against* the worker increases, contradictions to the worker's self-determination multiply. If, now, we turn from the producer of property to its owner, we find that there too a diminution of human aptitudes is present. In the case of the owner, the many-sidedness of human sense-experience is reduced to a ‘sense of *having*’.⁷³ Stated differently: where ownership is involved, possessive individualism rules.⁷⁴ If both the producer and the owner of property are humanly diminished, the difference between them is in Marx's view massive: the ‘propertied class’ and the

68 *Capital* Vol. 1 pp. 163-6.

69 *Ibid.* p. 272.

70 *Ibid.* p. 304.

71 *Collected Works* Vol. 3 p. 279.

72 *Ibid.* p. 273.

73 *Ibid.* p. 300.

74 We refer to *possessive individualism* later in the present section.

‘class of the proletariat’ present ‘the same human self-estrangement. But the former class feels at ease and strengthened in this self-estrangement...[whereas] the latter feels annihilated in estrangement; it sees in it its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence’.⁷⁵

The passages which we have just quoted are to be found in Marx’s work of the 1840s. In the first volume of *Capital* (1867), the same cluster of themes is to be found. As already indicated, the worker’s increasing powerlessness is foregrounded in the notion of a rising rate of surplus value. The implications of this rise are made explicit in the observation that, as capitalism develops, ‘accumulation of wealth’ at one pole of society is ‘accumulation of misery [*Elend*]’ at the other.⁷⁶ In the *Grundrisse* and in *Capital*, owners are depicted as ‘proprietors’ – who, as proprietors, count as ‘personifications of economic relations [*ökonomischen Charaktermasken der Personen*]’.⁷⁷ In such passages, Marx may seem to lose interest in ‘having’ – and the sensory impoverishment that ‘having’ entails. Instead of reflecting on possessive individualism and its consequences, he lays down a methodological rule: in *Capital*, he tells us, ‘individuals are dealt with...only insofar as they are the personifications of economic categories [*die Personifikation ökonomischer Kategorien*]’.⁷⁸ How should we respond to this methodological declaration? We propose that it is wrong to imagine that *experiential impoverishment* drops out of consideration. The notions of ‘personification’ and of *Charaktermasken* suggest discomfort and, so to say, oversimplification: to carry Marx’s metaphor a stage further, a *mask* distorts and oversimplifies a living individual’s face. A social world where individuals wear masks, and where they interrelate as *dramatis personae*, is a world where alienation prevails.⁷⁹

Besides what it has to say on production and ownership, *Capital* explores the notion of *property as an object* in a distinctive way. It tells us that, in a world where there is commodity production, relations between individuals take on ‘the fantastic form of a relation between things’.⁸⁰ Social relations, and individuals themselves, become thing-like (*dinglich*) – to the point where a market in labour-power exists. From a worker’s point of view, property *presents itself as an object* when food cannot be purchased and wages are non-existent or low.⁸¹ Marx’s 1844 comment on the worker ‘as a *commodity*’ and the central arguments of *Capital* say the same thing.

75 *Collected Works* Vol. 4 p. 36. We return to this passage, and its continuation, in section 5 (on ‘class’).

76 *Capital* Vol. 1 p. 799.

77 *Grundrisse* [Penguin edn.] p. 243; *Capital* Vol. 1 p. 179 (MEW 23 p. 100). See also the reference to ‘capital personified [*personifiziertes Kapital*]’ at *Capital* Vol. 1 p. 739 (MEW 23 p. 618). Our comments on Marx and *Charaktermasken* draw upon (but do not attempt to follow precisely) the third section of E. Renault ‘Three Marxian Approaches to Recognition’ *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* Vol. 16, No. 4 (2013).

78 *Capital* Vol. 1 p. 92 (MEW 23 16).

79 Wilhelm Reich’s image of *character armour* – C. Rycroft *Reich* (London: Collins 1971) pp. 40-8 – captures this point elegantly. On *dramatis personae*, see *Capital* Vol. 1 p. 280.

80 *Capital* Vol. 1 p. 165; see, further, pp. 166, 772.

81 If a reader adopts the standpoint of the protagonist in Knut Hamsun’s *Hunger*, a good many of the interconnections in *Capital* become clear.

Our claim is that Marx's points, in 1844 and 1867 alike, are points concerning *recognition*. When Marx thinks of property not *in terms of the object* but *in terms of individuals' lives*, he is thinking of it in terms where recognition is in play. If it is asked how, in Marx's view, recognition enters the picture our claim becomes more specific: for the producer and the owner of property alike, the recognition that property involves is (in the *Phenomenology's* sense) contradictory.

We comment, once again, on producer and owner in turn.

For the producer, the work-place – the 'hidden abode of production'⁸² – is a location where *one-sided and unequal recognition* (Hegel) prevails: this is so not merely because a boss patronises or demeans workers but because, as *Capital's theory* of surplus value makes explicit, one-sidedness and exploitation is intrinsic to commodity production. Surplus value and hence profit *just is* exploited labour. Likewise as a consumer, when the worker gazes upon capitalism's 'immense collection of commodities'⁸³ as a sum total of *what is unaffordable*, he or she confronts property as, in effect, a mountain or mass *of objects* that stands *over against* the individual. When the worker becomes increasingly exploited and 'powerless', what he or she experiences is the *denial of self-determination* that contradictory recognition entails.

For the owner, property is (in present day society) held in and through market relations – and the market is a social institution or system wherein (as in *any* such institution) *role-definitional recognition* obtains. In the market, individuals recognize one another as "proprietors" – as both the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* point out. The recognition which goes forward in the market is, being role-definitional, recognition of a contradicted or alienated sort.⁸⁴ If the market is, for Marx, a social institution of 'spiritual mass' (Hegel), it *cannot but* be a site of recognition in a contradictory or alienated sense. Marx, we suggest, underlines the notions of contradiction and alienation through his metaphor of *Charactermasken*: if masks do not exactly "fit" on to living faces, it is because *abstract universals* leave particular differences between individuals out of account.⁸⁵ Later in the present section, we shall comment on the possessive individualism (the sense of 'having') that the role definition of "proprietor" implies.

If, now, the figures of the producer and the owner are considered together, the result is (we may note) a familiar image in Marx. To the 'hidden abode of production' – the worker's work-place – there corresponds, for Marx, the juridical realm which presents itself as a 'very Eden of the innate rights of man'.⁸⁶ The world of capital is,

82 *Capital* Vol. 1 p. 279.

83 *Ibid.* p. 126.

84 In the passages under consideration, Marx goes so far as to describe proprietors as recognizing one another 'reciprocally' (see *Grundrisse* p. 243). But this is not *mutual recognition* in a free and non-alienated sense. It is, so to say, hypocritical or savagely ironic mutual recognition – the very inversion of the good. In section 4, we suggest that Marx here draws upon the *Phenomenology's* notion of an 'inverted world'.

85 On *abstract universals* and role definitions, see text at note 12, above.

86 *Capital* Vol. 1 p. 280. See also *Grundrisse* pp. 243, 674.

to borrow Hegel's words when describing post-Roman society, a 'world that is double, divided and self-opposed'.⁸⁷ For Hegel in the *Phenomenology*, a 'double' world is a world divided into *geistige Massen*; our suggestion is that, for Marx, the realms of production and exchange are *geistige Massen* in the same sense. The world where the producer and the owner are, in Marx's expression, the *dramatis personae* is a world where alienation and contradictory recognition rule. It is a world characterised by *Dingheit* – to employ an expression that both Hegel and Marx use.⁸⁸ Social relations acquire an *over-against* appearance, and – as in the sale of labour-power – reification afflicts individuals.

Let us stand back from our comments on Marx and property. How much has our argument achieved? Our claim is not that, for Marx, contradictory recognition *can only* appear through private property. It is that, in Marx's view, private property turns upon – and is therefore, to be understood in terms of – contradictory recognition. But have we supplied reasons for endorsing this claim? A critic of what has been said may argue as follows: "You have shown that Marx's conception of property can, indeed, be interpreted in the way you favour. But *can* is not the same as *must*. Why should Marx's conception of property be understood in the *Phenomenology*-influenced way you suggest?" To such a critic, we retort: the reading which we favour is, overwhelmingly, the most plausible. Marx's intellectual formation was that of a Left Hegelian, and his work – not least the *1844 Manuscripts* – shows an intimate knowledge of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. As demonstrated, even the terms which Marx employs – terms which are often missed by Marx's English translators – carry echoes of Hegel. Would it not be all-but-miraculous – a coincidence beyond reason – if Marx and the Hegel of the *Phenomenology* found themselves independently saying so closely-related things?

(b) *Marx and the natural law tradition*

Before moving on from Marx's view of property, we stress the broad historical purchase of Marx's discussion. As discussion of property in the history of ideas is broadened, issues pertaining to *contradictory recognition* come into clearer and clearer relief.

In the seventeenth century, when the foundations of present-day thinking took form, the notion of property was championed by Modern Natural Law. In his *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty* (commissioned in 1604) and *The Rights of War and Peace* (published in 1625), Hugo Grotius stipulated a *right to defend oneself* and a *right to possess property*. Both rights had, in Grotius's view, a natural status. In giving these rights a co-equal and, at the same time, a politically fundamental significance, a distinctive conception of individuality was formed. We approach this

⁸⁷ *Phenomenology* p. 295.

⁸⁸ Regarding Hegel: in a Master-and-Slave (or *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*) situation, where recognition is one-sided and unequal, the Slave is seen as exemplifying 'thinghood [*Dingheit*]' (ibid. p. 115). Regarding Marx: in a topsy-turvy world where there is commodity fetishism, social relations have a thing-like (*dinglich*) form (*Capital* Vol. 1 p. 165).

conception by asking what “natural” status entailed.

For Grotius, as for numerous seventeenth-century authors, *nature* was a gift from God: ‘Almighty GOD at the Creation, and again after the Deluge, gave to Mankind in general a Dominion over Things of this inferior World’.⁸⁹ The question posed by Grotius – and, after him, Samuel Pufendorf – was how this gift was to be received. The answer given in the *Rights of War and Peace* was unambiguous: from the common fund of God-given nature, ‘every Man converted what he would to his own Use’.⁹⁰ In other words, each individual may (in a state of nature) take what he wants, for his or her separate portion – the only proviso being that nothing is appropriated which another individual has claimed. Grotius explains his notion of individual appropriation with a simile – one which he derives from Cicero. In Cicero’s words, as quoted by Grotius: ‘*Tho’ the Theatre is Common for any Body that comes, yet the Place that every one sits in is properly his own*’.⁹¹ In the theatre of a God-given nature, that is to say, each potential proprietor may carve out – one is tempted to say: colonize – his or her space. Later in the seventeenth century, Pufendorf carried further and developed Grotius’s ideas. For Pufendorf, the ‘Manner’⁹² in which God’s gift may be received may take one of two forms. *Either* objects in a state of nature ‘lie free for any Taker’⁹³ (in which case, Grotius’s “theatre” simile applies, and what Pufendorf terms a *negative community of goods* obtains) *or* objects in a state of nature are publicly owned and may not, without public permission, be taken by individuals (in which case, what Pufendorf terms a *positive community of goods* is in operation). Stated simply, and in (for the seventeenth century) anachronistic terms: Grotius’s conception of property and Pufendorf’s notion of a *negative community of goods* underwrite private property, whereas Pufendorf’s notion of a *positive community of goods* points towards the ‘state property’ of ‘socialism’.⁹⁴ In case a reader of our remarks should feel that details concerning Grotius and Pufendorf are, at best, of antiquarian interest, it is worth observing that the tradition of Modern Natural Law was not only a major “carrier” of proprietorial ideas. It was massively influential during capitalism’s early history.

How do Grotius’s and Pufendorf’s reflections on property relate to Marx? We propose that the relation is close and all-but-explicit. It is as though Marx’s sharply critical discussion of private property is presented with Grotius and Pufendorf in mind. Let us start with the notion of *Charaktermasken*. If Marx’s metaphor of *Charaktermasken* is mapped on to Grotius’s Ciceronian simile to seats in a public theatre, it becomes evident that Grotius and Marx are talking about the same thing.⁹⁵

89 H. Grotius *The Rights of War and Peace* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 2005) p. 420.

90 Ibid. p. 421.

91 Ibid.

92 S. Pufendorf *Of the Law of Nature and Nations* (London 1729) p. 362.

93 Ibid.

94 For the conceptual mapping which our comment employs, see M. Hardt ‘The Common in Communism’ *Rethinking Marxism* Vol. 22, No. 3 (2010) p. 355: ‘what private property is to capitalism and what state property is to socialism, the common is to communism’.

95 In our comments on Grotius and Pufendorf and Marx, we draw upon R. Gunn ‘From Marx to Grotius and from

In both the notion of a mask (or role definition) and the simile of a theatre seat, a specific conception of *individuality* is implied: surrounding the individual, there is a *space* which may be narrow or roomy; at the outside edge of this space, a *boundary* obtains. Beyond this boundary, other individuals (who are similarly *bounded*) exist. Marx draws the same picture in his early ‘On the Jewish Question’: in bourgeois society, we learn, the ‘limits [*Grenze*] within which anyone can move *without harming* someone else are defined by the law, just as the boundary [*Grenze*] between two fields is defined by a boundary post [*Zaunpfahl*].’⁹⁶ This picture – which can, of course, be summed up in a variety of images – is immensely influential and long-lasting in bourgeois thought. It is alluded to when Fichte stipulates ‘a sphere for my freedom from which I exclude the other’.⁹⁷ It is presupposed when Berlin refers to an ‘area within which a man can act unobstructed by others’ and to a ‘minimum area of personal freedom’.⁹⁸ An alternative image – one employed by neither Grotius nor Marx – might be that of a row of suburban bungalows where each house is divided from its neighbour by a fence or car-port or hedge.⁹⁹

The image of suburban bungalows and their gardens suggests a way in which the Grotean conception of the individual may be developed. Is the garden not the *property* of the bungalow-owner? In the same way, is the ‘sphere’ (Fichte) or ‘area’ (Berlin) where rightful freedom is exercised not, for bourgeois thinking, the *property* of the individual concerned? If so, the notion of property occurs twice over in what may be termed the archaeology of bourgeois thought. First, the *right to property* is (so to say) one right amongst others – one flower amongst others – in a bourgeois garden. Second, the garden itself is owned: a so-to-say “meta” right – a *right to rights* of property underpins all else. If these conjectures are correct, *property* in bourgeois thought *instantiates itself*: stated differently, it has a foundational or “metaphysical” role. That this is so is underlined by the importance that Grotius accords to property. When Marx says that ‘the practical application of man’s right to liberty is man’s right to *private property*’,¹⁰⁰ the same complex of ideas is brought into focus.

Standing back from the motif of bungalows and their gardens, we turn to the notion of ‘having’. In ownership, according to Marx’s *1844 Manuscripts*, a ‘sense of *having*’ engulfs all other human dimensions.¹⁰¹ If the notion of *Charaktermasken* dovetails neatly with Cicero’s “theatre” simile, the notion of ‘having’ dovetails with our comments on gardens and property’s “metaphysical” role. In short, Marx depicts the

Grotius to Marx’ (1212) (<http://www.richard-gunn.com>).

96 *Collected Works* Vol. 3 p. 162 (MEW 1 p. 364).

97 J.G. Fichte *Foundations of Natural Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000) p.48.

98 I. Berlin ‘Two Concepts of Freedom’ in D. Miller, ed., *The Liberty Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2011) pp. 34, 36.

99 In Raymond Chandler’s *The High Window* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1951) p. 34, Philip Marlowe enters a region beyond Bay City where ‘the road was lined with walled and fenced estates. Some had high walls, some had low walls, some had ornamental iron fences, some were a bit old-fashioned and got along with tall hedges’.

Marlowe is entering an up-market version of the society that, for Marx, capitalism brings.

100 *Collected Works* Vol. 3 p. 163.

101 See text at note 73, above.

owner as a *possessive individualist*.¹⁰² We think of Marx as a central figure in a theoretical tradition – a tradition which, arguably, starts with Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*¹⁰³ and continues through Hegel’s early writings¹⁰⁴ – that points up and castigates the *part played by the idea of property* in European thought.

We end our section with an observation on how Pufendorf’s distinction between a *negative community of goods* and a *positive community of goods* relates to Marx. We have suggested that the idea of a negative community of goods underlies scenarios of individual appropriation – and thereby legitimises private property. In addition, we have suggested that the idea of a positive community of goods and the socialist notion of ‘state property’ (Hardt) are entwined. How does this contrast relate to Marx’s conception of specifically *communist* society? Marx, in his *1844 Manuscripts*, draws a well-known distinction between ‘crude’ and fully-understood communism:¹⁰⁵ our claim is that the distinction is frequently misunderstood. In a telling passage, Marx refers to the ‘brutish’ notion of a *community of women* as an example of what ‘crude’ communism entails.¹⁰⁶ What is ‘brutish’ about it is the circumstance that individuals – men, presumably – take whichever woman the individual selects. In short, ‘crude’ communism involves individual appropriation *and a negative community of goods in Pufendorf’s sense*. What about fully-understood communism – communism which turns on ‘the real *appropriation* of the *human* essence by and for man’¹⁰⁷ – in Marx’s estimation? What is striking is that Marx *says nothing* which encourages his reader to link fully-understood communism to a *positive community of goods* in Pufendorf’s sense. He says nothing which encourages his reader to equate fully-understood communism with ‘state property’. Instead, if the argument of the present paper holds water, he moves beyond both the negative and the positive conceptions of goods: instead, he condemns (and wishes to move beyond) the *property form itself*. Not the least of the implications of our *turn to recognition*, and of our discussion of property in terms of contradiction, is that it focuses afresh on Marx’s understanding of an emancipatory realm. If that realm is one of mutual recognition, it is a realm in which property *as such* and *in its essence* has no place.

102 In his *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1962), C.B. Macpherson links possessive individualism to the notion that the individual is ‘essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities’ (ibid. p. 3). That is, he links possessive individualism to the notion of self-ownership. We, for our part, prefer a broader definition: we think of possessive individualism as being present wherever the individual is pictured in property-based terms.

103 See, especially, J.-J. Rousseau *A Discourse on Inequality* (London: Penguin Books 1984) pp. 118-9. In the *Discourse*, Rousseau writes as a fierce critic of the Modern Natural Law tradition – which was, in the days before political economy, property-based thinking’s chief cultural “carrier”.

104 We are thinking of Hegel’s pre-*Phenomenology* Jena writings and in particular his critique of Fichte’s ‘spheres of freedom’. See G.W.F. Hegel *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s Systems of Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press 1977), pp. 144-147; L. Rauch *Hegel and the Human Spirit* (Detroit: Wayne University Press 1983) pp. 110-8. We do not discuss the relevant issues of Hegel-interpretation here.

105 Marx *Collected Works* Vol. 3 pp. 294-7.

106 Ibid. p. 294.

107 Ibid. p. 296.

4. *Contradictory recognition and exchange*

If the notion of recognition can shed light on the radicality of Marx's critique of property, it is equally effective in clarifying Marx's views on exchange. We underline this by turning now to a closer reading of the *Comments on James Mill* – a work which has received much attention in recent years due to its explicit treatment of recognition – and passages from *Grundrisse* and *Capital* – whose reflections on “personification” and proprietorship develop recognition-based themes. In addition to showing how these texts reveal Marx's critique of capitalism to be a critique of contradictory recognition, we make two additional arguments here. Firstly, that Marx's critique of contradictory recognition takes the form of “immanent critique”, one which draws attention to the *inversion* of mutual recognition within capitalist societies. Secondly, that Marx's critique of “personification” is a critique of role-definitional recognition which has radical implications for how capital and labour are to be seen.

a) Early Marx: *The Comments on James Mill*

Not the least fascinating aspect of the *Comments on James Mill* (1844) is Marx's highly Hegelian analysis of the relation between creditor and debtor. It seems undeniable to us that Marx's reflections on the relation of debtor to creditor are deeply indebted to Hegel's discussion of mastery and servitude (*Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*) from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The creditor-debtor relation seems a textbook case of that contradictory mix of “independence” (*Selbständigkeit*) and “dependence” (*Unselbstständigkeit*) which is Hegel's own title for what is usually called the “master-slave dialectic”.¹⁰⁸ The relation of creditor to debtor is, like that of master and slave, asymmetrical and unstable, premised on power and unequal recognition. It is unstable in part because it is unclear who is dependent upon whom: what if the debtor defaults on his or her debt? Moreover, each of the terms of the relation – creditor and debtor – are individuals who become defined by the relation, their identities and lives determined by the credit system. For Marx the “bond” of debt defines (subjectively, morally) the creditor and particularly the debtor, whose “creditworthiness” comes to exhaust his or her identity: they are “recognised” (Marx uses the term explicitly) solely in terms of their ability to repay.¹⁰⁹ In the credit system human individuality, indeed human morality itself, becomes “an article of commerce” and “man himself transformed into money”.¹¹⁰ In other words, credit involves not only *one-sided and unequal recognition* but also *role-definitional*

108 Hegel *Phenomenology*, p. 111.

109 When Lazzarato, in his analysis of the *Comments on James Mill*, refers to the element of “self-constitution” and “subjectivation” in the creditor-debtor relation, he unwittingly refers to the constitutive power of recognition (here, contradictory recognition) upon subjectivity. See *The Making of Indebted Man* (Amsterdam: Semiotexte 2011) p. 55 & 59. An explanation in terms of recognition is missing from Lazzarato's otherwise useful book because he is set upon reading Marx's *Comments* alongside Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* rather than alongside Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

110 Marx ‘Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*’ [*Collected Works* Vol. 3 p. 215], in *Early Works* p. 264; MEW 40 p. 449.

recognition.¹¹¹ Thus Marx writes in a passage that is worth quoting in full:

Within the credit system, credit's estranged nature operates under the semblance [*Schein*] of the highest political-economic recognition of man [*der höchsten national-ökonomischen Anerkennung des Menschen*]. It does so in a double way: 1) The antithesis between capitalist and worker, between big and small capitalists, becomes still greater since credit is given only to him who already has it, and is a new opportunity of accumulation for the rich man, or since the poor man finds that the arbitrary discretion of the rich man and the latter's judgment over him confirm or deny his *entire* existence and that his existence is wholly dependent on this contingency. 2) Mutual dissimulation, hypocrisy and sanctimoniousness are carried to extreme lengths, so that on the man without credit is pronounced not only the simple judgment that he is poor, but in addition a pejorative moral judgment that he possesses no trust, no recognition [*Anerkennung*], and therefore is a social pariah, a bad man, and in addition to his privation, the poor man undergoes this humiliation and the humiliating necessity of having to ask the rich man for credit.¹¹²

The "humiliation" involved in such a relation of dependency is one practical expression of cognitive inequality, and Marx is clear about the moral wrong thereby committed. But it is not simply the case that Marx's concerns are with the morality of humiliation and degradation. Because also noteworthy in this passage is that "mutual dissimulation, hypocrisy and sanctimoniousness are carried to extreme lengths". In other words, under a condition of merely "political-economic recognition", mutual recognition *turns into its opposite*, becomes mutual dissimulation, trust becomes distrust, honesty becomes dissimulation and even the individual is "counterfeited" like money. The "mutual complementing" of an individual's freedom that Hegel spoke of has become instead "mutual plundering",¹¹³ the relation between creditor and debtor has become one of "mutual servitude" (*wechselseitige Knechtschaft*),¹¹⁴ the dependence of both on an "alien mediator": money.¹¹⁵ In short, *mutual recognition has turned into contradictory recognition*.

Marx's *Comments on James Mill* are striking and powerful (and clearly topical) in their critique of the credit system.¹¹⁶ But on what grounds does this critique rest? Is Marx giving a moral reproach against "misrecognition" whereby debt is seen to damage an individual's self-respect or self-esteem? The problem with such a line of thought is that it introduces an external moral standard, where Marx introduces none. Is Marx then closer to what is often called "immanent critique", i.e. a critique which draws its standards from the object or theory under investigation, seeking to expose

111 See Section 1 (a) above, and footnotes 10-15.

112 Ibid. p. 264 [*Collected Works* Vol. 3 pp. 215-6]; MEW 40, p. 449-50 (translation amended).

113 Ibid. p. 275 [*Collected Works* Vol. 3. p. 226]; MEW 40, p. 460 (translation amended).

114 Ibid. p. 277 [*Collected Works* Vol. 3 p. 227]; MEW vol. 40, p. 462 (translation amended).

115 Ibid. p. 260 [*Collected Works* Vol. 3 p. 212], MEW vol. 40, p. 446.

116 On the topicality of debt, see S. Federici 'From Commoning to Debt: Financialization, Microcredit, and the Changing Architecture of Capital Accumulation', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113:2 (Spring 2014), 230-244.

the contradictions or hypocrisy therein? Certainly when Marx criticises “political economic recognition” he seems to take the path of immanent (as opposed to external) critique, focusing not so much on the degradation inherent in debt as the hypocrisy entailed in calling this mutual recognition.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, this is no straightforward immanent critique, because to criticise the inversion of mutual into contradictory recognition is implicitly to *uphold* mutual recognition as a value; mutual recognition becomes – implicitly – the measure by which its own reversal into contradictory recognition may be judged.

Why would Marx prefer the method of immanent critique to an external or moral critique? One intriguing answer suggests itself, namely that immanent critique is the mode of analysis appropriate to a social world that has become *inverted*, where everything is other than it seems, where reality is the opposite of how it presents itself. The concept of an ‘inverted world’ (*verkehrte Welt*), is to be found in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and Marx was, presumably, familiar with the idea.¹¹⁸ In the *Comments on James Mill*, Marx leaves several clues to indicate that Hegel’s idea of an inverted world may be his touchstone. One clue is a word which crops up again and again: “semblance”.¹¹⁹ In the relation between creditor and debtor we have the semblance of mutual trust and mutual recognition. To any thinker within the Hegelian tradition, the term “semblance” (*Schein*) is not incidental. It seems to us highly likely that Marx is using this term in its Hegelian sense of a *necessary appearing of the true in the form of the untrue*. Appearance is never *just* appearance in Hegel’s philosophy, never simply misapprehension. Things ‘appear’ with reason; the ‘essence must appear’ (*das Wesen muß erscheinen*), as Hegel says in the *Logic* (Hegel 1969: 479 & 499). Following Hegel’s logic, Marx seems to be telling us that where contradictory recognition prevails, it becomes unavoidable that morality appears in inverted, hypocritical guise.¹²⁰ It is with reason that bourgeois morality hides its own essence. Contradictory recognition – that involved in the credit system, for example – appears as mutual recognition in a world where everything is upside down.

This helps explain why Marx would reject a straightforwardly moral critique: a simple appeal to morals in a world where morality has turned into its opposite can be

117 Cf. Marx ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’, *Collected Works* Vol. 3 p. 270: ‘We have proceeded from the premises of political economy. We have accepted its language and laws.... On the basis of political economy itself, in its own words, we have shown that the worker sinks to the level of a commodity, and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities.’

118 For Hegel on the ‘inverted world’ see *Phenomenology*, pp. 97-8. Also relevant is Gadamer’s suggestion that the “inverted world” is no mere passing idea in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* but rather one which may structure the entire book (‘Hegel’s “Inverted World”’ in his *Hegel’s Dialectic: Five Dialectical Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1976). For a fascinating discussion see D. P. Verene, *Hegel’s Recollection* (Albany: SUNY Press 1985) Ch.4.

119 See, e.g. ‘Excerpts from James Mill’, *Collected Works* vol. 3, p. 214, *Early Writings*, p. 263; MEW vol. 40, p. 448.

120 Again Hegel may be Marx’s source here. The *Phenomenology* had already explored the inversion of various moral principles (“The Law of the Heart” and “Virtue”, for instance) into their opposite (“Self-Conceit” and the determinism of “The Way of the World”, respectively) in the Chapter on “Reason”, a chapter which – importantly – follows the Master-Slave dialectic and so, in terms of the *Phenomenology*’s narrative, suggests that moral inversion is one side-effect of relations of contradictory recognition. See A. Wilding ‘The World’s Course and its Discontents’ *Studies in Social and Political Thought*, no. 14 (Sept 2007).

like whistling in the wind. Nevertheless, a contrary danger exists of one's critique being so immanent that it can only draw its standards from existing norms and hope at best to locate their 'surplus of validity'.¹²¹ Here the risk is that revolutionary social change, change which draws inspiration from something other than the dominant norms, becomes inconceivable. Marx, we suggest, steers a path between the Scylla of wholly external critique and the Charybdis of critique that is overly immanent. It is the concept of mutual recognition which allows him to do this.

b) Later Marx: Personification and Exchange in *Grundrisse* and *Capital*.

When we turn to what later works such as *Grundrisse* (1857-8) and *Capital* (1867) have to say about recognition it becomes clear that there is no radical change in outlook on Marx's part; here is no "epistemological break" (Althusser) but merely a change of emphasis. *Grundrisse* and *Capital* share the aim of the *Comments on James Mill* in exposing two forms of contradictory recognition: one-sided and unequal recognition and role-definitional recognition. The relevance of Marx's later works to our discussion lies in their showing not only the credit system but commodity exchange *as such* to consist in contradictory recognition. Where the *Comments on James Mill* showed up the recognitive inequality between – and alienated social roles of – creditor and debtor, *Grundrisse* and *Capital* widen this critique to encompass the roles of capitalist and labourer. Again the semblance of mutual recognition in the discourse of political economy is Marx's particular target. As with the credit relation, commodity exchange generates a merely formal or apparent recognition between those who exchange ("proprietors"), a recognition whose praises may be sung by political economists but which belies an infernal reality – the inherently exploitative relation of the capitalist to the labourer.

An objection to our line of argument must be considered at this point. Doesn't Marx's critique of the unreflective and affirmative categories of political economy extend to the notion of mutual recognition? Isn't mutual recognition, in which liberty and equality come together, a merely bourgeois ideal, and under capitalist conditions mere ideology? We deny that this is the case. Though Marx does talk in the *Grundrisse* of a situation where individuals "recognize one another reciprocally as proprietors",¹²² the contradiction lies precisely in the notion of mutual recognition between *proprietors*. As we see it, the *Grundrisse* renews the critique of contradictory recognition which preoccupied the young Marx: a situation where individuals have the role of proprietors is a relation of recognition shot through with commodification. It is the same merely "political-economic recognition" which Marx referred to in the *Comments on James Mill*. What the *Grundrisse* adds to the early work is to expose the inversion of the liberal axiom that proprietors must be legally free: "no one seizes hold of another's property by force. Each divests himself of his property voluntarily".¹²³ As Marx immediately points out, this freedom is semblance: a

121 See section 1 (b) above on Honneth's method of "normative reconstruction".

122 Marx *Grundrisse*, p. 243.

123 Ibid.

“surface process, beneath which, however, in the depths, entirely different processes go on, in which this apparent individual equality and liberty disappear.”¹²⁴ When we look behind the appearance of proprietors or persons exchanging on free and equal terms, when we look instead at capital and labour (their “prerequisite”), this “equality and freedom...prove to be inequality and unfreedom.”¹²⁵

Does Marx jettison the equality and freedom involved in mutual recognition as one more myth of political economy or liberal thought? It seems to us decidedly not. Rather, Marx is a critic of *Schein-Anerkennung*, the semblance of mutual recognition where its opposite in fact prevails. He exposes the reversal of equality and freedom into their opposite, of mutual recognition into contradictory recognition. Crucially, as we have argued, the equality and freedom which flow together in mutual recognition remain for Marx the measure by which actual inequality and unfreedom may be judged. Put another way, mutual recognition is the measure by which contradictory recognition may be condemned. Marx’s critique rests upon no other values than the mutual recognition which capitalism in its very essence undermines.

When we turn to *Capital* we find a work where a relation of recognitive inequality takes centre place. That exploitation – of worker by capitalist – involves Hegelian “one-sided and unequal recognition” should now be clear. More must be said, however, about the role-definitional recognition involved in this relation. Our contention is that in addition to exposing one-sided and unequal recognition, a critique of *role-definitional recognition* lies at the heart of *Capital*.

In what sense? The answer is to be found in the notion of “personification” whereby Marx treats capitalist and labourer as “embodiments” or “incarnations” or “bearers” (he tries out various metaphors) of particular class relations and interests.¹²⁶ The capitalist *just is* capital personified: only as such does he become “respectable”.¹²⁷ Likewise, the worker *just is* labour personified: lacking means of production, owning only the ability to work, he or she has become wholly fungible: “abstract labour”. Both capitalist and worker are to this extent “machines” or “cogs” in a “social mechanism”.¹²⁸ To be labour or capital personified is to be an abstraction, all one’s individual characteristics bracketed out and one’s many-sidedness reduced to a single generalisation.

The implications of the above should not be under-estimated. One such implication is that Marx cannot straightforwardly be endorsing or siding with the category of

124 Marx *Grundrisse*, p. 247.

125 Marx *Grundrisse*, p. 248-9. What in the early work appears as moral inversion appears in the late work as a “*Lichtbild*” (Marx uses a metaphor from early photography: just as a photographic slide inverts reality, so capitalism presents to us a world through the looking glass (*Grundrisse*, p. 249)). On Marx (like Hegel) as theorist of the “*verkehrte Welt*”, see H. Reichelt, ‘Social Reality as Appearance: Some Notes on Marx’s Conception of Reality’ in W. Bonefeld and K. Psychopedis (eds.), *Human Dignity: Social Autonomy and the Critique of Capitalism* (Farnham: Ashgate 2005).

126 Marx *Capital* vol. 1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1976), p. 92.

127 Marx *Capital* vol. 1, p. 739.

128 Marx *Capital* vol. 1, p. 742 & 739.

labour.¹²⁹ A class is a pole of a one-sided and unequal recognitive relation. It involves, moreover, role-definitional recognition; to be a “worker”, to be a “member” of the “working class,” is to be recognised in a contradictory way. Hints of this radical line of thought were already present in the *Comments on James Mill* where Marx opposed “life” to “labour” (278). They reappear in Marx’s later work where communism is construed as a form of social existence which would no longer involve labour but instead some wholly new ‘self-conscious activity’: as the *Grundrisse* describes it, “the development of the rich individuality which is all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour also therefore appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of activity itself.”¹³⁰

The *Grundrisse*’s subtle analysis of the inversion of mutual recognition into contradictory recognition reappears in *Capital*. *Capital* famously draws a contrast between the realm of exchange, where “liberty, equality, property and Bentham”¹³¹ are the watchwords, and the “hidden abode of production”, where social relations take a very different form:

When we leave this sphere of simple circulation or the exchange of commodities, which furnishes the “free-trader vulgaris” with his views, his concepts and the standard by which he judges the society of capital and wage-labour, a certain change takes place, or so it appears, in the physiognomy of our *dramatis personae*. He who was previously the money-owner now strides in front as capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his labourer. The one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like one who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing to expect but—a tanning.¹³²

As with the credit system, Marx reveals a relation of apparent equality to involve independence and dependence; freedom for one is unfreedom for another. The realm of exchange again presents the *Schein*, the appearance of mutual recognition between persons (Marx is surely punning on the legal notion of the person, the proprietor, when referring to the *dramatis personae*) behind which lies a very different reality: the actuality of relations of exploitation, that is, contradictory recognition. But it is not as if social “reality” (as opposed to mere appearance) is therefore straightforwardly to be found in the realm of production (as a certain “productivist” tradition of reading Marx had it). Note that only “a *certain* change” in the physiognomy of the *dramatis personae* occurs in this famous quote. In fact as capitalist and labourer these actors still wear *Charaktermasken*, as the etymology of

129 Marx notes drily, that he by no means depicts the capitalist “in a rosy light”. But it seems to us that he could have added the same about the worker, since both roles involve misrecognition. Of course one role is more “comfortably” misrecognised, comfortably alienated than the other.

130 Marx *Grundrisse*, p. 325. For more on Marx as critic of labour see John Holloway *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press 2010) pp. 87-99; H. Cleaver *Reading Capital Politically* 2nd edn. (Leeds & Edinburgh: Antithesis / AK Press 2000) pp. 127-131.

131 Marx *Capital* vol 1, p. 280.

132 Ibid.

the word “person” indicates. Marx is telling us not merely that relations of production appear under the guise of persons, but that “personification” is itself a guise.¹³³

A comment on this conclusion is in order. Our reading of Marx as a critic of personification is an unorthodox one. That ‘worker’ and ‘capitalist’ are social roles which misrecognise individuals goes barely unmentioned in the recent literature on Marx and recognition. The work of Emmanuel Renault is a rare exception. In treating capitalist and worker as “*Charaktermasken*”, Marx is (according to Renault) calling attention to the “coercive dimension” and “falsehood” of these roles.¹³⁴ We endorse Renault’s argument and generalise the point: *all* social roles are “coercive” and “false”. We add merely the following: that it is a focus upon contradictory recognition (the common preoccupation of both Hegel and Marx) which brings the falsity of social roles fully to light.

We conclude this section with an observation on Marx’s relation to Hegel.¹³⁵ We have implicitly argued against a commonplace in Marx-interpretation, namely that Marx wanted to turn Hegel – who is “standing on his head” – the right way up.¹³⁶ In fact the putative opposition between the two thinkers looks more like common ground when we study what each has to say about recognition. For the Hegel of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the social world is already topsy-turvy and the task of critique becomes one of drawing attention to the shifting relation between appearance and essence in a world turned upside down. Critique is no different for Marx. In the above-discussed works it is as if Marx *plays off* the Hegel of the *Phenomenology* (as we have argued, the already-radical Hegel, the Hegel for whom the existing world is “inverted”, i.e. contradictory, hypocritical) against the Hegel of the *Philosophy of Right* (the later Hegel for whom the social world seems firmly on its feet). He plays off the thinker who is alive to contradictory recognition and whose thought aims at

133 On the theme of masks we note one intriguing implication of their use by Occupy and other protest groups such as Anonymous. Can the mask of Anonymous be seen as the ultimate “detouring” of the anonymity – the abstraction – involved in bourgeois personality?

134 Renault ‘Three Marxian Approaches to Recognition’ p. 709. On another point we find ourselves in agreement with Renault: Marx’s use of ‘recognition’ is indeed ‘at odds with the Hegelian connotations of “recognition” on which the contemporary debate draws’. But we suggest this is precisely because of the Honnethian assumptions upon which the contemporary debate rests. For us, Marx is best understood in terms of the Hegelian contrast between contradictory recognition and mutual recognition, a contrast whose force is absent in recent debates.

135 That Marx, as Renault argues, may have received Hegel’s ideas on interaction filtered through the work of Feuerbach and Hess seems to us both plausible and intriguing. But for us these lines of lineage are less pertinent than the underlying congruence between Marx’s arguments and Hegel’s critique of one-sided and unequal recognition and role-definitional misrecognition.

136 Marx *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 103 (Postface to the 2nd Edition); MEW 23 p. 27. Cf. F. Engels *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1946) p. 39. Michael Quante has shown that this famous phrase of Marx’s is more subtle than meets the eye. Marx does not say that the correct response to Hegel who is “standing on his head” is to put him “back on his feet” (this is Engels’ phrase) but rather to “turn him inside out” (*umstülpen*). In German, *umstülpen* is something one can do with clothing, e.g. a jacket or a glove. The two metaphors – putting Hegel on his feet (Engels) and turning him inside out (Marx) – are far from synonymous. As Quante suggests, Marx’s “turning Hegel inside out” may well be a reference to Hegel’s own Logic of Essence, Marx merely pushing Hegel’s dialectic of essence (inside) and appearance (outside) further. See M. Quante ‘Die Logik ist das Geld des Geistes: Zur Rezeption der Hegelschen Logik im Linkshegelianismus und der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie’ in Claudia Wirsing et al. (eds.), *200 Jahre Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik* (Hamburg: Meiner 2014) pp. 425-427.

free, unconstrained, unalienated interaction, against the thinker of ‘reconciliation’¹³⁷ who believed the modern State had mitigated or even transcended the alienation and inequality in civil society. Marx in effect reminds Hegel that civil society, by his time more clearly visible as realm of capitalist exploitation, is a realm of inherently contradictory recognition. Capitalism inverts the very principle of mutual recognition both thinkers hold dear.

5. Recognition and class

In sections 3 and 4, we argued that, for Marx, property and commodity exchange are instances of contradictory recognition. We argued that, when a contrast between contradictory and mutual recognition is made the key, distinctive features of Marx’s discussion spring to light. Our argument has a political implication: once approached in the light of *Phenomenology*-style recognition, property *itself* – not merely individual property but state-owned property – comes into focus as a target of Marxist critique. In the same way, labour *itself* comes into focus as a stage which is to be surpassed *en route* towards the ‘full development’ of human activity.¹³⁸ In sum, a *Phenomenology*-style reading highlights the *property form* and declares against productivist distortions of Marx’s meaning.

Before leaving property and commodity exchange, we comment on how *closely related to Hegel* Marx’s treatment is. This comment paves the way to an understanding of how *social class* – our next topic – is to be seen.

In Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, two forms of contradictory recognition – one-sided and unequal recognition, and what we have termed role-definitional recognition – are seen as historically important. In the two thousand years of European history from the Ancient Greek *polis* to the outbreak of the French Revolution, recognition that is *one-sided and unequal* and recognition that is *role-definitional* (and bound up with ‘spiritual masses’) are pervasive – and entwined in a range of ways. In property and commodity exchange as discussed by Marx, both forms of contradictory recognition are present – whether directly or in an indirect sense. Where property is owned and commodity exchange takes place, role-definitional recognition is *directly* present: as we have emphasised, individuals who take part in market transactions view one another as “proprietors”. One-sided and unequal recognition is present *indirectly* in the sense that, where individuals exchange products in a capitalist society, a ‘hidden abode of production’¹³⁹ – and thus exploitation – is assumed. This line of thought can be carried further by pointing out that, in Marx’s picture of capitalist society, the two forms of contradictory recognition highlighted by Hegel are not merely co-present: they are interdependent. *Role-definitional recognition* presupposes *one-sided and unequal recognition* because a capitalist market (where “proprietorship” is

137 Hegel *Philosophy of Right* p. 12. See also footnote 16 above.

138 *Grundrisse* p. 325. See text at note 130, above.

139 *Ibid.* p. 279.

acknowledged) realises surplus value only through exploitation. *One-sided and unequal recognition* presupposes *role-definitional recognition* because, where exploitation takes place, the role definitions of “capitalist” and “worker” are in play. The capitalist is the *owner* – with whom we are familiar. The worker is no less an *owner* – although what he or she owns is labour-power alone. When the worker enters the ‘hidden abode of production’, he or she continues to be recognized as a “worker” – but in a way which connotes misery rather than dignity. The worker *as “worker”* is cast into human nothingness, and belongs in the realm of ‘thinghood [*Dingheit*]’ experienced by Hegel’s Slave.¹⁴⁰

In this portrayal of capitalist social relations, the theme which interests us is one-sided and unequal recognition. If a discussion of property and exchange emphasises role-definitional recognition, Marx’s conception of *class* requires that the notion of one-sided and unequal recognition be moved centre-stage. This is not to say that one-sided and unequal recognition is the *only* form of recognition that class involves. We shall argue that, as our comments on the “worker” illustrate, role-definitional recognition plays a vitally important part. Our claim is that, in order to form a first impression of “class” society, recognition that is one-sided and unequal is to be borne in mind.

In a moment, we shall present our own account of what Marx understands as class society. As a reader will be unsurprised to learn, we regard this understanding as recognition-based. Before turning to this understanding, however, we note difficulties that arise from alternative approaches. Two in particular call for discussion. In commenting on alternatives, we indicate what we do *not* claim.

(a) In Marxist and non-Marxist theory alike, it is widely supposed that social classes are groups of individuals. This supposition may, to be sure, be stretched in its application by allowing that (some) individuals have ‘contradictory class locations’.¹⁴¹ However, the term ‘locations’ suggests a problematic view on individuality: an individual is pictured as a being who occupies a specific amount of space – a specific amount of *bounded* space – which may or may not fit into a “class” as a container. The circumstance that individuals are pictured in this manner encourages us to think of ‘contradictory class locations’ as, so to say, *limiting cases* of the “classes as groups of individuals” view. The view that *classes are groups of individuals* and the view that there may be ‘contradictory class locations’ share the assumption that – in Hegel’s terminology – classes are abstract universals.¹⁴²

Why should the “classes as groups of individuals” view concern us here? It is because, common though the view is, it is called into question by Marx.¹⁴³ In the very last, unfinished, chapter of *Capital*, Marx declares that class is not to be seen in terms

140 *Phenomenology* p. 115.

141 E.O. Wright ‘Class Boundaries in Advanced Capitalist Societies’ *New Left Review* No. 98 (1976).

142 On abstract universality, see the text at note 12, above.

143 Here, our discussion draws on R. Gunn ‘Notes on “Class”’ *Common Sense* No. 2 (July 1987).

of ‘the identity of revenues and sources of revenue’.¹⁴⁴ It is true that this declaration may be understood in more than one way. Does Marx mean that something *other than the source of revenue* establishes an individual’s class membership? Or does he call into question the view that classes are groups to which (as measured by this or that criterion) individuals may belong? Our preference is for the second reading because, we think, it fits best with Marx’s general thought. When the *Communist Manifesto* opens with the statement that the ‘history of all hitherto existing society’ is the ‘history of class struggles’,¹⁴⁵ a reader is introduced to a dynamic and a pattern of activity which culminates in a form of society where mutual recognition prevails. If Marx was picturing *classes* as *groups of individuals*, his thought would turn on a notion of class-membership that involved role-definitional recognition.¹⁴⁶ The dynamic that pointed *beyond* contradiction, and towards mutual recognition, would remain enmeshed in an alienated (a contradicted or contradictory) world.

To the above remarks on the notion of classes as groups of individuals, a cautionary note may be added. The view of class which we favour does not cast notions of group-membership entirely to one side. Our position is that such notions play a secondary part in Marx’s thinking. Below, when we reintroduce the notion of role definitions, we indicate how this part is to be seen.

(b) For traditional Marxism, the following proposition has a quasi-axiomatic status: *class relations* are *relations of production*. An implication of the proposition is that an individual’s class is decided by his or her place in the production process. Our response to this proposition is not straightforward and calls for comment at this stage.

Our first-off response to the proposition is to say: class relations are, like all social relations, relations of recognition. Are the claims that *class relations are relations of production* and *class relations are relations of recognition* incompatible? We deny that this is the case. There need be no incompatibility because, we consider, relations of production – property relations, exchange relations and relations in the ‘hidden abode of production’ itself – can be analysed in a recognition-based way. In sections 3 and 4 of our paper, we have dwelt on ways in which Marx offers such an analysis. Once it is seen that Marx, in his early and later writings, is focusing upon *contradictory recognition*, it becomes possible to speak of a “monism of recognition” which encompasses relations of production themselves.

This said, there is a sense in which the claims that *class relations are relations of production* and *class relations are relations of recognition* contradict one another. This sense is important, because it is present in a “traditionally Marxist” view. The reading of Marx as a *theorist of base and superstructure* – the reading referred to, and

144 Marx *Capital* Vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1966) p. 886.

145 *Collected Works* Vol. 6 p. 482.

146 In our ‘Revolutionary or Less-than-Revolutionary Recognition?’ (www.heathwoodpress.com) 24 July 2013, section 1, we criticised (as alienating) what we termed a ‘membership-based view of individual identity’. Our argument here is to the effect that a “classes-as-groups-of-individuals” view would ascribe a membership-based view of identity to Marx.

criticised, at the end of section 2 – understands relations of production in a way where recognition can have no place. For this reading, relations of production are ‘the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political [and ideological] superstructure’.¹⁴⁷ If relations of production are construed in the way this passage suggests, they count merely as ‘economic’. By contrast recognition, which turns on the notion of self-determining and totalising individuals, cannot be pictured in merely ‘economic’ terms. Let us agree that, when seen in terms of the base-and-superstructure model, the claims that *class relations are relations of production* and *class relations are relations of recognition* are incompatible. We remove this incompatibility, and bring into focus Marx’s overall discussion, by setting the metaphor of base and superstructure aside.¹⁴⁸

From alternative views, we turn to our own interpretation. How does Marx understand ‘class’? Famously, the ‘scientific [*wissenschaftlicher*],’¹⁴⁹ account of class which, it seems, *Capital* was to contain remains unfinished.¹⁵⁰ Where should a discussion of Marx on ‘class’ begin? Our approach is to start from very general features of what Marx terms ‘hitherto existing society’ – and then to work detail into the picture. As the picture becomes more specific, the notion of ‘class’ appears.

Might Marx’s conception of ‘hitherto existing society’ be summarised in a diagram? On the face of it this seems doubtful: for Marx, the history of ‘hitherto existing society’ is the movement of contradiction – and contradictions, when presented diagrammatically, tend to disappear.¹⁵¹ If, however, this difficulty is disregarded a schematic contrast can be drawn. Let us agree that the notion of *society* can, conventionally, be represented by a CLOSED CIRCLE. Let us agree, further, that the figure’s *closure* fits together with the idea of social integration. Can Marx’s view of ‘hitherto existing society’ be pictured in this way? We deny that it can. Whilst it is true that, for a society to exist, it must be capable of ‘continual reproduction’,¹⁵² what

147 Marx *Contribution* p. 20. We quote from the *Contribution* – or, rather, its 1859 Preface – to indicate that the quarrel between the claim that *Marx is a theorist of recognition* and the claim that *Marx is a theorist of base and superstructure* is, in part, a quarrel between strands of thinking within Marx’s texts. Our position is that, in the overwhelming majority of his writings, the contrast between contradictory recognition and mutual recognition is Marx’s theme.

148 Stating our conclusion differently: we agree with Chitty in his ‘Recognition and Relations of Production’ – see note 7, above – that an attempt to relate ‘recognition’ to Marx’s writings has implications for how relations of production are to be understood.

149 *Capital* Vol 1 p. 93.

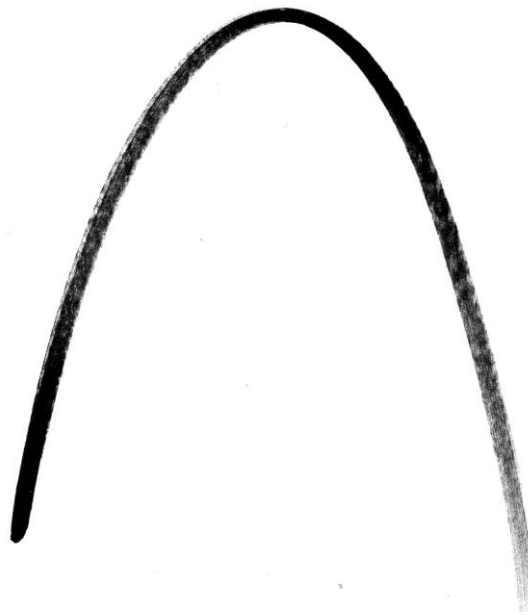
150 In Althusser’s memorable words (L. Althusser and E. Balibar *Reading Capital*, London: New Left Books 1970, p. 193), ‘The reader will know how Volume Three [of *Capital*] ends: A title: *Classes*. Forty lines, then silence’. The ‘forty lines’ are not, however, devoid of significance: it is there that Marx rejects *source of revenue* as a criterion of class. See note 144, above.

151 *Some* forms of contradiction can, it is true, be represented in a diagram. This is so when, for example, two forces or inert objects press upon one another – and an equilibrium is reached. It is so, once again, when two categories overlap (in which case we may, indeed, speak of *contradictory locations*: see note 141, above). When, however, being is seen as internally contradictory or when it ‘has power to preserve itself in contradiction’ (G.W.F Hegel *Philosophy of Mind*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1971, pp. 15-6 [*Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* Vol. 3 para. 382 *Zusatz*]; see, to the same effect, *Phenomenology* p. 19), a quantitative or merely two-dimensional picture is difficult to give. In Hegelian terms, *conceptual* as distinct from *representational* thinking becomes mandatory. And this is the case with “contradiction” in Marx’s sense.

152 *Capital* Vol. 1 p. 772.

is *reproduced* continues to be (until communism is achieved) contradictory existence. Stated differently: Marx's picture is one where social integration exists only in a fragile and problematic and "at-issue" way. What characterises 'hitherto existing society' is a dynamic – a dynamic of contradiction – which undermines 'continual reproduction' and springs social closure apart. If Marx's view of 'hitherto existing society' is to be given diagrammatic representation, an apt figure might be an OPEN PARABOLA – rather than the closed circle of conventional thought.

If the figure of an open parabola is to shed light on Marx's thinking, how might it be envisaged? We suggest that, if the parabola's opening is seen as *facing downwards* –



– striking features in Marx's view of 'hitherto existing society' appear.

Our claim is that, for Marx, life at the bottom of our "inverted parabola" diagram shades into a realm of *Dingheit*, or of 'thinghood'. Life as represented in the lower half of our diagram remains *through-and-through social* but is a realm of hell. It is a realm of 'misery' (Marx) where socially-constituted human beings *count as things* and as nothing else. It is a region where there are 'material [*dinglich*] relations between persons' and 'social relations between things';¹⁵³ the region is one where social relations are not *natural* but *quasi-natural* and exist in the mode of being contradicted or denied. The thought which our image of an open parabola attempts to capture is not that of social life in accordance with a natural order. It is that of social life where individuals are regarded *as though* they were natural and where, as a result, unimaginable horror – unimaginable *social* horror – is the result.

What do our diagram-based reflections tell us about Marx? If the image of a downward-facing parabola is accepted, and interpreted as we have suggested, Marx comes forward as a theorist for whom vertiginous precipices of inequality

153 *Capital* Vol. 1 p. 166.

characterise ‘hitherto existing’ social life. If our diagram captures (however schematically) Marx’s conceptual picture, to look socially *downwards* is not merely to glimpse poverty and destitution. It is to look into a bottomless pit.

With these comments in mind,¹⁵⁴ what conception of social relations does Marx favour? Only one answer to this question is known to us: *social relations* are, for Marx, *relations of recognition*. What do we mean, when we say (with Marx) that ‘hitherto existing society’ has a contradictory dynamic? It is surely that individuals subsist through recognition by others – however distorted or damaged or *contradictory* the recognition may be. Contradictory relations are relations between contradictory individuals – which is to say, individuals who are seen in a restricted or divided or demeaning way.

If social relations are, for Marx, relations of recognition, two points may be added. One is that what Hegel terms *one-sided and unequal recognition* is fundamental to Marx’s view of ‘hitherto existing society’. Across the vertiginous precipices of an unequal society, one-sided and unequal recognition flows. The second point concerns the dynamic that is present in Marx’s picture. If the picture is one of *recognition*, and if the recognition concerned has a one-sided and unequal form, the *Phenomenology’s* well-known discussion of Mastery and Slavery (or lordship and bondage) underlies Marx’s claims. In a society characterised by Mastery and Slavery, recognition is – in Hegel’s view – contradictory and unstable: the Master requires the Slave’s recognition, whilst regarding as worthless any recognition that the Slave (a “living thing”) may give. In ‘hitherto existing society’ as viewed by Marx, the same instability of one-sided and unequal recognition obtains.

At this stage in our discussion, we reply to an objection. What has been said appears to fly in the face of C.J. Arthur’s observation that ‘As far as the separate sections of the *Phenomenology* are concerned, Marx does not mention, and does not draw upon, the dialectic of “lordship and bondage”’.¹⁵⁵ Does Arthur pull the rug from under our recognition-based discussion? We deny that this is the case. It is true that, in the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx makes only passing reference to the *Phenomenology’s* Master-Slave section. But the overall argument which Marx presented throughout his theoretically active life is one where recognition obtains in contradictory forms – until, that is, the mutual recognition of communism is achieved.¹⁵⁶ When we refer to

154 In an anecdote told about Flaubert, something close to a *downward-facing parabola* appears: ‘Henry Céard recounts how, one evening in Flaubert’s flat in the Rue Murillo, he told the veteran novelist of the admiration he felt for *Sentimental Education*. Obviously moved by this unexpected tribute, Flaubert drew himself up to his full height and answered in a gruff voice: “So you like it, do you? All the same, the book is doomed to failure, because it doesn’t do this.” He put his long, powerful hands together in the shape of a pyramid. “The public,” he explained, “wants works which exalt its illusions, whereas *Sentimental Education*...” And here he turned his big hands upside down and opened them as if to let his dreams fall into a bottomless pit...’: Translator’s Introduction to G. Flaubert *Sentimental Education* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1964) p. 13.

155 C.J. Arthur *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and His Relation to Hegel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986) p. 92.

156 Marx’s argument to this effect is discussed in section 2, above. It is true that when Marx mentions ‘Herrschafts- und Knechtschaftsverhältnisse’ in *Grundrisse* and *Capital* it is often to denote pre-capitalist social relations (e.g. *Capital* vol. 1, p. 174; MEW vol. 23, p. 93). However, he also indicates in the same late works that capitalism does not abolish these but merely alters their form (‘*Formwechsel*’, see *Capital* vol. 1 p. 875; MEW vol. 23 p. 743).

one-sided and unequal recognition in the present connection, it is against this broader argument that we should like our suggestion to be seen.

From Arthur, we return to Marx's picture. We have suggested that, for Marx, *one-sided and unequal recognition* obtains – until, that is, communist society is achieved. Can the picture as we have presented it be broadened? We reply: indeed it can. Besides one-sided and unequal recognition, role-definitional recognition – so to say, the second form of contradictory recognition referred to in Hegel's *Phenomenology* – features on Marx's picture of historically existing societies.

How may the notion of role definitions – which we emphasised earlier, in our discussions of property and exchange – be worked into the sketch that we are attempting? A passage written in 1845 supplies the clue. 'The property class' – writes Marx – 'and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-estrangement. But the former class feels at ease and strengthened in this self-estrangement...The latter [by contrast] feels annihilated'.¹⁵⁷ There, a reader is presented with a view of society which we integrate into our "parabolic" diagram as follows: just as, in medieval cathedrals, prestigious figures were buried closest to the altar, so, in a similar fashion, some role-definitions (but not others) snuggle closely under our notional parabola's cusp. Bearers of such role definitions – role definitions which include "capitalist" and "proprietor" and "burgher" – are, to use a familiar phrase, comfortable in their alienation. Further down the diagram, role definitions such as "worker" and "immigrant" are sites of oppression, discrimination and struggle. Beneath even the low-ranking role definitions are individuals who exist through society but who are, in terms of role definitions, nothing at all. In the bottomless pit, which the figure of an open parabola acknowledges, subsist the wretched of the earth – or the *proletariat*, in that term's etymological sense.

The social picture at which we arrive is arresting. At its top end, immediately under the cup of the parabola, exist individuals who have social standing. Such individuals are 'somebody' in Hegel's expression¹⁵⁸ – because their role definitions have a self-confirming status. To use a turn of phrase favoured by Marx, they are not merely *in* but *of* society. Further down the picture, role definitions entail less and less status – and more uncertainty about what the role definition means and how long it may be held. What does it mean to be an immigrant? For how long, and with what degree of security, may one be a worker? This said, *any* role definition implies *some* degree of standing – however minimal and uncertain this standing may be. It is when, following

Whereas slavery involved 'immediate forced labour', wage labour amounts to 'mediated forced labour' (*Grundrisse* p. 326; MEW vol. 42 p. 245, trans. amended). Capital likewise entails 'mediated' as opposed to 'immediate' relations of domination (cf. *Capital* vol. 1 p. 174; MEW vol. 23, p. 93, trans. amended). Capitalism is, in other words, slavery continued by other means. For us, such comments (which are often clearer in the German original) show that Hegel's phenomenology of mastery and slavery was never far from Marx's thoughts.

157 *Collected Works* Vol. 4 p. 36.

158 *Philosophy of Right* p. 271 [para. 207 Addition]. The passage has attracted attention from commentators: see Williams *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* p. 255; S.C. Anderson *Hegel's Theory of Recognition* (London: Continuum 2009) p. 168; C. Özdağı 'City as an Apparatus of the State' *Felsefe Gazetesi* (www.felsefegazetesi.com) 17 August 2013.

Marx, we continue downwards that the horror of existence that is *social* and yet *non-social* meets our gaze.

Having rounded out our discussion, we are in a position to draw conclusions. Marx, according to our all-too-schematic presentation, is in no way a theorist who operates in role-definitional terms. Role definitions (or *Charaktermasken*) receive discussion but as part of what is analysed: so to say, they are part of the problem rather than part of the solution. For Marx, role definitions – each of which can, indeed, be seen as a specific social *location* and under which, to be sure, groups of individuals are ranged¹⁵⁹ – float on a raft of recognition; the recognition is contradictory and dynamic. On the basis of our schematic discussion, we can say more about what this dynamic entails. Although role definitions present themselves as fixed and static and with clearly-established boundaries, a deep and powerful current of *one-sided and unequal recognition* flows beneath them: issues of domination and struggle lie not *beyond their boundaries* but (changing the metaphor) *beneath the role-defined individual's feet*. Something of this sort is what Marx has in mind when he contrasts a realm of juridical appearance – a ‘very Eden of the innate rights of man’ – with the ‘hidden’ realm of production.¹⁶⁰ It may even be what Marx has in mind when he introduces his ill-fated metaphor of ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ – although, in this case, the ‘base’ is a current of recognition and the notion of a merely ‘economic’ structure is exploded. To employ terminology introduced in section 3, above, a shift from a juridical and role-definitional realm to a realm of one-sided recognition is to enter an inverted world.

Where does ‘class’ enter into our presentation? Our reply to this question is that ‘class’ is implicit in all that we have said. We stress this point: ‘class’ is present in all that we have said and not only in part of it. To equate ‘class’ with groups of individuals is, in effect, to see class *solely* in terms of role definitions – and thereby to become complicit in role-definitional alienation. Our own view, which grounds ‘class’ in a dynamic of contradictory recognition, tells the whole social story – and presents role definitions as, so to say, reified ice floes that are carried on recognition’s tide. To these remarks, a reader may raise an objection: does our recognition-based view not leave *what is essential to ‘class’* out of account? Surely a Marxist account of class must turn on ownership of the means of production? Let us agree that it does – but go on to say that the complex of themes discussed in sections 3 and 4, above, highlights nothing else. We do not downplay issues which the Marxist tradition has emphasised but, instead, approach these issues from a perhaps-unfamiliar angle. For Marx, the notion of property (and thus ownership) contradicts the flow of recognition. Property *is* contradicted recognition. To move to a realm of social existence where recognition is uncontradicted is to stand the category of property on its head. It is true that we have not gone into detail about ways in which property has secured its dominion.¹⁶¹

159 A reader is reminded of our reference to *abstract universals* at note 12, above.

160 *Capital* Vol. 1 pp 279-80; see also *Grundrisse* p. 247.

161 We have said little, for example, about the rate of surplus value and nothing about primitive accumulation. But we have said a good deal about the categories through which surplus value and primitive accumulation exist. On the

We have not (so to say) traced the moves through which the game of domination is played. However, we have (we hope) shed light on the game's conditions.

Our conception of class has implications for how we understand *The Communist Manifesto's* central terms: bourgeois and proletarians. How should the terms 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian' be understood? In the light of the present section, we can note an asymmetry between them: whereas the term 'bourgeois' echoes burgher or citizen and points to a role-definition of some standing, the term 'proletarian' points to social existence *where there is nothing* – and Slave-like *Dingheit* is the rule. In Ancient Roman law, with which Marx was familiar, a 'proletarian' is someone who owns nothing (other than his children, who may be exploited) and who *is* nothing – in recognitive terms. A proletarian is too poor even to tax. Standing back from the Roman example and generalising: if there is a 'proletariat', it does not qualify as an estate of the (republican or imperial or monarchic) realm. In terms of our diagram of an open and downward-facing parabola: if "workers" are placed lower in our diagram than snug and comfortable "capitalists" and "owners", proletarians are lower still – and subsist beneath the level where even the lowest or most lowly role definition is assigned. Proletarians are creatures of darkness. When they *rise* – and the word is notable – the bourgeoisie greets them as hitherto non-existent beings.

For some are in darkness
And others are in light
And you see the ones in brightness
Those in darkness drop from sight.¹⁶²

If Marx understands the term 'proletarian' in the terms which we have suggested, a number of political points follow. One is that the terms *worker* (or *working class*) and *proletarian* are not to be equated. The term "worker" (or "working class") refers to a role definition – not, indeed, a role definition which is comfortable and secure but a role definition nonetheless. The term *proletarian*, by contrast, refers to a Slave-like position in a dynamic of one-sided and unequal recognition: to be proletarian is to be excluded from role definitions and to exist through recognition alone. Being excluded from role definitions, a proletarian *qua* proletarian is undomesticated and (from existing society's standpoint) undisciplined. To state the same point differently: the notion of a proletariat *disappears from discussion* if only role definitions are acknowledged and recognition – *Phenomenology*-style recognition – is left out of account. In the modern world, what is a proletarian? Unlike a worker, or member of the working class, a proletarian lacks substance – or standing. Proletarians are, in Marcuse's famous words, 'outcasts and outsiders' – 'the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colours, the unemployed and the unemployable'.¹⁶³ (To Marcuse's formulation, a rider must be added: just as, in the *Phenomenology*, the

latter see, for discussion, W. Bonefeld (ed.), *Subverting the Present: Imagining the Future* (New York: Autonomedia 2008) Part 1.

162 B. Brecht, *Threepenny Opera*, closing lines.

163 H. Marcuse *One-Dimensional Man* (London: Sphere Books 1968) p. 200.

Master needs the Slave's recognition, so in a capitalist world the 'unemployed and unemployable' are needed – for employment purposes.) To put the point differently, *proletarian* existence and *precarious* existence¹⁶⁴ are one and the same.

Pausing for a moment, we acknowledge that our treatment of class – and, especially, the proletariat – requires further elaboration. This elaboration is not attempted here. Although our comments have political implications,¹⁶⁵ our aim is to indicate how, on the basis of a recognition-based reading, the notion of 'class' may be seen.

We end the present discussion of class by commenting on one of Marx's most famous passages. Having declared that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle', Marx gives some examples:

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf,
guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and
oppressed, stood in constant opposition...¹⁶⁶

An astonishing circumstance in Marx scholarship is that, to the best of our knowledge, no-one has approached 'class' by examining the list that Marx gives. In a very few words, we offer thoughts that may help to fill this gap.

The terms in Marx's list of examples are, sometimes, difficult to interpret because one and the same expression can have different historical associations. This said, the overall picture is one where social standing is clear-cut among oppressors and less clear cut among the oppressed. In short, the picture is one which our diagram of an OPEN PARABOLA roughly captures.

A 'freeman' is someone who is recognized as a full human being and who owns a specified amount of property. In medieval society, he – generally *he* – is a member of the third of the three estates (clergy, nobility and commoners). A 'slave' is someone who is less than human – someone who does not own property (but may be owned as property). In medieval terms, he – this time, *he* or *she* – falls outside (that is, beneath) the three-estates framework. The inverted parabola yawns.

A 'patrician' in Ancient Rome was a descendent of the first hundred men whom

164 See G. Standing *The Precariat* (London: Bloomsbury 2011) and *A Precariat Charter* (London: Bloomsbury 2014). Our aim, here, is not to endorse Standing's claim that a present-day 'precariat' is a distinct 'class'. Still less do we endorse Standing's political recommendations. We wish, instead, to propose that *precarious existence* is no new arrival on the social and political scene. Standing urges that individuals who live precariously be seen not as 'denizens' but as 'citizens' – in short, that they be granted role-definitional existence. Our own very different discussion locates role definitions in an alienated world.

165 In political terms, our remarks bring into focus what Harvey terms 'the revolutionary potential of urban social movements' rather than (as traditional in Marxism) the factory-based working class: see D. Harvey *Rebel Cities* (London: Verso 2012) p. xiii. What about Marx himself? Further discussion might pick up on Marx's view of the Paris Commune: see note 57, above. It might ask whether Marx and Castells – M. Castells *The City and the Grassroots* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1983) ch. 3 – do not see the Communards in *sotto voce* related terms. What about present-day politics? Our intention is to address the issue in a separate piece.

166 Ibid. p. 482.

Romulus appointed as senators; the ‘plebs’ were the general body of non-patrician free men. If they were free men then, presumably, they had social status. To employ terminology introduced earlier, they – the ‘plebs’ – were not merely *in* but *of* society. Should we conclude that, for Marx, a CLOSED CIRCLE encompasses ancient Roman society? Is ancient Roman society a counterexample to (or an exception from) our generalisations? Before concluding this, we should note that ancient Roman society employed slaves. And, of course, a proletariat – in that term’s etymologically-exact senses – was an ancient Roman creation. The case for a CLOSED CIRCLE rather than an OPEN PARABOLA is incomplete.

A feudal ‘lord’ is someone from whom land is held – and someone who is, decidedly, both *in* and *of* society. A ‘serf’ worked land for his lord. A ‘serf’ could not, unlike a Roman slave, be sold: medieval serfs went with the land they tilled. However, a serf’s clothing would be owned by his lord – and the lowest rung of serfdom was slavery. Where there was tenancy, no tenancy of land was involved. The hierarchies of such a society may, again, be represented by an open parabola.

The terms ‘guild-master’ and ‘journeyman’ have, once more, a medieval ring. A guildmaster is someone who has an acknowledged expertise in a trade, and who employs journeymen (or who trains apprentices). A journeyman is someone who is one step up from an apprentice but who is not (or not yet) a master. He may travel (or “journey”) and so change masters. He is paid by the day (*jour* = day) and is a day-labourer. From this brief description, it seems that a journeyman has social status. However, it is at this point that historical references become treacherous: when capitalism prised apart the structures of estates-based society, it did so through the employment of day-labourers. The chief “journey” which a doubly free day-labourer undertook was from the countryside in search of paid work. In, so to say, the early-modern period, journeymen became (from medieval society’s point of view) a socially undifferentiated horde.

If Marx’s list of class relations were carried further, a next step would be to explore ‘bourgeois’ and ‘proletarian’ themselves. This we have done, in the course of our discussion. Here, we note a peculiarity of the term ‘proletariat’. No doubt, present-day ‘outcasts and outsiders’ and a present-day precariat have their own, highly specific, relation to capitalism and its market requirements. However, there is a sense in which the *proletariat* is as old as history. If – for the *Phenomenology*, and for Marx – *history* is a *history of contradictory recognition*, the structures of ‘hitherto existing society’ can never be summed up in terms of role definitions. Beneath role definitions, lower depths obtain. Whether in fantasy or in reality, and whether in visible or invisible form, proletarianisation is a dimension of contradictory social existence. When Marx, in 1848, characterises communism as a ‘spectre’¹⁶⁷ he was, we suggest, referring to the proletariat.

167 *Collected Works* Vol. 6 p. 481. See, for a view of the ‘spectre’ metaphor that is different from our own, J. Derrida *Specters of Marx* (New York and London: Routledge 1994).

6. From contradictory to mutual recognition

Sections 3-5 of our paper explored contradicted recognition. They dwelt on what Hegel understands as *history* and what Marx terms ‘hitherto existing society’. Our final section looks beyond contradicted recognition and comments on how mutual recognition is to be seen.

We claimed in Section 2 that, for Marx, *communism* and *mutual recognition* are one and the same. No doubt, each of these terms highlights a different issue: whereas *communism* highlights sharing, *mutual recognition* points towards freedom. But the issues flow together: *free sharing* and *shared freedom* are different ways of saying the same thing. What is shared is a freedom that comes about through interaction, and freedom itself subsists in a dialogical or interactive way. In Marx’s view, *property* is the ‘nightmare [*Alp*]¹⁶⁸ – so to say, the incubus – whose weight contradicts recognition and distorts its form. When property (not just this or that species of property, but property *per se*) is dispensed with, individuality ceases to be monological and possessive; freedom ceases to exist *in spite of* other individuals.¹⁶⁹ Once property is transcended, freedom exists in and through interaction with others and individuals risk their identity in mutual recognition’s flow.

Such a view or vision has dark as well as light aspects. We start with the latter. Where mutual recognition obtains, each individual counts as free through the recognition that others provide – and from this stems an egalitarianism which schemes of social justice invoke. From this, too, stems a commitment to participatory democracy. (As we have argued elsewhere, a participatory democracy which stems from mutual recognition has a “consensual” – rather than a “majoritarian” – cast.¹⁷⁰) A list of commitments entailed by mutual recognition can readily be extended. Not least, it can bring into focus ecological issues. Above, it was urged that, when mutual recognition obtains, *what is recognized* is other people’s free and self-determining actions.¹⁷¹ This point may be generalised: to recognize freedom and self-determination implies concern for the context – the aesthetic quality and resources – wherein others’ actions are performed.¹⁷² If valid, these points require discussion that this paper does not

168 *Collected Works* Vol. 11 p. 103 (MEW vol. 8 p. 111). Marx famously says that ‘the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare (*Alp*) on the brains of the living’. In German folklore, an ‘*Alp*’ is an incubus. In our view, the metaphor applies equally well to property.

169 In Marx’s words, it ceases to be freedom that ‘makes every man see in other men not the *realisation* of his own freedom, but the *barrier* to it’ (*Collected Works* Vol. 3 p. 163).

170 See Gunn and Wilding ‘Occupy as Mutual Recognition’.

171 See section 1 (a), above.

172 The argument, here, might be phrased in terms of what is sometimes known as an ‘enough, and as good’ principle: see J. Locke *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988) pp. 288, 291. Or it may be phrased in terms of a *common sense of the commons*: see E.P. Thompson *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin Books 1993) p. 107. Locke’s phrase carries with it too much possessive individualist (and natural law inspired) baggage, however. And an argument that refers directly to *the commons* makes no mention of mutual recognition. Our introduction of the argument attempts to avoid these difficulties.

give. Here, however, we note mutual recognition's less warm implications.

In a world of role definitions and institutions (or *geistige Massen*), social structures possess a quasi-natural inertia.¹⁷³ Events unfold as governed by physical rules: mass times velocity equals momentum. One consequence of this thinglike or quasi-natural pattern is that social structures stand over against individuals. Another is that, in a fashion which is beguiling and bewitching, society's framework is associated with *security* – in both an emotional and political sense. If we turn, now, to mutual recognition there is a striking contrast. Connotations not merely of over-againstness but of security are absent. Freedom is *more exposed* – so to say, it is *more excoriated* – than was the case where alienation prevails. Why should this be so? The answer is that a mutually recognitive condition is more “artificial” and less “natural” – or, strictly speaking, less “quasi-natural” – than a condition of alienation. Being uncontradicted, self-determination (or human self-making) stands out in starker relief. What does the notion of exposed or “artificial” existence entail? A formulation by Hegel helps us to see the implication clearly: when mutual recognition exists, an action – any action – is placed before others. It is performed in the knowledge that others will interpret it. So far so good – but, says Hegel, what is ‘placed [*hinstellt*]’ is also ‘displaced [*verstellt*]’.¹⁷⁴ It may be misinterpreted, or involve dissemblance. Stated differently: *possibilities of acting in bad faith* continue, even where mutual recognition is in play. Indeed, possibilities of acting in bad faith increase – or become more of an issue: when individuals acted in terms of role definitions *it was strictly-speaking irrelevant* what “private” attitude an individual adopted towards his or her performance. If, say, a “lecturer” lectured, students need not ask questions about his or her attitude to academic life. When, by contrast, a mutually recognitive individual ‘places’ a speech or action before others, and asks for it to be acknowledged, *it matters* whether the speech or action is performed in good faith. In Hegel's view, there are ways *which are specific to mutual recognition* through which free interaction can go off the rails.

We have stressed the dark or less-than-comforting aspects of mutual recognition because, in doing so, we shed light on a question about Marx. Was Marx a humanist? More to the point: does our own recognition-based interpretation have a humanist character?

Evidently, the term ‘humanist’ can be used in more than one way. Not all forms of humanism strike us as objectionable. We are, however, concerned to dissociate our reading from humanism in a specific sense.

The form of humanism which we reject is one where a scenario of *self-realisation* occurs. According to this scenario, a picture of the human essence waits in history's wings until *humanity's true essence* is made real. Such a scenario is frequently given

173 Hegel's comparison between *natural masses* and *spiritual or social masses* (*Phenomenology* p. 300) brilliantly highlights this inertia.

174 *Phenomenology* p. 394.

a teleological twist: “humanity” is seen as a grand totaliser or global subject, and history as that subject’s expression or self-realisation.¹⁷⁵

Is Marx, as presented in the present paper, a humanist in this meaning of the term? We reply that neither Marx nor the Hegel of the *Phenomenology* endorses such views. Two points are decisive. First, neither writer employs the notion of a grand totaliser or global subject; for Marx as for the author of the *Phenomenology*, history is to be viewed in a non-teleological way.¹⁷⁶ Second, neither Marx nor the early Hegel thinks in terms of *self-realisation*. This latter point, which in the present connection is all-important, requires explanation.

What is meant, when we speak of ‘self-realisation’? The term points to a specific scenario. In this scenario, a *self* – a “something” which may be a substance or a subject or a God-like entity – has a fixed and determinate identity; all that the *self* requires is an opportunity to become real. When this opportunity presents itself, the scenario is completed: self-realisation occurs. Our claim is that, in Marx and the *Phenomenology*, no fixed and determinate self or “subject” exists. For Marx and for the *Phenomenology*, there is (quite literally) *nothing* which may become real. Stating the same point in a different way: there is *no conceptual place* which the *notion of a global subject* may fill. If the notion of humanism turns on the idea of self-realisation, Marx is (we may agree with Althusser) a theoretical anti-humanist.

Is our dismissal of self-realisation too hasty? Does the view of ‘hitherto existing society’ which we ascribe to Marx (and which we see as modelled on the *Phenomenology*’s conception of history) not, after all, involve something *at least very similar* to a fixed and determinate “self”? Do we not think of *uncontradicted recognition* as performing this conceptual role? Our reply to such questions is to concede the similarity – but to stress still more important differences. The notion of mutual recognition which we have championed is one where freedom (understood as self-determination) and an unfolding of human capacities obtain. Uncontradicted recognition is, as we have pictured it, the polar opposite of fixity and determination. To suggest (as our imagined questions suggest) that mutual recognition has a specific identity is to construe *that which is unspecific* or *that which questions all specificity* as specific for its part. In suggesting that mutual recognition plays the part of a self or determinate “something”, our envisioned questioner misunderstands the notion of ‘recognition’ itself.

It is at this point that our argument re-joins our reflections on mutual recognition’s dark side. The open and unspecific and so, to say, *unbounded* character of mutual

175 The form of humanism to which we object is, roughly, that which Althusser opposes: see L. Althusser *For Marx* (London: Allen Lane 1969). Althusser is, we think, right in claiming that Marx was not a humanist *in this meaning of the term*. He goes wrong in placing structuralism (and thereby positivism) in humanism’s place.

176 By a *teleological* view we mean, here, one where a God-like subject pulls history’s strings. In our paper, we take it for granted that Marx has no truck with such thinking. What about Hegel? There, the position is more complex because the later Hegel argues in favour of a ‘cunning of reason’: G.W.F. Hegel *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975) p. 89. Our claim – asserted here but not argued for – is that the *Phenomenology* owes nothing to such thinking.

recognition comes into prominence when the *exposed* nature of mutually recognitive freedom is seen. If mutual recognition is seen in terms of role definitions and social institutions – if, in a word, mutual recognition is seen in a “Honnethian” fashion – then, indeed, fixity enters Marx’s picture. (It does so because role definitions have boundaries, however unclear and evanescent the boundary may be.) If mutual recognition is seen in this fashion, then Marx becomes a theorist of self-realisation – and a “humanist”. If, on the other hand, mutual recognition is seen as an unfolding of potentialities and an endless process, the ghost of “humanism” is laid. The cost of laying the ghost, and of ending mystification, is that quasi-natural security becomes an untenable dream.

At the end of the line of argument that our paper has followed, numerous questions remain. The questions are of two sorts. How may a transition from contradicted to uncontradicted recognition be envisaged? How may mutual recognition’s interactive process be sustained? Without attempting to address general issues, we comment on each set of questions in turn.

How might a transition from contradictory to mutual recognition be envisaged? In an archived interview, Horkheimer expresses views which seem to tell against our claims. ‘Critical theory,’ he there states, ‘is based on the idea that one cannot determine what is good’; we cannot determine this because ‘we lack the means’. Critical theory belongs, in other words, in a world where alienation is so deep that emancipation cannot be pictured. How, in such a world, is critique possible? Horkheimer indicates a possibility: ‘we can bring up the negative aspect of this [the alienated] society’.¹⁷⁷ Horkheimer’s words seem to contradict our own because, for him, emancipation is hidden – whereas for us the mutually recognitive character of emancipation is plain. Between Horkheimer’s words and our own there is, let us agree, a difference of emphasis. But is there an incompatibility? We doubt that there is. At the same time, we concede that the issue of transition is shrouded in obscurity. A movement from contradicted to uncontradicted recognition cannot, realistically, be pictured as a straightforward and unambiguous transition from what is dark to what is light. Just as hierarchical patterns persist into a post-revolutionary society, so mutual recognition may arise already in a prerevolutionary society – in a fragmentary and prefigurative way. In a transitional epoch, it is impossible to decide what *can* and *cannot* be clearly seen. To these difficulties, a further complication may be added: a world where recognition is contradicted is, in Hegel’s expression, an inverted world. In a world which is inverted, glimpses forward are afforded¹⁷⁸ and, at the same time, denied. Nothing is what it seems. When Horkheimer says that ‘we can bring up the negative aspect’, it is possible that he alludes to Hegel’s “inverted world” motif. Horkheimer’s seeming pessimism (‘we lack the means’) and our own invocation of mutual recognition strike us as intertwining voices in a region where everything is

177 ‘Max Horkheimer on Critical Theory’ [1969] (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBaY09Qi-w0#t=49>). R.C. Smith quotes from the interview in his ‘Promissory notes of a better world’ (www.heathwoodpress.com) 7 September 2014.

178 An example of such a glimpse is the sketch of production carried out by ‘human beings’ at the end of Marx’s ‘Comments on James Mill’ (*Collected Works* Vol. 3 pp. 227-8).

shifting and uncertainty prevails.

How may mutual recognition be sustained? First, let us focus on mutual recognition as a process. The process is unbounded in every sense: individuality is not confined between a boundary demarcating a role definition (or role definitions); interaction is limitless since mutual recognition is extended to all others; and the “conversation” in which mutual recognition consists addresses all relevant topics. Marx sums up all of this by announcing an end to property, and our examination of his critiques of class and property and exchange – an examination conducted through the lens of recognition – has brought the radicality of his vision to the fore. Regarding class: a classless society is one where mutual recognition reigns. Regarding exchange: if a communist form of existence must involve mutual rather than contradictory recognition, what is presupposed is something as different as a gift economy is from a society based on profit. Regarding property: if Marx’s critique of property is approached in a recognition-based fashion, we may more readily see that he condemns not just this or that kind of property but property *per se*. His opposition is to communal as well as individual property, state property as well as private property. For Marx, where self-determination flourishes nothing that may be referred to as ‘property’ exists. Communism is, for Marx, commonising – a process of uncontradictory recognition rather than a legal or institutional arrangement.

All this said, communism as envisaged by Marx is not a utopia: possibilities of bad faith continue (as we have seen, with reference to Hegel) and relations of good faith have to be continually re-made. Communism knows no natural or quasi-natural inertia: although it is humane, there is no question of man’s (or humanity’s) realising its “true essence” - or “true nature”.¹⁷⁹ Lacking quasi-natural security, communism lacks the stability that inertia brings. At each stage in a communist society’s existence, a relapse into *what Hegel terms history* and *what Marx terms ‘hitherto existing society’* remains a possibility. No guarantees against a relapse are conceivable. More than this: what may be termed ontological insecurity and communism are inseparable. In the margins of a text describing communist existence, hints of existential horror appear.¹⁸⁰

How, in the face of horror, may emancipation continue? No *definitive* answer to this question may be given. For a *provisional* answer, and an answer that must be renewed at each point when threat emerges, we must turn to the process – the interactive

179 The temptation to think in terms of what is “natural”, and what something’s “true nature” may be, is – let us agree – almost irresistible. The source of the temptation is the circumstance that ‘spiritual masses [*geistige Massen*]’ exist: see our references to *Phenomenology* p. 300.

180 Thus Bloch, writing in 1918: The course of liberation...is...not aimed at facilitating somnolence or generalising the pleasurable, comfortable leisure of the contemporary upper classes. We do not propose to end up with the world of Dickens, or to warm ourselves at the fireplaces of Victorian England, at best. The goal, the eminently practical goal, and the basic motive of socialist ideology is this: to give to every man not just a job but his own distress, wretchedness, misery and darkness, his own buried, summoning light; to give to everyone’s life a Dostoevskyan touch...’: E. Bloch ‘Karl Marx, Death and Apocalypse’ in his *Man on His Own* (New York: Herder and Herder 1970) p. 60.

process – of mutual recognition.¹⁸¹ We must learn to identify tensile strengths which mutual recognition contains.¹⁸² What might these strengths be? We end our paper at the point where, we consider, a mature Marxism begins.

181 In saying this, we follow Hegel's example. In the section of the *Phenomenology* headed 'Morality', where (see note 169, above) his comments on *placing* and *displacing* are to be found, he in effect turns to mutual recognition as a process to show how *challenges to mutual recognition* may be overcome.

182 We must, for example, learn to think of *good faith* not in a moralistic way that is attached to altruism but as a form of recognitive practice. We must guard against lapses into history (or into alienation) not by erecting legal safeguards but by watching for changes in recognition – for example, a change from an egalitarian (or horizontal) to an institutional (or hierarchical) form. We must confront insecurity not by building possessive individualist enclaves but by developing perspectives which *freedom through others* brings.