I A Metaphor?

What are we talking about when we talk about recognition? My observations regard some expressions that are very often to be found in philosophical discourses inspired by the Hegelian theory of Anerkennung. For example it is claimed that theoretical and practical self-consciousness have an intersubjective structure insofar as they are constituted through recognitive interactions; or that right (Recht) is a recognitive phenomenon insofar as it presupposes diverse forms of reciprocal recognition between individuals. When we speak of recognitive constitution of the structure of self-consciousness or of social institutions such as right or the State, are we merely using vague and indefinite images or is this conceptual vocabulary to be taken seriously by theorists? The following observations by no means intend to resolve and exhaust the full extension of the theories of recognition but, rather, limit themselves to capturing a specific but important aspect of the question.
The problem I intend to deal with is, in particular, the following: if we take these manners of speaking seriously, then should we not maintain that they speak to us of the \textit{mode of being} of some phenomena, that is, of how determinate aspects of their \textit{ontology} are constituted through interaction?

\section*{II Axes of Recognition}

To get my bearings in the tangle of recognising, I shall preliminarily introduce a distinction between three axes or dimensions of recognition that converge in part with Paul Ricoeur’s study.\textsuperscript{1} We can thus distinguish between three dimensions of recognising:

1. \textit{Reidentification}: identification and perceptual reidentification of objects on the part of a subject;
2. \textit{Self-recognition}: relation to self of a subject, of a type that is both reidentificative and performative/attestative;
3. \textit{Reciprocal recognition}: relation between two or more agents who coordinate their interaction by reciprocally identifying one another, attesting their identity and referring themselves to variously codified norms of behaviour (functional, implicit, informal, formal). The reciprocity of the relation has to be kept distinct from \textit{symmetry} and from \textit{equality}: symmetrical relations and relations between equals are simply two subsets of relations of reciprocal recognition.

\section*{III Relational Structure of Recognition}

When we speak of recognition, in these three senses, we always speak of it as some type of relation: relation between a subject and an object, self-relation of a subject, relation between two subjects; it appears, moreover, that we are dealing with intentional relations. Furthermore, the theories of recognition that I intend to discuss assume, in some sense of the term, the logical priority of the third axis (reciprocal recognition): it is assumed that the integration between the three dimensions of recognising comes about through the subsumption of the first and second levels in the third, that is, through the subsumption of reidentification of objects and self-recognition under reciprocal recognition. The constitutive function is in fact assigned to the third axis, that is, to the relations of reciprocal recognition: it is these relations that constitute