Recognition, Perception, and the Distribution of the Sensible

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The notion of recognition has become central in contemporary critical theory as a means of examining the normative or ethical claims that some argue are intrinsic to our sociality. Although recognition has been thoroughly examined in the work of contemporary critical theorists such as Axel Honneth and Judith Butler, what is less clear is the relationship between recognition, perception, and the problem of recognizability. I suggest that the question of recognizability prior to the grounds upon which more normative claims are articulated is a central but underacknowledged aspect of the work on recognition. In this sense, the phenomena of perceptibility, recognizability, and visibility, or what enables one to be recognizable, are key to this discussion.

In this paper, I consider the work of three contemporary critical theorists who each focus on what I term the "problem of recognizability." Axel Honneth, Judith Butler, and Jacques Rancière all engage with what, in broad terms, might be referred to as the processes or structures that enable or disable recognition, which in disabling cases result in forms of invisibilization. Although Honneth, Butler, and Rancière may not agree on the terms of this account, or indeed the way in which they each interrogate invisibility, a comparison and dialogue between their respective accounts, points to the centrality of the problem of recognizability.

The notion of recognizability employed here is conceptualized in relation to perception.[1] It points to the fact that perception is not merely a

disinterested survey of the visual field, but indicates that within this field, other human beings are immediately distinguishable from other objects. The moment of perception is not a normative or ethical act as such, but the acknowledgement of the Other as a being like myself must take place before more explicitly normative acts of recognition are possible. Recognizability is, then, the term I am employing to indicate the perceptual process that necessarily occurs prior to a normative or ethical act of recognition. In this sense, the notion of recognizability points to the conditions that make recognition possible, and is therefore central to the success or failure of normative recognition relations. The argument here is that normative mutual relations of recognition are a secondary process that takes place after an initial act of acknowledgement in which the Other is rendered recognizable, and moreover, that this should form the basis of any account of recognition.

It is important to note, though, that there is no guarantee that one might be deemed recognizable. When such a failure of perception occurs, however, it is not due to the fact that the Other has *not been seen* in a literal sense, but instead that she has been actively or intentionally ignored or invisibilized. Here, let me point to an example. The problem of recognizability is evocatively portrayed by Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eye*, when she writes about the failure of recognizability in relation to a young black girl who visits her local grocery store in Ohio in the American midwest. Upon entering the store, the white storekeeper looks up from behind the counter and momentarily "urges his eyes out of his thoughts to encounter her." However, at the moment of perception, "[s]omewhere between retina and object, between vision and view, his eyes draw back, hesitate, and hover." As Morrison writes: "At some fixed point in time and space [the storekeeper] senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see." How can he be expected to "*see* a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary."2 In this instance, Morrison evokes the notion of a complete lack of "recognition" to indicate that a primary perceptual act of recognizability has failed to occur.

Taking the above scenario as an example, Butler would seek to explain this lack of apprehension as a result of an epistemological problem, in the sense that the recognizability of another is determined by epistemological structures that frame what is recognizable in the first place. Where recognizability fails to occur, Butler points to the epistemological frames that construct forms of knowledge and hence shape perception, in this case in relation to forms of racialization. In contrast, Honneth would explain this perceptual failure as a deliberate or intentional act of invisibilization that results from pathological social relations resulting in forms of reification or objectification. Honneth's explanation is therefore squarely based on an anthropological claim that recognitive relations are primary and that all failures of recognition represent a "forgetfulness" of originary social relations.

Finally, Rancière might describe the problem of invisibilization and the failure of recognizability conveyed in Morrison's text as the result of a particular construction of the sensible field, such that the field of the sensible is shaped by a particular political-aesthetic order that determines who is recognizable or visible at any given time.

Following on from this example, the twin problems that are examined in the paper are the following: (1) The primacy and importance of recognizability as providing the conditions for the possibility of normative relations of recognition; and (2) an examination of what disables or prevents recognizability and how such failures might best be explained.

In order to explore this set of issues, the paper begins with a discussion of Butler's reframing and articulation of the distinctions between "recognition," "intelligibility," and "apprehension," or what she also to refer to as "recognizability." In the second part of the paper, I contrast Honneth's account of the relation between recognition, perception, and cognition and his rendering of "invisibilization" as a "forgetfulness" of primary relations of intersubjectivity. In the final section of the paper, I consider Rancière's specific account of recognizability and invisibility according to the particular organization of the social and examine his account of politics as a means of disrupting the structures of invisibilization. I conclude by discussing the manner in which a dialogue between these three thinkers clarifies, problematizes, but also enriches this constellation of issues and argue that each thinker draws attention to the importance of the problem of recognizability for critical theory.

Reframing Recognizability: Rendering the Vulnerable Other Intelligible with Butler

The notion of recognition in various guises has long figured in Butler's work, from the Althusserian formulation of "recognition" as interpellation in *The Psychic Life of Power* to a more explicitly ethical account of recognition in relation to vulnerability in later work such as *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War*. In *Precarious Life*, Butler had already identified the problem of recognizability in her discussion of the interrelation between vulnerability, recognition, and ethical responsiveness to others. In a central passage, Butler proclaims:

> A vulnerability must be perceived and recognized in order to come into play in an ethical encounter, and there is no guarantee that this will happen. Not only is there always the possibility that a vulnerability may not be recognized and that it will be constituted as the "unrecognizable," but when a vulnerability is recognized it has the power to change the meaning and structure of the vulnerability itself.[3]

For Butler, then, the question of recognizability is here conceived through the lens of vulnerability as the basis for an ethics, or what in later work she has described as precariousness or exposure to the Other. In this context, she suggests that first the Other has to be identified as a "life," a life that is grievable, in order that the vulnerable Other is recognized.4 In this sense, Butler argues that although vulnerability might be a "universal" condition in the sense that it is a "precondition for humanization," it is also "fundamentally dependent on existing norms of recognition" that are conditioned by power.5 In contrast to Honneth, then, for Butler vulnerability and recognition are always conceptualized in relation to power.6 In this sense, although Butler theorizes recognition as that which extends us beyond ourselves, her earlier Althusserian account of the subject outlined in *The Psychic Life of Power* continues to inform her work. According to this formulation, recognition is construed in relation to the earlier model of subject-formation as subjection and is therefore always double-sided, such that it is simultaneously both dominating and enabling. Butler then describes the subject of recognition as "given over to a set of cultural norms and a field of power that condition us fundamentally."7

However, in *Frames of War*, Butler makes some more nuanced differentiations and helpfully identifies the differences between recognition and recognizability, as well as highlighting the problem of the field or terrain in which recognizability may or may not take place. In Butler's account, recognizability is prior to recognition, but in an additional step, she also argues that the conditions of recognizability are structured by what she terms "frames of intelligibility." In this schema, Butler highlights the norms that first determine recognizability, as well as the frames of intelligibility that produce those norms and determine what is knowable or intelligible. In her account of vulnerability or precariousness, then, she effectively identifies the process and structures of invisibilization. In this respect, Butler's differentiation between recognizability and recognition seems to have some elements in common with Honneth's account, but as we will see below, the differences between them are also instructive.

In *Precarious Life*, Butler seems to give more credence to an ontological basis for ethics and to imply a more seamless connection between our shared human condition of vulnerability and our ethical obligations grounded in a theory of recognition. However, in *Frames of War*, Butler seems to withdraw from the stronger claim of basing an ethics on the ontological condition of vulnerability, and instead begins from an account based on "frames" of normalization that are understood to precede acknowledgement or recognition. In this amended schema, in Butler's terms, one has to be able to apprehend the Other as "a life" before they can be recognized but this apprehension is dependent upon frames of intelligibility that structure what is knowable at all.8

In *Frames of War* she also makes a distinction between "precariousness," as an ontological category or "a generalized condition of living beings," and "precarity" as a social and political category that can address the ways in which forms of precariousness are differentially distributed or allocated. Moreover, she argues that our capacity for ethical responsiveness "depends upon the frames by which the world is given." As a consequence, she also rejects the Levinasian sensibility that was evident in *Precarious Life*, whereby an ethical claim by a vulnerable other might be made without being prescribed by formal structures of knowledge and therefore not dependent on the "epistemological problem of apprehending a life."9 In the context of *Frames of War*, however, her argument is that "if certain lives do not qualify as lives . . . within certain epistemological frames, then these lives are never" conceivable as injurable or vulnerable.10 Hence, a life cannot be considered grievable or lost if it is not first apprehended as another living being.

In this sense, Butler seems to suggest that particular frames of knowledge precede acknowledgement of the Other's suffering when she writes that

> The epistemological capacity to apprehend a life is partially dependent on that life being produced according to norms that qualify it as a life or, indeed, as part of life. In this way, the normative production of ontology produces the epistemological problem of apprehending a life, and this in turn gives rise to the ethical problem of what it is to acknowledge.11

In many respects, as we will see below, Butler then seems to suggest that recognition is a second- or even third-order category. In order to understand her claim further, though, we need to briefly examine the other main terms of her account.

Significantly, Butler argues that it is necessary to distinguish between the terms "recognition," "intelligibility," and "apprehension" (or what she also terms "recognizability"). As she writes, "apprehension" refers to a kind of "marking, registering, acknowledging, without full cognition. It is a form of knowing [that] is bound up with sensing and perceiving, but in ways that are not always—or not yet—conceptual forms of knowledge."12 Butler differentiates the notion of apprehension or recognizability from what she describes as the Hegelian-derived notion of recognition. For her, recognition refers to "an act or practice" undertaken by at least two subjects, which "is dependent on norms that facilitate recognition."13 However, the apprehension of someone is not limited by existing norms of recognition; Butler argues it might be facilitated by such norms but is not circumscribed by them. In this respect, she suggests it is necessary to distinguish between "recognition" and "recognizability." As such, where "recognition characterizes an act or practice, or even a scene between subjects," for Butler, "recognizability characterizes the more general conditions that prepare or shape a subject for recognition [that is]—the general terms, conventions, and norms . . . [that craft] a living

being into a recognizable subject" and enable recognition to take place.14 As a consequence, for Butler, *recognizability necessarily precedes recognition*.15

However, the question of what makes one recognizable is determined by the primary structures or frames of intelligibility that condition any act of recognizability. In this sense, the process of recognizability sits between frames of intelligibility and normative acts of recognition. Butler then claims that a life first has to be knowable before it can be recognizable. As she puts it, "a life has to be intelligible as a life, has to conform to certain conceptions of what a life is, in order to be recognizable. So just as norms of recognizability prepare the way for recognition, so schemas of intelligibility condition and produce norms of recognizability."16 Thus, for Butler, frames of intelligibility structure the field of what is knowable and hence determine the sensible and perceptual field of recognizability. Butler's focus on frames of intelligibility and the primacy of the knowable then seems to suggest that recognizability and recognition are second- and third-order categories, respectively. In this sense, frames of intelligibility are the underlying field that make recognizability possible or preventable, and it is only in a third step that normative recognition relations become possible after one is rendered recognizable.

Butler explains that the "frames" organize and delimit visual experience, and determine what can be apprehended and which objects in our perceptual field are recognizable as other human lives. However, she is also careful to state that the norms that structure the visual field only persist through their reiteration and that these norms therefore shift in the continual process of their renewal. Thus, frames of intelligibility require certain conditions of "reproducibility in order to succeed" and in the process of their perpetual renewal may be subject to "reversal" or "subversion" and are therefore open to a "structural risk" that may cause a rupture or break at the site of reproduction.17 In this context, Butler also suggests that a life can "exceed the normative conditions of its recognizability." However, in *Frames of War*, Butler makes clear that recognizability is more important than recognition, not only in the sense that it determines whether recognition will take place at all, but also because she thinks "we do not simply have recourse to single and discrete norms of recognition," but as she puts it, are positioned by "more general conditions, historically articulated and enforced, of 'recognizability.'"18

At first sight, and prior to her introduction of the notion of frames of intelligibility, Butler's differentiation between recognizability and recognition seems to have some elements in common with Honneth's two-level account of recognition, as we shall discuss below. At some places in her work, Butler refers to a kind of "primary affective responsiveness" to vulnerability or precariousness, and thus she locates "responsiveness" in the affective realm.19 Additionally, her attempt to designate a form for recognizability as prior to a full account of recognition as a reciprocal normative act seems to have some affinities with Honneth's differentiations. However, there are also some

significant differences between their approaches. As we shall discuss in the following section, Honneth begins with a strong intersubjectivist position that posits an originary form of intersubjectivity or affective relationality and argues that forms of invisibilization (or reification) can be understood as a temporary loss, concealment, or "forgetfulness" of an elementary form of recognition. In contrast, rather than entertaining a notion of primary intersubjectivity, Butler instead begins with an account of frames of intelligibility or frames of normalization that *structure* what is knowable or recognizable at all. In this sense, Honneth and Butler begin from significantly different starting points, and this shapes the way in which each theorist conceptualizes the question of recognizability.

However, what is notable is that Butler's account of the differentiations between recognizability, recognition, and frames of knowability has resonance with a set of problems also identified by Rancière. Butler's attempt to work through the problems of invisibilization and recognizability through the notion of epistemological or discursive frames of knowledge work in a parallel manner to Rancière's notion of the institutional order that he associates with the "police," which circumscribes what and whom is visible, thinkable, and sayable. Where Butler continues to be influenced by her structuralist heritage and articulates this in terms of "frames of intelligibility," Rancière brings together an account of aesthetics and politics in his notion of the "distribution of the sensible," which he defines as the relation "between a form of sensory experience and an interpretation that makes sense of it." "It is" he suggests, "a matrix that defines the whole organization of the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable."[20] Nonetheless, there are considerable points of overlap between their projects, particularly in terms of thinking through the problem of what determines the visible, the sayable, and the knowable. We shall look at the details of Rancière's account in more detail below, including his combination of politics and aesthetics. However, first we turn to Honneth's account of recognizability as a primary form of affective responsiveness to the Other.

Prior to Recognition: Recognizability as Affective and Attentive Engagement in Honneth

In his most recent work, Honneth gives credence to both the historical and institutional aspects of recognition and moves to a more explicit account of freedom. In earlier essays from 2001 and 2008, he outlines the ways in which historically shaped and institutional forms of recognition arise from a more originary or primary recognition stance.[21] In this sense, Honneth has developed what commentators have termed a "two-level account" of recognition, distinguishing between an elementary form of recognition and those more "normatively substantial" forms of recognition that he claims are basic intersubjective conditions required for successful subject-formation.[22]

As Honneth articulates it, although a precursor to all explicitly normative forms of recognition, the primary form of recognition is not determined by

institutionally derived or established norms. Rather, this underlying form of recognition represents a non-epistemic form of recognition and is typified by "the stance we take towards the other that reaches into the affective sphere, a stance in which we can recognize in another person the other of our own self, our fellow human."23 As Honneth explains, the form of primary recognition to which he refers indicates an emotional and affective, rather than epistemic, stance to others and the world.24 In contrast to Rancière's account of the "distribution of the sensible" and claim for an originary equality, or Butler's account of epistemological frames that structure the realm of the knowable, Honneth turns to an account that is based on the forgetfulness of originary relations of recognition caused by social pathologies, to explain why some "lives" (to use Butler's term) might or might not be recognizable.

Already in his 1982 essay, "Moral Consciousness and Class Domination," Honneth wrote about the problem of "invisibilization" or what he termed the "cultural exclusion" of oppressed social classes. In this context, he particularly highlighted the silencing of forms of moral conflict or social feelings of injustice that, as he put it, "lie behind the façade of late-capitalist integration."25 There, his critique was also aimed at Habermas' particular model of society and the public sphere, which resulted in the exclusion of certain voices and forms of moral protest from the field of capitalist class conflict; in other words, those forms of injustice that do not make it into formal modes of public articulation and do not become fully elaborated moral claims.26 In this early essay, Honneth, at times, sounds close to Rancière when he argues that "these techniques of control thus represent strategies for the maintenance of the cultural hegemony of the socially dominant class by latently narrowing the possibilities of articulating experiences of injustice."27 In this respect, Honneth is particularly critical of the way in which such forms of exclusion are based upon the deprivation of "linguistic and symbolic means," creating the invisibilization of the "part who have no part," to use Rancière's terms.28

However, Honneth's explicit account of "invisibility" and the problem of "recognizability" are more fully articulated in his later account of recognition, where he examines the interrelation between perception and recognition. In the later context of his essay "Invisibility," Honneth examines this constellation of issues with reference to Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* with its powerful descriptions of invisibilization in everyday interactions. In this context, Honneth makes a distinction between the literal and figurative meaning of "invisibility," whereby the invisibility of Ellison's main protagonist cannot be understood as a "physical non-presence" but must instead refer to invisibility in terms of a denial of his social existence.29 As Honneth suggests, one of the most prominent examples of this kind of "invisibilization" is the way in which "the nobility were permitted to undress in front of their servants because the latter were not there in a certain sense," and the same practices occurred in

America with the attitude towards and treatment of slaves. In this respect, Honneth claims that such forms of invisibilization are an expression of dominance by those in socially powerful positions, such that perception becomes a tool of domination.30

Moreover, Honneth argues, we can differentiate the degree of harm inflicted in such acts of invisibilization according to the degree of intentionality, or as he puts it, depending on "how active the perceiving subject is in the act of non-perception."31 For example, if the act of "inattention" was simply one of clumsy forgetfulness, or because the person invisibilized is actively constituted as "socially meaningless." Honneth's point here is that invisibility cannot be attributable to a failure to cognize the Other but instead must be due to socially shaped factors; in other words, the other is present in the cognizer's perceptual field but he or she is deliberately "unseen" or ignored.32

The act of recognizing the Other in a social sense, therefore, requires that the Other's visibility is acknowledged through expressive gestures that confirm that the perceiver is affected by or is attentive toward the perceived. For example, expressions such as a nod or a smile, or by stepping aside to allow someone to pass in a crowded street. The difference between cognizing and recognizing the Other in perception, then, can be distinguished through expressive gestures that indicate a *positive affirmation* of their social existence and, in this sense, Honneth makes a direct connection between forms of recognitive expression and perception. For Honneth, such recognitive gestures indicate an expression of the Other's worth and, in this regard, he claims that recognition is not secondary but can be described as giving "expression directly to a perception."33 With reference to early forms of expressive perception between caregiver and child observed in infant research, Honneth suggests that evaluative perception is not the same as the form of "individuating identification" that has conventionally formed the basis for the paradigm of perception. In this context, Honneth argues that the paradigm of perception understood as merely cognitive identification misses the genetically prior act of recognitive perception; that is, that perception is not merely a disinterested grasping of the visual field but one that is already evaluative, indicating that the "worth of persons is 'directly' given."34

For Honneth, then, the perceptual field is already a morally inflected one, in the sense that perception is recognitive of the "'worthy' property of persons"; in other words, it is already evaluative and not merely a form of disinterested cognitive identification. In this regard, the sensible field is already determined by the moral worth of persons and groups in which perception takes place. The lack of such expressive affirmation, then indicates "a deformation of the human capacity for perception with which recognition is connected" and invisibilization indicates a failure in the act of perception in the moment when recognizability occurs.35

Crucial to understanding Honneth's claim here in regard to invisibilization is his account of "affective recognition" and his work on reification. In this sense, for Honneth, objectifying or reifying tendencies can be understood to be a deviation from what he refers to as a "genuine" mode of relating to others and the world. In the *Reification* lectures, Honneth develops an existential mode of recognition that indicates a practical rather than epistemic stance toward others and provides a foundation for all other normative and institutional forms. Reification denies persons their status as human beings and renders them thing-like, thus representing a form of social pathology and a "deviation from a kind of human praxis."[36] Reified social relations therefore indicate that a perceiver has become a neutral, emotionless, disengaged observer with a merely detached, contemplative attitude to his or her surroundings.[37] In this sense, according to Honneth, objectifying stances must already presuppose "a more primordial and genuine [stance], in which humans take up an empathetic and engaged relationship towards themselves and their surroundings."[38] Honneth describes this existentialist form of recognition as a form of attentiveness or attunement to others, a form of affective recognition that assumes an affirmative practical engagement with others and the world. Thus, recognition can be understood as an "affectedness" in relation to others, and for Honneth it is upon this primary form of affective relationality that more explicitly normative recognition stances are then built.[39] However, despite this form of affective attunement forming a precursor to all other forms of human interaction, it does not determine the particular stance taken towards another person. The particular affectivity or emotion is not predetermined, but the form of engagement and attention must express a form of "existential affectedness" that expresses an acknowledgement of the Other's existence.[40]

Honneth, then, has two different but related ways of explaining recognizability: the first is outlined in the earlier essay "Invisibility," where recognizability is conveyed as an act of perception in which the worth of persons is directly given prior to cognitive identification; the second is developed in his *Reification* lectures, where the precognitive form of recognition is described as a primary form of affectivity in which the Other's existence is recognized in basic affective or emotional terms.

These final arguments indicate a central point of difference between Rancière's, Butler's, and Honneth's accounts. Where Butler explains the failure of apprehension or recognizability in terms of discursive and epistemological frames that predetermine who is recognizable, and Rancière suggests that the phenomena of recognizability is determined by the institutional order that fixes the "distribution of the sensible," Honneth suggests that forms of invisibilization and the failure of recognition can be attributed to reified or pathological relations. Honneth therefore begins with a strong intersubjectivist position that posits an originary form of intersubjectivity or affective relationality and argues that forms of objectification or reification can

be understood as social pathologies: that is, as a temporary loss, concealment, or "forgetfulness" of an elementary form of recognition. In this sense, it seems that there are already proto-normative expectations present in the forms of affective intersubjectivity that underpin Honneth's account of perception and affective recognition, and this underpins the more explicitly normative second-order and institutional account, both of which are fleshed out through social and historical struggles.

In contrast, Butler avoids assuming a prior underlying normative stance that grounds her account of recognizability and recognition, but instead suggests that the epistemological frames that structure different social orders determine the field of perception and recognizability. This is not to say that she leaves no point of resistance. On the contrary, as we saw above, she suggests that in order for the exclusion of certain lives and invizibilization to persist, such frames must be reiterated and renewed, but the normative basis for rupturing the epistemological and perceptual field remains unclear. As a result, we are left with the following question: If our ability to perceive precariousness or to even apprehend the Other at all, is structured by normative frames of intelligibility that establish the domains of the knowable, upon what grounds can we base our judgement and reflexivity of the vulnerable Other? In other words, upon what basis do we perceive another life as a life, if what we can know or perceive is always already framed by regimes of normalization? Although in *Frames of War*, Butler explains that in order to persist normative regimes must be "reiterated," my suggestion is that this does not fully answer the question about the basis upon which we can judge what constitutes better or worse forms of life, or better and worse forms of vulnerability.

In contrast, although Rancière's account of the "distribution of the sensible" at first sight appears to suggest a systemic and totalizing account of the institutional order, it is ultimately more agonistic and less anchored in the kind of epistemological and symbolic structures of Butler's poststructuralist account. In this sense, as we shall see below, in his later work Rancière, emphasizes the embodied and sensible aspects and the ways in which alternative aesthetic forms of experience can disrupt the institutional order and thereby "change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable, the feasible."[41] Moreover, underpinning Rancière's account is an *a priori* notion of equality that, in many ways, provides the same kind of normative basis for challenging such forms of perception as Honneth's a priori notion of recognition. Although Rancière would seek to deny that his claim of absolute equality is normative, it is very difficult to deny that it has a normative role in orientating aesthetic experiences and politics.[42] It is to this set of issues we now turn.

Invisibilization and the Distribution of the Sensible: Rancière on Recognizability

In his discussion of politics in *Disagreement*, Rancière effectively speaks about the problem of "recognizability" (or lack of recognition) when he describes politics as a means of interrupting the "natural order of domination . . . by the institution of a part of those who have no part."43 Thus, for Rancière, politics not only "turns on equality as its principle" but it makes "visible" those who have "no part in anything," whether it be the "poor of ancient times, the third estate, or the modern proletariat" who act in the name of a wrong that is done to them and who have no voice and remain unseen.44 As Rancière explains, it is assumed that the "part who have no part" do not speak "because they are beings without a name, deprived of logos." There is no speech considered possible by "nameless beings" whose existence is not recognized.45

As Rancière describes it: "Politics is primarily conflict over the existence of a common stage and over the existence and status of those present on it."46 Rancière's concern, then, is to highlight the way in which the political order, the "stage," is based upon an exclusion that invisibilizes certain groups and individuals and denies their existence. He refers to this particular organization of the political order, characterized by a fundamental division and distribution of roles and places, as "the police." The police, then, is understood in the broader sense of the term (also employed by Foucault) as describing "the more general governance of the social order," not merely the "police force" or "petty police." In contrast to Foucault, though, Rancière makes clear that "policing" does not refer to "the disciplining of bodies [but to] a configuration of *occupations* and the properties of the spaces where these occupations are distributed."47 The system or political order, then, legitimizes not only fundamental divisions but also the distribution of places, occupations, and roles and "puts bodies in their place."48

In *Disagreement*, despite his focus on logos or speech, the sayable and the unsayable, Rancière already points to more sensory and embodied dimensions. As he puts it:

> The police is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as a discourse and another as noise.49

In this central passage, Rancière clearly puts the problem of recognizability and visibility at the center of his concerns. The identification of visibility and invisibility, of speech that is not heard or which is designated simply as incoherent noise, is precisely another way of speaking about the twin problems of recognition and what constitutes recognizability. For Rancière,

then, recognizability is equated with visibilization within the sensible and political fields.

Furthermore, Rancière specifically understands this mode of distribution in terms of "aesthetic" and sensible forms. Thus, the political order is conceptualized in terms of what Rancière refers to as the "partage du sensible" or "distribution of the sensible." This formulation draws attention to the way in which specific sensible and visible forms become defined, and articulates the way in which the sensible field is determined by dominant modes of understanding that shape perception. This focus on the visible and the invisible is an aspect that Rancière, Honneth, and Butler all share. Honneth has explicitly acknowledged this shared interest in "the mechanisms of making people socially invisible" in his dialogue with Rancière, and at times, some of Rancière's formulations about the "order of the visible and the sayable" resonate with some of Butler's views in her attempt to breakdown the mechanisms of what and whom are apprehensible, intelligible, or recognizable.50

Rancière articulates the connection between politics, aesthetics, and the "distribution of the sensible" more fully in later work. In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, for example, he describes the distribution of the sensible as "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common" or delimits what is perceived and how various parts and positions are defined.51 This structuring of the various "parts" and "positions" is based on forms of activity and occupations that determine not only their distribution but designate who has "a part in the community of citizens."52 In this context, Rancière is very clear that "aesthetics" should not be understood in the more conventional sense of the term as merely "art theory" nor simply to "a theory of sensibility, taste and pleasure" for the disinterested spectator or "art amateur."53 Instead, it "refers to a specific regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts: a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and possible ways of thinking about their relationships."54 As Rancière clarifies, aesthetics can be understood "as the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience."55 Moreover, in a passage that brings a constellation of concerns in regard to recognizability and invisibility to the fore, Rancière defines the interrelation between politics and aesthetics as "a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time."56

An aesthetic "revolution" or intervention, then, would disrupt or "intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility."57 Thus, what Rancière refers to as aesthetic experiences or practices point to a

"redistribution of the sensible" or to a "reconfiguration of political space."58 In later work Rancière is interested in the disruptive character of aesthetic experience and the way in which it works by rupturing preconceived perceptions of "the way bodies fit their functions and destinations" and thereby challenges the consensus that holds the "distribution of the sensible."59 As Rancière explains, though, this should not be considered an aesthetic intervention merely confined to the sphere of art, nor should aesthetics be conceived as an autonomous sphere arising with modernity. Rather, it "is a revolution in the distribution of the forms and capacities of experience that this or that social group can share."60 Such aesthetic experiences are therefore political in that they rupture the sedimented field of the sensible and challenge the taken for granted practices and modes of what is sayable, doable, and visible.

Rancière refers to such political acts as a form of "subjectivization" which, in his terms, refers to something like the making of the subject through becoming a political actor, distinct from the part or roles the social order has previously designated. The political-aesthetic is therefore described as enabling a form of "dis-identification" from the dominant institutional order that attempts to delimit subjects. Modes of dis-identification and political-aesthetic action therefore enable the shaping of emancipated forms of subjectivity. Thus, in Rancière's schema, it is only through such disruptive practices that individuals are subjectivated. It is worth noting here that Rancière's employment of the term subjectivization differs markedly from the one found in Butler's work, which is drawn from an Althusserian model, as we discussed above. It is significant that both Rancière and Butler hark from an Althusserian background; in Rancière's case directly so in that he was a student of Althusser's, and Butler in terms of her explicit use of Althusser's formulations in her own work, specifically *The Psychic Life of Power*. However, in the context of Butler's work, subjectivization retains almost the opposite meaning to Rancière, such that she understands it as the way in which the subject is almost entirely structured and determined by language and symbolic structures.

Nonetheless, despite their very different accounts of subjectivation, Rancière and Butler are brought closer together in relation to their accounts of intelligibility and recognizability. However, where Rancière understands the system as one that is riven by an essential division such that certain parts are invisibilized, his account of politics is based not only on an a priori claim of equality; he also indicates that sensible forms can be made visible through aesthetic interventions that reconfigure the political order. In this sense, his account is more "agonistic" in the sense that the "part that has no part" can rupture the "partage du sensible," in some instances simply by disrupting the sensible fabric. However, where Rancière radically moved away from Althusser, in some respects, Butler is still confined by her Althusserian and structuralist

heritage, which finds its way into her later account of invisibilization and recognizability in terms of her notion of "frames of intelligibility."

In his later works, Rancière moves to an account of aesthetics that is further enriched with scenes that highlight affective, sensory, and embodied elements, and his rendering of aesthetic practices and politics paints a dynamic picture of the sensible field. As Rancière writes in *The Emancipated Spectator*: "What the artist does is to weave together a new sensory fabric by wresting percepts and affects from the perceptions and affections that make up the fabric of ordinary experience."[61] Aesthetic practices alter the sensible and visual field in which perception and experience unfold, and, in this sense, they are political acts as they enable "new modes of political construction of common objects."[62] At these moments, Rancière's descriptions of aesthetic practice are reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's writings about early cubist painting, which he argues offer a means of reconstituting the phenomenal field and rupture the taken for granted nature of dominant modes of perception. Furthermore, at times Rancière begins to turn to more phenomenological and existential modes of explanation in relation to the field of the sensible and the intersubjective fabric of community. As he evocatively renders it: "Human beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together; and politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of 'being together.'"[63]

In this later formulation of a sensate form of "being-together," Rancière defines "a human collective" as "an intertwining and twisting together of sensations in the same way."[64] In some respects, this mode of "being-together" can be viewed as Rancière's version of Honneth's existential and affective intersubjectivity. Rancière underpins his account of the transformation of the sensory fabric, however, with recourse to an originary notion of equality. He suggests that "weaving this new fabric means creating a form of common expression or a form of expression of the community—namely, 'the earth's song and the cry of humanity.'" Although at times Rancière's rendering of an originary notion of equality seems to have normative undertones, he instead claims it is merely a method for politics based on an a priori structural condition.[65]

This recourse to equality is a distinguishing feature between Honneth and Rancière, in the sense that Honneth resolutely bases his theory on a notion of freedom and the norms of mutual recognition. For Honneth, norms of recognition have to be immanently constituted and are built through social and historical struggles. In this sense, Honneth's entire account is based upon the relations between subjects within the field of the social, and he does not countenance a view that emphasizes external or systematizing forces that are somehow separate and stand apart from the field of social action. Although Honneth and Rancière disagree about the primary value underlying their respective theories, Rancière also understands the institutional order as one

that is immanently constituted, making clear that it is not an ideological structure, but is the result of forms of consensus and dissensus, although, some of his formulations, such as the notion of the "police order" and the "part who have no part," at times indicate systematizing tendencies.66 In contrast, Butler's recourse to frames of intelligibility that structure and constitute the institutional and political order is not an immanent construction shaped by the subjects upon whom it is imposed. It can be argued, then, that Rancière's later "fleshing" out of aesthetic experience and modes of intervention through which the political order might be reconfigured offer a richer account of the field of the sensible than that proposed by Butler. His unique rendering of the interrelation between aesthetics and politics opens up a realm of possibilities in terms of reconceiving the problem of invisibility, recognizability, and the field of perception that, in some respects, compliments Honneth's normative intersubjective account although there are also important differences.

Reconfiguring Recognizability

As discussed above, Butler, Honneth, and Rancière each contribute to the question of how the problem of recognizability might be reconfigured. Butler provides a particularly astute account that helpfully identifies a set of distinctions between recognizability and recognition, that goes some way to explaining why some individuals and groups are not apprehended within the perceptual field prior to the kinds of interaction that engage normative forms of recognition. Her account is important for highlighting the way in which recognizability provides the conditions that make recognition possible and for indicating the priority of recognizability vis-à-vis recognition. However, despite Butler's identification of this constellation of issues, her conceptualization of the field that structures recognizability in terms of frames of the knowable, is too discursively and epistemologically orientated and lacks a convincing account of the norms or values that underpin such an account.

In contrast, Honneth's account of recognizability and recognition are differentiated in terms of the distinction between a notion of primary affectivity and normative relations of recognition. Although the problem of recognizability is only briefly addressed in Honneth's two-level account, he does identify a prelinguistic and precognitive level of "existential" affectedness that is the precursor to recognition. For Honneth, the sensible field is one in which we are first affected by the Other at an emotional level and our acknowledgement of the Other's existence is expressed through embodied and gestural forms of communication. It can be argued that, out of the three thinkers, Honneth offers the most robust account of the intersubjective relations upon which norms of recognition are articulated and an account of recognizability based on a primary form of affectedness and attentiveness towards the Other in perception.67 However, the essays on invisibility and affectivity represent an element of Honneth's project that are left undeveloped and, in many ways, he has moved away from the more embodied and

prediscursive elements of experience that once more centrally characterized his approach.68 Moreover, although Honneth offers a compelling account of modes of invisibilization and a response to the question of how we know others exist, he does not offer a comprehensive account of the fabric of the sensible or perceptual field and the relation between perception and recognition.

In contrast, Rancière provides a more encompassing account of the sensible and perceptual field that also emphasizes intersubjective and embodied aspects. However, one of the most significant problems with Rancière's account is that he does not provide an explicitly normative basis for critique and merely posits an a priori notion of equality, which leaves him open to a criticism similar to the one leveled against Butler; that is, upon what basis can Rancière justify the normative basis of his critique and what justification is there for claiming that equality is merely a structural fact? In this sense, the strength of Honneth's theory of recognition is that he provides such a normative account and emphasizes the manner in which norms of recognition have to be immanently constituted and not merely asserted. On the question of recognizability, Honneth also provides a more convincing account of the way in which perception of the Other is already an evaluative act in which the worth of Others is directly given and is not merely a disinterested grasping of the visual field. Rancière provides no equivalent account of the complexity of the interrelation between recognizability and perception or of what happens in the moment of perception. Nonetheless, the claim here is that Rancière provides a more enriched account of the sensible and perceptual field and the manner in which the distribution of the sensible might be disrupted or ruptured. In this respect, bringing these thinkers into dialogue points to ways in which this constellation of issues might be addressed and the problem of recognizability reconfigured.69

1 The notion of perception here should be understood in broad terms to include not only vision but also the entire range of affective and sensible responsiveness, including hearing and touch.
2 Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 48. Also see my account in "Racializing Perception and the Phenomenology of Invisibility," in

Body/Self/Other: The Phenomenology of Social Encounters, eds. Luna Dolezal and Danielle Petherbridge (New York: SUNY Press, 2017), where I also draw on Morrison's text due to its overwhelming relevance to this set of issues.

3 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London, New York: Verso, 2004), 43.

4 Butler, *Precarious Life*, 20. For an interesting comparison between Butler and Honneth's accounts of recognition, also see Estelle Ferrarese, "Judith Butler's 'Not Particularly Postmodern Insight' of Recognition," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37, no. 7 (2011): 759–773.

5 Butler, *Precarious Life*, 43.

6 Butler, *Precarious Life*, 45.

7 Butler, *Precarious Life*, 45. Also see the reading by Catherine Mills, "Normative Violence, Vulnerability, and Responsibility," *Differences* 18, no. 2 (2007): 133–156.

8 See Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London, New York: Verso, 2010), 6. See a related discussion in Danielle Petherbridge, "How Do We Respond? Embodied Vulnerability and Ethical Responsiveness," in *New Feminist Perspectives on Embodiment*, eds. Clara Fischer and Luna Dolezal (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018).

9 Butler, *Frames of War*, 180, 3.

10 Butler, *Frames of War*, 2.

11 Butler, *Frames of War*, 3.

12 Butler, *Frames of War*, 5.

13 Butler, *Frames of War*, 4-5.

14 Butler, *Frames of War*, 5-6.

15 Butler, *Frames of War*, 5.

16 Butler, *Frames of War*, 7.

17 Butler, *Frames of War*, 10, 24. In *Frames of War*, Butler argues that her notion of "frames of intelligibility defies being a structuralist account of the norm" but instead affirms "something about the continuing life of poststructuralism" (169).

18 Butler, *Frames of War*, 4-5.

19 Butler, *Frames of War*, 34.

20 Jacques Rancière, "The Method of Equality: Politics and Poetics," in *Recognition or Disagreement: A Critical Encounter on the Politics of Freedom, Equality and Identity*, eds. Katia Genel and Jean-Philippe Deranty (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 133–155, 136.

21 Axel Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*, ed. Martin Jay (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Axel Honneth, "Invisibility: On the Epistemology of 'Recognition'" in *Recognition*, eds. Axel Honneth and Avishai Margalit, Supplement of the Aristotelian Society, no. 75 (2001): 127–139. In more recent work, Honneth has turned to an institutional account; see Axel Honneth, *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

22 See Somogy Varga, "Critical Theory and the Two-Level Account of Recognition— Towards a New Foundation?" *Critical Horizons* 11, no. 1 (2010): 19-33. Also see Danielle Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013).

23 Axel Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*, ed. Martin Jay (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 151.

24 Honneth, *Reification*, 90, ff. 70.

25 Axel Honneth, "Moral Consciousness and Class Domination: Some Problems in the Analysis of Hidden Morality," in *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. C.W. Wright (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995; First published in *Praxis International* 2 [April 1982]), 205-219, 207.

26 Honneth, "Moral Consciousness and Class Domination," 207, 209.

27 Honneth, "Moral Consciousness and Class Domination," 212–213.

28 Honneth, "Moral Consciousness and Class Domination," 213.

29 Honneth, "Invisibility," 127–139, 111.

30 Honneth, "Invisibility," 112

31 Honneth, "Invisibility," 112

32 Honneth, "Invisibility," 112

33 Honneth, "Invisibility," 124

34 Honneth, "Invisibility," 125-126. See also James Jardine, "Stein and Honneth on Empathy and Emotional Recognition," *Human Studies* 38, no. 4 (December 2015): 567–589.

35 Honneth, "Invisibility," 126

36 Honneth, *Reification*, 21.

37 Honneth, *Reification*, 24.

38 Honneth, *Reification*, 27, 32, 38.

39 Honneth, *Reification*, 151–152.

40 Honneth, *Reification*, 151–152.

41 Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement: A Critical Encounter on the Politics of Freedom, Equality and Identity*, 147.

42 See also Deranty on this point in Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Between Honneth and Rancière: Problems and Potentials of a Contemporary Critical Theory of Society," in *Recognition or Disagreement*, 33–80, 65.

43 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 11

44 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 9

45 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 23–24.

46 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 26–27.

47 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 28–29

48 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 27.

49 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 29.

50 See Honneth *Recognition or Disagreement*.

51 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 7.

52 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 7

53 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 4, 18.

54 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 4.

55 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 8.

56 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 8.

57 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 8.

58 Rancière, "The Method of Equality"; see also *Recognition or Disagreement*.

59 Jacques Rancière, "The Method of Equality," in *Recognition or Disagreement*, 145.

60 Rancière, "The Method of Equality," 147.

61 Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London, New York: Verso, 2011), 56.

62 Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 56.

63 Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 56.

64 Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 56.

65 Rancière, "The Method of Equality"; Deranty, "Between Honneth and Rancière: Problems and Potentials of a Contemporary Critical Theory of Society," 65–66.

66 Rancière, "The Method of Equality," 136.

67 See my work on Husserl and Honneth in regard to the notion of affection and attention in perception in "Attention, Perception and Affect: Between Husserl and Honneth" (forthcoming).

68 See also Deranty's view on this point in "Between Honneth and Rancière: Problems and Potentials of a Contemporary Critical Theory of Society."

69 For a more comprehensive discussion that extends beyond these positions, see my book-length account in: *When is One Recognizable?* (forthcoming).