Title: Three Models of Aesthetic Recognition

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Abstract:

In this chapter, I argue that the disregard for the aesthetic in the literature on recognition is problematic and shed light on how the aesthetic and recognition interact. I make the original claim that aesthetic recognition denotes a subspecies of recognition. I also show that this model of aesthetic recognition has significant advantages over two alternative models. The first alternative model, proposed by Jacques Rancière, identifies the aesthetic with recognition. However, one drawback of his conceptualization consists in the fact that it cannot underpin a differentiated social critique. The second alternative model, suggested by Jason Miller, maintains that the aesthetic conditions the recognition of cultural identities. I highlight several problems with Miller's approach. For instance, he fails to fully grasp the differences between Honneth's and Taylor's understanding of recognition and consequently he does not appreciate Honneth's reasons for rejecting the idea of cultural recognition. Further, by focusing on cultural identities he obscures the wider significance of his core insight. I therefore develop a revised version of his model which maintains that the aesthetic conditions all subspecies of recognition. Finally, I show that this revised model complements my own, according to which aesthetic recognition denotes a subspecies of recognition.

Introduction

How do recognition and aesthetics interact? Is there such a thing as aesthetic recognition? Even individuals who are well acquainted with the ever-growing body of literature on recognition will probably be at a loss when confronted with these questions, for the aesthetic is virtually never mentioned in philosophical discussions of recognition.[1] My claim is that this disregard for the aesthetic is problematic since the aesthetic and recognition do interact.

Let me illustrate this claim by considering how a recognition theorist like Axel Honneth would have to invoke aesthetic categories like theatrical performance, perception, visibility, and emotional responsiveness to makes sense of the following case study from the feminist

movement. In the early 1970s, Shulamit Firestone had a "dream" that continues to inspire feminist thinking (LaFrance 2002) and practice (Chandler 2017): "*a smile boycott*", "all women would instantly abandon their 'pleasing' smiles, henceforth smiling only when something pleases *them*" (Firestone 1971, 91).[2] From a recognition-theoretical perspective, "smiling" denotes one of those "expressive gestures" on which "every form of social recognition of a person … depends" since affirmative gestures of this kind signal to others that they are "socially visible" (Honneth 2001, 119) and that we are motivationally ready "to limit" ourselves "to benevolent actions in regard to the other" (ibid., 123). By engaging in a smile boycott, women stage the withdrawal of their "emotional readiness" (ibid., 122) to engage in relationships of recognition with men, in response to their systemic failure to see and treat women as equals in extant relationships of (personal, legal, moral, economic, and political) recognition. Smile boycotts thus reveal the interplay of recognition and aesthetics by drawing attention to the perceptive and "reactive" (ibid., 118) emotional responses that condition recognition and render it possible. Smile strikes raise awareness among men that how they perceive, emotionally respond to, and imagine women (to be or to behave) is implicated in undermining egalitarian relationships of recognition. Men's aesthetic engagements with women as well as the social conditions shaping them therefore need to be brought withing the scope of a feminist critique of recognition.

In recent years, two philosophers attempted to shed light on the relationship between recognition and aesthetics. They suggested different framings of this relationship and invoked different understandings of aesthetics and recognition. The first model *equates* the aesthetic with recognition (Section 1). Jacques Rancière proposes this informative identity statement in an exchange with Axel Honneth, which was published in 2017 under the title *Recognition or Disagreement: A Critical Encounter on the Politics of Freedom, Equality, and* Identity. According to the second model, recognition of cultural identities is *conditioned* by the aesthetic (Section 2). Jason Miller outlines this view in his 2021 monograph *The Politics of Perception and the Aesthetics of Social Change* (Section 2).

Against the backdrop of my discussions of Rancière's and Miller's approaches, I then develop my own model which is grounded in yet another understanding of aesthetics and recognition. My third model frames aesthetic recognition as a subspecies of recognition that has so far been overlooked (Section 3).[3] According to my notion of aesthetic recognition,

how we perceive, emotionally experience, and (re-)imagine the world denote valuable dimensions of our personality. It therefore captures another aspect of Firestone's "dream", namely, that "women" are "henceforth smiling only when something pleases *them*" (Firestone 1971, 91). In what follows, I will reconstruct and evaluate these three models of how recognition and aesthetics interact. What is more, I will argue that my own approach avoids disadvantages of the other two models, overcomes concerns articulated by Rancière, complements a revised version of Miller's conditioning model, and expands the range of recognition relationships familiar from Hegel and Honneth, thereby contributing to a better understanding and more differentiated critique of democratic ethical life.

Section 1: Rancière on aesthetics as recognition

Rancière's responds to the question of the relationship between aesthetics and recognition by generating what one could call with Frege (1892) an informative identity statement.[4] In other words, he further clarifies his own approach by arguing that even though "aesthetics" and "recognition" are concepts with different meanings ("sense"), they denote the same phenomenon ("reference"), at least if one takes Rancière's (idiosyncratic) definitions of these concepts, which I will presently outline, as one's starting point.

Aesthetics as "distribution of the sensible"

Rancière develops an original account of aesthetics as "distribution of the sensible" that extends the realm of aesthetics "beyond the strict realm of art to include the conceptual coordinates and modes of visibility" that structure every social "domain" (Rockhill 2004, 86). A distribution of the sensible is what makes it such that something appears as something and determines what kind of beings or ways of being belong to "a common world" (ibid., 89) by regulating "what is visible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made, or done" (ibid.).

The domains of the political and art are therefore both aesthetic since each denotes a historically changing distribution of the sensible. For instance, the "aesthetic regime of art" that supersedes "the representative regime of art" brings about the conditions under which a Duchampian ready-made can be seen as a work of art.[5]

Rancière on Recognition

To appreciate how Rancière connects this understanding of aesthetics with recognition, we need to first consider his distinction between ordinary and philosophical "recognition" (Rancière 2017: 84). Ordinary recognition has two strands: The first is epistemic and in play whenever we identify something as something. Epistemic recognition denotes "the coincidence of an actual perception with a knowledge that we already possess, as when we recognize a place" or "a person" (ibid.). The second strand of ordinary recognition is characterized as "moral" since it is concerned with how "we respond to the claim of other individuals who demand that we treat them as autonomous entities or equal persons" (ibid.).

Epistemic and moral recognition conceive of recognition as an act of "confirmation" (ibid.). In the former case, one confirms that something is known to us ("Yes, this is my hat!"), in the latter case, what is the confirmed is the moral status of someone as an autonomous or equal person. Further, both forms of ordinary recognition are, according to Rancière, "predicated on the idea of substantive identity" (ibid.) or 'already existing entities' (ibid., 83). I already have to be familiar with my hat to recognize it, and to recognize you as an equal person this moral status must already exist in my social world and be applicable to beings like you.

What then is Rancière's "philosophical concept of recognition" (ibid., 84) and how does it interact with ordinary recognition? Philosophical recognition deals with "the conditions behind" epistemic and moral recognition (ibid., 85). It is "more fundamental" than ordinary recognition since it is concerned with "the configuration of the field in which things, persons, situations, and arguments can be identified" (ibid., 85).[6] In short, ordinary recognition is about "the confirmation of something already existing", whereas philosophical recognition is about "the construction of the common world in which existences appear and are validated. ... It is what allows us to know … and identify anything in the first place." (ibid.)

The stage is now set for Rancière's informative identification of aesthetics with recognition, for it turns out that a distribution of the sensible and philosophical recognition are both concerned with the "construction of the common world" (ibid.) by way of establishing shared "modes of perception" (Rockhill 2004, 89) and identification. Hence, Rancière concludes that "a structure of recognition" is "a distribution of the sensible" (Rancière 2017, 85).[7]

In sum, Rancière distinguishes between ordinary and philosophical recognition, with the latter being presented as the condition of possibility of the former. He then equates philosophical recognition with his understanding of aesthetics as "distribution of the sensible" (ibid.), thereby clarifying that his notion of the aesthetic denotes the same phenomenon as the concept of recognition. Finally, Rancière maintains that philosophical recognition, as he understands it, is more fundamental than the Hegelian version which, in his view, combines the epistemic and moral strand of ordinary recognition.

Initial evaluation of Rancière's account of aesthetic recognition

I want to consider two disadvantages of Rancière's take aesthetics and recognition: Firstly, the "'Rancièrian' … theory of recognition" (Rancière 2017, 95) is of little use for the purposes of a differentiated social analysis and critique since it frames everything that belongs to a world in common as an aesthetic matter and, by implication, a matter of recognition.[8] Hegel and Honneth, by contrast, distinguish subspecies of recognition that underpin different social practices. Secondly, Rancière has not done enough to explain why his account of recognition does not lead to the kind of arbitrariness and relativism that arguably undermines the significance of recognition and aesthetics. For his notion of the distribution of the sensible implies that whatever "presents itself to experience" (Rancière 2004, 8) as something might equally well manifest itself as something else. For instance, Rancière argues that the distribution of the sensible that is a specific police order is "better" by virtue of having been more "often … jolted out of its 'natural' logic" (Rancière 1999, 31), that is, by having been confronted more often with its own contingency. Statements like this fuel the worry that contingency is at the heart of his understandings of recognition and aesthetics.

Section 2: Miller on how the aesthetic conditions recognition

Jason Miller does not equate the aesthetic with recognition, he argues that the aesthetic conditions recognition when it comes to the recognition of cultural identities.[9] Charles Taylor's influential 1992 essay "The Politics of Recognition", serves as a backdrop for Miller's claim. Taylor distinguishes between a "politics of universalism", which is about recognizing our shared humanity, and a "politics of difference", which is geared towards recognizing what is particular about cultural identities. Miller praises Taylor for bringing

"Hegel's philosophy to bear directly on the cultural turn in political thought" (Miller 2021, 147) and demonstrating that "the achievement" of contemporary "subjectivity is contingent upon the social recognition of particular identity forms" (ibid.). Yet, Miller also criticizes Taylor and other Hegelian theorists of recognition for overlooking that the aesthetic, that is, how we perceive and represent cultural identities, is therefore key for the recognition of cultural identities.

Aesthetics and the recognition of cultural identity

Miller's starting point is that "the social recognition of cultural identity" (Miller 2021, 22) has become a "key component[…] of democratic inclusiveness" (ibid., 10) and individual self-realization in recent decades because individuals "articulate[…]" their sense of self "increasingly … in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and other (often overlapping) markers of" (ibid., 11; also 5, 13) particularity. What Miller adds to this picture of a 'cultural turn' (ibid., 21) is the insight that the recognition of cultural identity is conditioned by the "aesthetic" or "the politics of perception" (ibid., 22). In short, Miller argues that "claims of culture" are inextricably mediated by "social perception" and how it is "negotiated" (ibid., 23).

To unpack this insight, Miller turns to Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art* (1823). According to Hegel, our "creative and receptive … aesthetic engagement" with the world is driven by "the human need to recognize ourselves in the sensible world" (Miller 2021, 160; Hegel 1975, 30-31). In other words, we "externalize" (Miller 2021, 160) or express who we are for ourselves and others through aesthetic or artistic artefacts. The domain of the aesthetic is therefore "a source of reflexive self-awareness" (ibid., 161) and other-awareness.

Against the backdrop of this reconstruction, Miller then argues that "the recognition of cultural identity" (ibid., 162) depends on (something like) "Hegel's notion of aesthetic reflexivity" (ibid, 163).[10] For cultural identities are expressed or "take[…] shape in" aesthetic or artistic artefacts that "give us an *imaginative representation* of how the world is seen and experienced through the lens of cultural particularity" (ibid., 162–163). However, since the social recognition of our cultural identity is "largely contingent upon whether and how the claims of culture are seen in a social context" (ibid., 163), successful recognition "seems to require" empathetic and "imaginative exchange[s] between self and other" (ibid., 164). Such

intersubjective processes of aesthetic reflexivity are supposed to also provide us with "a normative basis for … evaluating social perceptions" (ibid.) of cultural identities since by participating in them we realize "whether our perception of 'the *other*' accords with the *other's* self-perception" (ibid., 170; also 145). For instance, a "mismatch between" a groups' own sense of their cultural identity and how it is perceived by others can be indicative of "harmful stereotypes" (ibid., 168) or distorting social perceptions of distinct cultural identities. Intersubjective processes of aesthetic reflexivity are also an opportunity for "specific identity groups … that have been historically silenced and oppressed" (ibid., 171) to produce socially visible representations of their cultural identity in the first place.

Aesthetic reflexivity thus serves both a "critical" (ibid., 6) and an "affirmative" (ibid., 7) function in relation to the recognition of cultural identities: it can be about "critiqu[ing] … misperception[s]" of cultural identities or 'furnishing the social imagination with" (ibid., 8) representations of such identities.

Initial evaluation of Miller's understanding of aesthetic recognition

Let me begin with Miller's understanding of the aesthetic. Due to his concern with the role that social perceptions and representations play with regards to recognizing cultural identities, Miller ends up with a notion of the aesthetic that downplays the free play of faculties. An aesthetic-reflexive engagement with the world and others can go beyond representing for others in imaginative ways how we already perceive and qualitatively experience inhabiting our cultural identities. To put it differently, aesthetic engagement is not only about attempting "to see" the world "through the eyes of the other" (ibid., 168), for if our perceptive, emotional, and imaginative capacities play freely with the world (including with our cultural identities), then this aesthetic engagement might *transform* how we perceive, emotionally experience, and imagine ourselves as well as how others see us.

Against this backdrop, I want to make three criticisms: Firstly, Miller does not fully appreciate aesthetics' potential for initiating processes of (self-)transformation because his notion of the aesthetic fails to make enough room for the free play of sense perception, emotions, and the imagination. Secondly, it is potentially reifying to assume that how one understands one's own cultural identity before engaging in an aesthetic-reflexive dialogue with others can be simply used as the "normative basis" for determining whether "social

perceptions constitute *misperceptions*" (ibid., 154). Rancière, for instance, would worry about the reifying tendencies of Miller's approach since it frames recognition as "an act of confirmation" (Rancière 2017, 85) of "already existing" (ibid., 83) cultural identities. Thirdly, it is uncritical (and, one might want to add, un-Hegelian) to simply take "the *other's* self-perception" of their "cultural identity" (Miller 2021, 170) as normatively authoritative. Of course, we need to take seriously how others understand their own cultural identity, but it is problematic to assume that self-perceptions and self-representations cannot be distorted (especially if we are dealing with societies in which phenomena like racism and patriarchy are systemic and deeply entrenched). We therefore need an account of aesthetic reflexivity that also enables us to engage critically with how self *and* other perceive, emotionally experience, and imagine themselves and others.

Perhaps it is a hasty judgement on my part to infer from Miller's talk about "the match or mismatch between" (ibid., 168) individuals' own understanding of their cultural identity and how it is perceived by others that he regards the "self-perception" (ibid., 170; also 145) of cultural identity as normatively authoritative. However, if this is a misreading, then I simply don't see on what other grounds Miller claims that his account of aesthetic reflexivity "offers a normative basis for … evaluating social perceptions" (ibid., 164), for he does not mention alternative ways of adjudicating conflicts between individuals' own sense of their cultural identity and how it is perceived by others.

I now want to move on to problems ensuing from Miller's understanding of recognition. My claim is that an expanded version of Axel Honneth's conceptualization of recognition is philosophically and sociologically more plausible than the version developed by Charles Taylor, which Miller adopts (however, without being sufficiently clear about the differences between both versions). I agree with Honneth that there are good systematic grounds for rejecting the very idea of cultural recognition as a subspecies of recognition (Honneth 2003, 160–170). What is more, Miller's focus on the recognition of cultural identities obscures the wider significance of his insight. For the aesthetic (i.e., how we perceive, emotionally experience, and imagine others) conditions all subspecies of (moral, legal, personal, economic, and political) recognition. Finally, Miller's approach seems to imply that the aesthetic only matters instrumentally since the recognition of cultural identity presupposes that we don't misperceive or misrepresent others' cultural identity. I argue, by contrast, that

the capacities of sense perception, emotion, and imagination denote valuable dimensions of human personality. I therefore develop an account of aesthetic recognition that tracks these three valuable capacities. However, before I can further unpack these recognition-related criticisms, I need to first introduce the various elements of my alternative approach to recognition and aesthetics.

Section 3: Aesthetic recognition as a subspecies of recognition

We have so far considered two models of aesthetic recognition: Rancière's identification of the aesthetic with recognition and Miller's claim that the aesthetic (i.e., perceptions and representations) conditions the recognition of cultural identity. My own model conceptualizes aesthetic recognition as a subspecies of recognition. Like Miller's, my approach is Hegelian, but my point of reference is not Taylor but Honneth.

My attempt to draw on Honneth's theory of recognition to develop a notion of aesthetic recognition is confronted with two challenges: Firstly, neither Hegel nor Honneth outlines a distinctly aesthetic relationship of recognition.[11] Secondly, it is unclear how mainstream understandings of the aesthetic can underpin a relationship of recognition. To address these challenges, I first introduce key features of Honneth's understanding of recognition and then outline my novel capacity-based account of modern aesthetics. On this basis, I can then develop my notion of aesthetic recognition. In the conclusion of this section, I elaborate on my critical evaluation of Rancière's and Miller's approaches by comparing them with mine.

Honnethian recognition: key features

According to Honneth, recognition "represents a conceptual species" comprising different "subspecies" (Honneth 2002, 506).[12] For the purposes of this chapter, I want to highlight three features of Honneth's understanding of recognition. Firstly, recognition is grounded in "positive qualities" (ibid., 505) or capacities of persons. Different recognition relationships track different capacities. For instance, legal recognition tracks the capacity to make decisions for oneself, and moral recognition tracks the capacity to deliberate about what is right. Secondly, each subspecies of recognition is linked with a distinct social "status" (Honneth 2014, 124), for instance, the status of (equal) legal or moral subject. Each status licenses individuals to engage in "the performance of" distinct kinds of "acts" that can be

"performed by every … subject" (ibid., 65). For example, as a legal subject I can enter into contracts. Thirdly, recognition relationships are norm mediated. These norms of recognition tell us what kinds of "consideration" (ibid., 124) individuals owe each other due to them (being seen as) possessing valuable capacities and inhabiting distinct social statuses. For instance, as a legal subject I have a claim that my freedom of speech is protected.[13]

This theory of recognition is at the same time a theory of freedom as self-realization. For freedom is as the actualization of precisely those valuable capacities which are tracked and enabled by recognition. A recognition order thus affords more freedom if it takes into consideration more valuable capacities or "aspect[s] of human subjectivity", that is, if it is more differentiated and encompasses more complementary "spheres of recognition" (Honneth 2003, 143).

These views on recognition and freedom also shape Honneth's Hegelian understanding of democratic *Sittlichkeit* that has three key features: Firstly, freedom is the overarching "ethical idea" (Honneth 2014, 64) of democratic ethical life. Secondly, democratic *Sittlichkeit*'s differentiated character is underpinned by the conceptual and social differentiation of the notion of freedom itself since it is composed of complementary relationships (of legal, moral, personal, economic, and political freedom) recognition. Finally, ethical life is democratic because it is shape by a commitment to *equal* freedom for all. In a *democratic* society "all subjects must enjoy equal support in their striving for individual freedom" (ibid.).[14]

In sum, different recognition relationships are grounded in different valuable capacities, associated with different social statuses, and mediated by different norms of recognition. All relationships of recognition are relationships of freedom. These recognition relationships are key for understanding social integration and social differentiation, and for them to be compatible with a democratic form of *Sittlichkeit* they must be conceptualized in an egalitarian fashion.

The capacity-based account of modern aesthetics

My claim is that aesthetic recognition denotes a subspecies of recognition. To make good on this claim, I need to clarify my notion of the aesthetic and explain how it interacts with Honneth's understanding of recognition. However, since the two dominant ways of framing

modern aesthetics are unfit for underpinning a notion of recognition, I need to first recover my capacity-based account of modern aesthetics.

According to the first familiar framing, modern aesthetics' ultimate point of reference is a conceptual construct like art or beauty. Proponents of this framing therefore equate the discipline of aesthetics with philosophy of art or beauty.[15] The second framing grounds the aesthetic in a distinct type of experience, namely, aesthetic experience.[16] For proponents of this view it is thus crucial to account for what sets aesthetic experiences apart from other forms of experience.

My *capacity-based account of modern aesthetics* denotes an alternative to these two familiar framings since it is neither dependent on a conceptual construct like art or beauty nor does it presume that aesthetic experiences are different in kind from other experiences.[17] What emerges from my interpretation of modern aesthetics is that *modern approaches to aesthetics have three features*: Firstly, they are grounded in basic human capacities; secondly, they consider (non-instrumental or) explorative uses of these capacities as valuable in their own right; and thirdly, they invoke the following three capacities: sense perception, emotions, and the free play of faculties. The aesthetic, as I understand it, is thus in play whenever and wherever individuals relate to the world by making explorative (non-instrumental) uses of their perceptive, emotional, and imaginative capacities.

I generate this account in a reconstructive fashion by unearthing structural similarities between three seminal contributions to the emerging field of modern aesthetics from the first half of the 18th Century: Alexander Baumgarten's aesthetics of sense perception, Jean-Baptiste Du Bos's aesthetics of emotions, and Joseph Addison's aesthetics of the free play of imagination. The emergence of this capacity-based account has, in my view, *a significant cultural legacy*, since it frames (non-instrumental) explorative uses of sense perception, emotions, and the free play of faculties as intrinsically valuable (that is, independently of whether such exercises also promote practical, moral, or epistemic goals) for the first time in human history.

In *Proletarian Nights*, Jacques Rancière provides us with an example of aesthetic relating, as I understand it. He describes how the joiner Gabriel Gauny (1806–1889) interrupts laying

parquet flooring in the homes of rich Parisians to (non-instrumentally) explore the vistas that these appartements afford. Gauny is thus engaging in an aesthetic "elevation" or "sanctification of the senses," in this case, his "gaze" (Rancière 2012, 80–81). He appropriates the status of an equal aesthetic subject in such moments and challenges the view that members of the working classes are not capable of using sense perception, emotions, and imagination in an aesthetic (or non-instrumental) fashion. During the night, Gauny then generates literary accounts of such acts of aesthetic self-emancipation and self-assertion:

> Believing himself at home, he loves the arrangement of a room so long as he has not finished laying the floor. If the window opens out on a garden or commands a view of a picturesque horizon, he stops his arms a moment and glides in imagination towards the spacious view to enjoy it better than the possessors of the neighboring residences. (Gauny quoted after ibid., 81).

Aesthetic recognition: an overlooked subspecies of recognition

To develop my account of aesthetic recognition, I link up Honneth's notion of recognition with my capacity-based account of modern aesthetics.[18] Honneth's assumption that recognition tracks valuable capacities dovetails with my capacity-based account of modern aesthetics that is grounded in the capacities of sense perception, emotions, and imagination. Further, these three capacities are not underpinning any other familiar relationship of recognition. For instance, moral recognition tracks the capacity to deliberate about what is right and the capacity to make valuable contributions to social cooperation is underpinning economic recognition.[19]

Like other relationships of recognition, aesthetic recognition is also linked with a distinct social status, namely, the status of (equal) aesthetic subject, which licenses individuals to relate to the world in specific ways. For instance, as a moral subject I have the culturally granted opportunity to scrutinize whether "social demands" associated with social norms and roles are "unreasonable" (Honneth 2014, 98), and if that is the case, I can demand changes that would render them less unfair. As an aesthetic subject, I am "granted by the culture" (ibid., 96) of democratic *Sittlichkeit* the opportunity to reflect on how I perceive and emotionally experiences aspects of the world. Further, I am licensed to let my faculties play freely with these aspects, that is, to re-imagine or experimentally transform them. Against this

backdrop, we can appreciate, for instance, that the consciousness-raising groups that were a central feature of the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s amounted to collective exercises of aesthetic relating: women came together to explore and share with each other how they perceive and emotionally experience all aspects of their lives.[20] And on this basis they then re-imagined what it could mean to be a woman, thereby performing "a poetic leap of the imagination forcing new insights into the roles women and men play" (Ware 1970, 113) in society.

Like other subspecies of recognition, aesthetic recognition is also mediated by norms of recognition. These norms always require interpretation, for even if human capacities are singled out as valuable, this does not settle the issue of what it means to give individuals the "consideration" (Honneth 2014, 124) they deserve as beings who possess these valuable dimensions of personality. Norms of legal recognition tell us, for instance, what rights and liberties we ought to grant individuals who are capable of making decisions for themselves. Norms of aesthetic recognition are about the consideration we owe each other as sensing, feeling, and imaginative beings.[21] However, since aesthetic recognition has so far been largely overlooked, our understanding of norms of aesthetic recognition and how to evaluate their appropriateness is still in the fledgling state.[22]

In my view, aesthetic misrecognition fuels a range of conflicts and demands for change in contemporary society. Struggles of aesthetic recognition turn on how (certain groups of) individuals (for instance, women, trans individuals, individuals who are subjected to racism) perceive, emotionally respond to, and re-imagine aspects of the *status quo*. Think, for instance, of neurodiverse students who underpin their demands for adjustments to their learning conditions by giving accounts of how they perceive and emotionally experience the current system. Often there is also a comparative element to such aesthetic struggles for recognition since (certain groups of) individuals have a sense that how they perceive, emotionally experience, and re-imagine aspects of the *status quo* matters less than how others perceive, emotionally experience, and re-imagine it.

Like other subspecies of recognition that are part of democratic ethical life, aesthetic recognition also has an egalitarian framing. Sense perception, emotions, and imagination are valuable capacities that all individuals possess, and aesthetic recognition is tasked with

ensuring that all members of society are socially encouraged and enabled to realize these valuable dimensions of their personality. Engaging aesthetically with the world is also essential for cultivating and realizing our individuality. For we would not be able to give an account of our individuality without reflecting on how we perceive, emotionally experience, and (re-)imagine the world. Further, without aesthetic recognition and aesthetic relating, citizens could not develop a sense that they are licensed to re-imagine and transform social life based on how they perceive and emotionally experience it.

Evaluation and comparison of the three models of aesthetic recognition

With this brief outline of my understanding of aesthetic recognition behind us, I can now carry forward my evaluation of Rancière's and Miller's takes on aesthetics and recognition by comparing aspects of their approaches with mine.

Rancière seems most concerned about the reifying effects of (what he takes) Hegelian recognition (to be). As a variant of ordinary recognition that combines epistemic and moral aspects, Hegelian recognition frames recognition as an "act" of "confirmation" (Rancière 2017: 85) of "entities" that "already exist[…]" (ibid., 83) in a social world. Rancière's own conception of philosophical recognition is designed to counter the reifying effects of ordinary (Hegelian) recognition since it is concerned with the conditions of possibility of ordinary (moral and epistemic) recognition. In what follows, I want to discuss first to whether, or to what extent, Honneth's and my take on recognition are vulnerable to Rancière's reification critique.[23]

As I see it, I am less exposed to this critique than Honneth since my notion of aesthetic recognition expands the range of relationships of recognition that make up democratic *Sittlichkeit*. The integration of aesthetic recognition into our account of democratic ethical life opens it up because it turns extant social roles, norms, and practices into potential objects of citizens' practices of aesthetic freedom. As aesthetic subjects, citizens are licensed to explore how they perceive features of social life, investigate their emotional responses to them, and re-imagine or experimentally transform them. In short, once aesthetic recognition enters the picture, citizens no longer encounter given social practices, roles, and norms as unalterable "facts" that they are "constantly compelled to antecedently recognize" (Honneth 2014, 111).

My expansion of the range of relationships of recognition that is familiar from Hegel and Honneth thus goes some way in terms of addressing worries pertaining to reification.

However, this response does probably not go far enough for Rancière since it does not change the fact that I am buying into Honneth's understanding of recognition, which, according to Rancière, is based on an "identitarian conception of the subject" (Rancière 2017, 85). In other words, one prong of Rancière's attack is directed at Honneth's notion of the subject of valuable capacities that underpins his notion of recognition. This becomes apparent in Rancière's critique of Honneth's understanding of "progress" (ibid., 93). Honneth conceives progress as a development that, driven by struggles for recognition, ultimately aims for a recognition order that tracks and adequately considers all valuable capacities of individuals. Rancière speaks in this regard of "a dynamic of progressive integration of new capabilities" that is "guided by … a telos of integrity" (ibid., 92).

Honneth cannot simply dismiss this critique since he rejects the "attributive model" of recognition according to which it is the act of recognition itself that endows a subject with a valuable capacity or dimension of personality. According to Honneth, adopting such an attributive model would render his theory of recognition vulnerable to charges of arbitrariness and relativism, for it would leave him without criteria of appropriateness in relation to the attribution of valuable capacities (Honneth 2002, 507). However, Honneth also shies away from adopting a straightforward realist "perceptual model" according to which "human beings" always "already possess" the "evaluative properties" (ibid.) that are tracked by recognition. Instead, Honneth gestures towards a weaker perceptual model, while acknowledging the "difficulties" that are involved in generating such a "moderate value realism" (ibid., 508).[24] Honneth wants to acknowledge that "the valuable qualities for which we can appropriately recognize someone have reality only within the experiential horizon of a particular lifeworld" (ibid.). Honneth is aware that this move entails "the danger of a form of relativism" (ibid.) rearing its head again. To avert this danger, he avails himself of "robust conception of progress" (ibid.) that not only tracks "cultural transformations of valuable human qualities" (ibid., 509) but evaluates "the appropriateness of acts of recognition" that form part of "a single culture" (ibid., 508). Such a "conception of progress" is supposed "to avoid … the unfortunate choice between completely ahistorical value realism and cultural value relativism" (ibid., 509).[25]

However, in Rancière's view, this combination of a "moderate value realism" with an understanding of "progress" as "the expanding differentiation of evaluative qualities" that we recognize "people as having" due to "our socialization" (Honneth 2002, 509) in particular life forms leads to an "overstatement of identity" (Rancière 2017, 86). For this account of "progress" postulates an "intended endpoint" of "historical change" (Honneth 2002, 509), that is, a recognition order that adequately conceptualizes and takes into consideration all valuable capacities of subjects.

I share Rancière's sense that the presupposition that history has a *telos* or an "endpoint" (ibid) is problematic. I therefore lean towards a version of moral realism that is less demanding than Honneth's and does without such a robust notion of progress. At the same time, I find myself in agreement with Honneth that we need to hold on to the epistemic dimension of ordinary recognition by endorsing a weak realist notion, according to which recognition tracks valuable capacities. I would argue that human capacities are never just given, they emerge since they need to be conceptualized, cultivated, and actualized in particular ways in distinct socio-cultural settings. In my view, there is therefore an inescapable degree of indeterminateness pertaining to human capacities that manifests itself, for instance, in the historic variability of recognition orders. This significant leeway in terms of how human capacities are conceptualized, cultivated, and linked with distinct recognitional statuses and practices is thus incompatible with an idea of progress that postulates a "telos of integrity" (Rancière 2017, 92) or an "endpoint" of "progress" (Honneth 2002, 509). My take also puts into question the idea that we can simply compare two recognition orders and determine which is the more progressive one (since to undertake such comparative evaluations one always has to fall back on conceptualizations of human capacities which, in turn, are rooted in "a particular lifeworld" (ibid., 508)).

The changes to Honneth's value realism that I propose suffice, in my view, to address Rancière's worry that Hegelian approaches are (necessarily) linked with a reifying "identitarian conception of the subject" (Rancière 2017, 85). For Hegelians can acknowledge that there is an unavoidable indeterminateness (or a degree of imaginative freedom) with regards to how we conceptualize, departmentalize, cultivate, and socially realize human capacities. And due to this indeterminateness, the subject of capacities can never be fully identical with itself. Finally, my modifications to and expansion of Honneth's theory of

recognition also result in a more transgressive notion of democratic ethical life since it opens it up to different ways of conceptualizing, cultivating, and packaging human capacities – assuming these transformations are driven by egalitarian framings of these "valuable qualities" (Honneth 2002, 508).

I would like to add one further aspect to this discussion. I have highlighted that the Honnethian understanding of recognition is shaped by culture on a deeper level, even though recognition does not track particular cultural identities but valuable capacities. For the way in which we conceptualize, compartmentalize, cultivate, and transpose valuable human capacities into social statuses and practices is deeply cultural. To be aware of this is very important since this insight needs to inform our approach to the complex issues of interculturality and de-colonization. For example, one legacy of European colonialism that, to my knowledge, has not received the attention it deserves from Hegelian recognition theorists, consists in the imposition of conceptualizations of human capacities and associated social statuses and practices on cultural communities around the world.

To conclude my discussion of Rancière, I want to briefly consider a feature of his approach that is related to the above discussion. Rancière himself endorses a notion of "equal capacity" (Rancière 2017, 93), which he thinks is compatible with embracing a "model of the subject as self-constructed in a process of 'subjectivization'" that is "first" and foremost a process of "'dis-identification'" (ibid., 92). An example might help to render Rancière's thinking a bit more accessible: The history of modern democracy is plastered with protests of (groups of) individuals against their being excluded or treated as less than equals in their society. Think, for instance, of the struggles of women and "workers" (ibid., 93). Individuals engaging in such protests "enact", according to Rancière, their "denied" "equal capacity to discuss common affairs" (ibid.), they are not confirming a social identity. To the contrary, they are "breaking away from their given identity in the existing system of positions" (ibid.). They are also not claiming a particular identity because "they affirm the *common* capacity, the *universal* capacity as the capacity of those to whom it is denied in general, or the capacity of *anybody*" (ibid.). Rancière's understanding of "equal capacity" (ibid.) is thus not linked with a particular social or cultural identity. The "capacity of *anybody*" is a capacity that goes "beyond all specific capacities, that is, beyond any capacity that is recognized as being specific to particular social places, positions, or identity. It is the capacity of anyone" (ibid.). The upshot of this is that the subject of "equal capacity" is never identical with any particular

social identity. However, it could be argued that the Rancièrian subject is always fully identical with itself, or at one with itself, as the subject of the "capacity of anyone" (ibid.). Rancière himself thus ends up with a distinct version of an "identitarian conception of the subject" (ibid., 85), albeit one that cannot manifest itself in any social order. What is not contingent, according to Rancière, is thus this "equal capacity" (ibid., 93) which every contingent social order '"presuppose[s]" (ibid.) but cannot realize. The upshot of this discussion is that Rancière's version of recognition seems to embrace a distinct version of the epistemic and moral aspects of recognition. Rancièrian recognition is epistemic since it tracks this "equal capacity" (Rancière 2017, 93) and it is moral since he maintains, on this basis, that all social orders instantiate a "wrong" (Rancière 1999, 21–42) due to them involving arbitrary hierarchies and inequalities. However, it would have been interesting to hear more from Rancière about whether social orders can be more or less wrong.

The final part of this chapter is dedicated to expanding on my critical discussion of Miller's approach. To begin, I would like to highlight some problems with his argument that Honneth's account of recognition is 'incomplete' (Miller 2021, 154) due to it failing to reflect on how the aesthetic conditions the recognition of cultural identities. Firstly, Honneth explicitly rejects the idea that the "recogni[tion] of cultural differences" (Honneth 2003, 169; also 160–170) denotes a distinct relationship of recognition. According to Honneth, recognition does not track identities but valuable capacities. Against this backdrop he then argues that demands for cultural recognition can either be captured by "innovative application[s]" of the "recognition principle of legal equality" (ibid., 169) or they amount to unreasonable demands for "social esteem" (ibid., 168). I agree with Honneth that cultural recognition is not a subspecies of recognition. Miller's critique of Honneth thus presupposes something that Honneth explicitly rejects, namely, that it makes sense to speak of the recognition of cultural identity. To put it differently, Miller fails to appreciate that his argument only applies to Taylor's "politics of difference" since Taylor, unlike Honneth, embraces a notion of recognition that aims directly at "the social recognition of particular identity forms" (ibid., 150; Taylor 1992, 25). It therefore makes sense to argue that given Taylor's framing, it is problematic that he does not appreciate that the "recognition" of cultural identity is "contingent on the perception" and representation "of cultural identity" (Miller 2021, 154). In other words, it is an omission that Taylor does not reflect on how we

can identify and challenge "failure(s) of recognition" that are due to the "*misperception*" and misrepresentation "of cultural identity" (Miller 2021, 154).

What is more, by linking his insight that the aesthetic conditions recognition with the recognition of cultural identity, Miller also obscures its wider significance. I think Miller is right to claim that the aesthetic conditions recognition, but to unpack this insight, we first need to transpose it from a Taylorian to a Honnethian framing of recognition. If we do that it becomes apparent that the aesthetic conditions all subspecies of recognition. There is, for instance, ample empirical evidence that socially prevalent but problematic notions of race, gender, and class affect how individuals are perceived, emotionally experienced, and imagined (to be or to behave), which, in turn, can have an impact on whether and how these individuals are recognized as moral, legal, aesthetic, economic, and political subjects.

Against the backdrop of these remarks, I can now indicate how my thesis that aesthetic recognition denotes a subspecies of recognition (model 3) interacts with the claim that the aesthetic conditions recognition (model 2). My claim is that we can salvage Miller's insight that the aesthetic conditions recognition if we revise it in such a way that it becomes compatible with the Honnethian understanding of recognition and my own claim that aesthetic recognition denotes a subspecies of recognition. This can be achieved by framing the conditioning thesis in the following way: How individuals perceive and emotionally respond to others and how they imagine them (to be or act) affects whether they see them beings that deserve a social status (as equal moral, legal, aesthetic, economic, or political subject) and how they apply norms of recognition in their interactions with them. If we rephrase Miller's thesis in this fashion, we can also appreciate that he is right to speak of a "systematic neglect" (ibid., 26) with respect to Honneth. For Honneth does not thoroughly reflect on the fact that the aesthetic can affect and derail (all subspecies of) recognition. The upshot of this is that recognition theorists need to think harder about what it could mean to critically reflect on how (groups of) individuals are perceived, emotionally experienced, and imagined (to be or behave). In short, theorists of recognition need a critical theory of aesthetics.[26]

Yet, conditioning is not the only way in which the aesthetic and recognition interact. We ought not to lose sight of the fact that how individuals perceive, emotionally respond to, and

(re-)imagine the world is also (not just instrumentally) intrinsically valuable. Sense perception, emotions, and imagination denote valuable dimensions of our personality that are tracked by a subspecies of recognition, namely, aesthetic recognition. Via aesthetic recognition we can also makes sense of why cultural identities matter to individuals without reifying these identities or grounding claims for consideration in particular identities. For when we give an account of our identity, we engage with how we perceive, feel about, and (re-)imagine the world and ourselves. And aesthetic recognition implies that we owe each other consideration as perceiving, feeling, and imaginative beings. In sum, my model, according to which aesthetic recognition denotes a subspecies of recognition (model 3), complements a (revised) version of the model that states that the aesthetic conditions recognition (model 2*).

Conclusion

??????In this chapter, I argued that the disregard for the aesthetic in the literature on recognition is problematic. I outlined my original claim that aesthetic recognition denotes a subspecies of recognition. Furthermore, I reconstructed and evaluated two alternative models of how the aesthetic and recognition interact. The first alternative model, Jacques Rancière's, equates the aesthetic with recognition. However, this model is unsuited to underpin a differentiated social analysis and critique. The second alternative model, Jason Miller's, maintains that the aesthetic conditions the recognition of cultural identities. I highlighted that Miller's account of the aesthetic marginalizes the free play of facilities. What is more, Miller fails to clearly distinguish between Taylor's and Honneth's version of Hegelian recognition. His criticisms of Honneth therefore miss their target. Furthermore, he obscures the significance of his core insight. In response, I delineated a revised version of his claim that the aesthetic conditions recognition. Against this backdrop, I then argued that this revised model of how the aesthetic conditions recognition complements my own model which frames aesthetic recognition as a subspecies of recognition.[27]

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[1] For instance, there is no mention of aesthetics in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on "Recognition" (Iser 2019).

[2] I owe this example to Franco Palazzi (2023).

[3] I develop my approach in detail in my unpublished monograph *Aesthetic Freedom: Modern Aesthetics and Democratic Life* (working title). See also Schaub (2019).

[4] In his famous article "On Sense and Reference", Frege maintains that two "names or descriptions" can "*denote*" (Zalta 2022) the same phenomenon, even if they have a different meaning or "sense". That is why a statement of the form "a = b" (e.g., "aesthetics = recognition" or, to use one of Frege's examples, "the morning star = the evening star") is informative in a way in which the statement "a = a" is not.

[5] See Deranty (2010) for an overview of Rancière's view on regimes of art.

[6] I assume Rancière regards this variant of recognition as "philosophical" because making explicit conditions of possibility is traditionally seen as a "philosophical task".

[7] My guess is that Rancière speaks of a "structure" of recognition to emphasise the isomorphism between recognition and aesthetics: "Structure" is in relation to recognition what "distribution" is in relation to the sensible.

[8] For a similar worry, see Rockhill (2014, 169).

[9] For a similar claim about moral address, see Congdon (2021).

[10] Miller makes the additional claim that contemporary art has become a key site for negotiating cultural identities (Miller 2021, 3, 14) and a "significant medium for effecting social change" (ibid., 5–6), invoking case studies like the painter Kehinde Wiley (ibid., 164–170).

[11] Hegel displaces the aesthetic from the mature account of modern ethical life in his *Philosophy of Right* (1821). Honneth mentions the possibility of "aesthetic freedom" (Honneth 2014, 384n476) denoting a distinct form of freedom only in one footnote in *Freedom's Right*. See Schaub (unpublished manuscript, Chs 2, 4, 6).

[12] The following overview of how Honneth conceptualizes these subspecies of recognition is based on *Freedom's Right* (2014). In his earlier work, Honneth distinguishes three subspecies of recognition, which he calls "love", "rights", and "solidarity" in *Struggle for Recognition* (1995, 92–130), and "love", "law", and "achievement" in *Redistribution or Recognition* (2003, 138–150).

[13] See also Schaub and Odigbo (2019, 104–106).

[14] For a more detailed reconstruction of Honneth's account of democratic *Sittlichkeit*, see Schaub (2019, 77–79) and Schaub (unpublished manuscript, Ch 3).

[15] See, for instance, Davies (2016) and Grote (2017).

[16] A case in point is Guyer (2014a, 27; 2014b, 8).

[17] I outline and defend my account of modern aesthetics in my unpublished monograph (Ch 1).
[18] A systematic overview of my account of aesthetic recognition is provided in Schaub (unpublished manuscript, Ch 4).
[19] Of course, a full account of a subspecies of recognition requires more than identifying the relevant capacity or capacities. For instance, economic recognition presupposes that a subject has the capacity to make valuable contributions to productive cooperation. However, economic recognition is also sensitive to whether and how subjects make use of their productive capacities.
[20] See Ware (1970, 108–119) and Reed (2005, 89).
[21] I assume that norms of recognition are conditioned by ethical relationships (in the Hegelian sense). For instance, as a lecturer it is my responsibility (not the university's gardener) to consider how my neurodivergent students perceive and emotionally experience their teaching environment, and to take seriously their suggestions for change.
[22] It is true that recent years have witnessed a resurging interest among political philosophers in (particular) emotions and the imagination. See, for instance, Nussbaum (2012) and Cherry (2021). However, these works do not directly address the issue of norms of aesthetic recognition, that is, the question of what kinds of consideration we owe each other as sensing, feeling, and imaginative beings.
[23] I already indicated above that Miller could deflect some of the force of Rancière's reification critique by adopting an account of the aesthetic that fully embraces the free play of faculties.
[24] For an insightful discussion of Honneth's moderate value realism, see Congdon (2020).
[25] Honneth underestimates, in my view, the philosophical obstacles involved in developing such a "robust conception of progress" (Honneth 2002, 508). His own attempts to establish a culture-transcending standpoint or "neutral perspective" (Honneth 2014, 5) that would enable us to evaluate the relative merit of different recognition orders are, in any case, inadequate. On this issue, see Allen (2016, 80–121) and Schaub (2015, 114–120).
[26] For an outline of such a critical theory of aesthetics, see Schaub (unpublished manuscript, Ch 6).
[27] I would like to thank Timo Jütten, Wayne Martin, and the two editors of this volume for their insightful feedback on previous versions of this chapter.