RECOGNITION

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INVISIBILITY: ON THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF 'RECOGNITION'

In the 'Prologue' to his famous novel *The Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison's first-person narrator tells of his 'invisibility': as this ever anonymous 'I' reports, he is, indeed, a real 'flesh and blood' man, but 'one' simply wishes not to see him, 'one' looks straight through him; he is quite simply 'invisible' to everyone else. In regard to the question of how he came to be invisible, the narrator answers that it must be due to the 'construction' of the 'inner eye' of those who look through him unrelentingly. By this he means not their 'physical eye', not, therefore, a type of actual visual deficiency, but rather an inner disposition that does not allow them to see his true person. Only a few pages later do we as readers learn in an off-hand way that the person reporting his invisibility is black; for those who look through him in this way are, in passing, referred to as 'white'. With the aggressive, angry, abrupt statements of the first-person narrator, the 'Prologue' creates a scenario describing an especially subtle form of racist humiliation against which the black protagonist struggles through the entire novel: a form of being made invisible, of being made to disappear, that evidently involves not a *physical* non-presence, but rather non-existence in a social sense. In the following, I will take my lead from the metaphorical meaning of the concept of invisibility in order to consider the question of how we can grasp the act of 'recognition' epistemologically. My point of departure is the hypothesis that the difference between these two forms of invisibility is illuminating for our topic because it indirectly reveals what must be added to the perception of a person—to taking cognizance of him—in order to make it into an act of recognition. First, I will elaborate the difference between the literal and figurative meaning of 'invisibility'. This

will enable me then to deal directly with the question of the meaning of recognition in sections II and III.

I

Cultural history offers numerous examples of situations in which the dominant express their social superiority by not perceiving those they dominate. Most notorious, perhaps, is the fact that the nobility were permitted to undress in front of their servants because the latter were simply not there in a certain sense. The peculiarly active character of these instances of invisibility involving physical presence distinguish them from those portrayed by Ralph Ellison. In the latter cases, the protagonists, specifically the white masters, intentionally seek to make clear to blacks, who are physically present, that they (the blacks) are not visible to them. The colloquial expression for such active forms of intentional invisibility is 'looking through' someone. We possess the capacity to show our disregard to persons who are present by behaving towards them as if they were not actually there in the room. In this sense, 'looking through' someone has a performative aspect because it demands gestures or ways of behaving that make clear that the other is not seen not merely accidentally, but rather intentionally. It probably makes sense to differentiate the degree of injury as a result of such invisibility according to how active the perceiving subject is in the act of non-perception. This can extend from the harmless inattention displayed in forgetting to greet an acquaintance at a party, through the absent-minded ignorance of the master of the house vis-à-vis the cleaning lady, whom he overlooks because of her social meaninglessness, all the way to the demonstrative 'looking through' that the black person affected can understand only as a sign of humiliation. All of these examples are cases of a single type because they share the property of being forms of invisibility in a figurative, metaphorical sense. Because each of them is without any doubt visible, the 'acquaintance', the 'cleaning lady', and the humiliated black person represent distinct, easily identifiable objects in the visual field of the subject in question; as a result 'invisibility' here cannot designate a cognitive fact but rather must mean a kind of social state of affairs. However, in regard to invisibility of this kind, it seems misleading to speak merely

of a metaphorical meaning, as I have done so far. For the affec-
ted persons in particular, their 'invisibility' has in each case a real
core: they actually feel themselves not to be perceived. However,
'perception' must mean more here than it does in the concept of
seeing, that is, of identifying and cognizing something or
someone.

It makes sense at this point to shift from the negative concept
of 'invisibility' to the positive one of 'visibility' in order to elabor-
ate the previously mentioned distinctions more clearly. The per-
ceivability of a certain object, in this case, a human subject,
corresponds in a positive respect to the literal invisibility resulting
from sight disorders or optical hindrances. Human subjects are
visible for another subject to the degree in which he is able to
identify them, according to the character of the relationship, as
persons with clearly defined properties, for example, as the
acquaintance with the exaggerated laugh, the cleaning lady of
Portuguese descent who regularly cleans one's apartment on
Mondays, or, finally, the fellow traveller in the train compart-
ment who has a different skin colour. Visibility in this sense des-
ignates more than mere perceivability because it entails the
capacity for an elementary individual identification. The concep-
tual discrepancy that becomes apparent between visual invisi-
bility and visibility is due to the fact that, with the transition to
the positive concept, the conditions governing its applicability
are more demanding: while invisibility in the visual sense means
only the fact that an object is not present as an object in another
person's perceptual field, physical visibility requires that we
cognize it within a spatio-temporal framework as an object with
situationally relevant properties. Consequently, only with diffi-
culty can we say of someone who is falsely identified by the per-
ceiving subject, let us say, as a neighbour instead of the cleaning
lady, that she was not physically visible. On the other hand, how-
ever, we also cannot simply assert of this other person that she
was visible to the perceptual subject in question, since he, in fact,
did not cognize this person at an elementary level. I suggest,
therefore, that physical visibility implies an elementary form of
individual identifiability and, accordingly, represents a first,
primitive form of what we call 'cognizing' (*Erkennen*).

From here it is not at all easy to clarify the concept that is
supposed to represent the positive counterpart to 'invisibility' in

the figurative sense. As we have seen, it is a 'visibility' of this kind that Ellison's protagonist implicitly hits upon when he describes his form of 'invisibility' as a subtle form of humiliation by whites. However, what can the first-person narrator actually intend when he demands that he be 'visible' to his partners in interaction? Certainly, he does not mean the previous type of visibility, which I described as an elementary form of individual identification. For, on the contrary, in order to experience himself as 'invisible' in a figurative sense, the subject must have already made the assumption that he has been taken cognizance of as an individual within the spatio-temporal order. The subject can only claim of another person that she looks through, ignores, or overlooks him if he has already ascribed to that person the achievement of a primary identification of him. To this extent, invisibility in the figurative sense presupposes visibility in the literal sense. Perhaps we can approach the matter in question more easily if we ask ourselves how the affected subject believes he knows of his own social invisibility. Ellison's novel, which is a treasure trove for a phenomenology of 'invisibility', again offers a preliminary answer to this question. Even on the second page of the 'Prologue', the first-person narrator attempts over and over again to counter his own invisibility through an active 'striking out' that is aimed at prompting others into cognizing him. Even that which is described in the text as striking out 'with his fists' is most likely meant in a figurative sense and is probably supposed to describe the core of the various practical efforts through which a subject attempts to make himself noticed. But the metaphor makes clear that what the subject affected strives to provoke through his counter-measures is itself a visible reaction by means of which the other person expresses the fact that she perceives the subject. To be sure, if a subject can confirm his own visibility only by forcing his counterpart into actions that affirm his existence, this means conversely that the subject can establish his invisibility only through the absence of such types of reactions: from the perspective of the individual affected, the criterion according to which he ensures his visibility in a figurative sense is an expression of specific ways of reacting that are a sign—an expression—of taking notice of something or someone in a positive sense. Consequently, the absence of such forms of expression is an indication of the fact that he is not visible socially for his counterpart in this specific sense.

An alternative to this description could consist in the thesis that even 'looking through' represents only a special form of perception: the subject affected is viewed by another person as if he were not in the room. But a characterization of this kind, which draws on the multifaceted meanings of 'seeing as', obscures the fact that 'looking through' generally designates a public fact: not only the affected subject, but also the other persons present in the room, can normally establish that the overlooking or ignoring is of a humiliating kind. Social invisibility gains this public character only because it is paradoxically expressed in an absence of the emphatic forms of expression that are usually connected with the act of individual identification. Consequently, it seems more sensible to me to elucidate the phenomenon of 'invisibility' in the figurative sense with the help of the complex relationships that exist among human beings between perception and expression. The 'making visible' of a person extends beyond the cognitive act of individual identification by giving public expression, with the aid of suitable actions, gestures or facial expressions, to the fact that the person is noticed affirmatively in the manner appropriate to the relationship in question; it is only because we possess a common knowledge of these emphatic forms of expression in the context of our second nature that we can see in their absence a sign of invisibility, of humiliation.

Now, if we see an elementary form of 'recognition' in the phenomenon that I have up to now described as 'becoming visible' in the second, non-visual sense, the difference between 'cognizing ' (*Erkennen*) and 'recognizing' (*Anerkennen*) becomes clearer. While by cognizing a person we mean an identification of him as an individual that can gradually be improved upon, by 'recognizing' we refer to the expressive act through which this cognition is conferred with the positive meaning of an affirmation. In contrast to cognizing, which is a non-public, cognitive act, recognizing is dependent on media that express the fact that the other person is supposed to possess social 'validity'. On the elementary level on which we have up to now been operating in regard to the phenomenon of social 'invisibility', such media may still be regarded as equivalent to physically based expressions. However, all this still does not really explain what it is that is supposed to be expressed with the relevant expressions in the act of recognition.

II

In view of what has just been said, it could appear as if the act of recognition is due to an adding together of two elements: cognitive identification and expression. A certain person is first of all cognized as an individual with particular properties in a particular situation, and, in a second step, this cognition is given public expression in that the existence of the person perceived is confirmed before the eyes of those present through actions, gestures or facial expressions. However, the question is of course whether the expressive acts merely represent a public demonstration of the cognition that a person with particular properties can be found in a particular place. Are not rather the expressions, whose absence the socially invisible man complains of, something quite different in meaning from the expressions by which we confirm the perception of an individual's existence? For confirmation of this kind it would, indeed, generally be sufficient to point a finger at a particular person, to obviously nod one's head in her direction, or to confirm her existence explicitly through a speech act. But all that does not seem to capture the significance of the forms of expression that we expect reciprocally of one another in order to be 'visible' for one another—in order, that is, to receive social confirmation, in a sense that remains to be clarified. It seems to me to begin with that a suitable way of moving beyond this point is to return to the gestural and facially expressive signals with which a small child is as a rule introduced into social interactions by caregivers. It should then be possible, starting from there, to formulate a generalized answer to the question what those expressions stand for whose absence we complain of when we understand ourselves to be invisible in a figurative sense.

It is Daniel Stern's empirical investigations that have recently given us improved insight into the complex interactions through which the small child develops into a social being in the course of communication with his caregivers.[1] Drawing on the pathbreaking work of René Spitz, Stern was able to show that the socializing development of the child in the first year takes the form of a process of reciprocal regulation of affect and attention

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1. Daniel Stern, *The First Relationship: Infant and Mother* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 18 ff.

that comes about to a large extent with the help of gestural com-
munication. The caregiver has at her disposal a broad repertoire
of gestural and facial expressions that are supposed to give the
child highly differentiated signals of her readiness to interact. On
the other hand, the small child can make use of an entire spec-
trum of reflex-like activities that, in reaction to the gestural
stimulation of the caregiver, can develop into the first forms of
social response. Among the various gestures a special role is
assigned to the class of facial expressions that are supposed to
let the child know that he is the recipient of love, devotion and
sympathy. Occupying the first place here is the smile that is per-
formed in a reflex-like manner. Alongside of this, other forms of
facial expression can also take place; by a prolonging of the dur-
ation or by physical exaggeration, these facial expressions com-
municate especially clear signals of encouragement and
willingness to help.[2] With this class of affirmative gestures and
facial expressions we have to do with a special, almost automati-
cally practised, form of the multiple expressions with which even
adults can signal to one another in a fluid manner that they are
extending sympathy or paying attention. Stern himself makes the
connection with adult greeting rituals that make known, by way
of a subtly nuanced game of changing facial expressions, the par-
ticular social relationship in which the adults stand.

The various positive ways of behaviour with which caregivers
react to the small child evidently have their roots in dispositions
that are intimately connected with the body image and expressive
movements of small children. It is not the case that we must first
acquire a cognition that permits us to perceive in our counterpart
a small child in need of help before we can then apply the appro-
priate gestures of encouragement and of sympathy. Rather, we
seem as a rule to react directly to the perception of the small child
with expressive responses in which a fundamentally affirmative
attitude is expressed. The difference here may also be formulated
as follows: in the first case, only a kind of cognitive conviction
is demonstrated; in the second case, a motivational readiness is
signalled directly. Indeed, it would probably be more appropriate
here to speak of positive expressive gestures (of smiling or of
encouragement) than of the symbol of an action, because they

2. Ibid.

substitute for action 'in symbolic abbreviation'.[3] This formu-
lation makes most clear what the expressive responses with which
the caregiver reacts to the small child stand for. These expressive
responses do not articulate a cognition of just any type, but
rather express in abbreviated form the totality of the actions that
are supposed to be accorded to the small child on the grounds of
his situation. To this extent, recognition possesses a performative
character because the expressive responses that accompany it
symbolize the practical ways of reacting that are necessary in
order to 'do justice' to the person recognized. In the felicitous
formulation of Helmut Plessner, one could say that the
expression of recognition represents the 'allegory' of a moral
action.[4]

With these reflections we have, admittedly, abandoned the
original horizon of our argument, because with terms such as
'doing justice to' and 'according to' a vocabulary comes into play
that has a moral-theoretical character. The detour through
research on infants was undertaken because the facial expressions
of adults in relation to children make especially clear what those
forms of expression through which a human being becomes 'soci-
ally' visible consist in: they are prelinguistic gestures of smiling
and of empathy by means of which infants learn to emerge soci-
ally by signalling for the first time their readiness for interaction
with these reactive smiles. In answer to the question what these
affirmative expressive responses of adults stand for, it was shown
that they express, in symbolic abbreviation, actions that are sup-
posed to serve the well-being of the infant. Through their facial
expressions, caregivers signal to infants that they are actively
engaged in caring practices; in this way they help them to develop
means of reacting that reveal a social form of openness to the
world. Before I pursue further the question of what the moral
core of these forms of expression looks like, I want first of all to
consider whether relationships of recognition between adults also
display this kind of expressive form.

In the context of our recourse to infant research, it has already
been mentioned briefly that changing facial expressions of smil-
ing and of sympathy represent only a special, particularly plastic,

3. Cf. Helmuth Plessner, 'Lachen und Weinen', in his *Philosophische Anthropologie*
(Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1970), pp. 11–172, esp. 72.
4. Ibid., p. 73.

form of the expressive gestures that play a large role in interactive relationships between adults as well. Even adult persons usually make clear reciprocally in their communications, through a multitude of finely nuanced, expressive responses, that the other is welcome or deserves special attention: a friend at a party is worthy of a sparkling smile or a strongly articulated welcoming gesture, the cleaning lady in one's apartment is offered a gesture hinting at gratitude that extends beyond the speech act of greeting, and the black person is greeted like all other persons in the train compartment with changing facial expressions or a quick nod of the head. Of course, all these forms of expression vary considerably between different cultures; nonetheless, their constitutive function for interpersonal communication remains constant. By replacing or enhancing speech acts, or independently of them, these expressive responses are supposed to make clear publicly to the person in question that she has been accorded social approval, or possesses social validity, in the role of a specific social type (friend, cleaning lady, fellow traveller). It would be a simple matter to extend the list of positive forms of expression developed up to now by a series of further examples in order to show of what fundamental importance they are for the co-ordination of social action. However, nothing shows their central function more clearly than that their absence is normally considered an indicator of a social pathology that can end in a condition of 'invisibility' for the person affected. For this reason, if we see in the expressive responses mentioned the fundamental mechanism of becoming socially visible and, in this in turn see the elementary form of all social recognition, the implications are far-reaching. For every form of social recognition of a person then depends—in a more or less mediated way—on a symbolical relation to the expressive gestures that in direct communication ensure that a human being attains social visibility. In the same way in which Niklas Luhmann spoke of a symbiotic relation of each form of power,[5] we can take as our point of departure a symbiotic foundation of every form of recognition, no matter how generalized: recognition of a person comes about only with the help of media that, by virtue of their symbiotic structure, are modelled on the expressive bodily gestures with which human

5. Niklas Luhmann, *Macht* (Stuttgart: Enke, 1975), ch. 4.

beings confirm their social validity to one another. This dependency of recognition on expressive gestures results from the fact that only such bodily gestures are capable of articulating publicly the affirmation whose addition constitutes the difference between cognizing and recognizing. Only those who see themselves as having been taken cognizance of positively in the mirror of the expressive behavioural modes of their counterparts know themselves to be socially recognized in a elementary form. But it now becomes all the more pressing to address the question of what the affirmative expressive responses stand for that, with Plessner, I previously termed 'allegories' of a moral action.

III

Of course, the expressive gestures through which human subjects reciprocally demonstrate recognition already represent a certain form of behaviour: by smiling at or extending a welcoming gesture towards another person, we take up a position in her regard and, to this extent, perform an action. On the other hand, however, this kind of expressive behaviour also contains a reference to a multitude of other actions because it signals in symbolically abbreviated form the kind of subsequent actions in which the actor is prepared to engage. In the same way as, in the case of the infant, the caregiver's smile symbolically stands for loving behaviour, a welcoming gesture among adults expresses the fact that one can subsequently reckon upon benevolent actions. Expressive gestures, therefore, are actions that themselves possess the character of a meta-action insofar as they symbolically signal a type of behaviour that the addressee legitimately may expect. Now, if recognition in its elementary form represents an expressive gesture of affirmation, it follows, to begin with, that it also represents a meta-action: by making a gesture of recognition towards another person, we performatively make her aware that we see ourselves obligated to behave towards her in a certain kind of benevolent way. For this reason, the first-person narrator of Ellison's novel can conclude from his condition of social invisibility that those who 'look through' him do not have any intention of treating him in a respectful or in a benevolent way; on the contrary, in this case the absence of gestures of recognition is supposed to signal that the person affected must be prepared for hostile actions.

The idea that expressive acts of recognition represent meta-actions may also, in slightly altered terminology, be understood as a reference to the type of motivation that is demonstrated. With his gesture of affirmation, the actor gives expression to the fact that he possesses the 'second order' motivation to act only on those impulses and motives towards the addressee that are of a benevolent nature.[6] Here, in most cases the nuance of a particular gesture makes pretty clear the type of benevolent action it is supposed to be: by smiling lovingly, one articulates a motivational readiness for caring behaviour; by greeting someone respectfully, one expresses instead a negative readiness to abstain from all merely strategic actions. We are now in a position to make a connection to the Kantian concept of 'respect', which brings us closer to the moral core of 'recognition'.

In a famous formulation in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, Kant says of 'respect' (*Achtung*) that it is 'the representation of a worth that infringes upon my self-love'.[7] I want to focus to begin with on the second half of the sentence, coming back to the first part later on. The manner in which Kant in the subordinate clause speaks of something infringing upon my 'self-love' makes clear that here it is not the subject herself that imposes a burden on herself; it seems rather that the act of 'respect' as such has the active power, with the result that the suppression of egocentric inclination in the subject takes place, as it were, necessarily. To this extent, it would also be a mistake to speak of a mere resolve to limit oneself, because in the expression of respect 'self-love' is already infringed upon. Simultaneously with the expression of respect, the subject acquires a motivation vis-à-vis the respected 'worth' to forgo all actions that would simply be the result of egocentric impulses. It is this second-order motivation that builds a bridge to the analyses that I have undertaken up to now in relation to the act of recognition: in the expressive gestures that normally signal first-order recognition, exactly the same motivational readiness is expressed that

6. Partly based on: J. David Velleman, 'Love as a Moral Emotion', *Ethics* 109 (1999), pp. 338–74.

7. I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, translated and edited by M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 14. The Paton translation refers to 'reverence' as 'awareness of a value which demolishes my self-love' (I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, translated and analyzed by H. J. Paton, New York: Harper and Row, 1948, p. 67).

Kant describes in terms of 'infringing upon my self-love'. The Kantian formulation makes even clearer what is meant by the moral aspect of recognition to which I have hitherto referred with terms such as 'confirmation', 'affirmation' and 'according social validity'. A decentering takes place in the recognizing subject because she concedes to another subject a 'worth' that is the source of legitimate claims infringing upon her own self-love. 'Confirmation' or 'affirmation' thus means that the addressee is equipped with as much moral authority over one's person as one knows oneself to have in being obligated to carry out or abstain from certain classes of actions. Of course, this formulation should not be allowed to obscure the fact that here 'allowing oneself to be obligated' represents a type of voluntary motivation: by recognizing someone and conferring on him a moral authority over one in this sense, one am at the same time already motivated to treat him in the future according to his worth.

If this characterization captures the shared moral core of all direct forms of recognition, the differences between them are already apparent in the multitude of gestures that can give expression to the act of recognition. Whether someone smiles lovingly or merely greets one respectfully, whether someone extends his hand emphatically or merely nods his head in a benevolent way, in each case a different type of emotional readiness to engage morally with the addressee is signalled with the expressive gesture. Corresponding to the multitude of gestures are different assessments of worth that the subject is able to extend to her partner in interaction at any given time: the addressee may be considered worthy of love, of respect, or of solidarity; however these are no more than a few possibilities from a whole spectrum that is opened up in the fine distinctions that hold between the various expressive gestures of recognition. Once again, with Kant, we must keep hold of the idea that all these assessments of worth can only be the evaluative aspects of a property that he designates the 'intelligibility' of the person: whether we consider another human being to be loveable, worthy of respect, or worthy of solidarity, what is displayed in each case in the experienced 'worth' is merely a further aspect of what it means for human beings to lead their lives in rational self-determination. If at times this 'representation of a worth' refers more to the way in which life is coped with biographically (love) and,

at other times, more to a type of practical commitment (soli-
darity), in the case of respect it pertains to the very fact that
human beings have no alternative but to be guided reflexively by
reasons; to this extent, the last of the three attitudes mentioned
is not susceptible to further gradation, whereas the other two
forms of recognition may be increased to various degrees.[8]

With this discussion, we are in a position to take stock pro-
visionally, and so able to answer the question what the emphatic
expressions of recognition previously mentioned are supposed to
stand for. Concerning the facial expressions and gestures with
whose help human beings demonstrate recognition in direct com-
munication, we have seen that they cannot simply serve to
reinforce an act of identifying cognition: the character of a signal,
which such expressive responses possess, extends far beyond
mere claims about existence or about properties, for these
responses demonstrate a motivational readiness to limit oneself
to benevolent actions in regard to the other person. It is this
motivational readiness that, with the help of Kant, we can now
see as the result of an assessment of worth that is accorded to the
intelligibility of human beings: what is made clear in expressive
gestures of recognition is that a subject has already carried out
a restriction of her egocentric perspective in order to do justice
to the worth of the other person as an intelligible being. To this
extent, morality can in a sense even be said to coincide with rec-
ognition, because taking up a moral attitude is possible only
when the other person is accorded an unconditional worth by
which one's own behaviour is to be checked. Clearly, the form
of social invisibility that Ralph Ellison tells us about represents
a form of moral disrespect because the absence of gestures of
recognition is supposed to demonstrate that the first-person nar-
rator, unlike other persons, is not attributed the worth due to an
'intelligible' person. Admittedly, this conclusion gives rise to a
further problem that leads us back to the distinction between
'cognizing' and 'recognizing' with which we began our discussion
of 'invisibility'. For even in Kant it is not at all clear how we
should explain the 'representation' of the worth of a person that
he considers to be the prerequisite of all respect: is such a rep-
resentation the result of a mere ascription, or does it represent a

8. Stephen L. Darwall, 'Two Kinds of Respect', *Ethics* 88.1 (1977), pp. 36 ff.

form of cognition, indeed of perception? Up to now, I have
argued that recognition cannot be comprehended as the mere
expression of a cognition, because it means more normatively
than the simple reinforcement of an individuating identification;
what occurs in recognition is rather the expressive (and conse-
quently publicly accessible) demonstration of an assessment of
worth that accrues to the intelligibility of persons. However, if
this assessment of worth can itself be conceived only as a particu-
lar kind of cognition, then even the opposition between cognizing
and recognizing, which up to now has supplied the guiding
thread for my argument, would have to be revised.

The expressive behaviour with which the caregiver reacts to
the needy small child once again provides the key to an answer.
Even today it is not yet entirely clear to what extent the express-
ive behavioural repertoire of adults is a legacy of natural history
or a product of cultural socialization. At any rate, it is accepted
that the smile shown to the infant is more or less a reflex, for it
is not produced by way of a conviction of any kind to the effect
that it is necessary to respond to a partner in interaction who is a
needy small child. Caregiving adults neither ascribe to the infant
specific properties of neediness, nor do they operate on the basis
of a knowledge of his condition; rather, what they do in smiling
can best be captured by saying that they give expression directly
to a perception. Now, it is not entirely easy to describe this per-
ception itself as already a form of assessment of worth, because
it is not entirely clear whether it is at all the product of cultural
socialization. However, to the degree in which smiling detaches
itself from its roots in natural history and so becomes something
which we can dispense more freely, it presumably has to be
understood as the expression of a perception that is accorded to
the infant as a creature who is loveable. The early form of recog-
nition that caregivers extend to the small child by means of their
expressive behaviour is the expression of a perception of proper-
ties that refers symbolically to the future of an intelligible person;
and the first smile with which, after a few months, the small child
reacts to the facial expression of the caregiver marks the moment
in which this world of 'worthy' properties is disclosed to him for
the first time.[9]

9. René A. Spitz and U. M. Wolf, 'The Smiling Response: A Contribution to the
Ontogenesis of Social Relations', *Genetic Psychology Monoprints* 34 (1946), pp. 57–
125.

Through our attention to research on infants a further form of perception with strongly evaluative features has become apparent alongside the individuating identification that has up to now served as our paradigm for perception. From the manner in which adults perceive their children it is evident that human perception cannot be as normatively neutral as the concept of individuating cognition implies: the properties that are perceived in the context of gestural communication between caregiver and child are not cognitive markers of an act of identification but rather symbolic representations of an assessment of worth that refers to the freedom of intelligible beings. At least in this case, therefore, the relationship between cognizing and recognizing has to be specified a little differently than I have done up to now in my discussion of 'visibility'; for while it is true that recognition does not represent the expressive demonstration of a cognitive identification of a human being, it is indeed the expression of an evaluative perception in which the worth of persons is 'directly' given. I now see no reason not to extend the special case of early childhood socialization to the social world in its entirety and to make a claim for this kind of evaluative perception in the case of interactions among adults as well.[10] By way of a differentiation of the perception by which he originally sees in the facial expression of his caregiver a reflection of his own potential as an intelligible being,[11] the growing child learns to infer from his partners in interaction different assessments of worth that are always perceptions of his intelligible nature. In the end, within the framework of the evaluative vocabulary of his social world, the adult has at his disposal a range of possibilities for perceiving the 'worth' of a person of which the fact of intelligibility given in the human face remains the fundamental layer throughout.

If what Kant termed the 'representation of a worth' takes the form of an evaluative perception, a capacity for which every adult who has been socialized successfully normally has at her disposal, this has far-reaching consequences for the relationship between cognizing and recognizing. The act of recognition is, as

10. Cf. Cora Diamond, 'Eating Meat and Eating People', in her *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 319–34.

11. Cf. Donald Winnicott, 'Mirror Role of Mother and Family', in his *Playing and Reality* (London, 1982), pp. 11–18.

we have seen, the expressive demonstration of an individual decentering that we carry out in response to the worth of a person: we make known publicly by means of corresponding gestures and facial expressions that we concede to the other person a moral authority over us, on the basis of their worth, that sets limits to the realization of our spontaneous impulses and inclinations. However, as soon as we see that this experience of the worth of a person takes the form of a perception that begins with the reactive smiling of the small child, the merely cognitive identification of a human being seems to lose its apparent natural priority over recognition. At least genetically, recognizing precedes cognizing insofar as the infant infers from facial expressions the 'worthy' properties of persons *before* he is in a position to grasp his environment in a disinterested way. However, what holds for the small child is also of fundamental importance for the adult: in the context of social interaction with others, we usually become aware of the 'worthy' properties of the intelligible person first of all, so that the merely cognitive identification of a human being represents the exceptional case in which an original recognizing is neutralized. Corresponding to the priority of recognition in our social form of life is the prominent status of gestures and facial expressions with which we demonstrate to one another in general a motivational readiness to be guided in our actions by the moral authority of the other person. To this extent, the social invisibility from which the protagonist of Ralph Ellison's novel suffers is the result of a *deformation* of the human capacity for perception with which recognition is connected—or, as the author put it, 'a matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality'.

(Translated by Maeve Cooke and Jeff Seitzer.)