

## **Social Invisibility and Emotional Blindness**

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**Abstract:** The unsettling, humiliating, and often threatening experience of feeling oneself ‘invisible’ before the gazes of other people in one’s social world has obvious potential as a theme for collaborative efforts between social theorists and phenomenologists. This chapter proposes one way of approaching such an engagement, drawing in particular upon three authors who offer detailed analyses of social visibility and its potential pathologies: Axel Honneth, Frantz Fanon, and Edmund Husserl. The specific phenomenon is first located by way of Honneth’s treatment of social invisibility as frequented by behaviour that expresses an attitude of nonrecognition towards other persons immediately present. Drawing from Fanon (and others), it is then argued that Honneth’s generally perceptive analysis, by focussing primarily on cases involving the seeming absence of all emotive recognition, underestimates the role of certain (dehumanizing) emotional responses in conveying to persons their ‘invisibility.’ While the exact relationships holding between perception and affect remain largely unexplored in Honneth’s work, the chapter goes on to consider these relationships phenomenologically by drawing upon Husserl’s unpublished writings on emotion and social experience. Moreover, it is suggested that the form of nonrecognition involved with social invisibility can be understood as a manifestation of a broader danger implicit within affective life, that is termed ‘emotional blindness’. Briefly put, it is proposed that the ‘invisibilizing gaze’ manifests an affective response that, while sometimes partially co-responsive to social perception and understanding, is contaminated with associative configurations that lead our feelings astray.

## Social Invisibility and Emotional Blindness

*James Jardine*

“I don’t know what white people see when they look at a negro anymore, but I do know, that—I realized when I was very young—that, whatever he was looking at, it wasn’t me. It wasn’t me. It was something he was afraid of, it was something to which he was attracted, or which he found repulsive. But it wasn’t me. I was not a man.” James Baldwin<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The unsettling, humiliating, and often threatening experience of feeling oneself *invisible* before the gazes of other people in one’s social world—succinctly captured in the above excerpt from a 1960 television interview with the African-American novelist and essayist James Baldwin, but still today routinely lived by some members of social minorities, and other (historically or contemporarily) oppressed groups—has obvious potential as a theme for collaborative efforts between social theorists and phenomenologists. The present chapter proposes one way of approaching such a collaborative engagement, drawing in particular upon three authors who offer detailed analyses of social visibility and its potential pathologies: Axel Honneth, Frantz Fanon, and Edmund Husserl. The specific phenomenon will first be located by way of Honneth’s account of the manner in which social invisibility becomes manifest, namely in behaviour that expresses an attitude of nonrecognition towards other persons immediately present. As we shall see, Honneth ultimately suggests that the cognitive dimension at issue here—that is, what is conspicuously absent in invisibilizing social interactions—involves patterns of bodily expression that convey a (positive and context-appropriate)

*emotive* attitude towards the other. Accordingly, his account implies that affect plays an essential role in enabling us to see others in an affirmative or recognitive (rather than merely cognitive) fashion, such that it is the presence of certain affirmative emotional expressions that conveys to others their social (rather than merely literal) visibility. While this emphasis on the affective preconditions of social visibility strikes me as promising, in the second part of the chapter it will be suggested that Honneth's account of social *invisibility* is limited by its sole focus only on those cases where a mere *lack* of emotional responsiveness to others is present. For, as thinkers such as Fanon and Baldwin emphasise, one's invisibility before others may also become manifest through the *emergence* of actual (dehumanizing) emotional responses to one's perceptual presence.

While the essential relationships holding between perception, valuing, and emotion remain largely unexplored in the work of Honneth and Fanon, the third part of the chapter will consider these relationships phenomenologically by drawing upon Husserl's unpublished writings on affect and social experience. As Husserl's fine-grained analyses show, our emotive responses to perceptually present others are lived as embodied and evaluative attitudes which *target* others in their perceptual presence, and simultaneously as ways in which we *see* others as having new forms of (affective and axiological) significance. Moreover, I will suggest that the form of nonrecognition involved with social invisibility can be understood as a specific and accentuated manifestation of a broader danger implicit within affective life, that I will term *emotional blindness*. My account of this phenomenon draws upon Husserl's discussion of what he terms "blind" or "inauthentic" emotional responses: that is, cases of affective intentionality that evaluatively construe their intentional object in a fashion that is responsive more to certain preconceptions or associative horizons, than to the matter concerned as it actually documents itself in experience. More exactly, it will be suggested that the inhuman gaze which provokes a sense of social invisibility typically manifests an instance of emotive response (be it fear, disgust, or sheer indifference) that is "blind" in this sense. In other words, I will argue that the

manner of looking that conveys to others their social invisibility—or what could be termed an “invisibilizing gaze”—is infused with affective construals that, while sometimes partially co-responsive to social perception and understanding, are contaminated by associative configurations that lead the gazing person’s feelings astray.

## **I. Social Visibility and Invisibility**

Honneth’s examination of the phenomenon of social invisibility occupies a key function within his broader attempt to establish and motivate a systematic “recognition theory”: that is, a reinvigorated form of critical social theory that is sufficiently responsive to the psychological, normative, and political significance of mutual recognition between persons. In this broader philosophical framework, Honneth proposes three basic varieties of social recognition or acknowledgement (*Anerkennung*)—love and emotional support within intimate personal relationships, respect for each individual’s basic dignity as enshrined in reciprocally accepted legal rights, and shapes of social esteem or solidarity that are capable of valuing a diversity of specific identities and attributes (rather than privileging the self-understanding of dominant groups)—before arguing that participating in a nexus of social relationships that embody these three forms of recognition is a necessary precondition for identity-formation and social freedom. Moreover, Honneth contends that it is not only in their presence that such relationships of recognition affect human life, but also in their felt absence. That is, socialised human persons possess a repertoire of “moral expectations” delineating the kind of recognition they expect from others; and if someone’s actually experienced social relationships frustrate their recognitional expectations, they will often desire, and feel inclined to (individually or collectively) demand, the transformation of those relationships. The task of Honneth’s recognition theory is then to develop a more general account of the role played by mutual recognition in partially constituting autonomous and fully satisfying human agency; but at the same time to gear this

theoretical framework towards the thematic elaboration of a number of far-reaching dissatisfactions with historically constituted “recognition orders”—including grievances that have not yet been given explicit political articulation. By means of such elaboration, Honneth’s recognition theory ultimately aims to contribute to the critical development of various political demands, particularly as advanced by progressive social movements seeking to challenge and transform facets of the prevailing social order (which Honneth thematises as “struggles for recognition”).<sup>2</sup> Since he takes the phenomenon of social invisibility to involve the denial of “an ‘elementary’ form of recognition” (Honneth 2001: 115)—“elementary,” primarily because its absence or presence is, as we shall see, already exhibited at the pre-discursive level of immediate and involuntary bodily expression<sup>3</sup>—the task of providing a compelling account of this phenomenon is clearly of urgent importance for his broader critical-theoretical project.

In order to convey a preliminary sense of the opposed phenomena which his analysis of invisibility seeks to clarify, Honneth gives an initial priority to first-personal descriptions of one’s own sense of social visibility or invisibility, a choice that is presumably based upon his belief that these two social conditions leave a deep impression on the persons they afflict—with one’s own social invisibility being something lived through in a particularly visceral manner. Accordingly, he writes that to be socially visible involves living in a social world in which one’s “interactive relationships” with others permit a stable sense that one is “affirmed” or accorded “social validity” with respect to the “role of a specific social type” (2001: 119). This can be helpfully contrasted with the experience of one’s own social invisibility, which Honneth describes as “non-existence in a social sense” (2001: 111). The socially invisible person repeatedly suffers the humiliating experience of encountering others who fail to offer any visible acknowledgement that she or he is someone enacting a specific social role, or even that that they are a human subject *tout court* (2001: 114). Honneth’s prime example of such invisibility is the first-person narrator of Ralph Ellison’s novel *Invisible Man*: an African-American

man who feels himself rendered “invisible” by the near-constant and ritualized manner in which white Americans “look through” and actively and publicly fail to “see” him as a person. Referring to the distinction between love, respect, and solidarity as three forms of recognition analysed in his more systematic works, Honneth suggests that social invisibility in this sense represents a primitive form of disrespect, in as much as it involves a peculiar kind of nonrecognition that refuses to acknowledge the basic humanity of the other person (2001: 123). However, this mode of disrespect clearly differs from more overt forms of disrespect or dehumanization, in that it does not require actions that actively violate a person’s basic rights. Honneth’s task in his analysis of invisibility is therefore to elucidate what is involved with the specific form of disrespect that generates, in the person disrespected, such a sense of non-visibility.

In setting out to achieve this task, Honneth first emphasizes that, at least when contrasted with a more strict notion of invisibility—that would characterize only those entities that entirely lack any visual presence and availability for perceptual judgement—the kind of non-visibility to others reported by the narrator of *Invisible Man* must be understood as involving invisibility in a somewhat “metaphorical” or “figurative” sense (2001: 111-112). Experiencing one’s own social invisibility before others is not a matter of taking oneself to be wholly invisible to another person in a more literal sense, since it does not entail being completely absent from the other’s visual field. Correlatively, Honneth draws a distinction between “literal visibility” and “figurative” or “social visibility,” and aims to clarify what is absent in cases of social invisibility by investigating what more is required, in addition to mere literal perceptibility, for the emergence of social visibility in the context of an interpersonal encounter (2011: 111).

Importantly, Honneth claims that the additional cognitive ingredient required for social (rather than literal visibility) will not typically be a particular kind of speech act, one that would perhaps verbally

affirm the other person's visible presence or social validity. Rather, it is often through non-linguistic form of bodily expressivity—as enhancing or entirely replacing speech acts—that others impress upon us our visibility or invisibility in a social sense, since social statuses of this kind can be conveyed without any linguistic communication being necessary (2011: 119). Accordingly, Honneth suggests that paradigmatic instances of social invisibility involve interactions where one person fails to exhibit, before another, certain context-appropriate bodily gestures and facial expressions; and that the absence of such behaviour is significant for our sense of social visibility because it serves to express, not merely a perceptual grasp of our spatial presence, but a certain kind of evaluative affirmation that we ordinarily expect from other people in a given social context. Honneth offers the following examples of such non-linguistic expressive gestures:

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. (Honneth 2001: 119)

In Honneth's discussion of such recognitive gestures, a number of intriguing claims emerge, although for the current purposes it will suffice to focus on just two. On the one hand, Honneth argues that such bodily movements can be described as a kind of "meta-action" (a concept that he takes from Helmuth Plessner), in the sense that they make it clear to the other person that their agent is willing to act in a particular type of way towards them in the future, hence allowing the other to form an expectation of the kind of treatment she will be in for as the encounter unfolds. Thus, as Honneth puts

it, “a welcoming gesture among adults expresses the fact that one can subsequently reckon upon benevolent actions,” while “the absence of gestures of recognition” suggests, in the space of the encounter, that the other “must be prepared for hostile actions” (2001: 120). A powerful illustration of someone’s behaviour non-linguistically expressing a total absence of human recognition towards certain others—and thereby provoking a pronounced sense of insecurity in them—can be found in a passage from Audre Lorde’s semi-autobiographical novel *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Here, the narrator recollects the anxiety that the cold and hostile gaze of a museum guard generated in her Grenadian mother:

She did not know her way in and out of the galleries of the Museum of National History, but she did know that it was a good place to take children if you wanted them to grow up smart. It frightened her when she took the children there, and she would pinch each one of us girls on the fleshy part of our upper arms at one time or another all afternoon. Supposedly, it was because we wouldn’t behave, but it was actually because beneath the neat visor of the museum guard’s hat, she could see pale blue eyes staring at her and her children as if we were a bad smell, and this frightened her. *This* was a situation she couldn’t control. (Lorde 2018: 10)

On the other hand, Honneth seems aware that, in noting that recognitive gestures serve to convey their agent’s willingness to act in a certain kind of way towards the other in the future, we have not yet fully accounted for the temptation to describe such gestures as giving expression to the other’s *visibility*. Of course, one could always seek to dismiss the implication that such gestures betray anything significant about their agent’s way of *perceiving* the other person concerned, an implication which may after all simply be generated by a loose and entirely metaphorical usage of the terms “visibility” and “invisibility” in relation to such gestures. But this is not the path that Honneth pursues. Rather, he ultimately argues that regarding the kind of recognition at issue here as involving visibility



in a *wholly* metaphorical sense is an untenable solution; and that what is required, at least for the sphere of interpersonal relations, is rather a broadening of our conception of visibility such that it necessarily requires recognitional, as well as merely sensuous and cognitive, aspects (2001, p. 125). More specifically, he suggests that the kind of recognition that the gestures discussed above serve to express should be understood as a kind of “evaluative perception,” in which the worth or value (*Wert*) of the other person is “directly given” (2001: 124-126).

Honneth draws upon a number of philosophical and empirical resources in support of his proposal that elementary recognition involves a crucial dimension of evaluative perception, but for the present purposes it will suffice to indicate two central motivations for such a claim. Firstly, while such recognitive gestures as sparkling smiles and welcoming nods convey a normative significance that is embedded within “the evaluative vocabulary” of a “social world” (2001: 125)—and in this sense involve a kind of appraisal of the other person’s value or worth, one that further implies a practical willingness to treat the other in a certain fashion as the encounter unfolds—it is nevertheless the case that the recognizing subject does not ordinarily live through an episode of deliberation in which an evaluative judgement is formed on the basis of justifying reasons. Indeed, if such an episode of deliberation were to occur prior to the extension of a recognitive gesture, the person to whom this gesture was extended may well be left with a somewhat uneasy and insecure sense of their own social visibility. The attitude of evaluative appraisal conveyed by the recognitive gesture therefore appears to be one of a “direct” or “immediate” variety (2001: 125), and conceiving of this attitude as an act of *perception* therefore looks, at first glance, more phenomenologically plausible than understanding it as an intellectually-formed value-judgement.

In later sections of the paper, it will be suggested that a more detailed phenomenological analysis of the experience of the recognizing subject can allow for a further development of this line of thought.

But let me now mention a second motivation for Honneth's suggestion that elementary recognition constitutes a form of evaluative perception, one that draws more upon the perspective of a subject who is deprived such recognition. As Honneth writes, for "the affected 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 someone or something" (2001: 113). This thought can be spelled out by reconsidering Lorde's depiction of a mother who is frightened by the museum guard's 'pale blue eyes staring at her and her children as if we were a bad smell'. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, to paraphrase Baldwin, for those who become the target of a gaze of this sort, whatever it is the gazer is seeing, *it isn't them*. That is, the guard's way of looking is so intimately bound up—at least for the persons to whom the stare is directed—with a construal of the mother and children as base or repulsive, that it seems plausible to stipulate that, from the mother's point of view, the guard's attitude appears to render him unable to see, in a quite literal sense, what (or who) is there before him.

Let me now briefly take stock of some of the central Honnethian claims regarding social visibility and invisibility highlighted so far. For Honneth, our sense of our own social visibility is something vulnerable to the expressive significance manifest in the gestures and facial expressions of the other people with whom we interact in concrete social situations. More precisely, this social visibility is threatened or undermined, leading to the distressing condition of social invisibility, in the absence of gestures on behalf of others that serve to convey, not merely our own perceptibility in a literal or sensory guise, but also that we have been noticed by others in a more affirmative or evaluative sense. Part of what this means is that such cognitive gestures indicate a motivational willingness to treat others in what Honneth describes as a broadly respectful or benevolent fashion, with the fine-grained practical (or meta-practical) significance of such gestures being dependent upon the specific interpersonal context and the type of gesture extended. But they also serve to convey a particular kind

of evaluative stance on behalf of the recognizing person, a stance which is not typically a matter of predicative judgement but which rather shares the immediacy and receptivity of perceptual experience.

## II. Social Invisibility and Affect

While I take Honneth's essay on invisibility to offer a number of interesting and potentially insightful claims concerning the phenomenology of social visibility and invisibility, it strikes me that one of the most intriguing suggestions that emerges in his discussion is one that he does not explicitly develop in this text. Namely, at one point Honneth suggests that recognitive gestures serve to convey a certain kind of affirmative evaluation of the persons to which they are extended, at least in part because they are typically experienced as expressive of a certain kind of *emotional stance*, one which is held by the recognizing subject and directed towards the other person. As Honneth writes: "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" (2001: 122, emphasis mine). While Honneth does not really expand on this remark, one way of understanding it would be to surmise that what the recognitive gesture most directly expresses is an *affective* evaluation of the other of one or another form; and that this emotional stance is furthermore immediately intelligible to the person recognized as having motivational consequences, namely as eliciting in the recognizing subject a desire to treat them in a fashion that is morally delimited by the positive evaluation contained within the interpersonal emotion in question.

In the next section, I will argue that phenomenological analysis of affective experience lends support to the thought that our emotional responses to others contribute an evaluative component to perceptual

experience, and that this can help clarify Honneth's suggestion that affect plays a crucial role for sustaining a sense of social visibility in concrete social interactions. But it will first be necessary to consider the implications of this suggestion for our understanding of the central phenomenon under consideration here, namely social *invisibility*. Now, a peculiar lacunae of Honneth's article is that—despite his detailed analysis of what is involved with the gestures and attitudes required for social visibility—the kind of behaviour that portrays others as socially invisible is described in merely negative terms, namely as involving the simple “absence” of recognitive gestures (cf. 2001: 115-116, 119-120, 123). Yet if we attempt to take seriously (and further elaborate) Honneth's suggestion that social visibility is conveyed through emotionally saturated bodily expressions, then the possibility emerges that invisibilizing activity involves some kind of “deformation” of a person's *affective sensibility* as regards (certain) others (cf. Honneth 2001: 126).

While Honneth does not concretely spell out what such a deformation of affective perception might involve—or indicate, in positive terms, how this affective deformation could become salient (as denying visibility) in the context of an interpersonal encounter—Danielle Petherbridge (2017) has recently offered a crucial supplement to Honneth's account that sheds light on just this issue. So as to offer a more detailed and concrete analysis of social invisibility, Petherbridge draws upon an expansive body of writings that address and articulate the lived experience of being perceived in a *racializing* manner. In such cases of invisibilizing perception, the perceiver conveys through their embodied gestures and movements to the person perceived that they are *seen as racially other*—that is, as instantiating a racial identity constructed and sedimented in the social imaginary of a dominant group (with which the perceiver themselves will typically identify). Moreover, as authors such as Ellison (1952)—but also Fanon (2008), Toni Morrison (2007), Alia Al-Saji (2014), and George Yancy (2017)—have illustrated, the invisibilizing force of various racializing perceptual habits is paradoxically intertwined with their tendency to impress upon the othered group a highly accentuated

form of essentializing visibility, such that racializing social encounters are often characterised by a dialectic of invisibility and hypervisibility (Petherbridge 2017: 106-110).

Building upon Petherbridge's rich and rewarding discussion, I would now like to explore one aspect of the invisibilizing gaze that, by my estimation, Petherbridge underemphasizes: namely, that racializing perceptual comportment often involves forms of bodily expressivity that, rather than intimating a total absence of emotional responsiveness, actively convey specific (though distorted and alienating) emotional responses to the racialized person. For instance, in Fanon's famous account of realising that his being-for-others was unrecognizably distorted—through the various racist interpretations permeating his embodied presence in colonial French society—a pivotal role is played by the evident fear and aversion that his bodily appearance elicited in white French people (Fanon 1952: 89-101; cf. Young 1990: 122-148). At least in this case, the invisibilizing behaviour does not betray a total absence of emotive expressiveness, but rather intimates an affective evaluation of the other person that actively construes them as base, threatening, or repulsive. Accordingly, the affective state of the person gazing is not merely inhibited by—but *constitutes and projects*—a culturally sedimented and racializing interpretation of the other person. While this emotive attitude is, in a sense, crudely elicited by the perceived person's bodily appearance, it also further configures their bodily presence to the perceiving subject, through the functioning of certain culturally sedimented emotive habits (cf. Al-Saji 2014: 140-141; Yancy 2017: 17-44). To adopt Fanon's fruitful technical vocabulary, my suggestion here is thus that such emotive habits play a positive and constitutive role in imposing, upon the racialised subject's lived body, a "historical-racial schema" (2008: 91). Seen from a broader perspective, the (sociocultural) formation of such habits within individual persons serves to disseminate and reproduce societal patterns of nonrecognition and invisibility, patterns that are lived through viscerally by the persons who are thus racialized in the respective social nexus.

### III. Husserl on Emotional Blindness and the Phenomenology of Affective Experience

In the previous section, it was suggested that, in a number of cases, invisibilizing modes of behaviour—as well as visibility-enabling recognitive gestures—possess a (non)recognitional significance, at least in part because they give expression to certain affective states. In the remainder of this chapter, I would like to focus on just two issues raised by this thought. Firstly, an obvious question to be raised here is whether emotions can indeed be regarded as playing the role that I, following Honneth and Fanon, have suggested we might ascribe to them. That is, the question here is whether emotions can really function as immediate, non-deliberative, and even quasi-perceptual interpersonal evaluative stances; stances that are both intentionally oriented towards other people in our current perceptual field, as well as being ways in which we experience those others as having a certain kind of value or axiological significance. Moreover, if it is granted that emotions *can* function in this way, then a further salient issue emerges: namely, that of the different personal and social circumstances that account for why we sometimes emotively recognise others, while sometimes denying them recognitive visibility. In this dual assessment of the plausibility and explanatory implications of the suggestion that an elementary form of recognition can be located in certain kinds of interpersonal affect, I will now turn to Edmund Husserl's work on the phenomenology of emotion. While the emotions cannot be regarded as a major theme in Husserl's phenomenological philosophy, detailed analyses of emotional experience, and its relationship to value and valuing, can be found in *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I*, as well as in his research manuscripts and lectures. Rather than offering here a detailed overview of the issues and problems addressed by Husserl in those writings (cf. Drummond 1995, 2006; Melle 2012; Jardine 2020b), my aim will rather be to indicate certain claims that I find particularly insightful and salient for the concerns of this chapter.

Husserl's writings on affective experience seek to investigate whether, and in what sense, a person's emotional state might constitute a distinctive form of evaluative attitude, one that is typically directed towards and targets worldly matters—including other people in the subject's immediate perceptual environment. Furthermore, like the kind of evaluation that Honneth finds implied in the significance of recognitive gestures, Husserl takes emotive valuing to be a peculiar kind of subjective activity that needn't involve—but rather offers an important starting point for—evaluative thinking. But this emphasis on the non-intellective character of emotional valuation does not imply that such experience is devoid of all intentionality or intelligibility. Rather, our emotive responses involve a pre-theoretical experience of things, people, or worldly contexts *as valuable* (or *disvaluable*), an experience that is phenomenologically akin to sense-perception, but that also introduces novel forms of (felt) evaluative significance that do not emerge at the level of perceptual experience in the strictest and most literal sense (Jardine 2020b). For Husserl, then, the commonplace intuition that emotions are frequently intentional states—that is, states of mind that *relate* to matters external to the emotion itself, and which also *construe* those matters in a particular way—is a thought that gains considerable support and confirmation from phenomenological analysis. Moreover, his phenomenological studies of emotional life can be regarded as significantly clarifying and deepening this thought, to the extent that they claim to unearth and investigate an evaluative mode of perception that, they argue, is both constitutive of and unique to emotional experience. As Husserl summarizes one of the key findings from his research manuscripts: “When I am angry, when I am passionately agitated by the loathsomeness of a person's way of acting, then the *seeing* of that person's loathsomeness resides precisely in the affective agitations themselves, and in the ray of attentiveness (turning-towards-the-person) that passes through such agitations” (Husserl 2020: 128, transl. & emphasis mine).

While I am unable to comprehensively illustrate this here, I take it that Husserl's explorations of the evaluative content of emotional states, and of their complex intertwinement with perception—

including the perception of other people, a theme with which Husserl was much occupied and which also emerges in his writings on the emotions (Jardine, 2020a)—have much to contribute to our understanding of social visibility and recognitive modes of affect and perception. For instance, beyond illustrating that, and how, the emotions introduce a (complex and internally differentiated) evaluative component into our direct experience of other people, Husserl’s analyses also explore the role embodiment plays in emotive valuing. Ultimately, he suggests that a number of lived bodily processes and activities experientially contribute to our affective evaluations, in that they transform and enrich the evaluative significance that the matter emoted has for us (Jardine 2020b). Accordingly, it seems to me that Husserl’s writings can be of significant import in further clarifying the relationships that hold between embodied gestures of recognition, emotive valuing, and perception.

Moreover, Husserl’s work might also shed light on some of the background conditions that enable the emergence of socially visibilizing—as well as socially invisibilizing—modes of behaviour in concrete social interactions. Particularly relevant here is Husserl’s distinction between “authenticity” and “inauthenticity” in the emotive sphere, or to employ terminology that Husserl occasionally uses, between feelings that disclose value intuitively (*Wertanschauungen*) and a certain kind of blindness that can afflict our emotions (*blinde Gefühle, blinde Affekte*).<sup>4</sup> To illustrate this distinction, we can consider two different examples of interpersonal affect that Husserl himself discusses. As an example of authentic (or value-disclosive) feelings, consider the case of speaking with a person to whom one already has a profound affective attachment, and feeling uplifted by joy as one witnesses their familiar and beloved personality become manifest in their spoken words, tone of voice, and distinctive facial expressions. In this case, we can say that our feelings of affection for the other person—and joy at being in their presence—find a certain kind of fulfilment in what is currently perceptually given to us: here, *what we like* about this person is not merely taken for granted or anticipated, but rather given to us in the other’s bodily comportment (Husserl 2020: 102-103, 113-114).



This can be contrasted with modes of affective valuing that are inauthentic or blind in the sense that they assume an underlying interpretation of their intentional object that lacks any grounding in our experience of the concrete matter in question. Rather than finding experiential fulfilment, such feelings rather rest upon an implicit belief or preconception that relates their concrete objects to others with which it is passively associated, as putatively belonging to the same generic kind. One example offered by Husserl of feelings that are blind or inauthentic in this sense is a situation where one dislikes someone simply because they share a name with a particularly unappealing fictional character. As Husserl writes, “What can poor Eulalie do, to change that I once read a novel, in which a monstrous woman was called Eulalie?” (1988: 410, transl. mine; cited in Loidolt 2009: 173). As this example illustrates, while our emotional responses to other people may be lived through as offering an intuitive sense of *their* value or disvalue, there may well be presumptuous associative apperceptions or intentional elaborations at play in this emotive valuation that lack any grounding in actual familiarity with the specific person concerned (cf. Husserl 1989: 286; Merleau-Ponty 2012: 379). These inauthentic elements of our emotive reaction to the person will draw upon a general and typifying affective sense of other people, one that may be fed by fictional and historical narratives, as well as reinforced by certain emotionally salient and socially propagated images.

While Husserl more often describes emotional attitudes that are particularly determined by such associative prefiguring as “inauthentic” or “inadequate,” he occasionally describes them as *blind* modes of affective intentionality (2020: 112-113, 452-453). Emotions are characterised by blindness in this sense, when they project a (pre-predicative) appraisal of an intentional object that is motivated, not by what the object has actually shown itself experientially to be, but rather by a sense of the object that is passively configured through its association with other (real or imaginary) objects familiar to the emoting person.<sup>5</sup> In applying this vocabulary to the problematic of social visibility, it seems to

me inevitable to concede that not only much invisibilizing and alienating social behaviour (such as racializing forms of aversion), but also many cases of positive recognitive response (such as friendliness towards strangers), are characterised by a degree of emotive inauthenticity (or blindness) in this Husserlian sense. However, it seems to me promising to further develop Husserl's conceptual distinctions by proposing that racializing modes of affective perception are characterised by a specific and accentuated form of emotional blindness, insofar as they involve a style of affective articulation of the other's perceptual givenness—as sustained through a set of culturally sedimented emotive habits—that essentially distorts the other's embodied presence, through affectively associating it with various demeaning (and in some cases animalizing) myths and images. Accordingly, Husserl's analyses of emotive inauthenticity—as well as his reflections on its habitual-motivational and social circumstances, and on the modes of engagement through which we can relinquish our emotive prejudices—may significantly contribute to our understanding of the functioning and genesis of invisibilizing perceptual and emotive habits, and of effective strategies for interrupting them (cf. Al-Saji 2014).

## **Conclusion**

In the first and second parts of this chapter, it was suggested that a person's sense of their own social visibility is something that can be undermined when other people's non-linguistic bodily expressions repeatedly convey to them that, while they are in some sense present in the other's visual field, they have not been noticed in an emotionally affirmative fashion. As we saw in the second part of this chapter, this claim can be further developed by appealing to authors such as Fanon, who emphasise that particular kinds of emotive reaction project an image of the embodied self that is distorted by

various racist and racializing preconceptions, images, and stories. In the third part, we saw that Husserl's work on the emotions can lend a degree of phenomenological credence to the thought that emotions can function as a kind of immediate evaluation of other people that are perceptually present to us, an evaluation that allows us to directly experience such others as having evaluative significance. Husserl's analyses, then, serve to further solidify Honneth's intuition that loving smiles and respectful nods of the head convey a kind of immediate and affective valuation of us, in our perceptual presence to others. Finally, it was suggested that developing a Husserlian concept of emotional blindness may be of aid in clarifying the conditions for the emergence of the kind of deformed emotional response generative of social invisibility.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> These lines are an excerpt from an interview conducted by Nathan Cohen, on *Encounter*, CBC-TV, December 11th 1960. In addition, Baldwin (1964) offers a seminal discussion of the role played by socio-historical contexts in racializing and invisibilizing forms of perception and affect.

<sup>2</sup> For an early and systematic presentation of this model, see Honneth (1995). Particularly important refinements of the account can be found in Honneth (2003; 2014). In addition, see the particularly helpful and illuminating presentations of Honneth's broader project in Petherbridge (2013), Zurn (2015), and Kauppinen (2002; 2011).

<sup>3</sup> The conception of "elementary recognition" found in Honneth's writings on invisibility is introduced in order to demarcate any form of recognition, insofar as it becomes manifest at the level pre-discursive and pre-reflective embodied engagement (2001: 115, 119-20). Accordingly, it differs subtly from the more restricted concept of elementary (or "existential") recognition discussed in Honneth's lectures on reification, which is explicitly distinguished from love, respect, and solidarity, and understood as a separate and distinct form of recognition (Honneth 2008: 152-153; cf. Jardine 2015; 2017).

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4 Husserl mainly develops this distinction in manuscripts and lectures dating (roughly) from the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this being the period in which he was most occupied with the phenomenology of the emotions (cf. Husserl 1988: 343-344, 408-411; 2020: 22-24, 112-113, 271, 450-453). However, this language also reappears in his later writings on affect (cf. 2004: 223; 2014: 282, 286-9; 2020: 510).

5 One important complication in this regard is Husserl's distinction between "affective apperceptions" or "apperceptions of value" (*Gefühlsapperzeptionen, Wertapperzeptionen*) on the one hand, and "reactive emotions" or "affects" (*reactive Gefühle, Affekte*) on the other, these being two distinct kinds of affective intentionality (or "intentional feeling"). While affective apperceptions are more intimately united with sensibility, and are at play whenever a perceptual object passively affects as (aesthetically) pleasing or displeasing, the higher-order emotional reactions are more active and spontaneous achievements, involving a form of "emotive position-taking." While the affective apperceptions are already passively motivated by the object as (ap)perceived, the reactive emotions have a more complex normative structure, and exhibit a greater responsiveness to the habituated convictions and evaluations of the emoting person (cf. Jardine 2020b). I take that it is this latter mode of affective intentionality that is of most significance for our recognitive responses to others, not only because the most (personally and interpersonally) significant forms of evaluation reside here, and because they have a more richly embodied dimension and are thus in many cases more perceptually salient to others, but also because such reactions imply a far richer horizon of motivating assumptions, and are accordingly more vulnerable to inauthenticity or blindness. However, it is equally important to emphasise that such emotive reactions are, on Husserl's account, typically motivationally conditioned by the value-apperceptions that comprise the more passive stratum of affective life, and a comprehensive phenomenological account of emotive (in)authenticity must accordingly consider both dimensions.

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