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Recognition and power: An analysis of Lois McNay's *Against Recognition*

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1 │ INTRODUCTION

Emerging in the early 1990s in the work of Charles Taylor (1994) and Axel Honneth (1995), recognition theory revitalized an old Hegelian notion in order to explain various social conflicts that surround issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and identity. The basic premise of recognition theory is that human beings come to understand themselves as human only through being acknowledged as such by others. I see your humanity and particular identity, reflect it back to you, and you do the same for me. Thus healthy normative relationships are developed between individuals and groups of people (the two are of course intrinsically and necessarily linked). Unfortunately, this *pure* recognition is all too often distorted into *misrecognition*, which means that we do not see each other in a positive light and thus do not treat each other as we ought (recent events in US amply demonstrate misrecognition surrounding race and ethnicity, to say the least).

The above-mentioned picture of recognition has come under scrutiny by some postmodernist and poststructuralist thinkers—thinkers such as Lois McNay (2008)—who argue that recognition theory *fails* to delineate one of the most important pieces of the identity puzzle, and one of the most important grounds of oppression: namely, power. The argument presented by McNay, who is not entirely unsympathetic to the notion of recognition, is that by focusing heavily on identity, in whatever form that identity may instantiate (be it race, gender, the combination of the two, and so forth), we lose sight of the material conditions that structure various power relations and the way those relations shape human subjectivity. Relying on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus," McNay argues that recognition ignores the power relations which shape class, race, gender, and so on.

My aim in this paper is threefold: first I will show that McNay's argument that power is central to identity formation is quite sound, and, as will be demonstrated in the final stretch of the exposition, it is also supported by several current streams of research within recognition theory. That is, I believe that if recognition theory is to be fully developed it *must* take power into account, and, furthermore, that it has in fact done so (see Carnivez, 2011; Ferrarese, 2009; Petherbridge, 2016; Testa, 2017). Thus, I will first sketch her argument and draw out its general implications. Secondly, by working through the historical roots of recognition in German idealism, especially as found in the work of Fichte and Hegel, I will demonstrate that rather than being a neglected feature of recognition, power has *always* in fact been a central component of the theory from its very inception. I will then provide a critique of her framing of identity formation in recognition theory itself by reexamining the work of contemporary recognition theorist Axel Honneth. Finally, I will demonstrate how recognition theory has incorporated notions of power into its basic structure by

examining the contemporary literature alluded to directly above. With the exception of Greta Snyder's (2020) recent work, whose aim is decidedly different than the argument presented here, not much ink has been spilled on this particular text of McNay's. As such, this paper will also serve as a much needed expansion on this body of literature.

2 | MCNAY'S CRITIQUE

In her book *Against Recognition* (2008), Lois McNay argues that the primary difficulty with recognition theory, that which ultimately undermines the very notion of recognition, lies in the fact that it has not developed an adequate account of power relations. McNay believes that much of recognition theory boils down to identity claims, which, she argues, cannot account for the unequal power relations that are embedded in things such as class inequality due to resource misdistribution. McNay writes:

> The normative 'redemptive' force residing in the ideal of mutual recognition constrains the way it is used as an analytical tool to explain how power creates unequal identities. In order to render recognition plausible as an ideal of self-realization and equality, sociological barriers to its possible implementation must necessarily be diminished or construed as contingent, secondary effects of power. Thus problematic aspects of the reproduction of subjectivity that pertain to the pervasive and insidious nature of social domination are underplayed (McNay, 2008, p. 8).

And

> The idea of a struggle for recognition permits that each thinker set up a primal dyad as the origin of social relations and to attribute to this dyad a fundamental function, whether it be communication, self-expression or a constitutive need for acknowledgement. Social relations are then assessed according to the extent to which they realize or distort this primal function. On this view, social relations of power are always a *post hoc* effect, distorting or otherwise, of some antecedent and primordial interpersonal dynamic (McNay, 2008, pp. 8-9).

The central strand of the argument above is that the various recognition theorists set up a duality between self and other to explain the initial formation of the social. Self and other come to the realization of themselves as subjects through this initial interaction. Self and other also develop their identities through this interaction, and injustice is seen as a reflection of whether or not one's identity is acknowledged. The problem with all of this, according to McNay, is that in this initial encounter between self and other power inequality (or equality) is never mentioned. Power is tacked on after the fact, but a proper theory of power is never developed by any of the recognition theorists. The main problem with the original picture of social development is that it fails to recognize power as playing a central role in identity formation. It is not something to be added to one's theorizing after identity and subjectivity have been accounted for. Rather, it is constitutive of the very structure of identity and subjectivity. McNay derives her notion of power from Pierre Bourdieu's sociological notion of "habitus." According to McNay, "habitus denotes a process through which power relations are incorporated into the body in the form of durable physical and psychological predispositions" (McNay, 2008, p. 12). This is envisioned to be a materialist account of power, where the effects of power relationships almost literally shape the very physical makeup of the subject. This physical makeup would include bodily comportment (we can think here of the different ways that men and women dress and behave in public due to unequal power relations), and it also includes the way the psyche is structured due to our interactions with each other in the world.

McNay does not want to reduce her notion of power only to claims surrounding identity, however. She believes that one must add the notion of agency into the picture, and this is to be understood in a multifaceted way such that it

includes class, race, gender, and, most importantly, power (McNay, 2008, p. 196). She tells us that "one of the problems of the limited conception of power that is deployed by thinkers in their work on recognition is that the idea of agency is often yoked too closely to unified ideas of identity" (McNay, 2008, p. 162). Taking a cue from Patchen Markell (2003), McNay argues that identity is not unified and stable in the way that it is conceived by Honneth (1995) and Taylor (1994); it is the result of action and of power relations. She thus argues that the recognition theorists'

> Tendency to understand social relations as extrapolations from a foundational dyad of recognition results in a reductive account of subject formation in relation to inequalities of power. The most problematic of these reductions is that the concept of recognition tends to bind an account of social action too tightly to the idea of identity…*It presumes that agency derives its shape from identity rather than action itself being constitutive of identity* (McNay, 2008, p. 164; emphasis is mine).

This reading of recognition states that the different theorists tend to assume that the impetus for action and the desire for social change comes from various and multifaceted conflicts surrounding identity. For example, one strongly affiliates with one's gender, let us say as a transgender woman, and chooses to act based around this identity in light of injustices perpetuated against one's gender. According to McNay, the difficulty with the above-mentioned notion is that the logical order is actually *opposite* of what is stated here. One does not start with an identity and act on it—one obtains or develops an identity from acting in different ways in the world, and said identity is primarily shaped through various macro and micro power structures.

3 | A DEFENSE OF RECOGNITION THEORY PART I: RECOGNITION AND POWER IN GERMAN IDEALISM

3.1 | Fichte's account of recognition

The first place to begin our inquiry into the relationship between recognition and power is at its roots in the Fichtean project. Fichte's *Wisseschartslehre* (roughly translated as a science of knowing or knowledge, but there is no true equivalent in English) represents the bulk of his life's work—a sprawling, often revised and restarted project, it contains roughly 15 full iterations of grounding all philosophical thought from the activity of transcendental ego and the transcendental ego alone. Its initial formulation is presented in 1794 and translated into English as the *Science of Knowledge*. The *Science of Knowledge*, written partially before Fichte began teaching a course on the topic after obtaining the much coveted chair of philosophy position in Jena, and, quite often, added to mere days before Fichte was set to teach the material, is a long unpacking of a what is essentially a single cryptic tautological proposition: A=A, or as he elaborates shortly thereafter, I=I. Following the Kantian dictum that the unity of all objective experience is dependent upon the unity of the transcendental subject even further than Kant himself, Fichte argues that all philosophical thought is grounded in the self-positing activity of a transcendental ego: "the self posits itself simply *because* it exists. It *posits* itself by merely existing and *exist* by merely being posited" (Fichte, 1982, p. 98). That is, the very conditions for the possibility of all experience, including the experience of an empirical ego or self, are contingent upon a unitary transcendental subject that "posits" its very own existence. Thus, the transcendental I or ego serves as the bedrock for the possibility of all other experiences or even proposition and it itself cannot be further reduced, thus taking the function of an axiomatic starting point for all philosophizing and all freedom (if the positing was coerced or forced, then the I could not, in principle, be a starting point or unconditioned since other factors would condition it).

This project is initially criticized by a myriad of Fichte's contemporaries as essentially solipsistic, as the I functions as its own self-contained universe for each individual agent. Yet this was not Fichte's intention, both insofar as he believes that *practical* philosophy has primacy over theoretical philosophy, thus necessitating ethics as first philosophy, and because he comes to the realization that the transcendental I is more properly to be understood as an

intersubjective *product* rather than a mere starting point. The *Foundations of Natural Right*, written a mere two years after the first publication of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, represents the text in which he first and best elaborates his notion of intersubjectivity as constituted by the recognitive process. This notion of intersubjectivity is in fact permeated by a concern with power at the very outset as power is at the very heart of the process of self-positing in its *concrete manifestation* in the materiality of the world. Fichte develops his argument for recognition around four fundamental theorems. I will first quote them at length and then systematically unpack their implications for recognition and its entanglement with power. Fichte writes:

1. A finite rational being cannot posit itself without ascribing a free efficacy to itself (Fichte, 2000, p. 18).
2. By thus positing its capacity to exercise free efficacy, the rational being posits and determines a sensible world outside itself (Fichte, 2000, p. 24).
3. The finite rational being cannot ascribe to itself a free efficacy in the sensible world without presupposing the existence of other finite beings outside itself (Fichte, 2000, p. 29).
4. The finite rational being cannot assume the existence of other finite rational beings outside it without positing itself as standing with those beings in a particular relation, called a relation of right (Fichte, 2000, p. 39).

Let us examine each of these steps in turn, always keeping in mind that while Fichte still begins with the same foundational structure of a transcendental I positing the existence of the empirical I (I =I), a move derived from the most basic of logical law of identity, the best way to read the argument is in fact *backwards* starting with point #4. The simple reason for this is that he is demonstrating that the conditions for the possibility of transcendental subjectivity are most properly found in transcendental *intersubjectivity*, itself ultimately politically constituted through a relation of right.

The first step is retained from the original 1794 presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, as the finite subject realizes itself as subject by the act of positing. What this concretely entails is that I the philosopher, in contemplating the series of external cascading causal conditions that are descriptive of the structure of the empirical world, come to a realization that I cannot break from the series of conditions without myself being unconditioned—that is, free. Thus, the very act of positing of an empirical I from a transcendental one must assume freedom as its starting point, making freedom the condition for the possibility of all further positing (and further philosophical inquiry). The second step entails a realization on behalf of the subject that a positing of freedom does not happen in the solipsistic vacuum, but that an I, in its very structure as an I, can only be understood by reference to *objects* or an external world (what Fichte dubs the "not-I" in his original formulation). That is, a free efficacy is meaningless abstract construct if it has no world to act upon, for then freedom would be mere freedom of thought and nothing further.[1]

It is here that the argument for recognition truly begins because in positing a not-I or objective existence, the I is *immediately* led out of subjective confines into a world of others, who are themselves freely positing their subjectivity. As Klaus Brinkmann (2002) points out in the essay "The Deduction of Intersubjectivity in Fichte's *Grundlage des Naturrechts*": "The coexistence of free agents and their interaction presupposes as an apriori condition the idea of a *community of individuals* that, from a transcendental point of view, is prior to these individuals. A "we" here undergirds and grows the freedom of the individual I" (p. 7). It thus be noted here that this world of others is not in and of itself derived from the first two steps, but rather that the first two step are possible only insofar an Other calls upon or "summons" me to act. The initial act of positing, retained in some way throughout the Fichtean corpus, is possible only because of the existence of others as it is these others who allow me to learn a language, philosophy, logic, and show me how to work through a philosophical derivation in the first place. Thus, it turns out that the initial transcendental conditions are themselves further conditioned by intersubjectivity and said intersubjectivity is only possible, according to Fichte, when I realize that I am in a "relation of right," making the transcendental subject *inherently political*.

This brings us to the question of power in Fichte. This very derivation described above demonstrates both *implicitly* and *explicitly* how power is at the heart of the project. The very act of positing is an *implicit* exercise of micropower, which is always already embedded in macropower since the Fichtean transcendental subject is inherently political. At the outset the subject demonstrates their power and agency through the very act of positing insofar as the positing

itself is the concrete manifestation, spilled into the world, of freedom itself. If we extrapolate from the conditions of the world as it actually is, where micropower is stifled and muzzled due to a vast variety of institutional factors (access to resources, oppression based on race and gender, and so forth), what could be more powerful than a self simultaneously grounding itself and the world?[1]

The further element that must be noted here is that the development of this subjectivity, explicitly constituted as political, requires *embodiment* in order for it have any kind of efficacy in the world. Fichte writes:

> Thus to say that a rational being as an individual has been affected is to say that an activity that belongs to it as an individual has been canceled. Now the complete sphere of the rational being's activity, as an individual, is its body; thus the efficacy in this body, the capacity in it to be a cause merely by means of the will, would have to be restricted, or—more concisely—an influence would have to have been exercised upon the person's body (Fichte, 2000, p. 59).

What the above entails is the transcendental subjectivity, made possible by intersubjective recognition, is in fact meaningless without a medium or conduit through which the will can shape others and thus the world. This is only possible, according to Fichte, if one has or is a body. The body is, quite literally, a locus of biopower, making the earliest piece of explicit recognition theory possible only through the mechanisms of power itself.

Fichte deals with power *explicitly* once establishing the above criterion that the transcendental subject is by necessity *embodied*, for only an embodied subject can claim and do anything in the world or not-I. Fichte's argument here shows some of the limits of his political liberalism insofar as he believes that embodied and social subjects cannot be allowed to do as they please unrestrained in the world, for this would bring about the dreaded *bellum omnium contra omnes*. He in fact seems somewhat frightened by the individual power[2] he has shown to be so very real due to its potential for vast disruption that he introduces an institutional counter-mechanism to correct for it—the law of coercion of coercive power. According to Fichte, "the law of coercion is supposed to function so that any violation of rights will result inevitably and with mechanical necessity (so that the violator can foresee it with complete certainty) in the same violation of the violator's own rights" (Fichte, 2000, p. 130). In and of itself this particular insight is not radically new to Fichte (unlike his account of recognition, which, with the exception of some suggestive passages in Rousseau, is the first fully developed one in Western thought). What he is arguing has a common thread throughout the early development of philosophical liberalism insofar as one needs a third party to adjudicate between violations of individual rights and contract disputes.

What is new is how he thoroughly and completely permeates this notion of a "law of coercion" with a discussion of micro and macro power. Fichte writes:

> Now what kind of power is this supposed to be? – This coercive power is guided by a concept and aims at the realization of a concept (indeed a concept that is constructed through absolute freedom), namely the concept of the limits posited by the two contracting parties in their contract concerning their efficacy in the sensible world; therefore, this power cannot be a mechanical power but must be a free one. Now such a power (one that would unite all these requirements within itself) is not posited apart from their own power, as determined by their common will. Thus, the content of the contract they make to establish a right of coercion between themselves is this: *both will to deal with the one of them who has wronged the other by applying the law of coercion to him with their united power* (Fichte, 2000, pp. 130-131; emphasis Fichte's).

The implications of the above statement for the intertwining of recognition and power are both clear and decisive. First and foremost, it demonstrates that the project of recognition is in principle incomprehensible and unenforcible, for Fichte, if the recognizing subjects do not submit their individual power to a series of self-imposed checks. That is, they must *freely* limit their absolute freedom that is manifested through the act of positing a self in order to adjudicate

between rights and power disputes that are inevitable in the political arena. Thus, Fichte has now explicitly shown *both* how macro and micro power follow from basic recognitive interactions. Power manifests at the macro level in the form of governmental authority, and affects the individual through what he dubs the "common will." Furthermore, this macrolevel power is constituted from the ground up by means of micropower since its ultimate authority is guided through the process of recognition (what is missing from this account is the power wielded by the capitalist class, which shapes so much of the other power interaction in contemporary life, but this criticism is unfairly anachronistic as Fichte could not have possible conceived that development from within his own political milieu).

3.2 | Hegel's account of recognition

Hegel likewise places power at the center of recognition theory at the very outset of the Master/Slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. After demonstrating how a "pure" recognition would work, where each conscious agent in its desire to fulfill itself as self-consciousness is acknowledged by the Other and simultaneously reciprocates said acknowledgment, he turns to the more familiar picture and historical reality of a struggle that ends in either death or servitude. The struggle there is essentially a *power* struggle. The master holds the power of death over the slave, who ends up holding the power of labor, and thus life, over the master. This power imbalance immediately leads to a stilted subjectivity, and for this reason it must be corrected in order to obtain full, mutual recognition. The correction of the stilted subjectivity does not happen from the standpoint of the master, who views the servant[3] or slave as beneath them and thus unworthy of recognition—it happens from the standpoint of the servant, who *begins* to see themselves not through the master's recognition but through the power of their own labor. Speaking of the servant, Hegel writes:

> In his service, he sublates all of the singular moments of his attachment to natural existence, and he works off his natural existence. However, the feeling of absolute power as such, and in particular of service, is only dissolution *in itself*, and although the fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom, in that fear consciousness is what it is that is *for it itself*, but is not *being-for-itself*. However, through work, this servile consciousness comes round to itself (Hegel, 2018, p. 115).

Thus, power (*Macht*) is explicitly being invoked here by Hegel to describe the transition away from mastery as the possibility for self-realization and toward servitude, insofar as mastery finds itself non-essential. It held, at an earlier point of the dialectic, the power of life and death, but this power loses its luster when the servant begins to realize their own subjectivity through the "absolute power" of their labor, a power that is not held by the master since they refuse to labor on principle.

The *Phenomenology* is by no means a final word on Hegel's notion of recognition. In a multitude of ways it is the *Philosophy of Mind* of 1830[4] that is indicative of his final position. There Hegel is much more explicitly clear on precisely how recognition and misrecognition play out in the idealized Master/Slave account, and he is clearer on how mutual, noncoercive recognition develops. As Williams points out:

> The outcome of master/slave is different from the *Phenomenology*. In the mature system, the possibility of mutual recognition transcends coercion and domination is clearly exhibited, and master and slave mutually and reciprocally achieve liberation together. From this perspective, the concept of reciprocal recognition is more completely developed in the *Encyclopedia* than in the *Phenomenology* (Williams, 1997, p. 69).

That is, in the *Encyclopedia Philosophy of Mind* Hegel demonstrates much more precisely how one is able to overcome the struggle which looks to be endemic to human life in its various shapes – a struggle that was elevated to the level

of dogma due to the disproportionate influence that Alexandre Kojève's read had on the reception on Hegel in 20th century philosophy, especially in Marxist circles (I think Kojève himself would not dispute my characterization of the work. His interpretation is also an important piece of philosophy in its own right). Showing the exact parameters of how mutual recognition plays out is outside of the scope of this paper, however. What is significant about this point is that Hegel is further thinking about how recognition concretely manifest itself in *Ethical Life* (*Sittlichkeit*), which is not an abstract formal ethics, but rather the *material* manifestation of a particular set of organizing principles that spill out into social and structural institutions. As Robert Pippin argues, "virtually everything at stake in Hegel's practical philosophy… comes down finally to his own theory of recognition and its objective realization over time and in modern ethical life" (Pippin, 2008, p. 29).

In the final rotations of the dialectical process working itself out at the level of the materiality of institutions, Hegel drives the point home that recognition and power are two sides of the same proverbial coin. He writes:

> The objective mind is the absolute Idea, but it is only so *in itself;* since it is thus on the terrain of finitude, its actual rationality retains in it the aspect of external appearance. The free will initially has these distinction in it immediately: freedom is the *inner* determination and aim and it enters into relation with an *external* objectivity that it finds before it, an objectivity that splits up into the anthropological factor of particular needs, external things of nature which are for consciousness, and the relationship of individual wills to individual wills, which are a self-consciousness of themselves in their diversity and particularity; this aspect makes up the external material for the embodiment of the will (2007, ¶ 483, p. 217).

Hegel's argument here is demonstrating the transition of "objective mind," which is the domain of human activity as it is manifested in the institutions of our own collective creation, from its one-sided, internal capacity and toward its concrete externalization into the world as such. In its initial manifestation said objective mind is apparent in a one-sided manner, showing freedoms' inner nature. However, this inner nature is never complete for a thinker like Hegel, and must concretely emerge into the world in order to make its "embodiment" apparent—its actual, *externalized power*. The embodiment does not happen in the abstract pontification of the philosopher's pen (or keyboard), but rather in its interaction between concrete human agents, their needs (which depend upon the historical moment, geographical location, and a host of other socio-political factors), and the material world itself. Finally, and most importantly for our purposes here, is what transpires at the *very next* rotation of the dialectic. Hegel writes:

> But the purposive activity of this will is to realize its concept, freedom, in the externally objective realm, making it a world determined by the will, so that in it the will is at home with itself, joined together with itself, the concept accordingly completed to the Idea. Freedom, shaped into the actuality of a world, acquire the *form of necessity*, whose substantial interconnexion is the system of the determinations of freedom, and its apparent interconnexion is *power, recognition*, i.e. its validity for consciousness (2007, ¶ 484, p. 217; emphasis Hegel's).

In what amounts to Hegel's most explicit and undeniable intertwining between recognition and power, Hegel here elaborates on the two terms as being *synonymous*. The realization of freedom in its external materiality is possible only through recognitive relationships, which, as we already saw in the discussion of the *Phenomenology* above, are always already completely enmeshed with power. Whether that power is lopsided and pernicious, as is in the case of misrecognition, or on an equal playing field, as is the case in pure recognition, is entirely contingent upon what phenomenon is being studied in its historical specificity. As such, we find power at the heart of recognition theory in its very inception, rendering the claim that it is an afterthought in recognition theory to be factually inaccurate.

4 | A DEFENSE OF RECOGNITION THEORY PART II: EXAMINING IDENTITY FORMATION FROM A RECOGNITIVE STANDPOINT

I believe that McNay's attack on recognition comes from a flawed perspective on the overall structure on the grounding conditions of the theory itself, even if we reductively assume that recognition is primarily or only about identity[5] and completely ignore the insights derived from the examination of Fichte and Hegel above—insights which situate recognition on the level of subjectivity/intersubjectivity, power, and agency. If we begin our theory genetically at the developmental level, as Honneth does in his systematic reconstruction of the early, unpublished Hegel in *The Struggle for Recognition* (see Honneth, 1995, p. 71 and forward), then recognition is the mechanism by which identity is achieved. At birth it simply cannot be the case that I have any preset identity. My understanding of who or what I am is contingent upon the way others recognize or misrecognize me, and I them, based on my sociohistorical position in the world. Depending on where and when one is born, certain aspects of identity will be played up. My experience as an Eastern European living during the wars in the Balkans in the early 1990s was shaped by an overemphasis on cultural and religious differences, for example. If I had grown up in the American South during the 1950s, then race would have factored much more heavily into the equation.

The basic point I want to emphasize again here is that *even if we reduce recognition to claims surrounding identity*, which is an unwarranted reduction of the theory itself, identity is not and cannot be a preset given. It is developed through complex interactions with others and it changes depending on people's responses to my actions and my appropriation of these responses. Identity itself, as well as its structural formation, is subject to change and sometimes radical variation depending on where (and when) one is in the world. Furthermore, as Hegel points out in the *Philosophy of Right*, it is simply not the case that identity comes before action or that it is the ground of action: "what the subject *is*, is the series of actions" (Hegel, 1991, p. 151). Words, promises, an appeal to one's true character, and so forth, are meaningless unless they are backed up by actions. Only actions are to be judged—intentions are meaningless. While Hegel uses this to argue against what he dubs the empty moralities of feeling and deontology, the same basic sentiment applies here as well. I do not have an identity and then act upon or because of it—I *develop* an identity by acting and others reflect this back to me by their own actions. It should however be pointed out that at a certain point of one's life one's identity becomes fairly well developed. Once this happens then it is in fact the case that social action is tied to identity. The struggles over gender, race, and class inequality that motivate people to protest, fight, and become otherwise politically involved all have the common feature of being disputes over the devaluation of certain identities.

Even if we ignore Fichte and Hegel entirely, which I believe would be a mistake for all the reasons specified above, it seems to me that recognition theory as whole cannot be so naïve that it ignores the way in which power shapes subjectivity, identity, and agency. While I believe that McNay is more or less correct in pointing out that Taylor focuses too heavily on identity alone, I do not think Honneth repeats this mistake. Honneth focuses on three elements of recognition: love, rights, and solidarity. Although I have certain substantive misgivings about liberalism in general, from a purely practical standpoint rights have proven to be a concrete instrument by which certain power balances can begin to be addressed, and sometimes settled. They are certainly not a fix-all solution, but they have helped to shift power imbalances that have plagued the world. If we think again of the issue of women's suffrage, we can think how the right to vote was the beginning of a fix for the massive power imbalance between men and women that has plagued humanity, and continues to plague humanity, for at least as long as recorded history. By fighting for the right to vote, women began to take more control of their own agency. Power was *necessarily* at the heart of this fight since women were asking for men to recognize their ability to take part in the governing process; a power that had been denied to them up to that point. Identity politics as such, being a later, 20th century phenomenon, had very little to do with this battle. Furthermore, it seems to me that power is also an important element in the love relationship. A love relationship that has a power imbalance between the people involved leads to misrecognition rather than proper recognition, leading to stilted psychological development as well as physical symptoms that result from this stilted development. This is precisely what McNay has in mind when she wants to emphasize the notion of habitus.

McNay's go-to example for power concerns one's class position, and thus one's access to material resources (a matter of power), comes to shape what one is capable of doing and who one is. From the standpoint of recognition theory, it must be asked how it could ever be that a person's position as a working class member of society, or as an upper class owner of the means of production, could not affect one's conception of oneself or one's basic capabilities. Power (or a lack thereof) is one of the components that plays an essential role in motivating why struggles for recognition happen in the first place. People would generally not care much if someone were disrespecting their identity if they were the ones in the dominant power position (unless they were afraid to lose what they have). In the Hegelian scenario, the master is indifferent to what the bondsman or slave thinks of him, which is precisely what propels the next step of the dialectic *away* from the top-down relationship of master/servitude and toward *work*, itself an iteration of biopower.

While I must grant that recognition theory has not conceived of power precisely in the way McNay describes it (as habitus), I do not see anything inherent in the concept of habitus that cannot be incorporated into the theory. As McNay (2008) herself points out, "on Bourdieu's account, recognition and misrecognition are understood as specific effects of the habitus in which relations of power profoundly shape an individual's embodied existence in the world" (pp. 33–34). One of the places where Bourdieu deals explicitly with the notion of recognition is in his articulation of the embodied practices understood through the metaphor of a game in the *Logic of Practice* (1990, pp. 66–79). Sports or games are embodied practices *par excellence*. One does not have knowledge of how to directly engage in a complex sport, such as a martial art for instance, from cognitive representational observation of other practitioners, but rather through the practice or know-how (vs. knowing-that) which emerges only in and through the very activity. Thus, in the closest passage that amounts to a strict definition of habitus,[6] Bourdieu states:

> The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively "regulated" and "regular" without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53).

Captured in the language of recognition, what Bourdieu is arguing here is that the embodied practices that constitute habitus are not preset givens that can be either recognized or misrecognized, but rather that both structures and recognitive relationships emerge in and through these practices, and thus form a feedback loop that simultaneously emerges out of and shapes praxis. That is, as has been argued regarding identity formation, identity is the *result* of recognition not a static pregiven essence that is either recognized or not after the fact, or as Bourdieu explicitly articulates, "the countless acts of recognition which are the small change of the compliance of belonging to the field,[7] and in which collective misrecognition is ceaselessly generated, are both the precondition and the product of the functioning of the field" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 68). Identity, then, is an emergent property of the recognitive activities that are always already in play in a world that is not a game of our own choosing, and said game is transformed through the concrete practices of human beings—practices that are most certainly conditioned by micro and macro power, as McNay, Bourdieu, Fichte, and Hegel all clearly point out.

5 | A DEFENSE OF RECOGNITION THEORY PART III: THE RECENT LITERATURE

It should be further pointed out is that there has already been a significant amount of ink spilled on the interrelationship between power and recognition,[8] and this is for good reason. A political theory that cannot account for the ways in which power is wielded will of necessity ignore a central component of the very nature and structure of the political. In this sense McNay is absolutely correct—power is at the very heart of politics and of identity formation. However, it is

not the case that recognition theory has ignored or misunderstood power. In their Introduction to the volume of essays titled *Recognition and Power: Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory*, Bert van den Brink and David Owen point out that we must analyze "the extent to which the emergence and demarcation of the principles of recognition that Honneth identifies may themselves be products of power relations" (2007, p. 21). That is, in order to understand the very structure and flow of the recognitive process, one must account for the ways in which power shapes the very nature of recognition itself. The precise issue at stake here is to disentangle claims of legitimate moral progress from claims of pure power (Van den Brink and Owen, 2007, p. 21), since it is not necessarily obvious that all forms of recognition entail some movement toward the betterment of those recognized but might instead be a repositioning of the levers of power.

This particular strand of argumentation is meant to serve as a jumping point for the theoretical work that emerges in that particular volume, but the point that must be emphasized here is that it demonstrates a direct awareness of the notion that power and recognition are not concepts that are so easily parceled out from each other, and that there has been a longstanding concern within the literature of the relationship between the two. It is this relationship that Italo Testa further examines in "Recognition as Passive Power: Attractors of Recognition, Biopower, and Social Power" (Testa, 2017). Jumping off from the statement above, Testa argues that within the very heart of the recognitive structure there lies a piece of power that recognition has largely left unexamined—what he dubs "passive power" (Testa, 2017). Passive power is understood by Testa to be a subspecies of social power in general, and "social power may be understood as being a relational power to induce some effect on other agents" (Testa, 2017, p. 199). However, if we strictly maintain the notion of social power conceptualized in this manner, recognition becomes a largely a top-down approach of the ability to recognize, and thus ignores the passive component of being recognized (Testa, 2017, p. 194). What is important here about Testa's conceptualization is that it concretely demonstrates the ways in which recognition is enmeshed with power, both in the sense of the one doing the recognizing and the one being recognized, adding a layer of agency to the process from the standpoint of the person or people seeking recognition, be it of their identity or otherwise. As such, power is not an added afterthought to the recognitive process, but rather a constitutive component of it. In its passive component, it serves to answer the objection that recognition theory ignores the ways in which power affects the very nature and agency of the subject, especially the subject in the significantly more vulnerable position of the one being recognized. This too, is not free of power.

In the article "'Gabba-Gabba, We Accept You, One of Us': Vulnerability and Power in the Relationship of Recognition," Estelle Ferrarese (2009) examines how current discourse surrounding vulnerability of moral agents, especially ones in an oppressive position, has neglected to demonstrate how recognition and power (always entangled together) have left certain elements of harm undertheorized. In particular, she argues that the notion of vulnerability "fails to address the nature of the relationship of recognition, omitting from consideration the exercise of power and the mechanisms inherent to this relationship" (Ferrarese, 2009, p. 606), and, furthermore, that part of the power that is available to those seeking recognition in a vulnerable position is the ability to disengage completely from the recognitive dyad of recognizer and recognized in a what she dubs "the politics of exit" (Ferrarese, 2009, p. 606).

Ferrarese correctly observes that power is inherent in the very logic of recognition itself. If we simply stick to the dyad of recognizer and recognized, which is an extrapolation and abstraction of concrete (and often quite messy) instantiations of real-world recognition, the recognizer wields a substantive amount of power—the power to *deny* recognition to the one who is requesting or demanding it. Ferrarese writes: "The existence of a power to which the one who claims recognition is subject is inherent in the act of recognition. There is always such a power, even when he who recognizes, recognizes exactly and unreservedly the claim being addressed to him. He *can* refuse to grant recognition" (Ferrarese, 2009, p. 608). In the denial of recognition by the recognizer or one in the dominant position, the position of powerlessness is further amplified for the one seeking recognition insofar as they are incapable, sometimes for decades or centuries, as we have concretely observed in instances of anti-Black racism in the United States and elsewhere, to convince the recognizer of its need. This seems to put all the burden on behalf of the one who is already powerless, but ignores another element of power itself, according to Ferrarese, which is the ability to disengage in some form from the top-down approach—the power to *exit*.

What the above demonstrates is that power is not at all an afterthought in recognition theory, as McNay claimed above, but rather part and parcel of the very nature of recognition itself. It is power, in fact, that is the initial impetus for many instances of concrete struggle for expanding rights, acknowledgement of traditionally marginalized identities, and so forth. Furthermore, in this instance Ferrarese also shows how power itself is not as asymmetrically top-down as has been assumed, leaving all the cards, so to speak, in the hands of the one who wields more power. There is agency and power also at the hands of those who are seeking recognition (albeit a much more limited kind of power). The refusal to play the game in the first place allows for instances of resistance and freedom, and these instances are not an outflow of one's identity, because that identity is precisely what is at stake in the first place, but rather of the inherent agency and power that is wielded by those oppressed.

6 | CONCLUSION

The account presented here has worked through a substantial challenge to the theory of recognition presented in the work of Lois McNay, who, as we have seen above, argues that recognition theory has inadequately tackled the notion of power in light of its focus on identity, often relegating it to an afterthought, if it theorizes it at all. I have argued that McNay's contention that power is central to political theorizing is in fact correct—we cannot make sense either of identity formation, or of recognition itself, without tackling power. However, I have shown that rather than being an afterthought, power is in fact at the very heart of recognition theory. The work of Ferrarese and Testa shows how power is a part of the recognitive process, either from the standpoint of the one recognized in the sense of passive power (Testa) or from the ability to disengage from the dominant power structure altogether in a politics of exit (Ferrarese). Furthermore, I have shown how an examination of the roots of the theory in Fichte and Hegel concretely demonstrates that power has in fact *always* been embedded in the very logical nature and structure of recognition itself. Fichte makes recognition the very root of transcendental subjectivity, and this root cannot grow without the efficacy of the body as a locus of power. Fichte also contests, as much traditional liberal thought does from Hobbes and Locke forward, that a giving up of some power and some right is the only guarantee for peaceful freedom. Hegel's infamous Master/Slave dialectic likewise makes power even more explicitly at the center of recognition theory, insofar as the struggle between the two is embedded in the power of life and death that the master wields, which is ultimately undermined by the servant's realization of their own power in the labor process. Finally, I have shown that identity formation is the logical product of recognition itself, and not a starting point, as McNay contends, and I have suggested some further theoretical avenues to uncover in demonstrating the connection between recognition and power.

NOTES

[1] As Frederick Neuhauser points out: "Although it is possible to go further than Kant in accounting for the characteristics of knowledge in terms of the subject's own activity, there remains an element of that knowledge which is fundamentally irreducible to the subject's spontaneity. In other words, it is ultimately impossible to eradicate every trace of the nonsubjective (the "not-I") from an account of theoretical knowledge. Even though Fichte has reduced the role of Kant's thing in itself to that of a mere check upon the subject's otherwise unlimited activity, representation is nonetheless impossible without this *Anstoβ*, and therefore the theoretical subject is irremediably dependent upon something other than itself, that is, upon the not-I" (p. 49).

[2] This could very well be due to his encounter with the work of Machiavelli. See "Fichte und die Entdämonisierung der Macht" (Râmbu, 2017), "Fichte's Engagement with Machiavelli" (Moggach, 1993), and "War Without and Peace Within: Fichte's Political Appropriation of Machiavelli and Its Contemporary Context in Herder and Hegel" (Zöller, 2015). This literature takes us well outside recognition, however. I simply want to further point out the multiplicity of ways in which power permeates the political concerns of the German Idealists who first theorize recognition.

[3] "Servant" or "bondsman" is the correct translation of the German "*Knecht*," but "slave" has unfortunately caught on for describing the dialectic in play here. I say unfortunately because the connotation invoked by slavery is decidedly and much more harshly top-down in every conceivable way; so much so that it has led to lopsided readings of what Hegel is up to

in this infamous section of the *Phenomenology*. Luckily Terry Pinkard has finally corrected this mistake in his excellent new translation of the text. However, this is a topic for another paper.

[4] *The Philosophy of Right* serves as another important touchstone for his development of recognition, especially since Hegel demonstrates there how recognition plays out in the very formation and structure of the state and its intertwining with material conditions. However, properly developing how this plays out would take, at minimum, another substantive paper and thus falls outside the scope of the project here, which I believe has amply demonstrated the interrelationship between recognition and power in Hegel's thought.

[5] It should be clear that this is not an assumption I am willing to grant. Recognition is certainly about more than claims surrounding identity. It is also, at the very least, about the nature of intersubjectivity and about power.

[6] I do not intend this to be a critique. When one is dealing with embodied know-how one must be descriptive. A strictly cognitive account, or an a priori definition, undermines the very point one is trying to convey about embodied praxis since the entire point of embodied praxis is that it cannot, in principle, be completely captured in rational discourse. It would be as if one is trying to learn to play basketball by studying the physics of basketball rather than playing the game with others.

[7] He is referring to a playing field in a game/sport here, but a field can of course metaphorically refer to any domain or human activity.

[8] Some of this work has been done *after* the publication of McNay's book. As such, it is obviously not appropriate to criticize McNay for failing to incorporate it into her work. However, we nonetheless need to survey this literature in order to obtain a full picture of the interrelationship between recognition and power.

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