FRANZISKA QUABECK

Not I –
Kazuo Ishiguro
and the Politics
of Misrecognition

FRANZISKA QUABECK

Not I –
Kazuo Ishiguro
and the Politics
of Misrecognition

Acknowledgements

Contents

I   Oddity, Alterity and Authenticity

This book has three main objectives: a reappraisal of the birth of the reader; a reevaluation of the concept of 'unreliable' narration; and a reading of the works of Kazuo Ishiguro that traces their self-proclaimed debt to certain literary predecessors and goes beyond reading the novels by reference to their author's ethnicity. Accordingly, once again, this book takes Ishiguro's peculiar narrative perspective as its starting-point. The homodiegetic narrators of Ishiguro's novels are torn between their experiencing and their narrating I due to the misrecognition they receive on the diegetic level. This has made them internalise "an image in the third person," in Frantz Fanon's words.[1] There is a gap between their 'emotional' and their 'official' selves, between what they experience and what they try to relate as their story. An in-depth analysis of their split narrating selves allows a perspective on the novels that reveals that they are haunted by their literary predecessors and find themselves in the constant desire to imitate and emulate those that came before. Those predecessors are implemented on the diegetic level through literal parents, who must be read as metafictional ghosts, haunting the stories and setting a metafictional struggle for recognition in motion. As Ishiguro's narrators try to present themselves as worthy of their ancestors, they create versions of themselves which are incongruent with their own true inner selves, which is why this study proposes to substitute Booth's attribute 'unreliable' with 'inauthentic.' Reading Ishiguro's novels in chronological order reveals that strategies of imitation and emulation are gradually given up for an acceptance of the impossibility of being original. In a gradual process, origins are defied in every sense of the word throughout these novels in favour of a complacency for the inevitability of literary history's overbearing shadow. Therefore, this is mainly a study of the novels of Ishiguro – at the same time, it has little to do with the author Kazuo Ishiguro.

The narrators' inauthenticity means that they have become alien to themselves; they are Other within the self: 'not I'. At the same time, they seek their Other in the literary characters that they seem to be modelled on and try to define themselves by what they are not. In this sense, alterity, not identity, is the defining moment of their mode of being. Inauthentic narrators are oddities. They are at odds with the society of their storyworld, they are at odds with their sense of self, they are at odds with their literary 'parents' and they are at odds with the story they are trying to tell. This means that they are odd both within their diegetic world as well as on a metafictional level, which creates an analogy of content and form that results in stories that are being told and not told, narrators that are 'I' and 'not I'. The things that are told, especially when it comes to descriptions of the emotional or psychological self, are not necessarily true. Vital information is constantly withheld. Diegetically, the narrators' bluffs are never called – characters who contradict their stories are presented as disturbed or are eliminated altogether. However, beyond their diegetic world, their inauthenticity is unmissable. This is not to say that these

---

[1]   Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1952): 90.

narrators lie deliberately – rather, they lack congruent selves. This lack of congruence here signals a gap between narrating and experiencing I, where the narrators' conception of their selves differs notably from the reader's conception of those selves.

At the heart of both the narrative technique and the story told lies alterity in multifarious forms. As Monika Fludernik insists, alterity and narrative are inextricably linked, since "[n]ot only the subject but also the medium of narrative […] relates to a process of othering."[2] The reader necessarily encounters the storyworld and its inhabitants as Other, but in the case of homodiegetic narration, experiences are being othered by the narrator, too. We engage in dialogue with an Other's self, which is alien to us and which may even alienate us deliberately. At the same time, the narrators telling the story are concerned with their others on the diegetic level and in this case even with an Other outside of their fictional world. Those inauthentic narrators under focus here ironically seek recognition of their selves only to defy it concomitantly by their inauthenticity. At the same time, they try to orient themselves towards a tradition of their literary predecessors in the ancient dynamics of imitation and emulation. This may happen consciously by appealing to kindred spirits such as Daniel Deronda or Sherlock Holmes; but it also happens covertly in alliance with Lucy Snowe, Alfred Prufrock or Philip Pirrip. The narrators' attempts to join their foremothers and -fathers renders classic texts of English literature intertexts to Ishiguro's novels that will therefore be given due notice in this study at appropriate moments. There is an intertextual alterity through which these narrators try to define themselves against their Other – either in imitation or through emancipation.

In approaching any narrative, we necessarily encounter an Other. Fludernik has claimed that this is specifically the case in so-called 'third-person' narration: "in heterodiegetic or third-person fiction, the storyworld by definition functions as the realm of the unfamiliar, the strange and the alluring that seduces us with its charms and secrets."[3] Yet, even though a homodiegetic narrator may seem *prima facie* more accessible or even alluring, their strangeness may be even more profound. Fludernik rightly assesses that even "before the advent of postcolonial studies, and even outside colonial or postcolonial contexts, narrative has always dealt with the other, with alterity."[4] The novel necessarily creates alterity, but it often also portrays alterity and many readings have reduced their insights to exactly that: the experience of alterity through the novel and the ethical ramifications for the reader. Shameem Black, for instance, rests her case on the fact that "alterity is fundamental to the making of literature."[5] She concentrates on the alterity of "social difference" as embodied in the following categories: "nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, language, class, species, or other recognizable categories."[6] For her, the portrayal of these differences in literature concerns an ethics of representation and it has now become "appropriate to read works of fiction for an ethics of imagining

---

[2] Monika Fludernik, "Identity/Alterity" in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge: CUP, 2007): 260–273, 265.

[3] Fludernik, "Identity/Alterity," 264.

[4] Fludernik, "Identity/Alterity," 263.

[5] Shameem Black, *Fiction Across Borders. Imagining the Lives of Others in Late Twentieth-Century Novels* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010): 1.

[6] Black, *Fiction*, 2.

others."[7] In other words, one can resort to fiction in order to experience alterity and imagine the Other. In this case, alterity matters greatly in the storyworld, but while the investigation of the diegetic depiction of alterity might be necessary, it also seems limited.[8] As Rebecca Walkowitz sums up, "late twentieth-century and even early twenty-first-century approaches to international writing focused on novelists' multilingual or migratory beginnings, and on themes of cosmopolitanism or anti-colonialism in their works […]."[9]

Yet, the concern with alterity in the present study departs from the consideration of diegetic depictions of otherness. In fact, one of the main concerns in what follows is the creation of alterity through inauthenticity. The novels under investigation do have alterity as a major theme, but alterity matters beyond the diegetic level. Alterity transcends storytelling and lies at the heart of a narrative technique that portrays the incongruence of different selves. The novels explored in this study portray alterity within the self. This is why this is mainly a narratological study: the split between narrating and experiencing I that is logically necessary for any novel is read in this study as a demonstration of the lack of a core, authentic self. Each narrator hides the 'true' version of their story behind the account of the narrating I that displays an inauthentic, misrecognised, empty self. This necessarily evokes questions of identity, since the narratological peculiarity at hand results from the fact that identities are constructed by the Other, not the self.

There seems no doubt in either literature or theory that identities are externally determined. Descartes' famous dictum 'I think, therefore I am' only works on the assumption that it is absolutely clear, who or what this 'I' is. In his attempt to define what one may know, Descartes relied on an ontological premise of human consciousness that held in this manner only in the seventeenth century, if ever. Conscious thought might determine an existence, but it is questionable what this existence actually is, since there is no static, immutable 'I'. A person's 'I' is not intrinsically given but determined by their surroundings and therefore prone to influence and change. Johann Gottlieb Fichte attested that human consciousness is unquestionable: "Think the concept 'I' and think of yourself as you do this. Everyone understands what this means."[10] Yet Fichte already understood that as clear as this thought seemed to him, the idea of an 'I' necessarily requires the idea of a 'Not-I.' Fichte's first postulate is that the 'I' is characterised solely in terms of activity. It necessarily has to be, since consciousness in Fichte's thought is not a condition, but an activity, in which the 'I' actively posits itself. This first premise then leads him to

---

[7]   Black, *Fiction*, 8.
[8]   For great analyses see Alexander Beaumont, *Contemporary British Fiction and the Cultural Politics of Disenfranchisement. Freedom and the City* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Irene Gilsenan Nordin, Julie Hansen, and Carmen Zamorano Llena, eds. *Transcultural Identities in Contemporary Literature* (Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2013); Paul Jay, *Global Matters. The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010); Berthold Schoene, *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Lars Eckstein, ed., *English Literature Across the Globe. A Companion* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2007).
[9]   Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "Preface: Global Ishiguro" in *Kazuo Ishiguro in a Global Context*, eds. Cynthia F. Wong and Hülya Yildiz (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015): xi–xiv, xi.
[10] Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992): 110.

regard the directions this activity is geared towards, which can be both inwards and outwards. The 'I''s activity is inwards in the example above, when the 'I' posits itself. The activity is directed outwards in any other thought that posits anything that is 'Not-I'. The fact that consciousness is active therefore determines the 'I''s engagement with everything outside itself: "An act of self-positing can [not] be understood unless an act of non-self-positing is posited along with it. […] One does not and cannot think clearly of anything at all without also thinking at the same time of its opposite […]. Therefore, in connection with the act of positing the I, one necessarily has to think about the act of not positing the I as well."[11] The epistemological impossibility of positing the 'I' without a 'Not-I' therefore causes a necessary determination of the 'I' by the 'Not-I': "Thus, as surely as the I is posited at all, a Not-I must be posited along with it. […] In order to think clearly about the I, I require something to be the Not-I."[12] 'I' and 'Not-I' are thereby inextricably linked and determine each other reciprocally. The 'I' cannot be thought, let alone exist, in isolation, which means that the 'Not-I' is as initial to the consciousness of the self as the 'I' in Fichte's philosophy. Conscious thought is epistemologically impossible without a determining 'Not-I' and this necessarily creates a perpetual dialogue between 'I' and 'Not-I'.

As early as 1799, Fichte established this thesis on the formation of the self, which would take hold in its proper form only centuries later. Enlightenment thinkers still proclaimed a unified idea of the self that exists for itself in independence of its surroundings, but postmodern thought has returned unwittingly to Fichte's first idea. The fact that to think the 'I' without an Other is epistemologically impossible might not matter so much, if it did not fundamentally influence what is commonly termed a person's 'identity'. The epistemological notion of the 'I' becomes the ontological entity of the self, which is commonly equated with a concomitant sense of self. According to the *OED*, identity is defined as "[w]ho or what a person or thing is; a distinct impression of a single person or thing presented to or perceived by others; a set of characteristics or a description that distinguishes a person or thing from others."[13] Identity as a sense of self, and also as a subject in much literary criticism and theory, is a notion that is flexible, unstable and necessarily determined by its surroundings. Not least since the wake of postcolonialism and gender studies has the concept been regarded as always in flux and defying categorisation, which is often mirrored in disruptive styles of narration, consciously undermining their own linearity. Autobiographical writing is frequently seen as constitutive of identity in the sense that "our life stories are not merely *about* us but in an inescapable and profound way *are* us,"[14] and narrative fiction creates personae who seem to mirror this.

These assumptions raise different questions about, first, the mental or psychological perception of the 'I' and the mimicry of such in fictional narrative; second, about the social construction of identities; and third, about the ethical ramifications of negotiating

[11] Fichte, *Transcendental Philosophy*, 123.
[12] Fichte, *Transcendental Philosophy*, 123/124.
[13] "identity, n." *Oxford English Dictionary*. (Oxford University Press, 2023): <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8369890298>.
[14] Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically. How We Create Identity in Narrative* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008): x.

identities with the Other. As to the first question, Jacques Lacan's mirror stage represents one of the key attempts to explain the child's growing sense of self and it very consciously opposes "any philosophy directly issuing from the *Cogito*":

> This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* […] stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.[15]

Similar to Fichte, Lacan proposes an awareness of self prior to the acquisition of motoric skills or even language, in which the child becomes conscious of a distinct 'I' that forms the initiation of identity. Lacan specifically stresses this existence of an ego "before its social determination," which will "always remain irreducible for the individual alone."[16] The *Gestalt* visible in the mirror "symbolizes the mental permanence of the I"[17] and has a formative effect in the organism itself. This subject, however, is necessarily not absolute and deflects from the specular 'I' into the social 'I'. It is at this moment that the 'I' is linked to its social surroundings and comes to be determined by them.

Many modern identity theories postulate that after the primordial stage of the subject, identity is formed in dialogue or through discursive practices. Stuart Hall emphasises that this, however, does not require the abolition of the subject as a concept, but a reconceptualization: "thinking it in its new, displaced or decentered position within the paradigm."[18] Drawing on Michel Foucault's genealogy of the modern subject, Hall reverts to the question of identification, rather than identity, which places the emphasis on "the process of subjectification to discursive practices, and the politics of exclusion which all such subjectification appears to entail."[19] Therefore, according to Foucault and many others, identity is never an essentialist concept, but a positional or relative one: "this concept of identity does not signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; the bit of the self that remains always-already 'the same', identical to itself across time."[20] Before one can engage in any considerations of different categories of identity – sexual, racial, cultural or social – more has to be said about the specific strategies that are taken to be formative of these identities such as discursive practices or interpellation. For Foucault the subject is produced; it is an effect of discursive practices and determined by those, which is why there is no prospect of autonomy or liberation.[21] Important and distinctive of Foucault's theory of identity is the notion of corporeal identity, since the body seems as immersed

---

[15] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" in *Écrits,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1977): 1–7, 2.

[16] Lacan, "Mirror Stage," 2.

[17] Lacan, "Mirror Stage," 2.

[18] Stuart Hall, "Who Needs Identity?" in *Identity: A Reader*, eds. Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman (London: SAGE Publications, 2000): 15–30, 16.

[19] Hall, "Who Needs Identity?" 16.

[20] Hall, "Who Needs Identity?" 17.

[21] Hall, "Who Needs Identity?" 23.

in the dominant discourse as a human being's consciousness. In his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault attests that sexuality is linked with "an intensification of the body": "with its exploitation as an object of knowledge and an element in relations of power."[22] This clearly relates to his earlier thoughts on the subject in *Discipline and Punish*, where he claims, "[k]nowable man (soul, individuality, consciousness, conduct, whatever it is called) is the object-effect of this analytical investment, of this domination-observation."[23]

Foucault also seems to anticipate the concept of gender performativity as developed by Judith Butler. Identity theory is intersectional as it bears on different types of identity and the question of gender identity often lies at the core as it does in Foucault and Butler. Butler, like Hall, speaks of identification: what is at stake is linking the "process of 'assuming' a sex with the question of *identification*, and with the discursive means by which the heterosexual imperative enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications."[24] For Butler, the alterity that constitutes identity results from the abjection enforced by the discourse of an uninhabitable zone that defines the subject: "In this sense […] the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation."[25] The subject in Butler's theory is equally defined by what it is not, by its abjected outside, so it is constituted *ex negativo*. The dualism of inside and outside is not static, but fluid, since, according to Butler, identity is constituted performatively through discourse: "The power of discourse to produce that which it names is thus essentially linked with the question of performativity. The performative is thus one domain in which power acts *as* discourse."[26] Once again, the self is externally determined through discourse prior to its coming into being: "Where there is an 'I' who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that 'I' and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will."[27]

In Butler's theory of performativity it is the 'Not-I' that posits the 'I': "I can only say 'I' to the extent that I have first been addressed, and that address has mobilized my place in speech; paradoxically, the discursive condition of social recognition *precedes and conditions* the formation of the subject: recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject."[28] This is also true for Homi Bhabha's attempt to investigate the dynamics of identification. What Bhabha called the "new internationalism"[29] in 1994 has led to a variety of interrogations of identities both personal and collective. Bhabha's

---

22 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Vol. I: An Introduction* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984): 105.

23 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1977): 305.

24 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993): xiii.

25 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xiii.

26 Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1 (1993): 17–32, 17.

27 Butler, "Critically Queer," 18.

28 Butler, "Critically Queer," 18.

29 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994): 7–8.

theory of postcolonial identity, which is crucially influenced by Fanon and Lacan, is also contingent with the general assumption that identities depend on otherness. There is no core or essential identity and otherness does not serve to affirm "a pre-given identity,"[30] but for a person to develop a sense of existence they have to be acknowledged by a 'not I': "to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness."[31] The theoretical construct of an 'I' that depends on an Other necessarily becomes heavily politically charged in the (post)colonial encounter, because, as Fanon puts it, "there is always the question of worth and merit."[32] The "depersonalized, dislocated colonial subject"[33] becomes other to itself and finds itself in an 'in-between'-reality: "the otherness of the Self [is] inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity."[34] Yet, Bhabha acknowledges an, albeit distorted, sense of self. Through the determinant 'not I', the 'I' finds itself in the limbo of "occupying two places at once,"[35] belonging neither here nor there.

Most theorists of identity implicitly or explicitly acknowledge the fact that the notion of the self is not an epistemological, nor even a psychological, but rather an ethical question. As Kwame Anthony Appiah argues, "[i]dentities make ethical claims because – and this is just a fact about the world we human beings have created – we make our lives *as* men and *as* women, *as* gay and *as* straight people, *as* Ghanaians and *as* Americans, *as* blacks and *as* whites. Immediately, conundrums start to assemble."[36] Since the 'not I' determines the 'I', human beings must be free to develop their own sense of self uncoerced. However, this privilege has been withheld more often and more continuously than granted. Hegemonic societies exclude those individuals who have a sense of identity that is not in conformity with the ideas of those in power. The oppression, marginalisation and extinction of others due to their identities is visible through centuries, but power dynamics behind the oppression are mostly invisible and based on psychosocial processes and strategies that are difficult to expose. Many theorists, such as Charles Taylor, among others, posit that at the core of these processes lies language in the widest sense.

Human beings are dialogically constituted – the 'I' is in dialogue with the 'not I' and the reciprocity has a direct effect on the constitution of the 'I'. Therefore, "the making and sustaining of our identity […] remains dialogical throughout our lives," as Charles Taylor has it: "[M]y discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others."[37] The premise that overt and covert dialogue with the self's surroundings is constitutive of its identity emphasises the ethical dimension, since the formation of an

---

30   Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 64.
31   Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 63.
32   Fanon, *Black Skin*, 186.
33   Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 89.
34   Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 63.
35   Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 89.
36   Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005): xiv.
37   Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994): 25–73, 34.

identity thereby ultimately rests on the question of the good life. Classically, the notion of the good life is directed inwards as well as outwards. The good life is then a life that on the one hand is lived in accordance with inherent moral values as well as a life that is not hindered to flourish by external conditions. These external conditions however vary greatly and many theorists, such as Foucault, Butler, Bhabha, Fanon and Taylor, posit them as determinants for identity. Like Karl Marx famously said "[i]t is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."[38]

The dependence on external forces renders one concept in particular crucial for the formation of identities: recognition in the Hegelian sense of *Anerkennung*. The discourse of recognition is essentially a discourse of alterity since it is either the Other that is in need of recognition or it is the Other that denies recognition to the self. The basis for this relation is social interaction in dialogue (in the widest sense) on an individual scale, but the concept extends to collective entities such as groups or cultures as well as broader discursive formations. A general focus on recognition often takes Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel's theory as a good point to start. Hegel's philosophy is widely received in literary and cultural studies and his text on self-consciousness has become a classic reference in literary theory. Moreover, his so-called 'master-slave dialectic' has become a classic staple in analyses of literature.[39] Hegel writes: "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged [*als ein Anerkanntes*]."[40] Alterity and recognition are inextricably linked and as a unity, they constitute the first principle. There is no self-consciousness without consciousness of an Other and they are related in their mutual recognition. Hegel conceives of recognition as an intersubjective relation, but his theory of recognition is crucially characterised by a moment of conflict: "[T]he relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle."[41] This 'struggle for recognition' has become a terminological commonplace and succeeding theorists of recognition usually assume that on principle, recognition is something that is denied. For Hegel this is merely the natural consequence of the confrontation of individuals in the modern world:

> They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being for themselves to truth, both in the case of the other and in their own case. And it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; […]. The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a person, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness.[42]

[38] Karl Marx "Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*" in *Karl Marx. Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: OUP, 2000): 424–427, 425.

[39] For a paradigmatic example see Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "The English Master and the Colonial Bondsman" in *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012): 9–26.

[40] G. F. W. Hegel, "Phenomenology of Spirit" in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (London and New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001): 541–547, 541.

[41] Hegel, "Phenomenology," 543.

[42] Hegel, "Phenomenology," 543.

Logically, the subject's struggle for its own life is *pari passu* a struggle for the Other's death and the Other determines its consciousness as something decidedly alien and unequal. This leads Hegel to his famous allegory: it is the relation between lord and bondsman that is most suitable to describe the dynamic. The consciousness that exists for itself is the lord in this equation, whereas the bondsman is "*thing* as such."[43] The dynamic or movement of the struggle for recognition begins on behalf of the bondsman since he is excluded due to the lord's appropriation of his property.[44] In this allegory, self-consciousness as "the simple 'I'" is "the absolute object," which is "absolute meditation" and therefore has "as its essential moment lasting independence."[45] The inequality of the relation and the struggle for and withholding of recognition therefore seems best exemplified through the relation between master and, as it is more commonly referred to, slave. In this scenario, "the truth of the independent consciousness is […] the servile consciousness of the bondsman," whereas servitude as self-consciousness has "the lord for its essential reality."[46]

A crucial moment in this relation is the fact that while the lord is always aware of the relation, servitude as consciousness is not aware that "this truth is implicit in it": "For this consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord."[47] Hegel's assumption of a relation that is based from the start on the condition of oppression and a natural dominance of the self-consciousness over all others explains in part the multifarious reception of the model in postcolonial studies at least from Fanon onwards, where the master-slave dialectic is often read as an almost direct reference to imperialism and colonialism. Since Hegel's 'struggle' it has become clear that recognition is not only something that may or may not be granted, but more importantly, as something that can be withheld strategically and therefore cause a power structure of exclusion and inclusion. A historical consideration of the development of the theory of recognition often stops with Hegel until the concept is re-evoked in the second half of the twentieth century, which leaves quite a wide historical gap that might have to be reconsidered at another point in another book. In any case, from Hegel onward, theorists tend to consider an interpersonal, rather than intersubjective relation, and the dialogical self as object of interest rather than pure consciousness.

In recent years the debate on recognition has most influentially been continued by Charles Taylor, Kwame Anthony Appiah and Axel Honneth. While Honneth continues to place the emphasis on Hegel's moment of conflict in the "struggle" for recognition,[48] both Taylor and Appiah work with a stronger political stance on recognition due any person in the age of what they call 'multiculturalism'. According to them, the need to focus on recognition as a dynamic that dominates social relations on both individual and

---

[43] Hegel, "Phenomenology," 544.

[44] See Ludwig Siep, *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie. Untersuchungen zu Hegels Jenaer Philosophie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2014): 105.

[45] Hegel, "Phenomenology," 544.

[46] Hegel, "Phenomenology," 545.

[47] Hegel, "Phenomenology," 545.

[48] See Axel Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1994): 22ff.

collective scales is due to psycho-ethical considerations. It is a demand that arises in "today's politics" that claim to focus on the interests of "minority or 'subaltern' groups,"[49] who are denied recognition, and reaches to practices of exclusion and segregation specific to multiculturalist societies: "The demand for recognition […] is given urgency by the supposed links between recognition and identity, where this latter term designates something like a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental characteristics as a human being."[50] Charles Taylor argues, "[t]he thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves."[51] Recognition can be withheld deliberately in order to establish hierarchies and oppression, as a means of control over individuals or entire groups and can imprison them "in a false, distorted, reduced mode of being."[52] In contrast to Honneth, who emphasises the subject's struggle for recognition in opposition to its others in the vein of Hegel's original idea,[53] Taylor and Appiah concentrate more on the outside forces that determine whether a subject receives recognition or not. Thus, they share a position with Foucault and Butler that is often overlooked. The general psychoanalytic premise that it is the outside that determines the inside by mirroring back a picture of the self is in both discourses essentially influenced by Lacan's theory of the mirror stage as formative of the infant's self-consciousness. Moreover, many theorists agree on the dialogical concept of the self, although they seem to perceive of dialogue differently, since the notion of discourse as proposed in Foucault and Butler differs from Taylor's idea that the individual is in dialogue with its others as personalised interlocutors or "significant others."[54]

When Taylor speaks of the possibility of the self's internalising a distorted picture of itself, the implication seems to be that this is a 'second' self-image, a new one that replaces the old original or authentic one: "On the intimate level, we can see how much an *original* identity needs and is vulnerable to the recognition given or withheld by significant others."[55] This emphasis on an original identity constitutes the greatest conflict between the different approaches to the subject and it creates the overlap to theories of authenticity, since it is only the undistorted sense of the self that is considered an authentic self. The differentiation raises the question of whether there is one unitary self, at least in theory, or only fragments of identity as is most commonly assumed at least since the late nineteenth century. Taylor opposes the fragmentation of the self through his ideas on the possible authenticity of the self, but in a sense, the two theories are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In his theory of recognition, Taylor's first premise is that the sense of self is determined by its others just as Foucault would have it. However, Taylor's insistence on recognition as the vital factor of human existence, shows how theoretical

---

[49] Taylor, "Politics of Recognition," 25.
[50] Taylor, "Politics of Recognition," 25.
[51] Taylor, "Politics of Recognition," 25.
[52] Taylor, "Politics of Recognition," 25.
[53] See Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, 27 ff.
[54] Taylor, "Politics of Recognition," 36.
[55] Taylor, "Politics of Recognition," 36 [my emphasis].

his notion of an undistorted self is and how rarely the self even receives recognition: "[M]isrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need."[56]

Although he is not often included in the discourse on recognition, Bhabha's concept of mimicry takes up the same idea: "[C]olonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.*"[57] Bhabha's subject is a mimetic subject that tries to blend in and assimilate in the struggle for recognition as an equal, but ironically reveals itself as 'false' or inauthentic, which then seems to be the reason for a refusal of recognition: "[M]imicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal" and "fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence."[58] For Bhabha, the colonial subject cannot receive recognition either way, since it is doubly excluded. The overt exclusion is for its status as Other; the covert exclusion is based on the presumed inauthenticity of the subject. The colonial subject is therefore necessarily doomed in its struggle for recognition, but this is not the problem of the colonial subject alone.

In their attempts to grasp the human condition of contemporary times, many theorists come back to the central idea that if everyone's identity is formed from outside, a 'full' development of a self must depend on possibilities granted. Such thoughts immediately evoke deliberations of 'a true self' that may 'flourish'; that is not prevented from becoming what it wants to be. All of these phrases are frequently used in the discourse of authenticity and all these, alterity, identity, recognition and authenticity are inextricably linked – at least in theory. Out of all those concepts, authenticity is surely the most problematic, which is partly due to both an ambiguous meaning and an ambiguous use of the term. The different meanings of authenticity, however, must be sharply distinguished: authenticity is generally understood to be a characteristic, but it is crucial to distinguish of what. 'Authentic' can be used as meaning "of undisputed origin or authorship" or "faithful to an original" or, weaker yet, "reliable, accurate representation."[59] All of these definitions refer to something reified, something produced or even commodified, which often involves media representations and questions of marketing:

> There are real dangers in recent representations of indigenous peoples in popular discourse, and especially in the media, which stress claims to an authentic voice. For these claims, by overwriting the actual complexity of difference may write out that voice as effectively as earlier oppressive discourses of reportage. In fact, it may well be the same progress at work,

---

56 Taylor, "Politics of Recognition," 26.
57 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 122.
58 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 122, 123. There are two dimensions to mimicry, according to Bhabha, since is it not only a tool of colonial domination, but also a strategy of anti-colonial resistance. Mimicry reveals that the demand of being 'same' is a lie; there is no original true white self. The second dimension of mimicry will be important in this study in a different context.
59 Somogy Varga, "Authenticity," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2012), ed. Edward N. Zalta. Available online at http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/ authenticity/. Last retrieved Sep 26th, 2016.

and the result may be just as crippling to the efforts of indigenous peoples to evolve an effective strategy of recuperation and resistance.[60]

This myth of authenticity is probably the most ubiquitous of all, also to be found as advertisement of restaurants advertising authentic ethnic food. From here, it is only a small step towards self-help books.[61] However, this is not the concept of authenticity that is of interest for this study: "the distinction between authentic and derivative is more complicated when discussing authenticity as a characteristic attributed to human beings."[62] Understood as a human characteristic, authenticity seems to evoke the following questions: "What is it to be oneself, at one with oneself, or truly representing one's self?"[63] Such questions point to a core identity, something that is essential to the self and can be realised by a search within the self for what it really is. Such a search is, historically seen, first and foremost Romantic in nature, as Charles Guignon suggests, but bears on "our contemporary culture of authenticity" in its "attempt to recover a sense of oneness and wholeness that appears to have been lost with the rise of modernity" and in "the conviction that real 'truth' is discovered not by rational reflection and scientific method, but by a total immersion in one's own deepest and most intense feelings."[64] 'Wholeness' and 'feelings' certainly stand out as oddities in a poststructuralist, postmodern and postcolonial age. The idea that a self could be whole, that there could be something such as a stable identity, has long been discarded, and the resort to 'feelings' above all else seems both too romantic and too Romantic. Foucault especially has been critical, if not to say, derisive about what he calls the "Californian cult of the self," since for him, the claim of authenticity is "simply the mirror image of power-relations."[65] Yet, the search for a congruent self is strong, as the whole debate suggests, and Varga, for instance, claims that authenticity has turned "into a highly esteemed ideal that has shaped the way we relate to others and ourselves"[66] and seems to gain currency daily through different representations on Instagram.

Ultimately, the question of authenticity is a question of ethics, which is Lionel Trilling's point of departure in his influential *Sincerity and Authenticity*. According to Trilling, who is often considered the first analyst of authenticity in a literary studies-context, the rise of the individual in modern society can partly serve as an explanation. This account of authenticity is problematic in the sense that Trilling sees the concepts of sincerity and authenticity in direct succession of one another in the history of ideas: "[B]efore authenticity came along to suggest the deficiencies of sincerity and to usurp its place in our esteem, sincerity stood high in the cultural firmament and had dominion over

---

[60] Gareth Griffiths, "The Myth of Authenticity" in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (Oxford: Routledge, 1995): 165–171, 165.

[61] Such as Andrew Potter's *The Authenticity Hoax. Why the "Real" Things We Seek Don't Make Us Happy* (New York et al.: Harper Perennial, 2010).

[62] Varga, "Authenticity."

[63] Varga, "Authenticity."

[64] Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (Oxon: Routledge, 2004): 51.

[65] Somogy Varga, *Authenticity as an Ethical Ideal* (New York: Routledge, 2012): 27.

[66] Varga, *Ethical Ideal*, 4.