

Can the Excluded Criticize? On the (Im)possibilities of Formulating and Understanding Critique

Benno Herzog

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of Valencia, Spain

Av. Tarrongers, 4b

46021 Valencia

Email: benno.herzog@uv.es

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3685-2881>

Web: www.uv.es/herben

Twitter: @BennoHerzog

Abstract:

If critique does not want to be more than just a “passion of the head” it has to engage in dialogue with the worst-off in society. However, there are several mechanisms that hinder the excluded from giving words to their suffering. Furthermore, there are processes of invisibilization that impede even the perception of the excluded and their critique in the public space. The aim of this article is to conceptually explore the mechanisms of formulating critique by the excluded and of understanding critique in the public space. Therefore, I first provide a brief overview on the meaning of critique before then presenting suffering as a language of critique. In a third step I explore the multiple mechanism that hinder suffering from becoming visible and end up discussing some (fragmented) solution for overcoming these invisibilities. Although the excluded is hindered to formulate publicly critique in linguistic form, the suffering of the excluded can be understood as the ground for a powerful form of social critique.

Keywords: critique, Frankfurt School, invisibility, social suffering

Funding details:

This work was supported by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Industry and Competitiveness and Grant Number HAR2017-83519-P as part of the research project “Contemporary Representations of Mass Violence Perpetrator: Concepts, Narratives, and Images” led by Anacleto Ferrer y Vicente Sánchez-Biosca.

Disclosure statement:

The author declares that he has no relevant or material financial interests that relate to the research described in this paper.

Biographical note:

Benno Herzog is Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of Valencia, Spain. He has worked and conducted research in

Germany (Universities of Frankfurt and Mainz, Freiburg), the United Kingdom (University of Manchester, Open University, and University of Warwick), and Brazil (Federal University of Paraíba). His research focuses on social critique and critical theory of society, discourse theory and discourse analysis, and migration and discrimination.

Can the Excluded Criticize? On the (Im)possibilities of Formulating and Understanding Critique

Introduction

A critique of a given situation can be a powerful engine driving social change. The progresses in gender equality or the social welfare system at its whole can hardly be imagined without large groups of people formulating critique to a prior status quo. Such critique points towards the tension between a claim, i.e., a desired situation, and reality. However, the logics of critique are negative, not starting from a positive, desired situation but from an “uneasiness” with the existing one. Although this uneasiness might be a driving force towards change, it seems not to offer hints regarding the direction of this change. Uneasiness with situation A can lead to situation B, but it could equally lead to situations X, Y or Z.

If critique does not want to be more than merely a “passion of the head,” it must engage in dialogue with the worst off — with those who most experience “uneasiness” in a given society. Critique that neglects the socially excluded runs the risk to reproduce itself social exclusion. It is the excluded for whom we can reasonably suppose a greater amount and degree of unbearable situations. However, there seems to be a double translation problem. First, translating uneasiness into a directed force requires tools to distinguish between possible alternatives to the undesired situation. These tools might well be preconscious, but they must be socially and individually available. From a sociological point of view, these tools, as well as the available alternatives, are socially constructed. This fact does not mean that they are equally available to all members of society. Exclusion itself can be the result of a lack of socially available tools to overcome specific situations.

Additionally, there is still a second difficulty in formulating critiques. Especially if critique is aimed at a *social* situation, it must be effectively formulated; i.e., critique must be translated into an intersubjective, understandable language. Here, exclusion itself might have led to “speech theft” (Honneth, 1990), i.e., a situation in which the worst off do not find adequate language to express the reasons for their uneasiness. There are several mechanisms that hinder the excluded from giving words to their suffering. Furthermore, there are processes of invisibilization that impede the *perception* of the excluded and their critique in public space. The situation of exclusion directly points

towards a communicative separateness, a situation in which the communication offers of the excluded are not considered socially relevant (Luhmann, 2005; Herzog, 2011).

The aim of this article is to conceptually explore the mechanisms of formulating critique by the excluded and of understanding critique in the public space.

Therefore, I first provide a brief overview of what critique means, i.e., from where it takes its normative resources and how these resources are related to the possibility of critique becoming effective. Nevertheless, not only linguistic forms of critique are possible. Pre-linguistic and alternative forms of communication play important roles in regard to the excluded. I therefore then concentrate on the moment of uneasiness, or suffering, as a form of critique and attempt to conceptualize it in such way that we can read suffering as a language of critique. The advantages and limits of these forms of pre-linguistic critique are discussed. In a third step, I explore the role of exclusion or invisibilization, i.e., of the mechanisms that hinder the perception of the language of suffering. If the language of critique is not heard socially, its ability to foster change is quite limited. Finally, I discuss some solutions to overcome situations of invisibilization of critique that are implicit in suffering. Here, a diversity of perspectives, from empathy to aesthetics, are explored, and it is shown that, if we understand the dialectics of visibility and invisibility, i.e., of the expression and suppression of suffering, we can obtain a closer glimpse of the critical potential of the feeling of uneasiness.

1) Forms of critique

Michel Foucault (2007) understood critique as the “art of not being governed or better, the art of not being governed like that” (p. 44). Here, critique starts from a negative point: from a situation that seems unsatisfactory. Foucault does not ask where this will not to be governed comes from, whether it is a particular will or whether others share or should share his uneasiness with the form of being governed. In this section, we take a closer look at critique, its normative origins and what it is able to provide.

Critique is first of all a normative stance. When criticizing something, we state that something *should* or *should not* be a specific way. We say things such as the government should spend more on education, you should not wear a blue tie with this shirt, or we tell our kids that they should take an umbrella when going out. In all of these cases, we draw upon norms to modify a specific situation. Perhaps we are concerned with educational equality in the case of the government’s spending in this sector; we might

follow aesthetic norms of what colours fit best together, or we might be worried about health if going out without protection against rain.

The difference between critique and complaint or lamentation is that, when performing critique, we not only say that something should be different. When we complain about bad weather, or we lament the death of a loved one, we clearly want the situation to be different. The distinctive characteristic of critique is that, when performing critique, we also say that the situation *could* be different, i.e., that the situation could be changed by human action. A critique of the government always implies that the government could have acted differently, while a critique of an individual is aimed at his/her capacity to change his/her behaviour.

Since critique formulates affirmations not only about desirability but also about social possibilities, the emancipatory effect of the de-naturalization of society should not be underestimated. Only from the historical moment when we perceive society not as an expression of unchangeable nature (or of divine origin) but as made by human beings and therefore changeable by social action can we criticize phenomena now understood as social. The possibility of critique therefore depends on a convincing narrative about social ontology. The process of sociological illustration needed to perform critique consists of stripping off the natural appearance of phenomena and showing that they are, in fact, human made or can be changed by human action. Thus, for example, historically, one important milestone in feminist critique was the “discovering” of gender as a social — not a natural— category. Now, the construction of gender can be criticized not only because gender and gender relations *should* be different but also because it has been shown that they effectively *could* be different. Another example would be that only at the historical moment when there is a cure potentially available for certain diseases can suffering from these illnesses due to a lack of medicine no longer be understood as bad luck but receive a normative, social dimension.

The narrative needed for critique is therefore not mainly that something is produced by human beings but that human beings are in the position to change it. Critique presupposes that society does not work like the enchanted broom of the Sorcerer’s apprentice in the famous poem by Goethe who, once created, cannot be stopped anymore. Whether implicit or explicit, it is part of critique to show the transformability of the criticized social phenomenon.

At the same time, critique must rely on social norms to justify why something should change. There are roughly three different types of critique pointing towards

different relations between norms and the possibility of change (see e.g., Jaeggi, 2014 Herzog, 2020).

First, we can identify external norms. These norms are taken from an external source to criticize. This source might be a text, such as the Bible, the Quran or the Declaration of Human Rights. It might also be the deliberation of a group of persons or my own (well-argued) convictions. We then criticize a given situation by saying that it does not follow the standards provided by the Bible, human rights or my own conviction. The problem with this type of critique is that it might not be shared by those whom we are criticizing. For another, the Bible might not be a reason to change one's behaviour, or my aesthetic understanding of combinations of ties and shirts might differ from that of other persons. In these cases, the norms of critique cannot be seen as opening the way to communication but must be understood as external impositions.

Regarding the question of whether the excluded can criticize, this type of critique relies heavily on the "discursive capital" (Angermüller, 2018) of the critic. Those who perform the task of criticizing must return to (in the best case, intersubjectively convincing) narratives and be able to perform a competent speech act of critique. If the term "excluded" should have any sense, then it is the communicative irrelevance (e.g., Bude & Willis, 2008; Herzog, 2011; Luhmann, 2005) of those who are excluded. In other words, due to multiple mechanisms of invisibilization, whether it means not taking seriously the external sources of critique of the excluded, lack of access to the hegemonic practices of critique or not being taken seriously, as in the famous case of mansplaining (Solnit, 2014, see also Fricker, 2007), the excluded is seldom a powerful source of critique.

A more effective method of critique is called internal critique. This form of critique takes its norms directly from the object of critique. So, for example, if one says that one would not behave against the Bible or would never combine this tie with this specific shirt, I can criticize that person if he/she contradicts his/her own claims. It would then not be my external, normative stance that serves as a moral compass but the very normative convictions of the object of critique him- or herself. Here, we encounter at least two major problems.

First, this approach is quite limited in its scope. With internal critique, we can only criticize those actions that contravene the normative self-descriptions of social actors. This critique can never reach beyond the declared normative stance of the criticized. Thus, for example, internal critique would be unable to criticize racist behaviour *coherent*

with the normative self-understanding of those who evince this behaviour because the source of this type of critique is the criticized itself.

For our question about the capacity of excluded individuals and groups to criticize a second problem is even more important. The excluded as a source of critique can appear twice here: as critic and as criticized. As critic, the excluded faces the same problems of representation, as in the case of external critique, often lacking discursive capital to perform socially relevant speech acts. As said before, exclusion includes precisely not being considered a relevant partner of communicative interchange. However, the excluded as the object of critique can, at the same time be the source of critique. It is his/her normative standard that is used to perform critique. The problem here is that of how to access this standard. If we said that the excluded is socially hindered from performing competent speech acts or from being considered relevant, then accessing his/her standard of critique might be quite complicated since this form of critique is based on the assumption that the standards of critique lie open and can be used by the critic. Moreover, when thinking about the case in which the critique does not aim at a person but at a complex social situation, then it is not clear how a “situation” can express its normative standards.

This problem becomes even bigger when approaching the third type of critique, namely, immanent critique. However, while access to the source of critique becomes more complicated, this approach could help us at the same time to overcome these problems precisely due to awareness of the obfuscation of the normative grounds of those being criticized. Stated briefly, immanent critique does not take the *explicit* normative stance of the other to perform critique but relies on the *implicit* normative assumptions of society or of those criticized. Using implicit and not explicit normative claims, immanent critique not only points towards the contradiction between claims and reality. Rather, it also provides a statement of why there is a necessary (i.e., socially produced, not easy to lift) contradiction between normative claims and pathologic social reality. If it was already complicated to access the explicit, normative grounds of the excluded, it seems even to be more difficult to access these implicit grounds.

Critical social theory follows the approach of “practice-based immanent critique” (Stahl, 2013), i.e., a critique that takes its normative stance not necessarily from explicitly formulated discourses but from the norms implicit and socially institutionalized in the practices of social actors. When Karl Marx wrote in a letter to Ruge that “we shall develop for the world new principles from the existing principles” (Marx, 1970), he started

developing a theory that considered the already existing practice of work as a practice with normative emancipatory potential. Work itself is a practice that points towards the normative need, as well as the real potential, to overcome a social situation in which human beings become increasingly “debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable beings” (Marx). However, the theory of work opening up a privileged normative point of view, especially for the working class, has been heavily contested since the events in the first half of the twentieth century. In World War I, the working class, instead of unfolding its revolutionary energy against anti-emancipatory forces, engaged in mutual killing in the battlefields of Europe. But it was especially the Holocaust that most deeply cast doubt on the emancipatory effect or modern rationalization inherent in work. In Auschwitz, the *rational* organization of barbarism, illustration showed the Janus face of modern work rationality (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002).

In Habermas’ Theory of Communicative Action (Habermas, 1984), practical language use includes an inbuilt aim of “understanding” that he grasps as a form of emancipation. By speaking, human beings implicitly follow different norms that are intersubjectively valid. The critic therefore must only follow the traces of normativity inherent in competent speech acts to help to unfold the normative potential contained in these acts. However, this theory, which was highly popular in the 1980s, i.e., in the time of the new social movements that lacked the power of the working class to influence social reproduction and had only the power of the better argument, seems blind for the exclusion produced by the “order of discourse” (Foucault, 1981) itself. To participate in the discourse, according to the argument of Foucault, one must already accept a whole set of powerful preconditions that pre-structure the field of the sayable, excluding social actors, topics, forms of speaking and so on. Our question of whether the excluded can speak must be clearly denied within the Habermasian approach. Who counts as competent speaker for Habermas is precisely a result of several mechanisms of exclusion. Often subalterns are characterized as emotional and lacking the capacity to engage in rational arguments, or their concerns are excluded from the public sphere and relegated to the private one (Illouz, 2003).

However, other approaches to practice-based immanent critique are possible. In what follows, I present a far more democratic theory that includes all human beings as an immanent source of critique, especially those who are most anguished in a given society. I refer to a theory of social suffering that attempts to find in human beings feeling of being disrespected exactly this normative anchor that points towards emancipation.

2) Social suffering as form of critique

Suffering already played an important role as a motor of critique in the 19th century (e.g., Engels, 1975, Tristan, 1985), in psychoanalysis (e.g., Freud, 2002) and in the writings of the first generation of the Frankfurt School (e.g., for a good overview, see also Sembler, 2013). However, in the last few decades, there has been a new and systematic attempt to place suffering in the centre of social theory and to address the necessary interdisciplinarity needed to comprehend suffering as a social phenomenon (Ilouz, 2003, Herzog, 2020; Renault, 2017; Das, 1997; Wilkinson, 2004).

Suffering often has a physical moment that points towards its abolition: “The physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different. ‘Woe speaks: “Go”’, writes Adorno in his *Negative Dialectics* (Adorno 1973: 203). However, it is not only physical pain but also moral indignation or outrage that produces suffering. When speaking here of *social* suffering, I refer to a normative stance towards a situation rendered changeable or relievable by human action. The second part of this first, tentative definition is perhaps the easiest to explain. If suffering is to be a source for critique, then it must fulfil the aforementioned criteria for critique referring to something considered changeable.

What requires more explanation is the understanding of suffering as a “normative” stance. From where does normativity stem? Why is it justified to precisely use this normativity as grounds for critique? And finally, what does this form of critique based on social suffering contribute to overcoming the invisibilization of the excluded?

Several theories and empirical studies (e.g., Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Honneth, 1995) have claimed that, in our society, a specific set of norms is already institutionalized in different social spheres. Following a threefold model of modern societies, we can observe how people in different social spheres use explicitly, but mostly implicitly, different underlying norms that could appear, for example, in claims for recognition. We claim love and care in the family and other primary relationships because we all have basic needs. In legal relations, we refer to rights and equality when making a normative claim because we are all equipped with moral responsibility. In addition, in “communities of values” (Honneth), such as labour relations, we demand solidarity due to our social worth. What is important here is that we make these claims because usually, the norms of recognition *are already present in our daily practice*, in our practical

recognition and relation to others. Therefore, we use almost intuitively one language or another depending on the sphere in which we are moving. It would not make sense to claim love in the workplace or to demand that our two-year-old son should be recognized for the same traits and abilities as an adult.

What is important now is to understand that, although these norms are not universal but are part of a western, bourgeois society, they are broadly shared and institutionalized and form a socially accepted basis of our culture. What justifies speaking of a widely accepted normative basis and therefore uses these norms as grounds for critique is not that all the people consciously use these institutionalized norms and argue with them. It is exactly this point at which we return to social suffering. That the vast majority accepts these norms does not result in open argumentation but in the opposite: in the feeling of disrespect if these norms are not met. Independently, whether people are able to turn their feelings of disrespect into words, we all feel disrespected when not treated according to our basic needs in primary relations, according to equality of rights in legal relations or according to our traits and abilities, e.g., in the workplace. This disrespect is a form of social suffering.

Further, it is this disrespect, or social suffering, that is more democratic than the Marxian (industrial) working class or the Habermasian competent speech acts. Everybody, independent of his/her position in the production process (in the case of Marx) or cultural or educational capital (in the case of Habermas), is able to suffer when implicit normative claims are not met. Independent of whether people are able to express their suffering with words and turn it into positive claims of social recognition, the existence of social suffering confirms the existence of the underlying normative basis. Suffering is a very democratic phenomenon, and even if the subaltern is excluded from speaking in the public sphere, he/she is definitively not excluded from the possibility of suffering. We might even reasonably think that exclusion itself is or produces a specific type of suffering — a feeling of disrespect.

One of the main points of the debate between Honneth and Rancière (2016) concerns precisely the question of suffering and its potential for activating political action (which we could perhaps translate for our purpose with “social critique”, see also Janicka, 2019). Rancière is skeptical about the emancipatory impulse as such contained in suffering. What is more, he even claims that suffering does not entail a normative guide. This is true if we think of suffering as a natural or “authentic” category. However, here we always spoke of *social* suffering, as a feeling of disrespect due to the non-fulfillment

of already established social norms. The example of Rosa Parks which Rancière presents is very illustrative in that sense. Rancière affirms that Parks is not suffering but is making a claim about her rights. Without doubt the act by Rosa Parks was a communicative act about equal rights and could easily be understood as such. Still, when taking suffering as social suffering and not necessarily as a physical experience (Rancière rightly states that Parks not only refused to stand up because she was tired), then we could say that Rosa Parks as many other Black citizens suffered from disrespect, from the non-fulfillment of the previously recognized right to equality.

This understanding of suffering as related to the institutionalized, normative order of society also prevents us from taking all suffering not only as starting point but also as normative moral compass. Similar to the ideology of recognition (Honneth, 2004) there can be easily imagined an ideology of suffering (Herzog, 2020). We can put ourselves in the shoes of a white supremacist suffering from having to share public transport with people from ethnic minorities. However, in this case, the supremacist would not be suffering from a non-fulfillment of institutionalized norms but from the non-fulfillment of very particular ones. Suffering is not an original or “authentic” data that we can use to formulate critique but that has to be carefully interpreted and related to the existing normative structure.

Therefore, we can now use the norms inherent in social suffering, i.e. inherent in the feeling of non-fulfilment of socially institutionalized norms, to formulate an immanent critique. With regard to the excluded, this approach still means that the excluded is not the one who formulates critique but requires a representative critic to competently express his or her suffering. However, in this approach, at least the suffering of the excluded is the ground and the motor of critique, and this suffering can be even turned into the compass of critique. Moreover, given that exclusion itself produces a form of social suffering, the excluded even becomes the ground of critique par excellence. Eva Illouz (2003) described this situation as a certain “glamour of misery”, as a possibility and a movement of individual and social learning due to suffering.

There is one major problem with this suffering-based critique. The more that the critic is hindered from perceiving the suffering of the other, the more difficult becomes the formulation of critique in a classical, linguistic form. The formulation therefore depends on the perceivable reactions of disrespect of those suffering, as well as on the effective perception of this suffering by the critic. In both previous but necessary steps in the linguistic formulation of critique of suffering, we can find important processes of

invisibilization. These processes can have distorting effects and even contribute to disrespect and therefore be a source of new suffering.

3) Exclusion from the language of suffering

Although suffering was described as democratic—all of us have suffered at some point and, what is more, all of us are able to suffer—the *discourse* about suffering is not. Suffering can be understood as a pre-semantic form of critique (see also Adloff & Pfaller, 2017). However, it is not pre-social. As we have seen, the underlying norms that point towards emotional support in primary relationships, cognitive respect in legal relationships and social esteem in the community of values are socially learned. They are specific to western modern societies with their three distinct normative spheres. Social suffering as the grounds for critique points at the non- or incomplete fulfilment of one of these norms. At the same time, this status indicates that the accepted norms do not point beyond the already institutionalized norms. Basing critique on already accepted norms renders the critic unable to capture critiques of these norms (see also Romero-Cueva, 2013), or more precisely, the three basic normative spheres can only be criticized with the very same norms of these spheres.

Another, even more important problem for understanding critique is that suffering often does not show itself. People can suffer in silence. What first was presented as a democratic advantage, namely, that suffering does not require discursive capital, i.e., everybody can feel disrespect independent of his/her capacity to express critique, now turns towards an epistemological problem. How can we access the suffering of the other if it is not (clearly) expressed? People can feel shame in reclaiming a situation of non-suffering, i.e., of recognition in the form of love, rights or respect. From a sociological perspective, we understand this shame as a socially learned disposition, namely, as a lack of (socially produced) self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. It is often the excluded who have learned that their claims of recognition do not have the same importance than those of hegemonic social groups and therefore hide and stay silent. Moreover, people can even feel shame for their suffering and can have a sensation of guilt for the very fact that they are suffering. This feeling of guilt can be related to the feeling of being responsible for the situation that causes oneself suffering, but it can also stem from interiorized understanding of suffering being a socially proscribed weakness.

To this proscription of showing suffering or of even feeling disrespected, Axel Honneth added the dimension of “speech theft” (*Sprachraub*, Honneth, 1990). This term refers to the lack or unavailability of adequate forms of expressions. A limited number of available

discourses present accepted wordings and framings of conflictive social situations, depriving those who suffer from the appropriate manifestation of suffering. Honneth presented the example of common conflicts in labour relations. Here, we are used to framing conflicts in terms of working hours, salary and job security. This framing already offers proto-solutions for labour conflicts. At the same time, this framing of labour relations as material conflicts can impede the understanding of labour relations as moral relations and struggles for recognition (ibid.).

The notion of speech theft is still theoretically underdeveloped but can be positioned between what Fricker (2007) describes as “hermeneutical injustice” and Celikates (2017) frames as ideologies. The notion of hermeneutical injustices denominates “the injustice of having some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to persistent and wide-ranging hermeneutical marginalization” (Fricker, 2007: 154). The notion of ideology as Celikates (2017: 58) understands it can not only distort experiences of individuals but can lead to the fact that certain experiences not even can be made. Speech theft includes elements from both. Without an appropriate linguistic frame, the experiences of others cannot be understood adequately. So Fricker describes how, without the linguistic framing as sexual harassment, certain behaviours were understood by others as flirting and uneasiness stemming from that behaviour as lack of humour. However, speech theft also includes the possibility to adequately perceive a situation by the subject who makes the experience. Through words, people make sense of their feelings and interpret situations, they “digest” it and are able to perceive the situation in a specific way. This lack of digestion can even lead to a second suffering, similar to the case of trauma (Frost & Hogget, 2008). In our terms, a trauma is a first suffering that could not be adequately digested and therefore creates a second suffering.

However, even if expressed — whether in words or in another perceptible way — the suffering of the excluded faces several veils of invisibilization. We can roughly distinguish these mechanisms of invisibilization into physical and social. *Physical* invisibilization of suffering would then be all of those mechanisms by which it is materially impossible to perceive the expressed suffering of the other. This outcome can occur, e.g., through spatial segregation. If the other suffers in a migrant detention centre, in a segregated suburb or even in another country, then I do not have immediate access to this suffering. Foucault also pointed to some mechanisms of the “order of discourse” that prevent people from the possibility of their claims being perceived. Foucault spoke,

for example, of the “privileged right to speak” or the “taboo” against speaking in certain forms or about certain topics in specific conditions (Foucault, 1981). This taboo would also be a form of physical invisibilization because the silence of the other hinders in a very basic, physical way the perception of suffering.

Additionally, we also know *social* forms of invisibilization, i.e., situations in which the other is clearly heard but is not considered relevant. Rebeca Solnit (2014) made popular the term mansplaining for those cases in which the voices of women can clearly be perceived by others but are not given the same importance as the words pronounced by men. What is true for women is also true for other non-hegemonic groups Kidd, Medina & Pohlhaus (2017) present these “testimonial injustices” (Fricker, 2007) in an impressive variety of social fields and for very diverse non-hegemonic social groups. Even in cases in which there is no physical impediment against perceiving the suffering of the other, socially we often place less importance on the suffering of non-hegemonic or excluded social groups.

All of these mechanisms of invisibilization not only impede the suffering of the excluded from being turned into critique. Invisibilization itself can also be understood as a mechanism of exclusion and disrespect and, thus, produces social suffering. It is therefore an ethical imperative to overcome mechanisms of invisibilization to access the critique immanent in suffering, not only of those highly visible, hegemonic social actors but also of the worst off in society.

4) Fragmented solutions

The ethical need to access suffering to develop critique encounters several practical problems. We can never see every aspect of a given object. Every point of view always and necessarily leaves something in the dark. No object is totally accessible for us. In the case of a dice, we can only see three sides at a time. In far more complex phenomena, such as social suffering, we must assume that many relevant aspects are hidden. However, even if we cannot see all of the sides of a dice at once we can: a) infer the numbers on the hidden sides of the die based on those that we can see; or b) turn the dice around, creating a more complete image by bringing together two fragmented ones.

One important tool for perceiving the inner life of others even when not being clearly expressed is empathy. Empathy in popular, but also sometimes in scientific, literature is seen as the panacea against all types of social ills (for an overview of the debate on empathy see Herzog, 2020: 58-62; 163-173). If only more people were more empathic,

so the common argument goes, people would, on the one hand, do less harm to others and, on the other hand, be more willing and able to help those in need. Consequently, there are an enormous literature and pedagogic efforts to render people more empathic. In general terms, we can define empathy as the capacity to share the emotions and perspectives of others (Stellar and Keltner, 2014: 332). Independent of why exactly human beings are able to be empathic (regarding the debate between mirror neurons or the perception action model as an explanation for empathy, see also Preston, 2007), it seems that human beings not only can cognitively understand the feelings of others but can even feel similar — not equal — emotions to those of others. The joy and pain of others can trigger similar feelings in oneself. Therefore, empathy could be a good candidate for understanding muted, excluded, subaltern subjects and their suffering to overcome suffering through critique.

However, there has lately been a growing literature criticizing the uncritical appraisal of empathy (e.g., Bloom, 2016; Breithaupt, 2017; Vachon et al. 2014). In a meta-analysis of research articles on empathy, Vachon et al. (2014) concluded that, despite the pressure to publish findings that confirm the importance of empathy, there is practically *no positive relationship* between empathy and moral behaviour. It seems that empathy is not a pre-social capacity that helps us to overcome social invisibilization. Instead, empathy works in the very same way as processes of subordination, exclusion and invisibilization.

First, people are more empathic with those from hegemonic social groups. The luxury problems of the rich and famous can move masses to tears while being indifferent to the suffering of the subaltern (Bloom, 2016; Breithaupt, 2017). Second, empathy is a concrete feeling with the situation of concrete others. Humans are able to feel empathic with crying children, but it is almost impossible to feel empathy with a huge, impersonal group, such as Asian farm workers affected by a new global trade policy. Third, empathy can often be a driver of action away from one's own co-suffering, which is not necessarily the same as action that points towards the end of the suffering of others. Paul Bloom (2016: 74) quoted a letter from a woman living near a concentration camp. In the letter, the women asked the officials to find another place for the atrocities to end *her* empathic co-suffering. Finally, it seems that people are far more empathic with what was socially constructed as their own in-group than with members of the out-group. Although there is nothing inherently better or more deserving than not suffering for members of one's own nation, ethnic group, political party or family, people use selective empathy to give preferences to the overcoming of suffering of what is perceived as one's own group. In

short, when visibilizing through empathy, people follow and therefore reproduce very similar social mechanisms to those of social invisibilization; i.e., instead of overcoming social exclusion, empathy in practice reproduces social exclusion.

However, although empathy seems not to help us to find a moral compass, it can nevertheless be an appropriate tool *after* we have decided whose suffering with which we want to be empathic. In these cases, empathy helps us to access and understand the silenced suffering of the other, or in the words of Paul Bloom, empathy “could be a reliable and useful servant—but never a master” (Bloom, 2016: 212).

Another tool to overcome invisibilization is art or aesthetics, especially when there is a lack of words being produced through “speech theft” or any other mechanism that impedes the appreciation and expression of suffering through language. Aesthetics have been explored by many critical thinkers as tools of analysis of social reality. From Marx (1978) to the three generations of the Frankfurt School, aesthetic production has been used to gain a deeper insight into society — to enter a degree of deepness that language on its own cannot reach (e.g., Adorno, 2003; Kracauer, 2004; Habermas, 1973; Honneth, 2007; for a good overview see Hernández & Herzog, 2015).

To be generally perceptible, suffering must appear somehow, even if it occurs in a very indirect, embodied form. It is precisely here where art can show this embodiment of suffering. Suffering as a recurrent topic of paintings, music, poems, etc., confirms the possibility of accessing a phenomenon that blocks direct apprehension through language. However, art does not offer direct access to suffering either. Artistic production is also subject to certain economies of attention and social orders of visibility and therefore is not free from the mechanisms that (re-)produce invisibility at the same time as they attempt to visibilize. However, in contrast to the invisibility produced in linguistic apprehension, art does not fall into the same reifying identity logics as language. Art reflects in itself the impossibility of correct expression: art includes an eternal struggle of expression, and it is always processual and dialectic reflecting upon its own limitations. Moreover, if art were expressible in words, it would barely count as art. Therefore, art also escapes the question of truth and is “delivered from the lie of being truth” (Adorno). Adorno spoke only of “moments of truth” (*Wahrheitsgehalt*, see Adorno, 2003) in regard to art. Again, similar to in the case of empathy, art can add complexity to the picture of social suffering, uncovering formerly hidden layers of pain. Therefore, it can help to formulate critique. However, art itself, as well as the economy of attention and the perception of aesthetic products, cannot be considered a moral guideline.

That the techniques and mechanisms of visibilization sometimes even reproduce structures of power and exclusion should lead us to a critical understanding not only of invisibilization but also of visibilization itself. We have known since Foucault (e.g., 1990, 2002) that visibilization is a mechanism of power. By visibilizing, the priest, the medical practitioner, the teacher or the prison guard gains insights over the other as an object of knowledge. The consequence of this knowledge can be a voluntary or even involuntary deeper subjection to power. This epistemic extractivism of “the will to knowledge” (Foucault) cannot be disattended in regard to the suffering of others as the grounds for critique. There is no easy way out from even the well-meant critique being entangled in a web of visibility and accessibility that is not free from reproducing excluding power structures. There are well analysed cases in which the questions asked to help a patient produce even more suffering (Frank, 2001). There should also be a right to silence (about silence and invisibility as empowering strategies, see also Herzog, 2020). Like the Baron Munchhausen, who saves himself from drowning by pulling on his own hair, there is no other way of attempting to escape this dilemma than also placing oneself in the spotlight while looking for the normative grounds of critique in the suffering of the other.

Conclusions

Exclusion, as the socially produced situation of communicative irrelevance, also means that the excluded is denied access to pronouncing critique in socially relevant, public spaces. Furthermore, mechanisms of exclusion go even deeper, invisibilizing through procedures such as speech theft or socially learned shame of even the non-public expression of critique. This means, that the more an individual or social group is excluded the more it is prevented from expressing critique publicly and privately in linguistic form. As an example we can take the social field of substance abuse. This field is dominated by different discourses and legitimate speaker positions. Medical, political, legal and police discourse are usually pronounced in the public sphere by people with high “discursive capital”, i.e. by people who have the intellectual and material resources to intervene in public debates. They tell the public and the drug users what should and what should not be done. Drug users themselves are —at first— excluded from the discourse; they are objects, not subjects, of the discourse (Herzog, et al 2008). This exclusion intersects also with other lines of social discrimination such as race or gender (Matsumoto et al. 2018). Drug users only become legitimate speakers when they adhere to subject positions offered by the discourse such as responsible drug users (Campbell & Shaw, 2008), or helpless

victims of an “evil” substance (Herzog, 2018). These certainly recomforting positions are offered to them by the hegemonic discourse. Only when adopting these positions drug users become first-hand witnesses of the truth of the discourse. But it is not them who speak but the dominant discourse that speaks through those who have been forced to subject to the offered subject positions.

However, the excluded can clearly criticize in a pre-semantic way in the form of social suffering. Suffering can itself be understood as a pre-semantic form of critique. Furthermore, as exclusion itself produces social suffering, this specific suffering can be a ground of critique of social exclusion. To turn this suffering into socially perceptible critique, several mechanisms of invisibilization must be circumnavigated. Since the publicly visible critic trying to translate the suffering into words him- or herself is part of this powerful order of attention, critique must proceed in a circular, self-critical and reflexive way. Like artistical expressions that never can pretend to have said the last word, critique must approach suffering always in a dialogical, circular, fragmented ways to foster progress, i.e., to overcome social suffering — at least partially and provisionally. In the case of drug consumption, the role of drugs for artistic expression is widely known. Often the so created art-works have a specific sensibility for diverse forms of suffering or are a way of overcoming social exclusion related to drug consumption. At the same time, there does also exist the temptation to include artistic expression again in the institutional discourse and setting through art therapy with a clear therapeutic aim stemming from the hegemonic institutions and not the drug user / artist itself.

Here we see the danger of wanting to overcome social exclusion too easily. The type of tentative critique as presented in this article ultimately aims at overcoming the situation of exclusion, not only by including marginalized groups in a given hegemonic framework or discursive order but by changing this order that produces exclusion in the first stance. It takes elements of different forms of reconstructive critique as described by Celikates (2009). Interacting with those who suffer, the critic takes the position of the excluded and reconstruct therefrom, and in a theoretical informed way, a normative point of reference. In the best case this dialogical reconstruction leads to the empowerment of those who suffer in order to be able to express themselves critique and to overcome exclusion.

Coming back to the question formulated in the title of the article we could say that exclusion as communicative mechanism hinders the linguistic formulation of critique especially in the public sphere. Yet the suffering of the excluded and produced through

exclusion can be a provisional, precarious and fragmented starting point of social critique that ultimately, with the help of the informed critic, also could lead to a certain empowerment of the excluded. Critique would thus not only contribute to end suffering but would point also to the overcoming of limitations for rational and communicative social self-understanding.

Literature

- Adloff, F., and L. Pfaller. 2017. "Critique *in statu nascendi*? The Reluctance Towards Organ Donation." *Historical Social Research* 42 (3): 24–40.
- Adorno, T. W. 1973. *Negative Dialectics*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Adorno, T. W. 2003. *Ästhetische Theorie*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Angermüller, J. 2018. "Accumulating discursive capital, valuating subject positions. From Marx to Foucault." *Critical Discourse Studies* 15(4): 414–425.
- Bude, H., and A. Willis. 2008. *Exklusion - Die Debatte über die "Überflüssigen"*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Bloom, P. 2016. *Against Empathy. The Case for Rational Compassion*. London: Penguin.
- Boltanski, L., and L. Thévenot 2006. *On Justification: Economies of Worth*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Breithaupt, F. 2017. *Die Dunklen Seiten der Empathie*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Campbell, N. D., and S. J. Shaw. 2008. "Incitements to discourse: Illicit drugs, harm reduction, and the production of ethnographic subjects." *Cultural Anthropology*, 23(4): 688–717.
- Celikates, R. 2009. *Kritik als soziale Praxis. Gesellschaftliche Selbstverständigung und kritische Theorie*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus.
- Celikates, R. 2017. "Epistemische Ungerechtigkeit, Loopingeffekte und Ideologiekritik. Eine sozialphilosophische Perspektive." *WestEnd — Neue Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 2/2017: 53–72.
- Das, V. 1997. "Sufferings, Theodicies, Disciplinary Practices, Appropriations." *International Social Sciences Journal*, 49(154): 563–572.
- Engels, F. 1975. "The Condition of the Working Class in England." In Marx, K., and Engels, F. *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*. Vol. 4, 295–596. New York: International Publishers.
- Foucault, M. 1981. "The Order of Discourse." In *Untying the Text: A Post-structural Anthology*, edited by Robert Young, 48–78. Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Foucault, M. 1990. *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction* (Vol. 1). New York: Random House.
- Foucault, M. 2002. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. 2007. *The Politics of Truth*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Frank, A. W. 2001. "Can We Research Suffering?" *Qualitative Health Research* 11(3): 353–362.
- Freud, S. 2002. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. London: Penguin.
- Fricker, M. 2007. *Epistemic Injustice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Frost, L., and P. Hoggett. 2008. "Human Agency and Social Suffering." *Critical Social Policy* 28(4): 438–460.
- Habermas, J. 1973. *Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Hernández, F., and B. Herzog. (2015) *Estética del reconocimiento. Fragmentos de una teoría social de las artes*. Valencia: PUV.

- Herzog, B., E. Gómez-Guardeño, V. Agulló-Calatayud, R. Aleixandre-Benavent, R., and J. C. Valderrama-Zurián. 2008. "Discourses on Drugs and Immigration: The Social Construction of a Problem." *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 10(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-10.1.1191>
- Herzog, B. 2011. "Exclusión Discursiva – hacia un nuevo concepto de la exclusión social." *Revista Internacional de Sociología* 69(3): 607–626.
- Herzog B. 2016. "The Discursive Construction of Drug Realities: Discourses on Drugs, Users, and Drug-Related Practices." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Adult Mental Health*. Edited by O'Reilly M., and J. N Lester, 101-116. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Herzog, B. 2020. *Invisibilization of Suffering. The Moral Grammar of Disrespect*. London: Palgrave.
- Habermas, J. 1984. *Theory of Communicative Action Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Honneth, A., and J. Rancière. 2016 *Recognition or Disagreement. A critical encounter on the politics of freedom, equality and identity*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Honneth, A. 1990. "Moralbewußtsein und soziale Klassenherrschaft." In *Die zerrissene Welt des Sozialen*, 110-129. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Honneth, A. 1995. *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Honneth, A. 2004. "Anerkennung als Ideologie." *WestEnd Neue Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 1: 51–70.
- Honneth, A. 2007. "Verwirklichung von Freiheit. Bob Dylan und seine Zeit." In *Bob Dylan. Ein Kongreß*, edited by Honneth, A., P. Kemper, and R. Klein, 15-28. Frankfurt/Main Suhrkamp.
- Horkheimer, M., and Th. W. Adorno, 2002. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Illouz, E. 2003. *Oprah Winfrey and the Glamour of Misery. An Essay on Popular Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jaeggi, R. 2014. *Kritik von Lebensformen*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Janicka, I. 2019. "A New Way to Suffer: Girard, Rancière, and Political Subjectivation." *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*, 26: 161-177.
- Kidd, J., J. Medina, and G. Pholhaus, G. eds. 2017. *The Routledge Handbook of epistemic injustice*. New York: Routledge.
- Kracauer, S. 2004. *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kracauer, S. 1995. *The Mass Ornament – Weimar Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Luhmann, N. 2005. "Inklusion und Exklusion." In *Soziologische Aufklärung* 6. 226–251. Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag.

- Marx, K. 1970. "Brief an Arnold Ruge vom September 1843", In *Marx Engels Werke*, Vol 3. Berlin, Dietz: 343-346.
- Marx, K. 1978. *Die deutsche Ideologie. Marx-Engels-Werke*, 3. Berlin: Dietz.
- Matsumoto, A. E., M. Farias, and S. Luiz de Almeida. 2018. "Drug and Race." In *Drugs and Social Context. Social Perspectives on the Use of Alcohol and other Drugs*, edited by Mota Ronzani, T., 77- 88. Cham: Springer.
- Renault, E. 2017. *Social Suffering. Sociology, Psychology, Politics*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Romero, J. M. 2013. "Sobre la pretensión de trascendencia de la crítica inmanente." *Diálogo Filosófico* 85: 55–75.
- Semler, C. 2013. "Teoría Crítica y sufrimiento social en Max Horkheimer." *Constelaciones – Revista de Teoría Crítica* 5: 260–279.
- Solnit, R. 2014. *Men Explain Things to Me*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Stahl, T. 2013. *Immanente Kritik. Elemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken*. Frankfurt/Main and New York: Campus.
- Stellar, J. E., and D. Keltner. 2014. "Compassion". In *Handbook of Positive Emotions* edited by Tugade, M. M., M. N. Shiota, and L. D. Kirby, 329–341. New York: Guilford Press.
- Tristan, F. 1985. *Peregrinations of a Pariah*. London: Virago Press.
- Vachon, D. D., D. R. Lynam, and J. Johnsons. 2014. "The (Non) Relation Between Empathy and Aggression: Surprising Results from a Meta-Analysis." *Psychological Bulletin* 140(3): 751–773.
- Wilkinson, I. 2004. *Suffering: A Sociological Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity.