

Towards Non-Dichotomous Sociology: A Phenomenologically Inspired Epistemological Analysis

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Abstract

An article that reflects on the adaptation of a phenomenologically inspired approach within sociological epistemology. Using two sociological as examples perspectives – interpretivism and critical theory – we point at the normative assumptions common to both approaches. We suggest these are responsible for the impossibility of transgressing dichotomization and mediation – two features continuously reproduced within social sciences. With the use of phenomenologically inspired non-dichotomous epistemology we offer a way to work around these limitations. It is possible, we argue, thanks to the application of the categories of intentionality and responsiveness, to ground sociology in a non-dichotomous, and hence expanded, paradigm.

Keywords: non-dichotomous epistemology; phenomenology; interpretivism; critical theory; responsiveness; intentionality

1. Introduction

In this article we attempt to consider from the sociological point of view, the explanatory possibilities offered by an epistemology of selected phenomenological perspectives. We are interested in the non-dichotomous and non-mediated aspect of phenomenology, starting with the study of universal conditions of perception that do not differentiate into a subject or object, but apply to the

experience of contact itself (Merleau-Ponty). We then go on to expand and explore non-differentiated perception as it applies to the interpersonal “group” level as well as to intercultural experience (Waldenfels).

In our opinion, adequate attention to non-differentiated phenomenal experience as applied to dyadic or group/intercultural fields, is lacking in sociological thought. As a consequence, sociological thought is caught between attitudes determined on the one hand by individual autonomy at the micro level, and on the other hand by systemic and functional factors at the macro level. Without a transgressive – which we suggest is provided by phenomenology – sociology remains defined by this enduring opposition, or split. The epistemology of the social sciences is furthermore characterized by mediation, which means that each experience or phenomenon is captured in its form previously determined by symbolic, linguistic and cultural structures. The simple consequence of this is the abovementioned tendency to dichotomy, that derives from pre-existing divisions (subject-object, individual-society) that are deeply-rooted in a broadly Cartesian cultural epoch that has characterised the last 400 years of European thought etc.. As an illustration of these trends, we analyse two influential approaches: interpretive and critical sociology. Owing to the space limitation of this article, the authors focus only on these two sociological perspectives. Their complimentary critique is believed to be based on a collection of arguments which, if broadened, may serve as a critical resource for analysis of other influential currents in social sciences.

This article is also a voice in the discussion on the relevance of the phenomenological approach and the possibility of extrapolating its achievements to other non-philosophical fields. The renaissance of phenomenology illustrates a resurgence of interest in the fields of art analysis, ecology, feminism, and even neuroscience. Within the latter, there are studies that validate the existence of a reality that is undichotomized, prior to the division into a subject and an object (cf. Depraz, 2010; Varela, 2001; Zahavi, 2010).

The first part of this article approaches the subject of sociological sciences from the phenomenological perspective, re-centring the experience of pre-differentiated contact. The contact consists of two components: intentionality and responsiveness. In order to describe the former, we refer to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ontological analysis. Then we move on to the question of responsiveness, derived from the thought of Bernhard Waldenfels¹.

¹ The authors being aware of multiple attempts to go beyond the non-dichotomous epistemology within the framework of social philosophy and social sciences (eg., Ahmed, 2006; Grathoff, 1970; Plessner, 2018) have made a decision to narrow their scope of analyses and focus on two authors Merleau-Ponty and Waldenfels. Their perspectives seem both convincing and complementary which is further developed in the article.

In the second part, we describe the epistemological aspects of the interpretive paradigm, recognizing George H. Mead's social psychology and humanistic sociology as an inspiration for this. Although there were non-dichotomous tendencies in both, as we show, they were not elaborated by sociologists working within interpretive epistemology. This is, in our opinion, inconsistent with the original assumptions of interpretive epistemology.

The third part contrasts interpretive sociology. The father of the latter is Karl Marx, whom we describe as a thinker, rather than a sociologist par excellence, with critical sociology. inspired by Hegelian dialectics on the one hand, and positivism on the other. Then we analyse the Frankfurt School and the thought of Michel Foucault. In both cases, as in the analysis of interpretivism, it turns out that the nondichotomous premises present from the very beginning have not been fully developed.

We summarize the whole article by showing the normative assumptions common to both sociological approaches, responsible for the impossibility of going beyond the already mentioned reproduced features of dichotomization and mediation.

2. The non-dichotomous epistemology

In the understanding of the authors of this article, from the phenomenological perspective, the subject of sociology is contact, the relationship of the "I" with the world; we are less interested in what creates the social and what the social consequently is. Sociology has always emphasized – respectively – the study of social conditions and social functions. On the other hand, less attention was devoted to researching how the social (co-)emerges. We wish to turn to phenomenology, not so much to examine what is a reified object of thought, but to describe how what it is subject to reflection emerges. We want to describe the process of contact because, although it manifests itself in language, it is understood beyond understanding, at the level of being itself.

In practice, we argue that the ontological level of contact is realized as intentionality and responsiveness. Intentionality is directing to the other, to the world. Responsiveness, on the other hand, is the ethical dimension of accepting the other, including the world in one's self ("worlding"). The latter should be distinguished from reactivity, which implies the presence of two separate entities, potentially aimed at intersubjective understanding, as studied by Alfred Schütz for example.

Schütz transplanted Edmund Husserl's thought from philosophy to sociology, abandoning the detailed study of abstract laws and focusing on studying the intersubjectivity produced and reproduced by individuals in their daily lives (Schütz, 1967). An important concept used in this context was the "body of knowledge", that is, a set of rules, definitions, ideas and information necessary

to function in the social world, providing orientation and a way of relating to events. Schütz, although he wanted to study pre-phenomenal reality, limited it to the cognitive (reflexive-discursive) layer within the scope of his research and developed theory.

In our understanding, what is pre-phenomenal also applies to the emotional and sensory layer, based on two vectors: the intentional and the responsive. In Merleau-Ponty's language: the two-fold orientation in contact can be grasped in a non-dualistic way in the obverse and reverse of touching and being touched, seeing and being seen, speaking and being spoken.

Schütz's approach represents an explanatory model that defines experience as mediated by interpretation. The individuals he describes must gain access to the world, which means that there is an opposition between them and the world. In this approach and the access model emphasized within it, the effects of the Cartesian approach to consciousness as substance are still visible: "I am, I exist". I exist with certain qualities, and these qualities are properties of a substance, so I am a substance (substantial mentalism).

From the phenomenological point of view, we can be sure not so much about the substance, but rather about the reality of various connections (relations), including the reality of the relationship between cogito and cogitatum. These various kinds of connections, and not substance (as Descartes wanted), constitute the field of intentionality. Therefore, intentionality not only means awareness of something, but also a way of possible access to the objects of the world. We are dealing here, not with the emanation of consciousness onto the object, but rather with fusion with the object; an infrastructure of intentionality. "I do not grasp the way I myself am directly, by paying attention to how the world is for me, how there is Me in the world, how my intentional states engage Me in relationships" (Wiesing, 2014, p. 54). Thus, the question of accessibility disappears and the individual and the world become parts of a larger whole.

In the following fragment, referring to the phenomenological thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Bernhard Waldenfels, we try to show the emergence of the social, about which we wrote that its constitutive element is contact, or rather contacting. We describe the threads of the work of these two philosophers, allowing us to define what the contact infrastructure is, along with its dual intentional-responsive structure. Taking into account the dynamics of being in the world understood in this way, we use the Merleau-Ponty philosophy to reflect the aspect of intentionality. On the other hand, in Waldenfels' thought, the aspect of responsiveness is much more exposed.

Phenomenology wants or wanted to carry out the project "defending a priori knowledge and ideal objects against yesterday's empiricism and naturalism" (Tatarkiewicz, 1983, p. 215). Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty was interested in the primal layer of experience and, at the same time, in the primal structure of being which led him to introduce a category to define the primal differentiation

that can be recognised in experience itself, at the base of perception. This differentiation is referred to as "distance" (hiatus), the mutual relationality of my "I" and the world. Merleau-Ponty did not take this as an epistemological thesis only, as a result, he thought the correlation of the subject with the world would be lost. Due to the fact that the basis of perception recognises not only the epistemological but also the ontological distance, it became possible to link the two sides together. Thus, the statement from the level of perception research entered the layer of statements about being itself (hiatus as a property of being).

But this hiatus between my right hand touched and my right hand touching, between my voice heard and my voice uttered, between one moment of my tactile life and following one, is not an ontological void, a non-being: it is spanned by the total being of my body, and by that of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 148).

What we are dealing with when studying perception is a field of various "appearances". While experiencing cognition, we do not face unequivocal negativity that would be implied by the gap between the cognisor (subject) and the world (object) surrounding him. Always, one 'appearance' is replaced by another: another 'appearance' disappears after a while, but not into nothingness but for another 'appearance' – this is the author's famous '*il y a*', that is, something that is, is already something (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 88). Hence it can be concluded that 'appearances' occur on the surface of the cognition of the world. The surface of cognition is the common ground for the overlapping of both sides of the cognitive process.

Phenomenology, both that of the earlier Merleau-Ponty, the later Levinas and the modern, represented by, Bernhard Waldenfels for example, is characterised by a search for an increasingly fundamental level of experience that would legitimise the ontological status of the sphere of phenomena. Merleau-Ponty himself, in connection with the concept of "distance" he introduced, strove to approach the specificity of being in such a way that it would rely on the unity of its sensual and logical, rational aspects present in the original, initial differentiation. Instead of using existing and inadequate categories, such as being-nothingness, thing-perception, etc., he introduces the category of "visible-invisible"; the invisible is not simply something that does not exist for seeing, but creates another dimension of the world.

It is therefore not a de facto invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, which would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather it is invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 151).

Merleau-Ponty's thought was an inspiration for Bernhard Waldenfels, the German language translator of the works of the French phenomenologist. He investigates the phenomenon of the "alien". The alien, in contrast to the "other",

goes beyond the opposing pair: the same – different, and is situated outside this demarcation. The alien, just like the invisible, does not mean total unknowability. The experience of strangeness is a foreign experience, the research of which is carried out by phenomenological xenology and, as pointed out by Waldenfels, psychoanalysis (Migasiński and Pokropski, 2017, p. 14).

Waldenfels outlines in the figure of "intertwining with the alien" the basis of his epistemology, which, in our understanding, is a variant of non-dichotomous epistemology, emphasizing the co-creation and co-emergence of social entities. "The reference to the alien can be interpreted in two ways, as a boundary of one's own capacities or as a questioning of the own" (Waldenfels, 2011, p. 19). The very cognition and its tools: "speaking and acting" do not allow you to close yourself in self-reference. In order to operate, they are forced to be subject to multi-reference. Cognition and its tools remain themselves in the possessed continuity, yet still transcend themselves, because "it goes beyond itself as it touches upon the impossibilities of the invisible, the unheard, and the unthought" (Waldenfels, 2011, p. 17). Hence the nature of man described by Waldenfels: he is a lack-being and a surplus-being. The absence, for the sake of the non-existence of one permanent definition of consciousness, makes it potentially exposed to excess, that is, to constantly transcend the here and now. The alien grows on the ground of man, transcending and completing it.

It is no coincidence that this proposal shows traces of Levinas' heteronomy, assuming radical individualism opposed to autonomy. Thus, we enter the space of the theory of ethical experience, where responsibility as the experience of being called to respond – and thus accepting interdependence and subordination to a certain socially binding heteronomy – precedes individual freedom, individual cognition and understanding of the world we construct (Levinas, as cited in Critchley, 2012, p. 57).

Introducing the category of pathos as an unusual event that happens to someone and always bears traces of alien, of foreign influence, allows Waldenfels to break the subject object opposition. Pathos as the opposite of apathy, indifference, and the lack of difference, goes beyond traditional causality and intentionality. Someone to whom something happens is a subject in a non-modern sense; he is subjected to a certain experience of what Waldenfels calls a form of passivity, but of passivity understood as an alien ego ("I"), not the opposite of activity. Pathos and the answer to them constitute one and the same experience (Waldenfels, 2011, pp. 28-29). They are not disjointed wholes, only time separates them, leaving room for a learning response by being touched (by an event). Pathos does not so much make us think, as it forces us to think; it disrupts existing networks of meanings, violates the system of rules, and thus, de-contextualises the event.

Waldenfels shows that phenomenology with its categories of the horizon of experience and sense introduces liminality in the full sense of the word, referring directly to “the question of how limits can be described and transgressed without being eliminated” (Waldenfels, 2011, p. 22). The meaning unfolds against the background of real nonsense; it is not enough to assume only what the genesis of meaning is, but also how the meaning is formed, how it is generated in many ways in the process of recognising alienness in one’s self or being exposed to its influence². Phenomenology and its study of experience are, in the author's opinion, a counterbalance to the proliferation of institutional agendas that characterises modernity, reducing unusual events to established and accepted norms existing within one great multifunctional system, which is contemporary society (Waldenfels, 2011, pp. 25-26).

The viewpoint of the third party, which guarantees law and justice, is in a certain manner indispensable. Insofar as in discourse and action forms are repeated and rules or laws are applied, there is always some third person or instance in play. By subjecting the call of the alien to a universal law and thus by equalizing what is unequal, however, justice always contains an element of injustice. The attempt to produce a definitive symmetry between the own and the alien, and to make both equal to each other, would in the end be similar to the attempt to balance present and past, waking and sleeping, or life and death, as if one could at will cross the threshold that separates one from the other in either direction. (Waldenfels, 2011, p. 41).

The author applies this fundamentalist or constructionist attempts at eliminating this tension between pathos and responsiveness both to the interpersonal and intercultural levels, thereby opposing what he describes respectively as possessive individualism and possessive culturalism, which characterize Western thinking and modern rationality.

In the next part of the article, we would like to look at two sociological perspectives and their epistemologies as we argue that they can be classified as oppositional, i.e. privileging the opposing aspects of social reality. The first is the interpretive paradigm that emphasizes the agency of individuals. The second, the critical paradigm, which largely arises from the deconstruction of the assumptions of the former, speaks of the uncritical reign of ideas and the need to demystify them.

² In which the previously mentioned distinction between autonomy and heteronomy becomes present. If alienness is already in me from the start (perhaps as a learned language or a culture that came from the outside, radically transforming me), and also if functioning in the world is associated with being permanently exposed to external influences, which transform me to a greater or lesser extent, it is impossible to be autonomous, if defined as separateness and independence. Introducing alienness thus opens us to heteronomous subjectivity (Cf. Waldenfels, 2009, pp. 116-118).

We will show how both of these approaches, despite their transgressive, non-dualistic aspirations, reproduce the dichotomous tension that has characterized sociological theory from the start – between sociologism and psychologism; together with their grounding in unchanging, reified oppositions: subject and object, thing and cognition, individual and society. Such a dichotomization, in turn, is a simple consequence of a principle rarely deconstructed in social sciences, to which we will continue to refer, that we have access to reality only in a mediated way (through our own mind), observing our reflection on the world and not the world itself (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 1968; Wiesing, 2014).

3. The epistemology of interpretivism

The sources of the interpretive paradigm in sociology are American pragmatism and the Chicago School on the one hand and German humanistic sociology on the other. For the purposes of this article, we will first examine the concepts posited by G. H. Mead as a representative of social pragmatism, pioneering works for later American sociologists.

When analysing Mead's concept of self, it is worth starting with considering the issue of the human ontological status. What is man as a being, in this psychosocial concept? First of all, man is the result of the evolution of species, isolating themselves from the animal world through "his gaining (...) the ability to use meaningful symbols (language), think, reflect on his/her own activity and manage it consciously and, finally, live within an organisation, socially" (Mead, 1972). It is a behaviourist theory (which sees people in the same way as animals are treated) that extends classical behaviourism by the concept of self. At the same time, it should be added, no qualitative change has been made here, only enlargement. From this perspective, the self turns out to be something like a new organ, like an eye or a thumb, extending the spectrum of the ability to influence reality.

However, the self cannot be reduced one-to-one to an organ: "[t]he body is not a self, as such; it becomes a self only when it has developed a mind within the context of social experience" (Mead, 1972, p. 50). In the learning process, the social stimuli encountered lead to the emergence of appropriate dispositions on the one hand, and ourselves on the other. We are given to ourselves as a result of mediation, adopting the other person's point of view that informs us that "I" am, and, moreover, in a certain form. It may lead us to a twofold conclusion. Behaviorism, present in Mead's theory, makes his concept individualistic: the self is the disposition of the individual, existing as long as it is developed by all members of the species and reproduced in their behaviour. But, at the same time, the aspect of mediation, of being a transformed member of a society steers his thought beyond an individualistic approach.

As part of the process of an individual's growth into society described in this way, it is also worth considering the issue of agency and autonomy. This is a result of evolution and as such serves the purpose of adaptation to the environment (in order to learn how to survive). The individual must first understand the world and themselves, in this way objectifying both (it and themselves); this in turn being associated with the development of control not only over one's self, but also over the world. Thus, for Mead, intelligence enables "unlimited problem-solving", which makes him an adherent of the idea of progress. Crisis does not mean a catastrophe, but a driving force of progress (Mead, 1972). This instrumentalisation and thus autonomy described above – present in the world and in individuals – is in fact contained in the theory itself.

For Mead, psychology and philosophy were domains of a greater concern than sociology. His sociology would be better called a social psychology. The explanations made with regard to individuals became a basis for a description of society. Here too, we are dealing with an instrumental theorisation of society and an emphasis on individual autonomy by Mead as the theorist. Analysing the logic of his pondering, we are able to say that individuals require the presence of a community in order to equip them with the organ of 'self'.

The project of humanist sociology was implied by dissatisfaction with two previous views of society: as a sum of individuals or as a whole independent of individuals. "In other words, humanistic sociology is neither realism, nor sociological nominalism (...). From this point of view, neither 'society' nor 'individual' is something 'ready', 'given' or 'primary', but only becomes so in the course of social interaction, which is the most important datum of sociology" (Szacki, 2002, p. 437 et seq.).

It is worth noting that, following the ontological assumption of humanistic sociology, according to which interaction precedes the individual and precedes society, the epistemology did not develop consistently. The interpretive paradigm still remains founded on dualism of the subject and the object of cognition. In the same trend it manifests itself, as we argue, in two ways: as implicit atomism, and as pre-constructivism, which to some extent corresponds to the earlier division into nominalism and sociological realism, from which interactionism wanted to depart.

The question of nominalism and atomism may be raised for several reasons. The Chicago School of sociology assume that there are private 'dictionaries' and that individual participants in every situation define specific elements of the interaction. They emphasise the fact that everyone has their own dictionary and their own definitions. Situation participants are atoms, placed in a context that binds them together and enables mutual understanding. Intersubjectivity is what arises socially from that which was private. Thus, even the language of describing the world must be nominalistic, since the understanding of meanings is made only on the basis of individual, private experiences.

The turn towards constructivism is visible in the works of Goffman, where not only the private dictionary of individuals who meet in a situation is examined, but also the dictionary of a given situation: the supra-unit stabilising principle. Goffman tried to uncover the rules that collectively define the situation. He was interested in the possibility of a stable order in the context of the primacy of interaction. He was less interested in the individual and his or her actions than in the values and norms that are imposed on them (Goffman, 1970). In the "dramaturgical" phase characteristic of his earlier work, Goffman searched for the sources of order, assuming that the presence of other people inevitably transforms human behaviour into a performance that is primarily intended to make an appropriate impression on them. As we can see, interaction here only transforms the behaviour of individuals. In his late work, Goffman dealt more with the basis of interaction, that is, the normative organisation he called "the frame".

In subsequent years, symbolic interactionism of the Chicago School, and then ethnomethodology, evolved in the direction "which would best be called cognitive", a kind of reductionism that can be criticised as a departure from sociology itself (cf. Piotrowski, 1998, p. 26). The normative intersubjectivity that binds individuals takes a back seat, and the subjective processes taking place in individuals during interactions are increasingly analysed. The atomism of this approach is thus sharpened. Interestingly, the intersubjectivity in the cognitivism of Harold Garfinkel's followers was replaced by the binder of "formal properties of the broadly understood language system" (Piotrowski, 1998, p. 25). This shows that, despite the reduction of sociology to situational psychology and cognitivism, there is still a need to explain the possibilities of mutual understanding of individuals situated in a common socio-cultural horizon and to go beyond the solipsism that threatens this approach. Language is a form of contact with another human being, a form of objective spirit and cannot be narrowed down to private cognitive processes (Szubka, 2013).

Underlying normative sociology – pre-interactionist – and the currents discussed above is a common understanding of society, which turns out to be the source of the already sketched and still updated tension between constructivism / normativism and atomism / subjectivism. The "society" of sociologists is in fact a part of the dichotomy, the reverse of which must be chaos. To deny society as a normative order that presupposes individual autonomy³ is an inevitable transition to anomie. This dichotomy is a dogmatic dichotomy, i.e. a symptom of modern science, where something like a possible ontological pluralism is ruled out (Latour, 2013). Scientists, and especially researchers of the

³ Even Goffman's *frame* does not decisively break with autonomous individual action whereas Bruno Latour in his attempts to dissolve the micro-/macro- and subject/object distinction goes beyond that: "actantiality is not what an actor does ... but what provides actants with their actions, with their subjectivity, with their intentionality, with their morality." (Latour, 1997, pp. 47-64).

social world, make constant attempts to adapt to the subject of their research, but still embrace it in binary connections: society-individual, subject-object, etc. This approach looks at reality, framing it in the framework of a priori externality and exoticism (Descola, 2013)⁴. It is assumed that this alien world has a quantitative nature (Latour 2013)⁵, which is associated with the need to build new mediating qualitative constructs.

The assumption of objective quantity and subjective quality is behind the abovedescribed skirmishes of interpretative sociology. The overriding normativity, imperative towards individuals, is the world of objectivity and creative subjectivity – the world of quality. Even if these two planes are not reducible to each other, within sociology the relation of norms to subjectivity is of the same nature as quantity to quality. In all of this, it seems that there is still a positivist need to create a science whose philosophy and instrumentation turn out to be a function of power which is, in fact, responsible for the growth of modern society.

4. The epistemology of critical sociology

The common ground of interpretivism and criticism is the transformation of modernisation during the Enlightenment. Despite the mutual differences, the programs of the representatives of the interpretative paradigm are maintained in the spirit of optimistic enthusiasm, having their roots in the era of the Enlightenment. This means belief in the possibility of rational cooperation between individuals, and even rational conflict, lead to the reconstitution of an order that guarantees universal freedom. Critical thinking, on the other hand, expresses the disappointment with the Enlightenment postulates, as well as with the changes of the modern era. According to critical thinkers, rationalizing reality turns out to contradict its own demands and values. Universal freedom is called universal delusion („mass deception“). Critical theorists point to the relationship between the projected social order and the reproduction of inequality. Freedom is ideological here.

Moreover, for interpretivists, life and being are defined by *r e f l e c t i v e* acting individuals. The adequacy of consciousness to things and events is a constitutive condition of survival itself. The critical approach makes precisely such

⁴ Thus, Waldenfels makes a strong position on the role of phenomenology in modern philosophy. "The coherence of sense and the canon of rules are thus not bypassed but interrupted by the evidence of that which happens to us and forces us to respond. (...) For phenomenology, this means the need to turn against itself, to resist the euphoria of sense which would dull it like it dulls other philosophies of sense (Waldenfels, 2011, p. 32)".

⁵ Establishing quantitative nature is a way of looking at reality intelligibly. It is assumed that there is a language that can be described. This language is the neutrality of numbers, or, more broadly, an axiomatic system of quantitative neutrality. The equivalent of the intelligibility of society as a cognizable being is the order of symbols and meanings. Members of society who share them have at their disposal an adequate means of recognizing the nature of what is happening around them.

a claim an object of its hardest strike. Within it, there is a belief that consciousness is always socially conditioned. For optimistic-thinking interpretivists, the determinant of knowledge and survival is reality itself and the possibility of its adequacy (in relation to the cognised being). For "suspicious" critics, the categories of "truth" and "falsehood" deserve in-depth scrutiny. As a result of such a movement, the obviousness of the above-mentioned cognitive symmetry is denied, and research is reduced to analysis of the mechanisms of producing knowledge, since this is determined by something more than just a neutral world. Science as such is not neutral, it is not individuals who use knowledge, but rather some type of knowledge / rationality or even power, wields it. As a result, its development may lead to the exploitation of the natural world and interpersonal relationships. Exploitation is also implicitly at the root of the direction of interactionist thinking.

The father of modern critical analysis of social relations is Karl Marx, who expressed many key views, later repeated and modified by followers of this theoretical line. It is worth pointing out that his thoughts are rooted in Enlightenment systematics and accuracy. The optimistic finalism of his views, which he outlined when describing the coming revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, seems to be the result of operating within the framework of the Enlightenment paradigm of progress. The contribution of Marx himself is the idea that social existence of humankind determines their consciousness. The revolution is the discovery – as a result of “overthrowing of the existing power and the breaking up of the old social relations” – that given thinking is falsified and that definitions of reality, when presented as completely obvious, turn out to be false (Marx and Jordan 1971, p. 283; c.f. also Marx and Engels, 1998). In this final point of his reasoning, however, Marx probably did not take into account that the revolution itself may be a falsification, that the sense of liberation at its root can only have the transformation of one lie into another.

The second, probably greater, inspiration for Marx than the Enlightenment were the philosophical achievements of Hegel, whom the former widely criticised, while still using dialectical instruments in his research work (Williams, 1989). "Turning Hegel on his head", Marx rooted the concepts in a material base, pointing to – for example – the inability to maintain Hegel's state as an independent entity, the result of the development of consciousness itself. The basis for the state must be society, along with its relations determined by historical ways of satisfying needs. Nevertheless, the whole and the parts, ideas and material basis are intertwined. Marx's social criticism shows a holistic attitude that makes him consider phenomena as parts of larger wholes. The role of the researcher is to recognise the relationship between different levels of human activity at different historical moments.

Holism was Marx's reaction to the understanding of phenomena in isolation from one another or to speculation about society in general. The transition to designing a new order by way of revolution bears the hallmarks of speculation

after all. In this sense, it is a departure from one kind of epistemological bias towards another and does not fully satisfy holism.

Marx's new epistemological attitude is inspired by Hegel. The key areas of the narrative led by Hegel, which formed the basis for the arguments of his heirs, are „the intimacy of sensual impression on the one hand and the social world on the other" (Chmura, 2017, p. 261). It is a relationship in which one side is bodily nesting, and on the other the perspective of a socialised subject which, thanks to its place in the social structure, finds its place in the world. In other words, the internal structure of consciousness, both individual and general, is based on a dialogue in which two forms of self-knowledge clash.

From this dialectic of master and slave, and their interdependence, Marx deduced the universality of class antagonism in the history of mankind, and even more broadly: the fact of the permanent instability of a given social order, which also includes its own abolition. Post- Hegelian critique, evolving to a large extent in the Marxist line, began to neglect the first area of narrative described above – the intimacy of the sensual impression. Historical determinism became possible only when intimate impressions remained separate from the superior social and historical order. If everything is socialised, historicised and consequently, textualized, then we are led to such a way of acquiring knowledge that ceases to build and study knowledge at the moment of its becoming present (Cf. Heidegger, 2002, pp. 32-33). From the overall field of the structure of self-knowledge reflecting the Hegelian logic of the phenomenon, a social component is put before. What is sensual or carnal, is beyond direct interest, and so it is this interdependence that was of crucial interest to Hegel. This is both the reductionism and normativism inherent in a critical attitude. No matter how relevant the question concerning the possibilities for the condition of experience may be, it does not offer a steady anchor against the twists and turns of experience. Waldenfel's pathic experience must be designated as sense- and goal-less because it tears open the nets of sense, interrupts the system of rules, and thus decontextualizes the event (Waldenfels, 2011, pp. 21-34). In the context of Marx's theory, the people are not the members of a specific class like the proletariat, "the power of united individuals", they are the supplement that exceeds any social quantification or accounting, the uncounted demos, that is formless and wild (Critchley, 2012)⁶.

Another important current of the critical paradigm, drawing largely from Marxism, was the Frankfurt School. Within it, attempts were made to formulate the critical theory described by Max Horkheimer in 1937. The Frankfurt School

⁶ Analysing Marx's *Capital* Critchley argues that in "*einen Verein freier Menschen*" it is "*ver*" that interests him more than "*ein*": "At the heart of a radical politics there has to be a meta-political ethical moment (...) – the ethical experience of infinitive responsibility at the heart of subjectivity, a moment of *hetero-affectivity* prior to any auto-affectation (...) which also is the splitting at the heart of the self, a constitutive undoing and dispossessing of the self" (Critchley, 2012, pp. 117-120).

focused on the issue of Marxist emancipation within the framework of the rationalisation process described by Weber, i.e. the infiltration of rationality into ever new spheres of life. The perspective of two key representatives of the school, Horkheimer and Adorno, assumed constant criticism of ideas and the conditions in which ideas arise. They were especially interested in how purposeful rationality dominates the human spirit. As a result of disappointment with the revolutionary movement, emancipation turned out to be secondary to the priority of criticism. However, Adorno and Horkheimer did not deal with the realm of practice, remaining only in the realm of critical analysis, revealing ideological limitations and hypocrisy. Both the abovementioned and other theorists of the Frankfurt School tried to propose alternative concepts of socialisation: building interpersonal relations, human relations with the world and human relation to one's self. The proposed alternatives were not, however, comprehensive proposals, but the involuntary result of criticism always in the foreground.

As Hartmut Rosa writes, it is unclear what specific forms of relationship should look like, which are to replace the modern way of socialisation. "Mimetic, charismatic, auratic, erotic or organic" forms of relation are possible; this is the message, shouted almost in desperation" (Rosa, 2019, p. 356). Research carried out in this way which, following Marx, treats the theory as praxis, displays a fundamental impotence. The desperation in which the possibility of replacing reification and alienation by any of the above alternatives, is articulated in an expression of the powerlessness of the transition from a narrow praxis (focusing on understanding-oriented or recognition-producing relations) to a holistic and resonant praxis, that takes into account the importance of both the intimacy of the aesthetic, physical and emotional impressions, as well as cognitive aspects and the framework of the social world (cf. Rosa, 2019, pp. 307-356). A narrow praxis implies the "autonomy orthodoxy", a quality common to most critical authors, including all those cited in this article; it is understood as "autarchy", self-origination or self-legislation (Critchley, 2012, pp. 103-117). Despite the political within Marxism, the moment of decision, articulation, reactivation and event, the category of proletarian as revolutionary subject has a dubious ontology – according to Critchley, Marx communized autonomy and communism is an ontological category before it is that around which any political activism can orient itself.

As part of the discussed critical approach, apart from Marx or the theorists of the Frankfurt School, mention should be made of Michel Foucault⁷ and his followers, focused on so-called governmentality studies.

⁷ Despite the differences between various variants of critical social thought, the authors of the article follow the argument according to which Foucault represents one of reflective stages of the conceptual premises of a critical social theory including the early Frankfurt School and Jürgen Habermas (Honneth, 1993).

Foucault's thought can be read in at least two ways. On the one hand, for him the key category of "discourse" is treated as revised structures within which the obviousness of subjectivity is no longer possible. Discourse is not only the carrier of power, but also its producer; it is there that power comes to its definition and is inseparably connected with knowledge. Power is by its nature purposeful and intentional, which does not result from the agency of a single subject. Researchers looking for tools and methods, a set of normative principles of interpretation and analysis, often find in the works of this philosopher, a specific approach that can be instrumentally and often automatically recreated in research practice.

On the other hand, when looking at the debates initiating critical reflection in France at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, constituting Foucault's working environment, one can distinguish a "deeper" level of reading his thoughts, where the process of the emergence of subjects and structures from an undifferentiated whole was emphasized. Foucault drew from the thoughts of Lévi-Strauss and Lacan, for whom the subject of analysis was a system that existed before individual subjectivity, defining it and making its voice heard through it. In the statements that "before any human existence, there would already be a discursive knowledge, a system that we will rediscover", and that "The "I" has exploded – we see this in modern literature – this is the discovery of "there is"" here is more to notice than just a set of certain assumptions that can be reproduced in properly structured research practice. Here is the strongest and oldest conclusion that comes out: "there is a one". In a way, contemporary thinkers return to the seventeenth-century point of view, with the difference: "not setting man, but anonymous thought, knowledge without a subject, theory with no identity, in God's place" (Foucault as cited in Eribon, 1991, p. 161).

The elements of the philosophy of difference present in the works of Foucault, seeking foundations for the emergence of beings and meanings, in the basic "owning in which man and Being are delivered over to each other" (Heidegger, 2002, p. 36) are an invitation not to recreate an already made movement of thought, but to a continuous rethinking that each time assimilates opposing elements.

It seems that the heirs of Foucault's thought, especially those focused on the study of governmentality, remain faithful to the first reading and consequently to what, following, we referred earlier as autonomy of orthodoxy (Critchley, 2012).

Although the question guiding the author of *The History of Sexuality* boiled down to examining the constitution of sexuality as a moral sphere, he was essentially interested in the way in which the individual creates himself as an ethical subject (Critchley, 2012, p. 41). The so-called late Foucault was generally

focused on cultivating forms of ethical subjectivity capable of opposing the normalising power of the state and its disciplining mechanisms. "Care of the self" as a practice of freedom is the need for a more embedded, practice-based account of autonomy. Foucault's ontology therefore revolves around attaining the autarchy of self-mastery⁸.

If, however, we read subjectivity in the latter perspective, the perspective of an undifferentiated-differentiating system, the phenomenon of "radical" individualism appears before us. The alternative modus of subjectivity – not autonomous but heteronomous – involves working on accepting the fact of this essential owning, or system. Thus, we enter the space of the theory of ethical experience, where, speaking in the language of Levinas, responsibility as the experience of being called to respond and thus working on interdependence and subordination to a certain socially binding heteronomy is preceded by individual freedom, individual cognition and understanding of the world he/she constructs (Levinas, as cited in Critchley, 2012, p. 57).

The textualisation of reality, present in the critical paradigm, closely related to the perspective of historicising all knowledge and recognising truth as an element of the social construction of reality, is fundamentally aporetic. This attitude, the roots of which stem not only from Marxist criticism, but also from Nietzschean investigations, reduces the horizon of possible analysis only to what is discursive, and therefore possible to grasp in language. All the knowledge that is available to us is the result of interpreting the elements of the world as signs. The perception of phenomena is a fundamental mediation here, which means that the construction of the image of the world with its more and less significant, interesting moments or elements is a process well-established in the subject (Wiesing, 2014, pp. 1-42). A single person, as a carrier of culture and language, constructs reality in the very process of cognition. It is assumed here that there is no cognition and building knowledge about reality except on

⁸ Nikolas Rose's analysis of "care of the self" and the evolution of biopolitics is associated with significant aporias. Despite the difficulties of the contemporary situation, where biopolitics has taken over the somatic level and happens in the bodies themselves, which is extremely burdensome and can paralyse private will, resistance and autonomy seem more accessible to practice (Rose, 2001, p. 20). Moreover, as Rose observes, fear of maintaining our own existence makes our bodies available to biopolitical processes. This fear, within critical reflection, should not, however, be a neutral element existing "out there", but rather a construct: the effect and possibility of evolving management. Rose should not have taken the fear of private existence for granted, but rather theorised as a subjugating element. The fear of maintaining one's own existence, in the common sense taking it for granted, must in effect make individuals think about the possibility of subjectivity in the form of complete autonomy. The analysis of fear, which has been completed, leads to the exclusion of the intimacy of the sensation, and thus the exclusion of the sense of involvement in emancipation. On the other hand, treating fear as an obvious premise falls into the phantasm of autonomy. This phantasm can, moreover, be ascribed to the critical researchers themselves, who, following the manifestations of biopolitics, want to free themselves from its influences, in the name of the autonomy of subjectivity, understood anyway. As a result, both tracks of critical thinking not only fall into contradiction, but also do not allow the continuation of the movement aimed at emancipation.

the basis of locally and historically constructed a priori categories. So, a question arises about the real meaning of the world itself, located "out there", for building knowledge about it. The extent to which the intervention of the processes coming from the world on the basis of the subject is possible, modifying the perception and its a priori categories. Pantextualism, i.e. the approach that only texts and what is discursively available are significant, as well as reducing cognition to the interpretation of a text, is in fact solipsism or threatens to fall into solipsism, since the world itself, in this vision of reality, requires founding.

5. Summary

Both critical and interpretive sociologists reproduce the dichotomous tension between sociology and psychology that has characterized sociological theory since its inception. The normative-functionalist paradigm of the post-war period was represented by the so-called "over-sociologized" concept of man, where social conditions of life were the determining factor for human behaviour. In response to the one-sidedness contained in this approach, an interpretive critique was formulated, trying to give greater importance to the psychological components, individual autonomy and agency. Then subsequently critical theory proclaims its views from the position of a system which here boils down to the reign of ideas, ignoring the knowledge about the nature of being human. In this article, we wanted to show that the reproduction of the above scheme is related to a common normative assumption.

A preeminent feature of constructivism is the framing of experience as mediated by interpretation and symbolic representation. Models whose basic tool for describing epistemology is interpretation, fall into a vicious circle. In this article we present nondichotomous epistemology, as inspired by specific phenomenological perspectives, offering a transgression of the constructionist status quo. This is due to directing the research attention to the source of experience, which goes beyond all normativity (e.g. where everything is pre attribution of meaning). The social (co-)emerges from the aspects of intentionality and responsiveness that constitute experience, the intention of "worlded" events along with the response coming from the world.

Just as phenomenology transgresses sociological constructivism, the above-defined "heteronomy" – opposed to "orthodoxy of autonomy" – transgresses the status quo on a political basis. Both the interpretive and the critical-culturalist paradigm create their own remedies for the ills of the present day, using non-inclusive dichotomies. These in practice translate into unworked fears of alienness.

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