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“Prediscursive Epistemic Injury”: Recognizing Another Form of Epistemic Injustice?¹

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Abstract

This article revisits Miranda Fricker’s *Epistemic Injustice* (2007) through one specific aspect of Axel Honneth’s recognition theory. Taking a first cue from Honneth’s critique of the limitations of the “language-theoretic framework” in Habermas’ discourse ethics, it floats the idea that the two categories of Fricker’s groundbreaking analysis—testimonial and hermeneutical injustice—likewise lean towards a speech-based metric (equating harm to the capacities to know with compromise to the capacity to speak of what one knows). If we accept, however, that there are also implicit, preverbal, affective, and embodied ways of knowing and channels of knowledge transmission, this warrants an expansion of Fricker’s original concept. By drawing on Honneth’s recognition theory (particularly his Winnicottian-inspired account of ‘first order’ recognition and basic trust), I argue it is possible to extend the account of epistemic injustice beyond Fricker’s two central categories, to glimpse yet another register of serious “wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower.” I define this harm as prediscursive epistemic injury and offer two central cases to illustrate this additional form of epistemic injustice.

Keywords: Prediscursive epistemic injury, recognition, Fricker, Honneth

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1. Preparatory Notes on an Epistemic Scandal

In the early 1970s, while conducting research into the experiences of women in a maternity hospital in London (and shadowing the medical staff on ward rounds, notebook in hand), the British sociologist Ann Oakley was witness to the following exchange between a male doctor and his female patient:

Doctor: [reading case-notes] Ah, I see you've got a boy and a girl.

Patient: No, two girls.

Doctor: Really, are you sure? I thought it said . . . [checks in case-notes] . . .
Oh no, you're quite right, two girls. (Oakley 1993, 22)

If most readers share the impulse to guffaw at this moment of resplendent “mansplaining,”² recorded as it was by the sociologist’s shrewd eye for everyday sexism and power hierarchies in the medical institution of the day, this is not, of course, to deny the seriousness at the heart of the laughing matter. Many feminists have long drawn attention to the unhappy fact that women—just by dint of being women—can find themselves on the receiving end of negative stereotypes that undermine the credibility of whatever they might profess to know (more so, if they compound the issue by being mothers; perhaps multiplied “n”-fold if they happen to be women of colour, or hail from the so-called global South, or live on the social margins, or are poor).³ The doctor-patient exchange reveals how automatically—and with what casual offhandedness—the gendered dynamics of testimonial privilege and exclusion can kick in, even where there are scarcely grounds to dispute the word or authority of the woman in question. Here the fast and dirty heuristic of everyday sexism (i.e., here is a gravid woman—she can’t know anything for toffee) runs on automatic pilot and crashes promptly into the absurd.⁴

Despite the ubiquity of these dynamics of social power and their determinant effects on of the conditions of knowledge and the practices of knowers, getting them taken seriously within traditional Anglo-American philosophy heralds a rather momentous shift—instituted in no small part by Miranda Fricker’s groundbreaking *Epistemic Injustice* (2007). The unjust deflation of credibility of some knowers owing to identity prejudice, and the hermeneutic marginalization of

² For her definition of “mansplaining,” see Solnit (2014).

³ On the effects of intersectionality on epistemic injustice, see Patricia Hill Collins (2017).

⁴ The doctor engages in what we might call a ‘ritualized’ acknowledgement of his patient as ‘informant’ in the sense that Fricker (after Edward Craig) deploys this term. But the dubiousness he expresses the moment she contradicts his paperwork shows this is more formal than real.

those already so often marginalized in myriad other ways, is put front and centre of the philosophical task of understanding the conditions of knowledge, what it means to know, and who exactly gets to do the knowing. Fricker’s categories of *testimonial* and *hermeneutical* injustice set the parameters for this new attentiveness to the operations of power and prejudice in the work of epistemology and are now so well known as to scarcely need much reiteration here. To summarize briefly, *testimonial injustice* identifies the prejudicial (systematic) deflation of a knower’s testimonial credibility (due to group identity features such as those of race, gender, class) as illustrated by Fricker’s central cases: racist prejudice in the case of the trial of the innocent black defendant Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (denied testimonial credibility by his all-white jury), and the case of sexist prejudicial deflation of testimony of the character of Marge Sherwood from *The Talented Mr Ripley*, whose knowledge is dismissed as belonging to a “hysterical” subject and the unreliable product of “female intuition.”

If the wrong of *testimonial injustice* is enacted through a prejudicially induced lack of uptake of the listener of what the speaker-knower attempts to communicate, then *hermeneutical injustice* strikes the knower elsewhere and, in some sense, more fundamentally. This harm impinges on the knower’s capacity to name or conceptualize an important aspect of her own experience to herself, let alone convey it with any coherence to others. Hermeneutical injustice comes about, according to Fricker, because the interpretive schemas or “hermeneutical resources” within the social imaginary of a culture are always something of an ideologically stacked deck. Tracking the way that “material resources” are distributed in favour of the interests of the dominant and powerful, “hermeneutical resources” similarly reflect, shore up, and legitimate the ideological perspective of the more privileged and powerful, leaving subjects who are socially marginalized hermeneutically marginalized as well.

The central case here for Fricker is the report of the wrong done to Carmita Wood, a black woman⁵ subjected to sexual harassment by her boss in the workplace. As these distressing incidents happen prior to the phrase “sexual harassment” having any public currency or legal purchase, Wood is unable to seek redress or legal protection. Consequent to having no way to say what is happening to her that can arraign it as the moral wrong it is, she is exposed to serious secondary harms—she is denied welfare benefits when she fails to give “adequate explanation” for leaving her job for what she can only helplessly describe as “personal reasons” (Fricker 2007, 183). It takes the movement of second wave feminism and the shared experience of consciousness raising groups to generate the

⁵ In an odd elision, Fricker herself does not record the fact that Carmita Wood is black.

resistant hermeneutic resources to give this sexual harassment the name it warrants and to insert it into legal and everyday discourse. Indeed, this process of the “lifting of hermeneutical gloom” is just as much the achievement of Fricker’s text itself. For, as Fricker notes, until and unless these forms of epistemic injustice (testimonial and hermeneutical) are appropriately named and defined, they all too easily go unchallenged or resisted.

In what follows, however, I will make the case that these two forms may not exhaust the terrain of epistemic injustice. The purpose of this paper is to explore and identify a third form of epistemic injustice that, I will claim, meets Fricker’s general criteria of a “harm done to the subject specifically in her capacity as a knower,” yet is neither *testimonial* nor *hermeneutical* in character. This harm I describe as *prediscursive epistemic injury*.⁶ My claim is that this harm is not directly available for analysis within the parameters of Fricker’s account because she so thoroughly equates the figure of the knower with the figure of a speaker or linguistic “informant.” Yet this, I will argue, does not cover the complex myriad of preverbal cues, expressive gestures, and implicit and embodied knowledge that make up a significant volume of how one functions in the world as a knower, especially as this applies to relational knowledge.

It is these alternative embodied epistemic capacities of the knower that are my focus here. By drawing on Honneth’s notion of a “first order” of recognition in his classic *The Struggle for Recognition* (informed in part by the work of the British paediatrician-psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott), and by following Honneth through his “detour through infant research” in his later essay on social invisibility, I argue that here we find a means with which to extend Fricker’s original framework. Before homing in, however, on this specific moment of potential meeting between the two theoretical perspectives, it may be helpful to prepare the ground first with a few more preparatory remarks about what can be anticipated from such a dialogue.

⁶ I refer specifically to “epistemic *injury*” to discuss this form of epistemic injustice for several reasons: firstly, for its resonance with Honneth’s use of “moral injury” (echoing too Sennett and Cobb’s classic analysis of the *Hidden Injuries of Class*, which analyses how structural injustice impacts injuriously on the body and psyche of the individual). An emphasis on the *embodied* nature of these harms is also in keeping with the way “moral injury” appears in the recognition literature. See, for example, this passage from Robert Sinnerbrink: “The effects of social misrecognition involve not only distorted forms of communication but the real corporeal experience of suffering; this remains a fundamental experience essential to any account of misrecognition as a moral **injury** to the integrity, and hence freedom and dignity, of the autonomous subject” (Sinnerbrink 2011, 204).

2. Bringing Two Traditions into a New Conversation

It is true that recognition theory and feminist and critical race theories of epistemic injustice have only rarely crossed paths to date.⁷ In many ways, this lack of historical dialogue seems explicable more as the happenstance of their emergence in separate philosophical traditions that evolved along separate trajectories than as reflecting any inherent lack of common ground. As central representatives of each of these respective theoretical orientations, the German critical theorist Axel Honneth and the Anglo feminist philosopher Miranda Fricker share something in the departure points from which they launch their respective philosophical and moral projects: namely, a commitment to starting from the “negative space” of *social injustice* and the phenomenology of the suffering this causes.⁸ If neither commence with the theoretical project to set out any “ideal” theories of justice or the political, nor is either persuaded that distributive theories of justice alone can do enough of the heavy lifting required by an effective social critique. For Honneth, what this demands is a theory that addresses the moral injury entailed in failures of recognition; for Fricker, as we have seen, what this requires is an account that can put onto the radar the wrongful harms that identity prejudice and unequal distribution of *hermeneutical* resources inflict on the capacities of the subject as a knower.⁹

Yet, if Fricker and Honneth converge at important points in their respective social diagnoses, points of sharper divergence emerge when it comes to their visions of what might constitute progressive solutions to the harms they diagnose. For Honneth, a normative pressure towards moral progress and social learning resides immanently in the anthropological facts of human relations of mutual recognition. The progressive history of an expansion of the “circle of humans” who, for example, are deemed worthy of legal equality is what he sees as the central achievement of those moral struggles for recognition that drive social and protest movements.

⁷ Some important vanguard exceptions to the rule are articles by Paul Giladi (2018) and Matthew Congdon (2017).

⁸ Fricker, of course, follows up the critique of epistemic injustice with her proposed “corrective” of practices of epistemic virtue and testimonial sensitivity. Honneth also moves from the “negative” space of injustice, in so far as he assumes a positive normative and moral grammar can be extrapolated from the negative emotions of disrespect.

⁹ The dispute between Honneth and Fraser over the respective virtues of a recognitive versus a redistributive paradigm (Fraser and Honneth 2003) parallels the debate between Fricker and David Coady over the respective merits of a *discriminatory* versus a *distributive* model of epistemic injustice (see Fricker 2017; and Coady 2017).

These “struggles for recognition,” for Honneth, rise up predominantly “from below” (Honneth 1995, 116), and the morally progressive changes are attributed therefore, for the most part, “under pressure from disadvantaged groups” themselves (117). Fricker’s vision of moral progress, by contrast, does not unfold along these lines of a post-Hegelian realization of the potentials immanent in the “pre-theoretical” realm, nor does it carry any of the residual traces of an intellectual legacy of German post-Marxist Critical Theory. Instead, moral progress for Fricker comes framed around an Aristotelean model of virtue and excellence of character, where the vision of human flourishing—even if it has a democratic and normative commitment to expanding who gets included in the “circle” of those deemed worthy knowers—nevertheless envisages the corrective tasks of moral philosophy as rather more heavily conducted “from above” (in empathic solidarity, it is true, with those who are disadvantaged and who suffer, but virtuous testimonial sensibility seems to be practiced from above, nevertheless). In fact, there is not much agonism at all in Fricker’s vision of the corrective epistemic and ethical virtues. Her corrective project consequently turns primarily on the cultivation of virtuous listening in the appropriately sensitive listener.

Another point where the two theorists most obviously reconverge is in the view that the flourishing of the self (as either an autonomous agent and rational knower, or as a subject of recognition) is fundamentally and constitutively dependent on intersubjective relations with others. For Fricker, this plays out in terms of the knower’s dependence upon how open (or closed) are others to the reception of a speaker’s testimony, a question that has profound ontological as well as epistemic implications for the speaking subject. As she observes, “Even relatively inconsequential instances of testimonial injustice” (like, for instance, that apparently trivial moment recorded by Ann Oakley) “can carry a symbolic weight to the effect that the speaker is less than a full epistemic subject: the injustice sends the message that they are not fit for participation in the practice that originally generates the very idea of a knower” (Fricker 2007, 145). This view seems readily translated into recognition-theoretic language and chimes with a key tenet of Honneth’s moral philosophy, absorbed from the early Hegel, namely “that practical identity-formation presupposes intersubjective recognition” (Honneth 1995, 92).

In “Recognition as Ideology” (2012), Honneth directly broaches the question of the specifically *epistemic status* of practices of recognition. What knowledge claim is at work when we “recognize” another human being? Honneth weighs up two possibilities. According to the first, an act of recognition entails a *receptive* knowing of the other. Depending on which of the three spheres of recognition is involved, this might entail 1) an affectionate recognizing of what is valuable about a beloved intimate, who is at once a fellow creature of human need and utterly unique and irreplaceable, in the “first sphere” of recognition, as love; 2) recognizing

her as the bearer of equal and universal rights and human dignity, in the “second sphere” of recognition, as rights; or 3) it might entail recognition of her unique achievements, skills, and contributions that bring value to the collective social world, in the “third sphere” of recognition, as solidarity. Where it involves a “receptive” knowing, such acts of recognition are a positive affirmation (“Anerkennung”) of qualities *as belonging to and already there* in the person so recognized. But Honneth contemplates another, more complex, epistemic implication of an act of recognition, one that may offer a better clue to how the withholding of recognition can amount to a social injustice. In this case, recognition is allocated “attributive” (rather than “receptive”) power. Receptive recognition takes its knowing cue, so to speak, from what emanates from the object; recognition that is attributive, by contrast, actually *puts something into* the entity recognized, actively projecting upon it an attribute that may indeed not have been there prior to the act of recognition itself. The implications of this active attributive effect of recognition are even more relevant to the issue of epistemic injustice when we consider the consequences that follow upon such recognition being *refused*. For then the withholding of recognition from someone (of her appropriate status, say as a knower) is potentially a much graver wrong than simply exposing her to the failed *reception* of whatever piece of knowledge he might be attempting to impart. As Fricker suggests, “Persistent intellectual undermining causes him to lose confidence in his beliefs and/or his justification for them,” the result of which being that “he literally *loses knowledge*” (Fricker 2007, 49). Precisely because epistemic recognition can be “attributive,” it can also be actively “detractive,” stripping away from the knowing subject capacities she might otherwise have had.

To illustrate how intersubjective recognition can be epistemically detractive as well as attributive (or how the recognition of others has the capacity to give us the gift of our identity as knowers but equally has the power to steal it from us), consider the following scenario: Let’s say, for example, that I recognize that you are a real maths wiz. In accord with the first receptive account of recognition, the fact that I acknowledge you in this respect stands as a factor independent of the *fact* that you are so. My (receptive) recognition might contribute a gratifying social icing on the “cake” of what you are, but it is not a central ingredient of the cake itself, so to speak. But, if we take recognition to instead be capable of exerting attributive (or, in the negative, causally detractive) power, such an act of recognition (or its refusal) can *do something* to the one so known (or so refused). Now, it might appear that it should make no difference at all to the natural brilliance of the maths wiz whether anyone else gives a big tick to her wizardry. But, as creatures who are anthropologically vulnerable to the messages of fitness we receive from others, what might appear at first glance to be an *intrinsic* capacity (safely tucked away, so the subject has either “got it” or not, be it philosophical brilliance, mathematical

skill, or whatever) in fact only becomes securely internalized through the provision of *external*, intersubjective recognition. The pathway to its intersubjective securing is also the route to its potential undoing. In this sense, failures of recognition can leave us *epistemically undone*. Epistemic injustice tracks social injustice like racism and sexism in part because discriminatory prejudice and negative identity stereotypes expose subjects to *special* degrees and chronicity of being epistemically undone, in excess of the *general* or anthropological vulnerability that we all carry as creatures dependent upon our social relations of recognition.

The research of social psychologist Claude Steele on “stereotype threat,” for example, stands as one of the most striking pieces of evidence that heightened epistemic vulnerability tracks racial prejudice. It was enough for his black (but not his white) experimental subjects to be told that they were about to sit a test measuring their academic capacity for this to prime the stereotype “blacks aren’t as good academically as whites” and thereby induce *objectively worse performance* from them than if told the test was measuring something else entirely. Thus, it is possible to bring about *deterioration in epistemic function* simply by triggering internalized stereotype threat (for discussion, see Fricker 2007, 57). Identity power, in short, can work in subtle ways to bring about a subject’s *epistemic destabilization* or even *collapse*, much as Honneth conceives that extreme refusals of intersubjective recognition can instigate (in situations such as rape or slavery) a “psychological” or “social” death (Honneth 1995, 135). What a more intersubjectively supported (hence robust) individual might be able to endure without losing her footing or bearings, a more vulnerable one might succumb to, especially where a slight or insult is the latest in an accumulated mountain of many other equally “minor” messages of unfitness. As they pile up, the thousand minor cuts of a negative stereotype “may actually exert a causal force towards its own fulfillment” (Fricker 2007, 58).

3. Expanding the Concept of Epistemic Injustice through Axel Honneth’s Recognition Theory

Matthew Congdon recently made the point that, “though it has not been explicitly undertaken in the recognition literature, it would not be difficult to extend [Honneth’s] three-part schema of recognition, in order to reveal love, respect, and esteem as each bearing a special role in epistemic practice” (Congdon 2017, 249). His recognition-theoretic extension of Fricker’s theory of epistemic injustice results in his three hybrid concepts: “*epistemic neglect, epistemic disrespect, epistemic disesteem.*” These refer, it would seem, not so much to *forms* of epistemic injustice per se (whether they are testimonial or hermeneutical) as to *domains* of the recognition-cum-epistemic failures involved. As terms of misrecognition, they offer productive ways to reconsider certain cases of epistemic injustice.

Using Congdon’s terminology, we might, for example, return to our opening vignette—the exchange between the woman patient and her doctor recorded by Oakley. If Fricker’s analysis gave us the tools to identify the vignette as a (micro-) instance of testimonial injustice, Congdon’s adaptation of recognition theory yields to a further interrogation of whether we are dealing here with an instance of epistemic *disrespect* or one of epistemic *dis-esteem*. (For the moment, I bracket the question of epistemic *neglect* that correlates to the first sphere of recognition (as love), to which I return later). Were the former to be the case, then the wrong done would pertain to the failure to afford the female patient the general degree of credibility that is universally and automatically owed all knowers, as subjects in possession of baseline epistemic capacities as human rational agents. Congdon describes this as “the acknowledgement of the minimal set of capacities we grant to any knower whatsoever,” where this minimal standard is not deflated by the effects of prejudicial discrimination or sexism (see Congdon, 2017, 249). If the wrong is one of *dis-esteem*, rather than *disrespect*, then the specific mode of testimonial injustice involved would lie in the way it targets the woman’s *particular* knowledge or special skill or competence. (Although my intuition leans towards the latter, I leave it as an open question whether the insult goes more to a more “minimal set” of capacities one would universally ascribe to any caregiver—hence involves the wrong of *disrespect*—or whether it targets her particularly privileged epistemic position as the one who has insider knowledge of her own particular child(ren). It is also conceivable that both might be involved).

To further differentiate *epistemic respect* from *epistemic esteem*, consider for example the difference between the standing afforded to jury members (the defendant’s “peers,” whose task as knowers is to assess presented evidence and to come to a verdict “beyond reasonable doubt”), as compared to that of expert witnesses in a courtroom. While the first group carries the *epistemic respect* granted all citizens of the polity, the second figure, by contrast is afforded a particular and additional *epistemic* standing on the basis of their specialist expertise. Where jury members are assumed to possess minimally functional epistemic capacities taken as held in common by all adult citizens, the expert holds a different degree of epistemic esteem where her knowledge is founded on a particular level of acquired skill. Her testimony consequently carries particular weight in this designated domain of recognized specialist epistemic capacity.¹⁰

¹⁰ Interestingly, to be in possession of more than average knowledge (than that expected of the general citizen) is sufficient to get one excluded (“excused”) from performing jury duty. Anyone with legal training, for example, is deemed to “know too much” or too “expertly” to be able to engage in the kind of layperson’s deliberation expected of the reasonable jury member.

Of course, the same presumptions of superior epistemic esteem, when overdone, can (much like excess testimonial credibility) puff up into epistemic arrogance—arguably, exactly what leads to the testimonial injustice in Oakley’s vignette, where the hyperinflation (or overextension) of epistemic esteem of the doctor in question leads him to walk (and talk) all over the epistemic recognition he owes his patient. Indeed, the epistemic wrangles between competing realms of respect and esteem have historically played out in complex ways between the medical profession and women’s attempts to assert authority over their own bodies (as reflected for example, in Barbara Ehrenreich’s *For Her Own Good: 150 years of Expert’s Advice to Women*, 1978).¹¹

Congdon’s terminology, then, gives us useful conceptual tools to locate in which spheres or domains of “social integration” (Honneth, 1995, 60) a testimonial injustice occurs; it delineates the *domain-specificity* of the epistemic capacity that is being deflated or denied credibility. An example of epistemic dis-esteem from Fricker’s own illustration of testimonial injustice might be the conversations she quotes in which women tell of encounters in which their contributions are repeatedly given less recognition or “uptake” than those of their male colleagues, owing to sexist prejudice in the workplace. Thus, in professional meetings a woman will find her input ignored, talked over, brushed off (see Fricker 2007, 47). It does not seem quite right, however, to simply say that the woman in question has not been “heard.” Indeed, these women report that what can then ensue is that a male colleague then parrots *exactly the same suggestion* but gets a very different reception. As he does not run into the same obstructive testimonial wall (or testimonial glass ceiling?), the same point (now made by a different “informant”) can be seized upon enthusiastically, lauded as a great idea, recognized as a valuable contribution, and so on. In other words, when testimonial injustice operates, speech may get “heard” perceptually but not socially.¹² Such cycles of respective deflation and inflation of credibility in the realm of public and professional esteem can be tracked at all levels, including at the highest level of epistemic recognition (right up

¹¹ This clash is particularly intense in the field of women’s reproductive health and gynecology. For an interesting Australian study of the institutional (and gendered) patterns of refused recognition between obstetricians and midwives, and their mutual (if unevenly balanced) struggles to wrest (epistemic) esteem from each other, see Reiger (2008).

¹² This suggests that one can be both “heard” and yet *not (socially) heard*. This parallels Honneth’s 2001 account of how the protagonist of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* is both (*perceptually*) “seen” (hence “cognized” as an object), but *not “socially seen”* (not re-cognized as a subject).

to that of the awarding of Nobel prizes—think here, for example, of the story of Crick/Watson and Rosalind Franklin).

Congdon’s hybridized analysis of “epistemic-injustice-as-recognition–failure,” then, offers one productive instantiation of dialogue between the work of Fricker and Honneth. The extension of the category of epistemic injustice that is the purpose of this paper, however, takes a slightly different path. It applies to one particular aspect of Honneth’s analysis of mutual recognition—which he initially articulates in the context of theorizing the “first sphere of recognition” (recognition as love), but which he consequently extends beyond that intimate/familial domain to his later analysis of “social invisibility” (Honneth 2001). What he does there, addressing these aspects of intersubjective recognition, is to highlight the significance of the affective, embodied and “pre-linguistic gestures” (Honneth 2001, 118). It is these “expressive gestures that normally signal first-order recognition” (Honneth 2001, 121), that also, I will contend, give us an intimation of the category of *prediscursive epistemic injury* that I propose to introduce here. It is this specific moment of productive encounter between the work of Honneth and Fricker to which I now turn.

4. On Recognizing Embodied Knowledge

One promising result of a palimpsestic overlay of a theory of epistemic injustice by this feature of Honneth’s recognition theory, I claim, is that it opens conceptual space for the identification and analysis of a *third* manifestation of epistemic injustice, termed here *prediscursive epistemic injury*. By applying Honneth’s (psychoanalytic/object-relations-inspired) analysis of the first (or primary) sphere of recognition in tandem with Fricker’s concern with wrongful harms done to subjects’ capacities as *knowers*, we gain a refined, bi-focal theoretical lens through which to detect a distinct prediscursive form of epistemic injustice: arguably a form of injustice not fully legible in either theory on its own. Following Fricker’s method of elaborating her definitions of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice via the introduction of “central cases,” I will defend this claim through offering a few cases that might serve as illustrative instances of prediscursive epistemic injury.

Case 1: Ellison’s *The Invisible Man*—Racial prejudice and prediscursive epistemic harm

The first case of prediscursive epistemic injury I take from Axel Honneth’s essay on a phenomenon that he calls “social invisibility” (Honneth, 2001). Here Honneth references Ralph Ellison’s novel *Invisible Man* and the musings of the novel’s black protagonist regarding the paradox that he is, at once, a man who incontrovertibly exists in physical space (and therefore can be “seen” by others), yet he is “not-seen.” A mote or flaw exists in the “construction of the ‘inner eye’ in

those who look through him unrelentingly” (Honneth 2001, 111); a stubborn blind spot in white vision into which he falls as a black man, which makes him “invisible.” As Honneth observes, the black narrator is “perceived” as an *object* (hence he is cognized [erkannt]), but he is not *socially seen* as a subject (he is not “re-cognized” [anerkannt]). This demotion from a “subject” of relational knowledge to a mere “object” of instrumental knowledge resonates with the demeaning process Fricker describes as “epistemic objectification,” in which the knower as “informant” ceases to be treated as an epistemic subject or agent and becomes instead a mere objectified “source of information” (see Fricker 2007, 164).¹³

While Honneth frames this as a case of (racist) misrecognition, what I want to argue here, however, is that it also represents a form of *epistemic* harm, albeit different in kind from the two forms elaborated by Fricker. The epistemic harm in question is not one operating in either the register of *testimonial* or of *hermeneutical* injustice. Instead, it is *prediscursive* and involves the communicative channels of affect transmission and embodied knowledge. Reading this infliction of social invisibility as a case of prediscursive epistemic injury allows us to set it as a companion piece to Fricker’s own central case of testimonial injustice—the trial of Tom Robinson in Harper Lee’s *To Kill A Mockingbird*. There, as we saw, Fricker homes in on how identity prejudice generates the specific moral harm of the deflation of testimonial credibility of a black defendant arraigned before the judgement of an all-white jury who refuse to believe anything that a black man says. In the language of Edmund Craig’s epistemology, Tom Robinson is denied all status as a “trustworthy informant” (Fricker 2007, 134).¹⁴

Here, however, Honneth’s focus is on the refusal of a different mode of communicative “uptake” of the black subject owing to racial prejudice. While it is not framed by Honneth explicitly in terms of its harmful impact on the (invisibilized) subject in his capacity as a knower, I want to suggest that there may be compelling grounds for such an inference. This derives from the fact that while expressive, embodied, affective, and gestural communications do not carry the semantic information of propositional discourse, they most certainly *do* carry vital

¹³ If social invisibilization endured by racial and other minorities causes serious epistemic harm, it is also important to set this point alongside the seemingly paradoxical counter-claim that it can also be the basis of a variety of epistemic advantage which José Medina calls “meta-lucidity” (Medina 2013, 186–188).

¹⁴ This testimonial injustice wrongs Tom Robinson in his dignity as a (rational) knower but also brings severe secondary harms in its wake (his wrongful conviction and ultimate death). On the various normative frameworks through which the nature(s) of the wrongs of testimonial injustice can be assessed (i.e., consequentialist, Kantian, recognition theory, etc.) see Congdon (2017).

information nevertheless. The black protagonist of Ellison’s novel is (like Tom Robinson) denied uptake of his communications. But here we can register that this pertains to the broader spectrum of the nonverbal and embodied communications that an “invisible” man might use to signal his relational knowledge. This form of communication—much like verbal testimony—can then be subject to devastating deflation in the face of racist and identity-prejudiced interlocutors. The point to note here is that this kind of *epistemic injury* can be inflicted without a word being said. There is a form of epistemic injustice that does not play out in either the linguistic, propositional, or conceptual register, but yet is both *epistemic* and equally, profoundly *unjust*.

We might think of the prediscursive epistemic harm done to the “invisible” man as the silent film version of the epistemic injustice that plays out in Fricker’s central case of testimonial injustice. As it runs again, this time without words, we can see that there are, in fact, many channels in which the subject’s social knowledge and his status as social informant can be refused uptake—spoken testimony being only one of them (if a very significant one). A subject might be thus harmed in her capacity as a knower in this broader sense—without a single word being uttered. Such prediscursive harms impact on the capacities of the knower that include the patterns of giving and receiving of expressive, embodied, and affective cues. These can be highly sophisticated and complex patterns of communications and response, without being either linguistic or propositional. As Honneth describes it, “With this class of affirmative gestures and facial expressions we have to do with a special, almost automatically practised, form of the multiple expression with which [even] adults can signal to one another in a fluid manner that they are extending sympathy or paying attention. . . . It is, for example, ‘adult greeting rituals’ that make known, by way of a subtly nuanced game of changing facial expressions, the particular social relationship in which adults stand” (Honneth 2001, 117).

What a Honnethean perspective can bring to Fricker’s account is this sensitivity to the additional modes of deflation by which the uptake of the social communication can be refused: those that are *unworded, affective, expressive, and communicated by the body*. Prediscursive epistemic harm therefore may be akin in certain respects to testimonial injustice, but its specific embodied form remains nevertheless *nontestimonial*.

If the first case of prediscursive epistemic harm described above shares something of a structural similarity with testimonial injustice (yet is nevertheless *nontestimonial* in its form), in my second case I sketch out a case of prediscursive epistemic harm that shares something with hermeneutical injustice, but is nevertheless, for reasons I describe below, *nonhermeneutical*.

This second case of prediscursive harm resembles cases of hermeneutical injustice in so far as it similarly pertains to a *gap* that interposes itself between a

subject's experience (that it is very much in her interest to grasp) and her ability to *know* this experience adequately. But just as the first case of prediscursive epistemic harm was not *testimonial*, despite sharing the feature of communicative deflation, so too this case of prediscursive injustice involves a gap of informational access, yet one that cannot be deemed *hermeneutical*. It is not hermeneutical because the gap involved is not, in fact, a conceptual one. It does not pertain to the distribution of hermeneutical resources, nor does it speak to lacunae in the social imaginary. Rather this is a gap that is opened up by a harm done to the epistemic capacities of the knower to effectively process incoming information from the social and sensory world, as well as to read her own bodily signals. This failure can manifest as an informational *shutdown or a sensorial flooding*, as a hypervigilant overattentiveness to signals of threat in the environment, for example, or conversely, of an epistemic numbing. This kind of prediscursive injury is a harm to the knower at a basic level of informational processing, and it is also a moral injury in so far as it results from social injustice, but it is a *nonhermeneutical*. It is once again to the work of Honneth that I turn to illustrate what this kind of epistemic injury looks like.

Case 2: Extreme failures of first-order recognition and the dissociated knower

That Fricker's conception of epistemic injustice should be so exclusively oriented towards speech acts and practices as its exclusive site is scarcely surprising, given its lineage in the analytic literature of testimony (of C. A. J. Coady), and speech act theory (and its feminist innovators, Langton and Hornsby). But in Honneth's account, the intersubjective processes of recognition through which the practical relations to self are realized are from the outset conceived as by no means exclusively processes that occur in and through language. Nor, for that matter, is the anthropology of recognition theory restricted to the view of the human knower as a "rational enquirer." What the aspect of his theory directed to the first sphere of recognition instead recognizes is that the complex task of knowing each other as human beings demands more than is dreamt of by an epistemology restricted to propositional or discursive knowledge.

In her essay "Forms of Knowing and Epistemic Resources," Alexis Shotwell takes up something of this challenge to the generally accepted boundaries of epistemology (although she gets there via a very analytic debate around the know-how/know-that distinction) when she asserts that "there are forms of understanding and knowledge that are not propositional," and even goes on to make the forceful claim that "focusing on propositional knowledge as though it is the only form of knowing worth considering is itself a form of epistemic injustice" (Shotwell 2017, 79). Shotwell's avowed interest in highlighting these nonpropositional ways of knowing is primarily to make the case that they can constitute alternative *epistemic resources* of resistance with which oppressed groups can counter something of the

dominant stronghold and monopoly that privileged groups in society may have on the hermeneutical resources (Shotwell, 2017, 79). For her, these alternative epistemic resources involve “affect, implicit knowledge, and socially-situated embodiment” (86).

This is a suggestive train of thought, but the argument I want to make here is not concerned with the status of this nonpropositional domain of knowledge *as resource for resistance* (although this is an important line to pursue). My purpose is rather to draw attention to how these nonpropositional, implicit, affective, gestural, and embodied ways of knowing can also be sites of *injury*: equally vulnerable to damage and wrongly induced compromise in function as are the epistemic capacities associated with knowers as speakers. As we return to Honneth’s (Winnicottian-inspired) vision of the primary sphere of recognition (as love and care), it might, at first glance, be tempting to dismiss what goes on in the exchanges between mothers and infants, for example, as having no place in the realm of “real” epistemology. But this conclusion, I think, is a mistake. It is a mistake, firstly, because while an infant is not yet a fully realized subject (uppercase *S*), there are nevertheless clearly emergent signs of agency, intention, and openness to learning from experience already present in the small proto-subject (lowercase *s*). Now, while “*s*” may not know “that *p*,” and while it may be maternal empathy (with its curious feedback loops of projection, imagination, and recognition) that stands in place to receive much of the communication from the infant that can only be made sense of via empathic attunement, nevertheless these caregiver-infant communications do seem to warrant description as operating under special epistemological conditions.

In defence of this claim that the caregiver-infant relation warrants the label of an *epistemic space*, let me briefly continue Honneth’s own earlier “detour through infant research,” this time going by way of Beebe and Lachman’s careful microanalysis of interaction between mothers and their four-month-old infants, filmed in the research lab. There the authors describe how

microanalysis reveals subtle, split-second events that are often not visible to the naked eye in real time. It is this “subterranean” level of communication that our research reveals. . . . These moment-to-moment processes are rapid, subtle, co-created by both mother and infant, and generally out of awareness. Nevertheless they continue to influence how we act and feel, from infancy to adulthood. They profoundly effect moment-to-moment communication and the affective climate organizing different modes of relating. The films that we describe illustrate how strikingly different expectations are created, as these patterns repeat over time and form generalized action-sequence (procedural) memories.

Important, too, for the view that prediscursive knowledge can operate relatively autonomously from what “informants” can tell each other in speech, they clarify that

we do not imply that as infants develop, these patterns are actually transmitted into a linguistic format. We assume that early infant experiences are *encoded in a nonverbal, imagistic, acoustic, visceral, or temporal mode of information*, and that they may not necessarily be translated into linguistic form. (Beebe and Lachmann 2014, 3–4: emphasis added).

Nor is it the case that these special epistemic conditions (perhaps constituting an *epistemology of the infants?*) actually come to an end with the period of infancy itself, but continue on into adult life as the accompanying undercurrent of the rest of our highly verbal epistemic lives.¹⁵

If we take the step of regarding nonpropositional and nonlinguistic forms of knowledge as also deserving of inclusion in the list of capacities a subject possesses as *knower*, then what might *wrongful harm* to these capacities look like?

While Honneth does not himself directly address issues of epistemic harm that might arise as a consequence of the failures of recognition (as love), there is fascinating new experimental research (itself a continuation of the Winnicottian focus on early attachment relationships between infant and caregivers) which does just this, and which can tell us more about how epistemic neglect can manifest empirically. Two psychoanalytic psychologists from University College London, Peter Fonagy and Elizabeth Allison, have shown how the nature of attachment style developed between infants and their caregivers has striking consequences for the development of epistemic trust and what Honneth elsewhere describes as “a social form of openness to the world” (Honneth 2001, 118). These researchers firstly classified several infant-caregiver pairs (by the method of the so-called “Strange Situation” test) into four standard attachment categories of “secure,” “avoidant-insecure,” “pre-occupied-insecure,” or “disorganized” and then examined how each of these attachment styles correlated with the patterns of *epistemic trust* (and mistrust) with which the infants viewed their caregivers and third parties (see

¹⁵ Fricker, by implication, in fact *does* recognize something of the role played by nonpropositional, nonverbal, and affective knowledge. How else does the empathic teacher, who is described as sensing that her pupil is frightened of her, come by way of this knowledge (see Fricker 2007, 79)? Yet mention of this nonverbal way of knowing appears only in the context of Fricker’s discussion of corrective testimonial sensibility. That such prediscursive capacities of the knower might also be subject to harm is the additional point I want to make here.

Fonagy and Allison 2014). Given that these affective relational patterns often persist throughout the lifespan, this supports a strong genetic link between becoming an adequate knower and the affective embodiment involved in “first-order” recognition.

If a category of “epistemic neglect” can be extrapolated from Honneth’s first sphere of recognition as love (as Congdon suggests), then another severe failure of “first-order” recognition can impact the knower at a somatic level of bodily knowledge. Thus, bodily violation such as rape and torture can threaten to dismantle the integrity of the self as knower.

5. Bodily Violation as Epistemic Injury?

In a recent essay, Paul Giladi (2018), a prescient early adopter of recognition theory as a relevant resource through which to enrich and enhance the theories of epistemic injustice, finds much that is useful in Honneth’s account of basic self-confidence achieved through primary recognition. Giladi draws on this aspect of recognition-theoretic material to argue that the effects of traumatic disruption of basic self-confidence (of the sort that result from the horrors of rape or torture and other violations of the body) can be seen as analogous to the way that the “discursive abuse” and “violation of epistemic integrity” of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice can similarly decimate the “basic confidence” of the knower. Akin, then, to the traumatic loss of self-confidence and basic trust that can follow experiences of physical abuse, he posits that “epistemic abuse” wreaks analogous damage on the epistemic self-confidence of the subject as a *rational enquirer* (Giladi 2018, 147).

For my purposes here, however, I want to supplement this reading by analogy and suggest that there is another potential way to bring together the work of Honneth and Fricker on the question of instances of severe bodily violation, as in, for example, the case of rape. My argument here is that physical abuse might be not just *analogous* to epistemic abuse, but that physical abuse itself can have direct and severe negative epistemic consequences for the victim. In so far as these then subsequently harm her capacities to function well as a knower, they also qualify as *epistemic harms*. Of course, a rapist’s violation of his victim’s integrity and agency is not directed explicitly at his victim’s capacity as a knower per se—except in so far as his intention manifests utter indifference to what she knows about her own desires: namely that she does not *want this to be happening to her*. But such violation can, I suggest, bring resultant epistemic harms that, as Honneth suggests, can undo the foundational sense of an embodied self-confidence and not only shatter the epistemic trust and openness to the world and other people, but also undermine the subject’s epistemic trust in the *signals of the body itself*.

The harms that may be done to the physically violated subject specifically *as a knower* might not be accessible at all if we take the figure of the *knower* to be synonymous with a *rational enquirer*. To accept such a claim requires countenancing modes in which embodied ways of knowing exceed or precede propositional, conceptual, and discursive knowledge, and indeed accepting that there may be modes of direct phenomenological apprehension of the world that do not involve rational enquiry at all. This is not in any way to underestimate the gravity of not being able to function fully as a rational enquirer, of course; rather, it is to suggest that to address *only* this kind of epistemic impact may be to underestimate the extent and depth of the loss of knowing function that is incurred by the violated body (as the subject of knowledge). This embodied form of epistemic harm, in other words, may shatter the capacity to function as a knower at levels of a different order than those which operate when she stands in the “space of reasons” as a rational enquirer, or functions as a giver of testimony, or accesses her culture’s semantic and hermeneutical resources. It is for this reason that I think that we need another phrase to describe it.

If epistemic harms can be inscribed somatically, these violations may go to a deeper level than even those of testimonial or hermeneutical injustice. It seems to me that we miss something about the full extent of the epistemic harm that has been perpetrated against such a victim if we do not appreciate it is not only harmful on the semantic level, *but also a compromise in bodily knowledge*, or a compromise in *embodied epistemic function*. There is now, in fact, extensive research that suggests that when violation of bodily integrity is severe (to the degree that self-confidence and basic trust are compromised), the brain literally changes under its impact of such experience, as does the central nervous system’s reactivity to cues of danger (even down to autonomic functions such as the so-called “startle response,” elevated cortisol levels, and other physiological symptoms of a body in a state of hypervigilant scanning of the environment).

That there may be an analytical distinction to be drawn between the categories of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, on the one hand, and that of *prediscursive* epistemic harm, on the other, does not mean that in practice they don’t occur simultaneously or even as part of a conglomerate of interwoven harms. The devastating epistemic consequences of rape may in fact include all three. Thus, a rape victim may find, all too commonly, that her attempt to reveal what has happened (whether in a legal or informal context) is met with disbelief or her credibility undermined: in short, she becomes a victim of *testimonial* injustice.¹⁶ In

¹⁶ As Audrey Yap argues, a rape victim can be subject to credibility deflation if she does not accord with the dominant cultural “script” of the “good rape victim,” as so too a perpetrator can be the beneficiary of a “hyperinflation” of testimonial

addition, a rape victim might potentially also be a victim of *hermeneutical* injustice: if, say, the legal and social norms of her society determine that the category of “marital rape” is an oxymoron, because the “hermeneutical resources” of the day define it as unthinkable that married women can be raped by their husbands. As Katherine Jenkins has recently argued, a rape victim might also be subject to hermeneutical injustice of a slightly different form when such a concept exists in her culture, but she nevertheless cannot access it.¹⁷ But the epistemic gap that I want to highlight here between experience and knowing is more akin to the clinical category of dissociation and results in the figure of what we might call the dissociated knower (whether this dissociation is produced by relational trauma such as the childhood neglect Congdon mentions, or else by traumatic failures of basic recognition involved in experiences of bodily violation, as Honneth discusses). This is not a gap between experience and *hermeneutical* resources. It is, rather, a gap that interposes between the subject and her apprehension of her own experience and that impacts at the “lower levels” of basic processing of information, operating in a different register than those of conceptual naming. Such embodied epistemic disruption occurs, for example, in heightened startle reflexes, changes in such fundamental perceptual functions as pupil dilation, in malfunctioning habituation responses or hypervigilant states of autonomic arousal. All of these, I contend, might be understood to reflect an epistemic injury done to the subject in the wake of severe failures of “first-order” recognition.

Once we accept there is, in fact, a high degree of implicit bodily knowledge involved in the regulation and decoding of our encounters with others in the social world, then it also seems right to consider that a violent assault upon the material integrity of the body can be enough to produce such a distinctively embodied form of epistemic harm, damaging the subject in her particular capacity as a *knower*. If so, then the experience of rape might constitute a devastatingly dense and concentrated site of epistemic injustice, in so far as the three modes of testimonial, hermeneutic, and primary epistemic harm can all follow in its wake.

As I have attempted to show with the two “central cases” of prediscursive epistemic injury (the first elaborated explicitly as a *nontestimonial* case, the second as *nonhermeneutical*), there may then be grounds to take seriously the body’s implicit sensorium as a *practical knowledge system*. This separate category of harm

credibility and sympathy, if he does *not* fit the expected profile of what a rapist “should look like” and instead seems (is) a thoroughly normal guy (Yap 2017).

¹⁷ Jenkins contends that the internalization of “rape myths” can interfere with a victim’s ability to appropriately apply the label to her experience, “even though the relevant conceptual resources are available at some social locations” (Jenkins 2017, 200).

to this epistemic system—what I have here called *prediscursive harm*—can stand alongside those of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice (which are measured by the metric of how they affect the knower as *speaker*, or the *speaker's voice*). This new category, I have argued, can help capture the range of nondiscursive and nonpropositional forms of epistemic damage for which it is not the presence or absence of the spoken word, but rather the “body that keeps the score.”¹⁸ It is this elusive scorecard at the level of the phenomenology of the socially “invisibilized,” neglected, and/or violated body to which attention must be paid, if we are to grapple with the full reach of epistemic injustice right down into the “marrow of the bone” of its victims.¹⁹ Setting Honneth’s theorization of the “first order” of recognition in dialogue with the contributions of Fricker, is, I have argued here, one effective route to discerning the presence of such an alternative category of epistemic injustice, so that it too can be given a name and tracked to its source.

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¹⁸ This phrase comes from the work of trauma specialist Bessel Van der Kolk (2014).

¹⁹ The striking term “hermeneutical death” is deployed by José Medina to describes those “marrow-of-the-bone cases, in which hermeneutical harms become so pervasive that they compromise one’s epistemic life and status as a meaning-making subject” (Medina 2017, 47). While Medina still figures this death primarily as the “loss of *voice*” (i.e., as speech-oriented), it is notable that in his metaphor the *body* pushes itself forward as a site of registration, as if it is the body itself that can be penetrated (to the marrow of the bone) by epistemic injustice. My thought here is that this is actually more than a metaphor. Epistemic injustice might really penetrate the body and “score” it in deeply damaging ways.

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