

## I4: For more empathy

### **Uma und Aaron:**

Hey, we are Uma and Aaron. Participant and participant of the research module "Access - Questions of Access" at the UdK Berlin. As part of this research module, we had the opportunity to talk to the renowned author Lucy Fricke. In her works, Lucy Fricke deals with various aspects of social class and justice. The focus of our conversation was the contribution "Fish Factory" from the anthology "Class and Struggle". We asked Lucy to read us some selected passages of the text before moving on to the questions and conducting a short interview.

### **Lucy Fricke:**

"When a friend accuses me of selling my soul because I write a few articles for the Springer press, i.e. for money, and this friend is sitting in a Kreuzberg condominium that his parents financed for him, the anger is still there. Two years ago, at almost 44, I paid back the last BaFöG instalment. Just in time for menopause. There are strange goals in life. A few months later, I took a screenshot of my bank balance, which was in five figures for the first time in my life. I had written a bestseller and had never seen anything like it. I had money and success for a temporary state. A blip. When I celebrated my birthday shortly after, my father advised me not to buy expensive wine so that people wouldn't think I was rich. Because when you have money, everyone wants some. But he remained the only one. My fridge was piled high with bottles of champagne brought by generous friends."

### **Uma:**

And now we actually come to the last question and the fourth question. In your role as a writer, you contribute to making other life worlds more accessible and more tangible. This can also help to promote empathy and draw attention to stigmatisation as well as discrimination. What other measures could be taken to promote greater mixing and connection between different social classes and milieus, as you describe it?

### **Lucy Fricke:**

Yes, I hardly know where to start. It strikes me that things are drifting further and further apart, that milieus are keeping to themselves more and more. And that also has to do with urban planning, with rents. Who can live? I live in Kreuzberg now and I'm so close to this border. If I go down to the right, I'm in Neukölln. And if I go down to the left, I'm in the Kiez, where it's very well-off, and then straight ahead is Kreuzberg 36. And there I already see so many differences. And I think that if you are in a district with high rents, of course only people who can afford it live there. That also means that there are only one kind of children in the playground. That in the shops you actually only meet people of your own kind. I think it already starts in kindergartens and schools, so how do the milieus mix there? And that is becoming less and less, because everyone who can afford it sends their children to public schools or Waldorf kindergartens, Montessori schools, public schools. And the children then grow up with children of well-off parents. There is also this whole network. So that's also a point, if you want to leave your milieu somehow or if it's about social advancement, the network is enormously important. And if I don't know anyone who lives differently from me, then it's very difficult to get out of it. Then I don't have any either. So first of all, I don't have any role models or anything, but I also don't have anyone who is able to help me. By simply getting me a job somewhere or a flat or something. After all, it's a network that is also crucial for advancement. And of course you can't create that for yourself if you went to the wrong school. So, that's where it starts. And I find it extremely crass that it's like that at the moment. And I have the feeling that it's even stronger than in the 80s and 90s. And that these places where people meet are dying out a bit. So the pub, the corner pub, that too has become absolutely separate. So where do I drink my beer or where do others drink their cocktail or

something? There, too, almost nothing mixes. I have the feeling that the only place where all the milieus still somehow sit together is the football stadium. Everyone is still there. But otherwise, everyone is actually trapped in their bubble in their life. And I think that is, as I said, this thing with rents, with education, where is that possible? And that schools need to be better financed, teachers, educators. You don't send your child to a school in Kreuzberg because you think, or the parents think, "I don't have any children myself. But they don't get the best possible education there and don't get to be part of the network, which is of course also due to the fact that there are so many pupils and overburdened teachers and so on. I can understand that from a parent's point of view, or I understand my friends well, but of course I'm still against it and they feel the same way. So that's always such a struggle, yes, let's send the child to the state Kreuzberg school. I would always say yes, absolutely.

**Aaron:**

I actually went to a state Kreuzberg school and grew up there. And I also have a question that ties in with that. I wanted to ask what you think about offers such as mentoring or support programmes for young people. I myself, for example, benefit from such a programme to support gifted students and I see that there are also instruments to enable this social advancement or to link the different milieus. And I wanted to ask you again what other possibilities you see to intervene more strongly and to create stronger links.

**Lucy Fricke:**

Yes, I think it's great. But I only know about it in passing. I have the feeling that they are often private initiatives. There is also the Arbeiterkind e.V. (Workers' Child Association), where people who come from a working-class family and are now in an academic context, who have made a career for themselves, take care of others and accompany them and provide a bit of social intellectual support. And I don't know that the state provides that. Are there any programmes like that?

**Aaron:**

Well, I'm with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and that is actually financed by tax money. And on the one hand there are the political foundations, but then there is also the Deutschlandstipendium. But these are things that relate to studies. And you just mentioned that it is actually also something that plays a big role in kindergarten, in the children's shop and in school. So I know about this offer, but I also know about the offer for working children. And I think it is a good offer. But if you had all the power in the world, so to speak, what kind of instruments would you like to introduce? Or what kind of instruments do you think would be helpful to mix the milieus again? To give people the chance? Do you think it is important that this starts early in childhood?

**Lucy Fricke:**

Yes, I think that is important. For that, kindergartens, that is, should all be on the same level. The teachers should be paid much better. So that it is also an interesting job for academics. That also has a lot to do with salary. So what kind of job do I want to do and how much do I want to work myself to death for one-six a month or so, that's not attractive, everyone understands that. I think I would change that. I would be very much in favour of equalising rents. I also find these approaches: We give every child a certain amount of money when they come of age, every person. Then, of course, the issue of inheritance is also a very big one that has not yet been clarified. That's also what strikes me now, of course, at the age I am, that my friends and I were actually on the same level for a very long time and the heirs now all have houses, these summer houses, these holiday homes in Spain, in France, then of course the houses in Germany. And suddenly I think: "Oh, I've worked my ass off for the last 30 years and actually my slovenly friends have half a million in their bank account, while I have to finance my father's new hearing aid and soon a nursing home

and so on. You think it's really unfair, because you can't get out of it. So when I earn a little money now, I have to hand it over to my parents. And there is still, I think, an insane imbalance. And I see these approaches there. I know inheritance tax, but maybe this tax should also be used for such projects and not for financing heat pumps or something like that. I think that would be good. As I said, I see these neighbourhoods as a very, very big problem, that nothing mixes there anymore. And that there are ghettos.

**Aaron:**

I have a follow-up question. Namely, what other possibilities are there that might not be financial? Because we have just talked a lot about that. Economic capital plays a big role. But how can young people or people from social milieus or from the lower classes participate more in social life, in cultural life and influence and increase their cultural capital?

**Lucy Fricke:**

Yes, they first have to know what all the possibilities are and someone has to point them out, I think. So what is there in film, theatre, art, literature? What are the possibilities? You have to arouse a bit of interest somewhere. So if it doesn't come from home or from friends or something, you have to know somewhere that it exists at all. And there are certainly opportunities to go into schools, to have more artists or people who create art, even writers, go into schools and have conversations. I also know that sometimes writing courses or something like that are offered in schools. At that time, I myself took a writing course at university, I think when I was 14, because I knew someone who did. And I was allowed to go there. And that was totally exciting for me because I left my neighbourhood, which wasn't a good one, and then I sat in a seminar room at the university on Saturdays and thought, "Wow, there's a whole other world that I don't know anything about. And here I am a bit, perhaps also without ideas. But I do believe that education is the way out, so to speak. You have to go more into the schools or into the neighbourhoods and do that. I think the whole hip-hop scene and graffiti and break dancing as it used to be called, they do that, they do that incredibly fabulously. So that through making music, through dancing, through spraying and so on, they actually get into another community and suddenly really see what is possible. I have the feeling that this is somehow also limited to these things. So there's still such a weird difference, so there's a totally annoying difference between high culture and just hip-hop in that case. And that's absolutely not necessary. It's just stupid to make these distinctions. What should be accessible to whom and what can be expected of whom?"

**Uma:**

Yes, those are great answers too. Many, many, many thanks for the time, for the great answering of the questions, for the great audio recordings you made and the good passages of text there. Thank you very, very much.

**Aaron:**

And once again, thank you very much from my side. We are dealing with these questions and that is what is occupying us in the seminar. And I believe that many of us will hopefully one day be in a position where we can work on facilitating access and making it possible for this class image not to drift further apart, as you have somewhat outlined, but that we can come together again.