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# *Theory*

The Newsletter of the Research Committee on Sociological Theory  
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### **Editors of *Theory***

Craig Browne  
E-mail: [craig.browne@sydney.edu.au](mailto:craig.browne@sydney.edu.au)  
Paul Jones  
E-mail: [p.jones@unsw.edu.au](mailto:p.jones@unsw.edu.au)  
Department of Sociology and Social Policy A26,  
The University of Sydney, NSW, 2006, Australia

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## **Editors' Introduction**

This issue of *Theory* begins with an update from the Research Committee's Presidents on the mid-term conference to be held in Trento, Italy in June 2012. We have the pleasure of announcing the winner of the Junior Theorist Prize, to be awarded at the conference. This issue includes contemporary reassessments of Pierre Bourdieu's work. Even if you disagree with Bourdieu's sociology, it would be hard to deny its impact and influence. Our contributors have participated in major symposia on Bourdieu's work in recent years. Our final piece is by a former editor of *Theory*. José

Maurício Domingues discusses how his recent book takes up the challenges bequeathed by the history of sociology and those of global modernity.

### **From the Presidents of the Committee**

We are nearly finished organizing all the details for our mid-term meeting in Trento, Italy, which will be held June 27-29, 2012. We have had an incredible response to our call for papers from scholars all around the world. Our conference will be very dynamic and exciting, with a mix of regulars and newcomers, established names and rising stars in the world of sociological theory. Our panels are very diverse and cover a full spectrum of topics, including “Culture and Media”, “Visual and Iconic Power”, “Cosmopolitanism and Multiculturalism”, “Multiple Modernities”, “Theorizing Intellectuals”, “Reconstituting the Normative”, as well as many others. There will be a special keynote panel with Paolo Mancini from the University of Perugia, as well as a special session devoted to the winner of our Junior Theorist Prize.

The conference begins in the afternoon on June 27, with the keynote lecture, the Junior Theorist's prize, and an opening reception. The remaining sessions will be held on June 28-29. The conference schedule is designed not only to ensure stimulating intellectual engagement, but also to allow all attendees to enjoy Trento's beautiful scenery, charm, and gastronomic delights.

We encourage you to visit the conference website at <http://events.unitn.it/en/isa2012> in order to register for the conference. The registration fee includes admission to all academic sessions, as well as the opening reception and two lunches. The website also includes useful information about accommodations in Trento. We will continue to post additional information to the website as we get closer to the conference date.

We look forward to seeing everyone in Italy this Summer.

*Peppino Sciortino and Ron Jacobs*  
*co-chairs, ISA RC 16*

### **Junior Sociologist Prize**

The RC16 Jury for the Junior Theorist Prize has decided by majority vote to award the Junior Theorist Prize to Dominik Bartmanski for his paper ‘How to Become an Iconic Social Thinker - The

Intellectual Pursuits of Malinowski and Foucault’, published in the *European Journal of Social Theory*.

The Jury has also awarded a special mention of the Jury to Gianluca Manzo, for his paper ‘Analytical Sociology and Its Critics’ published in the *European Journal of Sociology*.

The prize will be delivered in the afternoon of June 27th, 2012, during the Opening Ceremony of the Midterm Conference in Trento. All members of RC16 are invited to attend.

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### **Pierre Bourdieu Reassessments**

#### **Distinction, legitimacy and class: A Reassessment**

Pierre Bourdieu, drawing on the Weberian theory of legitimate violence, developed a very strong definition of cultural legitimacy that proved quickly as fruitful as questionable. In an explicitly Weberian affiliation, it is indeed the capacity of legitimacy representations to contribute to the reproduction of power that endows the theory with its explanatory force. The imposition of legitimacy, which is at the root of symbolic violence, is only effective if, while deploying itself, it conceals the power that is the principle of its effective force. The strength of the legitimacy of an action or symbolic device is derived, ultimately, from the force of the groups whose interests it expresses. In the case of education - particularly with regard to France - the thorough and long-lasting dimension of pedagogical authority made it easy to update the structural affinities between the values of the privileged classes and the particular systems dedicated to the scholastic reproduction of legitimate culture.

Things get more complicated when we export the idea of legitimacy towards social universes less easily described in terms of a system. Such is the case with cultural production and consumption, which appear like so many “worlds”, to use Howard Becker’s words, characterized by specific histories and codes. The exclusive definition of the art object as the “objectification of a relationship of distinction” that is central in *Distinction* is justified by the fact that “its appropriation supposes dispositions and skills that are not universally distributed”. The opening pages of *La Distinction* appeal most explicitly to the legitimacy theory: “the more one goes towards the more legitimate domains, like music or art, and, within these universes, ranked according to their modal degree of

legitimacy, towards certain genres or certain works, the more differences in scholastic assets are associated with significant differences in both knowledge and preferences". How can the concept of distinction be assessed thirty years after Bourdieu's book radically changed the sociology of culture? To what extent this theory is linked with the specific context of the *Trente glorieuses* in France and with an idiosyncratic vision of the 'petit-bourgeois'? Can one propose a 'limited' theory of distinction that would make room for the legitimacy crisis of the legitimacy theory?

Above all, we have to reconsider the interpretative systems that we have resorted to in order to analyze the diversity of cultural products and their corresponding consumption styles by relating them to a theory of symbolic domination, based on the observation of the existence of a legitimacy scale. Intended to show the existence of a cultural scale, several (non-equivalent) pairs of terms exist: high/low, elite/masses, learned/popular, legitimate/illegitimate (sometimes, "free"), limited production/widespread production, and though more rarely, noble/common.

In fact, we often forget that social agents perceive in a variety of ways (and as a rule indistinctly) the cultural hierarchies to which sociologists assign very precise social ranking functions. Many hasty conclusions concerning cultural preferences are the simple result of the misunderstanding that sets in between the sociologist whose job consists of standardizing the cultural goods, at the cost of a true takeover by force (in order to be able to scale them, to assign a symbolic productivity coefficient that supposes the setting up of a general equivalent), and social agents who are confronted in real life with both the considerable heterogeneity and the incommensurability of cultural objects. Moreover, the mastery of practical knowledge concerning the hierarchy of genres or works can very well not give rise to the internalization of norms conferring a particular price on works

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the incommensurability of cultural objects. Moreover, the mastery of practical knowledge concerning the hierarchy of genres or works can very well not give rise to the internalization of norms conferring a particular price on works called "legitimate".

In the last thirty years, sociological work on culture has focused instead on re-examining the effectiveness of the division between learned and popular culture when this division is dissociated from the historical process of its emergence. On this account, most of the numerous studies on the cultural practices of the subordinate have attempted to establish that the subordinate were implementing complex skills there where *Distinction* had only seen the coarsest gestures. The rehabilitating dimension is incontestable here. Research in the social sciences has thus been a party to the process of corpus "de-hierarchizing" that has marked cultural life in the last forty years. This explains why the logics of distinction as developed by Bourdieu appear outdated if one applies them mechanically. Basically, the main interest for maintaining the reference to the idea of cultural legitimacy lies in its capacity to explain the selection process for works or genres that transform the social contexts of their consumption and produce new configurations of meaning. But it also invites us to consider with suspicion the mechanical use of the high/low or learned/popular pairs, which leads to considering culture on a vertical plane, and to being trapped by the homologies that dissimulate both the historical productive processes regarding the meaning contexts of works, as well as the multiplicity of forms of relationship to works.

Jean-Louis Fabiani

### **Bourdieu and working class culture**

My concerns in this paper centre on Bourdieu's account of the working-class choice of the necessary.(1) While this is a relatively neglected aspect of Bourdieu's work, it provides a strategic vehicle for examining both the instabilities generated by the role that aesthetic categories play within the analytical scaffolding of *Distinction* and the difficulties associated with his account of the habitus in this study. I shall, in pursuing these concerns, steer a way between two pitfalls which have characterised earlier discussions of Bourdieu's work. The first, associated mainly with empirical sociology, either discounts the aesthetic framing of *Distinction* as an external accretion which has to be jettisoned in order to access its empirical kernel, or interprets it as of possible relevance to 1960s

France but less so anywhere else. The attention within this literature has mainly focused on Bourdieu's account of the principles of pure taste – the aesthetic disposition of disinterestedness – and the (relative) failure to find any class capable of acting as the empirical bearer for such a disposition.(2) While these are valid criticisms, they take little account the broader role that aesthetic categories play in the analytical architecture of *Distinction* which cannot be understood if interpreted purely as a sociological text. It is that, but it is also a statement of a particular political conception of the aesthetic and it is around the figure of a working class whose taste is governed by the choice of the necessary that the nature of this aesthetic and the contradictions it generates are most clearly discernible. The second tradition, best represented by Jacques Rancière, seeks to rebut Bourdieu's criticisms of Kant in order to reclaim the Kantian legacy for an emancipatory politico-aesthetic project.(3) Rancière's critiques of Bourdieu have been paid scant regard by sociologists. This is regrettable. Although marred by the disciplinary hostility of a philosopher out to defend his turf against the empirical sciences,(4) his criticisms of Bourdieu's survey methods merit serious consideration.(5)

Rancière has argued that Bourdieu's text constructs a 'three-way game' within 'a social matrix of judgements of taste' governed by 'the conjunction of two great oppositions': between 'the dominant and the dominated, those with or without capital to put at stake in the symbolic market', and between 'the dominant fractions of the dominant class, characterised by the predominance of economic capital, and its dominated fraction, characterised by the predominance of cultural capital' (Rancière, 2003: 184-5). While this is true so far as it goes, it neglects the variability of the forms in which 'the dominated' appear and the roles they are called on to play depending on whether they are invoked as bearers of the popular 'aesthetic' or of the choice of the necessary.

In concluding his discussion of 'the popular "aesthetic"' in the first chapter of *Distinction*, Bourdieu attributes the popularity of the circus and music-hall, and of genres like melodrama, light opera and feature films, to 'the sense of collective festivity they give rise to and the array of spectacular delights they offer ... – fabulous sets, glittering costumes, exciting music, lively action, enthusiastic actors'. Their appeal caters to 'the taste for and sense of revelry, the plain speaking and hearty laughter which liberate by setting the social world head over heels, overturning conventions and proprieties' (Bourdieu, 1984: 34). While these quali-

ties are difficult to reconcile with the constraints of necessity, Bourdieu's discussion of the popular 'aesthetic' rehearses one of the chief principles which, at a later point in his discussion, define the 'choice of the necessary': that is, denying the working classes any capacity for making relational judgements of form. This is partly attributed to the functional orientation of the popular 'aesthetic' in which form is subordinated to use and is thus, contrary to the implications of Kant's definition of beauty, brought under a concept. However, this functional quality of the popular 'aesthetic' is presented, in this first chapter, not solely as a failure or shortcoming but also as an implicit critique and rejection of Kantian disinterestedness; as an anti-aesthetic which contradicts the dominant aesthetic and highlights its social particularity.

While the functionalist orientation of the working-class choice of the necessary also constitutes a rejection of 'specifically aesthetic intentions as aberrations' (Bourdieu, 1984: 376), its main role is to serve as the foil against which two different kinds of distinction are performed: the freedom from the constraints of necessity associated with the conspicuous consumption of the dominant fraction of the dominant class; and the capacity to execute abstracted and disinterested relational judgements of form which characterises the aesthetic disposition of the dominated fraction of the dominant class. Its interpretation, however, proves quite pliable across these two contexts. The contradictory registers in which Bourdieu discusses the culinary and domestic practices of the working class provide a telling example. His chapter on the working-class choice of the necessary focuses primarily on these as the aspects of class practice in which the force of necessity is most strongly manifest. This serves as a counterfoil to the disinterested interest in art for art's sake of the dominated fraction of the dominant class. Yet, in his earlier chapter on the place of habitus within the space of lifestyles, Bourdieu presents a directly contrary account of the working-class meal as being characterised 'by plenty (which does not exclude restrictions and limits) and above all by freedom', referring to working-class domestic life generally as 'the one realm of freedom, when everywhere else, and at all other times, necessity prevails' (Bourdieu, 1984: 194-5). These differences are largely explicable by the fact that, in this context, Bourdieu's account of the working-class meal is motivated by the contrast he wants to draw between its atmosphere of relaxed freedom and abundance and the 'due form' of the bourgeois meal interpreted as an expression of 'a habitus of order, restraint and propriety' (Bourdieu, 1984:

196). This variability is the source of a set of difficulties that reverberate throughout *Distinction* where the connections that are proposed between the working class and necessity operate as ‘textual shifters’ in the sense that the interpretation and value placed on them vary depending on the motivation of the contrasts they are meant to draw.

When, in his postscript, Bourdieu claims to have produced ‘the truth of the taste against which, by an immense repression, the whole of legitimate aesthetics has been constructed’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 484), the singularity of his formulation is misleading. For while Bourdieu faithfully follows the multiply-intersecting oppositions (civilised/primitive, culture/nature, human/non-human, body/soul) which organise Kant’s elaboration of the principles of ‘pure taste’, his interpretation of these as being ‘rooted in the opposition between the cultivated bourgeoisie and the people’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 490) invokes ‘the people’ in different forms. His accounts of the ‘disgust at the “facile”’ and of the relations between the ‘taste of reflection’ and the ‘taste of sense’ both oppose ‘pure taste’ to sensory and embodied forms of pleasure and participation. But they do so differently. The facile is described in terms which resonate with the principles of the popular ‘aesthetic’ – the facile as ‘light’, ‘frivolous’, ‘futile’, ‘shallow’, ‘superficial’, ‘showy’, ‘flashy’, ‘meretricious’, ‘syrupy’, ‘schmaltzy’, ‘cloying’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 486) – in which the gratification of the agreeable stands ‘opposed to the “distance” and “disinterestedness” of pure taste’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 487). The ‘taste of sense’, by contrast, grounds pleasure in what is low, coarse, primitive, or, more generally, in the forms of necessity that govern those forms of human life that are close to the natural, and thus serves as a counterpoint to the space for reflection and freedom that is the product of cultivation.

There is a more general issue at stake here concerning Bourdieu’s conception, in *Distinction*, of the habitus as a unified and unifying set of dispositions.<sup>(6)</sup> This is sustained only by a more-or-less rigorous partitioning of different aspects of working-class taste across different parts of the book. Music, film, reading, and television preferences thus figure mainly in his discussion of the popular ‘aesthetic’ while his account of the working-class choice of the necessary focuses almost entirely on practices of everyday life rooted in the economy of the working-class household. The difficulties associated with the forming and shaping of dispositions through quite different mechanisms (the operations of commercial cultural industries, the effects of economic class position on daily life) are thus entirely evaded. Or

they are resolved by deploying a form of argument which, as Bernard Lahire (2004) has noted, occurs throughout *Distinction*, through which tastes which might seem to rest on contrary principles are retrieved in support of the construction of a unified habitus through the logic of the ‘denied exception’. Having argued that working-class women lack any interest in, or capacity for, calculated effects in their choice and arrangement of decorative items in the home, Bourdieu notes that the ‘taste for the trinkets and knick-knacks which adorn mantelpiece and hallways’ seems to contradict ‘an economy of practices based on the search for the “practical” and the refusal of “frills” and “fancy nonsense”’. Yet this apparent exception is immediately realigned with his account of the choice of the necessary by suggesting that it is inspired by the intention ‘of obtaining maximum “effect” (“It’ll make a terrific effect”) at minimum cost’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 379).

The particularity of this manoeuvre can be illustrated with reference to the different procedures Bourdieu applies in evoking the scene of the country ball in *The Bachelors’ Ball* as one bearing witness to a ‘real clash of civilisations’ through which the urban world – its music, dances, cultural models, and bodily techniques – burst into peasant life, but with radically different consequences for men and women. In *Distinction*, the choice of the necessary constitutes a class determination which affects men and women equally, albeit that its modalities might be different. By contrast, urban popular culture impacts on peasant society in sharply divergent ways in view of the differential consequences the logic of matrimonial exchanges has for men and for women. Whereas this makes an aspiration to urban life and culture a part of a rational strategy, for women, of marrying out of their class, young peasant men, lacking any such exit strategy, fail to develop an equivalent repertoire of urban cultural styles. The result is a marked split of cultural dispositions within the class following a fracture along gender lines. ‘Owing to the duality of the frames of reference, a consequence of the different rates at which the sexes adopt urban models,’ Bourdieu argues, ‘women judge their peasant menfolk by criteria that leave them no chance’ (Bourdieu, 2008: 91). No chance, that is, because their habitus is out of tune with the habitus of a generation of peasant women whose tastes and dispositions have been restructured by the institutions of urban popular culture over and against their class conditioning.

**(1) Acknowledgement**

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<sup>2</sup> This is true, in different ways, of Lamont's (1992) assessment of the degree to which Bourdieu's categories can be applied in the USA and of subsequent attempts to replicate and critically revise Bourdieu's survey methods in Australia (Bennett et al., 1999) and Britain (Bennett et al., 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See, in particular, Rancière (1999, 2003, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> I have discussed the analytical and political weaknesses this occasions in Bennett (2010).

<sup>5</sup> I have discussed how, when read against the grain of his anti-sociologism, Rancière's formulations open up new possibilities for sociological research in Bennett (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu's later use of the concept of habitus was often at odds with his strict stipulations in *Distinction* regarding its class-based unity; see Bennett (2007).

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Tony Bennett

**Sociological determinism as a liberating force? Bourdieu, reflexivity and self-transformation**

As is well known, Bourdieu's structural praxeology advances a reworked version of the Aristotelian-Thomistic notion of *habitus* as the fundamental mediation between individual and society. The concept designates a 'socialized subjectivity' which contributes to constituting and reconstituting the objective social world in which it is embedded when drawn upon to manufacture individuals' practices. The emphasis on this circularity of the *habitus* pervades the whole of Bourdieu's *oeuvre*, where the category depicts the generating (though socially generated) principle behind practices and representations, or still, to quote one of his most infamous cases of stylistic acrobatics, as a 'structured structure predisposed to function as a structuring structure' of the same structures that structured it (Bourdieu, 1977: 72).

Besides pointing to the socially constituted and socially constitutive character of human agency, the main heuristic function of the theory of *habitus* is to highlight the prevalently tacit, pre-reflexive and non-discursive operation of the subjective movers of individual conduct. In the tracks of philosophers like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein, this entails a vigorous onslaught on the multiform intellectualistic depictions of human actions and motivations that result from the 'scholastic fallacy', the inadvertent procedure in which the analytical models constructed by the philosopher or social scientist are projected into the minds of the agents themselves and erroneously taken as the real, empirical causes of their practices.

However, even if Bourdieu underlines that the *habitus* is the fundamental and most frequent subjective mechanism of human practices, he does not deny the existence of causally effective actions motivated by reflexive deliberations, noting only

that such form of behavior depends on specific social and historical conditions of possibility. Besides the contexts of disjunction between subjective dispositions and objective conditions that configure what he calls the ‘*hysteresis effect*’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 108), the passage from a tacit activation of ingrained propensities of conduct to a consciously pondered choice of action alternatives, from *praxis* to *logos*, could also be backed by sociology, if conceived as an instrument of self-analysis.

His reflexive sociology is founded precisely upon the possibility that the infraconscious dispositions that condition one’s thoughts, emotions and actions may be rationally mastered if they reach the domain of consciousness. As Frangie (2009) has noted, although Bourdieu has highlighted the importance of reflexivity, mainly as a fundamental resource of social scientific methodology, he also came to endow it with the potential ethico-political role of making agents conscious of the social determinisms that externally and internally constrain and shape their conducts, opening up ‘the possibility of an emancipation founded upon the awareness and knowledge of the conditionings undergone’. This awareness could even subsequently support the reflexive cultivation of new forms of habitus, that is, ‘new conditionings designed durably to counter...[the] effects’ of a previous socialization (Bourdieu, 1999: 40).

The transposition of the notion of reflexivity as socio-self-analysis from the domain of scientific methodology to the ethico-political terrain may be understood as a conjoining of the Kantian and Marxist conceptions of the ‘critical’ in Bourdieu’s critical theory of symbolic power. In the tracks of Durkheim’s ‘sociological Kantianism’ (Lévi-Strauss), which points to the socially shaped character of the agents’ ‘categories of understanding’, this critical reflexivity systematically excavates the most deeply ingrained presuppositions of (lay or academic) thought and action. According to Bourdieu, however, the orientation of conduct and structures of perception that ensure the intelligibility of the social world to the agents are the same that lead these agents to doxically experience the enduring inequalities in resources and power asymmetries that pervade this same world as natural and evident. In this sense, the Kantian-Durkheimian diagnosis of the ‘ontological complicity’ between social and symbolic structures undergoes a Marxian twist, associated with the effort of unconverging ideologically-masked forms of domination.

The sociological objectivation of patterns of domination and symbolic violence, by pointing to their deep cognitive, moral, emotional and bodily effects upon individual subjectivities, has consequences that are inseparably political and existential. Since the ‘personal is social’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 202) and therefore political, the ethics of the good life becomes inseparable from the politics of the Just City, while the questioning and struggle against exterior and interiorized domination becomes both an ethical act of reflexive self-fashioning and a political move of resistance to domination. The ‘self-help’ tone of the closing words of Bourdieu’s sociological self-analysis must thus be read against the backdrop of this inextricable connection between ‘clinical sociology’ and ‘reflexive politics’ (Frangie, 2009: 213):

*‘Nothing would make me happier than having made it possible for some of my readers to recognize their own experiences, difficulties, questionings, sufferings, and so on, in mine, and to draw from this realist identification, which is quite the opposite of an exalted identification, some means of doing what they do, and living what they live, a bit better’* (Bourdieu, 2008: 113).

Despite the difference in the conception and methods of socio-analysis, the implicit reference to psychoanalysis betrays their common source in the Socratic project of self-consciousness as an emancipatory path. The idea is to expand the domain of human self-awareness to those dimensions of our conduct which, if left untouched by this scientifically-informed reflexive operation, remain hidden, repressed, unconscious, dissimulated. Being, as was Freud, an ethical rationalist tremendously sensitive to all sorts of obstacles that need to be faced in order for autonomous reason to emerge, Bourdieu pursues a different notion of the unconscious: the socially-acquired mental and practical propensities that configure our mode of being in the world. If ‘history is the true unconscious’ (Durkheim), the self-analyst informed by Bourdieu’s thought conceives the theory of the *habitus* under the aegis of Marx’s principle ‘*De te fabula narratur*’ and therefore knows herself as a ‘history made body’.

The disenchanting vein of this line of inquiry is undeniable, since it depicts human beings not as irreducible to the world, but as worldly, all too worldly, molded in their personalities’ most intimate territories by social-historical determinations which are ‘not of their choosing’ (Marx), but end up objectivated in their very subjectivities. Sociologically-armed self-analysis thus leads to the un-

comfortable and even painful discovery of objectivity within the very heart of subjectivity.

Nevertheless, this same disenchanting sociological-reflexive effort of ‘anamnesis’ (to use Plato’s expression) constitutes a liberating way for a self-reappropriation. Since, in this reality domain, we are not dealing with trans-historical laws of nature, recognizing the forces that act upon ourselves - and particularly ‘inside’, ‘within’ or ‘through’ ourselves - means acquiring the necessary tools to act upon these very forces. As in psychoanalytical therapy, in which the onslaught on psychic scourges depends on the uncomfortable and painful phase of recognition of the unconscious sources of one’s symptoms, the risky and unsettling rise of self-consciousness constitutes precisely the first *locus* of the possibility of freedom. Indeed, in his exploration of the metaphor of the puppet theater in the deceptively non-ambitious *Invitation to Sociology*, Peter Berger had already claimed a ‘Delphic’ (from the inscription at the Delphi Temple: ‘Know thyself’) or ‘clinical’ (Bourdieu) mission to the field of the social sciences, seeing in this potentially liberating self-reflection the very justification for the existence of our discipline (as in Berger’s humanist invitation).

Animated by the same spirit, Bourdieu affirms that sociology ‘frees us *by freeing us* from the illusion of freedom’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 28; italics added). This sentence is not (or not just, if you will) another instance of the unbearable repetitiveness of Bourdieu’s prose. By adding the highlighted expression, he intended to emphasize that the possibility for freedom that is offered by the objectivation of social conditionings of thought and conduct goes beyond a Spinozian or Hegelian ‘recognition of necessity’. To the extent that the ‘necessities’ operating in the social world are historically constituted and reproduced through human agents’ actions and representations, the recognition of such necessities may consist in the preamble for questioning, fighting and even destroying them. Therefore, in a singular combination of a ‘pessimism of the intellect’ and an ‘optimism of the will’, Bourdieu could even say that the determinism of his theoretical approach was precisely what turned it into a potentially liberating instrument.

Of course, things are never that simple (as Bourdieu himself, the good Bachelardian, was prone to emphasize). The only way Bourdieu’s project of a sociological enlightenment of lay agents’ perceptions of their historical-biographical predicaments could escape contradiction and self-defeatism would be by postulating that these agents *already*

*have*, in principle, the capability for a (relative and variable, but not negligible) reflexive distanciation from both their habitus and habitats – the very capability that would make ‘sociological self-enlightenment’ possible in the first place. There is no need to overestimate lay agents’ level of self-transparency in order to recognize that Bourdieu’s otherwise valuable emphasis on the tacit functioning of the habitus led him to neglect the causally significant extension of their reflexive and conscious knowledge of, and control over, their own behavior. Indeed, even if we set aside the independent causal role of human reflexivity and subscribe to the thesis that the emergence and/or effectiveness of the agent’s reflexive consciousness always depends on the social-historical rupture of the ontological complicity between subjective and objective structures, we would have to add, *pace* Bourdieu, that such situations are ‘radically more frequent’ (Elder-Vass, 2007: 341) in the social world than the French sociologist allows. *Ergo*, the occurrence of ordinary ‘micro-hysteresis’ - that is, of inadequacies between practical dispositions and experiential contexts - and, thus, the need to mobilize reflexive deliberations in conjunction with (or sometimes against) the propensities of one’s habitus are not only found in circumstances of radical crisis (e.g. May 68 in France, but constitute part and parcel of the daily social existence of any agent. Fortunately, there is now something close to a whole research program on the relation between habitual dispositions and reflexive deliberations or ‘internal conversations’ (see, Kögler, 1997; Aboulafia, 1999; Crossley, 2001; Sweetman, 2003; Sayer, 2005; Adams, 2006; Archer, 2007; 2010; Fleetwood, 2008; Mouzelis, 2008).

The advance of a reflexive sociology which mobilizes the tools of science to provide the lay actors themselves with a more precise grasp of the connections between their biographical predicaments and their structural locations in a macro-social history is not diluted, but *strengthened* by the realization that they are endowed with greater powers of reflexivity than Bourdieu had allowed in his theoretical scheme (ironically, the interviewees of *The Weight of the World* offer ample empirical evidence for that). The reintroduction of lay reflexivity in the theory of practice and the emancipatory program of reflexive sociology can, thus, be deemed as complementary parts of the exercise through which we strive to shape and reshape ‘sociology, society and, ultimately, our selves’ (Wacquant, 1992: 59).

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Gabriel Peters

**Gabriel Peters** is a PhD candidate at the Institute of Social and Political Studies of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (IESP/UERJ).

## Sociological Theory, History, Global Modernity

Sociology was born to a great extent as an interrogation about the sweeping transformations, which we now know as 'modernity', that unfolded before the eyes of Western intellectuals. An empirically based discipline was thus born, with strong historical leanings as well as challenging theoretical questions. Although he saw himself primarily as an economist and originally a philosopher, Marx (along with Engels) is certainly the first great author in this regard, to some extent establishing a way of analyzing social life that had few precedents in human history. That much was recognized by Weber, who however thought Marx's version of the social sciences was still 'primitive', especially insofar as his predecessor did not have a proper multidimensional view of social processes. He then proceeded to correct this shortcoming, broadening also the historical and theoretical scope of the burgeoning discipline. To confine myself only to the most classical authors of sociology, let me just add that Durkheim was in this regard more limited, answering the questions Marx and Weber had themselves proposed through a simpler and evolutionary scheme. If Marx and Weber surely had a Eurocentric perspective, in Durkheim's case this became more pronounced.

With the relocation of sociology to the United States, a sea-change occurred, in which Parsons' influence was decisive. Empirical issues were broadened but at the same time sociological theory became much more delimited by national boundaries and highly abstract (despite Parsons' concern with the bearing of his theory in empirical research), exceptions such as those epitomized by Bendix notwithstanding. At the same time, so-called Western Marxism also became more concerned with basically Europe and the US, while philosophy became its hallmark, it gravitated away from more direct concerns with empirical developments. We learned and accumulated a lot through that sort of general theoretical efforts, but a price was paid for

its relative disconnection from the historical matter (less so in the case of Parsons, always more subtle and wide-ranging, despite the increasing rigidity of his theoretical approach).

Modernization theory was a creature of the time as well. Supposedly preoccupied by empirical-historical questions, it was nevertheless so rigid and ideological that those issues worked basically as cover for its reified intellectual operations, showing itself incapable of actually connecting general theory and historical developments in a productive way. Marxism, or neo-Marxist approaches, such a dependency theory, at times suggested interesting topics and worked out relevant solutions, but theoretically it was usually poorer than its classical referent and thus meant no theoretical advances.

When sociological theory with its 'new theoretical movement' endeavoured to synthetically overcome the fragmentation which had become in a sense a hindrance to more ambitious perspectives (a problem present in the multiplicity of Marxisms which were more typical of Europe), it kept much of this abstract and less than historically oriented character. Habermas is absolutely a case in point, neofunctionalism originally too, Giddens very much so, with Bourdieu more concerned with avoiding excessive formalization and researching culture and inequality (in France alone, though). While Giddens tried to connect to some historical questions and neofunctionalism, and later on its offspring, cultural sociology, embraced more empirically oriented investigations, history by and large did not receive pride of place in sociological theory. We learned a lot and advanced too at this point, but problems remained. Since a strong theoretical movement does not actually exist at this stage, and much is (mi)spent in exegesis, especially in what is referred to as Critical Theory, this seems to have become a stable feature of sociological theory. On the other hand, the repetitions and reiterations of theoretical themes and solutions – as well as to a great extent the abandonment of the field by those who were until recently its main protagonists – seem to suggest that this way of doing theory has reached impasses which are difficult to overcome.

There are indeed some exceptions in this regard. First and foremost this was the case of Eisenstadt, who, from functionalism and modernization theory, worked out more sensitive and contingency-based perspectives, fundamentally focusing on the civilizational theory, 'Axial revolutions' and what he called 'multiple modernities'. To some extent at least this answered not only to the general

discredit of modernization theory, but also to the intensification of globalization since the 1990s. Weber appeared to be alive again, and, with a bit of luck, this could be Marx's case too, especially if we take into account the huge mess in which capitalism is enmeshed today.

Post-colonialism intends to play a role which could claim the heritage of critical theory, with moreover now a truly global character. The latter is arguable, since it, in fact, tends to overlook much of what had previously been produced outside the centre, at best reading some authors (such as Fanon) according to its own agenda. Once we look at it from a sociological perspective, it is evident that post-colonialism too often suffers from a serious limitation. That is, its origins in humanistic and literary studies have made it excessively concerned with discursive phenomena. Institutional analysis, economic issues, and even political factors (with power too closely connected to culture in their work) are usually left out of their purview, though there are exceptions to this rule, indeed, such as those which can be found in Chatterjee's and Nandy's work in India.

Altogether, I think we can identify some challenges and bottlenecks in contemporary sociological theory, or vis-à-vis the issues that could and should be included in its outlook, which I would like therefore to summarize now. Abstract theorizing needs to rest for a while, since very little innovation has come out of it (although I would like to claim originality for my concept of 'collective subjectivity', elaborated since the mid-1990s). Perhaps it can be reenergized by an opening to empirical-historical realities. This however, can be done today more productively with a perspective that becomes capable of embracing truly global realities, which often diverge from those which furnished the backbone, implicitly or explicitly of western theory. A link with historical sociology, or at least with methods derived from historical sociology, can be quite useful for this. In this regard, Eisenstadt, with his Weberian flair and historical erudition, was definitely insightful. On the other hand, insofar as a critical outlook is at stake, even though post-colonial approaches throw up interesting and often crucial problems, their answers have been limited and a critical approach would be better served if sociological theory were mobilized to tackle the systems of domination, in all dimensions, which cut across the globe at present. Immanent critique, which from Marx to the Habermas till a certain stage, underpinned critical theories, should be resumed, in place of the fuzzy 'reconstructive' strategy that has become

the staple methodology of the heirs to the Frankfurt School. This needs to be done, in my view, stressing once again a multidimensional approach, since an encompassing view of global modernity

needs to deal with capitalism, at best limited democracy, patriarchy, racism, consumerism, freedom, subjectivity and subjectivation, as well as a great many questions that resist assimilation within a more unilateral framework, both at a more general theoretical level and in empirical terms.

Not by chance, this is precisely what I have been advancing in the last years in my own work, in which the third phase of a globally heterogeneous modern civilization has furnished the focal point of interest (see especially Domingues, 2009 and 2012). I have been working this out mainly in relation to the ‘periphery’ and the ‘semiperiphery’. Therein we find also exactly those other, non-modern civilizations, with which modernity has hybridized, leading the global landscape to a extremely high level of complexity, although modernity seems to me to remain doubtlessly the main vector of this development. That is not say that the ‘centre’ and even a more general approach cannot be framed by the same strategy, on the contrary. Nor does it mean that this should be a last stage in social theorizing, since new issues, clues, concepts, can be arrived at through an analysis of other areas of contemporary modernity (globally defined rather than confined to its ‘multiple’, in fact mostly national expressions, in Eisenstadt’s proposal). More general theoretical concepts as well as middle range ones can be thereby achieved. This would also facilitate the communication and integration of western sociological theorizing with peripheral and semiperipheral approaches, so far usually timid theoretically, while central theorists do not often bother, for substantive as well as geopolitical-knowledge questions, to learn from such non-mainstream developments.

To be sure, we have become aware for quite some time now of the fact that there is no reason to expect a unified sociological theory. It goes without saying that many approaches are possible and needed to overcome the current problems faced by sociological theory, especially what can be seen as a tendency to technical sterility and often irrelevance. Although therefore not exclusive, of course, I think the way suggested above may pay off as a strategy to move forward in the several aspects on which hard work appears to be necessary these days.

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*José Maurício Domingues*