

Culture & Communication

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Winter 2021

Lecture # 16 Habitus

Warning

Some of the **concepts** for this week are very complex and the **language** used to describe them is often difficult to understand. Bourdieu's writing style doesn't help to make it easier. (That's why I added a slide from his former student Lois Wacquant).

BUT the phenomena that Bourdieu is trying to capture both **IN** the world and **ABOUT** the world should become clear(er) with some examples.

Helpful website

A reliable website with exegesis of Bourdieu's book (from Univ. of British Columbia).

[https://wiki.ubc.ca/Structures,_Habitus,_Practices_\(Group_10\)#Section_1:_Paragraph_1.262_Sonia_Zaib](https://wiki.ubc.ca/Structures,_Habitus,_Practices_(Group_10)#Section_1:_Paragraph_1.262_Sonia_Zaib)

today

Introduction to the notion of “**habitus**”

Relation between habitus and “practice”.

What we call “**structure**” is the result of a “doing”, e.g., knowledge is not a “thing” but a process, hence mutable, variable, reshaped in unfolding everyday actions or, better, interactions.

On Wednesday, the question will be:

Can habitus be changed?

Bourdieu (1977)

Bourdieu borrows from the phenomenological literature to uncover how the “object” of social science and the regularities captured by statistical methods are the product of practices, which are taken for granted.

Both Subject and Object are acknowledged and, most importantly, their on-going dialectics.

Habitus substitutes “consciousness, motivation, knowledge, etc.”

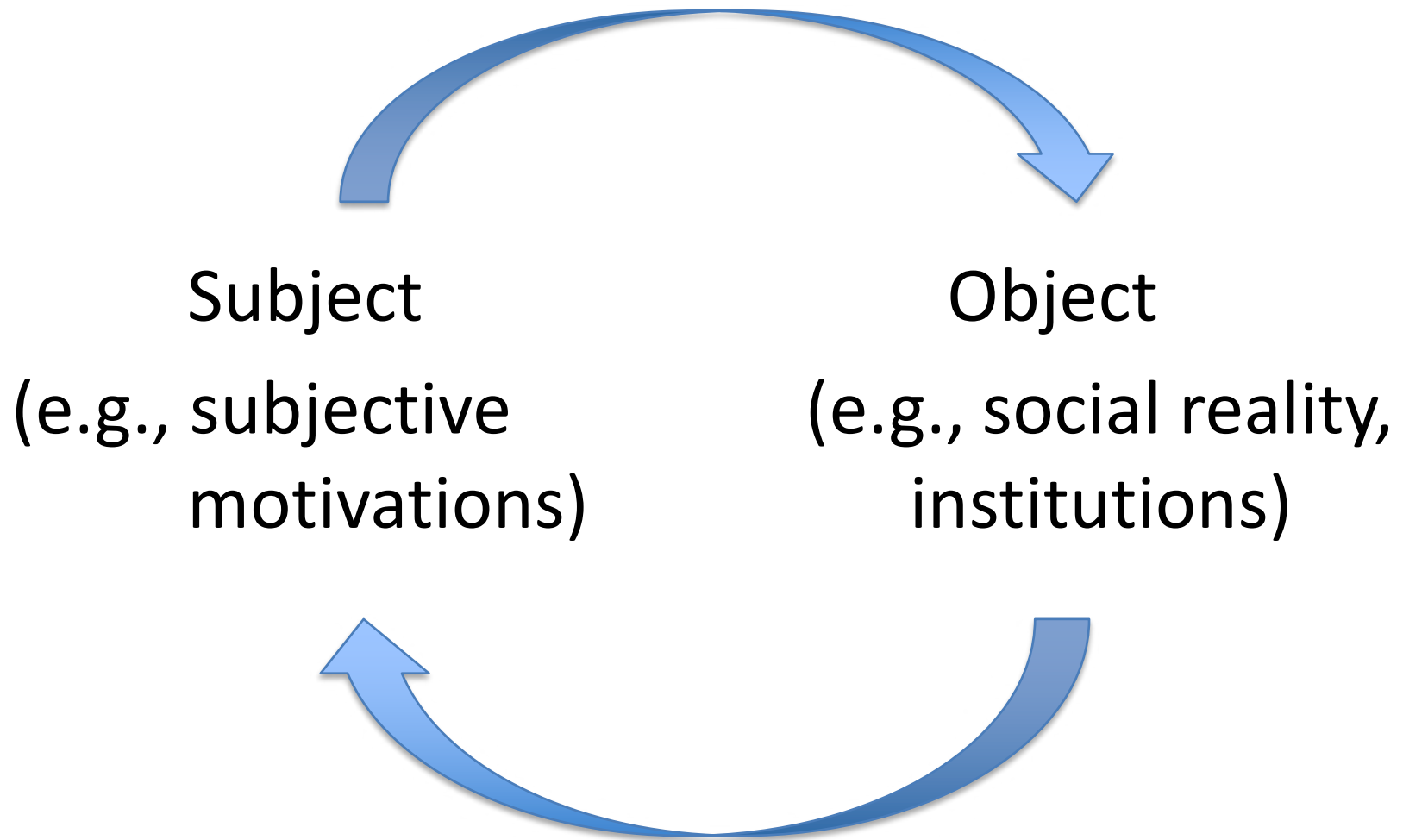
Why “habitus”?

Bourdieu wants to overcome the separation in science between the (acting, investigating) Subject (often hidden in the analysis) and the Object (the result of the analysis).

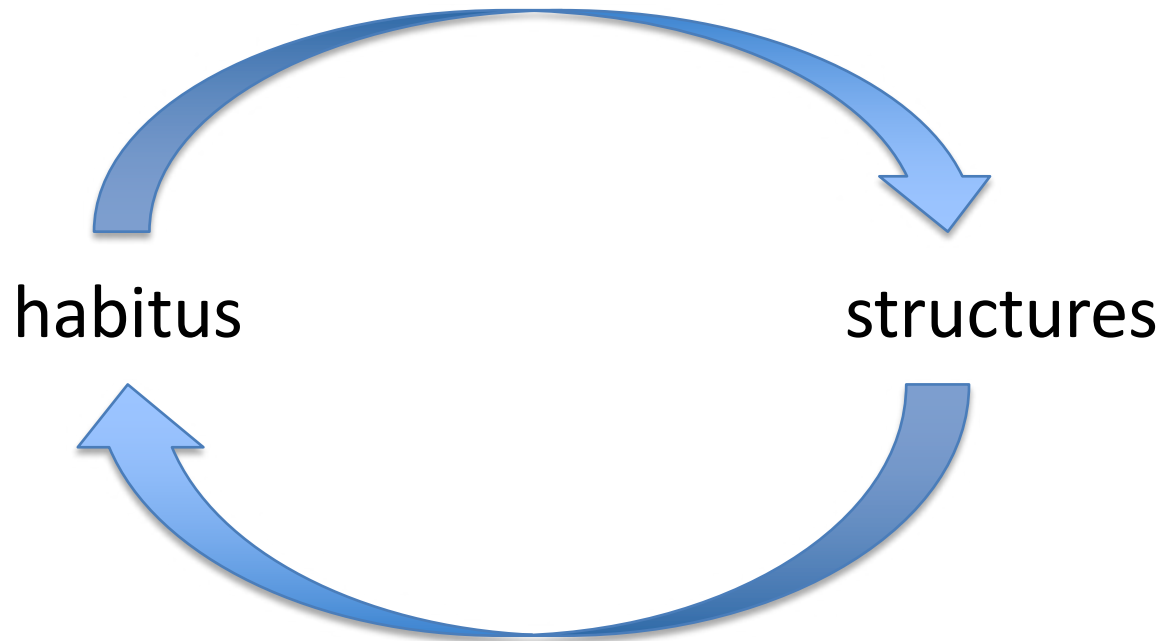
He criticizes “objectivism”.

What appears “objective” is the product of a *modus operandi* (way of doing things) of which the Agent is not conscious.

Dialectic Relation



Dialectic Relation



Example: school system as a structure/institution is the outcome of a dialectics of individuals' dispositions and institutional requirements/goals realized through practices (ways of being and doing)

The “commonsense world”

The habitus produces a “commonsense world” that appears as a reality separate from the Subject (or Agent).

Bourdieu is skeptical of the individual’s *intentions* as separate from the the **habitus** (“the harmony of ethos and taste”) as **dispositions** that are acquired, practiced, and reproduced within a group (e.g., class) (p. 82)

Different attitudes toward our “world”

1) “the natural attitude” (*die natürliche Einstellung*) – the unmarked, default way of being-in-the-world, including a practical engagement.

2) Examples of other attitudes:

“theoretical attitude,”

“aesthetic attitude”

“the arithmetic attitude”

Thesis: The “natural” is “cultural”

How do we go about uncovering the “cultural” side of looking at the world and being-in-the-world?

Two concepts-tools-to-think-with: (a) “**habitus**” (Bourdieu) (b) “**aspect**” (Wittgenstein)

(Latin) **Habitus** = 'condition, state, dress, demeanor, character, etc.'

In using language

In using tools

Ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, etc.

Being with others

Latin *habitus*

hăbĭtus , ūs, m. 1. habitus, P. a., from the verb *habeo* 'to have' (here 'I have')

I. *the condition or state* of a thing (class.).

A. In gen., *condition, plight, habit, deportment, appearance* of the body (in sing. and plur.): *deportment, appearance*,

2. Of things, esp. of places, *condition, habit, appearance*, etc.:

B. In partic., *dress, attire*

II.

A. In gen., *quality, nature, character*:

B. In partic.

1. *A state of feeling, disposition* (friendly or hostile) with regard to any one

2. In philos. lang., *an acquired perfect state or condition*

Bourdieu's use of Greek notion of ἑξις

“The child imitates not “models” but other people’s actions. Body *hexis* [ἑξις] speaks directly to the motor function, in the form of a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, because linked to a whole system of techniques involving the body and tools, and charged with a host of social meanings and values; in all societies, children are particularly attentive to the gestures and postures which, in their eyes, express everything that goes to make an accomplished adult – a way of walking, a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting and using implements, always associated with a tone of voice, a style of speech and ... a certain subjective experience.”

Greek hexis (ἕξις)

(Bourdieu 1977 p. 87)

ἕξις , εως, ἥ, (ἔχω):

I. (ἔχω trans.) *having, being in possession of,*

2. in surgery, *posture,*

II. (ἔχω intr.) *a being in a certain state, a permanent condition* as produced by practice (πρᾶξις), diff. from σχέσις (which is alterable) (v. infr.):

1. *state or habit of body, generally, condition, habit of a vine;* of material objects,

2. *state or habit of mind,*

b. esp. *acquired habit*, opposite of ἐνέργεια ‘operation, action, active force, cosmic force’

3. *trained habit, skill, ...*

Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*

“The habitus is precisely this immanent law, *lex insita*, laid down in each agent by his earliest upbringing, which is the precondition not only for the co-ordination of practices but also for practices of co-ordination...” (Bourdieu 1977: 81)

“In short, the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history ...” (ib. p. 82)

Embodied habitus

Sitting

Running

Walking

Cetona (Siena) Italy



Havana, Cuba (2015)



Sitting in a Samoan *fale* (1988)



Running







Walking

Pisa, Italy (2010)



Harrisburg, PA (2011)



Samoa (1979)



Habitus implies

Constraints (how, where, with whom to do X, etc.)

Structure (does it produce/support a “structure,” a pattern, a predictable activity, e.g., a ritual, an institution?)

History (Have these people done it before, how do we know?)

Competence: Do they show they have a “feel for the game” (Bourdieu’s term)?

Are they following a rule? Improvising (included in the concept of habitus)?

Improvisation & corporeality

“... a theory of habitus is incomplete without a notion of structure that makes room for the organized improvisation of agents. To understand this “social art” ([Marcel] Mauss) of improvisation consists of, we need to turn to Bourdieu’s social ontology.” (L. Wacquant 1992)

“Bourdieu’s philosophy of the social sciences [...] refuses to establish a sharp demarcation between the external and the internal, the conscious and the unconscious, the bodily and the discursive. It seeks to capture the intentionality without intention, the knowledge without cognitive intent, the prereflexive, infraconscious mastery that agents acquire of their social world by way of durable immersion within it (this is why sports is of such theoretical interest to Bourdieu ...) and which defines properly human social practice. [...] Bourdieu rejects the dualities – between body and mind, understanding and sensibility, subject and object, *En-soi* and *Pour-soi* [Sartre, from Hegel] – of Cartesian social ontology [...] He builds in particular on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the intrinsic *corporeality of the preobjective contact between subject and world* in order to restore the body as the source of practical intentionality, as the fount of intersubjective meaning grounded in the preobjective level of experience.” (Wacquant 1992: 20)

Chuck Berry

Roll Over Beethoven

Words and Music by Chuck Berry



Bright rock 'n' roll ♩ = 182



“Roll Over Beethoven”

By Chuck Berry, 1956, A-side of Single released on Chess Records.



Recorded in 1963 by The Beatles and released in LP *With the Beatles* – George Harrison on Vocals & guitar – also in (the U.S.) *The Beatles' Second Album*



12-Bar Blues in D & B

/D7/D7/D7/D7/G7/G7/D7/D7/A7/G7/D7/A7/

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

I I I I IV IV I I V IV I V

/B7/B7/B7/B7/E7/E7/B7/B7/F#7/E7/B7/F#7/

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

The Beatles play “One After 909”



Alternate Take...

Paul & John: ((sound fades in at 1m of the alternate take))

You've got the number on:: well::

She said she driving on the one after 909

Said move over honey you're driving it on that line

Said move over once move over twice

Come on baby don't be cold as ice

She said she's driving on the one after 909

Yeah[:::]

George: ((plays guitar solo)) **[1m:30s]**

John: ((starts singing)) *Well my baby said she's driving on the one aft—*

((band stops playing))

John?: Oh hell to::ld you

Paul: Well it's you too //(?) George!

John: you said we'd miss out a little late

Paul?: You're coming in wrong- halfway through the solo

?; So //(? you know)

John: Well was it a 12 bar? (.) It wasn't //(a twelve-)



“One After 909”:

/B7/B7/B7/B7/B7/B7/B7/B7/B7/B7/E7/E7/B7/F#7/B7/B7/
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

“12-bar blues” in the same key (B)



/B7/B7/B7/B7/E7/E7/B7/B7/F#7/E7/B7/F#7/
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Hypothesis

John Lennon “heard” George Harrison’s solo **as** a solo for **a 12-bar blues** and came in after 12 bars

Review

The notion of “**habitus**” was used by Bourdieu to provide a theory of human action that avoided the strict separation between Subject and Object and allows to see how “practice” – doing things in the world in routine ways – recreates “structures.”

What we call “**structure**” is the result of a “doing”, e.g., knowledge is not a “thing” but a process, hence mutable, variable, reshaped in unfolding everyday actions or, better, interactions.

One question for the next lecture will be:
Can habitus be changed?