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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Lisa Adkins is Professor of Sociology at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Her contributions to Sociology fall into three main areas: the sociology of economic life (especially the sociology of postindustrial economies and the new political economy), social and cultural theory, and the sociology of gender and sexuality. Some key publications include *Revisions: Gender and Sexuality in Late Modernity* (Open University, 2002), *Feminism After Bourdieu* (edited with B. Skeggs, Blackwell, 2005), and a Special Issue (co-edited with Celia Lury) in the *European Journal of Social Theory* on the theme of 'What is the Empirical?' (2009). Her recent work focuses on changing temporalities of labour and value in contemporary capitalism.

Mauro Basaure is Assistant Professor at the Instituto de Humanidades, Universidad Diego Portales, in Santiago de Chile, and he is a member of the Groupe de Sociologie Politique et Morale at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, France. He received his PhD from the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt, Germany. He was previously at the University of Chile, where he studied sociology (1993–9) receiving his MA in political philosophy (2000–2). He was a Research Fellow at the Institute for Social Research, Frankfurt (2004–9), where he initiated the International Study Group for Critical Theory, and at the Lateinamerika Institut of the Freie Universität Berlin (2003). His areas of research and teaching include social theory, critical theory, contemporary French sociology and political philosophy. He recently edited *Erneuerung der Kritik. Axel Honneth im Gespräch* (New York, Frankfurt: Campus, 2009) (together with Jan Philipp Reemtsma and Rasmus Willig) and *Foucault et la psychanalyse* (Paris: Le Félin, 2009) (together with Emmanuel Gripay and Ferhat Taylan), and he published *Foucault y el psicoanálisis. Gramática de un malentendido* (Santiago: Cuarto Propio, 2011).

Mustafa Emirbayer is Professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He is the author of 'Manifesto for a Relational Sociology' (AJS 1997); his most recent articles include 'Bourdieu and Organizational

Analysis' (with Victoria Johnson) and 'What is Racial Domination?' (with Matthew Desmond).

Bridget Fowler is an Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Glasgow. She specialises in social theory, Marxist feminism and the sociology of culture. A long-term interest has been the thought of Pierre Bourdieu, whose ideas she has taken up in various books: *The Alienated Reader* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991); *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory: Critical Investigations* (Sage, 1997), and (edited) *Reading Bourdieu on Society and Culture* (Blackwell, 2000). She is at present applying Bourdieusian theory to the study of obituaries, addressing critically what is sometimes identified as the contemporary 'golden age of the obituary' (see Fowler, *The Obituary as Collective Memory*, Routledge, 2007).

Bruno Frère is Research Associate at the Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique (Belgium). He previously worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Cambridge, and he currently teaches at Sciences Po Paris and at the University of Liège. He received his PhD from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales and has published on a variety of topics: political sociology, political philosophy, social theory, and the history of social sciences. He recently published a monograph on the history of social movements and alternative economy (*Le nouvel esprit solidaire*, Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 2009) and a book (with M. Jacquemain) on sociological theories in the late twentieth century (*Epistémologie de la sociologie, paradigmes pour le 21e siècle*, Bruxelles: De Boeck, 2008).

Bart van Heerikhuizen is Associate Professor in Sociology at the University of Amsterdam. Along with Nico Wilterdink, he wrote the market-leading 'Introduction to Sociology' textbook in the Dutch language (*Samenlevingen, inleiding in de sociologie*. Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1985), which is now in its sixth edition.

Hans Joas is Permanent Fellow at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS), University of Freiburg, and Professor of Sociology and member of the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. He is a regular member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, nonresident fellow of the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study, and Vice President of the International Sociological Association (2006–10). Among his recent publications in English are *Do We Need Religion? On the Experience of Self-Transcendence* (2008), *Social Theory: Twenty Introductory Lectures* (with Wolfgang Knöbl, 2009), and the

two coedited volumes, *The Cultural Values of Europe* (with Klaus Wiegandt, 2008) and *Secularization and the World Religions* (with Klaus Wiegandt, 2009).

Bruno Karsenti is Directeur d'études at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris and Director of the Marcel Mauss Institute. He has taught in the areas of political philosophy, epistemology, and the philosophy of the social sciences at the Universities of Lyon and Paris-Sorbonne. His most recent publications include *Politique de l'esprit. Auguste Comte et la naissance de la science sociale* (Paris: Hermann, 2006) and *La société en personnes. Études durkheimiennes* (Paris: Economica, 2006). He is Editor of two-book series, *Pratiques théoriques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France) and *Raisons pratiques* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales).

Wolfgang Knöbl is Professor of Sociology at the Georg-August-University Göttingen. Together with Hans Joas, he wrote *Kriegsverdrängung. Ein Problem in der Geschichte der Sozialtheorie* (2008) and *Social Theory. Twenty Introductory Lectures* (2009). In 2007, he published *Die Kontingenz der Moderne. Wege in Europa, Asien und Amerika.*

Hans-Herbert Kögler is Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Department of Philosophy at the University of North Florida, Jacksonville. A frequent guest-professor at the Alpe-Adria University in Klagenfurt, Austria, his work explores the hermeneutic foundations of social science and critical theory, theories of agency, language, and power, as well as intercultural understanding and cosmopolitanism. Major publications include *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault*, (1999), *Michel Foucault* (2nd edition, 2004), *Kultura, Kritika, Dialog* (Prague, 2006), and the co-edited volume *Empathy and Agency: The Problem of Understanding in the Human Sciences* (2000). In 1997 the journal *Social Epistemology* dedicated a special issue to Kögler's 'Alienation as Epistemological Source: Reflexivity and Social Background after Mannheim and Bourdieu'.

Bowen Paulle is an Assistant Professor in Sociology at the University of Amsterdam. He is involved in policy ethnography centred around efforts to desegregate schools and is author of *Toxic Schools* (under contract, University of Chicago Press).

Andreas Pfeuffer studied sociology, history, and Latin, and is currently working as a Research Assistant at the Institute for Social Research in Hamburg, where he is involved in a comparative research project on public services in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. He has translated various works by

Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Castel, Michael Pollak, Serge Paugam, Luc Boltanski, and Laurent Thévenot into German.

Keijo Rahkonen is Adjunct Professor of Social Policy and Head of the Department of Social Research at the University of Helsinki. He is also Director of the research project 'Cultural Capital and Social Differentiation in Contemporary Finland: An International Comparison', which is funded by the Research Council for Culture and Society at the Academy of Finland. He has been Visiting Research Fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK, and at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. His recent publications include 'Bourdieu in Finland' (*Sociologica: Italian Journal of Sociology Online*, 2008) and 'Nordic Democracy of Taste? Cultural Omnivorousness in Musical and Literary Taste Preferences in Finland' (with Jukka Gronow and Semi Purhonen, in *Poetics: Journal of Empirical Research on Culture, the Media and the Arts*, 2010).

Derek Robbins is Professor of International Social Theory in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of East London. He is the author of *The Work of Pierre Bourdieu* (1991) and of *Bourdieu and Culture* (2000). He is also the editor of two four-volume collections of articles on Bourdieu in the Sage Masters of Contemporary Social Thought series (2000 and 2005) and of a three-volume collection of articles on Lyotard in the same series (2004). His *On Bourdieu, Education and Society* was published by Bardwell Press, Oxford, in 2006, and he was the editor of the Special Issue of *Theory, Culture and Society* on Bourdieu (Volume 23, Number 6, 2006). He is currently writing *The Internationalization of French Social Thought, 1950–2000* for publication by Sage.

Franz Schultheis is Professor of Sociology at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland. He also taught at the Universities of Constance, Paris V, Neuchâtel, and Geneva. He is President of the Bourdieu Foundation and has edited many of Pierre Bourdieu's writings in German. He specialises in the sociology of labour, the sociology of social change, the sociology of popular culture, and the sociology of social structure. Amongst his recent publications are the following: Franz Schultheis, Berthold Vogel and Michael Gemperle (eds.) *Ein halbes Leben: Biographische Zeugnisse aus einer Arbeitswelt im Umbruch* (Konstanz: UVK, 2010) and Franz Schultheis, *Bourdieus Wege in die Soziologie* (Konstanz: UVK, 2007).

Yves Sintomer is Professor of Political Science at Paris 8 University, Guest Professor at Lausanne University, and Invited Researcher at Neuchâtel

University. He received his PhD in Social and Political Sciences from the European University Institute, Florence, and has a Habilitation to direct research (Paris 5 University). He studied at Paris 8, Paris 10, the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University Frankfurt, and at Harvard University. He was Deputy Director of the Marc Bloch Centre in Berlin, and he has held academic positions in various countries (Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Spain). Together with Hans Peter-Müller, he co-edited *Pierre Bourdieu. Théorie et pratique* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006). He is author of *La démocratie impossible? Politique et modernité chez Weber et Habermas* (Paris: La Découverte, 1999). His work has been translated into thirteen languages.

Simon Susen is Lecturer in Social and Political Theory at Birkbeck College, University of London. He previously worked as a Lecturer in Sociology at Newcastle University (2008–10) and as a Lecturer in Sociology at Goldsmiths College, University of London (2007–8). He received his PhD from the University of Cambridge and studied sociology, politics, and philosophy at a range of international universities and research centres, including the University of Edinburgh, the Colegio de México, the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales in Mexico City, and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. With John O'Neill and Bryan S. Turner, he is Editor of the *Journal of Classical Sociology*. He is author of *The Foundations of the Social: Between Critical Theory and Reflexive Sociology* (Oxford: Bardwell Press, 2007).

Bryan S. Turner is the Presidential Professor of Sociology at CUNY and Director of the Committee on Religion. He is concurrently the Director of the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies at the University of Western Sydney, Australia. He was the Alona Evans Distinguished Visiting Professor of Sociology at Wellesley College (2009–10), and in recent years he has held Professorships at the National University of Singapore and the University of Cambridge. Together with Engin Isin, he is Editor of the journal *Citizenship Studies*. He recently edited *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory* (2009), *The Routledge Handbook of Globalization Studies* (2009), and *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion* (2010).

Loïc Wacquant is Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, and Researcher at the Centre de sociologie européenne, Paris. A MacArthur Prize Fellow and the recipient of the 2008 Lewis Coser Award of the American Sociological Association, his interests span urban inequality and marginality, incarnation, the penal state, ethnoracial domination, and

social theory and the politics of reason. He is a co-founder and past editor of the interdisciplinary journal *Ethnography* and was a regular contributor to *Le Monde Diplomatique* from 1994 to 2004. His recent books include *Body and Soul: Notebooks of An Apprentice Boxer* (2004), *The Mystery of Ministry: Pierre Bourdieu and Democratic Politics* (2005), *Das Janusgesicht des Ghettos* (2006), *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (2008), and *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (2009).

INTRODUCTION

Preliminary Reflections on the Legacy of Pierre Bourdieu

Simon Susen and Bryan S. Turner

Unsurprisingly, the Second World War had separate and distinctive consequences for different national traditions of sociology. After the War, the dominant and arguably most successful of the Western democracies emerged in North America, and its sociological traditions assumed a celebratory and often triumphalist perspective on modernisation. The defeat of the fascist nations – notably Germany, Italy, and Japan – seemed to demonstrate the superiority of Western liberal democratic systems, and North American sociologists took the lead in developing theories of development and modernisation that were optimistic and forward-looking. The examples are numerous, but we might mention Daniel Lerner's *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958) or S. M. Lipset's *The First New Nation* (1963). At the centre of this post-war tradition stood *The Social System* of Talcott Parsons (1951), which involved the notion that systems could continuously and successfully adapt to environmental challenges through the master processes of differentiation and adaptive upgrading. In many of his short essays, he analysed the problems of German and Japanese modernisation and saw the United States of America as a social system that had successfully adapted to the rise of industrial modernisation. In its assessment of modern society, Parsons's sociology avoided the pessimistic vision of early critical theory – epitomised in Adorno's analysis of mass society – because he looked forward to America as a 'lead society' in large-scale social development (see Holton and Turner, 1986).

It is also the case that, in general terms, North American sociologists did not show much interest in European sociology, especially with regard to its more critical and negative assessments of modern capitalism. Parsons, of course, translated Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and published the first English version in 1930, but he did not focus on Weber's bleak and pessimistic view of the iron cage. He did not perceive

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Bourdieu's Sociological Fiction:
A Phenomenological Reading of Habitus

Bruno Frère[1]

Between Genetic Structuralism and Phenomenology:
The Complex Constitution of Habitus

For nearly thirty years now, the critical sociology of Pierre Bourdieu has been used in an increasingly large number of studies in the social sciences. It is remarkable, however, that it has had a rather weak impact on my own field of research: the study of new social movements. This chapter argues that the reason for this anomaly lies with Bourdieu's theory of habitus (a central element of Bourdieusian thought) and the particular problems that this theory poses for researchers of new social movements. As original and powerful as it can be, the theory of habitus is, first and foremost, a theory of reproduction and determination. As such, its ability to help us to understand the creativity and radical innovations of the actors who constitute new social movements is severely limited. Thus, whilst immersed in my own research, I found that I had to choose between two options: one option was to abandon the Bourdieusian approach to the social all together; the other option was to stay within the Bourdieusian paradigm and, in the light of its substantial shortcomings, seek to transcend its limitations. Preferring to pursue the latter – somewhat more optimistic – project, the question to be confronted was whether or not it is possible to move Bourdieu's paradigm forward, beyond its conventional applications, in order to render it operational in other areas, such as my own, where it is has not contributed a great deal. This chapter aims to demonstrate that it is possible to do so. Although Bourdieu's sociological framework in general and his conceptual tools in particular have often been used in a rather orthodox fashion, this chapter seeks to show that Bourdieusian social theory is sufficiently open for us to maintain much of its contribution whilst looking elsewhere to overcome some of its substantial shortcomings.

Thomas Kuhn's concept of 'paradigm' is often used out-of-hand, but it can certainly be employed to describe the framework which Bourdieu's work gave rise to. If we acknowledge that 'paradigms consist of scientific discoveries that are universally recognized and which, for a time, provide a community of researchers with certain types of problems and solutions' (Kuhn, 1983 [1962]: 11), then Bourdieu's 'constructivist structuralism' (which is also described as 'genetic structuralism') can be considered to be paradigmatic. Indeed, the Bourdieusian paradigm has opened a space for reflection between the two poles that dominated twentieth-century sociology for a long time: objectivism and subjectivism. Given this ambition, Bourdieusian thought has allowed for a conceptualisation of the relation between individuals and their social environment in a way that, when it was proposed for the first time, was entirely new (Kuhn, 1983 [1962]: 11).[2] To be sure, with the term 'structuralism' Bourdieu refers to the idea that there are objective structures in the social world which exist independently of the consciousness and the will of actors. These structures are capable of orienting and restraining social practices in, and social representations of, the world. When using the term 'constructivism', on the other hand, Bourdieu suggests that actors' schemes of perception, thought and action have a social origin. These predispositional schemes are constitutive of actors' habitus, and always exist in relation to positional schemes of external social structures, such as fields, groups and social classes (Bourdieu, 1987: 147).

The synthesis of structuralist and constructivist traditions can be regarded as a solution to the question (or, in Kuhnian terms, to the 'enigma') which was at stake during the 1960s and which neither tradition has ever been able to resolve. Both Luc Boltanski's 'pragmatic sociology' and Bruno Latour's 'actor network theory' are firmly situated in the debate concerning a possible synthesis of these aforementioned traditions. In particular, this debate obliges us to reflect upon the 'place of culture': the place where the constructions of culture by its agents, and of agents by their culture, are woven together. This place corresponds to the notion of habitus, a notion which found a role in the field of scientific sociological innovation and, indeed, did have an important impact on the discipline in general for a time (Boltanski, 2003: 159). Yet Boltanski does not align himself with those who make use of the term habitus in its 'strong' sense (for example, the researchers of the Centre for European Sociology, which Bourdieu used to run: Champagne, Pinto, Sapiro, and Accardo – to mention only a few of them). For, according to Boltanski, an orthodox Bourdieusian use of the term habitus remains trapped in a determinist understanding of the social, which fails to account for the sociological significance of situational contingency.[3] From a Boltanskian perspective, individuals often find themselves in situations where they are

compelled to 'improvise' or 'invent' their behaviour. In this context, Boltanski poses the following question:

> The analyst considers that he has reached the end of his task when he can show that, when immersed in different situations, the actor responds by actualising schemata that are written in his habitus, that is to say, predictably – which tends to mean the question of action itself fades away. But what remains of action once we have eliminated the uncertainty an actor must be faced with even in the most apparently routine of situations: that uncertainty that contains the possibility of something new occurring, that is to say an eventful dimension? (Boltanski, 2003: 160)

In other words, how can an actor – or, to use the language of genetic structuralism, an agent – 'invent' something? And, daring to push the question further, how can an actor innovate because, not in spite, of the weight of their habitus? This is the fundamental question that constructivist (or genetic) structuralism has left aside and that this chapter aims to address. This question ought to have been addressed a long time ago, both by those who see only 'determinism' in the notion of habitus (and, instead of seeking to resolve the problem, dismiss it as a concept that deprives the actor of freedom) and by those who defend it in an orthodox fashion (and who, instead of refining it, have until now subsumed an ever-increasing quantity of material from different domains of research under this analytic category, in order to prove its validity).

Just as it is necessary to transcend the limits of the notion of habitus, it is essential to push both theoretical and empirical investigations of this notion further than Bourdieu did himself. Genetic structuralism has been considerably reconfigured and strengthened since the publication of Bourdieu's Kabyle ethnology (1972) and his *Sens pratique* (1980; translated into English as *The Logic of Practice*, 1990). This is partly due to the work of two authors who are particularly widely read in the contemporary field of French social science: Philippe Corcuff and Bernard Lahire. They can be seen both as the least orthodox representatives of the Bourdieusian paradigm and as two scholars who have made substantial contributions to its fruitful development. We should therefore pay tribute to the existence of Corcuff's and Lahire's respective approaches. It is this type of work, situated at the edge of the Bourdieusian paradigm, which prevents that paradigm from becoming rigid and sterile. Their contribution shall therefore be discussed at some length in the first two sections of this chapter, assuming – with Boltanski – that their respective contributions can be regarded as firmly established (Boltanski, 2003: 159–160).

From the outset, Lahire and Corcuff situate Bourdieu's genetic structuralism in an area of overlap between psychology and philosophy. In so doing, they allow us to see clearly the potential in the notion of habitus, whilst laying the foundations necessary to resolve the enigma with which we are concerned: how can something new arise out of habitus? Both authors put forward the notion of 'the plural individual', a concept that does not easily find its place in Bourdieu's genetic structuralism. This theory – in associating the habitus with social fields, groups or classes – seeks to demonstrate the regularity of behaviour in a given situation. As we will see further in the argument below, both Lahire's and Corcuff's approaches are largely convincing, although it must also be said that they diverge in some respects. Nonetheless, their success comes, in the case of Corcuff, at the price of a partial abandonment of the notion of habitus and, in the case of Lahire, at the price of embracing an arguably excessive empiricism.

The methodological usefulness and conceptual forcefulness of the notion of habitus stem from the fact that habitus allows us to conceive of human subjectivity in terms of an ensemble of social norms converted into individual dispositions. To be sure, subjectively internalised norms are not explicit rules of behaviour but unconsciously assimilated – and thus 'socially naturalised' – tendencies to act in one way rather than another. The concept allows us to extract the 'unconscious' from the psychic straightjacket to which psychoanalysis had consigned it and by virtue of which the unconscious is considered a purely mental phenomenon (Frère, 2004: 88). The concept of the schemata (or dispositions) of habitus, however, does not refer to an existing representation of mental life of which we are unconscious (and which may be detached from the mind, and of which we become conscious *a posteriori*); rather, it refers to social injunctions that are 'addressed not to the intellect but to the body' (Bourdieu, 1997: 169).[4]

As a consequence, it seems that we are confronted with a curious paradox: habitus is unconscious, and yet the concept of habitus does not describe a merely mental, psychic or psychological state of affairs. This paradox is fundamental to the analytical value of the concept; at the same time, however, it has proved to be perceived as somewhat challenging by various scholars. It is probably this paradox which troubles Lahire, who searches for a correspondence of dispositions on a psychological level. According to Lahire, habitus can essentially be regarded as a psychological apparatus that functions mechanically and whose creative potential is limited. Corcuff on the other hand, without rejecting the notion of habitus altogether, seeks to abandon the emphasis on the allegedly 'unconscious' nature of habitus. In so doing, he attempts to develop a notion of a creative habitus. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's concept of ipse-identity, Corcuff has sought to demonstrate

that the human agent possesses a subjectivity (or, if one prefers, ipse-identity) that works independently of, and potentially contrary to, exogenous determinations. In opposition to this view, this chapter aims to show that, if the agent is capable of both 'inventing a situation' and 'inventing itself in and through a situation', this is *because of*, rather than *despite*, exogenous determinations arising from the social world.

The paradigm of genetic structuralism has been enriched by the elaboration of the notion of habitus via the concept of the 'plural actor' (which was first developed by Lahire and then adopted by Corcuff). Yet, we should not omit the unconscious dimensions of habitus (as Corcuff does), nor should we seek to reduce the predispositional schemes of habitus to a matter of the psyche (as Lahire does). This is why, in the fourth section of this chapter, the notion of habitus is referred to as a 'fiction'. Although habitus as such may be conceived of as immaterial and unlocalisable, it constitutes a tangible and powerful element of the social world in general and of social agents in particular. It seems essential to conserve the idea of an ensemble of unconscious social habits incarnated in each one of us in the form of behavioural dispositions, just as it is important to conceive of the magma of these dispositions without reducing the carrier of these dispositions to a purely psychological mechanism. For Lahire, the adaptation of the actor to a range of fields is made possible through the field-dependent development and mechanical reproduction of acquired skills. For Corcuff, this – somewhat determinist – conception of habitus needs to be revised in the light of the creative potentials of human subjectivity and the power of ipse-identity, which liberates the agent from the weight of social habits. In neither case, however, is it ever a question of the agent actually *inhabiting* the space: consciously or unconsciously, agents simply 'adapt' to the social spaces by which they find themselves surrounded. Neither Corcuff nor Lahire resolve the fundamental problem of the inertia of habitus. Even if we put forward a complex, rather than a monolithic, conception of habitus, and even if we are prepared to acknowledge that an individual is both plural and unique, how is it possible to account for the existence of human characteristics such as creativity or social ingenuity? Can the habitus be something *other* than the weight of personal history that conditions the activity of the actor? This question is frequently raised by sociologists studying aspects of human reality where the idea of innovation is essential to a proper understanding of social action; unsurprisingly then, this question is particularly important in the sociology of culture, the sociology of art, the sociology of knowledge, and the sociology of social movements.

By way of response, the final section of this chapter attempts to bring some elements of phenomenology to the paradigm of genetic structuralism in order to complete the redefinition of habitus introduced by Lahire and Corcuff.

Here then, the concept of habitus is not based on the Husserlian intellectual stream, which arguably feeds the sociology of Schütz; rather it is founded on a tradition that is still relatively unexplored in sociology, a tradition that focuses on the body, rather than on consciousness: the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty[5] – in particular his philosophical works on culture – and the political philosophy of Cornelius Castoriadis. As shall be demonstrated below, the analytical framework proposed in this chapter conceives of habitus as a creative capacity, that is, as a competence which allows for the construction of something new and hitherto non-existent. As a result of this conception, it is possible to envisage a habitus that is multiply-determined, unconscious and able to escape the mechanistic logic of social reproduction. The chapter draws to a close by referring to my empirical research on social movements. It seems that a collective work on the intellectual legacy of a thinker is the ideal place to move beyond the theoretical and practical limitations of this legacy; in addition, it provides an opportunity to consider the continuous relevance of this legacy to new areas of empirical research. The chapter concludes by arguing that a phenomenological elaboration of the Bourdieusian paradigm can help to extend its usefulness in the sociological study of activists engaged in new forms of social struggle.

Two Paths for a Genetic-Structuralist Sociology of the Plural Actor

Lahire begins his critical analysis of Bourdieu's approach by demonstrating the lack of precision with which certain key notions are used in critical sociology. He asserts that Bourdieu must have been unaware of the fact that, in the 1970s and 1980s, the field of psychology provided precise definitions of terms such as 'disposition' and 'psychological reproduction of social structures'. This omission on Bourdieu's part leaves his system – which is aimed at identifying relationally defined patterns in social behaviour and categorising them in terms of a particular habitus – relatively powerless. Indeed, the significance of this omission is reflected in the fact that Bourdieu's framework does not allow us to answer a number of fundamental questions such as the following: how can various individual and social experiences coexist in the same body, and what is their impact on the individual's life? Given that the Bourdieusian framework is not really concerned with the nature and development of individual dispositions, 'we have no example of the social construction of the incorporation or transmission of these dispositions. We have no indication as to the way they may be constructed nor the way they behave' (Lahire, 1999b: 129). Thus, within a Bourdieusian framework of social analysis, it is difficult – if not, impossible – to understand

why and how actors are able to incorporate objective structures and, more importantly, how these structures can be converted into mental and cognitive structures (Lahire, 1999a). The idea of the inscription of social structures in the brain, which take the form of mental structures, is problematic unless we succeed in explaining how cognitive structures and social structures are homologically interrelated. When we stand back and consider this issue more carefully, it becomes obvious that different sets of mental structures vary between different individuals.

The sociological acknowledgement of the existence and importance of psychological internalisation processes manifests itself in terms such as matrices, schemata and dispositions. Yet, the usage of these terms in sociology does not necessarily imply that their underlying ways of functioning have been adequately understood. In reality, genetic structuralism has reproduced these concepts in a reified, undigested and uncritical manner for the last twenty years. These concepts are, however, 'just a kind of resume of the most advanced psychological works of the era' (Lahire, 1998: 105; see also Lahire, 1999b: 124–125). Since the 1980s, researchers who study the incorporation of objective structures have failed to make sense of this dialectic; that is, they have not shown themselves capable of capturing the construction of multiple types of dispositions and schemata through social experience. Had they been able to do so, they would have confronted the challenge of exploring the diversity and irreducibility of individuals and, therefore, the diversity and irreducibility of schemata and dispositions. In order to do so, they would have had to refine their conceptual and methodological frameworks.

Lahire's project can be described as a psychological sociology inspired by the work of Jean Piaget (1999). As such, it makes extensive use of concepts such as 'schemata', 'dispositions', and 'matrices', that is, of concepts employed by structural-constructivist sociologists to give meaning to the social organisation of the actor's (or agent's) modes of thought, behaviour and action. These concepts, then, permit us to capture different modes and instances of interiorisation and, more importantly, the extent to which actors have the ability to adapt to different social contexts. Lahire's reconceptualisation of habitus allows us to conceive of the individual as a multiply socialised, multiply determined, and unique entity. As social beings, we are all confronted with an ensemble of local situations which have different degrees of impact on the composition of our dispositional baggage.

To be sure, there is nothing inevitable about the conversion of the objective structures of society into the subjective structures of the individual. Given its relative inability to take on board the work of psychologists, sociology has had a tendency to take the existence of schemata and dispositions, and in particular their relative social determinacy, for granted. This has allowed it to

construct a typology of individuals' responses in terms of a generalisation of arbitrarily chosen schemata.

> In fact, the regime of generalised transferral, not discussed and not adequately tested, prevents us from conceiving (and therefore observing) the existence of schemata or dispositions that are local (specific to social situations or areas of particular practices) modes of categorisation, perception, or appreciation attached to specific objects and areas. It reduces the process of exteriorisation of complex inner nature to a simple unique function, that of assimilation/ accommodation: assimilation of situations to incorporated schemata, and accommodation (correction) of previously established schemata to variations and changes of situation. (Lahire, 1999b: 136)

Thus, according to Lahire, our dispositional baggage is composed of a set of schemata, some of which can be inhibited or which may become dormant to leave room for the development or activation of others. They can be delimited as specific social dispositions, activated only in a precisely defined area of relevance, with a given individual learning to develop dispositions that differ in different contexts. Individuals do not simply engage in the constant transfer of dispositional structures; they carry a plurality of dispositions – corresponding to a plurality of social contexts – within themselves. Indeed, the more an individual is exposed to non-homogenous, complex and diverse social contexts, the more likely he or she is to possess a variegated legacy of adapted dispositions, habits or abilities that are non-homogenous and not unified. For the sociologist, working to discover this legacy is tantamount to restoring the individual's particularity, diversity and complexity. In fact, it is precisely one of Piaget's main achievements to have shown that mental categories are not static and transcendental but dynamic and situated components of every individual (Piaget, 1970: 80).

A significant amount of fieldwork which combines qualitative and quantitative data has broadened the Bourdieusian research programme. Without, in this case, drawing on the work of Piaget, but supported by several statistical studies, Lahire sets out a number of strong hypotheses. One example is his idea of 'dissonant profiles', which concerns individuals whose attitudes, practices and tastes do not necessarily correspond to the characteristics of their socio-professional or socio-cultural backgrounds (Lahire, 2004: 175–203). In light of the solid empirical evidence for these hypotheses, there is no need to make vague and speculative statements about the rise of individualism or to give in to the – ideologically biased – rejection of the notion of social class, of which contemporary thinkers such as Marcel Gauchet, Alain Renaut, Ulrich Beck, Charles Taylor, and Gilles Lipovetsky may be accused. What is

at stake here concerns another issue: the prospect of a rupture with certain Durkheimian intellectual habits leads to a fear of the 'psychologisation of social relations' and of the 'regression to atomism'. According to Lahire, this kind of fear can be found in contemporary forms of constructivist (or genetic) structuralism (Lahire, 2004: 696).

Notably, Corcuff is inspired by this area of overlap between psychology and constructivist structuralism, that is, by the kind of overlap that Lahire's psychological sociology attempts to sketch out (Corcuff, 2003: 82–86). Their position is close to Bridget Fowler's stance with regard to her concern with the popularisation of Bourdieu's work in the field of British cultural studies. In her work, Fowler emphasises the importance of the formation of plural identities in advanced societies, which reflects a social process that cannot be reduced to a mechanical interplay between internal and external structures and to the notion that the individual is a malleable entity completely determined by external structures (Fowler, 1997: 132). It is by insisting on this very idea of a plural singularity (or plurality of identity) that Corcuff tries to construct his alternative framework to a determinist conception of habitus 'which *a priori* unifies the dispositions and constructs a permanence of the person' (Corcuff, 2003: 70, emphasis in original).

Where Lahire turns to psychology and Piaget in order to specify which schemata compose the variable content of habitus, Corcuff turns to Ricoeur. The concept of ipse-identity (*identité-ipséité*) developed by Ricoeur refers to the moment when a person asks the question '*Who* am I?' This concerns the subjective element of personal identity, which is opposed to the objective element responding to the question of *what* that person is – idem-identity (*identité-mêmeté*).

This corresponds to the 'durable dispositions' of habitus (Corcuff, 1999: 98, and 2003: 62). Thus, here we are dealing with what may be described as the 'objective aspects' of a subject's identity. The ipse-identity, however, is closer to the notion of role distance favoured by Erving Goffman and to the idea of the sedimentation of a 'personal reserve' which is irreducible to the social roles taken on and internalised by the individual. Most researchers working within the structural-constructivist paradigm – for which the reflexivity of the actor is a biographical illusion (Bourdieu, 1994: 81–90) – do not account for the existence, let alone the significance, of the 'subjective sense of the self'. Some of them may go so far as to consider this sense null and void, or simply non-existent. It could seem that only a sociologist who is equipped with concepts such as 'domination', 'field' and 'habitus' is able to shed light on the real meaning and constitution of an individual's identity. This sociological hypothesis, although it is not false, is certainly inadequate. In their study of the social world, it is crucial for sociologists to explore the symbolic and material

impacts of social identities, and thus it is essential to study the power of habitus to make agents behave and act in one way or another.

Corcuff and Lahire on the Dilemmas of Consciousness, Empiricism and Habitus

The advantage of these two attempts to move beyond the limits of Bourdieu's paradigm is that their refusal to conceive of habitus as a set of 'durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures' (Bourdieu, 1980: 88) does not lead them to reject his genetic-structuralist hypothesis in its entirety – unlike other theorists such as, for example, Raymond Boudon in France and Jeffrey C. Alexander in the United States. It is because these schemata and dispositions are more than simply the 'incorporation of the same objectivised history in habitus and [mental] structures' (Bourdieu, 1980: 97) that they do not always produce identical behaviour that would be 'mutually understandable and immediately adjusted to structures' (Bourdieu, 1980: 97). In this regard, Bourdieu's intuition is accurate, and Corcuff and Lahire are right to take it on board and to develop it further.

Of all the recent models and approaches that draw on Bourdieu's genetic sociology, these two positions belong to the most convincing ones. Yet, one remark should be made in this regard. Both authors, in aiming to 'reform' Bourdieu's conception of habitus, introduce difficulties that Bourdieu's original model had avoided. Corcuff, for example, is right to insist upon his sociological interest in individual consciousness in general and in individuals' capacity to reflect upon their various identities and actions in particular. As a result, however, he partly closes the door that was left open to account for the richness of our socially constituted unconscious. Thus he implies that, if the actor is capable of creativity, this innovative competence must be understood only as peculiar to that ipse-identity, which is constructed as though existing in parallel to habitus.

Yet, it is Corcuff who leads us to the path of what may be described as the 'dynamic habitus'. He does so by drawing a distinction between an individual and a social habitus. According to Bourdieu, we cannot use these terms interchangeably because

> [...] that would mean assuming all representations produced according to identical schemata are impersonal and interchangeable which [...] reflects nothing about the particularity of the empirical self. [...] Each individual system of disposition is a structural variant of the others, in which the singularity of the position within class and trajectory are expressed. [...] The principle of differences

between individual habitus lies in the singularity of social trajectories to which a series of chronologically ordered determinations – which are irreducible to each other – corresponds: the habitus, which at any given moment achieves a unique integration, structuring new experiences according to the structures produced by prior experiences, which affects these structures in the limits defined by their powers of selection. (Bourdieu, 1980: 101)[5]

Corcuff is aware of the fact that here is an opportunity to use a conceptual archaeology in order to demonstrate, once and for all, that the notion of habitus is not a case of a collectivity acting as a bulldozer against the singular; rather, it is a term that permits us the irreducible nature of an individual's subjectivity. Bourdieu's genetic structuralism tends to conceive of habitus primarily in terms of its relation to a social field (that is, in relation to a social space within which actors acquire particular social characteristics and dispositional schemes). Given Bourdieu's emphasis on the field-specific constitution of habitus, Corcuff concludes that 'it is not possible to make the notion of habitus the end point for a sociology of singularity' (2003: 62).

From a Bourdieusian point of view, this is where Corcuff goes wrong. Having drawn attention to both the existence and the significance of the 'singular habitus', he himself avoids the question and does not pursue it any further. In fact, although he claims to account for the singularity of every habitus, he does not do justice to the full complexity of individual aspects of habitus. Considering the notion of habitus as 'inert' or as a 'receptacle for determinisms', corresponding to Ricoeur's idem-identity, Corcuff refers to the ipse-identity in order to speak more easily of subjective identity. Such an approach allows us to recognise actors' self-reflective and self-critical capacity, which they mobilise in their daily actions. Equipped with the conceptual tools that Boltanski forged in his *L'amour et la justice comme compétences* (1990), and with Laurent Thévenot in their *De la justification* (1991), Corcuff asserts that habitus is merely a 'facet of singularity' (2003) which ought not to monopolise the researcher's attention at the expense of the actor's reflexive capacities.

These capacities are testimony to the inalienable creativity of social actors. In spite of the weight of habitus, social actors are able to create and develop their identities themselves. The reflexivity of the actor allows 'identity' to emerge in response to the question 'Who am I?', and the practical response to this question can be found in the existence of a fundamentally dynamic and self-reflexive consciousness, that is, of a type of consciousness that is not merely unconscious of itself. Within Bourdieu's framework of genetic structuralism, habitus and creativity tend to be conceived of as mutually exclusive, rather than mutually inclusive, features of subjectivity. Ultimately, it seems as though Corcuff abandoned the question of individual habitus immediately after

raising it, for he seems to favour another concept, namely Ricoeur's concept of ipse-identity.[7]

Lahire, on the other hand, remains committed to the sociological framework of structuralist constructivism. According to this framework, actors acquire certain dispositions through their exposure to and participation in diversified social fields. These dispositions are nevertheless embedded in the unique structures of our subjectivity, defining who we are and what kind of identities we develop throughout life; and these identities always have a deep, indelible and quasi-genetic imprint. Lahire's approach permits us to understand why communication and coordination between differently socialised people is possible: for instance, a worker and a CEO who play cards together, the son of an opera singer and the son of a rapper who have a similar passion for Beethoven's concertos, and so forth (see Boltanski, 2003). Yet, the notion of the plural actor does not always allow us to understand how the determinisms that make up this figure comprise a wealth of unconscious abilities that are easily mobilised in the 'invention' of singular behaviour.

Arguing for a psychological test against 'Bourdieu's inclination to decide theoretical questions based on philosophical quotations', Lahire concludes by limiting his research to the discovery of the psychological products of habitus (Lahire, 1998: 187). He almost reaches the point of asking what the schemata and dispositions of habitus correspond to *materially* in the neurones of an individual brain. In this respect, his approach comes close to an anti-intellectual empiricism that is no longer capable of posing the question in the following terms: are we dealing with an empirically existing concept, or are we dealing with a 'mystic reality' and an 'additional space' (between structure and practice) that the sociologist needs in order for the theory to come full circle (Lahire, 1998: 63)?

In order to move towards an understanding of habitus that, metaphorically speaking, does not portray subjectivity as a collective bulldozer crushing all forms of singularity, it is necessary to avoid conceiving of the relationship between philosophy and empirical psychology in dichotomous terms. Objectivist approaches to the social have been criticised by early phenomenological sociologists such as Alfred Schütz, who – along with Scheler – argues that whatever form it adopts, 'empirical psychology supposes the objectifiability of the psychological as such, and includes the unfounded assumption that the same psychological events can reappear in a multitude of different subjects and can be reproduced through experimentation' (Schütz, 1962: 157; see also Scheler, 1993: 166).

This suggests that it is necessary to dissect the schemata and dispositions that we incorporate in the form of habitus. Yet, if we aim to determine their psychological location and content, we run the risk of producing simplistic

categories of social groups (that is, categories according to which individuals belonging to a specific group can be basically treated as identical). Lahire puts forward a 'psychological multi-determinism', rather than a 'sociological determinism'. Such a multi-dimensional approach permits us to understand why particular individuals may appreciate classical music even though their working-class habitus does not predestine them to such a choice. In principle, this applies to all dispositions that make up habitus. Each disposition corresponds to a field of socialisation, even if these dispositions turn out to be contradictory, as in the case of the working-class lover of classical music. Yet, the challenge of subjective singularity still needs to be confronted: how can we make sense of the notion of an individual habitus?

If the social agent is nothing more than the sum of dispositions, then how is it possible that social action is more than simply the exteriorised outcome of previously interiorised dispositions? More specifically, how can we explain the rise of new forms of behaviour in a given situation and the social ability to make something 'new' happen? If, following Corcuff, we explain processes of individuation in terms of actors' reflexive and creative capacities, it is far from clear how such capacities can be located in habitus. For the concept of habitus becomes easily dissociated from social acts by which individuals manage to construct their own identities. According to Corcuff, there are essentially two types of identity: first, an identity based on an individual habitus; and second, an identity based on free subjectivity, that is, an ipse-identity based on relative self-sufficiency.

In contrast to this position, I want to argue that the notion of individual habitus allows us to combine ipse-identity and idem-identity. If the former and the latter can be combined, then there is no reason to believe that they have to be separated from each other and that Bourdieu's genetic structuralism has to be completely abandoned. In fact, we may propose to embark on a third research project, which conceives of habitus neither as a merely empirical reality nor as a merely conceptual tool. From this perspective, habitus can be defined as a sociological fiction which may be considered as legitimate within sociology, similarly to the fiction of Kant's transcendental ego in philosophy (Frère, 2005).

If we reduce the concept of habitus to an indecipherable 'black box' (Boudon, 1998) or to a set of mental and cognitive structures (Lahire, 1998, 1999a, and 1999b), we end up imposing somewhat problematic – namely, positivist – parameters upon the sociological study of social action. Habitus, however, is not a box materially incorporated within the individual or a mechanically driven set of thoughts and actions. Rather, it is an intellectual abstraction, a sociological fiction which allows us to understand the individuation of collective schemata in the form of individually embodied

dispositions. The use of phenomenology comes into play here as a way of promoting a more adequate conceptualisation of this 'sociological fiction'. The principal goal of this approach to the nature of habitus is to conceive of habitus as a powerful conceptual and methodological tool for the sociological study of human reality.

Phenomenology and Sociological Fiction: A Third Genetic-Structuralist Programme for a Dynamic Habitus

It should be remembered that the term 'habitus' appeared for the first time in the writings of Aristotle, but then also in the work of Edmund Husserl, the founding father of phenomenology. He described the self 'as Me subsisting by durable habitus' and further articulated an idea of durable habitus as the foundation of the 'Me', or self (1994 [1950]: 114). Indeed, behind Bourdieu's use of the notion of habitus (considered as a corollary to the history of individual social life), Husserl's idea of retention is sporadically visible. According to this idea, our life is a succession of moments with other social subjects which, once they have happened, leave an imprint on us that 'still remains there' (1964 [1928]: 44). In his writings, Husserl seeks to understand why and how the traces of our past experiences can continue to influence our present ones. Ultimately, however, the notion of habitus is a concept of peripheral status in Husserl's writings, referring to a transcendental identity deeply hidden in the self. Retention, conversely, refers to a process that only concerns conscious events. For Husserl, it is the task of the phenomenological project to undertake the 'transcendental reduction' (the *epoché*) enabling us to regress to the level of 'pre-social subjectivity', and thus to the level of 'that which the personal subject can originally experience', that is, to their pre-social confrontation with the world (1982 [1952]: 278–279). Yet, consciousness is largely inoperative within the Bourdieusian framework of genetic structuralism.[8]

Similar to Bourdieu's emphasising the corporeal, rather than the cognitive, nature of habitus, Merleau-Ponty 'changed the nature of the Husserlian enterprise by centring his phenomenology on the body rather than on the consciousness' (Wolff, 1978: 499). In his work, the body is what puts us in contact with the (social) world, independently of our thoughts and consciousness. In this sense, the body epitomises a kind of original intentionality, a way of relating to our social environment that is distinct from reflexive knowledge (1945: 444)[9]: it is intertwined with the substance (*la 'chair'*) of the world; it sinks into it and merges with it. In the texts contained in *In Praise of Philosophy*, *Signs*, or *The Prose of the World*, Merleau-Ponty clearly leads the way for Bourdieu's genetic structuralism, as he conceives of our entanglement with the world and our ineluctable situatedness in our bodies

as 'cultural'. (By the way, this is the 'place of culture' upon which Boltanski insists in his writings.[10]) This view is based on the assumption that 'the unity of culture extends above the limits of an individual life the same kind of envelope that captures in advance all the moments in that life, at the instant of its institution or its birth' (Merleau-Ponty, 1960a: 111). In this, Husserl joins others who err in seeking 'in the mind the guarantee of unity which is already there when we perceive' the world and the meaning that one's culture (one's social universe) has deposited as sediment (Merleau-Ponty, 1960a: 111). Through the action of culture, in a certain sense I inhabit lives that are not mine, because the significations that the objects in the world take on for me are the significations that were forged by those who 'preceded my present' (Merleau-Ponty, 1960a: 111).[11] This present becomes what Merleau-Ponty calls the 'social-mine' (*social-mien*); that is to say, the raw material of my being-in-the-world that I will then be able to sculpt (Frère, 2005: 248).

At various points in his work it is possible to see a nod in the direction of sociology – a discipline he was one of the few philosophers to believe in at that time.[12] He describes, for example, a social fact not as a 'massive reality' (clearly directed at Durkheimian objectivism) but as 'embedded in the deepest part of the individual' (1960c: 123–142). Every life has 'a social atmosphere' which precedes and conditions the reflexive gaze we can turn on it. Because the work of Merleau-Ponty was interrupted by his sudden and unexpected death, this atmosphere, this social-mine (*social-mien*), 'has found no name in any philosophy', according to Claude Lefort.[13] It did, however, emerge in sociology. In moving from a philosophy that evacuates the substance of the consciousness to a sociology that does the same (as we can observe in Bourdieu's genetic structuralism), the being-in-the-world – the social-mine (*social-mien*) – is called habitus.

This interrelation between the individual and their cultural world is not reflexive. If it were reflexive, it would be similar to Corcuff's model, which applies the ipse-identity of Ricoeur to the notion of habitus.[14] The individual habitus, understood in the light of Merleau-Ponty's work, allows us to envisage the idea of a plural actor, that is, of an actor with a potential for creation and transformation. It thus becomes a fruitful, rather than a deterministic, concept.

One of our main questions is whether or not there is any legitimate room for the role of actors' creative capacity within Bourdieu's framework of genetic structuralism. Put differently, the question remains whether or not, within Bourdieu's social theory, there is such a thing as a subjective identity capable of creative activity. We can draw on the works of Corcuff and Lahire in order to understand how habitus is uniquely and, at the same time, unconsciously constructed. Yet, Corcuff and Lahire do not allow us

to understand how habitus therefore enables actors to construct themselves and the world by which they find themselves surrounded. In their writings, habitus remains a kind of blank slate, destined to be shaped by the outside world. Nevertheless, we need to recognise that habitus has a dynamic nature and creative potential; otherwise we are unable to conceive of individuals as unique entities with unique identities. Of course, in some parts of Bourdieu's writings, it is possible to find references to the idea of a habitus that, although it is socially constructed, is equipped with the capacity to act upon the social world. In fact, such a view portrays the relationship between habitus and the social world as a relationship of mutual and continuous transformation. Yet, we also need to recognise that in most parts of his writings Bourdieu has, to a large extent, neglected the existence – and consequently the significance – of the creative and transformative nature of habitus. Such a deterministic conception of habitus portrays actors as heteronymous entities condemned to reproduce the social conditions of their domination. This somewhat fatalistic perspective is particularly seductive when studying the situation of the working classes in advanced societies. For, according to this view, these classes 'learn' to like watching television, rather than reading books, and they 'learn' to disengage from, rather than to engage with, politics; in short, they 'learn' to accept their alienation.

With the phenomenology of the body, it becomes possible to use the concept of the plural actor, as proposed by Lahire, without discarding the existence of an individual habitus, which is largely ignored by Corcuff. Thus, we need to account for the fact that the existence of 'social determinations' and the existence of 'cultural richness' are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Socially complex individuals are not necessarily aware of the main elements of their cultural identities, and may be even less so of their creative capacity that allows them to 'invent' themselves and the world in which they find themselves situated. In other words, *all individuals are plural even if their personalities are structured by an unconscious habitus*. And 'the presence of a habitus' does not necessarily imply 'the absence of competences': individual actions are always shaped, but not necessarily determined, by the predispositional schemes of habitus.

Towards a New Approach of Activism

Merleau-Ponty uses the example of a painter to show how the 'being-in-the-world' is a source of creativity. In *L'œil et l'esprit* (1964; in English: *The Eye and the Mind*), he states that it is 'through the act of offering himself (his body) to the world' that the painter is through that very process of creation transformed into a painting of that reality, becoming as it were 'its echo' (see Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 16 and 22). Castoriadis follows in the footsteps of the phenomenology

of the body constructed by Merleau-Ponty, giving it a political application.[15] In *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (1975; in English: *The Imaginary Institution of Society*), he argues that

> [...] the support of the subject and non-subject in the subject (i.e. what comes to him or her from his or her social influences) is the body: the point of articulation between the Self and the Other is the body, that material structure full of potential meaning. The body is not alienation – that would mean nothing – but participation in the world. Meaning attachment and mobility constitute the pre-constitution of a universe of meaning that is prior to any reflexive thought. (Castoriadis, 1975: 157)

Castoriadis's description of 'the subject' overlaps with both Lahire's and Corcuff's respective accounts of 'the social actor'. The subject is not that abstract moment of a removed form of disembodied subjectivity; rather, it constitutes an active and embodied entity situated in different spheres of the social world. In this sense, the subject is not an 'absolute self'. Rather, it is an individual conditioned by social contents; and as such it is the 'active authority that constantly reorganises these contents by using them' (Castoriadis, 1975: 158). Autonomy is thus no longer, as the critical (or genetic) school would have it, seeking to prevent or control 'the effects of the oppressive structure of society on our lives' (1975: 161). Autonomy is precisely that structure itself, from the moment actors transform it by 'acting'.

What Castoriadis calls the radical imagination of the *psyche* corresponds to the description of habitus as sociological fiction outlined above. There is no point in trying to localise the psyche; it can be regarded as a magma of social determinisms. Castoriadis puts this as follows:

> [M]an is deep psyche; man is society. He is only in and by society, his institution and the socially imagined meanings that make the psyche adapted to life. Beyond biology [...] man is a psychological and socio-historic being. It is on these two levels that we will regain the capacity of creation that I have called imaginary and imagination. There is radical imagination in the *psyche*. (Castoriadis, 1996 [1978]: 112, emphasis in original)

The psyche is the ability to combine pre-given elements (habits) to create new forms of activity. Through the body, the psyche receives impressions that it gives shape to unconsciously in order to bring about discourses and action. According to Castoriadis, the psyche – that is, as our individual habitus – is 'the ability to bring to light things that are not real', but this ability is possible thanks to elements provided by reality. The magma, of which the components are unconscious, is our pre-subjective world, 'a compact mass, blind and

deaf and which leads to the "flowering of the imaginary'" (Castoriadis, 1997 [1978]-b: 95).

Castoriadis allows us to move forward considerably. Following Castoriadis, we can view the agent both as a proper subject and as a social actor with a psyche. From this perspective, we are no longer trapped in a determinist understanding according to which actors 'have no choice'. To be sure, actors do not really understand their actions because they do not understand the different social mechanisms by which their habitus is determined, but it would be erroneous to reduce the habitus to a dispositional apparatus aimed at the mere reproduction of an established order. Such a view would be equivalent to considering the habitus as purely passive. Instead, it is the task of a truly critical sociology to account for both the passive *and* the active, both the unconscious *and* the conscious aspects of the habitus. From this perspective, it becomes possible to regard the habitus as both an internalised social unconscious and a cradle of creative imagination that, rather than veiled in ignorance, is inhabited by a vision of dynamic magma.

Thus society is not simply a conglomerate of structures that restrict our freedom, but it is also a space of opportunities that facilitates our actions and thereby turns us into creative and complex beings, who are exposed to various experiences and who are capable of developing new modes of expression and action. New ways of being together can emerge without actors, involved in the construction of these new ways of being, necessarily being aware of this emergence. New social movements are a tangible illustration of what can come of such creative processes: largely random forms of habitus that are close to each other and yet dissonant. If, for instance, we look at the appearance of the social forums in Porto Alègre, Bombay, Paris and London, we can observe the emergence of groups of actors who come together periodically and who have developed a shared militant habitus through which people from different social and professional backgrounds manage to agree on particular political aims, such as the aim to 'combat neo-liberalism'. In their own way, individually or in small groups, they each innovate and invent new models of political contestation, new political justifications, or even new economic models such as cooperatives, mutual companies and so forth. They 'institute' propositions for 'an alternative world' inspired by the rejection of the existing one. Of course, each member of the movement has certain militant dispositions incorporated into their own history and life-course. Everyone is rich in determinations, and different people are embedded in different life forms, even if actors are not conscious of the exact extent to which their lives are shaped by external factors. 'Why engage in one association rather than in another one?', the activist may wonder when questioned by the sociologist. The question provokes hesitant and diverse responses that illustrate the

complexity of the various reasons that people may have when deciding to engage in a particular form of collective action.

Given the complexity of the issue, it would be difficult to come up with a 'proper' definition, let alone an exhaustive analysis, of political activism. In the contemporary world, activists seem to be increasingly reluctant to claim an affiliation to a trade union or an institutional federation. Instead, they engage only sporadically in political action, often through several different associations at once, to conserve their 'autonomy' (Ardizzone, 2007). This is not to suggest, however, that their engagement is 'weak'. Those present at the anti-globalisation summits become – as Merleau-Ponty would say – 'the body' of the event. They may identify themselves with different associations (for instance, Attac, Greenpeace, or No Logo) and sympathise with different discourses (for example, environmentalist, feminist, or anti-capitalist) at different moments in time. For some of them, this means that they engage in political actions and discourses with which they were not, or were hardly, familiar in the past; more importantly, this means that such collective events can lead to the *creation* of political actions and discourses which did not exist in the past. The fact that these forums exist as *new* forms of social struggle is indicative of the *creative* potential of social action. Yet, neither the traditional notion of habitus, in the strictly Bourdieusian sense, nor the critical use made of it by other theorists, such as Corcuff or Lahire, seem to be able to capture the emancipatory potential of social creativity, embodied, for example, in the existence of a 'militant habitus'.

It is highly probable that these forms of dynamic habitus, themselves the result of socialisation processes, have consequences of which the actors are not conscious. Whatever the future of the anti-globalisation movement, the combination of different encounters and processes will lead to new forms of institutionalisation at the macro-social level, and – both for activists and sociologists – it will be difficult to predict the exact nature of these institutionalisation processes.

Conclusion: A Sociology of Contingency

On the basis of the analysis developed above, it would be fair to suggest that sociological approaches which stand in the tradition of Bourdieu's genetic structuralism need to develop conceptual and methodological tools which allow us to account for the power of social contingency. The assumption that there is such a thing as a dynamic habitus is largely dependent on the idea that social innovation is unpredictable. As explained above, it is not possible to make sense of the existence of a dynamic habitus if we rely exclusively on Bourdieu's social theory, as Bourdieu – following Émile Durkheim – conceived

of sociology primarily as a science aimed at uncovering the underlying causal mechanisms that determine the course of social life. My own fieldwork, by which this analysis is inspired and which is based on my active participation in different social movements, suggests that it is intellectually worthwhile to try to develop genetic structuralism by drawing on issues of everyday life and the opaqueness of the magma of ordinary social action. Facing up to the contingencies of everyday life may indeed be necessary to prevent the Bourdieusian paradigm from falling into the trap of structuralist determinism. Of course, more work needs to be done to develop the ideas presented in this chapter further. It seems essential to explore the creative aspects of actors' 'militant habitus' if we seek to shed light on the resources mobilised in pursuit of social and political innovation. Creative imaginaries and creative action are indispensable components of creative societies. Thus, we may conclude by asking the following question: what is the radical imaginary, the cultural magma, the substance which brings actors together and allows for the possibility of collective action?

Notes

1   I am grateful to Simon Susen and Elena Knox for their detailed comments on this chapter.
2   In addition to the terms 'constructivist structuralism' and 'genetic structuralism', the term 'critical structuralism' is used in the Bourdieusian literature. Bourdieu's preference for the term 'constructivist structuralism' is symptomatic of the fact that he sought to distinguish himself from the 'relativist constructivism' of Bloor or Latour, with whom he disagreed on various points (see, for example, Bourdieu, 2001: 41). In this chapter, I use the terms 'genetic structuralism' and 'constructivist structuralism' interchangeably.
3   On this point, see, for example, Alexander (1995: 131).
4   On Bourdieu and psychoanalysis, see also, for example, Fourny (2000).
5   It is no accident that Merleau-Ponty had a tremendous influence on Bourdieu's intellectual development in general and on his conception of habitus in particular. In French sociology it is common to conceive of Bourdieusian structuralism in opposition to the phenomenological project (see, for example, Bénatouïl, 1999). We can endorse this reading on the condition that we take into account the fact that Bourdieu's reticence is essentially directed at the intellectualist prologue of this tradition, initially forged by Husserl (see the discussion in the last section of this chapter). According to Bourdieu, this intellectualist and anti-genetic tradition prevents us from posing 'the question of the social construction of the structures or schemata that the agent employs to construct the world' (Bourdieu, 1980: 44; on this point, see also Bourdieu, 1987: 47, Bourdieu, 1997: 175, and Bourdieu, 2001: 182).
6   Parts of this section are also quoted in Corcuff (1999: 103) and Corcuff (2003: 56). One cannot but notice that Bourdieu's conception of habitus was deeply problematic, as it largely constrained the notion of class habitus. Indeed, the homological interpretation of habitus of members of the same class reappears in most parts of his writings. This is indicative of Bourdieu's attempt to 'build hidden analogies' in order to identify

specific rules and regularities that determine the constitution of habitus, similar to the – positivistically inspired – attempt to establish rules and regularities for the objects of science (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron, 1968: 78).
7   The sociological questions arising from the concern with reflexivity and rational competence, a concern which is of crucial importance in Corcuff's writings, oblige us to reflect upon the concept of individual habitus.
8   In *Réponses. Pour une Anthropologie Réflexive*, Wacquant argues that, in Bourdieu's work, the term 'habitus' is a phenomenological concept. Quoting Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu defines it as 'the intrinsic corporality of pre-objective contact between subject and object so as to reproduce the body as a source of practical intentionality, as a source of signification [...] rooted at the pre-objective level of experience' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 27). In this regard, Bourdieu was opposed to the 'deep intellectualism of European philosophers who have overlooked the potential advantages of addressing the body' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 98).
9   We 'know' the world intuitively through our bodies before we become 'aware' of the world in a reflexive sense, and we know it with a knowledge that is shared with others and which stems from community. Indeed, our body allows us to be 'deaf to the world, in an initiation to the world upon which rests the relationship between a thought and its object, and which is always already complete when the reflexive return of the subject takes place' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 57).
10 Boltanski (2003).
11 I am immersed in the world before becoming aware of the world. Merleau-Ponty put this as follows: 'When I awake in me the consciousness of this social-mine (*social-mien*), it is my whole past that I am able to conceive of [...], all the convergent and discordant action of the historical community that is effectively given to me in my living present' (Merleau-Ponty, 1960b: 12).
12 On this point, see esp. Bourdieu (1987: 15).
13 Lefort (1978: 110).
14 This was best expressed in Merleau-Ponty's later writings: '[T]he body overflows into a world of which he carries the schemata [...] which continuously provokes in him a thousand wonders' (Merleau-Ponty, 1960a: 108). It is important to keep in mind Merleau-Ponty's insistence on the unconscious nature of the habitus: an '*unconscious* incorporation of specific social dispositions in practice, as an individual or socialised biological body, or as a social entity biologically individuate by incarnation' (Merleau-Ponty, 1997: 186). Thus, it develops on a daily basis through the subject's constant exposure to the social world. This essentially means that 'my body has its world, or understands its world without having to pass through representations, without submitting itself to an objectivising function' (Merleau-Ponty, 1997: 164).
15 See also Castoriadis (1997 [1978]-a).

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