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CHAPTER 14

Interlude II: Ideologies of Habitus

Martin Middeke and Christoph Reinfandt

Differentiation, we argued at the end of Interlude I, provides opportunities for mutual observation both within theory and between theory and other discourses. While metatheory has a tendency to absorb these differences into subtle discussions of epistemological problems, cultural theory addresses the frictions between different cultures of reflexivity much more explicitly, moving from, for example, an acknowledgement of 'The Literariness of Theory' (Sedlmayr in Part I) to an acknowledgement of what literature can do that theory cannot (Hotz-Davies's 'When Theory Is Not Enough' in Part II), or from a discussion of 'the construction of "Latourian literary studies" (Noys in Part I) to 'The "Literary Turn" in Organization Studies' (Glaubitz in Part II). Less philosophical and more pragmatic, cultural theory is marked by a more explicit political awareness (cf. Hotz-Davies, Eckstein and Reinfandt, and Wiemann in Part II) and thus adds a different dimension to the cultural capital accrued by metatheory with its emphasis on epistemology: It is not only about "knowing", but also about "doing", as it were, and the question is how the "knowing" based on "inward" processes of making sense relates to the "outward"

M. Middeke (✉)
University of Augsburg, Germany

C. Reinfandt
University of Tübingen, Germany

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cultural realms of "doing". As doing theory is a cultural practice as well, the effects of "outward" culture on "inward" processes of making sense would also have to be addressed within the remit of reflexivity.

Here, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus opens up interesting perspectives: As 'a form of social subjectivity in conformity with the immanent laws of a particular social field' (Castle 399), habitus describes a "durable" and "transposable" 'set of dispositions which generates practices and perceptions […] in diverse fields of activity' (Johnson 5); these dispositions are '"structured structures" in that they inevitably incorporate the objective social conditions of their inculcation' as well as '"structuring structures" through their ability to generate practices adjusted to specific situations' (Johnson 5); these structures naturalize themselves as a '"feel for the game", a "practical sense" (*sens practique*)' (Johnson 5). How, then, can doing theory be described in terms of habitus? Is it possible to consider theory *as* habitus? In order to go through with this, one would have to assume that, just like the literary field, the field of theory within the humanities 'exercises a "prism effect" on all external determinations and refracts them according to its own logic' (Boschetti 17; on "prismatic effects" cf. Viala); and that just like the literary field, but with different ground rules, the field of theory establishes itself 'as a relatively autonomous space' (Sapiro 31). Viewed as a relatively autonomous space along these lines, the field of literary and cultural theory today bears traces of the historical trajectory of literary theory from traditional hermeneutics (*What* does a text mean?) turned into a hermeneutics of suspicion from the perspectives of Marxism, psychoanalysis, and subsequent cultural and critical theories (*Why* does a text mean?) and on to the more functionally minded approaches of recent years (*How* does a text mean?) with their strong grounding in textual theory within a larger, fundamentally sceptical metatheoretical frame (cf. the chart in the introduction to the present volume, p. 4).

Against this background, ideologies of habitus in the field of literary and cultural theory today can be identified through a reversal of this trajectory, that is, a movement from text through critique and culture to (meta)theory. As Rogers Brubaker points out in his discussion of 'Social Theory as Habitus', "theory" has long been understood in purely logocentric terms, that is,

> as a structure of logical entities (concepts, variables, axioms, propositions, and so forth) possessing certain logical properties (generality, abstractness, precision, and so on) and standing in certain logical relations with one

> another (consistency, contradiction, implication, and the rest), on which one performs certain logical operations (deduction, generalization, specification, codification, and so on). (Brubaker 213)

However, the elements in these 'intricate and extended sets of logically interconnected propositions'(Brubaker 220) can only be retrieved, scrutinized, and held up for debate because theory comes in the form of '[c]odified, public writing' (Brubaker 215), that is, texts produced and processed under particular institutional conditions (> textual theory). The textual status of theory has a double effect. As the end product of a confluence of various academic practices (experiments, conferences, lectures, seminars, …), the published theoretical text predisposes its readers to come to terms with it 'in a more *theoretical* manner (in the ordinary logocentric sense of that term)' (Brubaker 216). The general, abstract and precise coordinates thus established can then be drawn upon to do 'what theory is supposed to *do*: namely, to "inform" research' (Brubaker 213). But that is not the only reading possible: theoretical texts can also be read as 'objectified products of […] habitus' (Brubaker 216) which enable the critical reader to 'proceed from texts to habitus' (Brubaker 220) in order to catch a glimpse of the 'internalized dispositions' which underwrite research practices just as much as the 'codified propositions' of theory (Brubaker 213). Quite obviously, there are two modes of reflexivity at stake here, one constructive and aimed at the optimization of the research process on cultural texts itself (> critical theory), and the other one deconstructive and aimed at unearthing the foundations of the research process ranging from sociological/institutional and dispositional questions (> cultural theory) to philosophical/epistemological questions (> metatheory). And while it is generally accepted that the 'scientific habitus […] differs from other habituses [sic] in its reflexivity', the doubling of the modes of reflexivity poses a theoretical challenge:

> In what sense can we speak of an unconscious disposition towards conscious self-scrutiny, and unreflective disposition to reflect? How can scientists do what other agents cannot: consciously master their habitus without interfering with its workings—indeed in a way which enhances its workings? (Brubaker 225)

In analogy to the sociological habitus in Brubaker's application of Bourdieu's theory of habitus to Bourdieu himself, it would certainly make sense to think about the theoretical habitus in literary and cultural studies

today as a 'tertiary or higher-order habitus, overlaid on, transforming without superseding, a primary familial and a secondary scholastic habitus' (Brubaker 226). And Brubaker's call for 'a *stratified* account of the sociological habitus' (Brubaker 226) can also be heeded with regard to the theoretical habitus in literary and cultural studies (and perhaps more easily, given the traditional textual focus in these disciplines).

An impersonalized stratified account of the theoretical habitus in literary and cultural studies would have to take both the temporal unfolding of the field (from *what*? to *why*? and *how*? as well as the ongoing negotiation of the balance between textually and contextually focused approaches in various national literary and academic traditions) and its systematic contours (metatheory—cultural theory/critical theory—textual theory) into account. In terms of distinction these two sets of coordinates have very different implications. Gone are the days when scholars in literary and cultural studies could claim authority as experts for spelling out the correct and culturally legitimate meaning of texts, resting comfortably in an amalgamation of hermeneutic and positivistic assumptions embedded in the deterministic discourse of the ideological mainstream. In this model, social distinction is grounded in the scholars' affirmation of the predominant ideology. The hermeneutics of suspicion, on the other hand, initially replaced the positivistic assumptions with assumptions drawn from the counter-discourse of Marxism and accordingly could not draw its social distinction from complicity with the predominant ideology but rather from its affiliation with critical agendas based on "higher" principles (social justice, the Marxist philosophy of history, …). In both cases, the explorative function of theory was embedded and contained in larger deterministic discourses. Only with the emergence of literary theories in the narrower sense, that is, theories that centre around the question "What is literature?" on the one hand and the broader implications of the linguistic turn on the other, could a fully developed science agenda based on reflexivity establish itself as the basis for social distinction, but it did so at the cost of specialization: The price for increasing scientific distinction (with all the caveats that come with the humanities/natural sciences gap that had also been established by then) was a delimitation of the general social distinction rooted in the perceived functions of providing orientation, values and/or critique derived from the object of study and theoretical reflection, that is, literature. To this day, and in spite of an increased awareness of the persistence of the ideologies of Romanticism (McGann) and liberal humanism (cf. Barry 11–38), literary and cultural studies have

not been fully able to shed this admixture of external dimensions, and what is more, the various registers of theory continue to partly draw their legitimacy from other disciplines such as philosophy or the cognitive sciences in metatheory, sociology, anthropology, history, political science in cultural and critical theory, and phenomenology or media studies in textual theory. But then again, this syncretism may in fact be the strength of literary and cultural theory, as long as it does not lose sight of its particular 'dispositional, as well as institutional, anchorage' (Brubaker 216) with its very specific potentials and limitations.

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