CHAPTER TWELVE

Overcoming Semiotic Structuralism: Language and Habitus in Bourdieu

Hans-Herbert Kögler

Pierre Bourdieu's conception of habitus marks a theoretical step which no adequate understanding of social reality can ignore. By introducing habitus, Bourdieu is able both to integrate and to transcend major insights of the linguistic turn in philosophy, most prominently the idea that conscious intentional understanding necessarily relies on a host of implicit, practical, and holistic background assumptions which constitute meaning while being themselves unrepresented (Searle, 1989). The concept of habitus incorporates this idea since it shows that individual agency and its self-understanding are constituted by relying on an acquired social sense, the cognitive habitus, which defines how an agent understands, acts, and perceives itself and its environment. At the same time, it transcends the philosophical thematisation of a constitutive yet implicit background because it makes this hidden continent of pre-understanding susceptible to empirical-analytic social science.

This major step is hailed in traditional social theory as well as by Bourdieu himself as the mediation of agency and structure. It consists in reconstructing how specific social environments (that is, the structural conditions of agency) relate to and shape the internal sense of intentional agency (that is, the individual first-person dimension of agency) (Bourdieu, 1977 [1972]; 1990 [1980]). Habitus connects the two via a realm of pre-structured, schematised modes of understanding that define the specific cognitive accomplishments that any particular agent is capable of performing. Social analysis shows that those cognitive performances can be typified, that they are quasi-determined by the relationally constituted environments in which agents are situated, and that therefore the realm of intentional reflexivity and decision-making is to a large extent pre-figured (or literally 'pre-conceived') in terms of the environmentally inculcated schemes that agents have previously acquired. The trick of this mediation of agency and structure is to show that agents

require the habitus *to enact* the embodied typified pre-conceptions that derive from social situations. Thus, the habitus is not itself just a form, scheme, or structure, but rather the agent-based capability to enact, to bring into play, to launch forward a certain understanding vis-à-vis an objective event or situation – and yet, its capabilities can only be enacted via the drawing on certain inculcated schemes, and thus remain in the end tied to an objectively existing social context. The social-empirical study of intentional cognitive attitudes has thus become possible.

Yet, the way in which Bourdieu conceives of the connection between the symbolic-practical schemes and the capabilities that activate them does not leave enough room for intentional and reflexive agency (Kögler, 1997; Bohman, 1997; see also Turner, 1994). This is not, as has been said regarding such criticisms, to deny that Bourdieu includes an account of consciously strategic agency, even though its acts and practices are nevertheless largely dependent on pre-accomplished modes of understanding (Foster, 2005). Agents are indeed very much capable of reflexively adjusting their acts and intentions to situations, albeit always on the basis of pre-structured schemes of understanding. The real question, however, is how agency can come to affect those interpretive schemes themselves, how the pre-accomplished modes of self-understanding can be challenged such that (a) specific ways of conceiving of something as something can be transformed and effectively criticised, that is, how it can be challenged such that different ways of understanding, feeling, and action become possible for the reflexively engaged agent, and (b) the strategic functionalist mode of investing those capabilities for an advantage for oneself in a situation or context could itself be challenged, meaning that one's existing mode of action for an agent could be seriously evaluated in light of value assumptions that do not have merely strategic value, but count intrinsically.

I will set out to show that Bourdieu's mediation of agency and structure owes too much to its departure from an overcoming of the one-sidedness of semiotic structuralism. Bourdieu's critique of Levi-Strauss's neglect of the temporal structure of gift exchange, which leads to the incomprehensibility of structures-in-action, as it were, emphasises the focus on agency, which – to avoid to complementary reduction of a free non-situated individual – remains socially grounded via the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977 [1972]). Yet, if we focus specifically on Bourdieu's account of language, we will see that his departure from semiotic structuralism, which rightly needs to be overcome through a more contextualist and pragmatic account, nevertheless fails to account fully for the *relatively autonomous realm of linguistic world-mediation*. I will argue that the capabilities related to habitus are capabilities operating always at both a pre-linguistic and a post-linguistic level, that is, they can only be understood

as involving both pre-conceptual practical skills and linguistically mediated conceptual frameworks. The way agents adjust their pre-understanding to a situation owes to practical as well as linguistic moments, and the way in which a socially inculcated habitus can disclose reality is itself dependent in part on the linguistic level. Thus, to suggest a base-superstructure model between social and linguistic habitus, to which Bourdieu appears to adhere, fails to do justice to the co-constitution between practical and conceptual moments in achieving an intentional approach to understanding. Yet, as we will see, the linguistic dimension itself needs still to be understood in a practically acquired and schematically mediated way, suggesting that overly conceptualist or cognitivist accounts of linguistic understanding leave out the imaginative perspective-taking based on socially situated meanings which define much of social dialogue and understanding.

Accordingly, I will reconstruct how Bourdieu's conception of habitus relates to language. Specifically, this will involve an analysis and critique of how a socially inculcated pre-linguistic habitus is supposed to relate to the linguistic habitus, or to our linguistically mediated intentional pre-understanding. While Bourdieu's account in the end only illuminates one side of the equation – the grounding relation between the social dimension vis-à-vis the linguistic one – his analysis helps to build a richer conception. By doing so, we can hope to make Bourdieu's immensely rich empirical analyses accessible to a reflexive account of agency that sees habitus-based conditions as sources of agency and transformation. We can also hope to integrate the fruitful concept of habitus into a body of social theory that is finally free from the traditional dualisms of agency and structure, freedom and determinism, individual and society, to conceive of social situations as mediated possibilities to interact creatively so as to enhance the realm of options and opportunities. The mediating power of the *symbolic imagination*, activated in intersubjective encounters wherein agents release the creative force of empathetic and dialogical understanding, is thus mobilised against an overly static and conservative understanding of habitus as the arbiter of previously acquired meanings as self-identity.

1. The Limits of the Semiotic Model of Communication

In Saussure we find perhaps the best, and certainly the classic, expression of semiotic structuralism, exemplified in his code-model of mutual understanding. The guiding idea is that in order for two (or more) speakers to communicate intelligibly with one another, their thoughts and beliefs have to be expressed in a *symbolic medium* in which the speakers participate, or according to which they articulate and structure their thoughts and beliefs. According to this reading, substantiated by the early introduction of the

speech circuit as the model of his semiotics, Saussure's semiotics sets out to explain the possibility of successful communication (Saussure, 1983 [1915]; see also Lee, 1997, Taylor, 1992).[1] An intentional speech act – inasmuch as it is oriented towards making an intelligible statement – presupposes the existence of a shared medium of expression.[2]

Saussure claims that it is essential for a sign *as a sign* that it has an identical meaning for the speakers; historical or etymological knowledge is irrelevant for this function. In order to understand the possibility of shared symbolic meaning, it is thus necessary to leave the genetic point of view behind.[3] To understand the meaning of 'house', for instance, the knowledge regarding its 'origin' as a term is superfluous. Identical meaning can simply be defined as a shared understanding of certain symbols pertaining to the same ideas for the individual involved in the communicative interaction. 'All the individuals linguistically linked in this manner will establish among themselves a kind of mean; all of them will reproduce – doubtless not exactly, but approximately – the same signs linked to the same concepts' (Saussure, 1983 [1915]: 13). The speaker, assuming that he or she can communicate with another speaker by means of symbols, has to presuppose the possibility of being understood. This means that Saussure privileges, albeit in a very general and structural fashion, the perspective of the language-user. It is ultimately the idealised first-person perspective of the speaker (who presupposes 'the same signs linked to the same concepts') that determines the need for a structural linguistics.

Such a structural linguistics has the task to reconstruct precisely what kind of system, or *code*, speaker and hearer rely on in order to explain the success of communication. The genetic or 'diachronic' view has thus to be replaced by a 'synchronic' view that analyses the functional properties and relations that allow signs to have a meaning, that is, to be precise, a *shared* meaning. This view alone allows us to capture the *structural links* that symbols establish between different individuals communicating the *sameness* of the symbols used: 'It is clear that the synchronic point of view takes precedence over the diachronic, since for the community of language users that is the one and only reality [...]. Synchrony has only one perspective, that of the language users' (Saussure, 1983 [1915]: 13). Yet, this does not imply that speakers are conscious of the structural properties of signs or symbolic orders on which they necessarily draw in order to communicate. For Saussure, the essential task of a structural linguistics, indeed the very birth certificate of this discipline as an autonomous science, is precisely to reconstruct 'objectively' the underlying features of such symbolic systems.[4]

In order to determine the nature of the code, Saussure rightly excludes the physical-physiological aspects from consideration. We are interested not in sounds as such, but in the 'experienced' sound-patterns that are endowed

with meaning. Similarly, we have to exclude *individual speech* from our consideration. Saussure motivates this point, far less controversial, with the argument that speech only 'executes' the underlying structure of language, while the *shared* understanding can only be made possible – by definition – by a dimension that is prior to, and both transcends and surpasses individual intentional acts. Saussure understands that the question of shared meaning forces one to consider language as a *social phenomenon*, and therefore feels entitled to exclude the mere individual actualisation of the underlying, meaning-enabling mechanism from semiotics. A *speech act* (*parole*) is defined as 'an individual act of will and intelligence' in which speakers make use of the underlying *code* provided by language; *language-structure* (*langue*) instead creates and establishes a common medium, the *code,* as a sort of intermediary ground between the speakers on the basis of which they can make themselves understood to one another.

There is no space – and probably no need – to go into all the well-known details of Saussure's semiotics. Suffice it to recall that language-structure (*langue*) is defined as a social, holistic, synchronic, and formal system. Language can be defined as a system of signs. A sign can be defined as a material carrier that 'indicates' or stands for something else (see also Cassirer, 1955 [1923]). Hence, meaning is determined by a conceptual and by a material side. *A sign is a unified duality between signifier and signified, or sound image and concept/idea.* The association between a single signifier with a signified, however, is only made possible by its difference to other signs. This is Saussure's novel point. The identity or meaning of a sign is thus determined neither by the prior articulation of a thought nor by its reference to some fixed entity or thing, but only by its difference to other symbolic units.[5] We can identify two important consequences following from this: first, *the principle of arbitrariness*, according to which every sign system or language defines meaning through 'arbitrary' distinctions[6]; and second, *the principle of internal differentiation*, according to which all the differences within a language are produced by the internal differences of sound patterns that distinguish conceptual meanings and by conceptual meanings that in turn define the differences between sound patterns.[7]

It is now crucial that a *conventional system of signs* mediates between communicators so as to allow for shared meaning. As mentioned above, Saussure grounds this thesis by submitting the more radical claim that the very thought to be communicated would be impossible without a material carrier, a symbolic articulation that structures the otherwise 'amorphous mass' (of thought) into 'articulated' and thus meaningful units (as in Cassirer, 1955 [1923]).[8] This means that a Platonic conception of pre-linguistic conceptual meaning is excluded; and since languages exist as conventional systems of meaning, thought itself bears a conventional marker.

Before noting several problems with this model, a remark is in order. The claim that the speaker's consciousness is symbolically structured does not mean, as Dummett suggests, that Saussure never escaped an empiricist psychology of association (Dummett, 1990: 131ff.). Symbolic relations are 'associated' in the mind of the speaker and express their meaning by being structured by syntagmatic and paradigmatic patterns of meaning. Yet, those symbolic forms are, in a Durkheimian fashion, rendered as previously constituted social media into which the self is socialised and out of which each speaker builds up an 'accumulated stock' of patterns, thus defining his or her specific linguistic competence. Accordingly, Saussure argues as a *social externalist* by placing the meaning-constitution in the in-between of speaker and hearer who are participating in the shared realm of symbolic structuration, and not within a psychological realm of mental associations.[9] Thus, an important step towards the mediation of language and meaning has been undertaken. Nevertheless, despite these clarifications, three major problems of the code-model remain.

1. Even though Saussure claims that the codes are constructed through speech, (implying that the linguistically reconstructed code is in fact an abstraction from embedded rules and norms), the social embeddedness of linguistic competence is not adequately taken into account. The code is presented as a formal and holistic grid that ultimately exists in a strictly demarcated sphere of internal differences. In this lies its function of guaranteeing meaning. Yet, a concept of symbolic sequence (such a syntagmatic or paradigmatic semiotic relations (Saussure, 1983 [1915]: 121 ff.) needs to be *understood* – and thus applied – in practical contexts, an application which cannot be controlled or determined by the code itself (Stern, 2003; Dreyfus, 1980; Wittgenstein, 1953). Since a formal rule can be interpreted in a variety of ways, agents must already know how to understand the rule. A new *rule* that would fix the interpretation cannot exist, because it could be read in different ways; for the supposed 'rule-of-application', the same problem (that is how exactly to understand it) would arise. What *is* essential, however, is to know how to apply the rule. Accordingly, agents have to possess some kind of practical know-how in order to account for understanding here. This Wittgensteinian argument – echoed by Gadamer's thesis of the intertwinement of interpretation and application (Gadamer, 1989 [1960]) – is evidenced by cultural studies that show how processes of 'encoding' – producing a formal and analysable structure of a text, a movie, an artwork, or a speech – do not predetermine the 'decoding' of the intended meaning (Hall, 1980). Interpretive understanding rather arises from an embedded, *context-sensitive* sense

that draws on a symbolico-practical background understanding which is both more elusive and more pervasive than the mere application of 'rules'. Bourdieu has a very clear grasp of this dimension of meaning, as his concept of *habitus* is developed to render the intuitive, practical, and embedded disclosure of meaning accessible to sociological analysis.

2. Saussure's model does not entirely separate the code from the intentional consciousness of the speaker, inasmuch as that code is introduced as a quasi-transcendental presupposition of successful communication. This general relation, however, does not translate into an *interpretive connection* between background-code and interpretive performance. Owing to the rigid methodological separation between *langue* and *parole*, between code and speech act, linguistic change – albeit considered as 'emanating' from individual speech – is never able to exert any intended or conscious influence on meaning. Echoing Durkheim, Saussure claims that *langue* exists 'external to the individual, who by himself is powerless either to create it or to modify it' (Saussure, 1983 [1915]: 14). While this statement is plausible regarding the formal features of language, it leaves unaccounted all processes of conscious adjustment and transformations of meanings that agents derive from interactions with the world and others. In this regard, Bourdieu follows in the questionable footsteps of the Saussurian structuralist approach. As we will see, Bourdieu rejects and overcomes the conceptualisation of language as *langue* or structure, which he replaces with the notion of habitus; nonetheless, he retains a quasi-foundational relation between habitus and agency, according to which intentional and reflexive agency is seen as the dependent product and 'actualisation' of the structural/schematic resources provided by habitus (Bohman, 1997; Kögler, 1997).

3. Saussure's model conceives of communication as a process enabled through a *shared structure*, but the 'sharedness' is not understood as a *mutual and intersubjective bond* of which the language-users are somewhat aware, i.e. as an *implicit normative order* that binds speakers to certain (however implicit) expectations and rules. Rather, the production of shared meaning is explained in terms of a somewhat parallel actualisation of similarly structured semiotic stocks. These objectively identical structures are supposed to explain the sameness of meaning. This means that the *experience* of shared meaning – that is, the fact that participants have an intuitive knowledge of the norms and expectations that are 'implied' in the social use of language – goes wholly unexplained. In fact, Saussure emphatically rejects a 'normative' understanding of semiotic codes: 'Synchronic laws are general, but not imperative. It is true that a synchronic law is imposed upon speakers by the constraints of communal usage. But we are not envisaging

here an obligation relative to the language users […]. A synchronic law simply expresses an existing order' (Saussure, 1983 [1915]: 91). Saussure entirely misses the implicit normativity that inheres in linguistic usage. Participation in linguistic practices, as we will see below, entails indeed a normative dimension, it compels speakers to behave and express themselves in specific ways, and it entails presuppositions that speakers, by use of linguistic means, can be held accountable for. Instead of rendering the sharedness of meaning solely in terms of *regularity*, the intersubjective performance of language asks for an analysis of the *normativity* of the rules that are followed.

Here, Bourdieu equally fails to include the intentional normative sense of rules and assumptions inherent in linguistically mediated practices, such that their violation – that is the *experience* of someone or something running counter to what is expected and demanded by normal language use – is greeted with a critical response. Often, such violations may lead to a demand for justification, such that the unexpected behaviour becomes understandable action in light of new reasons that are provided for it (Brandom, 2000). Bourdieu understands that there is a certain inherent normativity in language use, but analyses this mainly in terms of symbolic power, i.e. in light of a normal and normalised order that is – à la Saussure – conventionally imposed onto an existing situation. The internal organisation of the symbolic order is then explained via disproportionally available resources, which define different social positions, and thus different access-relations to differently constituted social environments, including different socially inculcated skills and practices, which coalesce to a social habitus. The sharedness of meaning is thus fully explained by the structural-holistic organisation of the background of an intentional speaker.

   This analysis is based on an agency-structure model for which the intersubjective relation is a later result, which in turn can be explained via the different habitus formations that are involved, and which in turn respond and are reconfigured through the experience of agents with different resources and habitus. In the social context as a whole, habitus functions as capital, as skills and cognitive-social capabilities, which are agent-based and agent-incorporated resources to advance one's social position (Bourdieu, 1977 [1972]; 1990 [1980]; 1985) [1984]). They function as means for the realisation of one's interests and goals which are themselves essentially shaped by one's habitus, as one generally attempts to reach that which is within one's reach. The intentional orientation at one's interests or values is thus *conceptualised* vis-à-vis the socially encountered other, with whom one may assess the legitimacy of one's claims, but it is *explained* by means of socially produced, causally induced background structures that produce an intuitive, practical, embedded

self-understanding via habitus. Accordingly, while Bourdieu's practical move advances significantly over the semiotic structuralism of Saussure, he retains some of the methodological baggage of structuralism in the way in which he conceptualises habitus as the underlying resource of intentional agency. To situate our post-Saussurian analysis and critique of Bourdieu in this context, however, we have to situate it more explicitly alongside with the normative post-Wittgensteinian approach to communicative meaning.

2. Two Models of Linguistic Meaning: Validity Claims versus Practical Dispositions

Our critique of Saussure's code-model provides us with a sense for the necessary desiderata of a revised conception of shared linguistic meaning, and thus a linguistically mediated reflexive agency. Such a conception would have to be able to include the context-sensitive applications of terms and sentences, it would have to account for reflexive transformations of meanings, and it would certainly have to account for the implicit normative dimension that inheres in language-use. Yet, at the same time, such a theory would still have to be able to designate 'something' as the common ground, it still requires a *medium* that accounts for shared meaning. The perhaps obvious move, in fact undertaken by the currently dominating turn toward performativity, is to locate the *rules* that speaker and hearer follow *within the performative practices themselves*. Instead of projecting (through a methodological objectification of underlying intuitive presuppositions such as 'sharing a code') an external system of symbolic relations, the rules and structures that bind agents to one another are now seen as existing 'within', as being internal to communicative practices. The turn from the code-model to the paradigm of performativity consists precisely in the translocation of rule or structure – or, to be exact, structuration (cf. Giddens, 1994) – into interpretive performance itself.

Now that this practical-communicative move has been undertaken, we may follow an ideal-typical path, in two highly divergent and yet somewhat complementary ways. On the one hand, we find the approach of *speech act theory* which takes its cues from the late Wittgenstein, but attempts to systematise the idea of rule-following in communicative contexts so as to derive some universal *presuppositions* of meaning, truth, and understanding (Wittgenstein, 1953; Searle, 1969; 1995; Habermas, 1983/1987 [1981]). This paradigm assumes that speakers reach communicative understanding through a set of standardised uses understood as shared counterfactual norms. On the other hand, the post-structuralist approach, as found in Foucault and Bourdieu, sets out to analyse the ways in which speakers are constrained by implicit discursive rules or practices (as it were, 'normalising norms') that shape perception,

conception, and action. Instead of aiming at *universal conditions* that would in counterfactual idealisation be able to account for the success of our meaning-intentions and truth-claims, this approach shows how the *actual success* (or failure) of particular speech acts is grounded in underlying grids of speech performances. We thus witness a dramatic split, indeed a deep internal rift in the approaches toward linguistic performativity. The internal reconstruction of 'underlying' performance-rules is either taken to account for the possibility of intersubjective communication and shared meaning; *or* it is employed as a critical means to unmask the necessary myths and misrecognitions that precisely inhere in the universal value-orientation which defines, among others, the speech act approach. While speech act theory aims at a reconstruction of the universalist presuppositions that it takes to underlie our truth-oriented sense of shared meaning, the discourse-theoretical approach uses the reconstruction of implicit rules of performative acts as a critique of the symbolic-social power that is usually exercised within such practices.[10]

The speech act approach claims to save our universalist and truth-oriented intuitions by providing a new 'performative' basis for intersubjective meaning. The basic idea is that a speaker, much like the idea that drove Saussure in the first place, can only avoid a 'performative self-contradiction' (that is, a conflict between intentional content and their speech performance) by assuming that shared meaning is possible. A closer analysis shows that the sameness of meaning is not sufficiently guaranteed by syntactical or semantic rules, but requires a pragmatic understanding of the context in which terms and sentences are used (Habermas, 1992). Yet, the pragmatic grounding does not open the door to contextualism or relativism, since it is possible to reconstruct types or standards inherent in language-use that define literal meaning.[11]

Habermas's version of speech act theory, the 'theory of communicative action', is particularly instructive in this respect (Habermas, 1983/1987 [1981]). Habermas argues that a speaker, by entering into communicative contexts, *willy nilly* comes to participate in a normatively structured situation in which he or she is taken, however implicitly, to raise exactly three validity claims. The idea is that speakers usually assume that what they say is true, that it follows rationally acceptable moral norms, and that it expresses an authentic intention on the side of the speaker. Such normative orientations are *latent* in everyday speech, and become *manifest* once one or several of the claims are contested: then the speaker has to provide reasons for why she said what she said – and the broken intersubjective understanding can only be *redeemed* by filling in the gaps interrupting the sharedness of sense. The sharedness of meaning is thus, in a certain sense, based on the counterfactual

assumption that valid reasons can be provided in case of need. For Habermas, this shows that *meaning and validity* are mutually presupposing concepts, because the understanding of an utterance can be explained by 'knowledge of the conditions under which a hearer may accept it. *We understand a speech act when we know what makes it acceptable* [i.e. what assumed conditions of validity make it acceptable, HHK]' (Habermas, 1983 [1981]: 297, italics in original).

Habermas's communicative theory does take into account the *contextual embedding of meaning* by granting that every speech act must, in order to make sense, draw on an implicit horizon of pre-understandings. Those *background assumptions* – which, according to Habermas, are situated in what he calls the 'lifeworld' – form a context in which statements are usually embedded, in which they initially are defined and developed. For Habermas, however, the intended meaning of utterances is not encapsulated in – that is, it is not bound by – their *initial* contexts of use. Habermas assumes that this is the case because, even in the most concrete circumstances, statements are uttered with the (however implicit) communicative understanding of being true, right, and authentic; they thus imply, by definition of their context-transcending validity claims, a wider, in fact an ultimately 'endless' or universal context of meaning. Because the initial assumptions are intertwined with context-transcending claims, the meaning that is first shaped in particular circumstances is taken to be capable of being 'transmitted' to any other context.

Now it is precisely this claim of the *possibility of context-transcendence* that the competing paradigm of performance-rules by Foucault and Bourdieu puts into question. In order to not miss the exact point of the opposition, however, it is important to see that the contextual embeddedness in rule-governed contexts is in fact not so much an issue just of 'rules' – rules the discourse-analyst is capable of reconstructing – but rather one of the *practical capabilities*, the embodied dispositions and skills that form the background for the application of rules in contexts. These contextual rules are considered *formative of meaning* by Foucault and Bourdieu. Following Wittgenstein, rules are not defining meaning-contexts 'on their own', but are deeply ingrained into, and operative through, the cognitive and interpretive skills and practices of situated agents. Foucault's attack on the humanistic self-understandings of modern institutions – including modern concepts of 'madness', 'health', 'man', 'punishment', and 'sexuality' (Foucault, 1979 [1975]; 1990 [1966]; 1994 [1976]) – as much as Bourdieu's reconstruction of the class-bases of certain cognitive capacities draws on the claim that social practices and its related practical sense pre-structures and thus pre-directs all conscious, if you wish, rule-governed behaviour (Bourdieu, 1977 [1972]). Bourdieu defines the practical sense as 'habitus', as a generative

capacity to produce certain statements and utterances; it always already organises the perceptions, thoughts and actions of agents according to an implicit grid that has been acquired in specific social circumstances:

> The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structural structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1977 [1972]: 15)

To be sure, Habermas might reply to such a form of 'practical reductionism' that the actual communicative capacities of speakers are misconstrued if rendered 'grounded' in contextually circumscribed understandings. Yet, the claim that agents are in fact capable of transcending their contextually acquired boundaries – boundaries that are assumed to be now operating from within the agent – needs to be cashed in by more than just a repeated reference to the inherent universal validity claims. This is so because the fact that discourse is oriented towards truth, morality, and authenticity is not an assumption that Foucault or Bourdieu leave on the side. Rather, it is part of their theories that the practical and power-laden dispositions work as effectively as they do precisely because agents consider their communicative performances as usually being true, right, or correct; the implicit 'modus operandi' that distributes the contextual resources differently so that certain statements and assumptions are 'true', while others are 'false' (and 'illegitimate', 'subcultural', 'abnormal', etc.) are, literally, in the background. The 'misrecognition' of statements is being guided by a socially inculcated sense that reproduces power; it works on the basis of – and not despite – the assumption that we are all oriented towards truth and validity, and that such truth and validity is, at least in principle, attainable for everyone.

Habermas had already in the seventies presented a theory of moral and cognitive development that was supposed to show how the speaker reaches, through maturing through different stages of cognitive and moral understanding, a universal standpoint (Habermas, 1979: 69 ff.; Habermas, 1990). Yet, the claim of such a formal reconstruction – that uses the normative ideal of a trans-contextual perspective to reconstruct the empirical emergence of such an understanding in each individual speaker – is subject to the very criticism as the communication theory itself. It is remains unclear how the universal standpoint is capable of disentangling itself from the practically acquired modes of self-understanding, given that such modes are more deeply ingrained in the communicative background – or the self for that

matter – than discursive rules. The reference to the normative dimension is by itself incapable of convincing us that situated speakers are capable of actualising its force, that they are up to the normative implications that their discourse demands – granted that communications implies such value-orientation. This problem is intrinsic to the universalist theory of speech performance, since the communicative coordination of action through speech is taken to be embedded in, and to arise from, concrete cultural and social contexts.[12]

The discussion has shown that each side has to defend a certain understanding of the background in order to make its position work. For Habermas, the meaningful background of communication cannot be considered resisting its communicative representation; whatever the initial assumptions are, it must be possible to articulate and explicate them in discursive communication so as to reach possible agreement about what's at stake and what's justifiable. For Foucault and Bourdieu, on the other hand, the background must essentially resist such reflexive explication, at least if their position is understood as implying inescapable power relations. Here, the critical theoretical explication of the structures of the social world never really catches up with its true nature and operating principle, which continues to belief in the pro-claimed normative value-orientations. Habermas's position must assume that the promise of possible understanding within language can (in whatever regulative manner) be fulfilled, whereas the poststructuralist position suggests we abandon this promise in order to see through its illusion. Yet, how intentional and critical agency may then be possible presents a major challenge for poststructuralist perspectives.

At this point I suggest that we should agree that we cannot simply dismiss the practical embeddedness of intentional agents, but that we also need to do justice to the relative autonomy of intersubjective communication, to the capacity of an agent as well as an interpretive social theorist to understand and exchange views regarding oneself and the other within a shared medium of meaning. We need to preserve this dimension of our shared everyday as well as theoretical understanding without denying that meaning entails in its background dimensions relations of power. If this is granted, the task becomes to show how the contextual embeddedness pointed out by Foucault and Bourdieu doesn't undermine the capacity of interpretive dialogue and intersubjective communication, and that intentional agency is capable of a reflexive self-understanding within a medium of theoretical articulation which entails the reconstruction of power without reducing to its exercise. If we want to find a way out of the dialectic of normative reason and practical power, we have to find a conception of understanding that is able to mediate between, on the one side, normative orientations and their

intentional self-understanding and, on the other side, the contexts of their embeddedness which entail power relations through inculcated practical dispositions. In order to prepare the ground for such a new understanding, we will now take a closer look at how Bourdieu conceives of the relation between language and power. In particular, we will reconstruct how the conception of habitus is employed to make sense of the linguistic mediation of reality and experience as grounded in social existence, i.e. power.

3. Language, Habitus, and Symbolic Power

Bourdieu assumes that an agent's capacity to speak – including the capacities to perceive, to think, and to act – are built up in the context of symbolic social practices that shape an implicit sense, a hermeneutic pre-understanding. Bourdieu can thereby sketch a theory of symbolic power in which the role of language is conceived in terms of the concrete social contexts that establish a speaker's authority and guarantee shared intersubjective understanding. Accordingly, Bourdieu does not define the construction of an agent's or speaker's identity vis-à-vis truth-oriented discourse (as Habermas does), but suggests that the overall *competence* to perform any speech act, in specialised discourses as well as in the social lifeworld, depends on the acquisition of skills and capabilities that are embodied in a linguistic habitus that in turn is grounded in social practices of power. Accordingly, with Bourdieu we can further pursue the most pressing questions of our inquiry at this point: to what extent are speakers shaped and constituted by the language they speak, inasmuch as this language reflects the social conditions of their existence, including relations of power and domination? More generally, how do social practices and institutions shape the symbolic meaning through which speakers make sense of the world and of themselves?

My thesis is that as a basic approach to these questions, Bourdieu grounds the linguistic habitus (the *symbolically mediated* background assumptions, values, and skills) in the social habitus (the *socially inculcated and context/class-specific knowledges, skills, and practices*) which leads ultimately to a problematic and under-analysed identification of both background dimensions. While this move establishes a crucial connection between intentional linguistic understanding and practices with social background structures, it disregards – or, at least, underestimates – the creative, reflexive, and critical potential that agents possess via the medium of language as such. Bourdieu fails to explore the critical gap that exists between the background inculcation of certain attitudes and assumptions, and the potential, which is grounded in their *symbolic form*, of transcending those assumptions in order to explore different attitudes, alternative interpretations, and contrasting viewpoints. Nonetheless, his discussion of habitus, both in its

social and its linguistic form, clarifies the dimension of the social background for any further theory of situated social agency.[13]

Regarding language, Bourdieu argues that what linguistics takes to be a natural product, or the essence of language as such, is in fact the production of political and social efforts at the unification or 'normalisation' of linguistic practices (Bourdieu, 1994, esp. 1994a). The process of 'codification' involves that unruly and open linguistic practices, which are spread out into many different contextual forms, are subjected to some kind of 'streamlining' procedure. What grammarians are analysing is thus not a mental or biological given, but a social product produced in part by the very activity claiming to discover its inherent structures. Accordingly, language as a Saussurian code, as a set of rules that exists in terms of strict syntactic mechanisms and fixed lexical meanings, is nothing but a fiction – albeit, since the birth of the national state and its educational system, a real because realised one: 'Linguists merely incorporate into their theory a pre-constructed object, ignoring its social laws of construction and masking its social genesis' (Bourdieu, 1994a: 44). Opposing what linguists take to be the underlying essential reality of language, that it is a code, Bourdieu claims that the law-like nature of 'language' is (a) a *symbolic construction* that produces what it claims to find, i.e. it is a codification of what exists in plural and practical contexts in a pragmatic and open-ended manner; and (b) a *social imposition* that has, once 'grammatically' established, been opposed to the everyday speech practices in order to normalise the social and cognitive behaviour of its agents:

> Produced by authors who have the authority to write, fixed and codified by grammarians and teachers who are also charged with the task of inculcating its mastery, *the language is a code*, in the sense of a cipher enabling equivalences to be established between sounds and meanings, but also *in the sense of a system of norms regulating linguistic practices*. (Bourdieu, 1994a: 45, italics added)

The code in Saussure (or for that matter 'depth grammar' in Chomsky) is in fact produced by the social context which brings about the transformation of linguistic practices into structured and codified entities. The concrete social context which functions as the causal site of this particular creation is the nation state, in the course of which local linguistic practices become subjected to the norm created via an official national language. Thus, 'dialects' become possible only against the official establishment of, say, 'French'. Bourdieu can show how the development of the modern state produced the need and politics of a unified national language. In this context, normative grammar is established, and the micro-practices of teaching and supervising linguistic

norms and conventions – such as spelling, pronunciation, and style – help to produce a legitimate language.

> [In France], the imposition of the legitimate language in opposition to the dialects and patois was an integral part of the political strategies aimed at perpetuating the gains of the revolution through the production and the reproduction of the 'new man'. […] To reform language, to purge it of the usages linked to the old society and impose it in its purified form, was to impose a thought that was itself purged and purified. […] The conflict between the French of the revolutionary intelligentsia and the dialects of the patois was a struggle for symbolic power in which what was at stake was the formation and re-formation of mental structures. (Bourdieu, 1994a: 47–48)[14]

For grammarians, these accountants of national languages thus help to create the socially recognised reality of a normed, and thus 'normal', language, which was also used to generate new universal forms of thinking. The new French, however, needed to be imposed on the dialect-speaking subjects; and, as critical sociologists, we need to examine how this was possible.[15] If there are different attitudes with regard to language and how to speak, we need to explain how subjects who speak patois are able to accept French as the legitimate language, how they come to perceive themselves as speaking 'dialect'. How is it that speakers subordinate their own identities to the ones imposed by the state, especially if they do not gain but lose symbolic recognition in this process?

Bourdieu's answer is prepared by the rephrasing of this problem, which entails that *symbolic power requires the cooperation of the oppressed*. In other words, the speakers themselves have to accept the view of 'French' as the legitimate language, so as to allow the symbolic (state) power to take hold of them: 'All symbolic power presupposes, on the part of those who submit to it, a form of complicity which is neither passive submission to external constraint nor a free adherence to it' (Bourdieu, 1994a, 50–51). The question is now how this *complicity* is brought about, what makes it possible, since it is obviously against the interests of those who submit to it because it denigrates them to a subordinate position. In order to explain this phenomenon, Bourdieu introduces a set of theoretical concepts, the most important of which is the social habitus and its derivative form, the linguistic habitus. It is here that we find the core thesis of Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power which consists in the grounding of intentional linguistic self-understanding in a prior cognitive mode, the habitus, which acquires a quasi-foundationalist meaning with regard to reflexive agency.

Bourdieu rightly rejects the (itself one-sided and problematic) view that the social world is constitutively created by the conscious and intentional use of linguistic symbols. He rather assumes that agents acquire, in the context of *early childhood socialisation*, a social habitus that pre-schematises their perception, thought and action by internalising structural features of their social environment. The general capacity of selves to adjust creatively and spontaneously to the ever-changing demands of social situations are thus not the free or conscious project of the subject, acting either alone or 'intersubjectively'. They are rather made possible by general, yet flexible, *interpretive schemes* that equip agents with the necessary skills to cope with their immersion in different social situations. Being relieved from the impossible task to always interpret anew, agents acquire a pre-conscious sense of how to react, how to perceive, how to speak, etc., i.e. their social habitus. These habitus formations or schemes are socially differentiated, since they are acquired and shaped by the social situation within which agents grow up, and thus reflect or represent the economic, educational, cultural, gendered etc. relations that define the respective social environments. Those objective conditions are nonetheless transformed into embodied schemes and skills that enable agents to smoothly adjust and react to the present. As such, habitus provides the agents with different skills, with a different form of 'capital', to participate in social institutions, or 'fields'. The habitus provides a precondition of one's successful participation in public life, one which is nonetheless differently shaped according to social background (Bourdieu, 1977 [1972]; 1990 [1980]).

For our context, the aspect of the *unconscious and pre-linguistic nature of habitus* is most important. For Bourdieu, the habitus is acquired *prior to the conscious use of symbols*, indeed to any use of linguistic symbols at all:

> There is every reason to think that the factors which are most influential in the formation of the habitus are transmitted *without passing through language and consciousness*, but through suggestions inscribed in the most apparently insignificant aspect of the things, situations and practices of everyday life. Thus the modalities of practices, the ways of looking, sitting, standing, keeping silent, or even of speaking ('reproachful looks' or 'tones', 'disapproving glances' and so on) are full of injunctions that are powerful and hard to resist precisely because they are silent and insidious, insistent and insinuating. (Bourdieu, 1994a: 51, italics added)

The fact that in many ways *the sense of the situation* – that is, of what is appropriate, expected, adequate, acceptable – is not conveyed through the explicit and conscious use of symbols, but in an insinuating and holistic manner, suggests

for Bourdieu that a *pre-linguistic* habitus builds up as a fixed and thus extremely effective stabilisation of meaning.

> The power of suggestion which is exerted through the things and persons and which, instead of telling the child what he must do, tells him what he is, and thus leads him to become durably what he has to be, is the *condition of the effectiveness of all kinds of symbolic power that will subsequently be able to operate on a (thereby created) habitus predisposed to respond to them*. (Bourdieu, 1994a: 52, italics added)

Accordingly, a social habitus is built up 'without passing through language and consciousness' (Bourdieu, 1994a: 51). It is pre-linguistically created in holistically structured social situations, and importantly, it pre-structures the linguistic habitus, that is, the way a subject speaks, expresses itself, and thinks with and through a language. The basic social habitus is defined as an internalised scheme of meaning that adjusts the subject to the situation; it is made up of embodied 'assumptions' derived from former experiences within the objective environment; the experiences are thus organised as a quasi-worldview.[16] Because this adjustment gets incorporated into a bodily scheme, it does not require reflective or explicit application; subjects are, on the contrary, always already attuned to the power-defined and hierarchical structures they know best because they grew up in them. Agents know practically and intuitively (and in this way much better than by means of reflexive thematisation) what to say, to think, to do, or to perceive:

> The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structural structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1977 [1972]: 15)

We thus encounter a theory close to Heidegger's 'practical holism', as understood by Hubert Dreyfus, according to which meaning, in our case the social sense of the situation as well as the capacities to think and speak, is preformed and basically anchored to provide a meaningful ground for the use of linguistic symbols in intentional, conscious and intersubjective speech (Dreyfus, 1980; 1993; Heidegger, 1962 [1927]). The habitus is supposed to explain how agents internalise what we could call a symbolic inferiority complex: they cannot but speak the socially based idiolect which defines, via the world-disclosing function of language, their self-understanding. At the same time, the agents cannot fail but recognise their own difference to the

official code, and thus must assess the value and acceptability of their own speech practices in light of the legitimate languages: 'All linguistic practices are measured against the legitimate practices, i.e. the practices of those who are dominant' (Bourdieu, 1994a, 53). Thus, the linguistic habitus is supposed to explain both the enduring nature of dialects, which are based on different social conditions of existence, and the universal acceptance of the legitimate code, which is inculcated through all sorts of micro-practices like school-teaching, media, etc., and which helps to maintain the power-differentiated status quo of the social order.

Yet, the question is whether we can assume that the linguistic habitus – and therefore the very notion of *linguistic agency* – is as strongly tied to particular social conditions, including specifically defined cognitive competences, as Bourdieu claims. If it is true, this claim would suggest a full constitution of speakers by social power. If the use of language is grounded in a linguistic habitus, which in turn relies on a social habitus formed through unconscious, practical interaction with one's environment, then speech practices can be nothing but the *expression* of that underlying disposition. It is hard to see then how speakers could critically reassess or change their habitual structures, since they are inculcated into a level of 'understanding' that escapes the conscious and intentional use of symbols.[17]

4. Linguistic Habitus and the Social Sources of Agency

Bourdieu's intended overcoming of the agency/structure divide can appear to be reductionist vis-à-vis agency due to its subordination of linguistic habitus to social habitus. Indeed, assuming that a habitus forms fully on the level of pre-linguistic and unconscious processes of agency-development deprives the reflectively acting subject of a major tool: namely, the capability to not only orient his or her actions or beliefs towards something directly encountered (so to speak, in front of it), but also the ability to engage in a *reflexive restructuration and reconfiguration* of those background assumptions and schemes that disclose something as something in the first place. While the social theorist in Bourdieu's case is capable of unearthing the habitus formations as the implicit background actor that pre-configures what appears as meaningful and real in a social context, the agents themselves remain subject to the capital they received due to prior socialisation that they are bound to invest as is. Precisely this division, however, would cut off the critical force that social theory could unleash with regard to the reflexive agency of which agents themselves could prove capable. And precisely this move, I suggest, comes about by unduly reducing the role of language in the mediation of individual agents with their objective environments, or in the constitution of habitus.[18]

This can be shown by going back to what habitus can possibly mean in the context of a theory of agency, Bourdieu's social theory included. If a social habitus is integrated into a conception of human agency, it must entail a constitutive relation to intentional agency, because without intentional concepts agency cannot be made sense of (Winch, 1991 [1959]). Bourdieu's important and convincing move is to sacrifice any Cartesian assumption of pre-existing capacities for a methodological socialism that assumes that capabilities emerge within the context of social relations. Those relations, however, are always already situated in objective contexts that determine how the emergent capabilities are de facto constituted. The cognitive resources on which agents can draw, their cognitive accomplishments as individual bearers of intentional processes, carry the irrevocable stamp of their environments, their relative wealth or poverty, with regard to certain conditions that enable the development of certain cognitive processes. Since we cannot assume any objective or independent access to the objects of intentional disclosure, the capacities are defined relative to their contextual usefulness, which in turn is defined in terms of the established contexts or fields which make some capacity relevant and important. As explained above, Bourdieu conceives the contextual structures such that they shape the social habitus – the agent-based capabilities – which thereby become (a) an objective reflection of the existing social environments and (b) a subjectively incorporated scheme of understanding that directs the intentional cognition of the respective individual agent.

The important step beyond and advantage over semiotic structuralism consists in the designation of the habitus as agent-based intentional capabilities. Thereby, the structures are not externally patched onto an otherwise unaffected individual, but they are shown to function as internal resources, as inner-cognitive dimensions of self-understanding, as true symbolic forms that define what counts for an agent as his or her self-understanding, because only thus can it delimit what he or she can possibly think, perceive, feel or do. Yet, the problematic feature of this move is that the meaning-constitutive force of linguistic concepts and assumptions in the constitution of habitus is not sufficiently taken into account, which means that the thematisation of the structuring forces on the habitus must remain, via methodological fiat, one-sided. This critique is not based on an individualist or normative truth-oriented intuition; rather, it draws on a reconstruction of how a habitus, understood as agent-based capabilities, must be formed so that it can *internally relate to the self-understanding of the agent*. To do so, it must entail capabilities that *define the agent's self-understanding*. It must track on the level at which an agent can possibly relate to herself or himself as such-and-such an individual. To do so, however, it must entail linguistic concepts and assumptions. It must entail a symbolically mediated dimension that cannot be fully constituted prior to

that level, because then the agent would not be an agent that is constituted at least in part via that self-understanding, which itself is part of the conceptual idea of being a human agent (Taylor, 1985; Humboldt, 1988 [1836]). Human agency is essentially defined by being constituted of having a reflexive relation to oneself, which needs to be taken into account when one is to mediate the intentional and reflexive understanding with an agent's dependency on external conditions and structures (Mead, 1934; Sokal and Sugarman, 2010).

Agency entails consciousness of oneself as an agent in the context of a given identity and situation. It also entails the assumption that one can distinguish between self-chosen and externally caused phenomena and events. Only if an agent is capable of establishing a self-relation in which his or her own understanding can be susceptible to an analysis where the agent can have an effect on the beliefs and actions of the agent himself or herself can we speak of human agency (Kögler, 2010). Yet, since the agent is essentially situated in a social context from which his or her capabilities emerge, we must name a *medium* in which the agent can define his or her agency with regard to himself or herself and the environment. In other words, it must be possible for an agent to reconstruct his or her own identity, to analyse how one is situated socially, how one can aim for certain goods, project certain goals, all in light of an assessment of the situation. And this analysis must (potentially) include a reconstruction of the agent's own limits vis-à-vis the encountered challenges. Thus, only if the linguistic mediation of an agent's self-understanding is taken into account can those demands be fulfilled. The fact that the linguistic habitus is a schematised pre-understanding that derives from an accumulated stock of experiences and encounters that coalesced into a pattern of habits and expectations, of skills and assumptions, allows for a reflexive thematisation of agency via its own intentional focus. It is important to note, however, that the very idea of habitus as an internally operative background of intentional cognition itself requires that it is intrinsically connected to language or linguistically mediated concepts and values. This is because only if it affects these beliefs and assumptions does it really concern the level that in turn shapes an agent's self-understanding.[19]

To insist, this is not an external point against Bourdieu's conception of agency, but amounts to an immanent criticism and even constructive explication of the implications of his position that attempts to mediate between agency and structure. The capabilities that define habitus can only come into play if actualised in the context of social fields, in which they function both as competence and as capital. Nevertheless, agents must be capable to orient their input at the value-orientations in the respective fields, which requires a practico-conceptual grasp of their intentional structure. Clearly, the value themselves as much as their substantive and socially shared interpretations are not consciously represented; an unconscious grasp, however, is therefore

not pre-conceptual, as the disclosure within which the actions take place is already saturated by the understanding of the values (Weber, 1978 [1914]; Winch, 1991 [1959]; Dilthey, 2004 [1910]). This becomes clear when their normative-intentional orientation is not fulfilled, such as when expectations are disappointed and agents make claims explicit. While the critical disruption of existing practices may thus help to bring to light – both in the practice itself as well as for the theorist – that they indeed entail a normative infrastructure, this fact cannot, as illustrated in the above critique of Habermas, lead one to idealise the practice in terms of formally abstract rules and apart from the embodied and inculcated forms of practical skills and capacities that define its local grounding. The fact that human agency is intentionally structured does not challenge the deeply social grounding, but it anchors within the symbolically mediated contexts the basic capability to reconstruct how a particular practice understands itself in light of its linguistically articulated concepts as well as its practical contexts. That the understanding of human agency requires intentional concepts, which in turn require linguistic mediation, can be made clear by three arguments (see also Kögler/Stueber, 2000).

1. The interpretive identification of an action as an action requires the bringing into play of what the action intends to realise, what it is aiming at. If we lack a purpose or value or goal at which an action aims, we are hard pressed to identify it as an action at all (Stueber, 2004). Yet, such a purpose or goal must be one that can be articulated, and thus can only exist in a linguistically mediated form (Gadamer, 1989 [1960]; Kögler, 1999). This is a *quasi-transcendental argument* which suggests that the medium of identification of an action forces us to attribute some conceptual structure to its nature (Habermas, 1988 [1968]).

2. The concrete identification that is attributed to an action as such-and-such has to be formulated by the social scientist or interpreter who develops a conceptual-linguistic account of what goes on. By assuming that this account captures, at least to an extent, the action at stake, and by means of the need to only thus be able to identify the act, the linguistic mediation and thus *articulation* inheres intrinsically within action. This means that the *methodological requirement* to be able to account for how one is able to identify the action which one is reconstructing requires that they can be explicated. This requirement would be undercut if we were to attribute the full meaning constitution to a pre-conceptual level which would resist any explication. In that case, any account of the social scientist would be but an arbitrary projection upon a practical continent forever withdrawn from our eyes, and therefore an account as good as any other, or none. Moreover, if this pre-conceptual level would be meaning-constitutive, and

as such form the background understanding of the social scientist, his or her explicit understanding would (a) remain encapsulated in his or her own habitus, and (b) never catch up with the explicit meanings that it portrays as the other's self-understanding. Bourdieu can claim, as he does, that in addition to the conceptual articulation of aesthetic habitus formations, as so brilliantly executed in *Distinction* (1985 [1984]), a practical skill-based level persists. Yet, he must grant that the symbolic interpretation of those attitudes as intentional attitudes – that is, as aesthetic perspectives in the full experiential sense – also captures a layer which is itself of meaning-constitutive importance.

3. The acquisition of a social habitus is not accomplished pre-symbolically but goes hand-in-hand with symbolic means. This is exemplified by developmental accounts of human agency (Sokal and Sugarman, 2010; Mead, 1934; Kögler, 2010). Far from suggesting that there is such a thing as a neatly separated sphere of practical, pre-conceptual, and unconscious meanings on the one hand, and linguistic, conceptual, and conscious meanings on the other, the creation of socially grounded meaningful attitudes is a symbolic-practical co-constitution. Mead's emergence of a communication of significant symbols adequately embedded this process in a gradual process which can include stages of play and game, i.e. the *imaginary perspective-taking* where an agent assumes in pretence the social perspectives of other agents, which always puts into play a mix of practical and conceptual dimensions (Mead, 1934; Sokal and Sugarman, 2010). Subsequently, the orientation at general rules that apply to all represents a more advanced form of abstraction, but really remains grounded in the capacity to represent all possible roles and put oneself imaginatively into the role of the generalised other. A widely shared *developmental account* of how intentional agency emerges from basic practical and pre-conceptual intersubjective settings strongly suggests that linguistic self-understanding, and with it the capacity to reflect and transform modes of self-understanding in a critical and creative fashion, belong to the core features of human agency (Clement, 2010).

The transcendental presupposition of understanding human agency is obtained via the intersubjective process of perspective-taking, which equips the social-scientific interpreter with the necessary capabilities to make sense of situated agents. The fact that linguistic elements are now seen as equally constitutive for the agent's self-understanding does not diminish the importance of the – differentially acquired – social habitus. Those background schemes of pre-understanding represent the contextually defined resources for agents to make sense of their environment in a pre-structured manner. Nonetheless, the fact

that these schemes are symbolically synthesised via the basic concepts and assumptions widens the options with regard to critical and reflexive agency. Now the ray of subjective intentionality is not fully preformed by an implicit holistic grid defining in advance its internal elements. Rather, the schemes themselves are potentially accessible, agents can relate not only to phenomena within their worlds, but reflectively thematise the world structures that define them *a tergo*.

The emergence of habitus from intersubjective perspective-taking means that the capabilities which brought about understanding can always be (re-) activated to advance beyond the hitherto acquired and established schemes of understanding. Intentional understanding is therefore not conceptually tied to specifically defined habitus, as if they operate only within a given frame, as if they are incapable of being utilised to challenge outworn ones, to transcend existing ones, and to disclose new ones. By emphasising the linguistic dimension of the background, the conceptual self-understanding is not severed from its practical, embodied, power-based source; rather, we now introduced a mediating level that allows agents to self-engage in an ongoing restructuration of their socially constituted selves. Agents will not just transcend their inculcated identities by means of idealised validity claims, but neither do they remain imprisoned in the sense-making structures they inherited from early childhood. By taking up, within their own agency, the otherness which social practices instilled in them, they unleash the developmentally acquired potential to go beyond an existing frame to understand others, to relate to oneself critically, and to project oneself in light of value-orientations that have a normative status and can be defended with reason. Only if the symbolic dimension of habitus is given its due can it be reconciled with ethical agency and, thus, with human agency as such.

Notes

1 According to the model of the *speech circuit*, one individual (A) makes conscious states that are represented by linguistic signs known to another individual (B). The communication of ideas is here undertaken by using vocal gestures that 'transport', by means of physical air waves, certain sounds to the receiver who thereby 'understands' the thoughts which were formerly present to individual (A). The basic question is: what makes the 'transportation' of meaning from (A) to (B) possible? What has to be considered an essential part of the process of creating or enabling a mutually shared symbolic understanding between (A) and (B)?

2 More radical than his empiricist predecessors, however, such success is not only explained by the 'subsequent' transposition of thought into the social medium of 'language' for the purpose of communication; rather, the very possibility of thought itself is attributed to symbolic mediation.

3 The 'genetic' point of view would reconstruct the historical genesis of how a term came to possess a certain meaning, that is how a certain 'sound' came to be 'associated' with a certain conceptual or cognitive understanding.

4 While from the 'intuitive' perspective of a language user meaning is 'simultaneously' in both participants, the structural properties that make such a 'miracle' of shared meaning possible usually remain altogether hidden. Only a 'structuralist' perspective that analyses the very nature of the symbols involved can explain how it is possible.

5 This point is supported by two reflections. First, we can only distinguish linguistic units by knowing their meaning. By hearing a foreign language, we are unable to distinguish how many words there are. In order to do so, we have to know the meaning of the words. However, on a more basic, phonetic level, each language defines internally which phonetic differences are to count as meaningful. Japanese, for instance, does not differentiate between j and r, German does not between w and v, but both are significant, that is, meaning-constitutive, in English. 'Jay' and 'ray' mean different things, but this could not be expressed in Japanese, and the difference between 'wheel' and 'veil' does not track phonetically in German. Second, the differentiation of phonetic sounds into meaningful differences within a sound pattern, which makes the fixation and identification of conceptual differences possible, is arbitrary and conventional. Thus, while the difference between 'cow' and 'now' (and to all other units) allows us to fix symbolically the idea of a cow, there is no intrinsic reason why 'Kuh' or 'vache' are not just as good. The systems that make meaning identifiable are thus arbitrary.

6 What is crucial, however, is that within the system the use of differences is absolutely determined, and thus, for the individual user, necessary in order to achieve meaning. In contrast to the idea of arbitrariness, this can be called the *conventionality* of the sign-system. While the symbolic order is arbitrary with regard to the thought (and ultimately the reality) that it expresses or represents, it is necessary within its system of distinctions, because only the established order of differences (as being the same for each sign and sign-user) can establish the identity of meaning.

7 The reference to objective differences in meaning is excluded, because of the restriction to meaning which in turn was justified by the orientation toward the 'psychological' side of meaning (we know that this 'psychologism' does not contradict Saussure's social theory of meaning, since the speaker becomes a speaker only as participant in the social world of meaning, which is due to socialisation). Similarly; the reference to objective phonetic differences is excluded, because natural languages establish conventional systems of phonological differentiation that internally 'decide' what counts as a meaningful sound-distinction. Thus, the identification of any positive term in a language is only possible on the basis of knowing its *difference* within the linguistic or symbolic system. This is the point behind Saussure's claim that language is a form, not a substance, because it is defined by the internal differences, and its law is the establishment of the rules that distinguish 'signifiers' and 'signifieds' from each other.

8 This idea goes back at least to Humboldt, who saw language equally as a necessary medium for thought. He defined language as the 'formative organ of *thought* […]. The inseparable bonding of *thought, vocal apparatus*, and *hearing* a language is unalterably rooted in the original constitution of human nature […]' (Humboldt, 1988: 54 and 55). Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms is based on the same thought (Cassirer 1955 [1923]).

9 One might also defend Saussure against such criticisms of the code as 'mentalistic' by pointing out that codes are taken to be constituted in the course of *intersubjective speech*

practices. As such, they seem to be tied back to the 'real' social practices of communicating agents. Yet, this defense would already reach beyond what Saussure himself supplies as theoretical means, as the following criticisms should show.

10 My analysis does not attempt a full scale comparison of social theories that are either based on speech act theory or on poststructuralist assumptions. Rather, I specifically focus on the issue of explicating the implicit social background assumptions with regard to their normative versus power-based implications. For a much needed analysis of the respective contributions of Habermas and Bourdieu, see the much needed book by Simon Susen (2007). For a critical comparison of Foucault and Habermas with regard to hermeneutic reflexivity, see Kögler (1996).

11 Far from giving up the game, à la late Wittgenstein, and accept an uncontrollable multiplicity of contexts and uses, certain standard-types of use can be filtered out – or reconstructed from the intuitive pre-understanding of speakers engaged in social communication. Such reconstructions will not repeat the positivist mistakes of the tradition by remaining focused solely on truth and reference; rather, the orientation at shared meaning deriving from intersubjective rules broadens the spectrum to include social value-orientations in a variety of fields.

12 Habermas is a far cry from a traditional liberal or action-theoretical position that assumes a 'free-floating' and disembedded agent. Yet, a final defensive move – the switch toward the macro-perspective of a theory of modernity that assumes that the inherent value-orientations have historically been fleshed out by constituting social fields like science, moral and legal discourse, and modern art – is equally bound to fail. This is because just as much as those spheres (or 'discourses') can be shown to be guided by normative rules, just as much do they exemplify underlying patterns of privilege and power, of unaccounted hierarchies and new modes of domination. The role of power-laden habitus props up, as it were, from within the rational public sphere like the tortoise to the hare in the fairy tale.

13 To suggest that language and linguistic habitus are ultimately grounded in social habitus seems to be contradicted by statements where Bourdieu acknowledges 'that social science has to take account of the autonomy of language, its specific logic, and its particular rules of operation' (Bourdieu 1994: 41). Yet, the 'autonomy of language' is explicated as a 'formal mechanism whose generative capacities are without limits', only to suggest that those generative capacities will themselves be employed to determine social power relations: 'Rituals are the limiting case of situations of *imposition* in which […] a social competence is exercised – namely, that of the legitimate speaker, authorised to speak and to speak with authority' (Bourdieu 1994: 41). At stake is whether the symbolic surplus, the 'originative capacity – in the Kantian sense – which derives its power to produce existence by producing the collectively recognised, and thus realised, representation of existence' (Bourdieu 1994:42) can be turned against power and reflexively appropriated by agents to realise normatively acceptable value-orientations.

14 Before going on, I should point out an ambiguity in this explanation. Bourdieu wants to show that the grammatical structure of language is due to the fact of the codification by grammarians, which shaped what is known as explicit grammars. Those grammars then helped to establish a national code, a national language – and suppressed all the dialects. However, the fact that one code was established and used to suppress and denigrate other languages, which then came to be seen as mere dialects, does not show as such that languages don't contain an implicit grammatical structure, as Chomsky or Saussure would claim. Bourdieu thus seems to conflate two issues: First, there is the question of whether languages should be seen as being constructed on the basis of

rules and codes (we have seen in our critique of Saussure that there are good reasons to question such an approach); and second, the question of how one specific rule system, the one associated with modern French in France, came to be seen as the legitimate language, and was used to integrate the population into the new ideology of the state. Here Bourdieu gives a plausible account of how conceiving a certain code as the legitimate 'grammar' of (a) language helped establish a sense of national identity and distinction.

15 Just as in Saussure, the idea is that the linguistic code forms the 'amorphous mass of thought' – even though now that amorphous mass is itself already linguistic mediated in terms of the unruly speech practices which later become known as dialects.

16 Bourdieu, however, criticises the concept of worldview because of its cognitivist overtones (Bourdieu 1990: 56).

17 As the previous remarks made clear, our interest is here to probe whether Bourdieu develops a one-sided notion of reflexivity, one which remains – by all its stringent and highly important critique of Saussure's structural semiotics – attached to a model of *reflexive objectification* that is taken from the representation of a natural fact, or an object. The alternative model is one of a *reflexive expressivism*, where the reflexive project is related to explicating and articulating the inherent conceptual, normative, and value-orientational beliefs and assumptions that define an agent's perspective vis-à-vis the other, the world, and the self. Yet, any such alternative account requires a more developed account of the role of language.

18 There is no doubt that Bourdieu, especially towards the end of his career, became very interested in the transformative powers given to agency. Our reflections were intended to bring to light the implications of his systematic analyses regarding the intertwinement of agency, language, and habitus, with a special emphasis on how the intentional meaning that agents attach to their self-understanding as well as value-oriented social struggles can be mediated with a social analysis of agency. In this regard I hold that the basis of Bourdieu's philosophy of language is too narrow to account for the complex meanings and potentials opened up by the linguistic mediation of reality. For a very sympathetic reading of Bourdieu in this regard, see the essay by Bridget Fowler in this volume.

19 If you drug or shoot someone, you do affect their cognition – you create weird and uncontrolled beliefs and images, or you entirely stop any cognition at all from happening – but you do not affect their *intentional self-understanding*. For that, the beliefs have to be incorporated into the stock of beliefs and values that consciously, and over the span of an agent's life-activities, define his or her self-identity. Drug experiences may later affect one's overall self-understanding, as they can be consciously appropriated. In any event, what counts as *real and fictional* is relative to the established symbolic frameworks of the social contexts in which a self-understanding emerges, but is nevertheless a real distinction within any such framework.

References

Bohman, James (1997) 'Reflexivity, Agency, and Constraint. The Paradoxes of Bourdieu's Sociology of Knowledge', *Social Epistemology* 11(2): 171–186.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1977 [1972]) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1985 [1984]) *Distinction*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1990 [1980]) *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1994) *Language and Symbolic Power*, edited and introduced by John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Mathew Adamson, Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1994a) 'The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language', in *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Mathew Adamson, Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., pp. 43–65.

Brandom, Robert (2000) *Articulating Reasons*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P.

Cassirer, Ernst (1955 [1923]) *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, trans. Ralph Manheim, Vol. 1: New Haven: Yale U.P.

Clement, Fabrice (2010) 'To Trust or Not to Trust? Children's Social Epistemology', *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, Springerlink, published online: 6 March 2010.

Dilthey, Wilhelm (2002 [1910]) *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. Edited with an Introduction by Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Dreyfus, Hubert (1980) 'Holism and Hermeneutics', *Review of Metaphysics* 34(1): 3–24.

Dreyfus, Hubert (1993) *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Dummett, Michael (1990) *Origins of Analytical Philosophy*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P.

Foucault, Michel (1979 [1975]) *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, Michel (1990 [1966]) *The Order of Things*, trans. unknown, New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault, Michel (1994 [1976]) *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage Books.

Foster, Roger (2005) 'Pierre Bourdieu's Critique of Scholarly Reason', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 31(1): 89–107.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1989 [1960]) *Truth and Method*, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donla G. Marshall, New York: Crossroads.

Giddens, Anthony (1984) *The Constitution of Society*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Habermas, Jürgen (1979) 'Moral Development and Ego Identity' in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 69 ff.

Habermas, Jürgen (1983/87 [1981]) *Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Vol. 1 and 2. Boston: Beacon Press.

Habermas, Jürgen (1988 [1970]) *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Jerry A. Stark, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Habermas, Jürgen (1990) 'Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action' in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 116–194.

Habermas, Jürgen (1992) 'Toward a Critique of the Theory of Meaning', in *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, trans. Mark Hohengarten, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 57–87.

Hall, Stuart (1980) 'Encoding/Decoding', in Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis (eds.) *Culture, Media, Language, Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, Hutchinson, London, pp. 128–138.

Heidegger, Martin (1962 [1927]) *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York: Harper & Row.

Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1988 [1836]) *On Language: The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind*, trans. Peter Heath, ed. Michael Losonsky, introduction by Hans Aarsleff, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kögler, Hans-Herbert (1996) 'The Self-Empowered Subject: Habermas, Foucault, and Hermeneutic Reflexivity', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 22(4): 13–44.

Kögler, Hans-Herbert (1997) 'Alienation as Epistemological Source: Reflexivity and Social Background after Mannheim and Bourdieu', *Social Epistemology* 11(2): 141–164.

Kögler, Hans-Herbert (1999 [1992]) *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault*, trans. Paul Hendrickson, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Kögler, Hans-Herbert (2010) 'Agency and the Other: On the Intersubjective Roots of Self-Identity', in Sokol and Sugarman 2010, Human Agency and Development, *New Ideas in Psychology* (NIP) (in press).

Kögler, Hans-Herbert and Karsten Stueber (eds.) (2000) *Empathy and Agency: The Problem of Understanding in the Human Science*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Lash, Scott (1998) *Another Modernity, A Different Rationality*, London: Blackwell Publishers.

Lee, Benjamin (1997) *Language, Metalanguage, and the Semiotics of Subjectivity*, Durham, NC/London: Duke University Press.

Mead, George Herbert (1934) *Mind, Self, and Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Saussure, Ferdinand de (1983 [1915]) *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris, La Salle: Open Court Publishing House.

Searle, John (1969) *Speech Acts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Searle, John (1989) *Intentionality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Searle, John (1995) *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York: The Free Press.

Sokal, Bryan and Jeff Sugarman (2010) 'Human Agency and Development', editors, special issue in *New Ideas in Psychology* (NIP), Elesevier.

Stern, David (2003) 'The Practical Turn', in Stephen Turner and Paul Roth (eds.) *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Malden, MA/Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 185–206.

Stueber, Karsten (2004) 'Agency and the Objectivity of Historical Narratives', in William Sweet (ed.) *The Philosophy of History: A Reexamination*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Press, 197–222.

Susen, Simon (2007) *The Foundations of the Social: Between Critical Theory and Reflexive Sociology*, Oxford: Bardwell Press.

Taylor, Charles (1985) *Human Agency and Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, Talbot (1992) *Mutual Misunderstanding*. Durham, NC/London: Duke University Press.

Turner, Stephen (1994) *The Social Theory of Practices: Tradition, Tacit Knowledge, and Presuppositions*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Turner, Stephen and Paul Roth (eds.) (2003) *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. Malden, MA/Oxford: Blackwell.

Weber, Max (1978 [1914]) 'Basic Sociological Terms', in Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (eds.) *Economy and Society*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff et al., Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 3–62.

Winch, Peter (1991 [1959]) *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, London: Routledge.

Winch, Peter (1964) 'Understanding a Primitive Society', in Bryan Wilson (ed.) *Rationality*, New York: Harper and Row, 78–111.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1953) *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. Elizabeth Anscombe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.