

## Chapter 19

# Habitus and Reflexivity: On Bourdieu's Self Socioanalysis

**Martine Legris Revel**

*Université de Lille Nord de France, France*

### ABSTRACT

*The author intends to explore the work that can be done by somebody on his/her own history in order to modify its course. Those questions have been largely debated. The purpose of this paper is to analyze Pierre Bourdieu's thinking of those topics. He is concerned with the interiorization of social structures (habitus) and suggested self socioanalysis as a new way of highlighting them in 1991. Can somebody truly escape from social structure's interiorization effects or even have an action upon them?*

### INTRODUCTION

Bourdieu had a cursus in philosophy before he chose social sciences, precisely sociology. In France, the first license of sociology was created in the early 60's. At the beginning of his career, he endorsed a Bachelardian perspective on science. In his first writings, especially in 1968 in *Le métier de sociologue* (Bourdieu et al., 1983), he was building a Bachelardian approach of science as objective and external to the sociologist,

implying the moment of rupture with common sense, prenotions and the reigning doxa, as one of the key moment of a scientific methodology of sociology. Still he did publish at the end of his career a small book called *Sketch for a self analysis* (2004 French version, 2008 English version, Bourdieu, 2008) in which he claims to analyze his own schemes of thinking and acting in an attempt to provide a rigorous approach of the social construction of the self as an habitus. We will discuss in this paper how this evolution was made possible and if it can highlight the debate upon normative and cognitive framing of the individuals and the possibility of a shift to occur.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-3670-5.ch019

Bourdieu's entry into political engagement really became public during the French 1995 strike that went on over one month. He actually met people on strike in Paris in Gare de Lyon, and pronounced a speech, intending to give them clues and information about their positions as social agent (Bourdieu, 1998). His involvement was not new, as he had already through his academic writings denounced social domination and reproduction. Still he did truly evolve greatly in his positions from his career start to his latest writing *Sketch for a self analysis*, in an attempt to analyse his own position and habitus in the academic field. Bourdieu never forgot his interest for science and epistemology; he did limit reflexivity to the practice of the sociologist. Thinking in terms of habitus introduces a considerable dose of skepticism regarding the emancipatory potential of knowledge, so how can self socio analysis help escape social determinism?

In the first part of this article, I wonder whether reflexivity has any role to play regarding the perceptions and self-perceptions of social agents or whether it is restricted to sociologists, being a methodological principle aimed at the epistemological strength of social sciences.

In other words, it is the *modus operandi* of his social scientific endeavour, rather than the symbolic capital associated with his position as a social scientist, that will guide our thinking about Bourdieu's work.

In the second part, I study how self-socioanalysis can play a role in a kind of liberating anamnesis. I then wonder if rational and emotional levels are intertwined, and then if social agents, here Bourdieu as a case, did transform the relationship between their habitus and the academic field.

I will then tackle three among this book hypothesis:

- A context if viewed as a kind of inescapable a priori for judgment can be de-stabilized and possibly re-structured through interaction with other actors, but cannot be entirely reflected by the actors themselves.

- A procedure can be adjusted to the context of individuals or communities without requiring a complete reflection of the context by the actors and by implementing at most a re-construction of it.
- A shift in the cognitive and normative framing to occur depends upon a plurality of factors that, to be effective and relevant, are themselves related to the specific context of an individual or a community.

## **REFLEXIVITY AS A SCIENTIFIC TOOL**

Bourdieu, with his emphasis on reflexivity, tempted his readers to try out his theories on his own writings, habitus and conclusions, in short, to be reflexive upon his own work. These bourdieusian readings located his analyses in their social contexts, i.e. the author's social position and trajectory in the academic and intellectual fields and the history and logic of these fields. He then focus his analysis not only on reflexivity as a methodological standard aimed at building the epistemological solidity of social science, but also as a way for social agents to become aware of their own habitus, through self analysis.

How does somebody acquire reflexivity in Bourdieu's framework (Mouzelis, 2007)? Whereas a crisis or a disruption between the habitus of a social agent and his location in the field is usually the painful first step towards acquiring reflexivity, in the social scientific field, this crisis can be remedied by practices of socioanalyses. As such, Bourdieu's notion of socioanalysis, could offer clues for identifying ways to understand and maybe overcome social structures interiorization.

## **This is not an Autobiography**

Bourdieu always used reflexive sociology as the core of his theoretical framework. I chose to use some chapters of his book *Raisons pratiques* (Bourdieu, 1994) to show what other authors

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