CRITIQUE AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

CRITICAL THEORY AND
SOCIAL SELF-UNDERSTANDING

ROBIN CELIKATES

Critique as Social Practice

Essex Studies in Contemporary Critical Theory

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Critique as Social Practice

Critical Theory and Social Self-Understanding

Robin Celikates

Translated by Naomi van Steenbergen

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Preface

In the past decades, the debate about the conditions of possibility of social critique has focussed largely on the question of normative criteria. The problem of how the norms, standards and values underlying particular forms of social critique might be justified theoretically has been at the forefront of nearly every discussion, as if this is the only controversial issue concerning critical social theory today. That this restriction in fact yields an extremely one-sided perspective in which a number of equally relevant questions are made invisible quickly becomes obvious as soon as one calls to mind the programmatic publications of the early years of the Institute for Social Research and the Frankfurt School. For in these publications, problems concerning normative justifications played a rather minor role, while almost all attention was devoted to the epistemological question of how the knowledge of the critical theorist relates to the pre-scientific judgement of ordinary members of society. Back then, the standards of critique hardly seemed to require further justification, since they were expected to reveal themselves more or less automatically in the course of an appropriate analysis of the historical process. The much more significant problem was that the theorist's critical assessment of the social conditions could not hope to meet with the agreement of those affected, in whose name it was made. The first generation of critical theory considered it its core task to develop an epistemological clarification of the standpoint from which any critique of social conditions is to be formulated – a critique that, clearly, would not immediately be shared by its addressees. The path that was thus paved for the development of theory led to both the critical treatment of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge and the rejection of the idea of a class consciousness given *a priori* (cf. Adorno 2003 [1953]; Horkheimer 1988 [1937]). In the more recent history of critical theory, questions of this kind hardly emerge any more, even though the problems have

remained the same. It seems as though the focus on the task of normative justification has concealed the fact that in the distance between theoretical critique and pre-theoretical beliefs there still lurks a problem that is difficult to solve. The value of the present book lies not least in the fact that it pulls these questions once more into the focus of critical social theory. What is to be negotiated in the following pages are the methodological problems that arise for any form of social critique from the largely undertheorised relation between observers and participants, theorists and addressees.

Nonetheless, the author of the present study, Robin Celikates, has been convinced from the start that there is little point in thinking through these problems once again on the basis of the old debates in the Institute for Social Research. These questions have long been discussed in other theoretical contexts as well, and in those contexts they have at times been approached with a significantly broader methodological apparatus and thus been lifted to an entirely new level of social-theoretical insight. In the face of the possible options, Celikates has, in the early stages of his research, made the exceptionally well-judged decision to take his cue from the more recent history of French social theory. In this field, the past decades have seen the development of an immensely fruitful discussion between Pierre Bourdieu and the social theorists who started as his students, the underlying theme of which was exactly this relation between sociological observation and social practice. The positions developed within this debate constitute the material for Robin Celikates's study. On the basis of a theoretically systematic literature review, he develops his own considerations, which ultimately go far beyond the field on which he draws. In this sense, two goals are skilfully intertwined and developed in the course of a single sustained argument: on the way towards a systematic answer to the question of how the relation between theoretical critique and everyday practice is to be understood, we are at the same time introduced to one of the most interesting chapters in the history of contemporary social theory.

In traditional methodological terms, it could be said that Robin Celikates's study follows a 'dialectical' argumentative schema. The starting point – the 'thesis', so to say – is Bourdieu's sociological work. Against the background of the question at hand, Bourdieu represents one of two poles in the spectrum of possible solutions. For Bourdieu comes close to putting the capacity for sociological critique in opposition to the attitudes of ordinary members of society – the latter being described as caught up in their particular perspectives, which are determined by their current positions and have turned into second nature. Celikates shows beautifully how this way of understanding the relation between critique and common sense essentially renders both sides incomprehensible: for the project of sociological observation and critique forfeits its methodological significance if it is no longer understood as the

explication of the intuitive everyday knowledge of participants, just as much as the latter's engagement in social practice becomes enigmatic if it fails to be understood as the exercise of critical capacities in the context of the performance of shared routines of agency. Celikates's first interim conclusion of his systematic history of theory therefore is that theoretical critique and the everyday performance of social practices always refer to each other – that, indeed, they are mutually constitutive. Any justifiable form of social critique must tie in with the existing critical consciousness of members of society, which, in turn, is continually stimulated and encouraged by the theoretically formulated insights of critique.

This argument paves the way for Robin Celikates to turn to the second stop on his argumentative journey, which in a way assumes the dialectical role of an 'antithesis'. It should be no surprise that this role is played by the moral sociology of Luc Boltanski, who, after all, emerged from Bourdieu's school himself. The reason for Boltanski to distance himself from his former teacher and colleagues was that they, to his mind, failed to give the reflexive structure of social practice proper consideration.[1] As Celikates convincingly shows, the point for Boltanski is precisely that there is no irreconcilable opposition between social action and critical reflection. Rather, any social practice always already, equiprimordially, contains forms of 'justification' and 'critique', since participants constantly face the need to mutually adjust their behaviour and thus question collectively presupposed ideas of order. According to this new conception of the nature of the everyday practice of members of society, social critique, too, acquires a fundamentally different function than the one ascribed to it by Bourdieu. Instead of judging social conditions from the 'all-knowing perspective' of a detached observer, it should place itself on an equal footing with the participants and descriptively reconstruct the latter's own judgements about existing conditions. Thus far, a comprehensive account of these oppositions within French social theory has been lacking. Here, it is provided, in an exemplary form indeed: not only are the positions of Bourdieu and Boltanski each developed in a balanced and meticulous manner, it is also the first time that the relation between them in its many Byzantine complexities is thoroughly brought to light.

In the dialectical structure of the book, however, Boltanski's theory could not assume the role of an 'antithesis' if it could not also be shown, from Robin Celikates's perspective, to have a number of serious imbalances and shortcomings. Celikates suspects that these lurk wherever Boltanski is seduced by his 'methodological egalitarianism' – the idea that participants and critical observers should in principle be treated as equals – to refrain from investigating socially conditioned differences in critical ability. On the view of the author, all social orders to this day have involved conditions that can lead to restrictions to or distortions of individuals' capacities for reflexive

detachment and judgement, so that it is highly misleading to assume a pre-existing equal distribution of critical ability. For Celikates, even after the 'pragmatic turn' that Luc Boltanski initiated with his work, there is a need for a theoretical form of critique that is more than a mere description of the critical activities of participants. For it is possible to bring to light and assess the social conditions that cause the differences in reflexive capacities on the first level, that of everyday practice, only on the basis of such 'second-order' reflection. This step brings us to the point in Robin Celikates's argumentation at which it starts to become clear what might, in our dialectical framework, be considered a 'synthesis': as the term already indicates, it would have to consist in returning once more to the critical impulse of Bourdieu's sociology of domination and reconciling it with Boltanski's basic pragmatic insights.

Following Hegel, however, Celikates is convinced that in order to clarify such a third position – one that both conciliates the other two and goes beyond them – it does not suffice to lean on the central components of the two inadequate positions so as to synthesise them; one must introduce yet another, not previously examined principle in order to explain how two complementary defects might be 'sublated' into a new standpoint. To this end, Robin Celikates uses, in an exceptionally original manner, the interpretation of psychoanalysis developed forty years ago by Jürgen Habermas in his book *Knowledge and Human Interests*. The idea of 'reconstruction' sketched there is to help explain how critique may move to a higher level in order to discern the social restrictions to which members of society, in the development and exercise of their critical capacities, are subject. It would be redundant to give a detailed account of the particular steps by which Celikates seeks to justify the programme of such a third, theoretically reformed form of critique; it will have to prove itself by facing the extremely challenging task it set for itself: to say something about the ways in which the reflexive operations of ordinary members of society are restricted, without in doing so betraying their critical capacities. The Institute for Social Research is fortunate to have published the German original of a study that ventures to tackle, with theoretical care and intellectual courage, this central problem for critical social theory.

Axel Honneth

Frankfurt am Main, April 2009

NOTE

1. On the debate concerning Boltanski's moral sociology, also see the special section in *WestEnd. Neue Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 2 (2008): 79–132.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Good sense is the best distributed thing in the world: [. . .] the power of judging well and of distinguishing the true from the false – which is what we properly call 'good sense' or 'reason' – is naturally equal in all men. (René Descartes)

All men are intellectuals. (Antonio Gramsci)

1. JUDGEMENTAL DOPES, REFLEXIVE AGENTS AND SOCIAL SCIENTISTS

We probably all know the problem from everyday life: criticise someone, and you may well find yourself accused of being a know-it-all. Normally, we assume that we ourselves know best what we do and why we do it – and most of all, what is good for us. When we are criticised, we justify ourselves. We articulate our self-understanding in terms of self-interpretations and self-descriptions. Of course, we do not take ourselves to be infallible in doing this; we admit that we sometimes miss things or succumb to one-sided perspectives. We even acknowledge that we might follow patterns of thought that are prone to distort our perceptions and judgements – of the situation, of others and indeed of ourselves – and correspondingly, we are quite willing to adopt the perspectives of others and to correct our interpretations and descriptions in reaction to theirs. The fact that we are able and willing to do so is part of our self-understanding as competent agents, which in these cases means: reflexive agents who are able and willing to critically distance themselves from themselves. If we are not willing to do this, we are rightly called 'incorrigible' or described as 'unable to take criticism'.

However, the reverse also exists: the case of the 'incorrigible critic'. Such a critic is unimpressed by our self-interpretations and self-descriptions. She believes that she can develop an understanding of our actions quite independently of our own self-understanding. She knows better, and the fact that we fail to recognise this only strengthens her criticism; to her, the fact that we insist that we know what we are doing counts as further evidence that we *do not*. Our willingness and ability to correct our self-understanding in reaction to the criticism of others strikes her as extremely limited. Correspondingly, she considers our self-ascribed reflexivity to be self-deception, and our attempts at justification hopeless *ex-post* rationalisations. The perspective she takes on our actions is not, according to her, open to us. Usually, though, we are left in the dark as to what grounds her claim to knowing better and what could justify it. For this reason, such a critic will hardly manage to reach her addressees; she, too, is 'incorrigible', and ultimately unable both to offer and to take criticism.

But what if this critic were able to refer to a form of knowledge to which she has access while we do not? Knowledge, say, of social forces that exist independently of our self-understanding and that influence our actions in ways that are almost imperceptible to us, yet for this very reason all the more effective? Would it, then, not be this critic's task to undermine our naive self-understanding as agents who know best what they do and why they do so and what is good for them – and to do so by bringing to light, by means of scientific methods that guarantee objectivity, the extent to which we are subject to forces that operate 'behind our backs' and elude our understanding? Are we in fact not reflexive agents at all, but rather *judgemental dopes*, as Harold Garfinkel (1984 [1967]: 67–73)[1] calls those who, in social theory, so often take the place of 'ordinary' agents, and who, because of their embeddedness in certain social practices, are incapable of distancing themselves from and reflecting on those practices? Are we but subject to the "illusion of reflexivity" (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron 2010 [1968]; EN 24)?[2]

Of course, both of these sketches paint a rather overdrawn and somewhat caricatural image of social science and of the idea of scientifically grounded social critique. The sharpness of this image, however, captures a particular aspect of the self-understanding of the social sciences and points to a methodological problem that we ought to take seriously. I shall provide a brief sketch of this in the Introduction and shall proceed by developing a detailed account of the problem of the relation of social-scientific observers to 'ordinary' agents viewed as judgemental dopes or as reflexive agents, with reference to a number of theoretical models.[3]

An understanding of critical social science that could be called 'orthodox' can be described as follows. Social science as a critical endeavour starts by

replacing one question with another: instead of asking why those who are 'oppressed, humiliated and disadvantaged' rebel in particular cases, we ought to ask why most of the time they do not only tolerate the status quo but in fact contribute to its reproduction, while taking it to be natural or even legitimate. Following Wilhelm Reich, "what has to be explained is not the fact that the man who is hungry steals or the fact that the man who is exploited strikes, but why the majority of those who are hungry *don't* steal and why the majority of those who are exploited *don't* strike" (Reich 2003 [1933]: 40; EN 19).[4] Since such behaviour so clearly seems to contradict their own interests, one may easily assume that the hungry and exploited (and obviously not only they) are mistaken about the actual situation and their true interests. Thomas Frank, for instance, asks this very question in his book *What's the Matter with Kansas?*: why do people in Kansas (and obviously not only those in Kansas) keep at their poorly paid jobs and vote every few years (again, we might add, in 2016), for a party whose policies consistently thwart their socio-economic interests?[5] Would they act this way if they were aware of their situation and interests? Why do these agents act in a way that is so clearly irrational?

In order to explain this, critical social theories often claim that agents do not know what they are doing since they are held captive by an ideology. To be held captive by an ideology means to have a necessary false consciousness (cf. for instance Adorno 2003 [1954]: 465; EN 115); that is, a consciousness that is first of all *false* (and not merely morally objectionable) and, second, for structural reasons, false with objective *necessity* (and not contingently or on the basis of some cognitive 'failure'). The notion of ideology itself implies that the ones subject to it do not realise their fate – indeed, it implies that the reproduction of the social order depends on the fact that individuals do not know what they are doing and that they are not aware of the way in which their thoughts and actions contribute to the perpetuation of this order (cf. Žižek 1989: 21, 28). Whoever can diagnose a set of convictions as ideological or a consciousness as false, will, for this reason, have knowledge that those under the spell of these convictions or this consciousness by definition do not have, and in their situation cannot have at all – for otherwise, their false consciousness would not be necessary after all. The ideology diagnosis indicates that agents, for structural reasons, do not know what they are doing. It seems that this diagnosis can only be made from an epistemologically privileged observer perspective, that is, from a standpoint beyond the ideological context. Those affected cannot take up this standpoint; the possibility to communicate with them seems to be blocked by insurmountable obstacles.[6]

This point already indicates why such a description, illuminating as it may seem initially, proves to be exceptionally problematic in its presuppositions and consequences. For the tendency always seems to be: "[I]deology is the thought of my adversary, the thought of the *other*. *He* does not know it, but *I*

do" (Ricœur 1986: 337; EN 248; cf. Thompson 1990: 5). As Terry Eagleton (2007 [1991]: 2) observes: "Ideology, like halitosis, is in this sense what the other person has".[7] According to this assessment, the discourse of ideology and false consciousness implies a deeply asymmetrical relation between the position of the critic, which is free from ideology and scientifically informed, and that of the others, *about* whom one speaks – those who are always objects of the critique of ideology, never addressees, let alone partners in a dialogue. These perspectives come apart and are strictly separated. While the other – which is the role in which 'ordinary' agents usually find themselves – is held captive by ideological delusions, the position of critique appears as the position of an observer located beyond ideology – grounded in a form of knowledge that the others do not and cannot have. This also holds for the critique of certain (say 'bourgeois') forms of knowledge as ideology – for such critique, too, is carried out in the name of a 'true' science that exposes the ideological character of what had thus far counted as knowledge. This variety of the critique of ideology is therefore essentially scientistic: based on a form of objective knowledge that is not accessible to those criticised.[8]

Such a strict separation and hierarchisation of perspectives also manifests in the conceptual repertoire of writings in the field: 'false consciousness', 'illusion', 'blindness' and 'distortion' characterise the inside of ideology, and thus the naive state of consciousness of those trapped within it. Their pitiful situation is then confronted with an 'unmasking' and 'debunking' critique, which, however, cannot be adequately received within the ideological context. The perspective of the critique of ideology owes its sober character to a presumably scientific understanding of what truly goes on in social reality. What does truly go on there is explained with rhetorical gestures to debunking and unmasking in reference to deep structures, hidden interests and power relations, which determine, behind the backs of the agents and invisibly to them, what they think and do – as if they were subject to a "natural law based on the unconsciousness of the participants" (Engels 1976 [1844]: 515; EN 434; cf., for instance, Marcuse 2002 [1964]: 18). Since their effects are 'based on the unconsciousness of the participants', only the social-scientific observer can recognise the social powers that determine the actions and thoughts of the judgemental dopes. This scientistic self-understanding has an indifference to the participant perspective built into it from the start. For if the participant perspective is understood as ideologically blind, the observer perspective, grounded in scientific insight, must break with it.

The sharp separation of these perspectives, which seems to be constitutive for the orthodox varieties of the critique of ideology and of critical social science, has been confronted with a number of normative, political, methodological and empirical objections, which I shall discuss in more detail at the end of part I. There is, however, a particular tension between

the project of a critical social science that locates the foundation of critique in objective scientific knowledge, and the trends in social theory and social philosophy that are often captured under the headings 'interpretive' and 'pragmatic turn'. Behind these terms lies the idea that social phenomena cannot be understood solely from an 'objective' outside perspective, since the practices, interpretations and self-understandings of agents are interwoven with these phenomena in a manner that can come into view only when the participant perspective – in particular the self-understanding of the agent and its articulation in self-interpretations – is understood as irreducible or even fundamental.[9] For this reason, interpretive and pragmatic approaches insist on the primacy of practice, the participant perspective and the self-understanding of agents, as opposed to the allegedly objective and scientifically grounded observer perspective, which lays claim to the privilege of detachment. To these approaches, the orthodox version of the critique of ideology seems to be driven by a 'hermeneutics of suspicion'[10] – an ultimately anti-hermeneutic attitude that is constantly looking for the reality beneath the surface, for the processes at play behind the agents' backs, which are concealed by their self-understanding and can therefore be detected only by the "oblique gaze of the sociologist" (Gadamer 1991 [1969]: 227).

These interpretive and pragmatic approaches, however, provoke the accusation that they merely duplicate what agents do and say anyway. Ultimately, the objection on the part of critical social science goes, this means abandoning any aspiration to be scientific and critical. Perhaps we will, in the end, better understand how agents understand themselves, but any form of critique that is not already available to them is condemned to silence. The interpretive and pragmatic approaches ignore the fact that the self-understanding of agents is often subject to systematic constraints. When agents systematically misunderstand themselves and their situations, scientific analysis hits a boundary, too, and the interpretive effort will have to be abandoned in favour of an explanation from the observer perspective. The fact that the development of the theory is so closely linked to the participant perspective seems to leave no room for critical distance and only extends the naiveté of the agents into the theory. These approaches thus forfeit the possibility of bringing actual social phenomena such as ideology and false consciousness to light at all.

And are there not 'happy slaves' and other forms of voluntary servitude that cannot be ignored by a critical social science?[11] Does this prime example of false consciousness not disprove the overly optimistic assumptions of the interpretive and pragmatic approaches? The 'happy slaves' and their modern reincarnations, textbook examples of ideological blindness, are supposed to have internalised their fate to such a degree that not only do they no longer fight it, they have reconciled themselves with it, and indeed experience it as happiness. This is a difficult case that can be diagnosed only from an

epistemically privileged standpoint, since "to the degree to which the slaves have been preconditioned to exist as slaves and to be content in that role, their liberation necessarily appears to come from without and from above" (Marcuse 2002 [1964]: 44). However, subjected to scrutiny this extreme case, referred to time and again in critical social theory, quickly turns out to be a myth, whose actual realisation is extremely implausible both historically and empirically. After all, no slaveholding society has managed to turn its slaves into happy slaves, to subject them so successfully to the view of the ruler that they entirely internalised that view, gave up all resistance and gladly accepted their fate.[12] With the breakdown of the myth of the 'happy slave', the critique of ideology loses the foundation for many of its favourite analogies. If even the extreme case of slavery cannot in fact be described as the myth suggests, as doing so conceals historical forms of critical consciousness and practices of resistance and critique, it certainly does not seem to lend itself as a metaphor for contemporary societies. Against this background, the self-understanding of certain forms of critical social science and social theory, which – in the light of the "atrophy of the mental organs" and the hegemony of the "happy consciousness" (ibid.: 82) that are allegedly typical for the 'happy slaves' of today – consider the only forms of reflection and critique that are still possible to be those "from without and from above", looks deeply problematic. In fact, the issues with it arise both for empirical and methodological and for normative reasons.

   The thesis I shall develop is a twofold one. Indeed, the interpretive and pragmatic approaches are right to reject the idea of a break between the objective standpoint of critique and the allegedly unreflected perspective of the agent – a conception that I shall discuss in part I of the book using the example of Pierre Bourdieu's model of *critical social science*. However, it certainly does not follow from this that we should abandon the project of developing a *critical theory*, since any critique that we might need is achieved by the agents in their everyday practices themselves – a conclusion suggested by a set of approaches that I shall discuss in part II in reference to *ethnomethodology* and the *sociology of critique*. In part III, therefore, I shall sketch a model of a critical theory 'after the pragmatic turn', and argue in favour of an understanding of critical social theory as social practice. The critique of ideology remains an essential element of this practice. Its methodological status, however, will be altered significantly in the course of my argument, since it will have to acknowledge as its foundation the reflexive capacities of the 'ordinary' agents evident in the everyday practices of justification and critique described by the sociology of critique – without, however, assigning the participant perspective an epistemic authority that would make it immune to criticism.

On the one hand, this reorientation of critical theory forces us to stop conceiving of theory as a critique of everyday practices that are strictly distinct from it – practices in which the agents – as in Plato's cave – are held captive by their unreflected routines. On the other hand, it will be necessary to sketch a conception of everyday practice and the reflexive capacities of agents that anchors the critical potential of theoretical detachment in this practice itself; that, indeed, shows this potential to be constitutive for practice. In this light, the conviction that we can be either observers or agents and that there cannot be any mediation between the two is no longer viable. For agents are capable of the very forms of detachment that the observer perspective of the social sciences all too often seems to wish to monopolise. In contrast to judgemental dopes, agents have the reflexive capacity to distance themselves, to adopt a different perspective and to judge, in order to "criticize, challenge institutions, argue with one another, or converge toward agreement" (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: 29; EN 15). The fact that they do all of these things is the insight that grounds the 'pragmatic turn'.

The three theoretical models that I shall discuss in parts I–III of the book have rather divergent views on agents and their abilities, and different analyses of the relation between social scientists and observers, on the one hand, and 'ordinary' agents, on the other.

The first model – the orthodox conception of a *critical social science* – is primarily motivated by the idea of epistemic asymmetry, and correspondingly demands a *break* between the self-understanding of the agent, which is described as pre-reflexive, naive and/or ideologically blind, and the critical and theoretically informed perspective of the social-scientific observer. According to this model, the principal task is to develop a critique, along with supporting *explanations*, of the social phenomena sketched above – in particular macro-social phenomena such as the reproduction of the social order.[13]

The second model – embodied in *ethnomethodology* and the *sociology of critique* – ties itself to the 'pragmatic turn' by proclaiming a fundamental *symmetry* between 'laypersons' and 'experts'. It considers its main task to be the *description* and *interpretation* of social phenomena especially at the micro-level, for instance of concrete situations of interaction and the practices that constitute them; practices that cannot be understood independently of the self-understanding of the agents involved.

The third model, finally – the model to which the title *Critique as Social Practice* refers – grants that agents themselves are capable of articulating and reflecting on their relation to themselves and to the world, and insists that any theory ought to tie in with everyday practices of justification and critique, rather than to take the historically rare and empirically implausible extreme of total ideological blindness as a starting point. At the same time, however,

it also tasks critical social theory with *analysing* and *criticising* the social conditions that thwart these reflexive capacities and the practices that correspond to them.[14] In this way, it attempts to avoid the dangers of paternalism as well as the contrasting danger of idealising existing social conditions and the reflexive capacities of agents.

2. CRITICAL THEORY AND THE PRAGMATIC TURN

The orthodox understanding of critical social science, which is expressed most clearly in the classical project of the critique of ideology, is characterised by a number of dogmas. Among these are:

- The idea of a critical social science that, thanks to its scientific method which allows for objective knowledge, can refrain from 'moralising' value judgements and that at its core is non-normative: the dogma of *scientism* and *objectivism*;[15]
- The assumption that while society – or more precisely, social practices, institutions and ideologies – is rife with contradictions, as a system of delusion it nevertheless constitutes a homogeneous totality that can be breached only by a critique grounded in science: the dogma of *totality*;[16]
- Closely connected with the assumption of totality is the "functionalist prejudice" (Joas and Knöbl 2004: 92; EN 57), according to which societies constitute practically closed and seamlessly integrated systems, in which every part – especially social practices, institutions and belief systems – has a particular function in the reproduction of the social whole. The explanatory task of the social sciences, then, primarily relates to the functional explanation of social phenomena, which cannot be grasped by their 'carriers': the dogma of *functionalism*;[17]
- Finally, the conviction that the critical impulse of social-scientific theory owes its existence to breaking with the perspective of the 'ordinary' agent and common sense, so that the relation between the (internal) participant perspective and the (external) observer perspective is characterised by an insurmountable epistemic asymmetry: the dogma of the *break* and *asymmetry*.

These four dogmas have been subjected to substantial criticism, mostly from phenomenological, hermeneutic and pragmatist quarters.[18] Nonetheless, they have persisted – albeit in weaker forms – until today. On the view defended here, the dogma of scientism and objectivism is resisted by emphasising the normative structure of social practices of critique and of the formation of sociological theory. Against the dogma of totality, I emphasise the

plurality and heterogeneity of the social world, in particular the contexts of action and justification in which agents operate day in, day out. Against the dogma of functionalism I place a weaker, more local functionalism, which does not focus on the reproduction of the social order as a whole, but on the stabilisation of *certain* institutions, practices and interpretive frameworks (whose meaning is not, however, exhausted by a local functional explanation). Against the dogma of the break and asymmetry, I stress the symmetry between social-scientific 'experts' and 'laypersons' or 'ordinary' agents.

Even when today, only very few representatives of critical social science and social theory assume – as Bourdieu does in certain respects – that their critical position can be justified purely scientifically and thus by means of a non-normative vocabulary, and that societies can be understood as totalities and that they should be analysed in a functionalistic manner, the assumption of a structural asymmetry and a necessary break between the observer and participant perspectives remains influential. This is hardly surprising, taking into account that the assumption is based on deeply rooted action-theoretical convictions, such as the view that our primary mode of action is unconscious routine action. The thesis that everyday action takes place in "inarticulate half-consciousness or actual unconsciousness" (Weber 1980 [1921/1922]: 10; EN 21) and the corresponding stereotypical description of everyday life as a rigid framework of blind habits and unrecognised compulsions are based on a whole range of dichotomies, of which the ones between practice and reflection and the natural and the scientific attitude are merely the most prevalent.[19] Only against the background of an understanding of everyday practice as essentially pre-reflexive and its participants as correspondingly blinkered will the objectivity of sociological knowledge appear as the sole basis on which radical detachment and critical authority become possible.

While the epistemological question raised by these foundational problems – that of the methodological status of critical social theories and their relation to practice – still played a central (if not necessarily productive) role in, for instance, the 'positivism dispute' and the debate on 'hermeneutics versus the critique of ideology', it has lately been pushed into the background by the dominance of the debate on the normative standards of critique.[20] The question from which standpoint a certain critique is formulated and what sort of relation it has to its addressees, however, is by no means identical to the question regarding its normative foundations. The suppression of the former by the latter threatens to conceal the problematic assumption of an asymmetry between critics of ideology and the ideologically blind, between social theorists and 'ordinary' agents. The question concerning normative foundations is clearly of central importance, but it cannot replace the at least equally central question – one even more important for the self-understanding of, say, early critical theory – of how the relation between theory and practice

or between theorists and their addressees should be understood, if it is not to be construed in line with the epistemological mainstream dogma that the self-understanding of agents is irrelevant for the empirical verification of the theory and only complicates the data.

   Besides its emancipatory orientation, critical theory also claims a double reflexivity: only reflection on the context in which a theory emerged and in which is used – a twofold dependency of theory on practice – enables an adequate understanding of the practical character of theory itself, and thus a break with the dogma of scientism and objectivism. The reflection on its own methodological status and its self-understanding as part of social practice are supposed to distinguish critical theory from "traditional theories", for "in contrast to what is the case for empirical-analytical theories, the metatheory of method is part of critical theory itself" (Wellmer 1977 [1969]: 13).[21]

   The dogma of asymmetry and of a necessary break between the participant and the observer perspective, which partly persists in certain forms of critical theory, brings critical theory unfavourably close to the other dogmas of the orthodox model of critical social science; a model that shares fundamental features with 'traditional' understandings of theory and science, and in that sense is part of the "orthodox consensus to see human behaviour as the result of forces that actors neither control nor comprehend" (Giddens 1984: xvi).[22] To add to this already unfavourable effect, the dogma of asymmetry and of the break also perpetuates the quasi-Platonic story of the cognitive bondage of everyday understanding and its liberation by theory – a story that is also politically problematic, and that is in tension with the ideal of self-emancipation claimed by the theory.[23]

   A critical theory that does away with this dogma and thus liberates itself from the remains of the orthodox model will have to understand itself as a theory of critical practice. Indeed, it is a theory of critical practice in a twofold sense: it aligns itself with social practices of critique and puts itself at their service. That is, its aim is to enable and further these practices – even when it is precisely 'uncritical' practices that constitute its starting point. As I shall show in part III, one of the fundamental tasks of critical theory is to provide theoretical and empirical analyses of the social conditions that prevent agents from taking part in social practices of critique by obstructing the development or exercise of their reflexive capacities. In order to do this task justice, and to distinguish itself, moreover, from the purely normative forms of social critique prevalent today, critical theory must retain its characteristic interdisciplinary connection between philosophy and the social sciences. Correspondingly, it will have to rely on a specific connection between philosophical reflection and empirical social research, on the sociological analysis of developments in society and their basis in the real-life

experiences and social struggles of agents. While philosophy is a necessary part of any critical social theory – even if it were merely for its theoretical self-reflection and its clarification of the normative foundations of critique – the social obstacles to everyday practices of critique and the reflexive capacities employed in these practices can ultimately be revealed and fed back into the critique of agents only by an empirical analysis – for instance of social psychology – that is informed by social theory and conducted by the individual social sciences. For this reason, critical theory is not primarily concerned with providing a substantive normative critique of some particular self-understanding that has been exposed as false, but rather with pointing out the sorts of restrictions to reflexive capacities that lead to distortions in the process of self-understanding.[24]

In part III of this book, I will therefore argue in favour of a model of critical theory that is distinct both from forms of external criticism – whether grounded, as is the case with Bourdieu, in objective sociological findings, or, as in the case of constructivist approaches, in moral philosophy – and from forms of internal criticism, such as those advocated in the wake of the interpretive and pragmatic turn. That this form of critique can be called reconstructive is due to its constitutive reference to the experiences, self-interpretations and practices of agents. Still, these are not accepted simply as they are, as lines in the sand that may not be crossed by critique. After all, we do not assume that astrology enthusiasts, business students or orthodox critics of ideology themselves necessarily have the best understanding of what they are engaged in. For this reason, it may seem pointless to insist that in order to understand the behaviour of, say, astrologists, business students or orthodox critics of ideology, social science analyses ought to be based on the self-descriptions of these agents. However, sociology can hardly come to an adequate understanding of the practices of these agents when it excludes their self-interpretations from the domain of explanantia as irrelevant, and only understands them as explananda. Taking the self-interpretations of agents seriously and considering them "incorrigible" are two very different methodological attitudes (cf. Taylor 1985c [1981]: 123–27).

While the dependence on practices and on the real-life "critical activity" of social actors "which has society itself for its object" (Horkheimer 1988 [1937]: 180f; EN 206; cf. ibid.: 203; EN 229) has always been part of the way in which critical theory positions itself methodologically, it cannot be denied that there is a parallel tendency to neglect social practices of justification and critique. This tendency can be found in both traditional and current forms of critical theory and is partly due to the hidden influence of the four dogmas mentioned earlier – above all, without a doubt, the prevailing assumption of an asymmetry between the theoretically informed (and impartial) perspective

of the observer and the naive (and excessively partial) participant perspective, along with the corresponding assumption of the necessity of a break with the self-understanding of agents.[25]

   If, in contrast, we understand critical social theory itself as a social practice, placing it – regarding the contexts of its emergence and use, as well as its subject matter – in a constitutive relation to the social practices of justification and critique and the reflexive capacities of agents that are expressed in these practices, then the dogma of asymmetry and of the break loses its appeal and can be recognised as a relic of a traditional understanding of theory. Because of its explicit relation to practice, critical theory in particular should understand itself as a voice within the context of social self-interpretation. In this context, the aim of a better self-understanding of agents can only be achieved when we speak *with* them, not merely *about* or *on behalf of* them. This excludes the paternalistic objectivation of agents just as much as the denial of their reflexivity and agency. Only the dismissal of the "myth of social science" can reveal sociology and social theory as "a form of social self-understanding or self-interpretation" (Bellah et al. 2008 [1985]: 297, 301). In order to achieve this, critical theory has to shake off a false understanding of the participant perspective, a correspondingly false understanding of the observer perspective and, connected to both of these, a false understanding of its subject matter. First and foremost, however, it will have to recognise its addressees as equal partners in a dialogical struggle for appropriate interpretations – partners that are capable of assuming the perspective taken by critical theory (cf. Bohman 2003). In part III of this book, I shall discuss why this reorientation is not in tension with critical theory's aspiration to be critical.

3. THE PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE – PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

Neither the previous sections of this Introduction nor the main parts of the book should give rise to the impression that the task of the philosophy of social science is to peer from its ivory tower at the social sciences and explain to them what they are actually doing or what they could be doing better. The philosophy of social science is not an usher, but an interpreter: it does not prescribe to the individual social sciences how they are to conduct their business, but it certainly can contribute to a more accurate idea of how they proceed and of the conditions and constraints that underlie those procedures in practice.[26] Its task is therefore primarily to make individual social sciences aware of the preconditions and implications of methodological decisions, which are often made implicitly. Becoming aware of these decisions, their conditions and their implications does, however, entail recognising that they are

contested and not without alternatives. In this sense, the philosophy of social science certainly does have a critical role to play.[27] The (implicit or explicit) decision for one of the three models distinguished above and discussed in the three main parts of this book, for instance, has considerable consequences for the self-understanding of the social sciences, as well as for their methods and aims. Although the question of how exactly the relation between the social-scientific observer and 'ordinary' agents should be understood is seldom asked explicitly (let alone decided), it is constantly answered. All research in the social sciences and social theory in fact implies a decision about this question. Under these circumstances, the philosophy of social science can point out the implications of the decision for a particular model and lay out the arguments in favour of one or against another.

Although philosophy should thus thoroughly restrain itself in relation to the individual social sciences, it can hardly be denied that any false self-understanding compromises the corresponding research practice, and that a critique of such a false self-understanding aims at a change in the relevant research practice. How exactly such a change will turn out cannot, however, be anticipated from a meta-theoretical perspective, but must be negotiated within the scientific practice itself. Moreover, the philosophy of social science can draw on the meta-theoretical debates within the social sciences, in which most of the relevant positions and arguments are already present – just like in the case of critical theory and everyday practices of critique, the former finds its starting point and its material in the latter. Its reflexive and thoroughly critical perspective ought therefore not to come 'from without and from above', but is anchored in its 'subject matter' itself and will have to prove itself in dialogue with it.[28]

The present study may initially strike many philosophers as containing too little philosophy and too much social theory, while many social scientists may find too little social science in it and too much philosophy. On second thought, however, both should realise how fundamental the questions of the philosophy of social science are for both philosophy and the social sciences. This view is in line with the central thesis of the interconnectedness of philosophy and the social sciences that has traditionally been central to critical theory: the former can only gain substance through its connection to the latter; the latter can only advance their meta-theoretical self-reflection in relation to the former.

4. THREE MODELS OF CRITIQUE

The questions raised in this Introduction – about the relation between the participant and the observer perspective and about the relevance of the self-understanding of agents for theory formation and of the social practices of

critique for critical theory – will be addressed in the three main parts of the book in reference to the three theoretical models sketched above.

In part I, I shall discuss the orthodox model of a critical social science grounded in objective scientific knowledge, using Pierre Bourdieu's social theory as an example. Why Bourdieu? Such a choice may seem surprising, since Bourdieu is known as a representative of a reflexive, emphatically non-positivistic sociology that leaves the traditional dichotomies between objectivism and subjectivism behind and formulates an alternative, grounded in practice theory, to the opposition between structure- and agency-based theories. Precisely for this reason, though, Bourdieu's theory can serve as an example revealing that the influence of the model of the break extends beyond the more narrowly scientific forms of social science and the critique of ideology.

In part II of the book, I shall reconstruct a radical alternative to the model of the break that rests on the assumption of a symmetry between the participant and the observer perspective. There are no fundamental differences between 'laypersons' and 'experts'; it is the 'ordinary' agents who have the relevant knowledge. In its purest form, this model is advocated by ethnomethodology, in particular by its founder Harold Garfinkel. Yet it also influences an important strand of French social theory after Bourdieu, encompassing both Bruno Latour's actor-network theory and Luc Boltanski's sociology of critique. This model is critical especially in its rejection of potentially elitist and paternalistic claims to knowledge and exclusivity. Its primary contribution lies in re-establishing a focus on the everyday practices of justification and critique that the first model allows to disappear behind the theorem of the constitutive misrecognition of social reality.

However, the second model too is confronted with a problem that cannot be solved within its own framework. While the first model detects, at the macro-level, social structures that necessarily operate behind the agents' backs and influence their actions and thoughts, the counter-model switches to the micro-level and describes the situated practices of justification and critique in which 'ordinary' agents exercise their reflective abilities. Theoretically, however, this conceals the possibility that certain social conditions can hinder the exercise or even the development of reflexive capacities, and that the analysis will in such a case have to change to the meso-level. The concern for the reflective capacities of agents is thus joined by a (theoretical and practical) interest in the social conditions under which the actual practices of justification and critique take place (or fail to do so).

In part III of the book, I shall take this problematic constellation as a starting point for a 'post-pragmatic' understanding of critical theory. My guiding thesis – that certain social conditions may lead to agents being hindered in the development or exercise of their reflective capacities – should be strictly

distinguished from the thesis that forms the foundation of the first model: that for structural reasons (that is, for reasons that have to do with the structure of practice as such), agents stand in a necessarily pre-reflective and blinkered relation to their own agency, as well as to the social context of their actions. My argument in this part will focus on the methodological question which form critical theory should take after the pragmatic turn – that is, after the insights with which the second model confronts the first.

Although in the individual parts of the book I shall take my start from particular theoretical standpoints – in the first from the critical social science of Bourdieu, in the second from ethnomethodology and the subsequent sociology of critique and in the third from critical theory, particularly as it has developed in the context of the Frankfurt School – I do not intend to develop a comprehensive overview or comparison of these positions. Rather, they are to serve as exemplars of the three models I distinguish, which all give very different and paradigmatic answers to one of the most fundamental questions in the philosophy of social science: what is the role of the reflective capacities of agents and the social practices of critique for those forms social theory we think of as critical? The systematic aim of the present study consists in developing a model of critical social theory that understands this theory as a social practice – one that does not presuppose a privileged position, and that proceeds not in breaking with the social practices of self-interpretation and critique, but in aligning itself with them.

NOTES

1. References throughout the book are to the works in the original languages (including page numbers where possible), followed by 'EN' for English translations where appropriate. See the bibliography for full details.

2. The point here is not that the social sciences possess additional information that they simply convey to agents, or that agents make mistakes that can be corrected by the social sciences (both is often the case, as should be acknowledged by any reflexive agent). Rather, the social sciences claim to occupy a perspective on practice that is fundamentally unavailable to agents. This marks the essential difference to the forms of criticism we know from everyday life. Of these forms, it is hardly ever claimed that they follow from a standpoint that is fundamentally inaccessible to the addressee; indeed, criticism is usually accompanied by a plea to take over the alternative standpoint.

3. Of course, ultimately the point is not to separate two distinct groups of agents. In everyday life, sociological observers too usually do not adopt the scientific attitude, but take up the 'natural' one. The identification of these attitudes with particular groups of agents is, however, suggested by the vocabulary of the critique of ideology, and creeps into many of these approaches *nolens volens*.

4. Cf. the excellent introduction in Rosen (1996). The considerations of the subsequent sections elaborate on Celikates (2006a).

5. Cf. Frank (2005), where on the very first page he writes: "How could so many people get it so wrong? [. . . is,] in many ways, the preeminent question of our times. People getting their fundamental interests wrong is what American political life is all about. This species of derangement is the bedrock of our civic order; it is the foundation on which all else rests". It should be noted, though, that the answer Frank provides has much to do with political strategies and agenda-setting (abortion, school prayers, etc.), and less with 'necessary false consciousness' in a narrower sense.

6. The critique of ideology itself has trouble explaining what exactly is meant by 'necessity' and 'inability' here. For the fact that agents are unable to form a certain consciousness of their practice can mean neither that they are unable to do so for 'logical' reasons, nor that they merely lack information. Rather, they must be prevented by obstacles of a structural kind.

7. Also see the criticism of the "epistemological self-righteousness" of certain forms of the critique of ideology in MacIntyre (1973).

8. For a non-scientistic form of the critique of ideology, cf. Jaeggi (2009).

9. Cf., for instance, Bohman, Hiley and Shusterman (1991); Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina and Savigny (2001); Dosse (1997 [1995]) and Taylor (1985b [1981]). In the Anglo-American debate, the methodological significance of the pragmatic turn is emphasised for critical social theory, too; cf. Bohman and Rehg (2001). The fact that the pragmatic turn is not identical to Habermas's turn towards formal and universal pragmatics will be discussed in part III, section 4.2. In what follows, I shall not understand the pragmatic turn primarily as a turn towards pragmatism (which, while breaking with the 'observer model of knowledge', still attempts to take a naturalistic perspective on society), but rather as the view – defended, of course, also within pragmatism – that practices of the relevant agents should form the starting point of a theory, and that any theory must itself be understood as a form of practice.

10. Cf. Ricœur (1965, Book I, chapter 2.3): 'L'interprétation comme exercice du soupçon' ('Interpretation as exercise of suspicion'); also cf. Ricœur (1995 [1969]: 148–51) and Geertz (2000 [1964]: 210).

11. Étienne de La Boétie's *Servitude volontaire* (1549) already recognised the foundations of 'voluntary servitude', which becomes second nature to people. He identified these foundations in the habituation of the naive masses, its ideological underpinning, and the role of those subjected in their own subjection. His only hope was a small elite of freedom-loving spirits. In this way, he shaped two essential topoi of critical social science (which can of course partly be traced back much further, indeed to Plato; cf. Rosen 1996).

12. This is shown by Patterson's impressive study (1982: 97, 100, 338); for a similar empirical objection to this model and many of its versions based on the critique of ideology, see part I, section 4.4. At worst, the critically intended discourse about the 'happy slave' adopts the viewpoint of former slaveholders (who would be their contemporary equivalent?), who also claimed that the slaves had no objections to the way in which they were treated.

13. This model shares the primacy of explanation with the 'naturalism' that is mainstream in the social sciences. According to this naturalism, the task of all

sciences is to formulate general and empirically verifiable (or falsifiable) laws that allow explanations and predictions not only of natural, but also of social phenomena (and, correspondingly, rational control over them).

14. The methodological debates on explanation, understanding and critique as alternative core tasks of the social sciences have shown that a strict separation between these is misleading and unproductive, and that any convincing sociological approach will have to combine all three aspects in a way that is tailored to the subject matter at hand. The distinction between these three alternatives may nevertheless be useful as a heuristic tool, for, doubtlessly, some approaches will emphasise explanation (our first model), others interpretation (the second model) and yet others critique (the third model), even when they do not exclude, but indeed thoroughly involve, the other two aspects.

15. On this "myth of the critique of ideology", cf. Leist (1986).

16. Cf. Jay (1984). Bühn (1999: 154), too, argues in favour of a "lean" model of critical theory that should refrain from claiming to have grasped "social totality" and should be aware of its own partiality (and thus its need to be supplemented).

17. On the difficulties of a functionalist perspective in the context of critical theory, cf. Henning (2006).

18. Cf., for instance, Giddens (1993 [1976]: chapter 1); Reckwitz (2012 [2000]: chapter 6), plus the literature referred to in endnote 9 above.

19. According to Edmund Husserl (1980 [1913]: 50–56; EN 56–60), for instance, the "natural attitude" that is pre-theoretical, purely practical and unaware of its own conditionality is the attitude of "naturally living about" [*Einstellung des natürlichen Dahinlebens*] – an attitude that needs to be "put out of action", "turned off", "bracketed" by the "phenomenological attitude" of the uninvolved observer, which is purely theoretically motivated. The phenomenological social theory of Alfred Schütz, who follows Husserl, is also shaped by these dichotomies. In part I, section 3.2, I show that this way of thinking is central for Bourdieu as well.

20. Cf. Habermas (1987 [1981]: 500; EN 374); Cooke (2006); for an overview of the problem and some attempts at solving it Finlayson (2009). For a critique of this lopsided focus, cf., for instance, Bühn (1999: 10f).

21. Wellmer adds: "The unity of theory and metatheory is nothing but a different expression of the unity of theory and practice".

22. Besides Talcott Parsons's systems theory, we can include other forms of functionalism, such as Marxist and structuralist theories, among this 'orthodox consensus' too.

23. For that reason, Marxist theory is already permeated by an internal tension between the ideal of proletarian self-emancipation and the liberation of the worker from the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie, which, it seems, can only be achieved from without. Cf. Mills (1990) and part III, sections 6.2 and 6.3.

24. In this translation, 'self-understanding' is used for both 'Selbstverständnis' and 'Selbstverständigung', where the latter denotes the process by which agents arrive at, renegotiate, contest and accept a self-understanding.

25. See the debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth (2003) on the ways in which theory may connect with or detach itself from the social struggles for recognition; for instance, Honneth's observations at pp. 136–39 (EN 114–17).

26. Cf., with a slightly different focus, Habermas (1983).

27. For a similar characterisation of the task of the philosophy of social science, cf. Rosenberg (2008 [1988]: 24). Of course, there are numerous social sciences which differ from each other significantly. This study will focus primarily on sociology, which in its theoretical and methodological considerations has proven itself exceptionally open to philosophy in general and the philosophy of social science in particular. The latter, in turn, tend to treat the fundamental problems of sociology as exemplary for the social sciences as a whole.

28. The critique of a monistic theory of science that, in the name of scientific unity, propagates that the sciences should all follow the methods of the natural sciences, emerges largely from the social sciences themselves. The assumption that the social sciences, just like the natural sciences, (should) formulate hypotheses that describe general regularities and can be verified or falsified on the basis of data is still prevalent, especially among empirical social scientists. Even so, it is met with great scepticism in the meta-theoretical self-reflection of the social sciences.

'I See Something You Don't See': The Model of the Break

What is the relation between the observer perspective and the participant perspective? And what is the relevance of the self-understanding of 'ordinary' agents for the development of social theory? The first of the three models, which I shall discuss in part I of the book, offers the following answer: agents are involved in practices in a way that renders reflexive and critical detachment impossible and forces agents into a structurally pre-reflexive and naive relation to the conditions of their agency. In order to liberate itself from the constraints of the participant perspective, social science must break with it and adopt an observer perspective, which depends on the self-understanding and the self-descriptions of 'ordinary' agents neither for its substance nor to test its methodological validity. On the basis of this fundamental methodological conviction, I describe this position as the model of the break. What exactly, though, does the break consist in? The image of the break should primarily be understood in an epistemological and methodological fashion and refers to a radical discontinuity between immediate everyday consciousness, common sense and the participant perspective, on the one hand, and the social science perspective, on the other. In examining Pierre Bourdieu's conception of a critical social science and its methodological foundations, the goal of part I is to develop a critique of the idea that the critical potential of social theory can only be established by breaking with the perspective of the agent. As I shall show in the subsequent steps of the argument in parts II and III, such a break is neither possible nor necessary and fails to exploit the critical potential of everyday practices – practices with which a critical social theory must align itself.

   The idea that a scientific, detached and critical perspective on society can be developed only by clearly delimiting it from the self-interpretations of agents is connected to a particular understanding of social science, which,

because of its dominance, I have in the Introduction described as 'orthodox'. The dogma of the break that forms the foundation of this model is as old as sociology itself. It is particularly explicit in Emile Durkheim's methodological writings, which laid the foundations for a tradition that still continues to shape sociology's self-understanding as a discipline, and that underlies Bourdieu's conception of a critical social science as well.

For this reason, I shall first sketch Durkheim's own attempt at a strict demarcation of the scientific nature of sociology from common sense, and show how this way of thinking is still influential today (section 1). Subsequently, I shall reconstruct Bourdieu's social theory as an exemplary case of the model of the break, with particular attention to the relation between the internalised habitus and distancing reflection. In doing so, I shall show that Bourdieu's basic assumptions concerning practice are intimately connected with the methodological thesis of the break and the epistemic privileging of the observer perspective (sections 2 and 3). In methodological and action-theoretical terms, Bourdieu's theory reveals a structuralist and objectivist bias that obscures the reflexive capacities of agents and entrenches the sociological observer as the sole instance of reflection, theoretical detachment and critique. This leads to a range of normative, political, methodological and empirical problems, all of which I shall discuss by way of conclusion (section 4).[1]

1. SOCIOLOGY AS A SCIENCE: DURKHEIM AND HIS LEGACY

The project of the meta-theoretical grounding of sociology as an autonomous discipline that can also be considered an exact science on the model of the natural sciences is initiated by none other than Auguste Comte, the scholar who gave sociology its name. Despite considerable differences between the two thinkers, Emile Durkheim immediately joins this intellectual project, and divides it into two parts. The first is the demarcation of the subject matter: what distinguishes the domain of the social from that of the natural, or the physical, and from that of the mental, or the psychological? The second is the development of a methodology adequate to this subject matter: which rules should knowledge of the social follow in order to count as scientific?

Durkheim's answers to the question concerning the *what* – that is, the subject matter – as well as the *how* – that is, the appropriate method for the new science – can be found in a succinct form in *The Rules of Sociological Method* of 1894 (Durkheim 2002 [1894]). While the two answers are related, I shall focus on Durkheim's methodological remarks, since these are far more

important for understanding the model of the break than his theses on social ontology.

First, however, a brief note on Durkheim's answer to the first question. The subject matter of sociology is the class of facts that Durkheim identifies as social facts (*faits sociaux*). Although these *faits sociaux* should be distinguished from the material objects that constitute the subject matter of physics, they are no less real. Their specific reality is characterised by the following properties, elaborated in the first chapter of the *Rules*: social facts are "external" to individual agents (that is, they are not innate, but acquired, and "imposed" by society); they exert social and moral pressure on individuals (which, however, only becomes visible in the case of non-conformist behaviour);[2] they constitute general characteristics of the society at hand (rather than individual characteristics that are then aggregated into a picture of the whole) and they are independent from individual actions and agents (money as a payment method, for instance, exists quite independently of any concrete payments and economic agents).[3] That social facts are "like things" means, most importantly, that they exist independently of the consciousness of agents, and that they should be treated by the social scientist as "hard" and "bare" facts. They leave no room for alternative interpretations, and thus provide the only secure basis for sociological explanations.

Since social facts – a classic 'Durkheimian' example might be the prevailing sexual morals of a society, or its suicide rates – can be reduced to neither physical nor mental phenomena, and thus can be grasped neither by the natural sciences nor by psychology, Durkheim thinks to have found in them the subject matter that necessitates sociology as an autonomous science. Yet such a science will also need specific methods in order to reach scientific knowledge of its subject matter. It is decisive for Durkheim's method that he claims to establish sociology as a science in a strict sense, which for him means a science on a par with the natural sciences. Since social facts do not depend on individual actions or the self-understanding of agents, they cannot be grasped by reconstructing, describing or interpreting these actions and self-understandings. Instead, they can be apprehended only by way of a quantitative approach that treats regularities like natural laws, describing and explaining them without falling back on a vocabulary of intentionality and normativity. Sociology, then, is called to "take on the esoteric character which befits all science" (144; EN 114). In his naturalist understanding of sociology as a positive science, Durkheim, despite all differences, aligns himself with Comte, according to whom sociology, as "social physics", is tasked with deducing prognoses from the scientific analysis of social facts and their regularities, and in doing so preparing a solid basis for activities such as political action.[4]

1.1 Science versus Common Sense

Durkheim's answer to the question of the methodology appropriate to the subject matter, that is, of the rules that must be followed to acquire a scientific knowledge of the social, again comes in two parts. He distinguishes rules for the *observation* of social facts from those that should govern their *explanation*. The first set of rules is of far greater importance to my question and shall therefore be my sole focus here. It comprises the following rules, discussed by Durkheim in the second chapter of his book:

- Given their particular character described above, social facts are to be thought of as *things* (*choses*) (15; EN 29); they are data (literally, in fact: things that are given), which constitute the subject matter of science (27; EN 34).
- Scientific knowledge requires the systematic "elimination" of all prejudices, and as such presupposes a break with anything that shapes ordinary consciousness or is taken to be self-evident in it (31; EN 43).
- The subject matter of any scientific analysis must always be defined precisely (34; EN 41).
- Science must break with the subjectivity of the agent's experience and achieve an objective representation of social facts, independently of their individual manifestations (43f; EN 47f).

While Durkheim insists that these rules are interconnected, the second and fourth rules are particularly decisive for the specifically Durkheimian conception of sociology as a social science. They demand a break with ordinary consciousness, as well as the systematic elimination of the participant perspective and the self-understanding of agents. Accordingly, immediately at the start of the *Rules*, in the preface to the first edition, Durkheim emphasises that sociology, as a science, can only establish itself *in opposition to* common sense:

> If a science of societies exists, one must certainly not expect it to consist of a mere paraphrase of traditional prejudices. It should rather cause us to see things in a different way from the ordinary man, for the purpose of any science is to make discoveries, and all such discoveries more or less upset accepted opinions. Thus unless in sociology one ascribes to common sense (*sens commun*) an authority that it has lost for a long time in the other sciences – and it is not clear whence that may be derived – the scholar must determinedly resolve not to be intimidated by the results to which his investigations may lead. (vii; EN 3)

According to this view, common sense in its "customary naïveté" (viii; EN 4) produces folk representations, which, as theorist and historian of science Gaston Bachelard puts it, science can only treat as "epistemological

obstacles", "for the representations that we have been able to make of them [i.e. the facts] in the course of our lives, since they have been made without method and uncritically, lack any scientific value and must be discarded" (xiii; EN 8).[5]

Like a researcher cutting his way through an untrodden jungle, "as the sociologist penetrates into the social world, he should be conscious that he is penetrating into the unknown" (xiv; EN 9). Obviously, in the case of a study of one's own society this consciousness is harder to cultivate than when investigating exotic nature or 'foreign peoples' – a context in which the impression of instantaneous understanding (an impression that is fatal for the scientific attitude) does not impose itself. Even the sociologist is not immune to common sense and therefore not immune to the danger of becoming the "victim of an illusion" (7; EN 22). This makes it all the more important, Durkheim argues, to strictly separate science from common experience and popular notions.

Elucidating the first rule, which calls for treating social facts as things, Durkheim writes:

> At the moment when a new order of phenomena becomes the object of a science they are already represented in the mind, not only through sense perceptions, but also by some kind of crudely formed concepts. [. . .] But, because these notions are closer to us and more within our mental grasp than the realities to which they correspond, we naturally tend to substitute them for the realities, concentrating our speculations upon them. [. . .] These notions or concepts – however they are designated – are of course not legitimate surrogates for things. The products of common experience, their main purpose is to attune our actions to the surround-ing world; they are formed by and for experience. (15f; EN 29)

The practice-bound notions of folk understanding "are as a veil interposed between the things and ourselves, concealing them from us even more effectively because we believe it to be more transparent" (16; EN 30). With Francis Bacon, Durkheim understands them as "*notiones vulgares* or *prae-notiones*", as "*idola*, which, resembling ghost-like creatures, distort the true appearance of things, but which we nevertheless mistake for the things them-selves" (17f; EN 31).

The social sciences are confronted with this problem in a much more pressing fashion than the natural sciences, since they are constantly tempted to reproduce common sense notions at a second, allegedly scientific level, lifting them to the rank of insights: "Men did not wait on the coming of social science to have ideas about law, morality, the family, the state or soci-ety itself, for such ideas were indispensable to their lives. It is above all in sociology that these preconceptions, to employ again Bacon's expression, are capable of holding sway over the mind, substituting themselves for things" (18; EN 31).

Similarly to the natural sciences, which owe their progress to their liberation from vulgar conceptions of, for instance, space, time and velocity, the social sciences had to break free from the claws of ordinary consciousness (all the more powerful because they did not feel restrictive) in order to achieve true scientific knowledge. Sociology's task was the analysis of the deeper causes of social behaviour that were lost on ordinary consciousness because of its naiveté and its thoroughly practical character – a task that called for knowledge to be rigorously guided by scientific rules.[6]

The demand of the second rule, that "one must systematically discard all preconceptions", is one that Durkheim considers the "basis of all scientific method" (31; EN 39). Both in defining his subject matter and in providing "proofs" and "evidence", the sociologist may not avail himself of the terminology of ordinary language, which is adapted to the wholly unscientific needs of practical affairs. Moreover, he "must free himself from those fallacious notions which hold sway over the mind of the ordinary person, shaking off, once and for all, the yoke of those empirical categories that long habit often makes tyrannical" (32; EN 39).

Durkheim's remarks ultimately come down to the fundamental demand that sociology break clearly with the ideas, concepts and judgements of everyday consciousness, as well as with the self-understanding of the agents constituted by them. Durkheim realises that this demand is, in the first instance, entirely negative: "It teaches the sociologist to escape from the dominance of commonly held notions and to direct his attention to the facts" (34; EN 41). This negative step, however, is the precondition for all further steps, for instance for the positive task of developing an adequate definition of the object of investigation, of the objective representation of social facts independent of their individual manifestations (45; EN 47) and of sociological explanation, which "consists exclusively in establishing relationships of causality" (124; EN 101).

The break with the participant perspective and the introduction of a scientifically grounded observer perspective, then, become necessary because the agents are caught up in the naive ideas of common sense and are themselves incapable of reflecting on the social conditions and the consequences of their actions – and thus on their 'true' meaning. Referring to Bacon's doctrine of the idols (which emerges as the source of both scientism and the critique of ideology), Durkheim's diagnosis of a naiveté that is both structurally conditioned and structurally necessary functions in a manner quite parallel to the diagnosis of ideological blindness, without, however, employing the more narrow vocabulary of the critique of ideology, and without assigning sociology an explicitly emancipatory role. His conclusion that an epistemological break with the participant perspective is necessary is also characteristic for the conception of critical social science that shall be our topic in the next section.

1.2 The Epistemological Break

The dogma of the break, in the account I have developed on the basis of Durkheim's *Rules of Sociological Method*, implicitly permeates the better part of sociology's self-reflection. It is formulated particularly explicitly in the French school of thought that also influences the conception of critical social science which I shall reconstruct and problematise using Bourdieu's approach as an example. First, however, it is important to hone in on two developments that the notion of the break undergoes on the way from Durkheim to Bourdieu.

I have already pointed out that Bachelard's conception of an "epistemological obstacle" – his insistence that "experience that is ostensibly concrete and real, natural and immediate presents us with an *obstacle*" (Bachelard 1967 [1934]: 6; EN 18)[7] – can, in line with Durkheim, be understood both as the specification of the problem and as the root of the call for a break with ordinary experiences and common sense conceptions. To Bachelard, in fact, the need for an epistemological break between scientific experiments and everyday experience appears so strong that he defines the former as an experience "that *contradicts ordinary, everyday* experience" (ibid.: 10; EN 22). To Durkheim's distinction between science and common sense, he adds the explicit distinction between scientific knowledge and mere opinion (*doxa*), which will be of central importance in our encounter with Bourdieu as well: "Science is totally opposed to opinion, not just in principle but equally in its need to come to full fruition. [. . .] opinion's right is therefore always to be wrong. Opinion *thinks* badly; it does not *think* but instead *translates* needs into knowledge. [. . .] Nothing can be founded on opinion: we must start by destroying it. Opinion is the first obstacle that has to be surmounted" (ibid.: 14; EN 25). According to Bachelard, there is a "deep epistemological discontinuity", a "rupture" (*rupture*) between "ordinary and common knowledge" (*connaissance vulgaire et commune*) and scientific knowledge (*connaissance scientifique*) (Bachelard 2004 [1949]: 102).[8] The confused ideas and opinions of ordinary understanding and common sense are epistemological obstacles that are all the harder to overcome since they do not have external causes. For this reason, they cannot be traced back to, for instance, a lack of information, which could be rectified rather easily. Instead, they originate from the human mind and its natural tendencies – its "naive intuitions" bound to immediate sense experience (ibid.: 107). The scientific attitude, therefore, will have to permanently engage in correcting common sense, and slowly show it the way out of the cave – a path from mere opinion to science.

Now it is not my intention at this point to call into question the plausibility of Bachelard's remarks on the natural sciences. It may very well be that in the natural sciences, there is "not continuity but rather a break between observation and experimentation", and the fact that advances in knowledge depend

on overcoming "epistemological obstacles" in the guise of unexamined pre-
suppositions can hardly be denied (ibid.: 54). However plausible the theme
of epistemological obstacles, as represented by common sense and *doxa*, as
well as the necessity of an epistemological break, may be within the context
of the natural sciences, the only question that concerns me at this point is how
they are transferred to the circumstances within the social sciences in order
to secure the objectivity of social knowledge through its severance from the
self-understanding of the agent, which needs to be conducted ever anew.[9]

Following Bachelard, the most prominent place of the notion of the
epistemological break is in Louis Althusser's historical classification and
epistemological characterisation of the works of Marx. Althusser here ties in
directly with Bachelard and finds in the works of Marx an epistemological
break (*coupure épistémologique*) separating Marx's early humanist phase (in
retrospect recognisable as ideological) from the scientific phase of the mature
Marx. The latter phase, according to Althusser, is characterised by the discov-
ery and development of historical materialism as the science of the historical
dynamics of modern societies – something that was only possible on the
basis of a break with the early philosophical anthropology and its underly-
ing humanism (cf. Althusser 1996 [1965]: 24f, 263f; EN 13, 32ff, 252ff).[10]
Any genuine science and any genuine scientific discovery require that pre-
scientific common sense and all previous theories (usually unconsciously
shaped by common sense) are radically rejected and replaced by a new form
of knowledge. What Althusser thinks he is able to show on the basis of the
concrete historical event of Marx's development, he generalises in a second
step into a general stance on scientific method that postulates a clear break
between science and ideology. This distinction, however, does not only char-
acterise the relation between science and pre-scientific common sense, but
must be carried out ever anew even within science itself. To the distinction
between ideological and theoretical practices, Althusser thus adds the notion
of pre-scientific (and therefore ideological) theoretical practice, and scien-
tific (and therefore non-ideological) theoretical practice (cf. ibid.: 168, 263;
EN 12f, 252). Nevertheless, the primary distinction remains the general one
between ideology, which is characterised by its social and practical function,
and science, which is characterised by its theoretical and cognitive function
(cf. ibid.: 238ff; EN 184ff; Althusser 1990 [1965]).

Because of its practical and social function, Althusser considers ideol-
ogy to be an organic component of any social order. It is a fundamentally
unconscious, yet integral dimension of the 'lived experience' of agents. To
agents themselves, the social structure in which they live necessarily remains
opaque. Entirely in keeping with the functionalist dogma, the mystified
notion of society safeguards the reproduction of the social whole by keep-
ing agents to 'their places' through corresponding forms of subjectivation. If

science is to reveal society's functioning, it will therefore have to break with the mystified ideas of the agents, and take ideology not only as an obstacle, but as a constant danger that can only be counteracted by perpetuating the break (cf. Althusser 1996 [1965]: 262; EN 233). Althusser summarises this position as follows: "The important point is that a science, far from reflecting the immediate givens of everyday experience and practice, is constituted only on the condition of calling them into question, and breaking with them, to the extent that its results, once achieved, appear indeed as the *contrary* of the obvious facts of practical everyday experience, rather than as their reflection" (Althusser 1990 [1965]: 15). Endorsing this strict distinction, Althusser, like Durkheim and Bachelard, continues a tradition that goes back to antiquity and ultimately to Plato – a tradition that defines science and knowledge in radical opposition to 'mere' opinion, to the illusions and misapprehensions of ordinary understanding.[11] That science acknowledges the (historical) necessity of ideology does not change the fact that it is to be understood primarily as critique of ideology (and ideological everyday experiences), as well as a critique of ideological mechanisms. Moreover, Durkheim and Althusser explicitly turn this general meta-theoretical characterisation into the foundation of the distinctive character of the social sciences – or rather of their own variants of social science – as science.

This brief sketch of the topos of the break from Durkheim through Bachelard to Althusser makes it possible to distinguish between two epistemological operations that are constitutive for the dogma of the break and intimately related. First, there is the *meta-theoretical* (as well as definitional) demarcation between science and common sense, coupled with the epistemological disqualification of the latter. Second, there is the more narrowly *methodological* (as well as operational or research practice-related) demand that scientific knowledge be achieved by a systematic break with – and against the resistance of – common sense, mere opinion and ideology.

Bourdieu and his co-authors, too, place themselves in the 'Durkheimian' tradition shaped by these two operations when, in their meta-theoretical work *The Craft of Sociology* – notably, in a section titled 'The break' – they formulate the first methodological principle that should guide social science as follows: "The social fact is won against the illusion of immediate knowledge" (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron 2010 [1968]: 15; EN 13).[12] From this perspective, sociology as a science is engaged in a constant battle with the "spontaneous sociology" of 'ordinary' agents, whose self-understanding threatens to impose itself as the permanent temptation of the interpretation that seems most natural. In order to constitute itself as a true science that is strictly separated from common sense and breaks through its entwinement with the reproduction and legitimation of existing social conditions, sociology must reject the "naive philosophy of the social" and the "spontaneous

movements of naive practice" that threaten to contaminate the sociological analysis (ibid.: 17, 28; EN 15, 24).

In this way, the social sciences structurally find themselves in conflict with the self-understanding of the 'ordinary' agents, for the latter naively consider themselves "little sociologists" who think they know what they are doing. This is an "illusion of reflexivity" (ibid.: 29; EN 24), because agents can in no way be aware of the social conditionality and mediatedness of what they consider to be "given" and immediately evident – because, that is, they precisely do *not* know what they are doing. What they are not in a position to see can only be grasped from a standpoint outside their practices and after breaking with their self-understanding and common sense. In the following sections, I shall discuss this model of the break and its foundations in action theory somewhat more elaborately in reference to Bourdieu's conception of a critical social science. It will become clear that even though Bourdieu argues for a methodologically more complex, not simplistically objectivist, under-standing of the possibilities and limits of such a break, he remains indebted to the dogma of the break in a way that keeps his approach from bringing fundamental characteristics of everyday practices to light.

2. PIERRE BOURDIEU'S 'SOCIOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF JUDGEMENT'[13]

2.1 The Gift Exchange and Its Consequences

In order to somewhat concretise our first steps into the discussion of the theoretical and methodological foundations of Bourdieu's conception of a critical social science (and to provide some initial indications of certain problems associated with it), I shall start by pointing out the extent to which Bourdieu's theory of social practice is shaped by the analysis of an extremely specific phenomenon: the now near-canonical example of gift exchange in the Algerian Kabyle tribe, the society in which Bourdieu conducted his first fieldwork.

During his fieldwork in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Bourdieu finds himself confronted with a scenario that provides him with the puzzle that will form the basis for all his future work (cf. Schultheis 2012).[14] At first sight, the question seems rather simple: what is happening when a person in the Kabyle society gives someone a lavish gift – for his wedding, say – and at a later date receives a similarly lavish gift at a similar occasion from the same person?

The agents themselves normally perceive the gifts in exactly this way: as extremely lavish. Moreover, they take these to be voluntary acts of giving, which are independent in the sense that they cannot be offset against each

other. The first person does not gift in order to receive a gift, but because he wishes to pay his sincere respects to the recipient. The initial recipient does not reciprocate because he feels indebted, but gifts out of a desire to pay his respects as well. A phenomenologically or hermeneutically oriented ethnological or sociological description will first of all seek to reconstruct these self-understandings of the agents, and attempt to understand the phenomenon "from the native's point of view" (Geertz 1974).

As an example of such a description, Bourdieu repeatedly refers to Marcel Mauss's short book *The Gift* (Mauss 2004 [1923/1924]). In the book, Mauss (who was Durkheim's nephew and student) analyses the peculiar entwinement of reciprocity and non-reciprocity as well as a mixture of voluntariness and obligation, along with the way in which these pairs shape the experiences of participants in the cycle of giving, receiving and reciprocating that characterises gift exchange. Bourdieu agrees with Claude Lévi-Strauss that Mauss remains too strongly tied to the participant perspective, and that he reproduces the naive self-descriptions of those engaged in the practice. Lévi-Strauss, in his famous introduction to Mauss's essay collection *Sociologie et anthropologie*, insists, contra the phenomenological approach, on an objectivistic analysis of the cycle of gift exchange that does not allow itself to be led astray by the experiences and self-interpretations of the agents (cf. Lévi-Strauss 2004 [1950]). Only thus might it become apparent that the exchange follows laws of reciprocity of which the participants themselves are unaware, and that it instantiates a structure that is fundamentally trans-subjective. The way in which gifting is experienced by participants in the practice is one thing; what does in fact happen is something else altogether. The agents' interpretations are a surface phenomenon, the causes of which anthropology and sociology will have to seek in deeper structures beyond the cognitive access of the agents. For Bourdieu, too, this is a truth that comes into view only after the objectivist break with the self-understanding and the perspective of the participants. According to Bourdieu, though, this is only half the truth.[15] While for Lévi-Strauss and all other objectivist approaches (such as structuralism or Marxism) the lived truth of the agents no longer plays any role whatsoever and is at best explained along the way, Bourdieu considers it an essential part of the phenomenon that is to be understood and explained. The subjective experience of the exchange is a constitutive element of the reality that must be understood and explained with the help of sociology, and for that reason, it cannot be pushed out of sight, as structuralism would have it. The epistemological operation of the break must therefore be understood as a more complex endeavour.

According to Bourdieu, this deficit of the objectivist approach shows itself particularly clearly in the fact that the approach forfeits the temporal dimension of the gift exchange. If the individual act of giving, which happens in

time, is understood merely as an element and instantiation of a structure that is itself timeless, then the act not only becomes interchangeable, but also fails to come into view as a temporal performance. The practice appears as a diachronic unfolding of a model that can be synchronically represented and is, in a sense, timeless. The analysis of the practice does not add anything essential to the description of the model. For the practice of gift exchange, however, the temporal structure is constitutive. The gift given in return *must* emerge at a later point in time, and it must be distinct from the initial gift in other ways as well. Reciprocating a gift right away with an identical gift or a gift of the exact same value is an insult not just for the Kabyle people, but in any culture. Its temporal structure is what makes the practice of gift exchange possible in the first place, and it is what allows, within that practice, for the use of strategies that play with the pace and the timing of the transactions (cf. Bourdieu 2000 [1972]: 5f).

Timing, that is, the choice of the right moment, of the *kairos*, the appropriate occasion, is of central importance for the functioning of the practice: depending on whether an action happens at the right time or at a wrong time, it can mean something completely different. A gift or an offer of help could, for instance, come across as generous, but also as impertinent. What is required are tact, intuition, adroitness – in short, what Bourdieu calls "practical sense" (*sens pratique*).[16] However, as an element of the habitus – those internalised and embodied dispositions that shape how agents think and act – this practical sense, which has no place in structuralist theory design either, is predicated on a pre-reflexive relation to the temporality of acting, which is only thematised when expectations are not met and the flow of acting is interrupted. Normally, for the agents the future is already there in the present and is anticipated pre-reflexively – that is, not in the mode of conscious planning (cf. Bourdieu 2000 [1972]: EN 152ff; 1977a: chapter 1). The past, too, is there in an immediate way as an experience that structures activities (and not in the form of explicit memories). The players in the game of gift exchange have a "feel for the game" (*sens du jeu*), a sense of their own place within the game and a "sense of placement". They have internalised the rules, and thus know at any given point where they belong and what they are supposed to do (cf. Bourdieu 1980: EN 66; 1994: EN 98; 1992 [1984]: EN 181f; 1997: EN 184). The immediate assessment of the situation allows them – at least in normal cases – to react adequately through intuitive and pre-reflexive decisions (and not through rational pondering and deliberation). The competent agent moves about in a familiar practice "like a fish in water" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: EN 127).

Whether an act is appropriate for the situation involves, for instance, whether one has settled on the right pauses before one's reactions – ones that are neither too long nor too short. The same goes for the exchange of

pleasantries as a specific form of symbolic gift exchange. The compliment 'Nice tie!' should not be reciprocated immediately with 'Yours is nice, too'. Of course, the delay can be used strategically. Exactly when the critical line between politeness and affront is crossed cannot be determined outside of a particular context. It depends, among other things, on the social standing of the participants, for instance whether time works 'in their favour' or 'against them'. Time working 'in someone's favour' can come with strategic advantages, which can be increased, but also lost. The strategies that can be used to steer the situation – keeping someone waiting, forestalling them, getting their hopes up or pre-empting them – are usually not employed consciously, but are habituated. Social power manifests not least in not having to wait oneself, while being able to keep others waiting (cf. Bourdieu 1992 [1984]: EN 89f).

The delay between actions opens up room for such strategies, which the objectivist account can only view as deviations from the standard model, not as essential features of the practice itself. Furthermore, it forms the basis of another constitutive element of the practice. For it is the specific temporality of the practice that makes it possible that the true economic character of the instances of exchange – which merely *seem* to be at odds with the agents' interests – is obscured and misrecognised (cf. Bourdieu 1980: EN 100f). If it were not for the time lag, it would not be possible to distinguish between a gift exchange and a regular market transaction, between gift and commodity. But it is this distinction that defines the practice of gift exchange for its participants, even when from the perspective of the social-scientific observer, it has only limited validity.

An adequate understanding of the gift exchange therefore requires a *double* break: a first break with the participant perspective, because that is the only way to bring to light the true economic character of the exchange, *and* a second break with the objectivist perspective, because from that perspective it is unintelligible why the participants in the practice understand the exchange the way they do. According to Bourdieu, only the second break can avert the "theory effect" that convinces the external observer that her model corresponds to reality (cf. Bourdieu 1997: 247ff; EN 221ff). In contrast to the agent, the sociological observer has the time and opportunity to detemporalise, to detach herself from the bustle of events, to wait and see and to observe. In reality, though, her model leads to a number of distortions of the practice: to a synchronisation of its performative character, to a neutralisation of its embeddedness in its context and to a dehistoricisation of its having-become. The purely theoretical view of the practice is not aware of this "scholastic fallacy", and conceals the contradiction that exists between the timelessness of theoretical reflection and the temporality of the practice, which is produced and can be experienced only in being performed (cf. Bourdieu 1994: chapter 7; 2000 [1972]: EN 27f; 1980: EN 80f). This detemporalisation masks

the uncertainty and incalculability that are characteristic of the practice – the logic of the practice, which for Bourdieu is opposed to the "logical logic" of reflection (cf. Bourdieu 2000 [1972]: EN 96ff, EN 141f).

What is at stake for Bourdieu in his discussion of gift exchange is therefore not only the specific temporality of the practice as something that is performed, that has a certain duration that cannot be grasped in isolation from the experience of the agent. Over and above this, he tries to show that this temporality is the reason for the necessary misrecognition of the economic character of this practice by its participants. It is the time lag between the gift and the return gift that allows for the repression and denial of the objective truth about the exchange. Thanks to this interval, the two acts of gifting (gift and return gift), which properly speaking are poles of a single gift exchange, can be understood by the participants as two separate acts of giving that have no necessary connection. The truth about the exchange recognised by the sociological observer – the fact that what is at stake are not acts of disinterested giving, but a sublimated battle for symbolic power and material advantages – cannot possibly be part of the official description of the exchange from the participant perspective. What the agents do, objectively speaking, does not coincide with what they believe they do: the agents "successfully perform what they (objectively) have to do because they *believe* that they are doing something different from what they are actually doing; because they are actually doing something different from what they believe they are doing; and because they *believe* in what they *believe* they are doing" (Bourdieu 1992 [1984]: EN 207). What they are actually doing is only evident to the sociological observer. The problem is not that the agents simply fail to view their actions in terms of a particular correct description; they are *necessarily* mistaken about the structure of their practice, since otherwise that practice would dissipate. The practice works only because the agents "do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing" (Bourdieu 2000 [1972]: EN 79; cf. Bourdieu 2003: 51; EN 288; Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron 2010 [1968]: EN 15).

This constitutive ambivalence of the relation of agents to the practice of gift exchange is characterised by Bourdieu as the "twofold truth of the gift": on the one hand, the gift is a generous gesture that is entirely free of self-interest and without any agenda; on the other hand, it is equally stringently subject to a logic of exchange that imposes its "forceless force" onto the parties involved. The official logic of honour and giving is accompanied by the unofficial and unacknowledged logic of economy (Bourdieu 1997: 229; EN 191; cf. Bourdieu 2000 [1972]: EN 188–202).[17] This is something only the social-scientific observer is able to see, however. The participants themselves have access to only half the truth. Even if the break with the participant perspective must be understood as a complex operation, it is inescapable.

2.2 The Economy of Practices

According to Bourdieu, the structure of gift exchange and its "twofold truth" can serve as a model for the analysis of any practices that belong to the "economy of symbolic goods" (cf. Bourdieu 1994: chapter 6; EN chapter 5). This economy is based first of all on a denial of its economic character. Second, it is characterised by a duplication of truth, by a contradiction between the 'subjective truth' of the participants and the objective reality analysed by the social sciences. The participants, however, are not hypocritical or cynical; the duplication of truth is the result of a work of denial and repression that is rooted in, and made permanent by, upbringing, 'training' and habituation. Relatedly, and third, Bourdieu identifies a taboo on making explicit the rules of the game (such as 'pricing' on the 'gift exchange market'). In this way, he can treat practices that at first sight seem to be entirely different as having an identical structure: the gift exchange, exchanges between generations within families (romanticised as gratefulness and love), the market for cultural goods (whose economy presents itself as an inverted world that is about pure art, instead of a struggle for recognition and symbolic capital) and the domain of religion (in which the church can only function as a commercial enterprise by denying its status as an enterprise).

On this economic view, all practices, even those that at first sight seem decidedly non-economical, are organised around the acquisition of capital (be it social, cultural or economic) – even if the strategies and interests at play are fundamentally unconscious and pre-reflexive, and do not show up in the subjective action orientations of the participants.[18] For this reason, every communicative, symbolic and cultural practice must always be analysed keeping in mind the potential gains in distinction and further accumulation of capital; indeed, it must be analysed by "a general science of the *economy of practices*, capable of treating all practices, including those purporting to be disinterested or gratuitous, and hence non-economic, as economic practices directed towards the maximising of material or symbolic profit" (Bourdieu 2000 [1972]: 356f; EN 183; also cf. Bourdieu 1980: 222; EN 122; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: EN 116).[19] This, however, puts Bourdieu – against his explicit intentions – at risk of falling back into an economic and reductionistic model of action, which may be enhanced by the analysis of the symbolic dimension of social reproduction, but which unhitches itself completely from the self-understanding of the agents, and thus fails to grasp the normative infrastructure and particular logic that fundamentally characterise everyday practices (cf. Honneth 1999 [1984]: 200–202; EN 64–66).[20]

Bourdieu invests the analysis of the gift exchange with a status that is doubly paradigmatic. On the one hand, the gift exchange is supposed to demonstrate the methodological distinction between phenomenology and objectivism as

well as the superiority of Bourdieu's own approach. On the other hand, the model thus developed – of an economic analysis of seemingly non-economic practices – and the diagnosis of the misrecognition of the economic character, coupled with the pre-reflexive relation of the participants to their practices, are extended to all forms of practice. The analysis of gift exchange thus turns out to be the foundation of Bourdieu's "general science of the economy of practices", of his diagnosis of the structurally pre-reflexive character of practices and of his demand for a break with the self-understanding of agents.

Such a procedure of course raises a question: how plausible is it to analyse the social and cultural practices of differentiated and pluralistic societies by means of a model that was developed during ethnographic fieldwork in Algeria in the 1950s and 1960s – that is, in a society that was, as Bourdieu himself emphasises, pre-capitalist and until that time relatively homogeneous and stable, but at the brink of a phase of radical, externally imposed change (cf. Lahire 2001 [1998]: 27–35; EN 19–21)? Before I discuss the problems that threaten Bourdieu's approach, however, I shall first specify the relation between habitus and reflexivity, and between the self-understanding of agents and the perspective of critical social science.

3. 'FOR THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING': HABITUS, REFLEXIVITY AND CRITICAL SOCIAL SCIENCE

3.1 Structure + Habitus = Practice?

The methodological aim of Bourdieu's approach is to overcome a series of dualisms in the social sciences – of agency and structure, micro and macro, subjectivism and objectivism – to unmask them as pseudo-oppositions, and thus to avoid the one-sidedness of both phenomenological and structuralist approaches, which he attempts to reveal in his discussion of the gift exchange.[21] He intends to reach this aim by using a *relational* theory that absolutises neither the side of the objective social structures nor the side of action in concrete contexts. The link between these poles of structure and practice is formed by the habitus. By *habitus*, Bourdieu means the dispositions of agents that are shaped by the internalisation of objective social living conditions – dispositions that, in turn, structure the agents' ways of acting and thinking. On the one hand, the habitus is acquired, since it can be traced back to upbringing, socialisation and conditioning. On the other hand, it is generative and productive, since it structures and produces the ways in which agents experience, act and think. Since the habitus is developed not in a vacuum, but always under concrete social conditions, it is not only a structuring force, but

is itself subject to structuring – indeed, it is structured by the social conditions under which agents live. As Bourdieu makes explicit time and again, the habitus is therefore at the same time *modus operandi* (manner of proceeding or acting) and *opus operatum* (itself a product) (cf., for instance, Bourdieu 1980: 98f; EN 34). The way in which the habitus functions is thus steady and stable as well as unifying and transferable: it is operative in an enormous variety of contexts in a way that, in each context, lends the actions of the agents (*how* they eat, dress, walk, think, talk – "function") a particular "style". Accordingly, the conformity between structures and practices that Bourdieu diagnoses is explained in a "genetic" manner, that is, by the internalisation of structures that are, in turn, "externalised" in actions shaped by habit.

According to Bourdieu, then, the way we act should not primarily be understood as the result of conscious decisions or rule-following, but as shaped by our particular habitus. In order to emphasise the all-encompassing and unifying way in which our actions are shaped by habitus, Bourdieu prefers to speak of practice and practices, instead of individual actions. We grow into the practices in which we take part and into the social games we learn to play, such as the practice of gift exchange, and we internalise – literally, incorporate – from an early age which opinions and actions are expected from us by our environment. For Bourdieu, the habitus is therefore quite essentially physical *hexis*, "the social embodied" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: EN 127; cf. Bourdieu 1997: 179; EN 152). Mediated by the habitus, the social structures structure the experiences, actions and thoughts of the individual without determining them completely. The agents are always within a system of possibilities, whose boundaries only manifest themselves when they reach the limits that constitute the particular practice and their own place in it, and behave in a manner that is literally "out of place". In such a case, they are called to order and reminded of their place ("Who does he think he is?", "Be reasonable, that's not for our kind of people") (cf. Bourdieu 1997: 220; EN 184).

Their habitus provides agents with a practical sense, a feel for the game in which they participate as social agents. The feel for the game consists in knowing one's way around, a sense of one's standing, a *savoir-faire*, and as such simultaneously a sense of the possibilities and the limits of the game and its players. This sense of orientation allows the agents to anticipate, in a practical way, likely courses of action, and makes that they unthinkingly conform to what is objectively possible.[22] However, it also allows agents to react with a certain flexibility, since the habitus comes with the capacity to improvise and to act in new and ever different situations – if always in a way that corresponds to the person's habitus and (through its influence) to their objective position in the social field. The habitus is the internalisation of the *nomos* of a particular social field, of its constitutive "principle of vision and division,

identical or similar cognitive and evaluative structures" that imprints an *eidos* and an *ethos*, that is, forms of theoretical and practical ways to relate to oneself and to the world (ibid.: 116f, 120; EN 172, 152; cf. Bourdieu 2001: 103; EN 72). It is only through this imprinting and impressing of *eidos* and *ethos* that an individual becomes a participant in a particular practice. The field in which the players interact (whether within art, science, economics or politics) is determined by the objective relations between the positions of the participants, who, in turn, have forms of (social, cultural and economic) power and capital at their command. The agents are involved in a permanent struggle to claim and improve their position within the field of power relations, even if they do not intentionally focus on this – even if their practices may indeed be based on a misrecognition of this deep structure.

Bourdieu's reconception of the vocabulary of action theory in terms of the basic notions of structure, habitus, practice and practical sense also derives from his sceptical attitude towards the vocabulary of rules and the corresponding 'intellectualistic' distortion of practice as intentional, rational or even calculating. In a section titled 'The fallacies of the rule', he reveals the ambivalences of this terminology that lead him to reject it as inadequate (cf. Bourdieu 2000 [1972]: 203ff; EN 22ff).[23] The notion of a rule, he claims, can refer to three distinct things: explicit social rules (for instance in law or morality), theoretically postulated explanatory models or schemata or principles immanent to a practice along with certain regularities produced by these (which can be revealed by statistics). The problem, for Bourdieu, is that these distinct meanings are often confounded, especially when those observing a practice confuse objective regularities (in the sense of statistically significant occurrences or behavioural patterns, such as those generated by the habitus) either with regulations that are explicitly and intentionally issued and observed, or with some sort of unconscious regulation by mysterious hidden mechanisms. In both cases, the observers are guilty of the mistake of making an inference from a (mostly inadequate) model of reality to the reality of this model.

The hidden shift from observed regularity (*régularité*) to the postulation of regulations (*règlement*) or unconscious regulation (*régulation inconsciente*) leads, on the one hand, to a "juridism" which makes the practice appear only as conscious rule-following, and, on the other hand, to the picture of a mechanism in which agents appear as mere automata that blindly respond to causal influences (Bourdieu 1980: EN 40). The participants in a practice, however, must be understood neither as perfectly autonomous subjects nor as automata completely subjected to independent laws. The practice is determined neither exclusively by conscious goal-setting nor by mechanical causes, and is thus made up neither of rational action nor of mere reactions.[24] It is precisely this false opposition that the habitus as a medium is supposed to prevent in

Bourdieu's theory of practice. Structure and habitus must be understood as restrictive *as well as* enabling or constitutive conditions. This makes the practice equally far from unpredictable creativity as from the mere reproduction of its conditions. Nevertheless, Bourdieu himself tends to rather 'mechanistic' descriptions of the nexus of structure, habitus and practice – descriptions which he then needs to declare are not meant quite as deterministically as they sound. A practice, for instance, consists for him in "a set of people tak[ing] part in a rule-bound activity, an activity which, without necessarily being the product of obedience to rules, *obeys certain regularities*" (Bourdieu 1987a: EN 64).[25] And the habitus generates "regulated and regular behaviour outside any reference to rules" – behaviour that represent a "normative fact", that is, a social phenomenon that can be objectively described, even if the practical sense of the agents does not allow for a purely objectivist description (ibid.: 65f; cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: EN 97, 105). The unconscious processes of adjustment to objectively given circumstances ("structures of the field") are solely the result of the "automatisms of the habitus" that make a virtue out of necessity, freedom out of force (Bourdieu 1980: 261; EN 145). The agents behave the way they do because of "their habitus, an internalised 'program' (in the computing sense) or algorithm"; they "act like so many independent, yet objectively orchestrated, cognitive machines" that function "according to the formula [(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice", even if they likely experience their own actions as thoroughly self-determined and free (Bourdieu 1982 [1979]: EN 424, 101; 1989: EN 1). Behaviour, however, thus runs the risk of being locked into a "near-circular relationship of near-perfect reproduction" and of turning into a mere extension of external structures (Bourdieu 1980: EN 63).[26] This is also manifest in Bourdieu's thesis of the objective harmonisation of group or class habitus by homogeneous living conditions, which involves the claim that "each individual system of dispositions" is *nothing but* "a *structural variant* of all the other group or class habitus" (Bourdieu 2000 [1972]: EN 86).[27]

   According to Bourdieu, the impartial gaze of the sociologist can identify "probable" classes, in the sense of "sets of agents who occupy similar positions and who, being placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, have every likelihood of having similar dispositions and interests and therefore of producing similar practices and adopting similar stances". Her "explanatory classification" makes it possible, in a manner "entirely similar to those of zoologists or botanists", "to explain and predict the practices and properties of the things classified – including their group-forming practices" (Bourdieu 1985b: EN 725; cf. Bourdieu 1982 [1979]: EN 298ff). Indeed, all Bourdieu seems to be able to do on the basis of this is to explain the automatic behaviour of 'judgemental dopes' who can be identified by their class membership – agents who are just intelligent enough

not to endanger the flow of the game: "A moment of partial, fragmentary, discontinuous consciousness always accompanies the actions and practices, whether in the form of the minimum of vigilance that is essential for guiding the automatisms or in the form of discourses that are to rationalise those actions and practices – in a double sense of the word" (Bourdieu 2000 [1972]; also cf. Bourdieu 1980: EN 107).

The habitus, however, incorporates not only the practical schemata that structure action, but also the cognitive and emotional structures that are inscribed on the body, that is, "somatised". It is only through the mediation of the habituated ways in which we perceive ourselves and the world that there exists a social world for us at all. The habitus therefore determines the way in which this world is "there" for a particular individual (cf. Bourdieu 1997: 118; EN 138). As a way of being-in-the-world, the habitus shapes the way in which I am positioned within the world, and thus how I experience the world and my position in it, but also how I can relate to it – which stances I can take towards myself and towards my environment. It comprises the shared interpretational schemata that produce what is experienced as the world of common sense in the first place. A central merit of the habitus as an experiential repository lies in the fact that it relieves agents from the pressure to reflect and reduces uncertainty and complexity by establishing schemata for behaviour, thought and evaluation that are experienced as natural, and thus as uncontroversial. Bourdieu calls these schemata *doxa*, so as to call attention not only to their function of relief, but also to the fact that they both are pre-reflexive and limit reflection.

As second nature, the habitus does not merely offer relief from reflection and enable pre-reflexive behaviour; it also constitutes a limit to reflection. There seems to be no space to develop a detached relation to one's own habitus and the behaviour generated by it. Since the habitus structures experience, perception, thought, judgement and behaviour, thus establishing experiential, perceptive, cognitive, evaluative and practical schemata, it restricts the horizon of possibilities that the agent experiences as given. For this reason, the habitus is a decisive accomplice in the reproduction of social structures and hierarchies. Bourdieu sometimes terms this the "*hysteresis* – effect": the social order, which exists of objective and symbolic structures, tends to reproduce itself by inscribing itself on the bodies and minds of the members of society, thus eluding scrutiny. For the enduring dispositions that constitute the habitus are structured by social structures that are mediated by processes of socialisation and in turn structure the behaviour and thought of the individual – they are simultaneously formed and formative. Correspondingly, the practice of the individuals is structured by the habitus, but at the same time (re-)structures the social structure, thus indirectly affecting the habitus, too. Since behaviour is not fully determined by the habitus, it changes the social

environment, and thus the environment in which the habitus develops. As products of historically situated practices, both social structures and individual forms of habitus are not only permanently reproduced by these very practices, but also changed. However, this dynamisation of the relations between habitus, structure and practice hits a limit in the decidedly static notion that all practical performances are framed by the first two dimensions.

According to Bourdieu, the *doxa* of the participants in a social practice – that is, their practical belief in the things they experience as self-evident – is linked to a structural illusion about the conditions and conditionality of their behaviour. It is only on the basis of their simultaneous recognition and misrecognition (*reconnaissance/méconnaissance*) that social practices enjoy perfect legitimacy as something natural (cf. Bourdieu 1980: EN 66–68; 1997: 122f, 114; EN 94, 104). The social game played by agents as participants in a particular practice or field cannot be called into question by them. This immunity to reflection and scrutiny is constitutive for the functioning of the game and is rooted in the self-understanding of the agents. Exactly this is what Bourdieu means by *illusio*: the agents must engage in the game and develop an interest in it in such a way that they lose their ability to detach themselves from it, so that the illusion becomes part of their identity. Only the unquestioning acceptance of the rules of the game guarantees, as *doxa* specific to a particular field, that the game will flow smoothly – and thus, on a large scale, the reproduction of the social order. In a "collective work of euphemisation" (Bourdieu 2000 [1972]: EN 196), the agents stage the lack of conflict and choice in the social world – a world whose functioning depends on their quiet and pre-reflexive consent. In every practice there is a tendency towards "the naturalisation of its own arbitrariness" (ibid.: EN 164). The practical sense of the agents – the way in which they unconsciously adjust to the space of possibilities – requires their submission (which they experience as voluntary) to whatever is the "comme il faut" (the 'proper way to behave'), which no longer requires an explicit 'il faut' ('one must'). In this way, the practical sense secures the execution of the "more or less codified programme of action that it contains" (Bourdieu 1997: 166, 171; EN 153). As the internalisation and embodiment of objective social circumstances and their symbolic representations, the habitus therefore plays a central role in the 'enchantment' of social conditions that ensures that the reflection of agents will always lag behind.

Accordingly, agents necessarily misrecognise the character of their practices, which in fact are conventional and socially instituted, as natural and self-evident. Through an act of "performative magic" (Bourdieu 1980: EN 57), the habitus functions as one of the pillars of symbolic power – the kind of power that is recognised accepted by the subordinated as natural and thus legitimate, and that is stabilised by their habitual dispositions. The

habitus thereby assumes a function that is analogous to ideology in a twofold sense: on the one hand, it underpins – wholly in line with the functionalist dogma – the reproduction of the social order as a whole; on the other, its functioning remains – wholly in line with the dogma of the break and of asymmetry – opaque to the agents held captive by the *doxa*, so that it can only be analysed from the perspective of the social-scientific observer. This makes it a form of false consciousness that is necessary in a double sense.[28] The quasi-ideological belief and disposition systems are functionally necessary and objectively fitting, since they can be traced back to the incorporation of social structures and thus correspond to the objective position in the social field. At the same time, though, they are necessarily false, since they involve a fundamental misrecognition of their own conditions, causes and effects – one that is essential to their functioning. The symbolic domination underpinned by the habitus lives solely off the recognition by those subject to it. However, by safeguarding its recognition through the habituation of its subjects, it completely avoids being called into question and criticised. In this way, Bourdieu undermines the emancipatory ambition of his own approach. For even if the subordinated are complicit in their subordination, they have no way to correctly understand their situation, let alone to change it.

3.2 Social Science as Critique

That a person's own habitus cannot become the object of reflection is surely one of the most controversial of Bourdieu's theses; that practices do not tolerate questions concerning their rationale and logic nor any reflection or introspection is one of its implications. Practices, Bourdieu claims, are not reflected by definition; they preclude any "recourse to themselves" and follow a "pre-logical logic", so that any practice is incompatible with the "mastery of the logic that is expressed within it" (Bourdieu 1980: EN 11, 19, 86, 92).[29]

The agents themselves are in a state of learned ignorance (*docta ignorantia*): they cannot become entirely conscious of their practice. Even if they possess *know-how* of the way they are to act, they still act "blindly", as if "enchanted" (cf. Bourdieu 1980: EN 102). That their know-how will only give them access to half the truth is something I have already discussed in the context of the example of the gift exchange. The *illusio* – the unconditional faith in the game that is being played – cannot be recognised as such by the agents themselves. This faith can only be recognised as an illusion – that is, as self-deception – when one considers the game or the practice from an external perspective. In this moment, the faith dissipates. The *illusio* and the conditionality of the practice can only come into view as such from the standpoint of the scientific observer, who has not invested anything in the game, for whom no commitment is at stake, and who, while not entirely disinterested,

is at least interested in something rather different, to wit, an objective analysis. The break here is thus simultaneously practical and epistemological. The capacity for critical self-detachment from everyday social practices befits only the social-scientific observer, who severs herself from the participant perspective. For the observer has the advantage over the agent "of being able to see the action from outside, as an object" (ibid.: EN 91; cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: EN 86). This observer standpoint and the methodological primacy of explanation over understanding that goes hand in hand with it enable the theoretical operation of unmasking the mechanisms and structures that are invisible from the inside perspective, and that shape the practice behind the backs of the agents.

Against this background, the task of a critical social science consists in enlightening the agents and dissipating their *doxa* by means of objective knowledge (cf. Bourdieu 1994: EN 40; 1997: 113, 130; EN 188; Wacquant 2001).[30] For Bourdieu, the critical function of science lies in the exposure of the reality behind appearances. In this way, science could have an eminently practical role in facilitating a *prise de conscience*, which in turn is the condition for emancipatory collective action. However, given the 'inertness' of social structures and the forms of habitus shaped by them, Bourdieu deems the prospects of such collective action rather slim. Moreover, the analyses of the social sciences that postulate the break with the self-understanding of the agents are hard to accept for those they are about. They are likely to provoke reactions that Bourdieu, using the vocabulary of psychoanalysis, describes as forms of defence and denial. For acknowledging the insights of sociology would involve another blow to the narcissistic self-image of the agents who understand themselves as autonomous subjects – a blow they could not possibly take lying down (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: EN 132f). For this reason alone, it would make no sense to give the agents a say in assessing the hypotheses of the social sciences.

This conceptualisation of the relations between practice, habitus and structure generalises the impossibility of reflection and the undesirability of deviation – features that Bourdieu can prove more or less convincingly in the case of concrete practices, such as the gift exchange in Kabyle society and the eating habits of the French labour class. Moreover, these features are thus built into the definition of practice itself:

> To maintain from the start that all action is the product of the application of a pre-reflexive practical sense, non-intentional, subconscious, etc., that everyday actions imbricate one another in a kind of permanent improvisation [. . .] is to universalize one possible case and remain blind to a large part of social practices [that] amount to so many everyday exceptions to the pre-reflexive adjustment of a habitus to a social situation. (Lahire 2001 [1998]: 166f; EN 121])[31]

Speaking of 'practice' in the singular suggests a unity that does not exist
as such and that conceals the heterogenous character of social practices by
forcing them, by definition, into an opposition with discourse, reflection
and theory. Perspectival change, detachment and other forms of reflexivity
that facilitate knowledge thus become a privilege of the sociologist, who
describes the reflexive achievements of agents as manifestations of a pre-
reflexive practical sense. For Bourdieu, therefore, the break with the practical
relation to ourselves and our world is a necessary step on the way to scientific
knowledge as well as to detachment and emancipation from unquestioned
practices (cf., for instance, Bourdieu 1994: EN 36f). Only in this way can the
enchantment to which the 'ordinary' agents are subjected in their everyday
doings be broken.

   According to Bourdieu, the social scientist does, as an observer of social
phenomena, have to ask about the social conditions and the distortive effects
of objectivation, which turns a practice such as the gift exchange into an
observable event. This renders the social science analysis reflexive, and
allows it to gain methodological awareness of the limits of objectivism,
which cannot integrate the truth of those who participate in the practice (cf.
Bourdieu 2001: part III). However, in Bourdieu, too, the objectivistic break
with the experience of the "native" – what in the tradition of Durkheim,
Bachelard and Althusser is called the *coupure épistémologique* – remains
primary, both epistemologically and in terms of scientific practice: for
him, *expérience native* rhymes with *expérience naïve*. The social-scientific
observer must break with the "spontaneous sociology" of agents and with
their self-understanding, which is distorted by the "illusion of reflexivity",
however self-reflective it may be (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron
2010 [1968]: EN 20).[32]

   Bourdieu deems the capacity for critical detachment a privilege of the
social-scientific observer, available to ordinary agents only temporarily and
partially in the moment of a crisis in the field (cf. Bourdieu 1992 [1984]: EN
182f). He invests sociology with the "epistemological privilege" to escape
the "vicious circle of historicism and sociologism" and, through sociological
reflection, to "neutralise" the social conditionality of its own position (ibid.:
EN xiii; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: EN 241).[33] In the same vein, Bourdieu
reintroduces the separation between *doxa* and *epistēmē*, thus securing the
scientific legitimacy of his own discourse. Like Althusser, Bourdieu too dis-
tinguishes not only between science and common sense or ideology, but also
between two kinds of science: science that, by subjecting itself to sociological
objectivation, analyses and grasps its conditions of possibility, and pseudo-
science that is bound to the common sense of the scientific field and is not
capable of objectivising and reflexively capturing the distortion of the object

by its objectivation nor the way in which the objectivation is conditioned by the objective position of the objectivising subject.

Bourdieu's conception of a critical social science is based on two pillars. First, on the *action-theoretical* conceptualisation of the nexus of structure, habitus and practice via principles of generation and behavioural regularities, which can view individuality only as a deviation subject to certain regularities and excludes reflexivity and detachment. Second, on the *methodological* demand for a radical break with the perspective and self-understanding of the agents. That Bourdieu's approach is characterised by the dogmas of scientism and objectivism as well as that of the break and of asymmetry, even though he actually strives to overcome the dichotomy between agency and structure as well as that between interpretivism and objectivism, is due to his functionalist version of "genetic structuralism" (cf. Bourdieu 1987a: EN 14). For this approach assimilates social practices to processes that can be described with a non-normative vocabulary, in which individuals participate more like 'dopes' than as reflexive agents. The attempt to mediate between objectivism and subjectivism, structure and agency ultimately caves in under the excess weight of the social structures. Assuming that the social world, in which people 'act', consists of relationships that are not to be understood as interactive or intersubjective, but as objective relations that exist independently of the consciousness and acts of the individuals, exposes Bourdieu to the risk of hypostasising the social space as a structure that is so persistent that it cannot be altered significantly by action and that is independent of critical and self-reflexive practices (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: EN 105).[34]

Given the homology of the objective structures and the corresponding forms of habitus, that is, of the positions of the agents in the social field and their dispositions, (individual) difference is only possible within an all-encompassing homogeneity, which sets the framework for any potential diversity, and ultimately determines it after all: "The result is that Bourdieu strategizes action (re-incorporating behaviorism), subjects it to overarching symbolic codes (re-incorporating structuralism) and subjugates both code and action to an underlying material base (re-incorporating orthodox Marxism)" (Alexander 1995: 130).[35] The homology of social and mental structures, moreover, accounts for the way in which the "logical conformism" "common to all minds structured in accordance with those structures" is combined with "moral conformism" into an "immediate adherence to the world, seen as self-evident and undisputed" (Bourdieu 1980: EN 172; 1982 [1979]: EN 471; 1994: EN 164).[36]

Bourdieu's formulation of the task of sociology, "to rip off the thin veil of faith or bad faith" (Bourdieu 1985a: 36) that blocks the agent's objective view of society, looks like an exemplary case of the "hermeneutics of suspicion"

astutely diagnosed by Paul Ricœur (1965: book 1, chapter 2.3). Not only will such a hermeneutics always remain dissatisfied with the self-descriptions of agents, it will even expose them as illusory, since what really happens, always happens behind their backs. The structure "that hides behind the interactions it structures" (Bourdieu 1987b: 181) can be detected only from the perspective of the social scientist. Counter-intuitive redescriptions, not designed to be compatible with the self-understanding of the addressees, will in some situations certainly have a liberating effect, since they allow agents to turn away from their well-rehearsed and potentially repressive self-understandings. In part, Bourdieu's concrete analyses convincingly show this. However, as an action-theoretical and methodological foundation, the generalised suspicion concerning self-understanding and the participant perspective has a rather disempowering effect. It does not merely bar Bourdieu from taking seriously the experiences and self-interpretations of agents, but also from properly understanding them in the first place.

It seems that to Bourdieu's mind, exposure of the basic, unconscious power relations that operate in the background, as well as the contingency and historicity of practices experienced as natural, requires the reintroduction of a quasi-Archimedean standpoint *au-dessus de la mêlée* that leaves the involvedness of the participants behind. This observer perspective and the corresponding methodological primacy of explanation over understanding are necessary in order to bring to light the deep structures that remain hidden to the agents themselves. What is problematic in this is not the attempt to show that the functioning of certain practices depends on the participants not knowing what they are doing, or that at least they had a tacit agreement to act as if they did not know what they were doing. Behind particular exchanges or moral judgements there may of course be very specific individual interests that only assume a guise of universality, which in some cases will be apparent to everyone and in others not even to the one benefitting. Such criticisms of false individual as well as collective pretence and self-deception are, however, often produced by the agents themselves, and must therefore be understood as a *dimension* of the practice of, for instance, gift exchange or moral judgement. Even when a certain practice (say the practice of astrology, management studies or the orthodox critique of ideology) seems inherently incompatible with a critical or objectifying perspective, this clearly cannot mean that its participants are in principle incapable of assuming this perspective (although it may be difficult for them, since it would involve a change in their self-understanding). In analogy to everyday language, which constitutes its own metalanguage in which the moves of the speaker can be commented on, criticised and justified in a reflexive mode, we could speak of a 'meta-practice', which, as the reflexive dimension of any everyday practice, allows for similar forms of commentary, critique and justification. This

cannot mean, however, that the conditions of a practice are constantly and fully transparent and reflexively available to its participants. Nevertheless, the idea that there is a certain category of conditions that are constitutive and *ipso facto* elude the agents trapped inside the practice is equally misleading. From the fact that not all conditions of agency can be simultaneously grasped by reflection, it does not follow that there is a certain category of conditions that cannot be grasped reflectively.

Quite apart from the questionable social and epistemological positioning of Bourdieu's perspective on practice, the question arises whether this epistemic standpoint does not lead to a distorted and inadequate image in which the agents rightly do not recognise themselves. In Bourdieu's theoretical framework, there seems to be no place for a conception of practice that incorporates the self-reflexive aspects of individual and social action in an appropriate manner. The method comes across as a misguided appropriation of psycho-analysis that can never quite trust the experiences and self-descriptions of its 'incompetent' patients, and that has incorporated their resistance to the diagnosis in its theoretical explanatory model as an understandable defensive reaction against the unsparing (but from the perspective of the agents depreciative) objectivation by the sociological observer. The more strongly agents object to the analysis of the theorist, the more speaks, from her perspective, in its favour. Any objection can be labelled a sociologically explicable defensive reaction and can thus be disqualified (cf., for instance, Bourdieu 1997: 226f; EN 189f).[37] This makes Bourdieu's theory at once a theory of society, a theory of the social and epistemological barriers thrown up by the object of research against the latter, and a theory of the necessity of these barriers for the functioning of society. The fundamental principles of this theoretical architecture – unconsciousness and resistance to sociological objectivation – secure the exceptional epistemological position of the social scientist, which she gains through self-objectivation.

4. FOUR OBJECTIONS TO THE MODEL OF THE BREAK

In the previous sections, I have already formulated some objections to the basic action-theoretical and methodological assumptions of Bourdieu's approach. Further objections can be raised on a more general level against the orthodox programme of critical social science, of which Bourdieu's social theory here serves as an exemplary case. For the sake of clarity, I shall divide them into four categories. The objections articulate normative, political-strategical, methodological and empirical doubts about the possibility and necessity of an epistemological break between the perspective of the agents and the perspective of social science. Although all four objections touch on

important points, I consider the methodological and in particular the empirical objections to be the most substantial. I shall therefore discuss these in the most detail.

4.1 The Normative Objection

According to Richard Rorty (1982), the only relevant objection to objectivistic social theories modelled on the natural sciences is a normative one: whenever the object of scientific analysis is at the same time a subject, his or her self-interpretations must be respected for moral, rather than for epistemic reasons. Even the "moronic psychopath" (Rorty's words) is one of us, and therefore his point of view plays a role, quite apart from whether it will help explain his behaviour (which Rorty denies). Respect for the agent means we should make an effort to develop an understanding that takes the self-understanding of the agent as its starting point (also cf. Detel 2007: 117). Critical social science does not manage to evade this objection simply because it does not hold the agent responsible for the illusions of everyday reason, but blames the processes that operate behind her back. From the perspective of the normative objection, it is "one of the stranger unwritten rules of twentieth-century social criticism [. . .] that it's okay to call people stupid as long as you make it clear that their stupidity is someone *else's* fault" (Heath 2000: 371n11). Moreover, statements such as "you only said that because you are a petty bourgeois/homosexual etc." reduce the person to a supposedly objective property, and are expressions of an objectification that is at least symbolically violent (cf. Boltanski 2004b).

The normative objection rests on the suspicion that the critical social scientist allows herself to take a stance towards the other agents that would not readily be accepted in the context of everyday practice. For in everyday practice, agents are subject to the *de facto* power of a normative principle, which the critical social scientist should not want to simply shirk either:

> In all symmetrical communications and democratic decision-making processes, individuals are treated as free, equal, competent and autonomous. The actual individuals, as they are or have become, are the highest and only legitimate 'judges' in their own cases. [. . .] This simple basic principle of democratic decisions is the outcome, still precarious, of long and arduous historical learning processes, in which the institutional and legal guarantee of privileged access to truth and rightness was criticised and the fallibility of all cognitive and normative human judgements was recognised. This principle of 'ultimate' individual autonomy is very clearly a specific normative principle, which should have factual validity in the actual opinion-formation and decision-making processes. In actual decision-making processes, individuals are treated 'as if' they were fully autonomous, competent, free and equal, even if they are not in the eyes

of others (such as parents, teachers, politicians, utilitarian welfare economists, psychiatrists, pastors, etc.). And they have to be treated as such, lest the minimal conditions for democratic communication be violated. (Bader 1991: 148f)

From the perspective of the normative objection there is no reason for critical social science to be exempt from this demand (even if the approach will, given its objectivising moments, certainly be in tension with it) – especially since the objection is not to be understood as purely 'moralistic', but points to the "*de facto* force" of the normative attitude in everyday practice, that is, to the fact that we, in our everyday practices of justification and critique, mutually subject ourselves to this demand.

4.2 The Political-Strategical Objection

A further, at least partially normative objection draws attention to two problems of political strategy to which the orthodox conception of critical social science leads:

First, a "phenomenology of avant-garde consciousness" can provide an insight into the dangers of epistemic and ethical authoritarianism that confront a theory that trusts itself to have the objective knowledge which, for structural reasons, is supposed to elude 'ordinary' agents. Such a consciousness is characterised by a permanent willingness to interpret all phenomena according to its own expectations, which are shaped by the theory, and to either push both divergent convictions of others and its own self-doubt back into the framework pegged out by the theory, or to delegitimate them.[38] This does not only expose the approach to the danger of "epistemic decay" (Mills 1994: 32) – that is, the immunisation of one's own convictions against objections and the accompanying learning processes – but also to the possibility that claims of epistemic superiority turn into claims of political superiority. In that case, the opposition of science and ideology degenerates from an instrument of critique into a means of legitimating one's own standpoint and of sealing oneself off from alternative perspectives and interpretations, which are disqualified.[39] Of course this objection is not to be understood as claiming that an approach such as Bourdieu's is necessarily structured in an authoritarian manner. Still, an approach like this hardly seems to provide any theoretical resources in order to counter this danger, but rather remains exposed to it. Bourdieu, for instance, tends to perceive the agents' insistence on their self-interpretations and their resistance against the supposedly objective analysis of social science not as a (potential) objection, but as a confirmation of his own insights. He legitimates this, harking back to Freud in a rather questionable way, with the notion of collective resistance against the sociological truth.[40] The stronger the resistance, this perspective suggests,

the more likely that one is right. Alternative descriptions and interpretations can be explained as reactionary (the protection of one's own interests) or as sociologically explicable opposition (against having to give up an idealised self-image). This, however, is an immunisation strategy that, by objectifying the opponent – "You could only think of this objection because of your (proletarian, academic, etc.) habitus" – undermines any dialogue and ultimately declares the other side incompetent.

A second version of the political-strategical objection points to a possible tension between disillusionment and mobilisation – between a positivist perspective according to which the social world is based on rigid laws that are operative behind the agents' backs and can only be recognised from the scientific observer perspective, and a critical perspective, which actually presupposes the changeability of social conditions and the agents' capacity for acting, and assumes that they are responsive to critique (cf., for instance, Boltanski 2000: 143f). The latter seems to be excluded by the correspondence, identified by Bourdieu, between objective and cognitive structures and the pre-reflexive "logical conformism" of the oppressed that is secured by it. If the agents are understood as being trapped inside the prevailing social conditions, critical social science loses its addressees and its practical relevance.

Although the elaborate study *The Weight of the World* aims to let those 'affected' have a say as well (which is often seen as a sign of an 'interpretive turn' in Bourdieu's work), it still remains bound to a relatively clear opposition between the subjective testimony of the agents and the objectivising sociological perspective. In an interview from the time, Bourdieu expresses the idea as follows: "Workers know a lot: more than any intellectual, more than any sociologist. But in a sense they don't know it, they lack the instrument to grasp it, to speak about it" (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1994).[41] The claim that workers – and the 'oppressed' and disadvantaged in general – lack the means to express themselves and to articulate interpretations and critiques of their situation is not only historically implausible (and incompatible, for instance, with E. P. Thompson's studies of the English working class);[42] there is also a discrepancy with the emancipatory aims of the theory. It is Bourdieu himself who sets these aims for the theory, but as I shall discuss in more detail in sections 5 and 6 of part III, they impose certain restrictions on the nature of critical intervention and theoretical analysis (and exclude, for instance, a treatment of the addressees of the theory as 'judgemental dopes'). The assumption that only social scientists can lift the veil of ignorance and lead the ignorant in slow and appropriate steps towards insight engenders the very opposite of emancipation, to wit, dependency and stultification. According to Jacques Rancière, an emancipatory practice must therefore presume fundamental equality (for instance

in the capacity for independent thought), which is incompatible with the pedagogical idea of a break between knowledge and insight on the one side and ignorance and incompetence on the other:

> Explication is not necessary to remedy an incapacity to understand. On the contrary, that very incapacity provides the structuring fiction of the explicative conception of the world. It is the explicator who needs the incapable and not the other way around; it is he who constitutes the incapable as such. To explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself. Before being the act of the pedagogue, explication is the myth of peda-gogy, the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, ripe minds and immature ones, the capable and the incapable, the intelligent and the stupid. (Rancière 2004 [1987]: 15f; EN 6; cf. ibid.: 68; EN 71)

The objectivistic and scientistic self-understanding that underlies the ortho-dox conception of the critique of ideology, according to which knowledge in the social sciences can only achieve the status of objective knowledge of social reality when it results from the stance of the detached observer and breaks with everyday practice, is therefore in tension with the emancipa-tory aims of critical theories, since it severs the connection between critical theory and practice. The diagnosis entails that it is impossible for critical theory to uphold its practical aims. Alternatively, critical theory can invoke a pragmatics of reflection, judgement and critique, which I shall sketch in part II as the core of the second model. This pragmatics does not only emphasise the complexity of everyday practice, but also shows that the agents have reflexive capacities at their command that are expressed in social practices of justification and critique (cf. Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: EN 15, 347ff; Anderson 1993).

4.3 The Methodological Objection

The first two objections leave open the question of the possibility of knowl-edge in the social sciences on the objectivistic conception, and point to the consequences of an objectivist approach, which they claim are questionable normatively and in terms of political strategy. The methodological objection, in contrast, contests the fundamental possibility of such objectivistically understood knowledge. On a very general level, the target of this objection is the 'positivistic self-misunderstanding' of sociology as a science, whose object is a social reality independent of the self-understandings of the agents, or one that underlies these self-understandings without the agents realising. There is a discrepancy between this self-(mis)understanding and the 'double hermeneutic' with which the social sciences are confronted.

The interpretive and pragmatic (and in that sense post-empiricist) meta-theory of the social sciences – developed under the influence of Alfred Schütz, Peter Winch, Charles Taylor, Anthony Giddens and others (cf., for instance, Vielmetter 1999) – locates the distinctiveness of the social sciences at the ontological, methodological and epistemological levels. It takes their subject matter to be fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences, and for that reason, holds that the social sciences require different methods, which in turn generate a different kind of knowledge.[43] Since the 'object' of the social sciences consists not of an immediately accessible social reality, but of 'the constructs made by the actors on the social scene', sociology must, as for instance Schütz argues, be understood as producing second-order theories, whose object are the constructions and typifications of the agents along with the social reality constituted by them (Schütz 1953: 3). The self-understanding and self-interpretations of agents are not external to the subject matter of the research, but inextricably interwoven with it, so that the sociological observer perspective cannot even bring its subject matter to light without taking into account the participant perspective. For if the experiences and self-interpretations of agents are constitutive of social reality, then this reality cannot be grasped when one attempts to circumvent the former (cf. Taylor 1985b [1981] and 1985a [1971]: especially 26f). Even when those advocating the first model – say Bourdieu – would have to admit that the self-understanding of agents is constitutive of the subject matter they are concerned with, it does not play the methodological role it should.

In this context, the notion of a "double hermeneutic" is used for the two-tiered situation in which the 'object' the social sciences attempt to grasp (interpretively and in other ways) has already been (pre)interpreted by the 'ordinary' agents themselves as 'lay' or 'amateur sociologists', and in which a reciprocal relation can arise between 'expert' interpretations and those of 'laypersons' (cf. Giddens 1984: xxxii, 284; 1993 [1976]: 9, 13; Thompson 1990: 21, 275).[44] Insofar as the agents are part of the 'object' of scientific interpretation, that object can react to the interpretation with counterarguments, alternative interpretations or transformations in self-understanding – and in this reaction, it can change to such an extent that the interpretation will have to react to it in turn, lest a conflict of interpretations arise (cf. Hunyadi 1995: chapter 1). This is due to the fact that the theory – but this also holds for any other form of interpretation or critique – is underdetermined by social reality.[45]

If sociology loses sight of the folk sociology of 'ordinary' agents, it will also miss how successful they are at explaining, interpreting, predicting and influencing the behaviour of other agents.[46] Just like social scientists, the subjects who partly constitute the object of the social sciences, are "subjects capable of understanding and reflecting, and acting on the basis of this

understanding and reflection" (Thompson 1990: 275). 'Laypersons', too, are on this view considered social theorists who conduct empirical research in order to be able to act in everyday life in a context-appropriate manner. They are *homines sociologici*, but not – as in Ralf Dahrendorf (2006 [1959]) – in the sense of occupants of their social roles, but as agents who – in a sort of 'meta-role' – at the same time need to be sociologists, since this is the only way they can navigate the manifold contexts of their everyday behaviour and cope with "the vexatious fact of society". For this reason, "there is no clear dividing line between informed sociological reflection carried on by lay actors and similar endeavours on the part of specialists" (Giddens 1984: xxxiii).

There is thus no structural or fundamental distinction between the theoretical practice of the social scientist and the reflexive everyday practices of 'ordinary' agents. Rather, they are interrelated in at least three ways: "The best and most interesting ideas in the social sciences (a) participate in fostering the climate of opinion and the social processes which give rise to them, (b) are in greater or lesser degree entwined with theories-in-use which help to constitute those processes and (c) are thus unlikely to be clearly distinct from considered reflection which lay actors may bring to bear in so far as they discursively articulate, or improve upon, theories-in-use" (ibid.: xxxiv).

In contrast to this, the first model portrays 'ordinary' agents as trapped by an illusion, as incapable of reflection or detachment. This view is often argued for as part of the more general theorem of the incompatibility of practice and reflection:

> "Reflect or act, you have to choose" would seem to be the generally accepted motto on this question. One thing (reflection) is supposed to prevent the other (action), paralyse it (thinking about what one is doing would block action), so that the two things each live their separate lives. Reflection could intervene before or after action (reflection *on* past or future action), but never during action (reflection *at the same time* as action). One of the reasons for this rather simplistic dualism lies in the fact that reflection is immediately understood (in a logocentric fashion) as theoretical, scholarly, rational reflection. It is implicitly considered that only these scholarly practices merit the name of "reflection". [. . .] there is always a pragmatically anchored reflection indissociable from the action under way and from the elements of the immediate context, which does not necessarily involve a "pause" in the action. A theory of action must therefore *integrate into its scientific programme the study of different forms of reflection at work in different types of action*. (Lahire 2001 [1998]: 185f; EN 159; my emphasis)

Once practice is labelled structurally naive and pre-reflexive, critique will really seem possible only from an external perspective. Such a perspective

will yield a flat and distorted image of social practice, largely blanking out the reflexive abilities of agents that are constitutive of its complexity. That agents need an exceedingly elaborate folk psychology and folk sociology in order to navigate the social world is acknowledged just as little as the manifold social practices of justification and critique that are involved in this.

If the conception argued for by the first model – of a pre-reflexive everyday practice and narrow-minded 'ordinary' agents (as 'judgemental dopes') – is rejected, there no longer is any reason to consider critique a monopoly of critical social science, or to hope it could be based on an objective scientific perspective. For the underestimation of agents and their reflexive capacities, inherent to the model of asymmetry and the break, comes with a corresponding overestimation of critical social science and its prospects for identifying social conditions of which the agents cannot be aware (cf., for instance, Boltanski 2008b). It is far from clear on what basis critical social science is supposed to be able to use the epistemic privilege in which it grounds its critique. The attitude of 'I see something you don't see' is perfectly unproblematic as long as it is understood as a practical attitude that can in principle be assumed by any agent and that is, in fact, taken up in everyday life by 'ordinary' agents all the time when they criticise each other. The problem arises only if the critical social scientist claims to see something that the 'ordinary' agents do not see for fundamental reasons, or fancies she knows something the others cannot know.[47] What might be the basis for such a claim if neither objective social science knowledge nor a historically privileged class perspective is available? And how is the clear epistemological break between science and ideology supposed to be established and sustained if the standpoint from which ideology is criticised is always at risk of turning out to be ideological itself?

In the absence of a neutral observer standpoint from which one could bring to light the entirety of positions and the ways in which they are related to an independent reality, it will have to be acknowledged that the critic of ideology is not *hors de combat*, but takes up a specific position within the ideological field, which she cannot neutralise with the objectivising methods of a reflexive social science à la Bourdieu.[48] In this context, the claim of critical social science that it can avail itself of an objectivistic and scientific foundation that is not itself normative looks like an attempt to shirk the demand for justification to which any everyday critique is subject (cf. Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: EN 11). Precisely this is what Rancière criticises about Bourdieu's approach: in a first step, a "theoretical mechanism" is construed from two basic ideas: "1. The system reproduces its existence because it is misunderstood. 2. By reproducing its existence, the system generates an effect of misunderstanding". In a second step, the "sociologist gets himself into the position of the one who forever denounces the system that manages to hide itself from its agents for good" (Rancière 2003 [1984]: 367; EN 162f).[49]

Although Bourdieu continually warns against the fallacies that his philosophical and sociological colleagues, with their purely "scholastic" perspectives, are at risk of falling prey to (cf., for instance, Bourdieu 1994: chapter 7), his own method therefore exposes him to a twofold critique. First, the scientist cannot enforce an objectivist break with the 'naiveté of the experience of the natives' and at the same time understand their practices (such as gift exchange). Second, the capacity for detachment from the immediate practical context and for taking a reflective and critical stance on one's own behaviour – a stance that does not presuppose a 'view from nowhere' – is a possibility internal to everyday practice, and certainly not a monopoly of sociology. Taking a different perspective, one that is in a sense external, is just as possible as a partial objectivation – both occur often enough in our everyday sociological practice. Problematic is only the false self-understanding of a social science perspective that deems it possible to break entirely with this everyday sociological practice.

4.3.1 Excursus: Participant Observation and Representation in Ethnology

We can close in on these fundamental methodological problems a little more by looking at the so-called crisis of representation and the 'reflexive turn' in ethnology that occurred in response to it.[50] To put it very schematically, the crisis started with the 'discovery' that traditional ethnology – after it left its phase of 'armchair anthropology' and actually ventured out into the 'wild' – generally functioned according to the following pattern: the social scientist observer travels to a far-away place, joins the locals at the campfire, so to say, and figures out what are the real function and meaning of the rather curious-looking practices of the natives – the observations authenticating the description, and the latter, in turn, the interpretation. Essential for this form of ethnological practice is the assumption that the strangers and their practices can be adequately described in the vocabulary of western ethnologists, so that it seems they can do without the presumably 'biased' indigenous self-interpretations. However, reflection on the context in which ethnological knowledge comes to be developed 'on the ground' – an explicit example, perhaps the most famous one, is Bronislaw Malinowski's *Diary in a Strict Sense of the Term* – gives rise to massive doubt about the putative objectivity of the observer perspective. For under the smooth surface of the finished products that deny the circumstances of their production, such reflection reveals the complexities of fieldwork – especially the involvement of the observer in the object of her observation.

The insight that the observer is no pure observer was initially redefined – again by Malinowski – from a problem into the method of 'participant observation'. Nevertheless, this practice too remains confronted with the objection

that it is unclear to what extent the 'scientific' (and in that sense only tempo-
rarily participating) observer can be distinguished from the 'non-scientific'
(and in that sense 'truly' participating) observers, and how their potentially
conflicting interpretations are to be dealt with. In this light, there are extreme
epistemological *and* political problems with any monologic form of represen-
tation that does not allow those represented to have a say, that does not attach
any importance to their self-understanding and that, thus, builds a structural
asymmetry into the relation between the observer and the participant perspec-
tives.[51] This pretension to represent manifests itself particularly crassly in
one of the entries in Malinowski's fieldwork diary: "Feeling of ownership:
It is I who will describe them or create them" (cited in the editorial introduc-
tion in Berg and Fuchs 1999 [1993]: 76). With what right – especially if the
observer is, after all, also a participant, and the participants are also observ-
ers? For if we allow that the 'natives' or 'ordinary' agents are observers who
participate and are capable of reflexive detachment, then the monopoly of
the ethnological observer on the external perspective disappears – the very
perspective that, in combination with her simultaneous internal perspective
as a *participant* observer, was supposed to render her uniquely qualified to
develop a comprehensive understanding unavailable in the same manner to
the agents themselves.

Methodologically, the crisis of the observer perspective and its claim to
representing the natives who are incapable of representing themselves and
speaking for themselves paved the way for a transition to a more interpretive,
hermeneutic approach, which promotes the agents' self-interpretations from
the rank of mere explananda to that of explanantia. The interpretations of
ethnologists are always interpretations of a second and third order, which are
based on the interpretations of agents and must therefore take their perspec-
tives into account (cf. Geertz 2000 [1973]: 15f).

Although the interpretive approach produced (to borrow two famous titles
from Clifford Geertz) "thick descriptions" "from the native's point of view",
there has always been attention for the fundamentally controversial nature of
the ever-partial interpretation, and for the necessarily dialogical – not merely
'empathic' – character of the interaction (more participation than observa-
tion) between the agents involved, the 'researchers' and 'those researched'.
The agents themselves are not mere 'native informants' providing additional
material, but are fundamentally equal conversation partners in the struggle for
the right interpretation.

The crisis of representation and the transition from observation to partici-
pant observation to interpretation to dialogue certainly should not invite the
questionable conclusion that the 'natives' have some sort of access to their
cultural knowledge that is available to them alone, and that the 'emic' insider
perspective is epistemically privileged. In a way, they have a similar relation

to their own culture as the ethnologists who travelled there, for in relation to their own culture they are themselves in the position of researchers and theorists; they adopt different perspectives and produce interpretations that are controversial and whose validity can be established only in a dialogue between all involved (cf. Sharrock and Anderson 1982 as well as McCarthy 1994).

This debate about the status of ethnological knowledge – the challenge to a pure observer perspective on the one hand, the problematisation of the claim to representation from the standpoint of the participant observer on the other – painted here with a very broad brush, involves some of the fundamental problems that, on a much more general level, characterise the relation between the participant and the observer perspective in the social sciences. The prospects for understanding another culture or society are greatly diminished if (and to the extent that) the ethnological observer believes she is able to grasp it from her imaginary external point of view independently of the interpretations of the participants. There is no reason to think that this would be different in the case of the sociological observer, especially when, as is the case in Bourdieu's theory, the ethnologist-native relationship tends to be translated into a sociologist-agent relationship.

This methodological objection – the critique concerning the *approach* of the model of the break – leads to the empirical objection: to the critique that essential aspects of the subject matter are blanked out. While the three objections sketched thus far raise important questions, in my judgement they do not run deep enough. The first two, especially, can be rejected by advocates of critical social science under the heading of wishful normative thinking and may only undermine their claim to developing a normatively adequate and practically relevant perspective on social reality. Only the empirical objection can show that critical social science fails to uncover the structure of the practice it studies, that it paints a distorted picture of social reality.

4.4 The Empirical Objection

One of the central theses of the orthodox model of critical social science, also advocated by Bourdieu, states that the stability of domination relies on those subjected to it incorporating the prevailing opinion, which at the same time is the opinion of the dominant group, the opinion that serves its interests. In addition, those dominated must accept the legitimacy of the domination by misjudging its foundations and modes of reproduction. The assumption that modern societies rest on the acceptance of certain beliefs and values, that is, on a kind of ideological consensus (even if it is also very much rooted in the body, and not 'just' in the minds of the agents), is, however, extremely questionable empirically. What speaks against the 'consensual theory of social

reproduction' and the associated theory of ideology as 'social cement' is not just the fact that it implies the existence of a functionalist macro-context that can hardly be empirically substantiated (cf. Thompson 1990: 87ff). Which beliefs are part of the dominant ideology, how they are 'forced down the throats' of the underprivileged social groups and in what sense they are functionally *necessary* for the reproduction of the social order or function as its 'cement' are far from clear. Furthermore, in modern societies it does not seem very easy to identify a dominant ideology, and even from a historical perspective supposedly dominant ideologies (for instance Victorian sexual morals, insofar as they can serve as an example for a dominant ideology) seem to have been believed by the dominant group rather than by those dominated.[52] The unity and integration that social orders are often supposed to display is compatible neither with the social plurality and heterogeneity of institutional contexts, practices and discourses of self-understanding, nor with the fact that, given this plurality and heterogeneity, it is possible for agents to critically distance themselves from concrete situations and contexts of interaction, and to develop oppositional forms of consciousness.

This general empirical objection can be spelled out in a variety of ways. To begin with, the idea implies that society is held together by social norms whose internalisation guarantees conformity to the norm and thus facilitates social order, as the behaviour of individuals is steered into socially acceptable directions without them being aware, implies an implausible notion of the "oversocialised person".[53] In his critique of the assumption of homogeneity – an assumption that also underlies Bourdieu's analysis of the internally stabilising context of reproduction consisting of structure, habitus and practice – Bernard Lahire, for instance, points out that there is no such thing as a homogeneous macro-structure that could guarantee, through the influence of a uniform habitus, that the individual modes of behaviour are not overly discrepant. Such a uniform habitus can be presumed to exist neither on the individual level nor on the level of social groups of classes. The plurality and heterogeneity of social contexts and fields of action rather lead to plural and heterogeneous forms of habitus, and on the part of 'ordinary' agents it calls for a degree of reflexivity that goes beyond the practical sense as Bourdieu understood it (cf. Lahire 2001 [1998]).

Granted, Bourdieu too allows for the possibility of a "*habitus clivé*", that is, a habitus that is split and internally contradictory, since it developed under heterogeneous conditions of socialisation (cf., for instance, Bourdieu 1997: 79; EN 64; Bourdieu et al. 1993: 1098; EN 383). The question, however, is whether he does not underestimate the heterogeneity of the lifeworlds and experiences that shape the habitus, as well as the fact that having to deal with divergent, not necessarily coherent, schemata of interpretation and evaluation is an everyday occurrence. At this point, Bourdieu could counter that under

certain conditions, increased reflexivity just becomes part of a specific habitus. This, though, would not only contradict his thesis that the logic of one's own practice cannot be questioned and that the habitus is essentially pre-reflexive and imposes strict boundaries on the reflexivity of agents; it would also fail to do justice to the strength of the objection. For the objection does not seek to restrict reflexivity to certain groups of agents under certain social conditions, but – as I shall discuss in the next part of the book in reference to ethnomethodology and the sociology of critique – grants all agents reflexive capacities, contesting the thesis of the pre-reflexive character of everyday action. On this view, problems and situations of crisis, which require the agent to adopt a reflexive and detached attitude, are far too common in everyday life to be conceived of as exceptions to the rule of unreflected routine behaviour (cf. Lahire 2001 [1998]: 56–59; EN 45–47).[54]

Like the "strangers" in Schütz's account, in most everyday situations 'ordinary' agents cannot afford to persist in their natural attitude, since socially binding interpretations of situations and scripts for behaviour are not given; they constitute problems that have to be worked on collectively by the agents themselves. In order to find their bearings, to adjust their own behaviour to the requirements of the situation at hand and to coordinate with the actions of others, 'ordinary' agents must possess the ability to take up a critical and detached attitude and need to be equipped with folk sociological theories that allow them to explain, interpret and anticipate the behaviour of others. In order to navigate a variety of differentiated social spaces with increasingly unstable expectations regarding behaviour and an aggravated risk of dissent, agents must be able to switch constantly between "engagement and detachment".[55]

If we are to understand their behaviour, then, we must credit the agents with the ability to separate themselves from the immediate context in which they act, and to develop a critical view on it from a different perspective. This very basic form of reflexivity grounds everyday practices of justification and critique just as much as the 'micro practices' of resistance of 'ordinary' agents. The existence of these practices easily escapes the attention of the critique of ideology or hegemony theory, since they are often located at the level of local interactions and do not always make themselves known at the macro-level of social structures and traditional interpretative models. With regard to these practices, James C. Scott speaks of "little traditions" that develop against the beliefs and values of the "great traditions" of the elites, and serve the 'ordinary' agent as cultural resources of dissent and critique. Scott argues that this makes the situation too complex to presume an ideological hegemony of "the dominant" to which "the dominated" – given the coercion and internalisation of the ideology – can only respond by accepting their lot and adopting the views of the dominant group (cf. Scott 1977;

1985).[56] A more precise sociological and historical inspection, which looks not just at the stage but also behind the scenes, will find a diverse repertoire of forms of critique and resistance, of counter-hegemonic practices and forms of self-understanding, with which agents question the legitimacy of the status quo. The fact that these practices often do not leave any marks in the "public transcripts" that document the official views does not mean that they do not exist; rather, it is necessary to search for the "hidden transcripts", most likely to occur in the social spaces away from the control of "the dominant" in which there is an opportunity for (at least rudimentary forms of) counter-publics to develop.[57]

An analysis of these "hidden transcripts" – myths, for instance, or stories and rumours – shows, in Scott's view, that the subordinated are in the vast majority of cases aware of the fact that they are being dominated, and that, contra the assumptions of ideology and hegemony theory, they certainly do not accept this as either legitimate (strong version) or natural and 'just the way it is' (weak version). Contra the thesis, also defended by Bourdieu, of a mental and political conformism that is supported by the internalisation of a way of thinking that legitimates domination, Scott emphasises three things. First, historically and empirically speaking, any form of domination is confronted with (more or less open or hidden) resistance. Second, the cultural forms of self-understanding developed by the subordinated, as they appear in the "little traditions", often display a utopian, critical and even revolutionary dimension, which controvert the supposed belief of the subordinated in the legitimacy, natural character and unchangeability of their domination. Third, social change is often initiated "from below", with hidden forms of resistance paving the way for open resistance mostly because they involve discourses of critique and justification that foster forms of oppositional consciousness, which in turn are a precondition for the intentional transformation of the status quo.[58] If no openly resistant forms of political action and discourse result, this should not necessarily be blamed on the ideological blindness of the agents; it could also be (from Scott's perspective, it would in fact likely be) due to a 'realistic' analysis of what is possible under the circumstances.

Such a perspective contradicts the thesis that agents are passive, that in their mutually coordinated behaviour they reproduce objective social structures and that they internalise the way of thinking of the dominant group. Instead, it emphasises the reflexive and critical potential of everyday practice – a potential that manifests itself in forms of appropriation and repurposing as well as in other everyday and popular tactics or creative ways of acting. These practices do not presuppose a break with common sense – they are a version of it.[59] At least in complex societies, an important role is reserved for the social circulation of sociological theories and their semantics, which are increasingly turned into resources that are available to 'ordinary' agents, and

that can be used by them – "*comme des savants*"[60] – in practices of judgement, justification and critique.[61] Not even the vocabulary of unmasking hidden layers of motivation or unconscious power relations – something critical social theorists long considered their monopoly – is exempt from this.[62] These thoughts give rise to the assumption of symmetry, formulated by Ève Chiapello as follows: "all humans must be granted the same elementary capacities as social scientists when it comes to questioning ideologies and social representations. It must be acknowledged that what the social sciences produce is already included in society's hermeneutic circle" (Chiapello 2003: 157). In the next part of the book, I shall turn to two approaches that build on precisely this assumption of symmetry.

5. SUMMARY AND PREVIEW

A critical social science which, like Bourdieu's, is indebted to the dogmas of the break and of asymmetry fails to capture the complexity of practice, because it blanks out the reflexivity of agents as well as the practices in which this reflexivity is expressed. Moreover, led by this false picture, it seeks a scientific standpoint that is located outside of the practice it analyses, and that is supposed to guarantee the objectivity of the social scientist's critical perspective by enabling the exposure of a social reality that exists independently of the self-understandings of agents. The latter can, in Bourdieu's view, even be understood in such a way that the sociological knowledge of the sociologist allows her to liberate herself from the social conditions to which she, like any other agent, is otherwise subject (cf. Bourdieu 1999 [1993]: 372f; cf. 2003). This double orientation, which I have criticised as an underestimation of the agents and an overestimation of critical social science, leads to the normative, methodological and political-strategic problems discussed above, but fails most importantly because of its one-sided view of social reality.

The assumption that only social science knowledge and the critique of the practices and self-understandings of agents based on it can form a foundation for the liberation of the agent rests on a set of action-theoretical presuppositions: agents – captured in the nexus of structure, habitus and practice – are not able to adopt a reflexive and objectivising attitude, the habitus as such is pre-reflexive and cannot be brought to consciousness, and unconscious, pre-reflexive routine behaviour is the primary mode of action. According to this picture, only the social scientist can lift the veil that obscures the 'ordinary' agent's view of social reality. She can achieve this because objectivation and blanking out the participant perspective are instruments "to *break* with the illusion of common sense" (ibid.: 367; cf. 2003). This illusion is fundamentally connected to the fact "that the primary experience of the social

constitutes a relation of immediate belief, which compels us to accept the world as it is" – so that sociology must "go beyond mere description and ask about the conditions of possibility of this doxic experience" (ibid.). The approaches that do not do this – including, from Bourdieu's point of view, the ones I shall discuss in the next part – resemble "a 'charitable' social philosophy and a 'soft' sociology that regards itself as based on 'understanding'", but which, by adopting the participant perspective, duplicates the "self-mystification" of the agents (Bourdieu 1998: EN 35f).

The 'objectivist' model of social theory clearly distances itself from the allegedly naive 'spontaneous sociology' of the 'ordinary' agents, who are caught up in the 'illusion of reflexivity' and therefore are bound to miss the constraints to which their action is subject.[63] It is the task of critical social science, then, to reveal what eludes the agents, since it happens behind their backs.

However, it is a central element of the reflexive structure of the self-experience of the agents that they understand their behaviour not as a quasi-mechanical reproduction of given and routine patterns of action, but as something that is fundamentally available to reflection – a fact that manifests itself in their mutual normative expectations and in the reflexivity of actual practices of justification and judgement. Competent agents assume of each other that they are – under 'normal' circumstances – able to explain and justify their actions (without, in doing so, falling for the illusion of perfect self-transparency). If this is not the case, they look for internal or external factors – for instance psychological or social ones – that have in this particular case led to the fact that they cannot explain or justify their own actions or those of others. From the points of view of ethnomethodology and the sociology of critique, to which I shall now turn, there is no *a priori* reason for the sociologist to adopt a different attitude from that of the agents, or to treat their explanations and justifications from the outset as epistemically suspect across the board: "people do not ordinarily seek to invent false pretexts after the fact so as to cover up some secret motive, the way one comes up with an alibi; rather, they seek to carry out their actions in such a way that these can withstand the test of justification" – whether by other agents or by a sociologist (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: EN 37).

In the following part, I shall discuss ethnomethodology and the sociology of critique – two approaches associated with the interpretive and pragmatic turn that argue against the conception of a critical social science as proposed by Bourdieu, by claiming that the basic premises of this approach, shaped by functionalism and structuralism, constitute the true veil blocking the theorist's view of social reality – a reality that is vastly more complex than the theoretical vocabulary of critical social science suggests. While Bourdieu argues that agents "normally never ask themselves the questions that I would ask myself if I acted towards them as an anthropologist" (Bourdieu 2003: 51; EN 288; cf. Bourdieu 1987a: EN 130) and that researchers therefore need not

pay folk theories any heed, ethnomethodology and the sociology of critique reserve a central place in their methodological and empirical work for the reflexive capacities of the agents and the complexity of everyday practices of justification and critique.

NOTES

1. In this book, I am primarily concerned with the action-theoretical foundations and the methodological self-understanding of Bourdieu's approach, not with his substantive sociological research. Agreeing with the fundamental critique developed here does not necessarily imply that one should contest the originality and fruitfulness of Bourdieu's empirical work (although its methodological status will, from the perspective proposed here, be understood differently).

2. According to Durkheim, social facts "are like molds into which we are forced to cast our actions" (2002 [1894]: 29; EN 37). Normally, we do this automatically and without being aware of it, so that the mould becomes noticeable only when an act "does not fit".

3. At the end of the first chapter of the *Rules*, Durkheim summarises his attempts at a definition as follows: "A social fact is any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint; or: which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations" (2002 [1894]: 14; EN 27).

4. While Durkheim's understanding of science is less overreaching, he did, for instance, regularly deliver a lecture course titled 'Physique des mœurs et du droit' ('Physics of morals and law'). The hope to provide social and political action with an objective foundation beyond ideological differences influences his work as much as it shapes Comte's.

5. I shall discuss Bachelard in the next section.

6. In a book review, Durkheim writes: "We regard as fruitful this idea that social life must be explained, not by the conception of it held by those who participate in it, but by profound causes which escape consciousness" (citation in Lukes 1985 [1973]: 231).

7. Cf. the entire first chapter titled 'The idea of the epistemological obstacle'.

8. Cf. the entire sixth chapter titled 'Common knowledge and scientific knowledge'.

9. Lévi-Strauss, for instance, takes up the topos of the break, and claims that "to reach reality, one must first reject experience, in order to subsequently reintegrate it into a synthesis that is objective and devoid of any sentimentality". Overcoming the "illusions of subjectivity" is necessary if one is to resist the "raising of personal preoccupations to the dignity of philosophical problems", thus lapsing into "shop-girl metaphysics" (1973 [1955]: 62f; EN 58).

10. The fact that Althusser, in contrast to Bachelard, speaks of "*coupure*" instead of "*rupture*" does not seem to have any deeper significance.

11. An early, partly politically motivated critique in this vein can be found in Rancière (1994 [1969]). For a (very one-sided) "culturalist" critique of the

structural-functionalist side of Althusser's Marxism that claims that the approach leaves no room for the experiences and self-understanding of agents, see Thompson (1995 [1978]).

12. The extent to which Bourdieu's position is indebted to Durkheim is also emphasised by Dosse (1992: chapter 6: 'Durkheim gets a second wind: Pierre Bourdieu').

13. Allusion to the subtitle of Bourdieu's 1979 book *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement*, published in English as *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*.

14. This section follows Celikates (2006b).

15. In relation to the following, see in particular Bourdieu (2000 [1972]: 337ff ('L'action du temps et le temps de l'action'); EN 4–8 (the English translation differs significantly from the French); 1980: chapter 6; 1997: 229ff; EN 191ff).

16. Cf. Bourdieu (1980: EN 66; 1997: 171; EN 184). It is no coincidence that this description is reminiscent of Aristotle's remarks on the *kairos* of acting (*Nicomachean Ethics*: II 2,1104a7ff). Since no *technē* can replace a practice and no fixed set of rules can guide it, agents will have to judge the particular situation, the *kairos*, for themselves, aided by experience (*empeiría*) and judgement (*phronēsis*). *Kairos* involves not only the right time, but the totality of circumstances to which the act must adapt itself. In contrast to the Aristotelian conception of *phronēsis*, however, Bourdieu understands the practical sense as an essentially pre-reflexive skill of orientation in and adaptation to situations.

17. The 'forceless force' of the gift exchange can make itself felt to the participants as well, though. It appears as an implicit obligation to adhere to the rules of giving, receiving and reciprocating. Of course, it happens time and again that a gift is not reciprocated or that someone takes the liberty of committing some other sort of *faux pas* – returning an identical gift, say, or something wholly inappropriate. Such behaviour quickly yields consequences, however: one is chastised as ungrateful – "After all we've done for you . . ." – and excluded from future transactions and communications, because the others were "short-changed".

18. This leads Bourdieu to the assumption of 'strategies without strategic intention'; cf. Bourdieu (1994: EN 81) and the critique of this idea in Elster (1981) (Elster accuses Bourdieu of having a "semi-conspiratorial, semi-functionalist world view"). Unsurprisingly, Bourdieu answers the (rhetorical) question "is disinterested action possible?" in the negative (1994: chapter 5; EN chapter 4); also cf. Bourdieu (1997: 145–51; EN 118–22). Bourdieu does avoid a crude form of materialism and determinism by introducing a comprehensive conception of strategic and interest-driven action, which takes into account not only material gain (in the form of money or power, for instance) but also symbolic gains (such as prestige and recognition).

19. In contrast to Mauss, Bourdieu thus eliminates the very altruistic moment of gift exchange. While Mauss views gift exchange as a countermodel to the modern remnant of sociality, which is thoroughly commercialised and only geared to the self-interest of atomised individuals, in Bourdieu's eyes, gift exchange is a paradigmatic case of the misrecognition of the economic logic of competing interests. Bourdieu's econom(ist)ic interpretation of linguistic practices can be found, for instance, in Bourdieu (1977b).

20. A similar critique can be found in Miller (1989: 217f). Also cf. Bourdieu's own warning against the danger of reductionism in (2000 [1972]: EN 182f, 232), as well as Ingram (2013: chapter 4.2) for a defence of Bourdieu against these criticisms.

21. Cf., for instance, Bourdieu (1967; 2000 [1972]: 72ff; 1980: 27ff; 1997: 133, 143; EN 191); Müller (2002).

22. Cf. Bourdieu (1982 [1979]: 734; EN 470). The aim of this study, possibly Bourdieu's most famous one, is well known: to prove that even the most personal and individual decisions – those of taste and style – are objectively conditioned by one's position in the social domain. As such, it ties in with Durkheim's study on suicide. Also cf. Bourdieu (1980: EN 66).

23. Bourdieu further elaborates on his rejection of the terminology of rules on the basis of its inherent ambiguity in an interview with the programmatic title "From rules to strategies" (in Bourdieu 1987a: 79–98; EN 59–75). According to Bourdieu, practices are strategy-oriented, rather than guided or controlled by rules (cf. Bourdieu 1994: 207, 211; EN 81).

24. Cf. Bourdieu (1987a: EN 9): "Action is not the mere carrying out of a rule, or obedience to a rule. Social agents [. . .] are not automata regulated like clocks [. . .]. They put into action the incorporated principles of a generative habitus"; cf. Bourdieu (1980: EN 41, 48f; 2000 [1972]: 95).

25. Even if Bourdieu uses *habitus* in order to avoid *habitude* (i.e., habit) (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: EN 122).

26. Cf. Bourdieu's own warning in Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: EN 108f) as well as the criticisms in Alexander (1995: 136) and Bader (1991: 96ff). The bias towards a mechanistic interpretation also has its basis in Bourdieu's understanding of the habitus as a dispositional regulation of behaviour. As the debate on the problem of rule-following in connection with Wittgenstein has shown, however, it is entirely unclear what the status of dispositions is and how they are supposed to steer behaviour.

27. On the reciprocal reproductive and stabilising relation between class position, on the one hand, and class sense and class habitus, on the other, also see Bourdieu (1985b).

28. Cf. Bourdieu and Eagleton (1994) and Wacquant (2002). Bourdieu avoids the notion of ideology because of the focus on false consciousness, which he deems too cognitivistic and incapable of doing justice to the central role of embodiment – not because he takes the associated idea of an epistemically privileged perspective to be unproblematic; cf. Bourdieu (1997: 211f; EN 177).

29. Cf. Bourdieu (1982 [1979]: EN 468 as well as 1980: EN 91): "Simply because [the agent] is questioned, and questions himself, about the reasons and the *raison d'être* of his practice, he cannot communicate the essential point, which is that the very nature of practice is that it excludes this question". Somewhere else (1997: chapter 2), Bourdieu argues that merely thinking about what one is currently doing leads to a transition from practice to reflection, from a practical to a theoretical attitude.

30. Bourdieu, however, does not directly address the question whether this perspective can be brought into line with the 'natural' attitude of the social scientist as an agent. On the contrast between *doxa* and reflexive sociology, also cf. Susen (2007: part II).

31. In the face of such objections at the theoretical level, Bourdieu can of course always point out that he bases himself on empirical findings. However, these too are controversial and are probably not generalisable as easily as Bourdieu often presumes; cf. Hradil (1989).

32. Cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: EN 66, 71) as well as Bourdieu (1999 [1993]: 367; cf. 2003). Besides the "good" sociological break, there are "strategies of the false break", such as the delineation of philosophy from common sense that Bourdieu, in his critique of Heidegger, considers a sociologically explicable and politically questionable aristocratic illusion (cf. Bourdieu 1988: 85f; EN 82). But even those advocating other theories – such as ethnomethodology – are subject to the "illusion of reflexivity" and will at best reach a "narcissistic reflexivity", which Bourdieu distinguishes from "scientific reflexivity" (characteristic of his own approach); cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: EN 214, 246).

33. Bourdieu certainly does "ask himself from what point of view he operates this sovereign objectification" – except that the 'he' here does not refer to Bourdieu himself, but to Raymond Aron (1992 [1984]: EN xvi). In the section of *La misère du monde* (*The Weight of the World*) titled "Comprendre", Bourdieu makes clear once again that according to him, agents do not know what they are doing, since they "do not innately possess a science of what they are and what they do" (Bourdieu et al. 1993: 1413; EN 620). The sociologist, in contrast, can help them articulate themselves, and for her part can, through the hard work of reflection, approximate a neutralisation of the social factors influencing her. In Bourdieu's view, this is the only way towards increased freedom (cf. Bourdieu 2002 [1980]: 44f; EN 23ff; 1997: 157; EN 117).

34. In a different passage (2001: 46; EN 20), Bourdieu writes that structures and individual dispositions, which are determined by the objective relations within a field, are the "real principle of actions". Cf. the critiques of Butler (1999) and Reckwitz (2004), as well a defence of Bourdieu against such a "totalising" interpretation in Ingram (2013: chapter 4.2).

35. Cf. Miller (1989: 201): what distinguishes Bourdieu's approach, consequently, "from a traditional mechanistic and deterministic theory, is evidently merely that causalities are no longer considered linear, but circular or recursive".

36. Cf. Bourdieu (1982 [1979]: EN 232ff, 374ff; 1989: EN 11–18). Bourdieu takes the idea of such moral and logical conformism from Durkheim, who considered it a necessary pillar of the social order.

37. Bourdieu aims to disclose "'the hidden' par excellence", "the transcendental unconscious" (Bourdieu 2001: 168; EN 86); cf. Dreyfus's and Rabinow's critique of Bourdieu: "The more common sense denies that *all* action is motivated *solely* by the attempt to use the structure of the social field to increase symbolic capital, the more the scientist sees evidence of the necessity of preserving the *illusio* in order for the system to work" (1993: 41).

38. For such a phenomenology, one that takes its start from the historical cases of Grenada and Stalinism, cf. Mills (1990 and 1994).

39. In a polemical critique, Jacques Rancière (1983: 239ff; EN 189) for this reason accuses Bourdieu of assuming the position of a Platonic "sociologist-king" coming

into the inheritance of philosophy, who shows agents their places and makes sure that everybody does their bit, and that he, in doing so, not only protects his own epistemically privileged position, but also joins the long history of the political as well as epistemological disappropriation of the oppressed.

40. Cf. Bourdieu (1985a: 187–88), where he speaks of "collective defence mechanisms", "negation", "traumatic reality" and "self-deception, that collectively entertained and encouraged form of lying to oneself".

41. Cf. Bourdieu et al. (1993: 1408ff; EN 621). This also becomes clear from the fact that the 'explanatory interpretations' *precede* the interview – the reader therefore already knows how to interpret what the conversation partners are saying. For a defence of the emancipatory potential of Bourdieu's approach, however, see Sonderegger (2009) and Ingram (2013: chapter 4.2).

42. Cf. Thompson (1966 [1963], particularly the preface and chapter XVI); also cf. section 4.4 below.

43. The fact that (since Kuhn) even the philosophy (and history) of science has in the meantime subjected the classical positivist view of 'hard sciences' to some revisions can be ignored here – especially since the force of the ideal of knowledge on the model of knowledge of the laws of nature does not seem to have been weakened by it in any lasting manner.

44. Bohman (1991: 7) speaks of a "double indeterminacy", which results from the fact that reflexive agents interact with other reflexive agents. This indeterminacy means that overly rigid explanations of behaviour are doomed to fail from the outset.

45. Taking a cue from W. V. O. Quine's classical formulation of the fundamental underdetermination of theories by the data on which they are based, that is, of the irreducible plurality of incompatible and yet empirically equivalent theories, someone like Steven Lukes (1978) emphasises that in the context of social theories, with their controversial terminologies (disputed among agents and theoreticians as well as between them) and their relation to a social reality that has already been pre-interpreted, this thesis is even more plausible.

46. 'Folk sociology' is to be understood, analogously to 'folk psychology', as referring to the patterns of explanation, interpretation and prediction of 'ordinary' agents. Whether the folk-psychological abilities of agents should be understood in terms of a substantive theory (as the 'theory-theory' supposes) or in terms of an imagined identification with concrete interaction partners ('simulation theory') does not need to be settled here. In the case of folk *sociology* at least, quite a lot seems to speak in favour of the 'theory-theory'.

47. That this claim to a privileged perspective is accompanied by a specific kind of blindness is an argument found in Luhmann (1990 and 1991).

48. My concern is in the first instance to identify the problem, not yet to take a stance on it; but see Clifford Geertz's remarks on this problem, which he calls "Mannheim's paradox", in Geertz (2000 [1964]).

49. For another critical approach to such a "sociology of necessity", see Boltanski (2002).

50. Cf., for instance, Marcus and Fischer (1999 [1986]: chapters 1–2); the collection of important contributions to the debate in Berg and Fuchs (1999 [1993]); and on

the relevance of this initially ethnology-specific debate for the philosophy of social science McCarthy (1992).

51. It is evident that this political asymmetry is fundamentally connected to the embeddedness of ethnology in the colonial situation. As I argued above, though, even in the case of social theory the asymmetry has a political dimension.

52. Cf., for instance, the influential critique of the idea of a 'dominant ideology' in Abercrombie and Turner (1978).

53. For the classical critique of this idea, see Wrong (1961).

54. In addition, Lahire points out that Bourdieu's analyses generalise from a particular case to a model of the social world in which everyone is under constant pressure to act, incapable of modifying or repeating their own actions, and best advised to manage new situations by reacting spontaneously without too much thought, like a tennis player coping with the next rally.

55. Cf. Elias (1956); Boltanski and Thévenot (1991: EN 357): "In fact, in order to face the world, people have to shuttle continually back and forth between reflection and action, shifting constantly between moments of conscious control and moments in which the appeal of the present launches them into the course of events".

56. In his empirical and historical studies, Scott describes in minute detail the mixture of calculated conformity and everyday practices of resistance and appropriation that are involved in the disadvantaged social groups' rejections of symbolic claims of domination; cf. Scott (1985, for instance at 304): "If, behind the façade of behavioral conformity imposed by elites, we find innumerable, anonymous acts of resistance, so also do we find, behind the façade of symbolic and ritual compliance, innumerable acts of ideological resistance". The notion of hegemony obscures the fact that most 'ordinary' agents in their everyday experiences and practices are perfectly capable of seeing through the ideology of the dominant group and of developing alternative interpretations and heterodox ideological views; and that they will very rarely take something to be justified or unchangeable just because it seems unavoidable under the circumstances, and because they adapt their behaviour for pragmatic reasons.

57. Cf. Scott (1990, in relation to the following in particular chapter 4: "False consciousness or laying it on thick").

58. Also see Mansbridge and Morris (2001), in particular Mansbridge's introduction.

59. Cf., for instance, Certeau (1990 [1980]); an explicit critique of Bourdieu in this vein can be found in chapter IV.2. Scott (1990: chapter 7) for this reason speaks of an "infrapolitics" of subordinate groups. On the significance of creativity and agency for action theory in general, cf. Joas (1996 [1992]).

60. Cf. Boltanski and Thévenot (1991: EN 37): "In everyday life, people never completely suppress their anxieties, and, like scientists, ordinary people never stop suspecting, wondering, and submitting the world to tests". Cf. Dubet (2006: 33; EN 16): "The individuals behave 'like philosophers' [. . . and] the philosophical categories are not very far removed from those of the agents".

61. The agents involved often draw on forms of critique and activism that are practiced by social movements, intellectuals and theorists. Their own practices,

though, exist rather independently of these, and in part constitute their foundation. For an analysis of an example – everyday feminist critiques of chauvinist behaviour by superiors and partners – see Mansbridge and Flaster (2007).

62. The popularisation and relative social diffusion of the Marxist and psychoanalytic vocabulary is only the most obvious example. Cf. Mesny (1998).

63. See above, p. 63f.

'Follow the Agents': The Model of Symmetry

A curious fact becomes apparent if you look at the first paragraph – it may occur in the third paragraph – of the reportedly revolutionary scientific treatises back to the Pre-Socratics and extending up to at least Freud. You find that they begin by saying something like this, 'About the thing I'm going to talk about, people think they know, but they don't. Furthermore, if you tell them it doesn't change anything. They still walk around like they know although they are walking in a dream world.' [. . .] What we are interested in is, what is it that people seem to know and use? (Harvey Sacks)[1]

The sociologists are forever beginning their descriptive works, 'Whereas it is commonly held that . . .' Then comes the corrective. [. . .] First, the writer knows without needing to demonstrate, one member to another, what it is that he is furnishing as to what the man in the street believes. [. . .] Second, he is somehow or other able to assign beliefs to the common man, without courting a quarrel. [. . .] The third feature is that the common-sense knowledge is said to be defective, and what the writer furnishes is a repair. (Harold Garfinkel)[2]

In part I of the book, I have developed a critique of Bourdieu's conception of a critical social science that could be applied more generally to all social-scientific models characterised by the dogmas of scientism, objectivism, the break and asymmetry. One of the central results of this critique is that a theory that denies 'ordinary' agents the ability to detach themselves from the situation at hand and to adopt a reflexive stance on their behaviour, obscures the complexity of social reality in general and of everyday practices in particular, and will not be able to grasp these in a manner that is anywhere near adequate. Social theory needs a vocabulary that allows it to describe with precision how the reflexivity of agents is constituted and expressed in

everyday social practices. In this part, I turn to two attempts to develop such a vocabulary: ethnomethodology and the sociology of critique that follows in its footsteps.

On Bourdieu's view, agents unconsciously put their actions – be it in the domain of aesthetic preferences, consumer decisions or politics – at the service of the reproduction of social inequality. Whatever reasons they offer for choosing this particular radio station, that particular vegetable or this particular political party, and however they interpret their own behaviour, Bourdieu claims that he can show that people's individual actions are ultimately determined by their objective position in the social field. The theoretical approaches I am about to discuss, in contrast, are interested precisely in the interpretations and justifications of agents, that is, in the ways in which they act and interpret their actions, and especially in the way they justify and criticise actions, both their own and those of others. These phenomena can be brought to light only by taking the agents seriously and not treating them as 'judgemental dopes'. For this reason, the focus is shifted from the structures, power relations and other social forces that operate behind the agents' backs and are opaque to them, to the complex practices of justification and critique in concrete situations, and to the self-interpretations that accompany these practices. With its radical renunciation of the epistemic privileging of the social scientist's observer perspective vis-à-vis the participant perspective of competent members of society, ethnomethodology initiates a transition from a "critique of social judgement" as practised by Bourdieu, to a social theory of judgement and critique. I shall sketch this approach in section 3 by drawing on the work of Luc Boltanski and his research group.

Quite generally speaking, both approaches I discuss as exemplary cases of the model of symmetry that stands in contrast to the model of the break are part of a countermovement, inspired by hermeneutics and phenomenology, against the naturalistic and scientistic conception of sociology as a science of general laws – a conception that shaped even the idea of critical social science. The countermovement focuses on the knowledge, capacities and self-understanding of agents, which are inaccessible from an objectivistic observer perspective, and reverses the epistemic hierarchy between 'ordinary' agents and social scientists.

Phenomenological sociology (such as the approach developed by Alfred Schütz) is an important step in this direction, and it also influences the position of ethnomethodology. It does not go far enough, though, for it treats common sense and the everyday knowledge of agents only as further topics of sociological analysis, not as forms of knowledge about the social world that are just as important as other kinds, if not more so. Schütz's critique of the naturalistic and scientistic versions of sociology is limited to the objection that they fail to capture the meaning and specific rationality of everyday

practice. According to him, these can only be disclosed when common sense itself is discovered as a theoretical resource – which is what phenomenological sociology does. The latter does not dismiss the project of a science of the social that is structurally different from the self-interpretations of agents and enjoys an epistemic privilege over them, but subjects it to different criteria of adequacy. Similarly, the phenomenological argument that the way the science of the social is rooted in, and made possible by, the lifeworld cannot be fully grasped by science is not intended as a wholesale rejection of the project, but as a way towards a more adequate understanding of it (cf. Schütz 1953: section IV).

Against this background, ethnomethodology appears as a radicalisation of the pragmatic turn that is supported by phenomenology as well. It does not understand itself as yet another, empirically richer form of theoretical analysis, but as an alternative to the orthodox project of social science and its dogmatic presuppositions, which I sketched in the Introduction. This self-understanding entails a complete revision of the status of theory: professional sociology and lay sociology are treated as epistemically equal modes of practical reflection, and both are part of social life and its reproduction and transformation in concrete situations of interaction. Analysis, interpretation, reflection and critique become visible as dimensions of everyday practice itself. This emphasises the continuity of practical and theoretical forms of relating to oneself and to the world, instead of the discontinuities between them. For even theoretical reflection is a form of the "practical sociological reasoning" that ethnomethodology considers a fundamental aspect of everyday practice.[3]

Ethnomethodology takes its critique of the orthodox project even farther and claims that it is precisely the theoretical and scientific attitude of the social scientist, supposedly separable from the 'natural' or 'life-world' perspective of the agents, that constitutes (very much in Bachelard's sense) an obstacle to understanding, since it blanks out the details of concrete practices, and in doing so not only distorts its subject matter but actually 'loses' it. The reflexivity of agents and the everyday production of the social order thus become a 'missing what': once they have been eliminated by the initial description, it is nigh on impossible to retrieve them, and social scientists can only fill the resulting gap by falling back on theoretical workarounds, such as the assumption of the internalisation of structures (cf. Garfinkel 2006 [1948]: 126–29). By grounding its action-theoretical vocabulary in this dimension of everyday practice, ethnomethodology develops a radical alternative to orthodox social science at the methodological level.[4] Ethnomethodology owes its radical character to the fact that it takes one of the basic ideas of the present study, which I would like to label 'methodological egalitarianism', to its logical conclusion. For it claims to open up a form of access to practice that does

not rely on the idea of a break between theory and practice, a structural difference between the observer and the participant perspective, or an opposition between science and common sense. Its relation to social practice and its participants is primarily one of learning, not of explaining and 'knowing better'.

Even if one grants that ethnomethodology thus makes an important contribution to the critique of the scientist self-conception of the social sciences, and that it enables an approach centred around concrete actions and situations of interaction to come into its own after the dominance of structure-oriented theory (such as Talcott Parsons's), the question still is what else a more precise look at all the inconspicuous everyday actions and contexts of action can add to the debate about the methodological status of critical social theories. This question can be answered in at least two ways. I would like to give a first indication of these straight away, even though they go beyond the ethnomethodological perspective. One option is to say, with Erving Goffman, that even those who want to wake 'ordinary' agents from their ideological slumbers should spend some time in their bedrooms and watch them snore.[5] On the other hand, such a 'look into the bedroom' could substantiate doubts, already articulated above, about the very notion of ideological slumber and the way in which agents supposedly conform like sleepwalkers to objectively given structures. It could show the complexity of the everyday practices within which the agents constitute, problematise and negotiate the situations in which they act ever anew.[6] As will become clear, the specific 'blockades' of these practices of self-understanding, which are the focus of critical theory, can be diagnosed only on this basis.

Even if ethnomethodology manages to bring to light the complexity and reflexivity of everyday practice, thus questioning Bourdieu's basic action-theoretical and methodological premises, the fact that it is restricted to the analysis of situations of social interaction and to an allegedly purely descriptive approach means that it severely limits itself. As a consequence, it misses the fact that everyday practice has a normative structure that goes beyond concrete situations of interaction and is expressed in practices of justification and critique. In discussing Boltanski's sociology of critique, I follow a model of social theory that takes as its methodological starting point the reflexive capacities of agents. On the basis of these, it develops a theory of practices of justification and critique – a theory that also takes into account the regimes, dispositifs or orders of justification on which agents can draw, and that go beyond the particular situation. The shared starting point of ethnomethodology and the sociology of critique is formed by the reflexive capacities of agents, which often manifest themselves as 'proto-sociological', informed, critical, justificatory or explanatory detachment: "[R]eflective distance is a regular accomplishment of competent actors who live within many different practices and with overlapping shared meanings" (Bohman 1991: 222;

cf. Bohman 2003). The following discussion of the ethnomethodological approach will show more precisely how this achievement is to be understood.[7]

I shall first provide a general outline of this approach and its basic tenets (section 1), and subsequently discuss some problems and ambiguities that I take to result from them (section 2). I shall then turn to the way in which the sociology of critique, and in particular Luc Boltanski and his co-authors, further developed the central assumptions of ethnomethodology. In comparison to ethnomethodology, the sociology of critique offers a more systematic analysis of the normative logic of practices of justification and critique (section 3). Finally, I shall point out two problems with this approach as well (section 4) – problems that necessitate a transition to the form of critical theory that will be the focus of part III of the book.

1. WHAT IS ETHNOMETHODOLOGY?

How do 'ordinary' agents succeed in constantly reconstructing, reproducing and changing the social order in their everyday doings? Which 'methods' do they employ in social interaction and in 'managing' social reality? What capacities and knowledge do they need? How is it that they successfully shift back and forth between all sorts of situations, negotiate definitions of situations and impart their actions with meanings that can be understood by others – achievements that are essential for the mutual coordination of behaviour and therefore for social interaction as such?

Ethnomethodology, as a first indication, is concerned with answering these questions. It is a study of the methods of 'folk sociology', and since these methods are rationally ordered and reflexive, it is concerned with the methodologies of the agents themselves. In other words, the point of ethnomethodology is to develop an analysis of 'folk methods' and 'folk methodologies'.[8] Theories and methods are taken to be essential dimensions of everyday practice, not privileges of science. The focus is on everyday methods for acting in concrete situations, techniques for making sense of things, negotiations of shared definitions of the situation at hand and concrete processes of 'practical sociological reasoning' – whether in the context of working as a lab analyst, queueing for cinema tickets or doing empirical social research. From the perspective of ethnomethodology, social reality is not given or static but is constituted ever anew in and through concrete practices. While the 'orthodox' approaches in the social sciences are interested in the general structures that underlie and structure concrete interactions and contexts of action, ethnomethodology chooses to remain 'at the surface' and focuses its attention on the details of the everyday practices in which these structures emerge in the first place, and within which they are constantly changing.

First and foremost, what concerns ethnomethodology in these practices are everyday methods for producing order. For unlike most social theory, ethnomethodology does not conceive of social order as a theoretical riddle, but as an everyday phenomenon that is constantly produced by the members of society *ad hoc* and *in situ* – a phenomenon that indeed *must* be produced in order for their actions to be recognisable and understandable as having a certain meaning. Like social 'facts', social order must be understood as an *accomplishment*, to use a notion central to ethnomethodology, that is, as a practical achievement that consists in the performance of social practices by the agents themselves.[9] In this sense, Garfinkel characterises "the objective reality of social facts as an ongoing accomplishment of the concerted activities of daily life, with the ordinary, artful ways of that accomplishment being by members known, used, and taken for granted" (Garfinkel 1984 [1967]: vii).[10] The 'accomplishment' of the members of society is considered 'work' ('work', here, is taken to include the 'production' of traffic jams and of queues in front of cinemas): "Members are particularly knowledgeable of, sensitive to, and skillful with this work, with doing it, assuring it, remedying it, and the like" (Garfinkel and Sacks 1970: 353).[11] Particular importance is attached to 'interpretive work', that is, any work required to interpret the situation as a normal situation and to establish the behaviour of the agents involved as appropriate to the situation.

If one thus assumes that the orders and structures of everyday practice are the result of 'work' that needs to be done by the agents themselves, it seems likely that the agents do not act in an utterly uncoordinated manner and produce order purely coincidentally, but that they have methods to achieve this aim, which invest the actions both with a structure 'that makes sense' and with intelligible meaning and a normative dimension.[12] Garfinkel sometimes calls these processes and methods 'accounts'. Accounts are representations, descriptions and interpretations all at once. They are not external to the context of action, and therefore are not commentaries that interrupt action and are put forth from a meta-level. Rather, they are thematisations and interpretations of action (in the form of incidental remarks, explanations, problematisations, justifications, announcements, but also things like non-verbal gestures) that cannot possibly be separated from the performance of the action itself.[13] The accounts are on the same level as the actions that constitute their 'objects' and that they should render 'accountable', that is, intelligible and attributable. They are actions and messages about actions at the same time – or, as I put it above, practice and meta-practice. The vocabulary used in them is itself part of the experience it is meant to describe.

Accounts are agents' attempts to make their behaviour intelligible – attempts developed *while* they act. While intelligibility is a prerequisite for coordination, it is not a 'natural' property that belongs to actions as such, but

something that must be 'co-produced' by the agents as they act. The capacity to develop accounts of our actions (for ourselves as well as for others) and the actual practices of 'accounting' make 'accountability' – the attribution of social practices and the responsibility of agents – possible, and produce it ever anew.[14] Responsibility, here, consists in the fact that the situation and situated action become accessible to the agents themselves. They become observable, describable and communicable because they are public and meaningful – and therefore, among other things, open to critique and justification. Only because accounts continually refer back to the situation do they become available as conditions, objects and products of action.[15] Moreover, this meaningful order is trivial and banal in the sense that it is 'easily accessible' to all, and not only recognisable from the detached perspective of the professional sociologist. With its help, the agents construct – not only through their mental accomplishments, but always in their material practices as well – a framework for action within which they can orientate themselves towards each other. In doing so, they cultivate cognitive and normative expectations, which they have of others, but also ascribe to each other.

The agents themselves, too, become accountable by taking each other to *be* accountable, reasonable and responsible: "In normal social interaction we reciprocally impute practical rationality to interaction partners, credit them with knowing what they are doing and why they are doing it, view their conduct as under their control and done for some purpose or reason known to them, and thus hold them responsible for it" (McCarthy 1991 [1989]: 30).[16] Of course, this is first and foremost a hypothesis that could always be proven wrong. In case it does turn out to be counterfactual, however, the agents can fall back on procedures and methods for handling such a situation. The way in which agents are 'held to account' and 'account for' their own conduct is socially refined and varies according to the context and role at issue. Competent agents must be aware of this "differential accountability" (ibid.: 29) and need to be able to act in a way that is appropriate to the context (cf. McCarthy 1994: 250; Garfinkel 2002: 173f).

If the above description is correct, the possibility that one is held accountable (that one *must* justify oneself), and the ability to account for oneself (that one *can* justify oneself) play a central role in everyday life: "[D]ecision-making in daily life would thereby have, as a critical feature, *the decision-maker's task of justifying a course of action*" (Garfinkel 1984 [1967]: 114). However, the idea is not that a rational agent calculates in advance which course of action has the best prospects for coming across as justified in the eyes of the interaction partner, and then 'goes through' with this. Rather, it depends on the action and the context who can hold whom accountable when and in what way – and this comes down to interpretations of the situation and attributions of accountability that are negotiated during or even after the fact,

not so much to foreseeable factors, even when agents, of course, constantly try to anticipate and influence the *ex-post* interpretations of others.

Let us turn to an example. In an early paper (1956), Garfinkel attempts to show that "denunciations" (intended here as a form of critique that does not necessarily amount to 'betrayal' and does not need to be based on 'lowly motives') depend for their success on whether the agents manage to establish themselves as *bona fide* representatives of the relevant parties and to portray the 'opponent' as an outsider.[17] Normally, this requires significant 'communicative work', which, in addition to the mobilisation of moral outrage (of which the public denunciation can then be said to be an expression), involves "justificatory work". In such cases, the strategies of denunciation or critique often follow a pattern: "Y is not who he or she seems/pretends to be, but is *really X / has been X from the start*!" (e.g. "For him/her, it is not about being honest, but about promoting him-/herself"). The denounced then have to present themselves as 'public' agents who are not guided by any private motives, but only by experiences accessible to everyone and by norms and values that they invoke as generally shared.

In this way, any denunciation is subject to normative restrictions that cannot be manipulated arbitrarily and that set certain limits to the strategic action of agents. Potential denouncers find themselves confronted with justificatory burdens that are supposed to prevent or at least complicate false or arbitrary denunciations, and that make purely strategic conduct unlikely. That agents in such cases of justification and critique (of which denunciation is merely an example) have different grammars and vocabularies of justification at their command, which they can nevertheless use only if they have the relevant competencies and interpret the situation appropriately, is one of the central links between ethnomethodology and the sociology of critique. I shall come back to this further below.

Ethnomethodology assumes that social practices – not only practices of justification in a more narrow sense – are fundamentally characterised by reflexivity and indexicality (cf. List 1980: 19ff). Their *reflexivity* consists in the fact that agents relate, within and through their practices to the situations in which they act as the presuppositions, objects and results of their conduct, and that, in doing so, they construct the meaning of their actions while they act, not afterwards – this is what the notion of 'accounting' indicates. Agency is reflexive, then, because agents, in acting, relate to their actions as well as to the situations in which they act, and in doing so, in a sense, produce those situations in the first place. In the next section, I shall return to the question exactly at which level this reflexivity is located.

Indexicality, for ethnomethodology, is not only a property of certain words whose reference varies with the context in which they are uttered (such as 'I', 'this', 'now'), but constitutes a general characteristic of all speech and

action: their "irreparable" and "incurable" contextuality. In other words, 'indexicality' refers to the fact that the situational context is not external to the particular performance and meaning of words and actions, but constitutively interwoven with it: "Its concrete meaning can only be understood when taking into account the who, when, where, what and why of its execution" (McCarthy 1994: 254; cf. Garfinkel 1984 [1967]: 4–7; Dodier 2001).[18] The indexicality of all speech and action makes any attempt at a general theoretical description or normative prescription, regardless of pragmatic context, unlikely to succeed. Instead of offering a generalising analysis such as that of Bourdieu, who wishes to break through the facade of heterogeneity in order to reveal how every aspect of practice is influenced by fundamental structures, ethnomethodology therefore develops contextual analyses that do not aim to 'get rid of' indexicality or demand agents to do so. What ethnomethodology desires is precisely to 'teach us difference'.

The irreducible indexicality of our speech and action is not merely a theoretical issue, but just as much a practical problem, which can be tackled only in a way that is appropriate to the situation and to the goal of the practice at hand. Practices of classification in science and medicine can serve as an example: despite the impossibility of construing a perfect classification, many will do in practice 'for all intents and purposes', meaning that the agents themselves manage to perform the necessary generalisations (sufficient for the practical requirements of the concrete situation, such as the demands of other agents) and to substitute general terms for indexical ones to the extent demanded by the situation. The remaining indexicality of the results reached in this way is not to be conceived of as an obstacle, but as the basis on which the results can be used going forward.[19] For this reason, there may be a tension between the normative accountability of a given act and its radical indexicality, since the former always necessitates a certain amount of generalisation and 'de-indexicalisation'. This tension, however, is itself of a contextual nature and can be handled and overcome only within the particular context at issue. Moreover, 'the context' does not consist of a static and objectively describable set of conditions and factors ('structures') that restrict the interaction from outside; rather, it is the result of a reflexive negotiation of a shared definition of the situation by its participants. The agents, in turn, have a genuine practical interest in the determination of the context, since the collective answer to the question in what situation they find themselves is one of the factors that determine which actions appear as conceivable or socially acceptable in the first place. The determination of the context – that is, its 'framing' – should give at least a temporary answer to the question 'What's going on here?' – a question that can be asked any time. The framing lends meaning to the situation, and, as such, is what initially makes it the specific situation in which the agents have to act. Ambiguities and conflicts

about the framing are just 'ordinary troubles' that come with it. And even in case the framework 'shatters' – when the common definition of the situation fails – the agents have methods for handling the situation, such as 'framework repair', 'framework change' or other forms of 'reframing' that constitute the context.[20]

The practical manner this problem is dealt with shows most clearly in the way people handle rules both in 'everyday' and in 'scientific' contexts.[21] Rules and norms do not produce immediate and stable links between specific situations and required actions in either of these contexts. Whether the situation is one of type Z in which rule X or norm Y is applicable in the first place cannot be resolved solely in reference to X or Y – just as little, in fact, as the question what exactly must be done in case of Z in order to act in accordance with X or Y. Such direct determination is impossible, if only for the fact that the meaning of an action and the meaning of the corresponding situation can only be determined in reference to each other, and because the latter must be understood procedurally – that is, as an accomplishment. Moreover, any application of a rule requires the agent to take into account the specific context – and here, too, the rule or norm and the situation in which it is to be applied are mutually determined in complex processes of deliberation and interpretation. In that sense, any new 'application' is always more than a mere application; each individual case is a 'next first time' – both a first and the next instance in a series (Garfinkel 2002: 163).

Rules and other prescriptions are therefore fundamentally incomplete and depend on the ability of agents to 'take initiative', that is, to appropriate them autonomously, to fill their gaps while using them, to reinterpret or extend them in the face of unexpected situations or features of the situation, or even to make exceptions.[22] At the same time, referring to rules allows agents to make their conduct 'accountable', to explain and to justify it, since rules give their actions a 'general' or 'generally intelligible' character.

The rules and norms on which agents draw, then, do not constitute abstract and fixed standards, but serve as flexible resources for the attributability of actions as well as for the construction and preservation, but also the transformation of situations. The idea of 'accountability' must be understood as normative through and through. It presupposes that agents reflexively draw on norms and that they adjust their conduct accordingly. The structure of 'accounts', which constitute the reflexivity of everyday action, consists in a kind of normative grammar that the agents use when they argue or agree about the attribution and assessment of actions. Such processes of negotiation will give rise to *ad hoc* modifications, which are necessary because the concrete situations and the possible actions within them remain underdetermined by the norms: "When a person seems to be following rules, what is it that that seems to consist of? We need to describe how it gets done. These practices of

etc., unless, let it pass, the pretense of agreeing, the use of sanctioned vague-
ness, the waiting for something later to happen which promises to clarify
what has gone before, the avoidance of monsters even when they occur and
the borrowing of exceptions are all involved. I am proposing these as prac-
tices whereby persons make what they are doing happen as rule-analyzable
conduct" (Garfinkel in Hill and Crittenden 1968: 220). These practices of 'ad
hoc-ing' – of contextual interpretation and reinterpretation – encourage the
"tolerance of indexicality" (Patzelt 1987: 84). Here, too, the ad hoc character
is not to be understood as a deficiency or a limitation, but as an enabling
condition: "To treat instructions as though ad hoc features in their use were a
nuisance, or to treat their presence as grounds for complaint about the incom-
pleteness of instructions, is very much like complaining that if the walls of
a building were only gotten out of the way one could see better what was
keeping the roof up" (Garfinkel 1984 [1967]: 22).

   The indexicality of social practices and phenomena also grounds their irre-
ducible concreteness, which Garfinkel describes as their "essential quiddity
and haecceity", their "just whatness and thisness": "Think of freeway traffic
flow in Los Angeles. For the cohort of drivers there, just this gang of them,
driving, making traffic together, are *somehow*, smoothly and unremarkably,
concerting the driving to be at the lived production of the flow's just thisness:
familiar, ordinary, uninterestingly, observably-in-and-as-of-observances,
doable and done again, and always, only, entirely in detail for everything
that detail could be" (Garfinkel 2002: 92n1). This highlights once again the
processual and performative character of society – the fact that social facts
really are 'facts', things that cannot be understood independently of people's
actions, since they become real only through and in these. Notions such as
"doing society" and the "methods persons use in doing social life" (Sacks
1984a: 21) express the same idea, which has immediate consequences for the
description of even the most banal behaviour. Harvey Sacks, for instance,
emphasises in 'On doing "being ordinary"' that the production of behaviour
we understand as normal really is exceedingly demanding and complex:
"'An ordinary person' [is] somebody having as one's job, as one's constant
preoccupation, doing 'being ordinary'. It is not that somebody *is* ordinary; it
is perhaps that that is what one's business is, and it takes work, as any other
business does" (Sacks 1984b: 414). Consequently, the accent shifts from the
question concerning the *why* (the quest for explanations) towards the ques-
tion as to the *how* (the quest for adequate descriptions and reconstructions
of particular doings): "The 'how' is an *achievement* in action, of action,
and as action" (Lynch 1999: 221). Theoretically and methodologically, this
constitutes a radical de-reification and dissolution of the social. The pro-
cess of socialisation [*Vergesellschaftung*] and the emphasis on the fragility,
negotiability and changeability of social reality take the place of the hypos-
tasised collective noun 'society' and of rigid social structures or mechanisms

operative behind the agents' backs. Any 'social fact', however rigid, appears as an accomplishment and a situated achievement – as something that is constituted by situated action and is ever changeable.

The fact that these achievements are endogenous, that they derive from within society, that they are accomplished by the agents and that in addition they have a methodological character is of central importance: "Ethnomethodology's fundamental phenomenon, and its standing technical preoccupation in its studies is to find, collect, specify, and make instructably observable the local endogenous production and natural accountability of immortal familiar society's most ordinary organizational things in the world, and to *provide for them both and simultaneously as objects and procedurally, as alternate methodologies*" (Garfinkel 1996: 6).

These admittedly somewhat convoluted descriptions imply an image of the agent that is utterly different from that of critical social science. Agents clearly do not merely have knowledge about the social structures in which they can act competently and which, in acting, they constitute and constantly change; they also have the competencies and capacities to detach themselves reflexively from their immediate environments. These competencies could be described as 'judgement' and 'reflexive ability'.[23] This leads to the rejection of the widespread conception of the agent as a

> judgmental dope of a cultural or psychological sort, or both, [. . .] who produces the stable features of society by acting in compliance with preestablished and legitimate alternatives of action that the common culture provides [. . . or] by choices among alternative courses of action that are compelled on the grounds of psychiatric biography, conditioning history, and the variables of mental functioning. The common feature in the use of these "models of man" is the fact that courses of common sense rationalities of judgment which involve the person's use of common sense knowledge of social structures over the temporal "succession" of here and now situations are treated as epiphenomenal. (Garfinkel 1984 [1967]: 67f)[24]

Whether this implies a rejection of the idea of a radical break between science and common sense, between the competencies of professional sociologists and those of laypersons, is something I shall discuss in section 2.2. First, it needs to be established how exactly we should conceive of reflexivity in the context of ethnomethodology.

2. REFLEXIVITY IN EVERYDAY PRACTICE

2.1 Forms of Reflexivity

I shall begin this section by drawing a distinction between different ways of understanding the notion of reflexivity. This will provide the basis for

an elucidation of the ethnomethodological thesis that reflexivity is a funda-
mental feature of agents, their practices and the accounts of these practices.
Among other things, this thesis raises the question to what extent sociological
reflection goes beyond the reflection that is achieved by agents in social prac-
tices of self-understanding – a matter that is directly related to the question
concerning the difference between 'ordinary' practices of critique and critical
social theory, which will be the central topic of part III of the book.

Very generally, a relation is reflexive when it involves a reference of some-
thing to itself, for instance in the form of a self-thematisation. Obviously, this
formal definition can be concretised and enriched in a great variety of ways.
At least the following kinds or understandings of reflexivity could be distin-
guished (cf. Lynch 2000):

- The notion of *basic or mechanistic reflexivity* relates only to the recursive-
  ness of certain processes, such as simple feedback mechanisms (in this
  sense, any old fridge has reflexivity). This understanding is uninteresting
  for our present purposes.
- *Self-reflexivity* is often taken to be a mark of the mental, since mental states
  are characterised by the fact that they can take themselves as an object ('I
  think that p', etc. In this sense, it is also an attribute of natural language: 'I
  actually meant to say that q').
- *Substantial forms of social reflexivity* are what is meant, for instance, when
  people talk about the self-observation of social systems or of 'reflexive
  modernisation', in which a 'subject' (a 'system', or even 'modern society'
  as a whole) becomes the 'object' of its own observations.
- Reflexivity can also be used in a *methodical* sense, for instance in the sense
  of self-reflection as the critical and systematic questioning of one's own
  opinions and knowledge claims, or in the sense of being aware of the inter-
  dependency of subjects and objects of observation.
- *Methodological or meta-theoretical reflexivity* would be the capacity for
  detachment that is frequently identified with the social-scientific attitude,
  the avoidance of one's own 'local habits' and the problematisation of
  unquestioned assumptions.
- A 'milder' variety of detachment is related to the assumption of *interpre-
  tive reflexivity*, which refers to the fact that at least the social sciences and
  humanities always face the interpretation of what has already been inter-
  preted, and reflect on what is itself reflexive ('double hermeneutics').

Now the *ethnomethodological understanding of reflexivity* differs from
these notions, in particular from meta-theoretical reflexivity, in the sense that
in its understanding of reflexivity as something constitutive and ordinary, it
explicitly renounces the dichotomy of scientific reflexivity and unreflected

or pre-reflexive everyday conduct. In doing so, ethnomethodology also does away with the conception of a break between the level of the unreflected, necessarily naive interpretations of 'ordinary' agents and the level of reflected interpretations of sociologists who make good on their claim to objectivity at least under certain circumstances. As I have shown in part I, this idea can still be found in Bourdieu, who claims that the naiveté of everyday practices and of the narcissistic pseudo-reflexivity of ethnologists (and ethnomethodologists) can be contrasted with a 'truly scientific' form of reflexivity, which is aware of the objective social conditions to which even the observer is subject, and thus makes "a rigorous science of the social world" possible in the first place (cf. Bourdieu 1999 [1993]).

Ethnomethodology renounces these dichotomies. From its perspective, the most important phenomenon is the reflexivity of endogenous sociological descriptions, that is, of the accounts and the practical sociological reasoning of agents themselves. The reflexivity of these practices of self-understanding manifests itself in the fact that they are employed by members of society in order to make specific situations of everyday behaviour available – observable, intelligible, describable, reportable – and thus, in a word, accountable (cf. Weingarten and Sack 1979).[25] To this end, agents employ ways of constructing, reproducing and transforming social contexts of acting, whose temporality is particularly important. Garfinkel (in Hill and Crittenden 1968: 147f) speaks in this context of "timing considerations", "time order considerations" and "time ordering as a production", since the agents cannot recognise the temporal structure of the situation in which they act *ex ante*, but need to produce and negotiate it themselves, *in situ*. Like the action situation, the temporal structure of interaction is simultaneously the precondition, the object and the result of action.

Reflexivity, then, is not a primarily cognitive feature or achievement of agents that is required only when something goes wrong, and that interrupts a course of action that would otherwise proceed unreflected. The ethnomethodological understanding of reflexivity assesses the situation differently: it conceives of reflexivity primarily as a feature of accounts and accounting practices, which agents use to make their actions accountable. Reflexivity, on this view, is a quality of action itself: in what agents do and in how they do it, they simultaneously thematise and show what they are doing and what they mean by it. The basic reflexivity of practice consists in the fact that any action involves some commentary on itself: it suggests a particular interpretation (as an action of a certain type and as meaningful, reasonable, appropriate, etc.) and thus instructs other agents on how they are to view the situation (cf. Garfinkel 2002: 105). To do this, agents have more or less standardised forms of narrative, models of description and glossing, explanation, justification and critique at their disposal. These are not added onto action from the

outside but form a constitutive meta-practical dimension of action. The best way to elucidate this is by the example of colloquial language, which contains its own metalanguage. Reflection, in the form of explications, say, but also of discourses, is a dimension of the 'ordinary' use of language. When we explain what we really meant to say, we make use of the same linguistic resources as in the original, misunderstood speech act (cf. Bertram 2006: chapter V.1; Boltanski 2008e: second lecture; 2011).

Initially, reflexivity as a quality of agents plays a role 'only' insofar as they credit each other with it. Through such mutual ascriptions, however, reflexivity becomes constitutive both for the self-understanding of agents and for any understanding of their practices. Accordingly, reflexivity is not something individuals 'have' as a quasi-natural property, but exists only in and through the practices in which it is expressed and actualised. This redescription should do justice to the fact – baffling from the perspective of certain social theories (if they note it at all) – that the members of society, as 'experts on the ordinary' (cf. Hörning 2001),[26] are constantly engaged in describing themselves and others, and in explaining, justifying and criticising what they have done, are doing and are planning to do. From an epistemic virtue that is to secure the privileged status of the observer standpoint and that, with some effort, can be developed by 'ordinary' agents too, reflexivity is thus turned into a universal and unspectacular (and in this sense 'uninteresting') feature of social action.[27]

The reflexivity of the 'subject matter' – the agents and their practices – on its part influences any theory or analysis of it, since such theories do not function on a meta-level either, but operate from within the subject matter and even co-constitute it:

> Endogenous reflexivity refers to how what members do in, to, and about social reality constitutes social reality. [. . .] Referential reflexivity conceives of all analysis – ethnomethodology included – as a constitutive process. Not only are members deemed to be involved in endogenous constitution of accountable settings, but so are analysts. Thus, ethnomethodology is referentially reflexive to the extent it appreciates its own analyses as constitutive and endogenous accomplishments. Referentially reflexive appreciation of constitution is radicalized when the appreciator is included within the scope of reflexivity, i.e., when the formulation of reflexivity – as well as every other feature of analysis – is appreciated as an endogenous achievement. (Pollner 1991: 372)

This interpretation of ethnomethodology (not uncontroversial in its own right) implies a radicalisation of the pragmatic perspective, in the sense that it applies the idea of the reflexivity of accounts to ethnomethodology itself, and thus departs from the claim to a privileged representation of objectively identifiable and describable structures of the social world. What takes its

place is an understanding of theory and science as merely *one more* form of reflexive interaction between ordinary members of society, which, just like any other activity, is engaged in the constitution of the context that it studies and within which it takes place.

From this perspective it is therefore misleading to assume, as for instance Thompson does, that the "interpretative transformation of the doxa", in tying in with the "hermeneutics of everyday life", posits a "methodological break", without which the social sciences would be unable to bring to light the social and historical conditions of these everyday practices of self-understanding and their doxa (Thompson 1990: 25, 279f). But if this is true, then how are we to understand the thesis, defended by some ethnomethodologists, that agents 'normally' have no interest whatsoever in the reflexivity of their practices, and that this reflexivity goes fundamentally unnoticed and remains unreflected? On this assumption, the interest in reflexivity must stem from elsewhere, and in that case, what suggests itself (following Schütz) as a source is the 'scientific attitude', which, in contrast to the 'mundane naiveté' of the 'everyday' or 'natural attitude', is characterised by detachment and scepticism. But why would the participants not understand their practices as endogenous accomplishments, thus occupying the ethnomethodological perspective *themselves*? Does the ethnomethodological description not show exactly that the agents permanently problematise why they act as they do (cf. Garfinkel 2006 [1948]: 170)? To deny this would imply that the perspective of the participants – their seemingly unswerving faith in common sense and the everyday world – is at least (structurally) deficient compared to the ethnomethodological perspective on their practice, if not naive. This, however, would push the participant perspective back into an opposition with the privileged perspective of the ethnomethodological observer, rehabilitating one of the basic premises of orthodox social theory that was supposed to be left behind.[28]

The idea that everyday forms of reflexivity are 'uninteresting' in Garfinkel's sense can also be understood to mean, though, that the agents 'normally' do not pay too much attention to this feature of their everyday practice. On that understanding, practices are simultaneously reflexive and taken for granted (but not pre-reflexive). Yet do the agents, in their practical sociological reasoning, not take a particularly marked interest in their everyday practice and all the forms of reflection and self-understanding involved in it? I shall elaborate on the difficulties to which these questions lead in the next two sections. Right now, the point is to maintain that on the ethnomethodological view, reflexivity should not just be attributed to the theoretical or scientific perspective, but must be understood as a phenomenon that can be found at different levels and that can be reconstructed in the context of a pragmatics of reflection. The reflexivity of everyday practice can assume highly sophisticated forms, for instance when agents initiate studies and

investigations into the social contexts of their actions: "Reflexivity [. . .] is a singular feature of practical actions, of practical circumstances, of common sense knowledge of social structures, and of practical sociological reasoning" (Garfinkel 1984 [1967]: vii).

2.2 Pros and Laypeople

If reflexivity is a constitutive property of everyday practice and of ordinary members of society, it can no longer be considered a unique feature of the scientific observer perspective that is established by breaking with this very practice. In order to bring to light laypeople's (that is, 'ordinary' agents') methodical action and methods for self-understanding, professional ethnomethodologists do not employ methods that are fundamentally different from those of laypersons, but essentially the same ones. There are no fundamental differences between the way in which a person makes her behaviour intelligible and the manner in which a sociologist explains behaviour (cf. Weingarten and Sack 1979: 11; Garfinkel 2002: 283; Garfinkel and Wieder 1992).[29] Sociology – whether ethnomethodological or not – appears as 'one everyday action amongst many': "We are proposing that the member of the society, no less than the accredited member of the sociological association, is involved with, is concerned with, is skilled with, is entitled to the use of, demonstrably rigorous procedures" (Garfinkel in Hill and Crittenden 1968: 26). Distinctions, insofar as they exist, can be traced back to contingent circumstances, such as how much time can be devoted to an analysis of the details of everyday action.

This cuts the ground from under any ironising rejection of the self-understanding and articulations of laypeople as merely subjective, determined, pre-reflexive, superficial, uncritical or otherwise deficient in comparison with the insights of the social-scientific observer. The assumption of an idealised scientific rationality that sets a standard for everyday forms of knowledge and rationality – a standard that agents, in different degrees of irrationality, will always lag behind – suggests a view of 'backward' agents who are baffled by the complexity and reflexivity of everyday practices (cf. Garfinkel 1984 [1967]: 262ff; 2002: 122). Ethnomethodology, then, deems the dichotomy of science and common sense, which has since Durkheim been constitutive for the prevalent self-understanding of the social sciences, counterproductive. Instead, ethnomethodology assumes that agents are fundamentally reflexive and know very well what they are doing. In contrast to the analyses of orthodox social science, ethnomethodological studies do not function as "correctives", "remedies" or "ironies" (Garfinkel 1984 [1967]: viii), but follow a general principle of symmetry: actions as they are performed and the various ways in which they are represented, interpreted and questioned – whether

by the agents themselves or by professional sociologists – are located at the same level. In relating to actions, moreover, professional sociologists and laypersons draw on structurally similar methods, and thus proceed at the same methodological level.

Yet here we are once more confronted with the problem of the reflexivity of the relation of participants to their practice. After all, even ethnomethod-ologists seem to acknowledge that the professional sociologist is disposed to doubt the certainties of everyday life and to detach herself from immediate practical interests, whereas the 'ordinary' agent who is bogged down in the natural attitude tends to be rather disinclined to do the same. The method of doubt clashes with the agents' trust in the unquestioned lifeworld, and for this reason it requires special justification. Garfinkel, for instance, reports that test subjects, within their everyday environments, had great trouble keeping up an attitude of distrust towards other people, that is, acting on the assumption that their conversation partners were consistently guided by hidden motives and did not mean what they were saying at all (cf. ibid.: 51; Wieder and Zim-merman 1979).[30]

It can be doubted, however, that the distinctions between everyday com-portment and the scientific attitude are categorical differences, rather than merely gradual ones. Moreover, even 'ordinary' agents in their common prac-tices constantly adopt forms of the 'scientific' attitude that belong to 'practi-cal sociological reasoning'. Garfinkel himself provides evidence for this, for instance when he points out the willingness of jury members to leave behind the "natural" attitude and take up a "theoretical" stance, especially in situa-tions of justification and critique (cf. Garfinkel 1984 [1967]: 111). Clearly, there are countless situations in which agents are capable of undertaking such a change of attitude, and in which they do in fact undertake it. Talk of two diametrically opposed attitudes and characterisations (and epistemic hierar-chisations) of these as 'natural' and 'common' versus 'scientific' and 'theo-retical', then, not only lack precision, but ultimately also lose their meaning. This is especially true if we can suppose that the situations in which people act are increasingly heterogeneous, which makes the assumption of routine action, of quasi-automatic adaptation to the situation or of the actualisation of relatively homogeneous schemes of interpretation and action implausible (cf., for instance, Lahire 2001 [1998]: 56–59; EN 45–47, 207–10).

A similar point can be illustrated in reference to another idealised distinc-tion between common and scientific rationality: "The 'relevant other persons' for the scientific theorizer are universalized 'Anymen'. [. . .] Specific col-leagues are at best forgiveable instances of such highly abstract 'competent investigators'" (Garfinkel 1984 [1967]: 275). Now this of course applies to actual scientific practice only to a limited extent, since in those activities too, the relevant others are often very concrete others. At the same time, the

argumentative shift from concrete to generalised others, in which the for-
mer are indeed held to be a 'forgiveable instance' of the latter, is a popular
move in everyday practices of critique and justification as well. Presumably,
therefore, at least with regard to the observation sketched above, the point
for ethnomethodology is to highlight the similarities between common and
scientific practices of explanation and argumentation, rather than to bring
two mutually exclusive attitudes into confrontation, as tends to be the case in
phenomenology and other traditions.

   In the ethnomethodological critique of social science, the refusal to pro-
mote the contingent dissimilarities between lay and professional sociologists
to the status of fundamental differences is connected to the view that profes-
sional sociologists too are 'just' ordinary members of society. Unlike layper-
sons, though, they manage to keep (themselves and) others in the dark about
the status of their investigations, and they claim, relatively successfully, to
have painted particularly accurate pictures of social reality. Their assurance
that they speak from a scientifically privileged standpoint, however, conceals
the actual character of such a theory as one practice of self-understanding
among others – a practice whose perspective is not necessarily epistemically
privileged:

> There is the assurance, the so-called social science assurance, that research
> undertakings which are delivered were made by someone already knowing what
> he is looking at, and making use of what he knows, in order to make the thing
> that he will have delivered a cogent and believable report. The report is accom-
> panied by an indication that he can rely upon an Archimedean lever whereby
> his account stands as something separate from, as excused from, the setting in
> which this account was put together. The account stands as a scientifically privi-
> leged report on the setting [. . .]. What we are suggesting is that all such attempts
> to excuse the present company, to propose that one can do practical sociological
> accounting while reserving that privilege, makes use of unexamined practical
> devices to assure the cogency, the recognizability and the visibility of that claim.
> [. . .] We are saying further that those accounts in every case are reflexive fea-
> tures of the same settings in which they are used to recommend their features
> as cogent accounts. [. . .] We refer to that as doing the work of social science
> accounting from within the setting that is accountable. (Garfinkel in: Hill and
> Crittenden 1968: 112f)

   If the fundamental distinction between lay and professional sociologists,
between everyday practice and science, is nullified, then how does ethno-
methodology understand itself? According to its own self-understanding, eth-
nomethodology is neither a sociological theory nor a social science method.
As such, ethnomethodology distances itself from traditional conceptions of

theory and science – a move that is often considered to constitute a fundamental form of critique and that has even more often been categorically rejected.

The aim of ethnomethodology is primarily to redescribe and respecify known phenomena: "Any and all topics of order were taken to be eligible for ethnomethodological respecification as achieved phenomena of order, commonplace achievements, seen but unnoticed, specifically uninteresting, and specifically unremarkable 'work of the streets'" (Garfinkel 1996: 11). Ethnomethodology thus proposes a change of perspective – one that is presented as being incompatible with orthodox approaches in the sociological tradition and with contemporary social science. Therefore, one at least fails to appreciate the radical nature of this new approach if one tries to incorporate it into new syntheses (such as those of Giddens and Habermas) as an interesting version of microsociology that enriches the mainstream. Garfinkel makes quite clear that this has never been the intention: "We are not engaged in recommending common-sense activities as another variable. It is not another variable. It is not an overlooked consideration. It is the heart of the enterprise. It is what we are doing" (Garfinkel in Hill and Crittenden 1968: 128; cf. Rawls 2002: 1–64).

As this remark shows, the crux of ethnomethodology lies not so much in particular substantive theses, but rather in a change of attitude. The attitude that is to be adopted is often described in terms of the rather unclear notion of ethnomethodological indifference, which consists in refraining from judging members of society and their practices, and in bracketing normative questions. Is this a crude version of positivism, or even hostility to theory? On closer examination, this objection is untenable, even if some representatives of ethnomethodology do endeavour to develop an empiricist gesture that is supposed to 'let the phenomena speak for themselves' and to render precise analyses and theoretical postulates redundant, since these threaten to obscure the complexity of everyday practice.[31] Since the phenomena that are to be made to speak are usually agents who speak anyway, not only can this prescription be understood literally, it also, for the same reason, loses its positivistic overtones. The distinction 'detailed description' versus 'theoretical construction', however, should not be understood as if the ethnomethodological observer were to reach her subject matter without any interpretive and constructive efforts. Of course, the vocabulary and theoretical assumptions of ethnomethodology inform its descriptions, and thus they partly constitute the subject matter that is being studied. The research programme of ethnomethodology may be based on experience, but as such, it is neither empiricist nor hostile to theory.

In this light, the demand for ethnomethodological indifference is meaningful only if ethnomethodology really is considered less a theory and more a

methodological attitude (cf. Lynch 1999: 220). The point is to resist the temptation to "ironise" the everyday phenomena under investigation (cf. Patzelt 1987: 36ff). As such, ethnomethodological indifference calls for detaching oneself from the absolutisation of supposedly scientific standards of rationality – standards that, also in social theory, frequently ground the descriptions and assessments of the actions of 'ordinary' agents. Methodological indifference, then, primarily means that agents and their actions are not described – on the basis of theoretical assumptions and of a paternalistic and ironising attitude – as deficient, pathological or irrational. When such descriptions occur, they rather are endogenous in nature – produced in concrete contexts by the members of society themselves. The sociologist's attitude towards the members of society should primarily be one of learning, not of explaining and correcting. In this way, ethnomethodology distances itself in a decisive manner from approaches that consider the participant perspective relevant but still structurally deficient.

2.3 The Tension between Everyday Practice and Reflection

In elucidating the notion of reflexivity and the relation between professional sociologists and laypeople, I have already touched upon a problem that is at once substantive and methodological. This problem concerns the status of ethnomethodology itself and can be characterised as follows: ethnomethodology considers social scientists to be participants who, in principle, have the same status as laypeople. All the same, social scientists seem more willing or able to overcome the layperson's naive and pre-reflexive trust in the life-world, the hypostatisation of the social world and the widespread status quo bias. But if that is the case, how do ethnomethodologists understand their own actions? If one consistently acts on the assumption of a symmetry between laypeople and professional sociologists, one will have to drop the claim to special theoretical knowledge and understand one's own theory as but one reflexive and contextual form of self-understanding among others. However, Habermas, for instance, points out that this exposes the ethnomethodologist to the risk of "self-destructive relativism" – a position from which one can no longer grasp the distinction sketched above. On this view, the only alternative is the integration of ethnomethodology into more conventional theories and research programmes, which would reintroduce the privileged perspective of theory vis-à-vis the agent.[32]

This confronts ethnomethodology with a pressing question: is there, after all, a categorical distinction between laypersons and scientists, or should we simply speak of "persons doing sociology, whether they are laymen or professionals" (Garfinkel and Sacks 1970: 338)? The dilemma is to either

claim privileged access for the scientist, thus giving up on the original radical insight concerning the symmetry of the participant and observer perspectives, or insist on this insight and give up on the ambition to develop a theory that, in whatever way, stands out from everyday and ethno-theories.

Presumably, the latter is as hard as it is because even from the perspective of ethnomethodology, 'ordinary' members of society seem to display no interest in reflecting on their practices, let alone in theory. That the assumption of this lack of interest is not to be understood as an epistemic privileging of the theoretical standpoint has already been indicated above. In that case, though, it also is not suited to ground the kind of distinction called for by Habermas. Garfinkel makes this clear when he says:

> To say they [viz. the actors] are "not interested" in the study of practical actions is not to complain, not to point to an opportunity they miss, nor is it a disclosure of error, nor is it an ironic comment. Neither is it the case that because members are "not interested" that they are "precluded" from sociological theorizing. Nor do their inquiries preclude the use of the rule of doubt, nor are they precluded from making the organized activities of everyday life scientifically problematical, nor does the comment insinuate a difference between "basic" and 'applied' interests in research and theorizing. What does it mean then to say that they are "not interested" in studying practical actions and practical sociological reasoning? [. . .] They treat as the most passing matter of fact that members' accounts [. . .] are constituent features of the settings they make observable. Members know, require, count on, and make use of this reflexivity to produce, accomplish, recognize, or demonstrate rational-adequacy-for-all-practical-purposes of their procedures and findings. (Garfinkel 1984 [1967]: 8)

What, however, is the aim of Garfinkel's (in)famous "breaching experiments", if not the thematisation and examination of the production – otherwise unthematised – of an unquestioned lifeworld by pre-reflexive patterns of action and interpretation? These "crisis and shock experiments", after all, are designed to show how members of society immediately attempt to normalise situations that have spun out of control, and to re-establish the way in which they can take lived reality for granted by reconciling their (background) expectations with what actually happened (cf. Patzelt 1987: 185ff). In order to achieve this, the experiments sabotage the background assumptions that are constitutive of everyday practices, for instance by undermining conventions of personal space and conversational entry and exit rules, by incessantly enquiring about the meaning of constitutively vague colloquial manners of speaking ("Hey, what's up?") or by addressing other members of society as if they had social roles (such as guests or waiters) that do not in fact apply to them at all. The normalisation strategies employed in response to such

disruptive actions might consist in remaining serious, insisting on compliance to the rules and demanding explanation, or understanding the whole thing as a game or a joke and playing along. If such strategies are no longer effective – if, that is, the behaviour of the other can no longer be made any sense of – people mostly react irritated and disturbed, taking the actions as attacks on their own status as competent members of society. All the same, they can still hope that the behaviour of the other turns out to have meaning after all, just of a kind that is not (yet) accessible to them.

Now one reading of these experiments suggests that they are capable of revealing the implicit, unthematised systems of rules underlying interaction, the structures of their normative 'deep grammar'. Such an interpretation, however, once more introduces a dimension that is hidden from the agents and that can only be recognised from outside, by 'breaching' – that is, through an experimental break, motivated by the 'scientific attitude', with the distortions of the participant perspective. For in contrast to ethnomethodologists, the agents do not perceive the social world as constituted by their actions, but as a conglomerate of given facts. Now all of a sudden they seem to be ensnared again in an unreflected faith in the objective givenness of the world of *doxa*.

However, here too the assumption of the unquestioned character and unquestionability of the lifeworld – shared in some of Garfinkel's early writings – needs to be questioned. Just because the lifeworld is defined as unquestionable, and just because there is a long philosophical tradition that presumes that we will hammer thoughtlessly until the hammer comes apart, we should not yet accept this as an adequate description of social practice. Moreover, we may well doubt that the agents themselves are incapable of conducting 'breaching experiments', or that at least they are disinclined to do so. For practices of breaching seem to be quite widespread – it is not only true for children that playing with normality belongs to normality, and that intentionally breaking a rule is part of learning and using it. In any case, against the background of the orthodox consensus it is interesting to consider an interpretation of ethnomethodology that does *not* adopt the assumption of a fundamentally unreflected lifeworld. The crisis experiments could also be understood to reveal the fragility of social reality and the 'reality work' required for its (re)production. But they also teach the students conducting them, and indeed their 'test subjects', how easy it is to reinterpret, stretch and invalidate the seemingly unimpeachable rules of everyday interaction – thus showing them in an exaggerated form what they, to a certain extent, have all been doing in everyday life anyway.

In this context, it is enlightening to consider the 'case' of the 'transsexual' Agnes (who was born and raised as a boy) along with its theoretical interpretations (cf. Garfinkel 1984 [1967]: chapter 5). Living in a society in which

her 'condition' is not accommodated by traditional gender norms, Agnes has detailed and complex knowledge of the construction and reproduction of gender identities, knowledge that allows her to "pass" in everyday situations as a "normal woman" and thus to minimise the risk of being "found out". Her "passing" as a woman constitutes an achievement, possible only through a methodical, highly context-sensitive effort to attain the desired status.

In discussing this example, Garfinkel is particularly interested in the relation between routine and rationality (cf. ibid.: 172ff). According to a widespread assumption that is supported by the lifeworld theorem, routine, and the trust in the unquestioned social world that is practised through it, functions as a foundation on which punctual rational action – action that reacts to moments of crisis – "leans". For Agnes, this routine has become a problem, the grounding relation has been broken, and this makes her a "practical methodologist", a "doer of the accountable person" (ibid.: 180f). What should we take this example to show? To what extent are all 'ordinary' agents in a similar position as Agnes?

It is probably tempting to conclude that Agnes is the exception that proves the rule, an exception that shows all the more clearly how little reflection is normally required to produce the stability of the everyday world. Such a conclusion, however, would seem to contradict Garfinkel's own interpretation of the case, which, according to him, shows "how 'being able to give good reasons' is not only dependent upon but contributes to the maintenance of stable routines of everyday life as they are produced from 'within' the situations as situations' features" (ibid.: 185). This indicates that the relation between routine and rationality, everyday life and reflection, must be understood differently than the idea of the unquestioned lifeworld and the pre-reflexive natural attitude suggests. Following Sacks's description in 'On doing "being ordinary"' (1984b), the production of 'normal', routine and habituated behaviour might be understood as a highly complex achievement that must be carried out reflexively (meaning that it cannot, as usually happens, be considered essentially pre-reflexive).[33]

This opens up an alternative interpretation of the 'breaching experiments': they do not show the pre-reflexive character of the background assumptions that stabilise an unquestioned lifeworld and that can only really be shattered by extreme crises; rather, they reveal their fragility, as well as the work that is required of agents in order to establish, again and again, the ever precarious and temporary stability of the contexts in which they act, as well as of their own identity. Everyday practice rests on ascriptions and presuppositions that can turn out to be counterfactual, and on a tentative 'advance' of trust in the other's interpretive capacities and willingness to cooperate, which can turn out to be ill-founded. The fact that there is such a thing as stability and normality at all becomes clear through the ever-present possibility of its

collapse as a consequence of the reflexive work of agents. As such, normality proves to be extremely fragile. Unlike in Habermas (1985 [1967]: 303; EN 168), who claims that it is only the "power of reflection" that "shakes" "the dogmatism of life-praxis", from the perspective of ethnomethodology, the lifeworld is permeated with this power from the very beginning, and is constituted reflexively.[34] This interpretation precludes a characterisation of the 'natural' attitude as pre-reflexive and immune to doubt and problematisation. Conversely, it is not only compatible with the central ethnomethodological ideas of the reflexivity of agents and their practices, and the symmetry of lay-people and professional sociologists, but also makes it possible to maintain an understanding of ethnomethodology as the radical alternative in social theory that it aims to be.

2.4 So What?

In the previous sections, I have presented ethnomethodology as an approach that does not only develop a relatively detailed vocabulary for describing concrete social practices, but also offers a methodological alternative that does not rely on a break with the participant perspective. In its view that all agents in principle possess the same reflexive capacities, and in the corresponding equalisation of laypeople and professional sociologists, the approach is radically egalitarian. This position should be understood as methodological. Such a 'methodological egalitarianism' is not an *observation* of a fact, but a heuristic – indeed, methodological – *attitude*. As such, it certainly does not preclude that it may, in some situations, make sense to assume that the actual development and exercise of these capacities is not equally possible for everyone. Whether and when this is the case, though, is a question ethno-methodology does not ask.

The approach and the vocabulary of ethnomethodology open up a different perspective on social practice and the capacities of the participants – one that is worth taking into account. A substantial benefit is that the participants come into view not just as informants but as independent agents who are to be taken seriously. They possess reflexive capacities and have their own theories about agency, which allow them to understand, explain, justify and criticise the behaviour of other agents, and to participate in the constitution of social reality. This is connected with the idea "that the actors are always engaged in the business of mapping the 'social context' in which they are placed, thus offering the analyst a full-blooded theory of what sort of sociology they should be treated with" (Latour 2005: 32).[35] Just like some forms of philosophy of mind take agents themselves to have a 'theory of mind' that allows them to explain, interpret and predict the behaviour of others, social theory too should assume that agents themselves have theories about agency and

society at their command. These theories are essentially reflexively produced, that is, they involve theories about the everyday theories of other agents: "Every competent social actor is herself or himself a social theorist, who as a matter of routine makes interpretations of her or his own conduct, and of the intentions, reasons and motives of others as integral to the production of social life" (Giddens 1993 [1976]: 160).[36] Since agents orient their actions by their everyday theories, these theories are constitutive for society as the subject matter of social science. The everyday sociological views of 'ordinary' agents, then, cannot – as in Bourdieu – be understood as misleading ideas derived from spontaneous sociology about a social reality that is independent of these ideas and merely concealed by them. They are, instead, an essential element of the 'double reflexivity' that is characteristic of everyday practice and that, within sociological theory, is perhaps expressed most consistently in the ethnomethodological attitude.

If the proposed change of attitude is accepted, several distinctions (such as the one between the participant and the observer perspective, and between the natural and the scientific attitude) are no longer available in the form in which they are central for numerous approaches in the social sciences. More precisely, these distinctions are rejected as theoretical and reintroduced as endogenous distinctions, that is, they are understood as distinctions that are made and used by agents themselves in everyday life. This change of attitude leads to a 'flat' image of social practice, that contrasts with the idea of a deep dimension that lies below the surface of appearances and must first be exposed, with difficulty, from an epistemically privileged scientific observer standpoint, since for structural reasons, it necessarily remains hidden to the agents. Of course, the claim here is not that agents, in full self-transparency, are constantly busy reflecting on the conditions of their own agency – in that sense, there always are non-reflected deep dimensions of action, which can be viewed both from an everyday sociological and a social-scientific perspective. What is at stake is just the rejection of the presupposition of a certain sort of 'fact' – such as structures or forms of habitus – that fundamentally cannot be reflected on by the agents, and that is only accessible to the social-scientific observer. From this perspective, the assumption of such a deep dimension and the introduction of 'social mechanisms' operative behind the agents' backs looks like a way to secure the epistemic privileges of the scientific observer position – one that implies a distorted image of everyday practice: "[Social mechanisms] are systematically required as 'secondary elaborations' in defense of the privileged status of social scientists' empirical judgments. And, in turn, preoccupation with the 'problem of error' and its resolution tends to deflect attention away from the systematic study of the actors' actual knowledge, the properties of their judgments, their procedures for assessing outcomes, etc." (Heritage 1984: 68). Detailed descriptions of

concrete situated interactions should obviate the recourse to social structures or mechanisms that are opaque to the agents and that influence their actions without their knowledge. This, in turn, is supposed to pull the rug out from under the entire project of a critical social science, which strives to debunk and replace the agents' self-interpretations. According to ethnomethodology, social structures, contexts and the like – any factors that, on the orthodox understanding of social science, form the 'hard' foundation that ultimately determines even the self-understanding of agents – are not given, but the results of reflexive everyday practices that require continuous updating. For this reason, they cannot – *contra* Bourdieu's "genetic structuralism" – be understood as objectively pregiven conditions of practice.

Because of this 'situationist' orientation of ethnomethodology and its 'positivist' bias, however, some central aspects of everyday practice and the exercise of reflexive capacities never come to light. Since the analysis remains at the level of the details of isolated sequences of interaction, the capacity of agents to hold each other accountable, that is, to justify and criticise their own and others' actions, is curiously left out in the cold. The conditions of the development and exercise of the agents' reflexive capacities remain unthematised, even though the agents themselves would surely be interested in them. The normative logic and grammar of practices of justification and critique, in which the agents develop and exercise their reflexive capacities, is taken into account just as little as the plurality of principles and systems of justification on which agents can draw at any time, and on which they do in fact draw regularly in order to detach themselves from concrete contexts and to justify their critiques. It is precisely this dimension, central for everyday practices and the self-understanding of agents, that I shall elaborate on in the following sections, drawing on Luc Boltanski's sociology of critique and its reconstruction of practices of justification and critique. Subsequently, I shall discuss a more fundamental problem, which both ethnomethodology and Boltanski's approach face. This problem necessitates the transition to a more ambitious understanding of critical social theory, albeit one that, unlike the model discussed in part I – and this is the decisive difference – relinquishes the idea of a break between the participant and observer perspectives.

3. 'WHAT PEOPLE ARE CAPABLE OF': PRACTICES OF JUSTIFICATION AND CRITIQUE

3.1 From Critical Sociology to a Sociology of Critique

The sociology of critique, developed by Luc Boltanski and other members of the *Groupe de Sociologie Politique et Morale*, aligns itself with some of

the core insights of ethnomethodology. It too assumes a fundamental symmetry between 'ordinary' agents and 'professional' sociologists, rejects the demand for a break between the participant and observer perspectives and emphasises the reflexivity of everyday practice. Moreover, it develops a vocabulary for analysing concrete practices of self-understanding that does not put 'ordinary' agents down as 'dopes' who do not know what they are doing, but understands them as competent agents who possess judgement and other reflexive capacities.

In contrast to ethnomethodology, however, the approach of the sociology of critique, at once empirical and theoretical, is of a far less 'situationist' bent: it emphasises the normative structures of everyday practice that go beyond concrete contexts of interaction, as well as the plurality and heterogeneity of forms of action and justification. In contrast to the structures analysed by the first model, though, these are not taken to elude the reflection of agents or to be operative behind their backs. A further fundamental difference must be mentioned: ethnomethodology not only restricts itself to the local production of meaning and order in concrete situations, but understands this construction itself as something contingent – something for which no further ground can be found or given. The sociology of critique, in contrast, assumes that agents in their everyday practices are subject to certain demands to justify themselves, and that they try to satisfy these by drawing on general principles that are expressed in socially and culturally mediated forms of argumentation. On this view, the construction of meaning and order must rely on normative frameworks ('justificatory regimes') and is subject to their normative binding force. These normative orders make everyday practices of justification and critique possible in the first place. That critique is possible and necessary depends both on the existence of these demands and the "factual power of the normative", and on the continual avoidance of the demands and the "normative power of the factual":

> To be valid, critique must be capable of justifying itself – that is to say, clarifying the normative supports that ground it – especially when it is confronted with the justifications that those who are subject to critique supply for their action. Hence it continues to refer to justice, for if justice is a delusion, what is the point of criticizing? On the other hand, however, critique presents a world in which the requirement of justice is incessantly contravened. It unmasks the hypocrisy of moral pretensions that conceal the reality of relations of force, exploitation and domination. (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999: EN 28)

With its focus on everyday practices of justification and critique, the sociology of critique acts as an alternative to the orthodox model of critical social science and rejects the demand for a break with the experiences and self-interpretations of agents as methodologically and empirically inadequate. The

orthodox model – to which, according to the sociology of critique, Bourdieu's theory squarely belongs – is characterised as follows:

> Persons are presented as inconsistent (and thus as unworthy) because they offer rational justifications for their behavior in the name of superficial and fallacious motives (prenotions or ideologies) whereas their behavior is actually determined by hidden but objective forces. Order is maintained by some form of deception (alienation, belief) that, without being imposed by the force of arms, nevertheless stems from violence. This deception guarantees the stability of the social order, which is self-evident, and is only rarely called into question. The sociologist does the work of a scientist insofar as he himself is not fooled and is able to unveil what is hidden under false appearances. (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: EN 345)[37]

From the perspective of critical social science, thus understood, agents are incapable of coming to an independent and adequate understanding of the social and are therefore at best considered 'informants'.

> This is why they [viz. the agents] have to be *taught* what is the context "in which" they are situated and "of which" they see only a tiny part, while the social scientist, floating above, sees the "whole thing". The excuse for occupying such a bird's eye view is usually that scientists are doing "reflexively" what the informants are doing "unwittingly". (Latour 2005: 32–33)

The sociology of critique, in contrast, takes the experiences and self-interpretations of "ordinary" agents as a starting point. It does not reject the mutual ascriptions of a capacity for reflection and critique that are constitutive for everyday practice and for the self-understandings of agents as illusory, but adopts them. Thus, Bourdieu's sociological critique of judgement – a critique that denies agents the capacity for judgement and associates the capacity for reflexive detachment exclusively with the position of the social-scientific observer – is replaced with a "sociology of the capacity for critical judgement and justification" (cf. Wagner 2004). The latter takes its start from everyday situations of dispute – one could speak of the 'fact' of critique and justification – in which the agents actually demonstrate their capacity for reflexive detachment.[38] It considers 'ordinary' agents as "justificatory beings" who are able to justify what they think and do, and expect themselves and others to put this ability into practice (cf. Forst 2007a).

This methodological paradigm shift is captured by the programmatic formula "From critical sociology to a sociology of critique".[39] Against the rhetoric of a break between science and common sense, between sociology and ordinary agents – a rhetoric that Bourdieu attempts to use in support of the scientific and critical status of his analyses – the sociology of critique

emphasises the fundamental *symmetry* of critical abilities in the relations between agents and in the relation of agents to social scientists. It denounces the way in which a social science that declares itself objective delineates itself from "illusory indigenous forms of knowledge", since such an approach obscures the heterogeneity of the contexts in which people act and the complexity of the demands for reflection and coordination to which agents in their everyday practices are subject, and since, in doing so, it levels sociologically relevant distinctions (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: EN 344; cf. Boltanski and Thévenot 2000).

With one eye on Latour, the sociology of critique reformulates a basic idea of ethnomethodology into a methodological maxim: the agents must, in part quite literally, be followed in their actions, interpretations and assessments ("*suivre les acteurs*"). For actually, the participants in a practice have the relevant knowledge about the social world, and for this reason, any adequate theory of this practice can only be developed together with them and in reference to their own theories:

> The duties of the social scientist mutate accordingly: it is no longer enough to limit actors to the role of informers offering cases of some well-known types. You have to grant them back the ability to make up their own theories of what the social is made of. [. . .] Using a slogan from ANT [i.e. actor network theory], you have "to follow the actors themselves". (Latour 2005: 11f; also cf. Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: 11f)

In an exact inversion of the Bourdieusian perspective, the agents, for structural reasons, seem to be one step ahead of sociology, not just with regard to the constitution of the social world in practice, but also when it comes to interpretation and critique: "As a rule, it's much better to set up as the default position that the inquirer is always one reflexive loop *behind* those they study" (Latour 2005: 33; cf. ibid.: 11f, 32f). According to this socio-theoretical version of the principle of charity, any understanding of social practices of critique must be based on the presumption of the rationality of agents, and on taking seriously their self-interpretations and normative claims, which cannot be reduced to structures that are operative behind their backs without them being aware. The aim of the sociology of critique is to analyse the capacities and claims of agents as well as the practices made possible by them, not to reveal some sort of subsurface dynamics hidden to the agents. For this reason, the sociology of critique decidedly is a second-order 'science' or theory, for the agents themselves already have the socially relevant knowledge – and thus the true science and theory of the social. Accordingly, the task of sociology is 'merely' to "model" the capacities employed in social interaction along with the corresponding knowledge, which come

to light in "moments of reflexivity" in which agents explicitly engage in practices of justification and critique (cf. Boltanski 2006b: 12f; 2002). What epistemic benefits, though, come with taking up such a perspective?

3.2 Elements of a Sociology of Critique and Justification

The first thing that becomes apparent from this ethnomethodologically inspired perspective is how much effort 'ordinary' agents make in their everyday practices to negotiate interpretations of situations, justify their actions and respond at least tentatively to critique. As my earlier analyses of ethnomethodology have shown, these activities are anything but chaotic or disorderly. In situations that are experienced or interpreted as problematic, agents draw on socially and culturally mediated models of argumentation in order to detach themselves from the concrete situation and to engage in an exchange of reasons in which critique and justification are inseparably linked. By considering these everyday practices of justification and critique in the light of pragmatics, grammar and topics, the sociology of critique discloses them in a more systematic manner than is possible on ethnomethodology's 'situationist' approach. Analogously to the use of these terms in linguistics, pragmatics studies the actual practices of critique and justification, grammar investigates rules and limiting conditions that underlie these practices, and topics construct an inventory of the repertoire of general categories and manners of speaking that can be used by agents in different contexts.

Naturally, even the sociology of critique does not take all action to occur in contexts of justification. For this reason, it distinguishes four higher-order modes of action that can be categorised along two axes: dispute versus peace and symmetry versus asymmetry. These modes, which exhibit different degrees of reflexivity, are: love/agape (peace with symmetry), routine/appropriateness (peace without symmetry), violence (dispute without symmetry) and justification/justice (dispute with symmetry – the most reflective mode of all).[40] The idea that social practices have a reflexive structure is not to be understood in the sense that agents in practice are always concerned with reasons and justifications. This is only the case in the mode of action of justification. However, it is always *possible* for agents to change into this mode or to "fall out of" the other three modes, and in fact, under the pressure of everyday situations of crisis or conflict, they often do change and "fall".[41] For the necessity of justification depends not on the mere possibility of critique but on its actual employment. For this reason, an agent's capacity for judgement is not called upon constantly, but only when a situation is experienced and defined as 'problematic'. If, for instance, it is disputed how a situation should be interpreted and assessed, and how one ought to behave in it, a mere "That's just the way it is" or "That's just how we do it here" does not

suffice. In such a case, agents will have to draw on general principles and try to apply these to the particular nature of the situation at hand (cf. Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: EN 133–48).

The sociology of critique only addresses the forms of action associated with the mode of justification, but it does consider this mode of action to be pivotal to both everyday practice and the self-understanding of agents. Starting from the 'fact' of critique and justification, it asks about the 'subjective' and 'objective' conditions of these practices. 'Subjective' conditions here are capacities and competencies of agents, which they ascribe to each other and that are ascribed to them by the sociology of critique as well. 'Objective' conditions are the regimes of justification that can, according to Boltanski and Thévenot, be discerned within the 'metaregime' of justification. The situated exercise of reflexive capacities constantly refers to different regimes, dispositifs or orders of justification, which act as normative points of reference for both justification and critique. The sociology of critique, accordingly, is a two-level theory: it starts with the reflexive capacities of agents that are expressed in everyday practices of self-understanding and subsequently analyses these practices as a complex nexus of orders of justification, which involve grammars and topics of justification and critique. The orders of justification are ideal-typical models of justification, each built around a particular principle of justice and equivalence (cf. ibid.: part II).[42] Because of the existence of these different regimes of justification, not all demands need to be traced back to one single principle, as is often presumed by monistic philosophical moral theories that postulate a homogeneous space of reasons. The plurality and heterogeneity of worlds of action and regimes of justification in complex societies here have a double significance. On the one hand, they require the "arts of living in different worlds", that is to say, the (mutual) ascription of cognitive and evaluative abilities, which allow agents to find their ways in complex situations and in overlapping spaces of reasons (ibid.: EN 148).[43] On the other hand, they allow agents to adopt a detached and critical attitude with respect to the particular context in which they act by referring to other modes of actions and regimes of justification: "The possibility of exiting from the present situation and denouncing it by relying on an external principle and consequently on the plurality of worlds thus constitutes the condition of a justified action" (ibid.: EN 235).[44]

Given the confrontations with plural and heterogenous contexts and regimes of justification, agents must also be able to shift between different contexts of action and justification, and to answer the question which action 'fits' a particular context, without always being able to draw on established scripts for competent conduct. In contrast to the model of the break, agents must be considered to have the ability to react to the demands for reasons 'adequately' and in a way that corresponds to the particular situation, whether

these demands come from within their own environment or from outside. To do this, they need more than the dispositions of practical sense one might gain from socialisation, to which Bourdieu's model is restricted; they need judgement and the capacity for reflexive detachment, for the "ability to detach oneself from the immediate environment, to remove oneself from the confusion of what is present [. . .] constitutes the minimal ability human beings must have if they are to involve themselves in situations without getting lost in them" (ibid.: EN 146; cf. Boltanski 1990: 74; EN 90).[45]

On the basis of everyday forms of justification and critique, such as motivated demands for justice, the sociology of critique shows that agents do in fact have the postulated capacities. In order for a 'denunciation' of a situation, institution or agent that is experienced as unjust to be successful, in order for a denouncer not to be dismissed as paranoid or querulous and for their critique not to be disqualified accordingly, the persons concerned must abstract from the particular features of their case and focus on the general characteristics that are 'relevant to justice'.[46] They do so by referring to justificatory practices of generalisation, de-particularisation and decontextualisation. These may consist in pointing out that one's own concrete experience has a relevance that goes beyond the individual case at hand, or that it is in some way representative – that it, for instance, stands for the experience of *any* female worker or *any* migrant (cf. Boltanski 1990: chapter I.2).[47] Conversely, the denunciation of a scandal often consists in the revelation of something particular (such as a particular interest) that hides behind the mask of generality (for instance the claim that one is acting for the common good or only followed generally accepted rules). Such a practice will have a genuinely critical and political dimension if it reveals the relevance of individual or collective experiences for the normative self-image of a community – if, that is, it can successfully claim some sort of 'concrete' or 'exemplary' generality. The practices of justification and critique here include individual and collective efforts of argumentation, interpretation and translation. These become necessary because of the controversial nature of the normative status of the experiences of agents and the corresponding interpretations of the situation, and direct the indignation underlying the critique into the more orderly channels of the exchange of reasons and counterarguments.

If the agents are interested in a solution that comes about 'legitimately' (which is to say: not violently, but discursively, whether as consensus or compromise), it follows from an individual's scandalising complaint or critique – if she is able, that is, to make it plausible that it derived from her "right to justification" – that the addressee is subject to an "imperative to justify".[48] What exactly the right to justification is a right to, and under what sort of obligation the imperative to justify places someone, will always need to be concretised in the particular context at hand, and can of course

be controversial itself. The agents, critics just as much as those criticised, will have to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate moves in the practice of justification, for instance between valid arguments and strategic manipulations. To be sure, these distinctions are always the result of concrete negotiation processes and interpretations of situations as well, for what is accepted as a legitimate reason and what counts as a justification will always be context-dependent and subject to negotiation. Nonetheless, an *ad hominem* criticism, for instance, which cannot be understood in the light of any higher-order principles, but is guided by personal animosity, will hardly be taken to be legitimate in any context, and can therefore be considered generally improper. The process of generalisation and de-particularisation, in the course of which agents gradually leave the concrete circumstances of their dispute behind in order to advance towards a solution of the conflict, does not necessarily lead to a result against which no possible legitimate objection could be raised. Rather, it is perfectly sufficient to find a justification that all affected parties are happy to call 'good enough' in the particular context: a justification 'for all practical purposes'.

In order to substantiate the legitimacy of their claims, agents must submit to restrictions that determine which demands count as justified and appropriate within the relevant regime of justification. In doing so, they can refer to a plurality of general principles that serve as reference points for the justifications governed by such a regime. Agents draw on these principles in order to interpret situations and solve conflicts, as they strive to find and legitimate a consensus or compromise. In concrete social contexts, agents must follow the relevant rules – or at least make plausible that they do – so as to lend their actions a certain meaning and legitimacy, and to be recognised as competent actors (cf. ibid.: 20f).[49] Unlike the rules of a game of chess, however, the rules of such a grammar of justification do not determine unambiguously and comprehensively which moves are possible and legitimate, and which moves in the space of reasons have which meaning. Rather, they structurally leave open the possibility of divergent interpretations and conflicts about the 'right' or 'decisive' framing of the situation, even though, naturally, the regimes of justification cannot be employed and interpreted at will.

In any situation that can be allocated to a specific regime of justification (such allocations, of course, can always be disputed), agents are subject to both normative and pragmatic requirements. The *precise* nature of these requirements – what kind of behaviour is out of the question, what is allowed and what is imperative – cannot be determined in advance, but must be negotiated within the concrete situation. The social situations in which agents find themselves are often characterised by uncertainty – they are "disturbed situations" (*situations troubles*) (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: EN 137) – so that it must first be clarified and negotiated what kind of situation it is in the first

place, which agents are affected and have a say, and so forth. The focus on justification therefore should not belie the fact that this model is by no means harmonistic. After all, it takes the very case of conflict as its starting point, and practices of justification and critique do not necessarily end in consensus. In addition, there will be conflicts and tensions between the different modes of action, regimes of justification and worlds. In practice, agreement and conflict, justification and critique are always intertwined.

In addition to general principles and rules, orders of justification involve specific narratives of justification as well as historically developed models of argumentation and interpretation on whose topoi agents can draw in trying to justify their actions to themselves or others. Even the regimes of justification themselves, though, should not be understood as static and unambiguously codified regulations from which individual judgements could be unproblematically derived. Rather, these regimes too are subject to historical change, and because of their structural underdetermination, there is always a risk that their concretisation will lead to interpretive conflicts. For this reason, they cannot be conceived in isolation from social practices of justification and critique but are bound to these in terms of their genesis, content and validity – for it is only in such practices that they can arise, be understood and gain concrete content and actual binding force.[50] The existence and limits of the orders of justification cannot be read off from social reality, and thus cannot easily be identified by theory. Here, too, theory does not have a privileged position compared to the agents. Rather, it will have to trace how orders of justification develop in the light of controversies and how they are mutually distinguished.

In contrast to Michael Walzer's pluralist model of different spheres of justice, the regimes of justification are not unambiguously categorised as belonging to different social spheres – such as the market, the family, the state – and goods corresponding to these. The notion of 'contexts' or 'spheres' of justification should not be understood to mean that these can be localised, that is to say, related to particular domains of social action and particular institutions. In order to bring to light the different forms of critique it is indeed necessary to refrain from binding the regimes of justification to specific social contexts, and to acknowledge that different forms of justification may clash within a single context or that one form of justification may be employed by agents in very different contexts.

To sum up, the theoretical and methodological basis of the sociology of critique is characterised by the following four principles:[51]

- The principle of *symmetry* rejects the strict separation and hierarchisation – central to the model of the break – of scientific and un-scientific or non-scientific forms of knowledge, action and one's relation to oneself and

to the world, of science and common sense. According to this principle, there is a fundamental "symmetry between the descriptive languages or explanatory principles used by the social sciences, on the one hand, and the modes of justification or criticism used by actors, on the other hand" (ibid.: EN 11).[52]

• The principle of *pluralism* refers, first, to the plurality of modes of action: besides justification, most notably the modes of violence, love and routine. Second, it refers within a mode of action to the plurality of the 'worlds' in which agents act together, and to the regimes of justification and critique connected to these (also cf. Thévenot 2006).

• The principle of reflexive *capacities* emphasises 'what people are capable of', that is to say, their know-how, their ability to act, quite generally the competencies needed to engage in practices of justification and to change between different 'worlds'. This most importantly concerns judgement as the capacity to connect the general (principles, rules, etc.) with the particular (concrete situations, persons, etc.) and to detach oneself from individual contexts of action.

• According to the principle of *grammars of agreement*, there are rules which the agents must follow in order to coordinate their actions and judgements, as well as limitations and conditions to which their justifications are subject so as to be acceptable. To be able to make a generalisation, agents have to draw on certain models or narratives of justification, which, similarly to the grammar of natural language, allow certain moves in the game of justification and rule out others. In parallel with the plurality of regimes of justification, there is a plurality of grammars of agreement: depending on which regime of justification applies, agents will have to develop their arguments orienting themselves by different principles.

3.3 Two Forms of Critique

The plurality of the different orders of justification and the ever-present possibility of tension among them also ground the distinction between two forms of critique, and, correspondingly, two modes of 'revelation'.

In the first case, the regime of justification is fundamentally accepted, while the way in which it is applied in the concrete situation is criticised. This case occurs, for instance, when a company promoting a person is criticised for not following the officially propagated performance principles and basing the preferment on family ties instead. This is an internal, 'reformist' critique that questions the 'purity' of the application of the principle of justification – Boltanski calls this the "test" (*épreuve*).[53] Such a critique does not, however, call the principle itself into question – the principle, after all, is what

should be done justice. In such cases, critique can "reveal" that a value – or as Boltanski and Thévenot put it, a "worth" (*grandeur*) – is transferred illegitimately from one domain to the other and can point out either unjustified overestimations (*transport de grandeur*) or underestimations (*transport de misère*), that is, unjustified privileges or disadvantages.

In the second case, the critique questions the very order of justification or its appropriateness in the situation at hand. This occurs, for instance, when a grading system for schools that is based on a combination of equal opportunities and merit is criticised for masking the impact of social inequalities, which could not possibly be counteracted by one school labouring for equal opportunities. This is a more radical form of critique, one that aims at the replacement of a regime of justification that is deemed inadequate in the situation at hand, and that can support this demand by pointing out that the description of the situation that had thus far been generally accepted is inappropriate. In this case of a conflict between incompatible principles, Boltanski and Thévenot speak, following Lyotard, of a clash (*différend*), while the first two situations were cases of mere contention (*litige*) (cf. Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: EN 219–23, 133f).[54] Referring to the tests that are supposed to mediate between the balance of power and norms of justice, Boltanski and Chiapello formulate the distinction as follows:

> The first is *corrective* in intent: critique reveals those features of the tests under challenge that infringe justice and, in particular, the forces mobilized by certain of the protagonists without the others being aware of it, thereby securing an undeserved advantage. In this instance, the objective of the critique is to improve the justice of the test – *to make it stricter* [. . .]. A second manner of criticising tests may be dubbed *radical*. In this instance, what is at stake is no longer correcting the conditions of the test with a view to making it more just, but suppressing it and ultimately replacing it with a different test. In the first case, critique takes the criteria the test is supposed to satisfy seriously [. . .] In the second case, it is the validity of the test itself [. . .] that is subject to challenge. (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999: 75; EN 32–33; cf. ibid.: 540f; EN 503; Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: 295f; EN 217ff)

While the first case presents a critique 'immanent to the polis', the second can be understood as a critique that transcends the polis. It must be noted, though, that critique (whether exercised by sociologists, philosophers or 'ordinary' agents) is only ever possible on the basis of a concrete order of justification ('polis') and that there is no external standpoint that can be taken up independently of existing practices and regimes of justification: "In fact, there is no higher vantage point above any of the worlds, no external position from which the plurality of justices could be considered from a distance, as a range of equally possible choices" (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: EN 232).[55]

From the perspective of such a pragmatics of critique, then, it is impossible to determine in a context-free manner whether a particular critique or justification is acceptable; such a question can be settled only in a particular situation and in reference to the relevant order of justification. Critics will have to engage with the normative logic of the relevant discourse, and show, for instance, that the principle at issue only *seems to be* satisfied, while 'in reality', a different principle is followed. If they fail to refer to the relevant discourse, they are bound to come across as grumblers. Nevertheless, as I made clear above, the plurality of forms of justification allows for a more radical kind of critique – one that does not question the application of a principle of justification, but the very principle itself. Drawing on different orders and registers of justification and critique, agents can detach themselves from the concrete situation at hand and problematise it in the light of a different order or from the perspective of other agents.

The everyday practices of critique and justification, then, are structurally similar to the procedures of critical sociology.[56] Agents mobilise arguments claiming universal validity, draw on generally recognised methods of giving evidence, isolate the relevant facts, reveal their conversation partners' (self-)deceptions and point out the particular interests behind ostensibly impartial arrangements: "This operation of reversal consists in showing that false worth conceals deficiency; it corresponds to the first stage of unveiling, which we shall call a *critique*. Critiques are articulated by operators such as 'in fact', 'in reality', 'are only', and so on" (ibid.: EN 224). In their critiques, agents sometimes mobilise explicitly sociological models of argumentation, as well as a variety of normatively laden distinctions – conscious/unconscious, manifest/latent, authentic/alienated, communicative/strategic, legitimate/arbitrary – which also belong to the conceptual repertoire of critical social theories. The theories of 'experts' are resources for 'ordinary' agents – 'laypeople' – to draw on in their everyday practices of interpretation, justification and critique. And indeed, they often do draw on them. This means that theoretical analysis, the agents' self-descriptions and social reality meet each other in a hermeneutic circle, which undermines both the idea of a theorist who is detached from the subject matter she studies, and of the unreflective and naive agent.

The agents' critical operations are by no means signs of a 'naive spontaneous sociology', as Bourdieu presumes; rather, they show that 'ordinary' agents have an elaborate everyday sociology at their command that is neither particularly naive nor spontaneous. Correspondingly, the assumption of a break between common and sociological forms of critique is rejected as a dogma. From this perspective, the attitude of the critical sociologist who believes that she needs to break with the illusions of common sense differs not all that much from the attitude taken by 'ordinary' agents in claiming to

break with the illusions of other agents, their own group or their former self. The sociologist, however, is mistaken about the methodological status of her point of view (Boltanski 1990: 37; EN 18). In shifting from 'critical sociology' to the 'sociology of critique', the intention is not to leave critical social science behind for restorative reasons. Rather, critical social science (including its manifestation as a critique of ideology) is to be understood as a specific social practice; that is to say, as a specific form of critique and justification that may be practiced most professionally by social critics in academic institutions, but that can in principle be taken up by any agent.[57]

4. SUMMARY AND PREVIEW

A sociological analysis of everyday practices of justification and critique from the perspectives of pragmatics, grammar and topics shows that agents, under 'normal' circumstances, are willing – and feel the need – to justify their actions to themselves and to others, and that they ascribe this need and willingness to others as well. Following ethnomethodology, the sociology of critique assumes a fundamental symmetry between the perspective of experts and that of laypeople, between science and common sense. It combines this with a fundamental critique of the notion of an epistemological break, which is constitutive not only for classical forms of the critique of ideology but also for Bourdieu's critical social science. The 'hermeneutics of suspicion' associated with the orthodox programme of critical social science is not an appropriate methodological principle, even if it can certainly have practical relevance as an attitude that can be adopted by 'ordinary' agents in practice, and that, for this reason, is of course accessible to theory, too. If critique is primarily understood as social practice, instead of a theoretical project detached from practice, it will have to be admitted that the different forms of 'désengagement' – taking a distancing attitude towards practice that grounds critique – are open to 'ordinary' agents as well. Since the latter, too, are always capable of changing their perspectives and contexts and are indeed forced to do so to a greater or lesser extent in everyday life, the level of explicit reflection of laypeople and professional sociologists can only differ gradually and for contingent reasons. While there may be *de facto* differences between science and common sense, then, there are no *de jure* differences that, like in the orthodox model of critical social science, would leave room for a break between the scientific and the participant perspectives, or would, on principle, allow for the latter to be denied an equal epistemic status. This is not changed by the fact, which can hardly be denied, that professional theorists have conceptual and theoretical resources at their command that are not normally available to 'ordinary' agents.

However, a double presupposition underlies the symmetry thesis: the assumption that the conditions of the practice of justification and critique that I called 'subjective' and 'objective' really do apply. That is to say, first, that the competency to develop justifications and critique is universal and shared by everyone, and second, that there is a plurality of regimes of justification, on which agents can actually draw in practice in order to exercise the corrective and radical modes of critique. But can it really be assumed that these preconditions for the practices of critique and justification are actually given, and correspondingly, that the sociology of critique will find a foothold in social reality? Might there not be circumstances in which the capacities that are essential to these practices are obstructed or inhibited? Granted, it does not seem implausible "that people possess genuine critical capacities – that is to say, that they are never so alienated as to be incapable of establishing a critical distance" (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999: EN 488). But this fundamental assumption cannot rule out that the capacity for detachment and critique is unequally distributed or structurally impaired, nor that there exist hegemonic social arrangements that inconspicuously defy the pressure of justification, or indeed hegemonic regimes of justification that oust competing forms of argumentation and thus limit the socially available opportunities for critique. In other words: just like the 'objective' conditions studied by the sociology of critique – that is, the culturally available regimes of justification – the 'subjective' conditions – the capacities of the agents – may well be subject to limitations, which cannot simply be ignored by the theoretical perspective.[58]

That all agents have essentially the same competencies to partake in practices of critique should not be understood to mean that they are not subject to social conditions, as if, for instance, the unequal distribution of cultural capital through the education system described by Bourdieu were irrelevant for the practical possibility of using these competencies. Rather, the fact that people are unequally endowed with material and symbolic resources has an impact on the situation of justification itself. This certainly raises the question – which cannot be addressed adequately within the second model – whether the exercise of reflexive capacities may not be obstructed by certain social conditions, even if it is surely only in extreme cases that they are absent altogether.[59] Moreover, different positions in the social field open up different opportunities to hegemonise one's own definition of reality or one's own interpretation of a situation as the sole legitimate one, without having to justify this specifically under the pressure of critique. This very description, though, can lead to an increased pressure to justify, if it is convincingly taken up by agents. If it is true that ideologies always aim for justification, critique will always find a foothold.[60] Naturally, practices and regimes of justification can be ideological as well, but both can always be criticised from within the practice itself. Accordingly, the critique of ideology is not bound to an

external scientific perspective. Nonetheless, under such conditions theory can be eminently practically relevant, since it offers (and helps to make plausible) redescriptions and problematisations in the service of critique.

The possibility for the sociology of critique to make a critical turn has thus far hardly been envisaged by this approach itself. Only Boltanski and Chiapello, in their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, demand that sociology develop a theoretical vocabulary that can contribute to the revitalisation of the forms of social critique that have been blunted by the ideological mutability of capitalism and that can thus counteract the fatalism diagnosed by the authors.[61] At the same time, Boltanski and Chiapello point to the ambivalent consequences of the forms of critique they study: these both transform and stabilise capitalism. However, the authors do not apply their macro-level analysis of the interplay between critique and the social order to the micro- and meso-level action-theoretical model that was developed in *On Justification*. Therefore, the question remains what the social conditions of critique and justification are, and how one might effectively participate in these practices.[62]

Although Bourdieu's objections to ethnomethodology and the sociology of critique – that they reduce sociology to mere ethnography, offer nothing but a depoliticised inventory of what is crudely given (that is, of the dominant order) and are forms of a subjectivism that only reproduces the illusion of immediate understanding (Bourdieu 2000 [1972]; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: EN 248) – do not testify to a particularly sophisticated understanding of these approaches, his suggestion that the question concerning the conditions of possibility of the phenomena at issue is obscured in these approaches must, for the reasons mentioned above, be taken seriously. The perspective of ethnomethodology and the sociology of critique allows a precise description of the (normative) logic of social practices of justification and critique but tends to lose sight of the social conditions of their exercise. In part III, I shall therefore develop an approach that avoids the dichotomy between a break with the self-understanding of agents and a mere inventory of the forms of self-understanding that happen to exist. The social conditions under which people criticise, justify and tinker with compromises must be captured by theory as well. In order to do justice to the practices of justification and critique, we will need a form of theory that both connects with these practices and goes beyond them.

NOTES

1. In Hill and Crittenden (1968: 13).
2. Ibid. 15.

3. "Practical sociological reasoning" is Garfinkel's term for the quasi-sociological methods of ordinary members of society (1984 [1967]: 5). Since these are overt phenomena, he also speaks of a "worldly observability of reasoning".

4. In both respects, ethnomethodology played a leading role in the gradual disengagement in the French debate from Bourdieu's programme for a critical social science. It was also formative for the sociology of critique in its early stages; cf. Dosse (1997 [1995]: 88–94, 180–94; EN 67–72, 150–63); Dodier (2001).

5. Cf. Goffman (1986 [1974]): 14: "I can only suggest that he who would combat false consciousness and awaken people to their true interests has much to do, because the sleep is very deep. And I do not intend here to provide a lullaby but merely to sneak in and watch the way the people snore".

6. For an example of such an interpretation, see McCarthy (1995 [1989]: section 6) as well as Rehg (2001). In this sense, one could understand the perspective of ethnomethodology and the sociology of critique as social theory's answer to my empirical objections against theories such as Bourdieu's.

7. In my discussion of this approach, I focus on the most important works of Harold Garfinkel, as well as on some publications by his students (which takes me beyond the collection of Garfinkel's papers published in the 1960s to which the sociological debate, for reasons that elude me, tends to confine itself). I cannot go into the two central points of reference of ethnomethodology – positively, the phenomenology of Schütz (with whom Garfinkel had close contact as a student), and negatively, the action and systems theory of Parsons (who was his PhD supervisor). In addition, I ignore the many instances of overlap with other approaches such as pragmatism and symbolic interactionism. Cf. the overviews in Patzelt (1986) and Joas and Knöbl (2004: lecture 7). I owe the first and therefore decisive pointer to ethnomethodology to discussions with Hans Joas.

8. The 'ethnosciences' (gathered under the heading 'cognitive anthropology') study the local forms of knowledge that, in certain cultures, accompany certain practices (such as the botany, chemistry and astronomy of the 'natives'). Garfinkel's original proposal was to extend these studies to the *methodologies* of 'natives' (his first subjects: the members of a jury) (cf. the introduction in Garfinkel [2002] as well as his introductory remarks in Hill and Crittenden [1968: 7f] (this text is a transcript of oral presentations at a conference that were not given titles, and which I shall therefore cite by naming the speaker)). Garfinkel later extended the term to include the methodology of social science, which he did not take to have a privileged position vis-à-vis common sense and 'ethnosociology'. In doing so, he took himself to offer a radical alternative (and not just a supplement) to conventional approaches in the social sciences. The term 'folk methods' is to be understood by analogy to 'folk psychology', which studies the system of assumptions, concepts and practices with which 'ordinary' agents understand, anticipate, explain and influence each other's actions. The notions 'folk theory', 'folk psychology' and 'protosociology' should not suggest, however, that compared to 'real scientific' theories these are structurally deficient early forms of theory that one day should be replaced by the latter.

9. On the following, also cf. Lynch (2001). To cite one of Garfinkel's typical formulations (1991: 10f): "There are good reasons for ethnomethodological studies

to specify the production and accountability of immortal, ordinary society – that mir-acle of familiar organisational things – as the local production and natural, reflexive accountability of the phenomena of order. [. . .] For ethnomethodology the objective reality of social facts, in that, and just how, it is every society's locally, endogenously produced, naturally organised, reflexively accountable, ongoing, practical achieve-ment, being everywhere, always, only, exactly and entirely, members' work, with no time out, and with no possibility of evasion, hiding out, passing, postponement, or buy-outs, is thereby sociology's fundamental phenomenon". Pollner (1991: 370) speaks, even more generally, of the "accomplished character of all social activity".

10. Ethnomethodology is the study of this phenomenon (cf. ibid.: 11).

11. On the complex notion of 'place work', which is required from only appar-ently inactive participants in order to form a queue, cf. Garfinkel (2002: chapter 8); Garfinkel and Livingston (2003).

12. In English, this dimension is apparent in the expression "to make sense of someone / something".

13. Accounts are "practices of saying-in-so-many-words-what-we-are-doing". Garfinkel emphasises their inseparability from actions by calling them both "reflex-ive" and "incarnated" (1984 [1967]: 1). In speech act theory, these are, following John L. Austin, called 'explicit performative utterances': "When I said the ice over there is very thin, I didn't mean to criticise you, but only to warn you".

14. Of course, even "the rational accountability of practical actions" is "an ongo-ing, practical accomplishment" (Garfinkel 1984 [1967]: 4).

15. Cf. Garfinkel in Hill and Crittenden (1968: 206ff). That the assumption of an objectively existing and shared world to which everybody has similar access is at the same time a precondition, object and product of everyday conduct, is shown by Pollner (1974).

16. McCarthy uses the ethnomethodological analysis of the reflexivity of everyday practices to oppose a conventionalism that he takes to be defended by Rorty. Whether any idealising suppositions of a Habermasian kind can be derived from it is doubtful, though.

17. Cf. Boltanski, Darré and Schiltz (1984). It is surely no coincidence that Boltan-ski's theory of regimes and practices of justification also starts with an analysis of scenes of denunciation and critique. I shall come back to this in section 3.2.

18. Dodier rightly emphasises that it belongs to the ethos of ethnomethodology to do justice to the complexity and indexicality of all social problems, and to refrain from levelling them, as the analyses of orthodox social science would do.

19. Cf. Garfinkel in Hill and Crittenden (1968: 193): "Adequate description of adequate procedure-for-all-practical-purposes is somehow or other an accomplish-ment having itself the same indexical features and relying on the same indexical features that are found in the sentences that make up its report, as the procedures it uses to accomplish its own report". Also cf. the presentation of empirical material in Garfinkel (1984 [1967]: chapters 6 and 7), as well as the example of a centre for suicide prevention, whose staff has to decide what counts as "suicide for all practical purposes"; ibid.: 11ff.

20. Cf. Goffman (1986 [1974]: 8); on the reflexivity of practices of framing also Turner (1987: 74–76).

21. On the structural similarities between "situations of sociological inquiry" and "common sense situations of choice" cf. Garfinkel (1984 [1967]: 100); Wieder and Zimmerman (1979).

22. In organisational sociology, this situation is called the 'shop floor problem': the employees' *ad hoc* solutions to unforeseen problems can only be integrated to a very limited extent into new processes or policies without damaging this very capacity for creative and collective problem-solving. Organisations therefore have to learn (or resign themselves to the fact) that such gaps cannot be filled, and that any attempt to fill them may have extremely counterproductive effects.

23. Cf. Garfinkel (1984 [1967]: chapter 3); Patzelt (1987: 59): "The talk of the 'competency' of an agent refers to the skill in dealing with the ethnos-specific ways in which everyday practice is conducted, which are constitutive for the status of a member". 'Ethnos' here is understood as a group that produces and maintains a common social reality. Being part of such a group depends on particular skills and on taking part in particular practices, not on ethnicity or other 'natural' facts. In that sense, using the term 'ethnos' for such groups is somewhat misleading.

24. Cf. Heritage (1984: 110ff). The objection more generally targets abstract models of the agent, which always diminish what the agent is capable of and which are imposed on the agent from a theoretical perspective, independently of and before any concrete practice. In a "sociological and naturalistic" interpretation of Wittgenstein, David Bloor (1992: 269) argues for exactly this thesis: that agents are to be understood as "cultural and judgmental dopes"; after all, they follow social rules blindly, and therefore in a manner that is automatic and ultimately causally determined (for a similar position, also cf. Fish [1989]). The objection of Garfinkel and ethnomethodology is that such a view dissolves the phenomenon – how do agents act in concrete situations?

25. Garfinkel (1984 [1967]: vii) speaks of the "members' methods for making those same activities visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes, i.e., accountable".

26. For Schütz (1946), the 'ordinary' agent is always simultaneously (albeit with respect to different aspects of life) "expert", "informed citizen" and "man [*sic*] in the street", and relates to his primary social context in a structurally naive and prereflexive way only in the latter respect. Also cf. Harrington (2000).

27. Garfinkel (1984 [1967]: 4) therefore speaks of "the 'uninteresting' essential reflexivity of accounts of practical actions". Wieder and Zimmerman (1979: 105f) summarise the idea in the form of a fictional research report by an alien sociologist: "All social groups of Earth people are characterised by the fact that their members almost without exception seem to be engaged in describing and explaining themselves. [. . .] In any case, all stories about humans, whether they are told by ordinary people or professional storytellers [viz. the so-called social scientists] have a similar function. They are stories about society and about accomplishments within it. [. . .] This way, people make decisive aspects of social situations and events that constitute them – notwithstanding their actual character – happen in and through the narratives, for this is the way in which the people of the Earth teach each other how they ought to 'see' the organisation of their social world".

28. For this reason, Garfinkel (1984 [1967]: 75), for instance, notes: "[A] concern for the nature, production, and recognition of reasonable, realistic, and analyzable actions is not the monopoly of philosophers and professional sociologists. Members of a society are concerned as a matter of course and necessarily with these matters both as features and for the socially managed production of their everyday affairs".

29. Since there are social scientists among the people studied, social science methods, like any other methods, go from being a resource to being the research topic. Sometimes one gets the impression, though, that this is only true for conventional sociology and ordinary thinking, and that ethnomethodology, with its very different methods, targets both at the same time. On the other hand, ethnomethodology has always emphasised that categories of social theory are employed in perfectly ordinary practices of, say, the classification of people and events, and in the explanation and justification of actions. These phenomena are studied as 'membership categorisation practices' in the context of so-called 'member categorisation analysis'. The main objective is not to spell out to sociologists that they are really only presenting one particular form of common sense as science without being aware of it; rather, the point is to draw attention to the reflexive and methodical character of everyday conduct and the 'practical sociological reasoning' involved in it, in order to reject the customary social science descriptions of everyday practice and common sense as pre-reflexive or otherwise deficient.

30. As Garfinkel emphasises in an early article, without such trust there would be no reliable and passably stable framework that is needed to make habituated action possible in the first place (cf. Garfinkel 1963).

31. According to Sacks (1984a: 21), for instance, sociology ought to be "a natural observational science", since it consists in formal descriptions of actual actions; also cf. Sacks (2004 [1963]). To Sacks, the fact that agents also describe their own actions does not count as an objection, since in that case, what sociology is to provide are descriptions of these descriptions. The only difference between the descriptions of agents and those of sociology is that the latter are developed in the light of an awareness of their incompleteness (i.e., of the "etcetera problem"). Even in everyday action, however, the etcetera problem emerges, in the sense that the agents will have to isolate the *relevant* properties of the situation, and can problematise any description in reference to characteristics that have not been taken into account, yet are relevant.

32. Cf. Habermas (1987 [1981]: 1, 179–88; EN 124–30); a similar critique can be found in Giddens (1993 [1976]: 39–49).

33. The "routine grounds" in the title of Garfinkel (2006 [1948]), then, are not to be understood as the pre-reflexive foundations of social action.

34. The notion of a discursive 'liquefaction' [*Verflüssigung*] of the lifeworld, as developed by Habermas in his *Theory of Communicative Action*, also implies an idea of 'lifeworld certainties' that are only gradually 'communicatively thawed', and thus it too seems bound to a rather static notion of a 'frozen' and largely mute and unreflected everyday practice.

35. Cf. ibid.: 62: "ANT [actor-network-theory] is simply the social theory that has decided to follow the natives, no matter which metaphysical imbroglios they lead us into".

36. This does not mean, of course, that everyday theories cannot be distinguished from scientific theories. However, the differences seem to be gradual. Laypersons too are capable of developing theories that are explicit, relatively formal, consistent and so on – and they do in fact develop such theories in everyday life quite regularly. Cf. Beck (1972: 203f): "For just like the sociologist always is a social actor too, the social actor is always a sociologist. In this context, then, the basic formula is: *all people are lay sociologists* [. . .] sociological assertions always either *compete* or *coincide* with the sociology-equivalent interpretations of self and others, the hopes and the interests of the groups whose social dynamics they describe and explain". For this reason, Beck speaks of a "continuum between 'professional' and 'practical' social theorists", "once with and once without a degree" (ibid.: 204f, 223). Cf., from the perspective of critical theory, Brunkhorst (1996: 107).

37. On the relation of this pragmatic turn to Bourdieu's critical social science, also cf. Bénatouïl (1999).

38. In this instance, too, I shall not offer a comprehensive account of the entire theory, but restrict myself to the aspects that are central to the question at hand. The most detailed elaboration of the theory to date can be found in Boltanski and Thévenot (1991); for an overview, see Boltanski and Thévenot (1999); Wagner (1999); Nachi (2006).

39. Cf. Boltanski (2006a); for an additional plea for the transition to a sociology of critique, see Dubet (2006: 41f; EN 21f).

40. Cf. Boltanski (1999: 260f; 1990: chapter I.8). Boltanski also uses the term 'equivalence' for 'symmetry' and 'non-equivalence' (or, in the English translation, 'regimes-not-recognising-equivalence') for 'asymmetry'. That justification is only one mode of action among others is emphasised by Boltanski and Thévenot just as much as the fact that agents in the course of their interactions can "fall out" of one mode and into another (for instance, from the mode of love into that of justification). However, about the relations between these modes, and what happens when, say, violence or routine suppress or overgrow the relations of justification, we are hardly told anything.

41. For a defence of the idea that the ubiquity of such conflicts and crises is typical of everyday life in modern societies, also cf. Lahire (2001 [1998]: 45–47).

42. The six orders of justification identified by Boltanski and Thévenot each also specify forms of the common good (*bien commun*); they are somewhat misleadingly called 'cités' (in the English translation this becomes, just as misleading, 'polity' and 'common world') – cf. ibid. (EN 83ff); Boltanski and Chiapello (1999: EN 22ff, on "Cities as normative supports for constructing justifications"; ibid.: EN 522): "Cities are thus simultaneously operators of justification and critical operators. On the one hand, each city serves as a fulcrum for criticizing tests organized in accordance with the logic of a different city: On the other, each displays a critical orientation directed against the bad practices of the specific world containing the reality tests that are pertinent from the standpoint of this city itself". The choice of the six orders of justification isolated by the authors certainly could, in individual cases, be criticised and expanded. Rather than the substantive argumentation for or against the inclusion of some particular order of justification, though, what concerns me here is the

methodological reasoning that lies behind it and that can claim validity independently of its conclusions. However, cf. the compelling critiques of Honneth (2008) and Hartmann (2008).

43. On the plurality of normative principles to which agents refer, cf. ibid. (217–19); Dubet (2006: 30ff, 459ff; EN 13ff, 231ff).

44. Also cf. ibid. (EN 15): "In order to understand the actors' capacity for criticizing, we had to construe them as endowed with the possibility of shifting from one form of justification to another while remaining true to a consistent set of requirements".

45. At times, Boltanski and Thévenot speak of a "common sense", which consists of a moral sense or a sense of justice, on the one hand, and a sense of normality, on the other, and which is associated with the ability to generalise as well as with the ability to recognise the nature of a situation and to act correspondingly – which is to say, 'naturally' (cf., for instance, Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: 144–48; Thévenot 1990).

46. Cf. Boltanski (1990: chapter I.1: "A sociology of disputes"; 1993: chapter 3: "The topic of denunciation"; 1987); Dubet (2006: 14f, 43; EN 4f, 17ff) (including ample empirical support).

47. Boltanski supports his theory with an analysis of letters to Le Monde, in which the readers complain about any number of things, but with very few exceptions heed certain rules in order not to disqualify themselves.

48. Cf., for instance, Forst (2007a); Boltanski (1990: 64; EN 36). The first part of *On Justification* bears the title "The imperative to justify".

49. Boltanski and Thévenot go as far as to understand these principles, following Latour's terminology, as 'actants': factors that are not passive and manipulable at will, but that have a logic of their own which limits our agency. This does not amount to a reification of these principles, which of course are still conceived of as socially constituted; the point is rather to dissolve the asymmetrical subject/object dualism of action theory. Whether or not the principles are described as actants does not seem relevant for the question at issue here. What is decisive is their role in coordinating and stabilising social interaction.

50. According to Boltanski and Thévenot, the classical texts of political philosophy and social theory can be read as attempts to explain, systematise and clarify models of justification that are used in practice, that is, as attempts to spell out the grammars of justification to which agents refer in everyday situations. These contain exemplary formulations of the repertoires of justification on which 'ordinary' agents draw in everyday life, and whose skilled manipulation is taught by a rising tide of 'how-to' guidebooks (cf. Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: 128f). For Boltanski and Thévenot, there is a symmetry and continuity, not a clear break, between the systematisation of the principles in political philosophy and the way in which agents draw on these principles. Without knowing it, agents follow models of argumentation that are inspired by, for instance, Rousseau, when they criticise corruption and cronyism and thus the encroachment of 'domestic' relations on politics.

51. On the following, cf. Nachi (2006: chapter 1). Nachi identifies a fifth principle, according to which actants take the place of actors or agents, and which is supposed

to bring to the fore the constitutive role of 'things' and 'objects' in the constitution of a situation. Even though this clearly is an important aspect, it strikes me as far more characteristic of Latour's sociology than of the sociology of critique, which, in my view, cannot do without a relatively classical action-theoretical understanding of competent agents. Both of these approaches do, however, share the view that it cannot be the task of sociology to decide which 'beings' (say me, the mob, my laptop or Kobolds) count as true agents, but that this will in many cases be disputed, and must be worked out by those 'affected' themselves.

52. The most elaborate critique of the 'great divide' can be found in Latour (2006 [1991]); also cf. Latour (2004).

53. Cf. Boltanski and Chiapello (1999: EN 32): "Critique leads to tests in so far as it challenges the existing order and casts suspicion upon the status [*état de grandeur*] of the opposing beings. But tests – especially when they claim legitimacy – are vulnerable to critique, which reveals the injustices created by the action of hidden forces". On the idea of tests, cf. ibid. (72ff, 362ff; EN 30ff, 318ff).

54. Barrington Moore (1978: 493), too, distinguishes in his historical-sociological study of the reasons for oppression and revolt between a critique that finds fault with an offence against the existing "implicit social contract" (when an agent violates the recognised norms) and a critique that targets the "conditions of the contract" themselves – in particular the assumptions underlying the contract about what is unjust and what is unavoidable (and therefore neither just nor unjust). Dubet (2006: 36; EN 18) emphasises that it is always possible to employ different principles of justice (equality, recognition of merit or respect for autonomy), for instance, in one's working life. Critique can target a discriminating, exploitative or alienating practice, but it can also denounce the application of a principle in terms of a different one (for instance, the egoism or anomie that may, from the perspective of equality, result from an overemphasis on merit or autonomy). Agents, then, practise both internal and external critique (cf. ibid.: 209; EN 135, 230). With regard to this "critique croisée" or "intersecting criticism", in which actions that are considered justified within one regime of justification are criticised from the viewpoint of another, cf. Boltanski and Thévenot (1991: EN 10) as well as the "critical matrix" in ibid. (chapter VIII).

55. It also follows from this that there is no higher-order or privileged context of justification – such as morality or politics – that always trumps all others in case of conflict. However, see Ricœur's argument that the regime of justification in which 'ordinary' agents face each other as citizens should be understood as a sort of meta-regime in which people debate and decide about the relation between the other regimes of justification (Ricœur 1995).

56. Cf. Boltanski and Thévenot (1991: 4f); Boltanski (1990: chapter I.3: "Ordinary denunciations and critical sociology", as well as ibid. (63; EN 35).

57. Cf. Boltanski (1990: chapter I.3), as well as ibid. (54; EN 28).

58. For a similar critique, cf. Honneth (2008) and Hartmann (2008: 116–18).

59. Cf. Bénatouïl (1999: 312f), as well as my remarks in part III, sections 2 and 3.

60. Cf. Adorno (2003 [1954]: 465): "*ideology is justification*. [. . .] Where mere unmediated relations of power prevail, there are really no ideologies. [. . .] Accordingly, the critique of ideology too, as a confrontation of ideology with its own truth,

is only possible to the extent that it contains a rational element on which critique can work [*sich abarbeiten*]". Also cf. Scott (1990: 77).

61. Cf. the postscript in Boltanski and Chiapello (1999), titled "Sociology *contra* Fatalism". Although the authors use the notion of ideology to characterise the 'spirit of capitalism', they explicitly distance themselves from its critical use in the sense of 'false consciousness', and adopt the 'value-neutral' usage that dominates the ethno-methodological debate (cf. ibid.: xliii ff). For a differentiation of these conceptions, also see Celikates (2006a).

62. Boltanski's recent theoretical work does seem to go in this direction; cf., for instance, Boltanski (2008a; 2008c; 2008d; 2008e). For a critical discussion, cf. Boltanski and Honneth (2009); Celikates (2009).

Part III

Critical Theory as Reconstructive Critique

The course of my argumentation so far has led from the orthodox model of a critical social science, which I developed and criticised in reference to Pierre Bourdieu's theory, via the ethnomethodological focus on the reflexivity of agents, to the sociology of critique. In this final part of the book, I shall argue that in order to do justice to the practices of justification and critique, the sociology of critique in turn needs to be transformed into a critical social theory. My critique of the scientistic model of critical social science in part I of the book, however, has made clear that this critical social theory will have to adopt the insights of ethnomethodology and the sociology of critique discussed in part II, and leave behind the dogma of asymmetry and the break. In the following, I shall sketch a model of critical theory that meets this requirement. In order to distinguish this model from other possible conceptions of critical theory, most importantly from internal and external critique, I shall refer to it as 'reconstructive critique'. First, I shall argue for it by recapitulating the deficits of purely internal and purely external forms of critique as they might be understood on the basis of the model of the break and the model of symmetry (section 1). In a second step, I shall elaborate on the structural limitations, touched upon at the end of the previous part, of the sociology of critique and the internal forms of critique that belong to it (section 2). These limitations, I shall argue, necessitate a transition to a more ambitious form of critical theory (section 3). Subsequently, I shall distinguish three ways of understanding the notion of reconstruction, and correspondingly, the project of reconstructive critique (section 4). Following an interpretation defended by the early Habermas, I shall argue that the way in which reconstructive critique operates can be understood more precisely by comparing it, at a methodological level, to psychoanalysis (section 5). I shall then combine these insights

by discussing, once again, the fundamental features of my understanding of critical theory as reconstructive critique (section 6), and concretise the theory on the basis of an example from social psychology (section 7). My aim is to outline an understanding of critical theory that leaves behind the dogma of epistemic asymmetry and the break, and that allows the reflexive capacities of the agents to take centre stage – not their supposedly objective interests and needs nor a social reality that is independent of their self-understanding and only accessible to the social-scientific observer – without giving up on its critical ambition.

1. INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL CRITIQUE?

The models of the break and of symmetry, discussed in parts I and II of the book, are associated with two forms of critique that I shall here compare. Against this background, and as an answer to the problems to which both forms of critique lead, I shall then sketch an alternative third option.

According to a prominent manner of classifying critique, the different forms of social critique can be categorised along two axes, which can be brought out by two questions (cf. Iser 2004; Pollmann 2005: chapter 1): 'From which standpoint is critique formulated?' and 'What role does theory play for critique?'. The relation between critique and its addressees is a central aspect of both questions but is hardly ever discussed.

First of all, it seems that any answer to the first question can be categorised in one of two ways. Either critique makes use of a standpoint that exists independently of the self-understanding of the criticised individual or collective and is grounded in, for instance, objective social science knowledge – in that case, it will be an *external* (or strong and context-transcendent) form of critique.[1] Or else, critique strives to be anchored within the self-understanding of the criticised individual or collective itself, so that it does not require an external standpoint – in that case, it is an *internal* (or weak and context-dependent) form of critique. The latter is ultimately a contribution to the clarification of self-understanding within a framework that is not itself questioned. The external form of critique, in contrast, considers even the framework that internal critique presupposes and accepts as unproblematic – that is, the self-understanding of the agents – as something that can be problematised and that calls for critique.

From the response to the first question, the answer to the second can be derived. In the case of *external* critique, the task of theory is to use social science methods to develop an insight into the functional laws of social and historical processes that operate behind the agents' backs, and to explain why social reality is deficient *and* why it is that agents do not recognise its

deficient character. In the case of *internal* critique, in contrast, the assumption is that members of society are able to criticise their deficient practice themselves; and when the majority is not capable of doing so, someone from within the community will have to step up who will hold up a mirror to his fellow citizens and who will show them the implications of their self-understanding. Normally, an elaborate theory is not necessary to achieve this. In fact, such a theory would quite likely be rather counterproductive, as it would raise the suspicion that the critic is a snob (cf. Walzer 2000).

As our encounter with the model of critical social science in part I has shown, external forms of critique face a whole range of problems, which can be briefly summarised as follows.

First, it is unclear on what basis a critic could claim to possess the epistemic privilege on which her critique is supposed to be based if one rejects the dogmas of orthodox social science discussed in the Introduction.

Second, the overestimation of the potency of social science knowledge goes hand in hand with the underestimation of the agents. External critique often presents 'ordinary' agents as 'judgemental dopes' who are trapped in illusions and incapable of reflection and detachment. In doing so, however, external critique commits itself to a flattened and distorted image of social practice, largely obscures the reflexive capacities that are constitutive for the complexity of this practice and is blind to the social practices of justification and critique.[2]

Third, the claim of a privileged insight into the functioning of society and the interests and needs of people harbours the risk of a double paternalism and authoritarianism – one that is both epistemological and political. The critics claim to be able to take up a position outside the web of practice, in which the other agents are ensnared in such a way that they are unable to reflexively detach themselves and recognise their own situation and interests. On the basis of this diagnosis, the agents can be denied the right to have a say in the determination of their needs and interests, and in the diagnosis and therapy, allegedly formulated on a scientific basis, that are supposed to help them get out of this unenlightened state. As Bader puts it:

> We call objective definitions of people's interests "paternalistic" whenever cognitive or normative critique of their subjective interests leads to the agents being hindered, in practice or legally, to formulate their own interests for themselves – in other words, that the "critics" decide for them. Paternalism is autocracy with bad democratic conscience. As in all autocratic decisions, it is claimed not just that the decisions of the "enlightened, all-wise, and benevolent" rulers or elites are in the objective interests of those over whose heads the arrangements are made, but also that this undemocratic way of making decisions is only provisional and temporary. (Bader 1991: 149; cf. Cooke 2005, especially 382f; 2006: chapter 1)[3]

Fourth – and for the same reason – external critique faces motivational and strategic problems. Its emancipatory ambition to have a practical impact is undermined by the fact that it fails to take seriously the self-understanding of agents, and that it denies them the capacity for reflexive detachment and for acting on the basis of such detachment.

Fifth, external critique – not in its complex theoretical forms, but certainly in many of its less sophisticated practical manifestations – faces the objection that it is almost impossible to distinguish its concrete diagnoses and therapeutic suggestions from cases of internal critique. Even in the context of frequently quoted (and usually not very imaginative) extreme examples that are supposed to prove the necessity of external critique – some barbaric practice in Africa or the Far East that can supposedly only be problematised thanks to the higher insights of the Western critic – it is usually the case that at least prototypes of such critique are already present within the relevant culture, society or community itself and are being expressed by the affected agents (even when their efforts may be eclipsed by the hegemonic ways of seeing things).[4]

Of course, the possibility of a critique – in the name of justice, human rights or other norms and values that are claimed to be universal – of which there are no early incarnations in the culture, society or community that is addressed, cannot and should not be precluded, neither logically nor empirically. Any example of this, however, will likely be confronted with the empirical and normative objection that it underestimates the complexity of the culture that it criticises, and that it thus – however good its intentions might be – duplicates the suppression of local critical voices.[5] Since the sociology of critique shows that the arguments and vocabularies of critical social theories find their way into society's discourse and self-understanding, a perfectly external standpoint is neither necessary nor desirable (and probably not even possible in the first place). Therefore, the distinction between internal and external critique, if it is made at all, must only be used in practice as a context-dependent distinction that can itself be turned into a critical strategy.

One could respond to this critique of external critique – the exhibition of its limits and presuppositions – by following the sociology of critique in adopting the perspective of internal critique. According to the model of symmetry, the possibility of reflection inherently belongs to the way we think and act. We are capable of relating reflexively to our own beliefs, intentions and actions, to the context in which we act and to other agents, and of taking up the perspective of (real or imagined) others. These reflexive capacities, which we have as 'ordinary' agents and which are constitutive for our self-understanding, comprise the ability to understand what we are doing while we are doing it, and to relate to this understanding while we act. As ethnomethodology shows, reflexivity is therefore not something special, not a privilege

of the theoretical or scientific perspective, but a feature of everyday practices (cf. also Giddens 1997 [1984]: 36, 55f, 335). Given this everyday reflexivity, moreover, our thinking and acting always involve the possibility of critique. We are capable of questioning our own beliefs, intentions and actions, the context in which we act and other agents, and we can do so from a whole range of perspectives. As the sociology of critique shows, critique is nothing special either, not a privilege of the theoretical or scientific perspective but a feature of everyday practices. Reflexivity and critique – or more precisely: the reflexive and the critical attitude – are immanent and constitutive dimensions of everyday practice and do not emerge only as the result of a break with the alleged naiveté of the everyday attitude and of "thinking and acting as usual" (cf. Lynch 2000).

In contrast to the rhetoric of the *break* between science and common sense, between social science and the 'ordinary' agent – which a dominant strand of the debate in social theory spanning from Durkheim to Bourdieu attempts to use to ground the scientific and critical status of its own analyses – such a description suggests a fundamental *symmetry* of reflexive capacities among agents and between agents and theorists (cf. Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: 12f; Latour 2005: 12f; part II, section 3.1). Now from the perspective of the sociology of critique, in order for the everyday critical attitudes and practices of the 'ordinary' agent – that is, the various forms of internal critique – to become perceptible at all, this theoretical programme (which I have referred to as 'methodological egalitarianism') should involve a suspension of any external critique, or more precisely: of the critical attitude and practice of the theorist. The "critical and normative attitude" is contrasted with a decidedly "uncritical and descriptive attitude", which calls to mind the ethnomethodological principle of indifference and is supposed to disclose the social domain of critique and normativity in the first place (cf. Heinich 1998: chapters 2 and 3; from a different perspective Vobruba 2003).

Unlike external critique, the approach of internal critique (more or less adopted by the sociology of critique, albeit in a much more complex form) rests on the idea that the moral sense and everyday morality of a community provide both 'ordinary' agents and theorists specialising in social diagnosis with criteria to assess social conditions and the existing attempts to justify and criticise these (cf. Boltanski 2006a: 11; 1999: 255). This position, however, faces at least three very fundamental problems. I shall briefly mention all three of these and proceed by elaborating on the third and most serious one.[6]

First, even in relatively 'traditional' societies it is far from clear that one can assume a homogeneous moral sense and something like an uncontroversial everyday morality. The claim that something is in accordance with a society's moral sense or everyday morality will in many cases be too

contentious to be helpful in solving conflicts, since in any society there will be different normative orders, which overlap, but are also in tension – as, in fact, the sociology of critique itself points out (cf. Dodier 2005; Cooke 2006: 14f). The conventionalist standpoint, for which a collective "That's just how we do it here" sets the standard, and the slightly more refined contextualist position, for which the standard is set by a collective "That's just how we do it here" that is in keeping with 'our' deepest moral intuitions and expectations, both neglect the fact that their criteria are controversial, and that their appeal to particular conceptions of presumably shared value means that they risk sliding into arbitrariness.

Second, the focus of internal critique is overly limited, for it simply blocks out certain existing practices of critique. The social practice of critique is more diverse and complex than the model of internal critique presumes. In fact, there are all sorts of critique that transcend well-rehearsed forms of self-understanding and culturally shaped value systems from within, or that question them 'from the margins'. Such forms of critique – which, from the perspective of internal critique, are often rejected as external – are by no means necessarily unintelligible or demotivating for their addressees and are often produced by the agents concerned themselves. In contrast to what the claim to exclusivity of internal critique would make one believe, there really are social practices of 'external' critique – they just function differently than the advocates of external critique presume. Here, the difference between internal and external forms of critique once again proves to be context-dependent and 'endogenous'.[7]

Third, the perspectives of the sociology of critique and of internal critique obscure the social conditions of the development and exercise of the reflexive capacities that constitute the 'subjective' presupposition of the social practices of critique on which they focus. I shall now discuss this problem in more detail, since it is of central importance in the transition from the sociology of critique to an understanding of critical theory as reconstructive critique.

2. SECOND-ORDER 'PATHOLOGIES' AS STRUCTURAL REFLEXIVITY DEFICITS

As I indicated above, the sociology of critique conceives of the status of social theory differently than critical social science does:

> Sociology is a second-order science, since it is the ordinary agents who have the knowledge necessary to act in the social world. Sociology's relation to this everyday knowledge is similar to the relation of linguistics to actual language-users. Not linguists, but those who speak have knowledge about the language.

> But the language-users do not know how they manage to speak [. . .]. By analogy, sociology's first task would be to develop models for the social competences of the agents. (Boltanski 1999: 270; cf. Boltanski 2000: 141; 2006b: 12f)

Partly following ethnomethodology, the sociology of critique has the ambition to develop exactly such a model of the reflexive capacities of the agents, as well as of the practices of justification and critique in which these are expressed. It aims to do so by 'following the agent', which is to say that it proceeds primarily in a descriptive manner, and thus suspends any form of critique grounded in theory.

Within the framework of 'methodological egalitarianism', however, the ambition to model the social practices of justification and critique cannot be fulfilled satisfactorily. I shall show this by outlining a fundamental problem that confronts any approach that seeks to reconstruct the competences that are realised in such practices without paying heed to the *social conditions of their development and exercise*. Of course, the approaches discussed in part II of this book do not deny that 'ordinary' agents acquire and exercise their reflexive capacities in social contexts – that is, under certain social conditions. Because of the 'situationist' orientation of these approaches, however, these contexts and conditions only appear as contexts and conditions that have been negotiated and constituted by particular agents in concrete situations, or as discursive regimes of justification – not as potentially structural restrictions on both reflexive capacities and practices of self-understanding.

The representatives of the sociology of critique are aware of this problem to an extent, as a passage from Boltanski's *Love and Justice as Competences* shows: "The actors [. . .] all possess critical capacities; all have access to critical resources, *although to varying degrees*, and they call on these resources more or less continuously in the ordinary course of social life" (Boltanski 1990: 54; EN 28, my emphasis).[8] Boltanski does not address the question how exactly the differences in the actual exercise of reflexive capacities come about, and what their conditions are. This, though, is exactly the kind of information one would expect from an empirically informed sociology of critique. If one does not fall for the "illusion of linguistic communism" (cf. Boltanski and Bourdieu 1975) – that is, if one does not believe that both communicative competences and the ability to make oneself heard are strictly equally distributed, but acknowledges that opportunities to access the practices of justification and critique differ, and that one's chances to get a hearing in society are socially conditioned – then one cannot avoid the question which *social conditions* must be present in order for agents to be able not just to *exercise* their reflexive capacities, but to *develop* them in the first place. Precisely this issue is what calls for a critical theory that goes beyond the self-imposed limits of the sociology of critique in both its critical and its

theoretical ambitions, without betraying the basic intuition of 'methodological egalitarianism'.

When social conditions occur that obstruct the development and the exercise of reflexive capacities and the corresponding practices of justification and critique, I propose we might speak of *second-order 'pathologies'*, which manifest themselves in *structural reflexivity deficits* on the part of the agents (regarding the terminology, cf. Honneth 2000b [1994]; Strecker 2005; Zurn 2011; Bader 1991: 191ff). By this, I mean circumstances in which agents do not have immediate access to 'problematic' situations of a first order, so that they do not recognise these situations as problematic, or, if they recognise them as such, they do not understand and thus criticise them. This can happen for a number of reasons, for instance objectively and normatively inappropriate ways of allocating responsibility (when social problems, such as unemployment, are blamed on individuals) or the naturalisation of social situations (when social problems, such as competition for resources, are conceived of as an unavoidable consequence of human nature).[9] The unquestioned guise of legitimacy or naturalness of such social practices and institutions – which could, of course, be called 'ideology' – can therefore be situated at a second level, for it prevents or complicates reflection on and critique of opinions, dispositions, preferences, ways of acting and social contexts at the first level. Second-order 'pathologies', accordingly, make it impossible, or significantly less likely, for first-order injustices to be criticised, changed, or even revealed in the first place. Diagnosing these pathologies does not necessarily require substantial assumptions about which first-order problems are objectionable. Second-order 'pathologies' are first and foremost understood formally – and not, initially, substantially – as structural reflexivity deficits. That is to say, they impose *structural* restrictions on the reflexivity of agents. While reflexivity is, of course, always conditioned by the context at hand, these structural restrictions go beyond the concrete context, and thus undermine the very conditions of possibility of justification and critique. Under unfavourable circumstances, the capacities of agents are hindered either in their exercise – for instance by hegemonic or ideological regimes of justification – or even in their formation – for instance by socialisation. In the worst case, there will be no effective practices of justification and critique at all, or else, the practices that do emerge will not meet the measure of reflexivity that is 'objectively' possible, that is, the level that would properly express the agents' capacities. Nevertheless, it is of decisive importance that even in the most adverse social circumstances, agents will still have basic reflexive capacities. Restrictions of or damage to these capacities, then, can only ever be partial; they can never result in a complete loss of the capacities.

This kind of description raises a fundamental problem. The question that arises here is similar to the difficult challenge, involved in the diagnosis of

ideology, of distinguishing between subjective and objective interests and claiming that agents 'really' ought to criticise certain phenomena. In our case, the question is how we might determine more precisely which potential capacities agents have, which capacities they need in order to partake in practices of justification and critique and how these potential and necessary capacities differ from those that can actually be observed, that is, those that are expressed in actual practices. This problem of course requires an adequate solution, which again cannot be the outcome of an 'objectivist' or 'subjectivist' determination, but is to be attained within a process of clarifying the self-understanding of the agents. Critical theory, accordingly, cannot draw on a substantial conception of capacities; it must keep its understanding of them as formal as possible, and ask which reflexive capacities agents need in order to ask and answer the question as to the objectionability of their situation *themselves*. On this view, the task of critique is emphatically not to find its own answer to this question (and perhaps to draw up a list of the most important capacities, to which the actual situation can then be compared). Whether critique might not be bound to drawing on substantial assumptions, and how such potentially unavoidable hypotheses relate to the agents' practices of self-understanding, is a question to which I shall return below.

Leaving aside how this problem will be solved, two things are important to note at this point. First, there clearly are situations of the kind just sketched, that is, second-order 'pathologies' (I shall discuss three exemplary cases in the next section). Any satisfactory social theory must be able to take these into account and explain them. On both counts, the sociology of critique and especially ethnomethodology run up against their limits. Second, such situations present not just a possibility that is contingent and occasionally empirically realised, but one that is structural – a possibility that is opened up by the very conceptual structure of the notion of capacities, and that should therefore be taken into account in theory at the categorical level.

If social theory cannot content itself with the description and analysis of actual performance, but needs to attribute certain capacities to agents in order to understand their performances in the first place, it will not be able to avoid drawing a conceptual distinction between a *capacity* and its *actualisation* (or individual instances of actualisation).[10] An example of such a distinction can be found in Aristotle. According to him, the reality of a capacity consists precisely in the process of its actualisation – we can only recognise a capacity, for instance, by referring to its actual enactment, and conceptually, too, the former can only be determined in reference to the latter (which is why we say things like: "I mean, e.g., that the potentially constructive is that which can construct, the potentially seeing that which can see, and the potentially visible that which can be seen"; Aristotle: *Metaphysics* IX 8, 1049b14–16). At the same time, however, any actualisation is bound to certain conditions

of possibility, so that the attribution of a capacity must always go beyond the description of a particular act as the exercise of this capacity – a capacity is only really a capacity "not in all, but in certain circumstances" (ibid.: IX 5, 1048a16–20). For this reason, we are always confronted with a twofold possibility: first, that the capacity is insufficiently or incompletely manifested in its actualisation; second, that the presumed capacity itself has been developed to an insufficient or incomplete degree.

These distinctions are captured in the difference between 'capacity' and 'ability': the fact that I am in principle 'capable' of reflecting on my actions or of speaking French does not mean that I am, here and now, 'able' to reflect on my actions or to speak French (cf. Eldridge 1997: 104f, 202f).[11] The latter can founder either on the agent's failure to develop the capacity in an adequate manner or on external or internal obstacles (the lack of objective or subjective conditions of possibility) that get in the way of the capacity, even though it actually is present.

Of course, lest abilities or capacities be metaphysically hypostasised, the criterion for attributing them should ultimately be the actual conduct of agents. We are justified in making an attribution only when (but also: whenever) their conduct can only (or: best) be understood and explained by doing so. The conceptual distinctions between a *capacity* and its (more or less successful) *actualisation* and between an *actually present* capacity and one that is *yet to be developed* imply that there is a realistic possibility of a dual gap. The fact that a capacity is only potentially present, or that it is hindered in its development or exercise, does not by itself mean that the person is 'incapable' in the sense that she does not have the capacity at all – the point is that she *is* capable, just only potentially or in principle, but not under the circumstances in question. In this sense – and this is of crucial importance for a non-paternalistic diagnosis of second-order 'pathologies' – we are always confronted with different degrees to which such capacities are realised. Any dichotomy between a complete lack and a perfect realisation of capacities is artificial.[12] But the idea of 'degrees of realisation' also must not be understood to imply that partly actualised capacities could be placed somewhere on a one-dimensional continuum. Rather, capacities attributed to people can be developed and exercised in a great number of ways (variously valued in society), which vary just as much as the social conditions of the acquisition and exercise of the capacities.[13]

From this perspective, the critical and emancipatory commitment of social theory is to track down, analyse and criticise the social conditions that can block or hamper the development or exercise of the reflexive capacities that are constitutive of the self-understanding of agents. The task of social theory is to reflect on the "question of the conditions of successful realization" of a practice and to develop a critique of the "social conditions [that make]

success impossible" – the impact of social circumstances (Menke 2004: 143; EN 38). Accordingly, social theory can offer critique beyond the critique accomplished by the participants themselves. It can criticise the social conditions, the forms of self-understanding and the symbolical orders – which will then be called 'ideological' – that obstruct the development or exercise of the capacities actualised in social practices of critique and justification, and that, in doing so, also make it impossible (or at least more difficult) for agents to become aware of the fact that this is happening.[14] In such a case, a transformation of these conditions must pave the way for the transformation of the self-understanding of the agents – the elimination or reduction of structural reflexivity deficits. As 'consciousness-raising critique', critical social theory has a central role to play in this – a role I shall discuss in more detail in the next section.[15]

3. SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF CRITIQUE: CRITICAL THEORY AS META-CRITIQUE

3.1 On the Psychogenesis and Sociogenesis of Reflexive Capacities

The fact that there are social conditions that can boost or hamper the development and exercise of the reflexive capacities of agents implies that these capacities are not naturally present in us, and that we are not guaranteed to always retain all of the capacities we currently have, let alone at the same level (whether or not they are innate). These capacities have certain conditions of possibility, and refer in a double way to their genesis: initially in the primary sense that at some point they came to exist, but also in the derivative sense that their development is never complete, and that they are always in the process of becoming. In speaking of the 'psycho- and sociogenesis' of reflexive capacities, I mean this double genetic dimension. I use this notion to refer to the conditions of both the development and the exercise (and as such: the continual development) of the reflexive capacities of agents. 'Psycho- and sociogenesis' does not indicate two different processes, but two dimensions of one and the same process that are conceptually interwoven and practically inseparable on an empirical level as well.

In the next section, I shall draw on descriptions from literature and the social sciences to sketch three exemplary cases in which the psychogenesis and sociogenesis of the reflexive capacities of agents is hindered or obstructed. This does not imply any empirical thesis regarding the actual emergence of these capacities. Rather, the point is to sketch some of the conditions – in a purely negative manner, and without any claim to completeness – that

(could) cause agents to lose their ability to fully develop or exercise their reflexive capacities, especially the capacity to relate reflexively to social conditions and their impact. Such conditions can be understood as obstructions to social practices of justification and critique, and thus as second-order 'pathologies', which become manifest on the part of the agents as structural reflexivity deficits.

3.2 Second-Order 'Pathologies': Three Cases

3.2.1 Double-Consciousness: W. E. B. Du Bois on Life 'behind the Veil'

With *The Souls of Black Folk*, African-American social theorist and writer W. E. B. Du Bois (2007 [1903]) presents a social science analysis and thick ethnographic description – praised by Max Weber as "brilliant" – of the social and psychological consequences of racial segregation (the "color-line"). At the core of this experience is the loss of the ability to view oneself through one's own eyes, instead of from the perspective of white Americans. Du Bois argues that "the strange meaning of being black" (3), in those circumstances, lies in the fact that black people are "shut out" from the world of the whites "by a vast veil" (8). The powerful metaphor of the veil already makes clear that the issue is not just that black people are excluded from certain activities or places; what is at stake is the impact of these social and political forms of exclusion on the agents' perception of themselves and the world. The wall dividing white and black is the expression of a specific form of blindness on the side of the former, but most importantly, it has an effect on the cognitive and perceptive abilities of the latter, denying them a "true self-consciousness", for it allows for self-knowledge only "through the revelation of the other world" (8): "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (ibid.).

This experience damages one's psychological integrity and splits the subject: "One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (ibid.). The "double self" is "handicapped" (9, 12) and is driven by the repressive social atmosphere that is rife with prejudice to an "inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement" (12). The "prisoned souls within the Veil" (65) live in "two separate worlds" (68). They are constantly forced into certain roles instead of being able to interact "authentically", and in this way, they develop, both individually and collectively, the "double-consciousness" that Du Bois argues shapes their (self-)perception, their thought and their conduct.

Of course, the plan of the "Old South" – "we build about them walls so high and hang between them and the light a veil so thick that they shall not even think of breaking through" (64) – never truly works out, for the striving for freedom and the awareness of the injustices that have been suffered turn out to be highly resilient in the face of the hegemonic power of the ideology of the rulers. Still, neither the awareness of injustice nor the striving for freedom remains entirely unaffected. Both are gnawed away at by self-doubt, by the oppressive and ever-present "afterthought, – suppose, after all, the World is right and we are less than man? Suppose this mad impulse within is all wrong, some mock mirage from the untrue?" (64). The loss of epistemic self-confidence also affects the agents' other reflexive abilities. The conditions described by Du Bois turn into obstructions to the agents' reflexive abilities, since their development and exercise psychogenetically and sociogenetically depend on conditions that are systematically damaged "behind the veil".[16]

Du Bois's analysis, however, is rife with ambivalences, which seem near-impossible for such a diagnosis to avoid. It has the elements of a three-part strategy, which Cornel West, because of its elitist tendency, calls "Victorian". For, West argues, in response to the captivity of the unenlightened mass of black people behind the veil, Du Bois champions the idea that self-elected representatives of the Enlightenment should build a cultural elite (the famous 'Talented Tenth') that acts in the service of the 'true interests' of the ignorant masses, and that, to achieve this, takes educational and political measures and founds institutions that it will itself lead, thus facilitating material and spiritual progress for all – "by the educated few for the benefit of the pathetic many" (West 1999 [1996]: 93). Even if one shares West's critique of elitism and is inclined to join him in pointing out that the diagnosis of structural reflexivity deficits cannot be understood to mean that the agents are altogether incapable of reflection and therefore incompetent, this does not necessarily controvert Du Bois's analysis. For the danger of epistemological and political authoritarianism and paternalism arises only from a particular interpretation of the diagnosis – or more precisely, from equating reflexivity deficits with the inability to reflect, as well as from deriving concrete political imperatives from such a diagnosis and interpretation – and therefore does not refute the diagnosis as such (also cf. Bader 1991: 151). Any critique that takes its start from such descriptions, however, at least needs to be aware of the methodological and political ambivalences that are involved in them. West, for this reason, concedes that Du Bois's analysis of "black invisibility and namelessness" is unparalleled in managing to reveal the "psychic scars, ontological wounds and existential bruises" that result from it (West 1999 [1996]: 102; cf. ibid.: 101ff). The "double-consciousness" has these "ontological", psychological and existential consequences because it damages a person's 'essence', her integrity and personality, and because it obstructs the

development and exercise of the reflexive capacities that are constitutive of self-understanding. Being constantly classified as a semi-person with reduced reflexive capacities denies those affected the 'luxury' of a sceptical and detached attitude to the social world. The less the dominant social ontology has envisaged a place for them, the more they depend on the social world.[17]

3.2.2 Invisibility: Ralph Waldo Ellison on the Struggle against Not Being Recognised

A phenomenological analysis of the "psychic scars, ontological wounds and existential bruises" inflicted by life behind the "veil" that is much more concrete than Du Bois's forceful but rather abstract depiction can be found in Ralph Waldo Ellison's *Invisible Man*. This 'epistemological novel' about social invisibility and its consequences opens with the famous self-characterisation of the nameless narrator:

> I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe, nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. (Ellison 2016 [1952]: 3)

This opening is followed by the invisible man's story, whose stages turn out to be as many traps set by society for the protagonist: from the initiation ritual of the battle royal in which young black boys have their powerlessness beaten right into them, via his exploitative labour in the Liberty Paints Factory that is famous for the purity of its white paint, and his forced psychiatric treatment, to his engagement in the Brotherhood, an organisation led by white man, striving for black emancipation. The story shows the schizophrenic and nightmarish qualities of a situation in which one is systematically overlooked and forgets how to see oneself properly, in which one is thrown back on one's own resources and in which there is nothing but life behind different masks. These circumstances drive the narrator to a crisis that is at once existential and 'socio-ontological', and that calls his status as a person into question. Soon enough, the sight of him gives rise to the exclamation: "Behold! a walking zombie! Already he's learned to repress not only his emotions but his humanity. He's invisible, a walking personification of the Negative, the most perfect achievement of your dreams, sir! The mechanical man" (92).

Ellison, however, does not only depict how such refusals of recognition make people invisible (by being denied any opportunity to articulate themselves in public), lead to misrepresentation (as they distort articulations of normative experiences and beliefs) and cause contempt (in giving rise to negative classifications of people by themselves and others) (cf. Voirol

2005). In addition, at the end of the novel he makes it unequivocally clear that this situation can only be put right by those who are affected by it, that self-enlightenment and self-emancipation can never be delegated to a politically and epistemically privileged elite, however much the reflexive capacities of the victims of the situation are hampered by the social circumstances. The protagonist realises this in the moment he first notices that Brother Jack, chief ideologist of the Communist Party parody 'The Brotherhood', has a glass eye: his paternalistic ambition to lead the black masses on the basis of scientific insights turns out to be another case of the very blindness to reality that doomed the protagonist to invisibility from the start (Ellison 2016 [1952]: 457ff). In a final reversal, I. M. (as the invisible man abbreviates himself, thus at the same time confirming his own existence) uses this invisibility to go into hiding and get rid of the false masks that were imposed on him from outside, but that he also kept putting on himself, in the hope – always dashed – that he might be accepted after all. Regardless how one is inclined to judge the example set by the end of this inverted bildungsroman and its phenomenology of disillusionment, when the protagonist opts to go underground and retreat into isolation, Ellison constantly brings home to his readers that the process of overcoming structural reflexivity deficits cannot solely be propelled from outside, by an external enlightening authority. Instead, it is anchored in one's own experiences – in this case, in the experiences that the protagonist, in a way, has to go through – and in the end, those affected must be trusted to handle it.

3.2.3 The Psychopathology of Labour: Christophe Dejours on the Banalisation of Social Suffering

To ward off the impression that the obstruction of the development and exercise of reflexive capacities only occurs in contexts of extreme exclusion and domination, such as in the case of 'racial segregation', I shall now present a further analysis that will perhaps resonate more strongly with some readers' own experiences.

The French labour sociologist, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Christophe Dejours studies contemporary changes in working conditions and their effects on the psychological states and self-understanding of workers. His diagnosis is that certain ways of organising work can have lasting effects on workers and can inhibit their psychological functioning, especially if the work is fragmented and repetitive and the workers are permanently overtaxed and isolated. The most important negative effect stems from the systematic suppression of the agents' subjectivity, which can lead to many forms of psychopathology, and in extreme cases even to the "destruction" of subjectivity and thus of the basis of mental health (cf. Dejours and Bègue 2009). The danger

that the subjectivity of workers is deformed is connected to the fact that work and its effects, as well as workers and their suffering, are made socially invisible. This invisibility makes it very unlikely, at best, that these problems are discussed in public (cf. Dejours 2006).

Besides exploring the psychological impact on workers, Dejours also enquires into the reasons for the social acceptance of suffering at work, that is, into the defence mechanisms that help us "close our eyes" (Dejours 1998: 17). These are, or so we might interpret his analysis, second-order 'pathologies', forms of concealing and blocking out suffering and fear (which are only partly strategically employed). Collective defensive ideologies and "strategies of communicative distortion" (cf. ibid.: 82ff) support these defence mechanisms by, for instance, attributing responsibility for social problems to individuals or disregarding the notion of responsibility altogether. Collective indifference on the part of society, denial and silence on the part of those responsible and resignation and increased psychological problems on the part of those affected are the effects that prompt Dejours to speak of a 'banalisation' of socially induced suffering (cf. ibid.: chapter VIII).[18]

According to Dejours's diagnosis, an essential element of this 'banalisation' is 'normopathy', a pathological striving to appear 'normal' at all costs and to make the situation look 'normal' as well. Besides indifference in the face of the suffering of others, this striving is characterised primarily by the fact that one's capacity for independent thought and one's judgement are suspended and replaced by recourse to common stereotypes (cf. ibid.: 168). Little by little, participation in a practice whose injustice is concealed by a second-order 'pathology' extinguishes the reflexive capacities of those affected – the agents lose their moral sense and their ability to detach themselves from the situation, to judge it adequately and to act accordingly (cf. ibid.: 116f).[19] Dejours points out that the working conditions he analyses impair not only the reflexive capacities of those directly affected. When a society gets used to looking away from socially induced suffering, this is bound to damage the capacity to relate reflexively to social conditions and their effects, even in those not directly affected.

The social conditions that are sanctioned by everyday consciousness as normal, then, turn out to constitute a massive impairment of the ability to understand oneself as an autonomous and reasonable subject, and to lead one's life as such a subject. It is impossible for agents to remain indifferent to these impairments when they are confronted with them.[20] In this way, Dejours diagnoses a tension arising between economic practices and the political self-understanding of modern societies that is usually successfully concealed (and perhaps even defused). James Tully describes this tension as follows:

> In liberalism, we speak of rights, liberty, and community. [. . .] Yet, when we examine our producing practices we see that the way they are organized, and

so the forms of subjectivity and the types of abilities they foster, undermine the development of agency and abilities necessary to engage in liberal practices of rights, liberty, and community. [. . .] The producing agent and her ability are not as the liberal language game presupposes. Rather, she possesses, in virtue of being engaged in the productive practice, a different form of subjectivity and range of abilities which, in turn, disable her from developing the identity and abilities necessary for the full exercise of rights, liberty, and community. (Tully 1993 [1988]: 260f)

If this diagnosis is plausible, then critical theory will have to take on the task of analysing this tension and its consequences for the agents.

Even this brief sketch of some exemplary cases makes clear that the diagnosis of an obstruction of the development and exercise of reflexive capacities, and the corresponding entanglement of epistemic deficits and damaged subjectivity, yields a dilemma – one that confronts every critical social theory. Henry Louis Gates, in discussing the effects of colonial rule on those colonised, presents this dilemma particularly clearly:

You can empower discursively the native, and open yourself to charges of downplaying the epistemic (and literal) violence of colonialism; or play up the absolute nature of colonial domination, and be open to charges of negating the subjectivity and agency of the colonized, thus textually replicating the repressive operations of colonialism. (Gates 1991: 462)[21]

In other words, if a theory observes massive impairments in reflexive capacities, it exposes itself to the objections levelled against Bourdieu at the end of part I; if, however, it assumes that the agents themselves have adequate reflexive capacities to recognise and criticise the problematic aspects of their own situation, it puts itself at risk of ruling out the possibility that the development and exercise of their reflexive capacities are structurally obstructed.

These two extremes result in a tension: the structural ways in which the reflexive capacities of agents are restrained can be diagnosed and tackled only in a dialogical process between critical theory and its addressees – a process in which these capacities are, to an extent, presupposed and fundamentally involved. As the descriptions of the problem of structural reflexivity deficits that draw on Du Bois, Ellison and Dejours show, even in seemingly straightforward instances, it can be very difficult to come to a balanced analysis that avoids both extremes. Recall, though, the point I discussed in the previous sections: methodological egalitarianism is a *methodological* egalitarianism and should not distract the theorist in cases where agents, because of certain social conditions and structural asymmetries in the distribution of power, knowledge, influence and argumentative capacities, suffer from structural reflexivity deficits.[22] The principle of symmetry that underlies methodological egalitarianism does not mean that

there are no asymmetries – in the face of the many subjectively experienced and empirically provable asymmetries, this would be absurd and would downplay a real problem. Rather, it means that asymmetries between the capacities and knowledge of 'ordinary' agents and those of social-scientific experts cannot be presumed or methodologically derived, but must be empirically substantiated and explained. All the same, though, the political implications of methodological egalitarianism must be heeded in order to ensure that the diagnosis of second-order 'pathologies' and the corresponding obstructions does not itself have an obstructing effect on the reflexive capacities of the agents and their practices of self-understanding – for this, of course, would be disempowering instead of emancipating.

I will leave it at these three brief sketches of situations in which the agents involved are – in very different ways and to very different extents – restricted in their agency and reflexive capacities because of certain social conditions. Of course, one may well be sceptical that it is possible for social science to prove the existence of a generalisable relation between certain social conditions and the impairment of the development or exercise of reflexive capacities. One reason for this is that many factors play a role in this context, and that these factors are often particular to the individual or situation at hand (cf. Dubet 2006: 442; EN 221; Lahire 2001 [1998]: EN 53ff). Nevertheless, the exemplary cases described above give an impression of the types of situations in which an obstruction of the development and exercise of reflexive capacities is particularly likely to occur. Another ground for scepticism may be that any claim that such an obstruction is present must always be investigated in individual cases and will be a hypothesis that ultimately cannot be verified or falsified from an observer perspective, but must be settled in a dialogical process in which those affected are fundamentally involved. Methodological egalitarianism says that even the diagnosis of a structural reflexivity deficit cannot legitimate depriving agents of their right to have a say, for such a diagnosis must itself be grounded in the self-understanding of the agents, and this grounding, in turn, can only be achieved in a dialogical exchange with them – even when our examples thematise the danger of mutual understanding breaking down as a result of the systematic obstruction of reflexive capacities. This approach is grounded in the assumption, empirically not implausible, that certain reflexive capacities remain present even in cases of extreme subordination and ideological indoctrination. Despite their different topics and very divergent approaches, the analyses and descriptions of Du Bois, Ellison and Dejours may count as exemplary critical interventions in situations in which the critical self-understanding of agents is obstructed and must first be stirred into action again. On the interpretation defended here, this is precisely the task that critical theory, too, should take upon itself.

3.3 Critical Theory as Meta-Critique

The social conditions under which the reflexive capacities of agents and thus the social practices of justification and critique are constrained can be very diverse – as the three cases discussed above have shown. Whatever the exact conditions may turn out to look like in individual cases, such obstructions and structural reflexivity deficits are the central starting point of critical social theory. Accordingly, I propose that we understand critical social theory – in keeping with the possibility, sketched above, of second-order 'pathologies' – as *second-order critique*, as *meta-critique*, which aims to strengthen everyday practices of justification and critique by disclosing the social conditions for the possibility of these practices of reflection and transformation by participants themselves. Such a meta-critique is a second-order critique, since it strives to (re-)establish the conditions that enable and foster first-order critique, that is to say, everyday critical practices. In other words, it is a 'critique of critique', in the sense of an analysis of the social conditions of possibility of critique. The term 'meta-critique' refers to the self-reflexive character of critique: meta-critique is a dimension of first-order critique; it thoroughly analyses and criticises the latter's conditions and conditionality, without assuming a fully external position in doing so.[23]

   In this meta-critical orientation, critical theory clearly goes beyond the projects of ethnomethodology and the sociology of critique, which are limited to internal forms of critique and decidedly refrain from adding anything to what is said and done by the agents. In investigating the social conditions of the success and failure of concrete practices of justification and critique, critical theory – as meta-critique – aims to make these conditions available for participants to reflect on in the first place. Insofar as the purpose of critical theory is to link up with social practices of justification and critique and to foster these, it enquires about the conditions of these practices. This also comprises the question concerning the distribution of "justificatory power" as the social power to demand and challenge justifications. In its role of analysing and criticising the unequal distribution of this power, critical theory is always a "critique of relations of justification" as well (cf. Forst 2007b: 281; EN 195ff).

   The transition from the sociology of critique to critical theory results from the internal logic of the positions discussed in part II. As Boltanski acknowledges, there are circumstances that none of the agents involved complain about, but that still appear problematic from a theoretically informed normative perspective. In such situations – which strictly speaking cannot be taken into account within the theoretical framework of the sociology of critique – it can happen that the agents, as Boltanski puts it, "close their eyes", or that internal or external obstructions prevent them from "opening"

them.[24] Then is it not – in situations of structurally induced "social bad faith" (cf. Boltanski 2004a: 22f, 65f, 152, 226) – the task of critical theory to diagnose the impediments to the exercise of reflexive capacities in social practices of critique that, according to Boltanski, are to be the object of social-theoretical analysis, and thus to contribute to the possibility of these practices? This, however, would mean that the theory would need to ask itself the double question why certain situations are not perceived as unjust, alienating and the like, and why the perception of a situation as unjust, alienating and the like does not always translate into a collective awareness of the injustice, alienated nature and so on of this situation, let alone into collective action aimed at rectifying it (cf. Honneth 2000 [1981]). An answer to this question will have to take into account not only 'collective action problems' but also possible social obstructions of the agents' reflexive capacities and of social practices of critique, which those affected may not readily recognise. This is also how Boltanski's sparse remarks on a possible critical role of social theory can be understood:

> The most urgent task of the sociologist is therefore to use these reflexive moments as supports in trying to raise the level of social reflexivity – and to do so by implementing the specific forms of reflexivity and critique that have accompanied the social sciences from the start, as well as the methods in which these are embedded. This is particularly important in explaining the contradictions that take an inextricably logical and normative form, in the face of which the agents often prefer closing their eyes, for they are engaged in action and subject to the imperative not to interrupt the course of action or, one might say (paraphrasing Marx), ask questions to which they do not have an answer. (Boltanski 2006b: 12f; cf. also 2000: 140f)[25]

This sort of programme, however, requires a social theory that goes beyond describing social practices of critique and brings to light second-order 'pathologies', and it needs this theory to have the explicit (normative) objective of enabling processes of self-understanding in which the agents themselves can thematise the conditions that, according to the theory, have obstructive power. The version of critical theory I wish to advocate here claims to meet both of these requirements.[26]

4. CRITICAL THEORY AS RECONSTRUCTIVE CRITIQUE AND SELF-REFLECTION (I)

4.1 Critical Theory as Reconstructive Critique

I shall now discuss in more detail to what extent the conception of critical theory I wish to propose can be understood as an alternative to the dichotomy

of internal and external forms of critique – more precisely, of *external* sociological critique à la Bourdieu and *internal* sociology of critique à la Boltanski. On this conception, critique is neither restricted to reconstructing actual instances of self-understanding, nor does it need to adopt an external standpoint in its attempt to transcend these. The following remark by Adorno points in a similar direction:

> The alternative of either calling culture as a whole into question from outside under the general notion of ideology, or confronting it with the norms which it itself has crystallized, cannot be accepted by critical theory. To insist on the choice between immanence and transcendence is to revert to the traditional logic criticized in Hegel's polemic against Kant. As Hegel argued, every method which sets limits and restricts itself to the limits of its object thereby goes beyond them. (Adorno 2003 [1951]: 25f; EN 31, translation adjusted)[27]

The form of critique that distances itself from the false dichotomy of internal and external critique is what I shall refer to as *reconstructive critique* (concerning this term, also cf. Honneth 2007 [2000]; Iser 2008: Introduction). Reconstructive critique does not offer its addressees normative standards for critique from the outside, but tries to develop these on the basis of the normative structures (which need not be fully articulated or explicitly understood by its participants) of the practices that are constitutive of a social context – or more precisely: on the basis of the norms, values, self-understandings, expectations and intuitions that are part of these practices. The reconstruction, then, is an attempt to render implicit normative content explicit. It is a second-order construction inasmuch as it latches onto the practices and self-understandings of 'ordinary' agents and their first-order reflexive constructions as they are revealed by ethnomethodology. Reconstructive critique has four characteristic features, which I shall discuss in more detail in the course of the next section:

It is *constructive* (though not 'constructivist' in the strong sense of the word), for the interpretive nature of its 'material' and the underdetermination of the theoretical attempts at reconstruction by this material make any reconstruction simultaneously a construction, driving it beyond mere explication.

It is *normative* (though not 'normativist' in the strong sense of the word) because of the orientation of critical theory towards enabling the reflexivity of agents and of the social practices of critique, an orientation that grounds even its most concrete reconstructions, without, however, presupposing a full-fledged theory of the right or the good.

It is *dialogical* in how it relates to the self-understanding of agents, which it neither avoids nor takes over as is without question.[28]

It is *critical*, finally, in the sense that it can be in tension with the self-understanding of agents – indeed, it *must* be in tension with the actual self-understanding of agents in situations of second-order 'pathologies', when the transformation of the situation requires the transformation of the

self-understanding of the agents, that is, the deconstruction of structural reflexivity deficits (cf. Honneth 2000 [1981]; Rosa 2004).

What exactly, though, should we understand 'reconstruction' to mean?

4.2 Three Conceptions of Reconstruction

Before I proceed to discuss three conceptions of reconstruction – one inspired by psychoanalysis, one formal-pragmatic and one 'left-Hegelian' – in reference to their objects and methods, I shall first briefly introduce them.

The first conception of reconstruction can be found in Jürgen Habermas's *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1979 [1968]). Habermas there argues that critical theory can find a paradigmatic role model for strengthening its still underdeveloped methodological structure in psychoanalysis. He characterises the method of psychoanalysis (though, *nota bene*, not its theory) as reconstruction and elaborates on this insight as follows:

> The intellectual work is shared by physician and patient in the following way: The former *reconstructs* what has been forgotten from the faulty texts of the latter, from his dreams, associations, and repetitions, while the latter, animated by the constructions suggested by the physician as hypotheses, *remembers*. [. . .] Only the patient's recollection decides the accuracy of the construction. If it applies, then it must also "restore" to the patient a portion of lost life history: that is it must be able to elicit a self-reflection. (ibid.: 282; EN 230)[29]

According to Habermas, the role of theory in such a setting is "necessarily practical", since its aim is to "reorganise" the self-understanding of its addressees:

> [T]he experience of reflection induced by enlightenment is precisely the act through which the subject frees itself from a state in which it had become an object for itself. This specific activity must be accomplished by the subject itself. There can be no substitute for it, including a technology, unless technology is to serve to unburden the subject of its own achievements. (ibid.: 302; EN 247f)

In the next section, I shall discuss to what extent psychoanalysis, as a reconstructive procedure that aims to initiate processes of self-reflection in its addressees, can serve as a methodological role model for critical theory. First, I would like to sketch two alternative ways of understanding reconstruction, in order to provide a background against which the contours of the conception of the early Habermas can emerge more clearly.

The second conception of reconstruction can also be found in Habermas, for the author of *Knowledge and Human Interests* did not remain convinced of his own ideas for very long. As early as 1973, in a postscript to the second

edition, he introduced a crucial distinction that was to clear up a supposed confusion – the distinction between "reconstruction" (for which he now uses the German term '*Nachkonstruktion*') and "self-reflexion in a critical sense" (which is an essential aspect of what 'reconstruction' ['*Rekonstruktion*'] means in *Knowledge and Human Interests*)". "[O]n the one hand", Habermas writes, the term 'reflexion' "denotes the reflexion upon the conditions of potential abilities of a knowing, speaking and acting subject *as such*; on the other hand, it denotes the reflexion upon unconsciously produced constraints to which a *determinate* subject [. . .] succumbs in its process of self-formation" (ibid.: 411; EN 1973: 182).[30] As is well known, Habermas subsequently devoted himself to the project of rational reconstruction [*Nachkonstruktion*] in the form of a 'quasi-transcendental' universal or formal pragmatics, in which the aim is to reconstruct the normative structures of all action and speech in order to provide critical theory with a solid normative foundation.

A third conception of reconstruction can be found in Axel Honneth's work, and could be characterised as 'left-Hegelian'. A "normative reconstruction" would have to try to "uncover in the social reality of a given society those normative ideals that offer a reference point for a justified critique because they represent the embodiment of social reason" (Honneth 2007 [2000]: 66; EN 50). What is reconstructed here is the demonstrably rational normative content of institutionalised relations of recognition. Such a reconstruction is *critical* when it can show that the normative content has a 'surplus of validity' compared to its existing institutionalisations, so that these do not fully realise the former, even if they fare better than their predecessors. In such cases, the 'surplus of validity' should generate normative 'pressure' of a kind that ultimately seems to push the logic of development into a progressive direction.

The differences between these three conceptions of reconstruction become clear when we focus on *what* is being reconstructed and *how* it is reconstructed. It is important to keep in mind that despite the differences in subject matter and method, these conceptions have in common that reconstruction is in each case understood as an essential element (according to the second and third conceptions even as the foundation) of the specific form of critique at hand.

First on the *what* of reconstruction. On the first understanding, the reconstruction concerns concrete 'pathologies' and their genesis; on the second, universal rules and competences and on the third, the normative and rational content of a particular practice or life form. In the first case, the 'object' of reconstruction is historically concrete; in the second case, it is abstract and 'transhistorical' and in the third case it lies somewhere between these poles. Now on the *how*. According to the first conception, reconstruction proceeds analogously to psychoanalysis, combining theoretical reflection and dialogical interaction with its addressees. According to the second, it proceeds

analogously to Chomsky's and Piaget's ideal-typical reconstructions of cognitive and linguistic competences, rule systems and developmental logics, and strives to reveal 'quasi-transcendental' structures, to wit, the conditions of possibility of communicative interaction and social conditions as such.[31] According to the third conception, it proceeds analogously to Hegel's reconstruction of the rational and normative deep structure of particular institutions and practices, which can be understood neither on the level of formal pragmatics nor as the result of historically contingent developments and must instead be conceived as a stage in a process of the progressive historical realisation of reason.

The second and third conceptions of reconstruction – that is, the formal-pragmatic and the left-Hegelian ones – are more ambitious than the first in the sense that they aim to reconstruct not contingent structures but *constitutive* ('irreducible' or 'quasi-transcendental') ones. (For Habermas, 'constitutive' of the human life form means: of communicative action and the lifeworld; for Honneth, it means: of the development of personal identity in relations of recognition.) Despite their dialogical spirit and their fallibilistic provisos, both approaches are essentially *monological*, since for any constitutive structure it must in principle be the case that it can be revealed independently of the (self-understanding of the) agents who are subject to this structure. Of course, this *monological* manner of identifying *constitutive* structures is not by itself an argument against these approaches, but it does subject them to special justificatory burdens of which the first conception seems to be free (although it is of course subject to other justificatory burdens).[32]

The fundamental problem of the second, formal-pragmatic understanding is that the abstract reconstruction of rules and competences is detached from the critique of concrete relations of communication. Although this form of reconstruction in Habermas's own estimation remains "without practical consequences" (Habermas 1979 [1968]: 413; EN 1973: 183; cf. Habermas 1978 [1971]: 28–31; EN 22–24; 1985 [1970]: 336f; EN 298), it is supposed to make critique possible, in the form, indeed, of a "critique of relations of communication" – that is to say, a critique of the specific "communicative pathologies" that result from "systematically distorted communication" and can only be recognised against the background of the irreducible universal conditions of understanding.[33]

Now, not only is it notoriously unclear what an 'irreducible' rule might be in the first place and how the reconstruction of 'irreducible' rules can have critical force – what exactly is, for instance, a "performative self-contradiction"? – the status of formal- or universal-pragmatic considerations themselves remains unsettled as well. Either the preconditions that were derived in a formal-pragmatic manner are of a substantive nature, and therefore paint an image of everyday practice to which this practice constantly fails to live up in reality, or they are purely formal, and therefore tend to be

empty, since it can only be negotiated in concrete practices (and accordingly cannot be discovered from the armchair) which moves in a language game will be accepted and which will not. This critique leads to the conclusion that all distinctions that Habermas believes he can make at the abstract formal-pragmatic level (between convincing and persuading someone, for instance, or between argument and rhetoric) are contested and can only ever be made in concrete contexts – and that the same holds for the diagnosis of "systematically distorted communication".[34]

In Habermas, reconstruction appears as a kind of 'self-interpretation of reason', even though initially it can be no more than a proposal for a theoretical reconstruction, which competes with alternative proposals that also claim to offer a suitable reconstruction of our practices and self-understandings. Since the decision between two competing reconstructions can neither be simply read off the 'facts' nor decided at a purely philosophical ('quasi-transcendental') level, those 'affected' – whose self-understanding, after all, is supposed to be at stake – should be included in the examination. Of course, the agents meant here understand themselves as rational. Nevertheless, if the self-interpretation that is proposed to them or developed together with them is hypostasised into a "self-interpretation of reason", this threatens to conceal both the dialogical and conflictual character of this process of self-understanding and the fact that it always takes place under particular social conditions (cf., for instance, Tully 1988, especially 22ff).

A weaker form of this last objection can also be raised against the third, left-Hegelian understanding of reconstruction, insofar as it is based on the thesis that the history of struggles for recognition is to be understood as a history of the progressive realisation of reason in history or as the unfolding of a normative potential that inherently belongs to any relation of recognition. Should this thesis be grounded in more than just the 'Whiggist' perspective of the agents, and actually raise the standard of reconstructive critique beyond what is historically contingent and controversial – what, in other words, has merely relative validity – then the resulting critical *social* theory will have a strongly philosophical slant. At the very least, this philosophical aspect of the project can be expected to be in tension with its propagated attachment to the insights of empirical social research and the exchange with its addressees. Whether formal-pragmatic or left-Hegelian, the problem emerges as soon as a reconstruction is elevated to a 'quasi-transcendental' level; as soon as it strives to be more than one possible interpretation of the self-understanding of agents that is controversial and must compete with other reconstructions – a competition for which the social practice of self-understanding is the only possible arena.

Given these considerations, it seems appropriate to build a historically concrete (not formal-pragmatic) analysis of practices of justification and critique and their social conditions into the project of reconstructive critique. The normative ideals guiding critique, in that case, are not derived in an abstract

fashion from the structure of conditions of communication or relations of recognition, but gained from concrete – that is to say, socially and historically specific – practices, institutions and interpretive models.[35] If reconstruction raises a more extensive validity claim, it runs the risk of universalising local standards and ways of self-understanding, and deceiving itself with the belief that it has now found a firm, incontrovertible foundation. The practices of self-understanding that form the arena within which agents who understand themselves as rational demand justifications and develop criticisms are themselves conventional in nature. From the participant perspective, these practices are of course understood as more or less rational and normatively binding, and naturally, this has consequences for these practices. Nevertheless, they can hardly be considered instantiations of a transhistorical rationality that, from the theoretical perspective, lies beyond the self-understanding of agents.

In the light of these doubts about the orientation towards constitutive structures and the monological methods of the second and third conceptions of reconstruction, it seems legitimate to return to the first conception, and to see how far we can get on the basis of it – avoiding, that is, the additional philosophical burdens of justification. In the following, I shall therefore attempt to show that the first conception fits a model of critical theory that strives, by means of the reconstruction of historically concrete social conditions of justification and critique, to produce "reflective unacceptability", that is, to produce or bring to the light practical contradictions in the self-understanding of its addressees, in order to prompt a process of reflection and self-understanding that is a precondition for practical transformations (cf. Geuss 1981: chapter III.1, as well as section 6.1 below). Such a conception of reconstructive critique reverses Habermas's separation of reconstruction and critique, understanding these instead as inextricably intertwined. In order to develop this approach in more detail, I shall now return more systematically to the analogy between psychoanalysis and critical theory; an analogy whose productive potential even Habermas, after *Knowledge and Human Interests*, failed to take advantage of.

5. PSYCHOANALYSIS AS A MODEL?

> That we disavow reflexion *is* positivism. (Jürgen Habermas)

5.1 Habermas: *Knowledge and Human Interests* Revisited

What exactly makes psychoanalysis a suitable model for critical theory? Before I turn to this question directly in the next section, I shall first sketch Habermas's own answer in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, which I merely touched upon above. In contrast to his later attempt to reconstruct the normative standards of critique by means of a pragmatics of speech acts, Habermas

here strives for a meta-theoretical analysis of the intertwinement of theo-
retical reflection, self-understanding and critique that is typical for critical
theory. In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas argues that critical
theory can find a methodologically paradigmatic example for this approach
in psychoanalysis (cf. Bonß 1982). If one disregards the "scientistic self-
misunderstanding" of psychoanalysis – that is, its misleading focus on the
explanatory model of the natural sciences – and if one takes seriously the
fact that psychoanalytic theory, because of its connection to the therapeutic
situation, is also "embedded in the context of self-reflection", then psycho-
analysis appears to be "the only tangible example of a science incorporating
methodical self-reflection" (Habermas 1979 [1968]: 263, 306, 262; EN 246,
252, 245).[36]

   Habermas's alternative to the scientistic interpretation of psychoanalysis
can be summarised in four points:

   1)   The way psychoanalysis *proceeds* must be understood as *reconstruc-
tion*. In the therapeutic situation, an individual's life history is reconstructed.
The conception of reconstruction here involves the *restoration* of a structure
that was lost or became buried as well as the *construction* of a hypothetical
model of this structure, which is needed in order to make the (re)establish-
ment of the structure possible in the first place (cf. above 138 and Freud 1999
[1937]). Reconstruction, then, cannot simply be understood as the restoration
of a former state; rather, it is a procedure that is itself constructive (cf. Haber-
mas 1979 [1968]: 328; EN 270).

   2)   The theoretical 'knowledge' of the analyst – or rather: her hypo-
thetical reconstructions – can be practically effective, and therefore tested,
only in the context of a successful *dialogue* with the patient or analysand;
that is, in an interplay of interpretation and self-interpretation: "Seen from
the analyst's perspective, it [the hypothetical construction] remains mere
knowledge 'for us', until its communication turns into enlightenment –
that is, into knowledge 'for it', for the patient's consciousness" (ibid.:
282f; EN 230f). Between 'communication' and 'enlightenment' lies the
process of working through. Since this process is a dialogical one, the
therapist can only achieve an adequate interpretation if she "methodi-
cally assumes the role of interaction partner" (ibid.: 290; EN 237). For
this reason, in psychoanalysis "the validity of general interpretations
depends directly on statements about the object domain being applied by
the 'objects', that is the persons concerned, to themselves" (ibid.: 318;
EN 261) – and the same holds, as Habermas claims and, as I shall argue
in detail below, for critical theory.

   3)   For Habermas, the conception of *self-reflection* plays a decisive role
in the characterisation of both the process of reconstruction and its *aim*, that
is, the situation that is to be brought about by this procedure, for "*the act of
understanding* to which it [psychoanalysis] leads *is self-reflection*" as well

(ibid.: 280; EN 228). In dialogue with the analyst, the analysand experiences the "emancipatory power of reflection" (ibid.: 243f; EN 197); she goes through a process of self-reflection that is triggered by the analyst's attempts at reconstruction. For the goal of these attempts is "setting in motion a process of enlightenment and bringing the patient to self-reflection" (ibid.: 299; EN 244) – a process in which the self-reflective effort has to be made by the subject herself. Self-reflection can be turned neither into a science nor into a technique, nor can it be delegated in any other way. The addressees must therefore be engaged in the process in such a way that they can describe it from their own perspective as a process of self-reflection in which they are agents, not mere objects: "analysis is *not a steered natural process* but rather [. . .] a *movement of self-reflection*" (ibid.: 306; EN 251).

4)   Both in the context of psychoanalysis and in critical theory, the transformative power of critique depends on *subjective preconditions* on the part of the addressees: psychoanalysis "is critique in the sense that the analytic power to dissolve dogmatic attitudes inheres in analytic insight. Critique *terminates* in a transformation of the affective-motivational basis, just as it *begins* with the need for practical transformation. Critique would not have the power to break up false consciousness if it were not impelled by a *passion for critique*" (ibid.: 286; EN 234). If the subjects had no interest in self-reflection and emancipation, however inarticulate, if they did not suffer from the psychological and social obstructions of the development and exercise of their capacities, critique would be powerless. For this reason, critique must presume that the subjects agree with the underlying 'ideals' and presuppose a corresponding interest that can be turned into a 'passion for critique'. This presupposition is supported by Habermas's postulate of an (anthropologically grounded) "emancipatory cognitive interest" (ibid.: 244; EN 314) – the "interest in self-knowledge" (ibid.: 287; EN 235) "which aims at the pursuit of reflection as such" (ibid.: 244; EN 314). Without this interest, reflection would not have any practical consequences, and neither psychoanalysis nor critical theory would have a foothold.

5.2 Psychoanalysis, Self-Reflection and Critique

I shall now investigate the parallels between psychoanalysis and critical theory in a somewhat more systematic fashion. However, since drawing this parallel invites a host of misconceptions (to which I shall come back later), I must emphasise first and foremost that the claim that psychoanalysis is paradigmatic is restricted to the *methodological level*; it does not relate to the domain of substantive theory (such as the theory of drives). Moreover, like any analogy, it does of course have its limits. My point is to draw certain analogies that pertain to structure – that is, to provide a formal description of the ways in which psychoanalysis and critical theory proceed – not to

make any claims about commonalities in content (which may or may not be present).[37] Very roughly, the methodological analogies can be divided into those pertaining to aims and objectives and those pertaining to procedure and method. This division, however, must be understood as a heuristic distinction, since on the interpretation I defend here, one of the points of both psycho-analysis and critical theory is precisely that the aims of a theory affect its procedure, and that they will – for instance in relation to appropriate methods and intersubjective behaviour – limit and shape it.

5.2.1 Aims

The *aim* of both psychoanalysis – this "peculiar conversation among adults that aims at fundamental psychic change" (Lear 2003: 9) – and critical theory can, as a first approximation, be glossed by means of the intimately linked concepts of autonomy and 'Mündigkeit', or maturity in the sense of the ability to think and speak for oneself. If these concepts here remain largely indeterminate, this is partly due to the insight that a more substantive speci-fication would be self-contradictory, as it would limit the very competence and autonomy it advocates – to wit, the subjects' ability to lead their lives in a self-determined, reflective and critical way, and to decide for themselves what this might mean. What we can observe, however, is at least an internal connection between an individual's 'maturity' and their capacity for reflec-tion and critique – a connection that Adorno describes as follows:

> Mature [*mündig*] is the person who speaks for himself, because he has thought for himself and is not merely repeating someone else; he stands free of any guardian. This is demonstrated in the power to resist established opinions and, one and the same, also to resist existing institutions, to resist everything that is merely posited, that justifies itself with its existence. Such resistance, as the ability to distinguish between what is known and what is accepted merely by convention or under the constraint of authority, is one with critique, whose concept indeed comes from the Greek "*krino*", to decide. (Adorno 2003 [1969]: 785; EN 281f)

From this perspective,

> the analyst is committed to facilitating the analysand's freedom. We [viz. the analysts] may not know precisely what we mean by this [. . .] but, in general, we are not interested in influencing our analysands to pursue any particular end, but in helping them to develop their own capacities for self-understanding, for understanding of others and for thinking through what they want to do a better understanding of who they are and what they want. (Lear 2003: 54)[38]

In the context of psychoanalysis (and also, I would claim, in critical the-ory), 'maturity' and autonomy are to be understood as 'procedural' qualities,

not 'substantive' ones; they indicate a certain mode of being a person and a subject, not a substantive way in which this mode is given content.[39] In this respect, they can be further characterised by the conception of reflexivity, that is, by the capacity to confront one's own wishes, opinions and modes of behaviour – which are always developed in concrete social contexts – and to take up a reflective attitude towards them. Being autonomous, then, does not mean being entirely free from external or not consciously controlled internal influences, but establishing a reflective relation towards these (internal or external) influences. It means being able to take up a second-order perspective, which nevertheless must have concrete practical consequences if the person is not to develop a dissociated relation towards her own actions and desires. Both psychoanalysis and critical theory start from the diagnosis that the capacity for autonomy and reflection and the practice of self-understanding are restricted – in the first case primarily by internal, psychological factors, and in the second case primarily by external, social ones. Their aim is to strengthen this capacity and to facilitate this practice. This means that in individual cases, they aim to make themselves superfluous at the 'end' of the analytic process by transferring the role of analyst and critic to the subject herself, or by enabling the subject to adopt that role. As Jonathan Lear puts it:

> [T]he analytic process is thought to consist, at least partially, in a process by which the analysand comes to internalize the capacity for analysis. Analysis is not supposed to be over once analyst and analysand cease meeting; rather, the analysand is supposed to be in a position where she can carry on the activity of analysis largely on her own. (ibid.: 97f; cf. Lear 2000: xxxviii; Küchenhoff 2005: chapter 1)

The point, then, is not to envision a situation in which psychoanalysis and critical theory are 'out of a job'. Given his conception of the human psyche, Freud never considered such a situation possible or desirable, and critical theory, too, will hardly be able to adhere to the ideal of a conflict-free and fully rational social order when the historical-philosophical premises that support this conception have proven untenable (cf. Menke 1997). What is meant is rather that the task of the analyst or critic in a concrete situation is always to enable the addressee to continue the practice of analysis and critique, and thus to make herself in that sense dispensable.

Although this insight necessarily implies that the analyst and critic should assume a certain degree of modesty with respect to their own roles, it also entails a consciousness of the difficulties involved in these roles. In contrast to, for instance, the ability to tie one's shoes, which is acquired at some point and then, normally, simply exercised without any significant problems, "to be an analyst one must ever be in the process of becoming an analyst": "Paradoxically, part of the internalization of the capacity to be a psychoanalyst is

the recognition that this process of internalization must always be incomplete" (Lear 2003: 32, 91; cf. ibid.: 58, 94, 97). As I indicated earlier, something similar holds for the capacity for self-reflection in general, for it too is such that one must constantly appropriate it anew, never sure that one possesses it. 'Professional' analysts and 'ordinary' agents, who in a certain way are (and must be) 'lay analysts', are equally subject to this condition. Acknowledging this condition belongs to their practical identity as reflexive agents.

On this interpretation, analysis tries, "by means of its critical function, to expand the function of critique, or to establish it in the first place" (Küchen-hoff 2009: 304; cf. ibid.: section 5), so that the analysand herself can adopt and exercise the analytic capacity for critique, which always presupposes a certain detachment from oneself. That the acquisition of this capacity can never be considered complete also grounds Freud's notion of 'interminable analysis': there is no 'beyond' analysis and critique – no point in time when one is justified in claiming that it has been enough with the analysis and critique, without proving in doing so that in fact, it has not been enough. Both analysis and critique are therefore not projects that can be completed, but forms of self-reflection, which – just like the recognition of their inter-minability – are constitutive of our self-understanding and of our practices of revising it.

With respect to the modesty or restraint of the analyst, Freud time and again warns against the 'therapeutic' and 'educative ambition' (Freud 1999 [1912]: 381, 385; EN 115, 119) to shape the analysand according to one's own idea of a successful life:

> Moreover, I assure you that you are misinformed if you assume that advice and guidance in the affairs of life is an integral part of the analytic influence. On the contrary, we reject this role of the mentor as far as possible. Above all, we wish to attain independent decisions on the part of the patient. (Freud 1999 [1917]: 450; EN 375)[40]

In other words, the analyst largely refrains from settling any normative questions, such as spelling out a substantive ideal of proper selfhood, and consistently starts negatively, from the suffering of the subjects. According to Alfred Lorenzer, for instance, psychoanalysis, as a critical hermeneutic process, is characterised by the fact

> that it takes its start from the structure that was divulged under psychological stress and is "ultimately objectively *damaged*"; that the analyst does not enter the hermeneutic field with assumptions about the "*right*" life"; that psycho-analytic therapy shows itself to be "critical theory" by *dissolving* its object of knowledge (i.e. the damaged personality structure), instead of, as "traditional theory" would do, conceiving of it as a complex data set and taking it into account as such. (Lorenzer 1977: 135)

The analyst cannot control what effects the therapy has – what the agents do "after and with the therapy" is up to them.

Critical theory should proceed in a very similar fashion. It should not rely on substantive values and norms (or ideas about the good or right life) that would have to be justified by means of constructivist theorising; instead, it must tie in with the suffering of its addressees, or less pathos-laden: with their awareness (however diffuse and weakly developed) that there is a problem. Critical theory should only refer to values and norms when and to the extent that these are part of the self-understanding of the addressees. Drawing on theoretical models and conceptions that are not at the outset available to the analysand is an indispensable aspect of this, for both the analyst and the critical theorist. The value of autonomy or 'maturity', however, has a special status, since it denotes a certain mode of relating to norms and values. To enable people to adopt this mode is the aim of both analysis and critical theory.[41] Moreover, autonomy and 'maturity' form a constitutive dimension of the self-understanding of agents, which means that agents cannot be indifferent towards the prospect of these qualities being impaired. In this sense, critical theory and psychoanalysis do not primarily target particular instances of self-understanding that strike them as false for substantive reasons; they focus on forms of self-understanding that are defective at a procedural level and that express structural reflexivity deficits.

This understanding of the aim of psychoanalysis also suggests an answer to the long-familiar criticism that analysis does not lead to emancipation but only to adaptation and normalisation, as it reintegrates the subject, who because of her illness had more or less dropped out, into social life. Granted, it is not the aim of psychoanalysis to change society, but to allow the individual to be herself within a certain social context in a way that is as autonomous and symptom-free as possible. But the focus on autonomous selfhood, of course, also has implications for the assessment of social circumstances that either undermine and subvert or foster and support autonomy and 'maturity'. If the former is the case, there is a direct link between the aims of psychoanalysis and the necessity of a critical analysis of this social context. Moreover, only an individual who is capable of self-reflection and autonomous conduct in a psychoanalytical sense can envision far-reaching social transformations. At the level of aims, then, there are not only methodological parallels between psychoanalysis and critical theory, but also a certain complementarity.

5.2.2 Procedure and Method

The aim of the process of analysis – to foster the capacity for self-reflection and critique, and thus to develop the analysand's ability to take up the role of analyst or critic herself – can be achieved only by means of a procedure in

which the subject is considered, from the very beginning, capable of actually taking up this role. The addressees themselves have to "convert the language of the psychological-sociological 'explanation' into the language of a deepened self-understanding" (Apel 1971 [1968]: 42; EN 340). On this interpretation, it is also or in fact especially true for a therapeutic situation that there are can only be 'participants'; as we saw, the therapist can only achieve a convincing interpretation insofar as she "methodically assumes the role of interaction partner" (Habermas 1979 [1968]: 290; EN 237).[42]

Obviously, this cannot mean that the situation is perfectly symmetrical. After all, the diagnosis of a structural reflexivity deficit is the starting point of both psychoanalysis and critical theory. In this sense, it will, in certain situations, be necessary to conceive of the agents' capacity for reflection not as a precondition, but as a result. This should not, however, be understood to mean that the agents were entirely incapable of reflection beforehand, for only when agents can be taken to have a certain capacity for reflection can they count as addressees of both psychoanalysis and critical theory in the first place.[43] Accordingly, the agents must be capable of engaging actively in the process of transformation. Quite often, though, this process does not occur spontaneously, but must be set in motion from outside, and what sets it in motion will be forms of 'objectivising' interpretations, readings of symptoms, claims regarding 'health' and 'illness' and so forth.

The temporary asymmetries, then, owe their meaning and function to an underlying symmetry just as much as they aim to establish real symmetry – the latter in the form of a capacity for reflection and a practice of self-understanding that are no longer impaired by the diagnosed obstructions (cf. Bühn 1999: 102). But in that case, how should the temporary asymmetry be understood? Is it impossible for psychoanalysts to avoid the role of legislator and teacher at least occasionally, as Wolfgang Loch (1975) suspects? Of course, it comes down to how these two roles are understood. Nevertheless, the interpretive attitude seems more appropriate to the role of the psychoanalyst than the legislative or pedagogical one.[44] At least, psychoanalysis is not – just as little, in fact, as critical theory – a legislator who imposes a foreign law onto her 'subjects', nor is it a teacher who always knows the things her 'students' do not, and which they can learn only from her. The asymmetries that run through the endeavour of critique and analysis are of a special kind, since they are not one-dimensional, but 'complex'. This means that the (epistemic) relation between the analyst or critic and her addressees is not simply lopsided, but rather characterised by a variety of 'mixed' forms of asymmetry. Some of what the analyst and critic know, the addressees do not, and some of what the latter know, the former do not.

In this context, theory plays a peculiar role. On the one hand, theoretical resources are indispensable for the analyst's and the social critic's ability to

form hypotheses. Theory allows them to order and interpret the material in a
certain way. It provides them with a systematic vocabulary that helps them
to describe problematic phenomena and their effects in a manner that helps
agents not only to take a different perspective on these phenomena, but also
to change their practical attitude towards them. Unlike what Michael Walzer
suggests in relation to social critique, a good eye (or in the case of analysis:
a good ear) does not suffice. If reconstructive critique is to succeed, it also
needs a good theory to help it get off the ground.[45] Moreover, theory guides
reconstruction (or at least informs it), for reconstructions are always selective,
using a particular vocabulary and singling out aspects of the phenomena that
appear relevant. This is especially true for analysis guided by Freudian theory:

> Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation is, in two respects, a systematic retelling
> of what someone is doing. First, it consistently redescribes the analysand's ver-
> bal and nonverbal communications. It redescribes them not only as being about
> actions but – and this is more important – as being actions in and of themselves.
> Second, out of the innumerable possibilities of retelling the actions in question,
> the psychoanalytic interpreter selects those descriptions that center on [. . .]
> familiar features of psychoanalytic content. (Schafer 1980: 67)[46]

Regardless whether one agrees with the substance of concrete psychoana-
lytic redescriptions, this evaluation makes clear how strong an influence the
theoretical perspective has on reconstructions and on the vocabulary of the
corresponding redescription.

   Here, then, theory plays a necessary and substantial role: the descriptions
and interpretations of the analyst (but also of the critical theorist) draw on a
vocabulary that is not initially available to the agents themselves, but which
they can appropriate. For this reason, the psychoanalyst may be able to trig-
ger a process of reflection in areas where, say, conversations with close
friends do not help. The psychoanalytic theory that is employed in psycho-
analytic practice is thus an example for second-order theories. These theories
are located between meta-theoretical reflection and the 'ordinary' practice
of critique, and become a necessary means of reviving practices of self-
understanding and critique when these appear to have stopped functioning in
their 'ordinary' instantiations. Freud characterises the role of the theoretically
informed analyst in this process as follows:

> The primary motive force in the therapy is the patient's suffering and the wish
> to be cured that arises from it. [. . .] By itself, however, this motive force is not
> sufficient to get rid of the illness. Two things are lacking in it for this: it does not
> know what paths to follow to reach this end; and it does not possess the neces-
> sary quota of energy with which to oppose the resistances. The analytic treat-
> ment helps to remedy both these deficiencies. (Freud 1999 [1913]: 477; EN 143)

On the other hand, which reconstructions are appropriate in individual cases cannot be derived from the theory in any straightforward manner. Concrete cases cannot simply be subsumed under it. Rather, analysts and analysands must form a 'working alliance' in which they are equal partners and in which both play an active role. This relation therefore differs from a classic lay-expert relationship (such as the one between a doctor, whose role is to have authority, and a patient, whose role is to recognise the doctor's authority).[47]

That it is important to speak of 'analysands' rather than 'patients', then, is not a purely formal matter, but has substantive grounds: not only are those 'concerned' involved in their 'complaints' differently than patients with 'purely organic' illnesses are; these 'complaints', moreover, can only be 'cured' when those 'concerned' take up an active role within the analytic dialogue.[48] Relevant here is also that any hypotheses based on the theory depend for their criterion of adequacy on the self-understanding of the addressees – and this again holds for both psychoanalysis and critical theory. That is to say, there are no criteria for testing the hypotheses that can be made explicit and employed independently of the analytic dialogue – and thus of the transformation of self-understanding within this dialogue: "There is no corroboration for depth-hermeneutical interpretation outside of the self-reflection of all parties involved – a self-reflection which is found in and carried out through dialogue" (Habermas 1985 [1970]: 366; EN 317).[49] The same holds for criteria for the disappearance of symptoms and the 'ability to function', which cannot be operationalised from an external perspective at all.

With respect to the way psychoanalysis is bound to the addressees' self-understanding and its articulation, the transformative dimension too is essential to the psychoanalytic dialogue as enacted self-reflection. After all, the mere intellectual-abstract insight that, for instance, unconscious levels of motivation exist, cannot be expected to have a significant impact just by itself. What is needed is rather a passage to a sort of practical understanding, for insights are only useful to the analysand if and insofar as she can appropriate them (in a process that is both cognitive and affective) and endorse their consequences. In psychoanalysis, then, 'curing' someone is not an operation on an object whose engagement is not necessarily required. Rather, it depends on an act of appropriation that takes place through a process of self-reflection and self-transformation. Accordingly, the way in which an analysand adopts an interpretation that is guided by theory and worked out together with the analyst cannot be modelled on the way in which empirical convictions are embraced. Rather, what is at stake is a changed self-interpretation, a transformation in the subject's self-understanding, for these are interpretations that constitute her identity. Hence the "double nature of the psychoanalytic

process as both a critical-hermeneutic and a practical-transformative process"
(Lorenzer 1985 [1974]: 138).[50]

This is the dimension to which the Freudian concept of 'working through'
applies. In contrast to simply being told some information or acquiring intel-
lectual knowledge, 'working through' denotes a reflective form of knowledge
that can only result from going through a certain experiential process. To cite
Freud one last time:

> It is a long superseded idea, and one derived from superficial appearances, that
> the patient suffers from a sort of ignorance, and that if one removes this igno-
> rance by giving him information (about the causal connection of his illness with
> his life, about his experiences in childhood, and so on) he is bound to recover.
> The pathological factor is not his ignorance in itself, but the root of this igno-
> rance in his inner resistances; it was they that first called this ignorance into
> being, and they still maintain it now. The task of the treatment lies in combating
> these resistances. (Freud 1999 [1910]: 123; EN 225; cf. Freud 1999 [1914]; Lear
> 2005: chapters 1.7 and 4.6)

We can here draw an analogy with critical social theory: just as little as it
suffices in psychoanalysis to present the patient with a certain interpretation
of his disorder without confronting its causes, social critique will be inad-
equate if it merely points out reflexivity deficits in agents without analysing
their causes (which in critical theory will be understood as structural) and
ensuring that these can be reflected on by the addressees. Neither psycho-
analysis nor social critique are purely epistemic or cognitive projects; they
cannot bring about transformations solely by imparting knowledge. Rather,
they constitutively depend on a dialogical transformation of the addressees'
self-understanding. For this reason, a "fundamental aim of analytic critique"
lies in "the self-reflective attitude" (Küchenhoff 2009: 302). Within psycho-
analysis, critique is always empowering and enabling; it aims to establish
"conditions for the possibility of change" (ibid.: 303). These conditions,
though, cannot be imposed from the outside but must be performed by the
analysand herself. The same holds for critical theory.

In contrast to what, say, Wolfgang Detel (2007: 141) suggests, it is impos-
sible to maintain an absolute distinction between therapeutic and ethical
discourses. The treatment of disorders is not at odds with tying in with the
competences, attitudes and standards of agents. Rather, therapeutic discourse –
at least when it is a psychoanalytic discourse – *relies* on this connection to the
agent's abilities and expectations. In this sense, it will always involve an ethi-
cal discourse, as it is a discourse about the correct way for agents to understand
themselves. As such, it must tie in with the agents' competences, attitudes and
standards if for no other reason than that it is a dialogue *with* them, in which

it cannot simply assume a substantive conception of a successful life. If the approach tries to forgo this connection to the agent, if the analysand is forced by the analyst (or the agent is forced by the critical social theorist) into the role of patient, a mere object of treatment whose competences, attitudes and standards are ultimately a negligible variable, then this process, which in its very essence is a process of self-reflection, is bound to fail. Just like critical theory is not principally opposed to the agents' everyday sociology, but can dovetail with it, the deeper explanations of behaviour developed by psychoanalysis can be understood as extensions of folk psychology and do not necessarily break with it (cf. ibid.: 130).[51] Even pointing out meaningful aspects of the behaviour of agents that are not initially accessible or transparent to them, or to enable others to develop self-understanding through self-reflection, is only possible if these insights can be integrated into the agents' self-understanding in the first place.

This special constellation yields a further methodological peculiarity for both psychoanalysis and critical theory, one that I already referred to above. In the case of psychoanalysis, hypotheses cannot be validated (or tested) independently of the self-understanding of the analysand, nor can such validation be secured by means of direct yes-or-no statements from the analysand. Instead, it can only be derived from changes that are produced, or at least provoked and guided, by the analysis.[52] The description of the relevant changes, however, is itself an interpretation, which in turn cannot be proven by means of theory-free data, but only in a dialogue between the analyst and the analysand (cf., for instance, Schafer 1992: 180). What counts – beyond the rather vague notion that the symptoms should disappear – as 'success', a 'cure' and the like must be negotiated and can be very controversial. The possibility of such conflicts of interpretation is inherent in the process of interpretation itself.[53] After all, the processes of change initiated by analysis (as a 'talking cure') are not quasi-natural sequences of events but transformations of a person's self-understanding in which the analysand is constitutively engaged – processes, in other words, that do not merely happen to her, and that can therefore not simply be observed from the outside.[54] Quite clearly, this is a method of validation that departs from standard theory, in which the validation of a theoretical hypothesis and the observation sentences that can be derived from it must be achieved by means of empirical observation: "The problem here is not the underdetermination of theory by evidence, but almost the opposite: the evidence, the life-practice of the subject, appropriates the theory for itself, giving it existential determinacy of a kind unavailable to natural scientific theories" (Bernstein 1995: 68).[55] This existential determinacy, then, is no longer within the theory's domain of influence but is a matter of practice, which both transforms and is transformed.

5.2.3 Is the Analogy between Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory Misleading?

The attempt to draw an analogy between psychoanalysis and critical theory faces a number of objections. Although these objections are all closely related, I shall discuss them one by one. In doing so, I shall once more focus on methodological questions and largely ignore criticisms of substantive psychoanalytic theses.

   First, it is time and again pointed out that the analyst runs the risk of perceiving every reaction of the analysand in the light of her favourite interpretation and of reinterpreting these reactions as a symptom of internal resistance in case they do not fit the mould: "[T]he psycho-analyst can always explain away any objections by showing that they are due to the repressions of the critic" (Popper 2013 [1945]: 422).[56] If critical theory were to follow this example, it could interpret any self-interpretation of its addressees that was incompatible with its own hypotheses as an expression of their deep ideological blindness. This, however, would have to make us severely sceptical towards its explanatory claims. Some proponents of a naturalistic understanding of science turn scepticism of this sort into a wholesale objection against both psychoanalysis and critical theory, arguing that they lack falsifiability and are therefore unscientific.

   Certainly, it would be naive to deny the danger of theory shielding itself against divergent evidence and against objections from the perspective of its addressees. Nonetheless, this is not a danger with which psychoanalysis and critical theory are confronted exclusively, or on principle to a larger extent than other theories.[57] Moreover, this danger is taken into account in both theoretical models, since they both emphasise the dialogical character of the development and validation of the hypotheses formulated on the basis of the theory. It is therefore a mark of a good analyst or critic that she is aware of this danger and organises her work accordingly. As to the objection that these theories are not scientific, this can be rejected in terms that are as general as those in which it is posed. Apart from the fact that dialogical validation certainly can be understood as a falsification procedure, it does not make much sense to measure psychoanalysis (or any social science, for that matter) against standards that are allegedly appropriate to the natural sciences, and thus foreign to the discipline at hand. The involvement of the analyst and the critical social theorist, the corresponding impossibility of a pure observer standpoint, the fact that the 'object' of their research is pre-interpreted, the essentially interpretive character of their method and the possible conflicts of interpretation that arise from it are all constitutive features of their subject domain and the appropriate mode of accessing it. These are not obstacles to knowledge but aspects of what it means to have knowledge in this domain.[58]

Second, a worry formulated from the hermeneutic perspective may arise: the idea of 'psychoanalysis as a model' seems to immediately lead back to the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that was rejected in part I of this book as a problematic effect of the break between the observer and participant perspectives (even though my reconstruction of psychoanalysis thus far does not really leave much room for this objection to be raised anew). Was Freud not one of Ricœur's 'masters of suspicion'? For evidently, the psychoanalytic situation is structured by the very separation of perspectives that I criticised – the one of the analyst who is in the know, and the patient who must be led towards knowledge even against her own resistance. Correspondingly, the identification of the critical theorist with the role of the doctor seems to owe more to the latter's authoritarian pedagogical impulse than to the interest in emancipatory knowledge of the person in need of treatment.[59]

Since this objection is closely related to the first one, it will suffice to recall the remark made above that both the analyst and the critic would completely misunderstand their own roles if they took themselves to have special knowledge that is unavailable to the addressees. The role of the "sujet supposé savoir" (cf. Lacan 1973 [1964]), that is, the subject who is taken to possess such knowledge, is indeed occasionally offered to both the analyst and the critical theorist. If they accept it, however, they violate both the ethos and the methodological foundations of their theories. Just as little as it is the task of psychoanalysis to set analysands off on a particular course is it the task of critical theory to single out one particular option as the only passable one and to push for it being realised in practice.[60] As I explained above, moreover, in contrast to what is the case for a 'hermeneutics of suspicion', symmetry here has priority over temporary asymmetries and conditions these.

A third objection against psychoanalysis as a model is raised on the grounds that unlike the problems of psychoanalysis, the issues of social theory are *not* such "that the social agents are caught up in them in such a way that their experience of these problems is obscured. The problems that the analyses meet are not such that they block the subjects' cognitive access to them". For this reason, "the subjects cannot be seen to suffer from a fundamental obstruction of their social possibilities for experience" (Giegel 2000: 49, 53).

This objection relies on a postulate whose empirical plausibility is disputable and would first have to be substantiated. An inverse objection to 'generalised psychoanalysis' could be formulated as follows:

> To understand pressures whose power depends on the failure to understand them is impossible by definition to those who are affected by them: for that, what is needed is the method which is the analyst's monopoly. The liberating self-reflection cannot succeed on the "object level", therefore, but must necessarily advance to the "metalevel". (Bubner 1971 [1969]: 205; EN 32)

The foregoing sections suggest that this is not the case – that a particular interpretation of the psychoanalytic method will be able to avert the danger of falling back into the model of the break. Granted, psychoanalysis suspends and questions the addressees' immediate and given forms of self-interpretation and self-understanding, but it does so in a way that is only justified when it can be recognised as such by the addressees on the basis of a reformed self-understanding. The subjects must therefore be trusted to perform the 'push' to the meta-level themselves, for in contrast to what the citation above suggests, they alone can liberate themselves from unfathomed pressures. In this sense, we certainly can speak of an obstruction of certain possibilities for experience without implying that they cannot be understood on principle. And there is no reason to allow for this possibility in the domain of psychoanalysis while denying it for critical theory.

Fourth, one could object that the analogy between psychoanalysis and critical theory implies an analogy between their respective addressees, and that the identification of society with a patient ('large-scale subject', 'collective unconscious', 'society on the couch') is untenable for ontological, methodological and political reasons.

That society cannot be understood as a 'large-scale subject' is true not only for the social-theoretical reception of psychoanalysis, but for any form of social critique. While such critique may intend to refer to 'society as a whole' (whatever that may mean exactly), it will always address concrete agents (or groups of agents). It criticises concrete practices, institutions and forms of self-understanding, even though it may thematise the way they are connected and their meaning for the social order at large. It is true for critical theory that 'society as a whole' is not the right phenomenon to tackle. But it is not clear why the methodological analogy with psychoanalysis should compel such an assumption. Nevertheless – and this must clearly be kept in mind – the analogy here comes up against a limit, since obviously the social critic does not have a dialogical exchange with her addressees at the same level as is ideally the case in a psychoanalytic situation.

Fifth, it could be pointed out that someone who goes to see an analyst has already recognised that she needs help and is willing to undergo therapy. Is it not the case that the addressees of critical theory lack this very 'awareness of the problem'? Is critique not needed exactly where everyone thinks everything is quite alright and change would only do harm? In this vein, Anthony Giddens, for instance, writes:

> The emancipatory goal of psychoanalysis, the expanded autonomy of the patient, is achieved through a process of self-understanding developed through the analyst-patient dialogue. Here there is a preexisting consensual system, since analysis is entered into voluntarily by both parties; the participants share a mutual interest in the outcome, the betterment of the patient; the process of therapy is organized purely through symbolic communication; the achieving of reflexive

understanding is the very medium of the extension of the analysand's autonomy of action; and the 'domination' which the patient overcomes as a result of successful therapy is that of his own inner makeup, not the domination of others over him. None of these conditions seem to apply in the circumstances of actual social life, for example in situations of class domination. (Giddens 1977: 211f)

Of course, analysis has subjective preconditions, but as I indicated above, the same is true for critical theory. Even when one is of the opinion (as one should be) that critical theory should also and in fact particularly focus on cases in which the agents themselves close their eyes and may not be aware of any problem at all, it can hardly be denied that critique needs a foothold. For this reason, any critique must take there to be at least a rudimentary awareness of the problem on the side of its addressees from which it can take its start. The objection formulated by Giddens, moreover, does not hold true in the sense that even if the aim of critical theory – increased autonomy in the form of an increased capacity for reflection and critique – is not fulfilled by a process of self-understanding, it is at least conditioned by it (the same holds for psychoanalysis). The self-reflection whose initiation is the aim and specialisation of psychoanalysis constitutes a necessary, but certainly not a sufficient condition for overcoming second-order 'pathologies'. In this context, too, the gap between theory and practice can only be bridged by the agents themselves. As Horkheimer writes: "To conceptualize a defect is therefore not to transcend it; concepts and theories constitute one moment of its rectification, a prerequisite to the proper procedure, which as it progresses is constantly redefined, adapted, and improved" (Horkheimer 1988 [1935]: 292; EN 189).

In spite of their brevity, these replies should suffice to lend some plausibility to the methodological analogy I have tried to establish between psychoanalysis and critical theory. I have attempted to take up and systematise the analogy introduced by the early Habermas in order to clarify the conception of critical theory as reconstructive critique. In the previous three sections, I have elaborated how psychoanalysis can help us to understand the constructive, normative, dialogical and critical aspects of reconstruction, and to make them more precise regarding both aims and procedures. In the next sections, I shall return to the methodological structure of critical theory itself, before finally discussing a concrete example that may clarify the way reconstructive critique advances.

6. CRITICAL THEORY AS RECONSTRUCTIVE CRITIQUE AND SELF-REFLECTION (II)

6.1 Reflective Unacceptability and Cognitive Dissonance

Following up on the discussion about the methodological parallels between psychoanalysis and critical theory, I shall in the last sections of this part

attempt to characterise the corresponding conception of reconstructive cri-
tique in more detail. On this view, critique aims not only to identify, but also
to produce 'reflective unacceptability', that is, to produce or bring to the light
a practical contradiction in the self-understanding of its addressees, in order
to prompt a process of self-reflection, which in turn is a precondition for a
transformative practice. Under what circumstances, though, can we speak
of reflective unacceptability? According to Raymond Geuss, a belief can
be understood as reflectively unacceptable in case agents would abandon it
for being incompatible with fundamental aspects of their self-understanding
if they had the relevant information about the conditions under which they
came to have the belief. A reconstructive critique of ideology "shows the
agents that this world-picture is *false* consciousness by showing them that it is
reflectively unacceptable to them, i.e. by showing them that they could have
acquired it only under conditions of coercion" (Geuss 1981: 62). What exactly
'conditions of coercion' might be is initially left open by Geuss, just like the
question of the relation between the 'genetic' and 'normative' dimensions
of reconstructive critique. In any case, the agents will have to appropriate
the reconstructive hypotheses of the theorists – their suggestions on how to
interpret, explain and criticise the social conditions under which they live and
develop their understanding of themselves and the world around them. They
themselves need to realise that certain social conditions are unacceptable to
them if they are to maintain their self-understanding, and it is the agents who
will have to adjust their world view in the face of particular social conditions
in order to be able to adhere to fundamental aspects of their practical identity.
This makes it necessary to refer not only to the experiences of agents, but also
to the epistemic and normative principles that are (at least implicitly) recog-
nised by them, for "if we can't find the appropriate experiences of suffering
and frustration and the appropriate principles of reflective acceptability in the
life and form of consciousness of those agents, Ideologiekritik cannot begin,
and we have no right to call the agents 'deluded'" (ibid.: EN 65).

The way in which reflective unacceptability is produced can be clari-
fied in reference to the psychological phenomenon of cognitive dissonance.
Cognitive dissonance arises when one or more of the beliefs, attitudes, emo-
tions and/or habits of an agent are contradictory or inconsistent. That such
dissonance always *prima facie* constitutes a 'practical problem' for agents
who understand themselves as rational can be seen from the fact that those
'affected' normally strive to resolve the dissonance by, for instance, bringing
their conduct in line with their discrepant beliefs or adjusting their attitudes
to their emotional reactions.[61] The same tendency, however, can turn from
reducing dissonance into avoiding it altogether, and thus cause information
that could spark cognitive dissonance to be blocked out or fended off. To
illustrate this by means of a popular example: a smoker who likes to smoke

even though she is aware of the risks can either stop smoking or interpret the available information so selectively that her beliefs about the risk change and the dissonance remains below a certain threshold, so that it never reaches a problematic level.

In order to connect this phenomenon to the notion of reflective unaccept-ability, the model of cognitive dissonance will have to be extended and pro-vided with a 'directional index'. The extension is necessary to ensure that the notion can cover conflicts between the social conditions under which agents live and their self-understanding. Since the strength of dissonance depends on the meaning of the conflicting elements, a conflict with beliefs and attitudes that are fundamental to the agent's self-understanding will trigger rather strong dissonance and thus entail psychological pressure to reduce (and not merely avoid) the dissonance. Still, this process – and this too can be learnt from the analogy with psychoanalysis – ought not to be understood in an overly cognitivist manner, since the experience of reflective unacceptability is not free of affect. As an experience with the potential to transform one's self-understanding, it is always both cognitive and affective. Reconstructive critique will furthermore have to make sure not merely to produce reflective unacceptability, but also to point the effort of resolving the dissonance in the right ('emancipatory') direction. This should not be understood as a sort of 'paternalism'. Rather, the point is to engage in an exchange with the agents in order to ensure that the theory does not lose sight of the fundamental dimen-sions of the self-understanding of its addressees.

If critical social theory can make plausible its assessment that certain social conditions obstruct the exercise of capacities that are *ex hypothesi* constitu-tive for the self-understanding and practical identity of the agents, and if the 'impossibility of the realisation' of a capacity that is to be realised does not remain external to that capacity, but leads to the destruction of the capacity itself (cf. Menke 2004: 159; EN 43), then the agents will have to react to this in one way or another. Underlying this conviction is the "strong and frankly anthropological thesis that human subjects cannot be indifferent about the restriction of their rational capacities" (Honneth 2007 [2004]: 52; EN 39).[62] If they do manage to be indifferent towards the diagnosis (or simply reject it) without the dissonance exceeding a certain limit, this could be a sign that the theoretical hypotheses are in need of revision. Besides the possibility that the theoretical hypotheses (about the supposed reflective unacceptability of cer-tain conditions) are simply false and that those concerned are right to reject them, two other possibilities need to be taken into account: the possibility that the addressees lack the necessary reflexive capacities and cognitive resources to understand the theory (for instance because they suffer from massive social disadvantage or are blinded by ideology), and the possibility that the dialogue between a critic and her addressees fails because the critic takes the wrong

approach (for instance because she lacks persuasive power or is not willing to engage in dialogue). Which of these three possibilities is actually the case and what the extent of the dissonance is cannot be settled in an objective manner outside of a dialogue between theorists or analysts and their addressees.

Again, it is the *self-understanding* of the agents that gets to deliver the final verdict on the adequacy of the interpretations suggested by reconstructive critique. Individual and collective self-understanding, however, are not taken to be static, monological or homogeneous (as is the case in conventionalist conceptions of critique and often in internal conceptions too). Instead, they are understood as capable of being *transformed* by a (theoretically informed) change of perspective and the corresponding processes of reflection. In this way, they are rendered dynamic (cf. Tully 2004). Exactly what circumstances are reflectively unacceptable, then, is not fixed. The answer to this question does not precede the dialogue between critics and addressees, nor is it external to it; it can only be settled through dialogue, and dialogue is the only means by which it can be changed. For this reason, the dialogue itself must be reflexive in structure: the limits of the dialogue will always have to be taken into account within it.

These considerations also allow us to appreciate the misunderstanding of normativist and constructivist theories, which argue that the referral to the agents' normative and epistemic principles that is supposed to avert the paternalism of external forms of critique in fact opens the floodgates to subjectivism and relativism. As I argued in part II, the principles on which reconstructive critique relies are subject to constant mutual critique, if only because of their plurality and heterogeneity. Confronted with such critique, agents must produce justifications that develop a normative momentum of their own. In the long run, these justifications can undermine not only hegemonic attempts at shielding oneself from being questioned, but also subjectivist and relativist assertions that these are the principles of agents and therefore they cannot be criticised.

The methodological commitment to the self-understanding of the agents admittedly involves abandoning one of the basic principles of traditional critique of ideology, to wit, that ideology is not only false consciousness, but necessary false consciousness. On this view, forms of false consciousness are necessary when they are indispensable elements of the reproduction of the social order as a whole, when they are functional for maintaining the status quo. If this description were accurate, then the insight of agents would be obstructed *on principle*. In that case, the reflexivity deficit could not be dismantled by the agents themselves but would have to be disposed of in the context of a historical process that would happen behind their backs.[63] Epistemologically and methodologically, we

can arrive at a sharper formulation of this point with the help of Helmut Dubiel (1989: 510f; EN 9):

> The attitude from which these structures or constraints of domination are described is ultimately that of the detached observer. The observer's perspective is necessary since we have to explain how a critical theory as a theory of total domination is possible at all. It turns out that this is possible only insofar as the theory can lay claim to an – albeit threatened – sanctuary outside the described context of domination. The status of a victim of total domination cannot be reconciled with that of a subject of critical theory. The very idea of describing a context of total domination from the perspective of a participating victim is theoretically absurd. Whether I act with a theoretical or with a pre-theoretical, lifeworld orientation in a problematic situation, my act is necessarily tied to the assumption that the range of action [*Handlungsfeld*] available to me is not entirely closed off. The internal connection between the fact that there are alternative possibilities, that I have the chance to reflect and reassure myself of their presence, and that I experience myself as a subject capable of acting is anthropologically basic.

The fundamental nature of this connection can also be understood to mean that even in the cases of structural reflexivity deficits that I have described above, we can and must always presume there to be a foothold for critical theory in the practices, self-understanding and experiences of the agents concerned. This, however, requires jettisoning the extremely problematic assumption (which probably cannot be made intelligible anyway) of an all-encompassing situation of domination that cannot be comprehended by the agents, since it both functions as a universal system of delusion and precludes reflexivity.

Now despite these convincing objections to the connection of the assumption of totality with the 'functionalist prejudice' that characterises the orthodox model of the critique of ideology, reconstructive critique should not preclude the possibility of describing social obstructions to the development and exercise of reflexive capacities in a functionalist fashion. In that case, however, these obstructions are to be described as necessary for the stability of *particular* institutions, practices and interpretive models, not for the reproduction of the social order as a whole. To distinguish this view from 'global functionalism', we could here speak of a 'local functionalism'. And to the extent that certain beliefs can be ascribed a local function in the reproduction of certain repressive practices or forms of self-understanding, this form of functionalism could be understood as a dimension of the critique of ideology. Ideological, then, would be the "ways in which meaning [viz., particular beliefs, forms of self-understanding, etc.]

serves, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of power which are systematically asymmetrical" (Thompson 1990: 7).[64] That some self-understanding is functional in this sense in the first instance only means that it contributes to the reproduction of a practice or institution that is deemed problematic (and not yet that it is necessary for its continued existence). Most importantly, however, the proposed view allows for the possibility that agents themselves see through this functional connection, and that they criticise and transform it, since the assumption is that their reflexive capacities are only partially impaired.

If the idea that critique can be based on scientific insights into social and historical regularities (or even on the privileged standpoint of a specific class) is jettisoned, there seems to be no getting around the presumption that *agents themselves* have to be able to understand the insights of social theory, to transform the existing institutions, practices and interpretive models and to describe this process of transformation (if necessary) retrospectively as a learning process.[65] The validity claim of theory, in that case, can only be one that is to be realised in practice itself. The validity of the theory is decided "not in supposedly neutral reflection but in personal thought and action" (Horkheimer 1988 [1937]: 196; EN 222).[66] It is doubtful, however, that the test 'in thought and action' should be understood to mean that the validation of the hypotheses of critical social theory must take place in revolutionary practice – that, to follow Horkheimer's dictum, "[i]f the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the eating here is still in the future" (ibid.: 195; EN 220f).

In a slightly less dramatic version of the underlying idea, the interpretations suggested by theory should be argumentatively tested by the agents themselves, in practices of self-understanding that are as undistorted as possible:

> In a first step, the social-scientific observer formulates hypotheses about intransparent power relations, which causally explain a state of consciousness and the interests corresponding to it. The second step of such an endeavour of the critique of ideology – if it has appropriated the insight that the final verdict on the needs and interests of a subject can only be delivered by that subject himself – would then consist in clarifying the process that would enable the participants to themselves validate the power hypotheses.[67] (Strecker 2009: 133)

This makes the question of the criteria for the assessment, evaluation and validation of the views of critical theory a procedural one, located in social discourses of self-understanding. Here, *actual* discourses, and not imagined hypothetical or advocatory ones, are the relevant forum – the only one in which the processes of enlightenment can take place that, in a way, are at

the same time presupposed by these discourses.[68] For the switch from actual discourses to hypothetical or advocatory ones quickly becomes a pretext for no longer taking the former into account at all. The pedagogical certainty that the others are not ready yet (to decide for themselves, to have an equal say, etc.) and would first have to be enlightened has too often turned into the authoritarian ambition to speak on behalf of others, even if they actually have divergent views, for critical theory to somehow accommodate it (cf. Bader 1991: 148f). A theory that aims for autonomy and maturity cannot declare its addressees incompetent as part of its methodological procedure – however indirectly – without undermining its own ambition. In this sense, it is true for both psychoanalysis and critical theory that their aims impose certain limits on the means and processes available to them, and that the appropriateness of the means – in particular the way in which agents are addressed – will have to be checked in relation to its aims ever anew. Again, what exactly would be appropriate and what concrete restrictions would be called for cannot be determined in general or one-sidedly by the theory. If the addressees perceive themselves as being considered incompetent since they are only viewed as judgemental dopes, psychoanalysis and critical theory cannot be indifferent in the face of this. They must take such critique of the way they go about seriously, or they may well end up cutting the process of 'assisted' self-reflection short. What else could it mean that the validity claim of theory "can be verified only in the successful process of enlightenment, and that means: in the practical discourse of those concerned" (Habermas 1978 [1971]: 10; EN 2)? If critical theory wants to adhere to its emancipatory intention and appreciates that this also has methodological consequences, then the emancipation it aims for can only be *self-emancipation*, and the transformation it strives for only *self-transformation*.

6.2 Between Symmetry and Asymmetry

In my discussion of psychoanalysis, I have already made clear that critical theory connects its critique to the ambition to facilitate *self-reflection* through theoretical reconstruction. The question of how this is to be understood more precisely can still be fruitfully approached by considering a debate that unfolded in the 1960s and 1970s under the heading 'Hermeneutics or Critique of Ideology?' One of the protagonists of this debate, Karl-Otto Apel, distinguishes a purely hermeneutic or internally focused understanding from the understanding characteristic of critique, which "reflectively surpasses" the subject's self-understanding. What he thinks should be 'surpassed' in theoretically informed understanding is the "world- and self-understanding" of the agents. Apel argues that this is necessary because the interpretations

articulated by the agents may be influenced, without them being aware, by the "obscure intrusion" of "de facto life-forms" (Apel 1971 [1968]: 38; EN 337). In order to prevent this 'obscure intrusion' from blurring even the theorist's vision, she will have to supplement the access to the object domain (i.e. the participant perspective) that is purely based on understanding with a "quasiobjective explanatory science". The latter form of access, however, has preliminary forms within the object domain itself, that is, in everyday social practice, which means that the theorist's access to this domain does not differ fundamentally from the access that is open to social agents themselves:

> In every human dialogue there comes some point where one of the participants *no longer* attempts to take the other hermeneutically seriously in his intentions, but rather attempts to distance him objectively as a quasinatural event, a point where he no longer attempts to sustain the unity of language in communication, but rather attempts to evaluate what the other says as a symptom of an objective factual situation which he can explain from without in a language in which the partner does not participate. (ibid.: 39; EN 338; my emphasis)

The 'no longer' here is not to be understood in a temporal sense, as if any objectification always followed on taking someone hermeneutically seriously, and as if these attitudes were mutually exclusive. Rather, these two attitudes denote two ends of a spectrum of complex ways in which agents can relate to each other. In everyday practice, the cases of perfect 'taking seriously' and utter 'objectification' (as a 'quasinatural event' no less) are hardly realistic options – thankfully, one might add. For the same reason, it seems at least misleading to speak of a 'language in which the partner does not participate', since the very point of these kinds of descriptions is that they *are* understood by the 'partner' and adopted along with their practical consequences. It would therefore be fatal – both for 'ordinary' agents in their role as critics *and* for critical theory – if the vocabulary used were to be *on principle* inaccessible to the other agents, to whom, or rather with whom, one speaks.

In Apel's view, "the conversation partner who is at least *ex professione* superior cannot help but suspend the communication with the other partner to some degree and allow a stance focused on the explanation of behaviour to take its place" (Apel 1970: 185). If the theoretical intervention is aimed at emancipation, however, the objectification (or objectivation) must be ascribed a status different from 'manipulation', even though Apel treats these as identical. The 'communicative provocation' of a reflective process does not make 'manipulation' retrospectively redundant and it does not put a different – more favourable – complexion on it. Rather, communication really does exclude manipulation, or at least it subjects it to normatively and methodologically motivated restraints to which manipulation is not necessarily subject in everyday life. It would be impossible to understand the primacy

of symmetry over asymmetry that is constitutive of both psychoanalysis and critical theory in any other way.

On the way to a 'deepened' form of symmetry, Apel argues, it may turn out to be necessary to employ "theory-formations which interpret human life-utterances in a language in which the original authors of these life-utterances cannot directly participate" (Apel 1971 [1968]: 41; EN 339f). How is this necessity to be understood? If we follow the methodological considerations developed above, the role of these theories is merely to aid a certain transition. They are *hypothetical* constructions, or simply *reconstructions*, which show the agents something they cannot, at this point, see for themselves – or may not even be able see from their current perspective at all (cf. Alcoff 2007).[69] This, however, means that the agents – in keeping with the assumption of symmetry – must be considered capable of shifting perspectives in such a way that they can adopt this alienating manner of speaking: "the sole explanation of the fact that men [*sic*] are able to react to the causal-analytical explanation of their behavior with a new type of behavior lies in the insight that men can convert the language of psychological-sociological 'explanation' into the language of a deepened self-understanding" (Apel 1971 [1968]: 42; EN 340). If such a 'conversion' or 'translation' by means of self-reflection were impossible, then the objectification or objectivation of the conversation partner would have a completely different status (which already casts a blight on Apel's rhetoric: 'quasinatural event', 'manipulation', etc.). In this case, it would not be a hypothetical and ultimately empowering redescription and reconstruction, but a disempowering endeavour that would turn the acting subject into to an object of detached description and paternalistic guidance. Both would be fatal for psychoanalysis and critical theory alike, whose aims and methods fundamentally depend on relating to the addressees as reflexive agents (and emphatically not as judgemental dopes). For this reason, they will never be able to leave the participant perspective behind. They irreducibly remain forms of reflexive self-understanding (cf. Bernstein 1995: 76).

This revision of the status of theory, however, also changes the status of the theorist (and analyst). The latter turns from a "disengaged observer" into a "reflective participant" (Habermas 1985 [1967]: 208; EN 93).[70] Instead of being on principle superior to the agent, the theorist is at the same epistemic level, even if he does – at least temporarily – have a better view of the terrain. He owes his temporary superiority to his methodical view of the "object", which "distinguishes a reflective understanding from everyday communicative experience" (ibid.: 301; EN 167). But if theory is to avoid "the misunderstanding of itself as a science" (Habermas 1978 [1963]: 266; EN 238), it needs to assume that agents will at least be able to appropriate this methodological view. After all, facilitating this appropriation is exactly the aim of the theoretical intervention. The result is the seemingly paradoxical position

of critical social theory: "the vindicating superiority of those who do the enlightening over those who are to be enlightened is theoretically *unavoidable*, but at the same time it is *fictive* and requires self-correction: in a process of enlightenment there can *only* be *participants*" (Habermas 1978 [1971]: 45; EN 40; my emphasis). In the next section, I shall elaborate on this tension, which critical theory cannot resolve.

In keeping with the lessons learnt from ethnomethodology and the sociology of critique, if critical theory is to avoid the questionable dogma of the break and asymmetry, and if it seeks to hold onto its emancipatory ambition, it will have to consider agents capable of taking up different standpoints and of critically detaching themselves from their own situation by means of a change of perspective (cf. Bohman 2003: 92). Critical theory, too, is subject to the "principle of epistemic symmetry":

> Theorists try to understand their "subjects" or the cultural elements they are dealing with in a way not *principally* different from their attempts to understand other theorists or theories (empirical or normative). And the participants are able in principle to understand and criticize what the theorists have to say about them. There would be technical difficulties, of course, but there is no fundamental epistemological barrier. (Peters 1994: 108)

In contrast to the models discussed in part II, however, critical theory does systematically acknowledge a dual fact: that there exist "public standards of detachment" (Elias 1956: 228) which contain social paradigms of justification that not only enable but also restrict the agents' understanding of themselves and the world around them, as well as social conditions that obstruct the development and/or exercise of their reflexive capacities. These *limits of reflexivity* are fundamentally accessible to *second-order reflection*, and such reflection in turn is not a structural privilege of critical theory; if it is a privilege at all, then only a temporary one. For second-order reflection must be understood as a dimension of the first-order reflection performed by 'ordinary' agents.[71] In its role of *meta-theory*, the task of critical theory is to analyse the conditions of critique; in its role of *meta-critique*, its task is to criticise those conditions which obstruct social practices of justification and critique.

Critical theory thus combines two logics that usually (for instance by the approaches discussed in the first two parts of this book) are understood as mutually exclusive. On the one hand, it builds on a 'logic of competence', which brings to the fore the reflexive capacities of the agents and the practices of justification and critique that these capacities make possible. On the other, it takes into account a 'logic of obstruction', which focuses on the social conditions that systematically obstruct the development and exercise of

these competences. Only by combining these two logics in one approach can we do justice to both the problem and the ambition of critique, for "creating awareness of these obstructions, and thus the ability to deal with them, is not possible without self-reflection, and this very fact is the core of critical social science" (Bonß 1982: 415).[72]

6.3 Critical Theory and the Tension between the Logics of Competence and Obstruction

Naturally, an antithetical relation between the logics of competence and obstruction arises whenever critical theory diagnoses a structural reflexivity deficit on the part of the agents. This foregrounds a tension between two fundamental intuitions of critical theory that was implicit in the previous parts, and that I would now like to address explicitly. On the one hand, it is impossible to assess the validity or plausibility of a theory that aims at practical transformations without taking into account the agreement of its addressees, so that any such theory is necessarily bound to the agents' self-understanding. On the other hand, if a theory is rejected by its addressees, this cannot be the final criterion for its inadequacy. After all, there is always a possibility that the agents are prevented from appreciating the correctness of the theory by internal or external obstructions to their reflexive capacities and to the corresponding practices of self-understanding, and that they therefore reject it prematurely.[73] In order to understand why this tension does not drive critical theory to a fatal self-contradiction, we can draw on the distinction between definition and criterion widely employed in epistemology and philosophy of language. That the agreement of the addressees is the only possible *definition* of the validity of a theory (or of the critique that is derived from it) does not mean that it is a *criterion* that can be *operationalised* in practise or a definite test by which the theory (or the critique that is derived from it) can be validated.

A quick look at an admittedly controversial example from the debate on theories of truth may serve as an illustration. The view that truth can only be defined as the correspondence between assertions and states of affairs (between 'that p' and 'p', e.g. between 'snow is white' and snow being white) – in other words, that this constitutes the "essence" of truth – does not imply that it is possible in individual cases to assess the validity of an assertion by establishing whether the relevant state of affairs obtains. The correspondence theory of truth could be considered an adequate definition of truth even if it is unsuitable as a criterion or test for the verification of assertions.

By analogy, we could argue with regard to the verification or falsification of critical theory that, *on the one hand*, the adequacy or inadequacy of

a theory and the appropriateness of any critique derived from it consists in (that is: is defined as) the addressees' agreement or disagreement under certain conditions and with certain consequences. The question whether critical theory can be justified in holding onto its hypotheses if agents reject these even under ideal circumstances (however these are to be understood exactly) must therefore be answered in the negative. For if this option were open, this would require either an external normative criterion independent of the self-understanding of the agents or objective knowledge about what is good for them. Since such a criterion is not available to a reconstructive (and thus not constructivist) conception of critical theory, there seems to be no normative reference point and no authority apart from actual acceptance (albeit under specific circumstances). *On the other hand*, however, no actual acceptance or rejection forecloses the possibility that the assessment may have resulted from social conditions that would, from the agents' own perspective, disqualify it (for instance because the agents based their acceptance or rejection on a misjudgement of their own interests, or because not all those concerned were able to have a say).

Beyond the basic analogy with the distinction between definition and criterion in theories of truth, the case of critical theory differs from these in the sense that the insight that an actual rejection by the addressees is not a sufficient reason for giving up the theoretical hypotheses does not in and of itself point to an alternative criterion. Even the qualification of agreement as hypothetical agreement (for instance under certain ideal conditions) does not resolve this difficulty, for the addition 'hypothetical' does not mean anything more than that no individual act of acceptance suffices as a criterion. It does not provide an alternative positive criterion, which means that the problem has only been shifted. A purely hypothetical acceptance, moreover, would be out of the question as a corrective to theory – after all, it is only imagined by the theorist on the basis of her theory. For the same reason, it obviously could not have a transformative impact on actual agents. Both, the corrective to theory and the transformative power of theory, however, are vital to critical theory. Since there is no other criterion available, then, and since switching to hypothetical acceptance leads into the problems just discussed, only actual acceptance remains. Whatever its status in concrete cases may be, there is no other test for critical theory, no other possibility to validate its hypotheses. In other words:

> Without erasing the whole problem, we cannot simply use the familiar liberal phrases and just say that everyone is the "best judge of their own interests". For what is important is precisely that the definitions of interests, which are always subjective, are exposed to critique and debate. Unlike the well-known "last instances", however, whose hour never comes – since in the judgement of those

who have a monopoly on the truth, the persons in question will only be "sufficiently mature" when pigs fly – it must be said quite clearly that this autonomy of the last instance quite simply means nothing but the actual authority to decide whenever something is being decided. (Bader 1991: 149f)

This test and this verification, however, can never deliver a final judgement (and are therefore not criteria in a strict sense), but only ever 'prima facie reasons' for or against the hypotheses fed into the dialogue. While the acceptance of the addressees is necessary (in the sense that there is no alternative), then, their rejection in individual cases never suffices to settle the matter. The critic does not say: "I hope that the others will agree, or my critique will be mistaken" – but whether the critique is justified can only be determined by means of the acceptance of those 'concerned'.

Now my thesis is that this tension cannot be resolved – indeed, that it is constitutive for the methodological self-understanding of critical theory and essential for distinguishing it from other theoretical models. Against this background, the strategy of resolving the tension one way or another – "The theory must be wrong, since the people do not accept it" or "The people are even more deluded than we theorists thought" – without problematising this solution, will always indicate a failure of critical theory or the critical theorist. Critical theory will have to accept that this tension does not admit of being operationalised and resolved at a meta-theoretical and methodological level. It must, as the phrase goes, be 'borne'; or rather: critical theory must bear this tension at the theoretical level, but deal with it in practice.[74]

In the end, it is the mark of a 'good' critical theorist to show judgement, that is, to be able in concrete situations to decide situatively – without resolving the tension – whether in a particular instance the theoretical hypotheses ought to be revised or the diagnosis of delusion should be radicalised (or whether the dialogue with the addressees should be conducted in a different manner and with different theoretical tools). At this point, therefore, substantive psychoanalytical and social-scientific explanations come into play, aimed at individual or social obstructions and the dynamics of psychological or social processes, which may be inaccessible to the self-understanding of the agents at least in practice (albeit not on principle). These explanations also do not lead us out of the dynamics of dialogical verification onto the safe terrain of objective science. The shift in levels that is practiced by critical theory and that I described using the notions of 'meta-theory' and 'meta-critique' – that is, the problematisation of the conditions of acceptance or rejection of a theory by its addressees – does not mean that the dialogue is abandoned, and it does not constitute a shift to the level of objective science. Rather, it is to be understood as a further stage in the dialogical process that binds the theorists and addressees together in the model of critical theory, that keeps

confronting them with the possibility that their viewpoints cannot be made to coincide completely, and that thus stops to question its own position and the way it is conditioned.[75]

There is, then, no criterion for the validity of a theory but the acceptance of those involved, but this acceptance is itself subject to certain criteria. It must, for instance, occur under certain conditions, which in turn can only be reconstructed from the epistemic principles of the agents. Any actual acceptance can therefore be criticised as unsatisfactory on the basis of the conditions under which it occurred. Again, the question whether or to what extent these criteria are met in a particular case (or to what extent the proposed conditions are present or absent) cannot be decided monologically from the theoretical perspective, but must itself be part of the discourse. This circular structure is unavoidable as soon as critical theory gives up on a privileged insight into the interests of those involved that is independent of their own self-understanding. Any approach that refers to the agents' interests but believes it can do without any discussion with them would ultimately fall back into objectivistic conceptions of need interpretation. While such conceptions may be intuitively enlightening in more or less fabricated extreme cases, in practice they will hardly be applicable, and they conceal the political – because fundamentally contested – nature of need interpretation (Fraser 1989).

The methodological structure outlined here, which forms the foundation of critical theory, certainly does not take the critical sting out of it:

> The test – rather the farther down the road test, the last test, if there is such a thing – for what is acceptable or unacceptable should be what agents – the subjects of critical theory – reflectively find acceptable or unacceptable under ideal conditions. But along the way, critical theorists, who after all are agents too and subjects of their own theory, throw out "hypotheses", theories, or hunches about what is, after all, acceptable or unacceptable for the other agents reflectively to consider and reject or accept or modify. That's plain normative work. (Nielsen 1993: 386)

And this normative endeavour fundamentally consists in raising the question to what extent the conditions under which discursive exchanges take place may themselves be unacceptable. The point is not to establish a positive delineation of optimal or ideal conditions, for what these might be is far from clear. The point, rather, is a negative one: to identify deficient conditions that are unacceptable from the perspective of the agents themselves.

The demands on the verification or falsification of critical theories – or more precisely, of their "'hypotheses', theories, or hunches about what is, after all, acceptable or unacceptable for the other agents" – are not thus reduced, but interpreted in an extremely rigorous way. On Detel's view,

critical theories can only be considered confirmed if two conditions are met. First, their empirical hypotheses must be confirmed in the usual manner, for obviously, their self-description as 'critical' does not license them, as one of the stock polemics against critical theory never fails to assume, to randomly construct empirical hypotheses that are not subject to whatever is the accepted validation procedure. Second, critical theorists and their addressees must, "after concluding the emancipatory process", come to the non-coercive agreement that the description of the initial situation was correct, that the theory helped the agents orientate themselves in the transformation process and that the new situation is less repressive and may be stabilised (Detel 2007: 150f). Formulating the question of the possibility of a validation of the hypotheses produced by critical theory as a question of the possibility of their *ultimate* confirmation or dismissal, however, comes down to answering it in the negative. This becomes quite clear when the aspects of validation mentioned by Detel are considered more carefully. In the first instance, one is confronted with the problem that it is not so easy to isolate the empirical 'aspects' from the rest of the theory. Moreover, it is not evident when an emancipatory process can be considered 'concluded', for in the context of critical theories – just as in psychoanalysis – 'success' can hardly be understood as a objectifiable and operationalisable criterion that can mark the final conclusion of a process. As I explained above, the same holds for the agreement of the addressees (whether or not this is qualified as 'noncoercive'). And finally, the diagnosis of the new situation ('less repressive' and 'stable'), will, just like that of the old one ('repressive' and 'in need of transformation'), always present an opportunity for divergent interpretations and assessments, which cannot be excluded with reference to 'the facts' but will lead to an essentially normative conflict.

This seemingly negative result may invite the conclusion that critical theories cannot be validated at all, and that they should therefore be expelled from the domain of the social sciences and rational discourse and passed on to domains such as politics or ideology. That this would be rash, though, already follows from the distinction, common in the philosophy of science, between 'cannot be validated conclusively' and 'cannot be validated at all'. The fact that in the case of critical theories it cannot be said *with perfect certainty* whether a hypothesis should be considered true or false and whether it should thus be accepted or rejected, does not mean that in concrete cases there may not be good (empirical, normative, methodological, etc.) reasons in favour of or against holding onto that hypothesis. To ask for more, with an eye on the natural sciences and their methods of theory choice and validation, would come down not only to measuring critical social theory by standards that are foreign to its domain, but also to adhering to a flawed idea of the natural sciences that its own meta-theoretical self-reflection has long done away with.[76]

Not only does the bogey of '"anything goes" as method' ignore the normative logic of the exchange of reasons and the internal rationality of the dialogue both within a research community and between theorists and addressees, it would also deprive the empirically substantive hypotheses of critical theory of a chance to be systematically – and therefore also empirically – validated. Dialogue here acquires a kind of meta-status, for while weighing the reasons and empirical evidence in favour of or against holding onto reconstructive hypotheses belongs to the core business of the critical theorist, both the reasons and the empirical material can only be determined, exchanged and critically validated in a dialogue between theorists and addressees. There is no other authority, and in concrete cases, no single authority can count as 'final'.[77]

6.4 Critical Theory as Social Practice

We can now expand the project of a pragmatics of critique, discussed in part II in reference to the sociology of critique. There seems to be little reason to follow the latter in restricting the pragmatics of critique to everyday practices of critique. Rather, we should understand the different versions of critical theory themselves as specific forms of social practice – not only because most of their argumentative strategies can also be found in everyday critical discourses (at least in a rudimentary form), but also because critical social theory fundamentally understands itself as a specific form of practice that is anchored in and orientated towards everyday practice.[78] Just like Horkheimer argues in his 1937 essay, 'traditional' theories misunderstand themselves because they fail to appreciate their own status as theory; in other words: because they fail to reflect on the fact that they are anchored in and connected to social practice. Critical theory, in contrast, is characterised by a double reflexivity: it reflects both on the way and context in which it came to be and on the context in which it is used. That is to say, it reflects on the relation between theory and its addressees, who, in a way, are present in the theory in a twofold manner: both as objects (in the sense that they belong to the subject matter of the theory) and as subjects (in the sense that they are addressed as reflexive agents who are the only ones who can be trusted to carry out the transformation aimed for by the theory). It is precisely because of this reflexivity that critical theory is superior to traditional theory *qua theory* (cf. Menke 1997: section II).

Horkheimer, in addition, emphasises that it is necessary for theory to link in with a pre-scientific "consciously critical attitude" "which has society itself for its object" and expresses itself in a "conscious opposition" (Horkheimer 1988 [1937]: 203, 180f; EN 229, 206f). Critical theory's reflection on the

context in which it is used is fundamentally connected to this 'critical atti-
tude': as reflection on the conditions of reflection and thus as second-order
reflection, and as critique of the conditions of critique and thus as second-
order critique. From the very first moment, then, critical theory grounds its
claim to being *critical* not in a special kind of knowledge reserved only for
itself. Rather, this claim is based on two facts: first, that critical theory reflects
on the way it is embedded in pre-scientific practices and forms of self-
understanding, taking into account the contexts in which it emerged and is used,
and second, that in its attempts at reconstruction it is guided by the interest in
analysis, critique and the overcoming of obstacles that stems from practice.

   The perspective of such a 'pragmatics' of reflection and critique allows us
to better understand the methodological status of the argumentative modes
of critique that go beyond the model of reconstructive critique sketched
thus far. For the question arises how we are to categorise, methodologically
speaking, the analyses and diagnoses formulated in the context of critical
theories that say that we cannot expect any agreement of agents that will be
informative to theory, especially under conditions of complete and universal
delusion, of the culture industry's 'enlightenment as mass deception', or of
society as a 'closed system' in which people are 'surrounded from all sides'
and "conformism is drilled into them, sparing not even the most subtle parts
of their inner lives" (Adorno 2003 [1954]: 475f). The generalisation of such
diagnoses clearly invites the methodologically problematic conclusions that
I have already referred to and that someone like Marcuse (apparently without
any particular awareness of this problem) does draw:

> In the last analysis, the question of what are true and false needs must be
> answered by the individuals themselves, but only in the last analysis; that is, if
> and when they are free to give their own answer. As long as they are kept inca-
> pable of being autonomous, as long as they are indoctrinated and manipulated
> (down to their very instincts), their answer to this question cannot be taken as
> their own. (Marcuse 2002 [1964]: 8)

   What status can such diagnoses and their methodological implications
claim for themselves in the light of the issues discussed above? The answer
to this question consists of two parts. On the one hand, such generalised
assertions always ought to be met with a certain measure of scepticism,
since for different reasons (especially methodological and empirical ones),
which I have outlined at the end of part I of this book, they are untenable. In
particular, critical theory must assume that its addressees are responsive to
critique; they need to have at least some basic reflexivity that remains intact
even under unfavourable social conditions, and therefore must not be reduced
to 'amphibians' (cf. Horkheimer and Adorno 2004 [1947]: 43; EN 28). That

this does not mean that the conception of critical theory I argue for no longer accommodates this type of diagnosis, is clear from the second part of the answer: these theorems can be understood as elements of critical 'strategies' that critical theory uses to respond to particular situations. The question that arises is what type of situation requires the kind of critique formulated by thinkers such as Adorno and Marcuse. From the viewpoint of critical theory, such a situation may be one in which criticism of agents seems to remain inert or without effects, or in which the agents seem to forgo any kind of normative attitude towards the status quo – in other words, when the agents may suffer from structural reflexivity deficits and when the development or exercise of their reflexive capacities may be obstructed (which is how Adorno's analysis of the culture industry can be understood).

The way critical theory proceeds when facing such a situation has two aspects. On the one hand, it claims to describe the situation correctly or appropriately (for instance as an obstruction of reflexive capacities). On the other hand, and building on this diagnosis, it intervenes in the situation in the interest of a (re-)establishment of the conditions for reflection and critique. Meta-critical, theoretical and practical aspects are inextricably intertwined here, with the practically grounded and theoretically guided intervention only being in apparent contradiction to the meta-critical level. From the meta-theoretical and meta-critical perspectives, the proposed 'totalising' diagnoses and hypotheses of critical theory, which initially seem to contradict their methodological structure (as elaborated above), can be assigned a different status. They are to be understood as elements of a critical intervention in practice that in part needs to employ strategies such as an exaggerated and drastic rhetoric in order for its counter-intuitive redescriptions to achieve the desired practical effects – especially the activation and the facilitation of processes of self-reflection.[79] Adorno, too, knows that people are not 'amphibians', but he describes them as such in order to achieve a certain effect. From the perspective of a pragmatics of critique, these ways in which critique proceeds can be understood as moves that are immanent to practice, without being bound to a problematic paternalism as a consequence. For this reason, the point is not to challenge the legitimacy of certain varieties of critique that have been advocated in the history of critical theory, but to offer an alternative description of their methodological and epistemological status. The performative aspects of the theory will nevertheless have to be embedded in an argumentative exchange with the addressees, understood as reflexive agents, not as judgemental dopes. They can never replace this dialogue, lest theory ceases to be critical and becomes manipulation.

Even if the relatively formal conception of critical theory that I have developed here manages to convince, these last remarks already indicate that in order to reveal and produce reflective unacceptability in individual cases

– that is, in order to conduct social critique as a social practice – recourse to richer accounts of the relevant self-understanding and more substantial forms of critique will be indispensable. The meta-theoretical considerations – as well as the demand that the tension identified above be preserved – will remain sterile as long as they remain decoupled from concrete social and political questions and struggles as well as the corresponding sociological and empirical analyses. Critical theory, therefore, must leave the level of meta-theoretical reflection and meta-critical analysis behind, and join the 'struggles' (Marx's "Handgemenge") of critical practice. This cannot be the result of any special knowledge on the part of the critical theorist, but constitutes a practice that will always be particular to a certain context and is essentially political.[80] In closing, I shall show, by means of an example that is closely connected to empirical reality, that theories and methods of individual and collective self-enlightenment nevertheless play a constitutive role.

7. 'SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION' AND RECONSTRUCTIVE CRITIQUE

In order to lend some more substance and concreteness to my methodological considerations, which have thus far been rather abstract, I shall conclude my systematic remarks by sketching a research programme in social psychology. Not only does this programme supply reconstructive social critique with empirical material; it also can be understood as a form of reconstructive critique in its own right. In addition, it provides a theoretical vocabulary with which the phenomenon of ideology can be described, analysed and criticised without driving the approach into the methodological and political dead ends into which the orthodox critique of ideology and the scientistic programme of a critical social science discussed in part I manoeuvre themselves.

   'System justification theory', as the approach is called, starts from the following questions, which are central to the tradition of critical theory too. Why do the members of disadvantaged groups often display such positive attitudes towards the status quo and the representatives of the system? Why is 'out-group favouritism' – an implicit preference for the members of other groups with higher social status and a corresponding negative self-classification – so widespread among members of groups with low social status? Why do economically disadvantaged persons so often oppose redistributive policies and why do women so often accept disadvantaging gender stereotypes and conventional role allocations (cf. Jost, Banaji and Nosek 2004: 908; Kay et al. 2007)? From the perspective of system justification theory, the difficulty here is twofold. On the one hand, there is the problem of the *empirical* diagnosis that the vast majority of people not only accept the legitimacy of the status

quo, but even seem to defend it against critique and attempts at reforms or revolution, even when this is evidently not in their interest. On the other hand, there is the problem of a *theoretically* unsatisfactory but within the social sciences nevertheless widespread disjunction: either to consider the disadvantaged as rational agents who are kept from changing the social order in their favour only by collective action problems, or to understand them as ideologically deluded judgemental dopes who pose no threat to the status quo.[81]

On a very general level, system justification theory has two epistemological interests. First, why is the social, economic and political status quo ('the system')[82] cognitively and ideologically supported by those whose interests, individually or as a group, are so clearly in conflict with it? Which psychological mechanisms, which manners of thinking, feeling and acting are at work here? Second, which practical – that is, in particular: which psychological and social – consequences does such support for the status quo have, especially for the disadvantaged? This very pair of questions makes clear that the epistemological interests of system justification theory are not purely theoretical, but have an eminently practical significance at least for those 'concerned'. Evidently, there are many areas of overlap with the conception of critical theory that I have sketched in the previous sections.

In order to close in on an answer to the first question, system justification theory postulates a general psychological tendency to legitimate and rationalise the status quo (that is, the prevalent social, economic and political situation) – hence 'system justification'. Subsequently, it attempts to support this hypothesis with empirical evidence, which is partly experimental and partly stems from the analysis of existing data (cf. Jost and Banaji 1994: 2; Jost, Banaji and Nosek 2004: 887).

The meaning of 'system justification' can be clarified in more detail by distinguishing it from other psychological 'mechanisms' that have been studied extensively.[83] While 'ego justification' is the need to uphold a satisfactory image of oneself, which allows one to feel like a true, justified and legitimate individual, 'group justification' denotes a striving for a positive image of one's own group. The latter involves defending and justifying the conduct of other group members who are criticised by third parties and drawing on prejudice and stereotypes in doing so.

'System justification', correspondingly, is the social and psychological tendency to ascribe legitimacy to the status quo, and in particular the distribution of resources, power and social roles (to develop, in other words, what Weber (1980 [1921/1922]: 16; EN 31) calls a 'belief in its legitimacy'). This also involves conceiving of the status quo as fair, legitimate and justified or as natural and unavoidable, only because it exists.[84] Under these conditions, agents are most likely to overcome the tendency to justify the status quo when there are strong motives of ego and group justification – that is, interests of

the individuals and the group along with their corresponding normative self-images – that conflict with this idealisation (cf. Jost, Banaji and Nosek 2004: 887). In a less interest-centred vocabulary, this might be described as reflective unacceptability in the sense discussed above.

At least at first sight, it might be a surprising empirical fact that the tendency of system justification is particularly strong in disadvantaged groups and in societies with great social and economic inequality. Especially when they do not see any chance of improving their situation, agents apparently tend to rationalise it, to blame themselves for it, to adopt positive and negative stereotypes of dominant groups and to accept pseudo-explanations for their own powerlessness. As John T. Jost and his colleagues observe, those who suffer the most have the most to explain, justify and rationalise (cf. ibid.: 909). What these mechanisms have in common with the phenomena targeted by the critique of ideology is that they not only stabilise the status quo by legitimating it and shielding it from criticism, but also have a 'palliative' effect by reducing feelings of anxiety and guilt, cognitive dissonance and uncertainty. In fact, they have this effect on both privileged and disadvantaged members of society (cf. Jost and Hunyady 2002; Jost 1995: 400; Jost and Banaji 1994: 3, 11).[85]

At this point, I shall just mention a few sample hypotheses that have been formulated on the basis of system justification theory and can be empirically verified:[86]

- Both groups with higher social status and those with low status are frequently thought (by both sides) to 'deserve' their positions (for instance because their members are more (or less) intelligent and responsible). In this context, agents draw on stereotypes in order to rationalise social and economic differences between groups ('members of group *x* are poor because they are on average much more lazy, stupid, etc. than members of group *y'*).
- The existence of complementary stereotypes suggests that social inequality is compensated for by groups with low social status being ascribed positive qualities ('poor, but happy/honest, etc.'). Often, the assumption is that these qualities balance each other out, adding up to a kind of equilibrium in society at large, so that in the end everything is pretty fair and the "illusion of equality" can be maintained (cf. Kay et al. 2007).[87] The belief that the socially disadvantaged are more honest and virtuous and the romanticisation of their lives help both sides reduce their cognitive dissonance, which ensues from the observation of social inequality and the simultaneous belief in the fairness of the status quo.
- Agents tend to rationalise the anticipated status quo by judging events that are likely to happen as more desirable than those that are unlikely. Two

forms of this phenomenon have been identified: 'sweet lemons', when the originally rejected option is considered more and more desirable as the likelihood of it materialising increases, and 'sour grapes', when the originally preferred option is considered less and less desirable as it becomes less likely.

- Members of disadvantaged groups are disposed to accept pseudo-explanations for differences in status and power, and thus develop a more positive assessment of their situation than is appropriate.
- Members of disadvantaged groups tend towards 'outgroup favouritism', while members of advantaged groups tend towards 'ingroup favouritism'. The former display a weakened sense of their own legitimate claims (a 'depressed sense of entitlement'); that is, they internalise the social inequalities and adapt their claims and expectations to the status quo (this is similar to the phenomenon of 'adapted preferences').

The social psychology research programme of system justification theory is of great interest to critical social theory for two reasons. First, it manages to operationalise the notoriously vague notions of ideology and false consciousness. As such, its operationalisations can be used to formulate empirically testable hypotheses that can refer to concrete social practices, institutions and forms of self-understanding, and thus avoid the dogmas of totality and functionalism. Second, it involves an emancipatory knowledge interest, in the sense that system justification theory can itself be understood as a kind of reconstructive critique. The theory can be understood as reconstructive critique because it confronts agents with largely implicit and unconscious psychological 'mechanisms', and thus at least potentially produces reflective unacceptability and triggers a reflexive process and corresponding changes in self-understanding, which in turn are preconditions for social and political transformations (cf. Jost et al. 2003: 32).

This brings me to the second question addressed by system justification theory: the question of the negative impact of 'system justification', especially on disadvantaged individuals and groups. Even if people are evidently psychologically attached to the status quo, these attachments and the underlying psychological dispositions towards identification with the status quo can entail serious disadvantages for them. Obviously, these disadvantages largely must be borne by those affected themselves, for instance in the form of lower self-esteem and depressions, neuroses and other psychopathologies. In combination with a weakened sense of one's legitimate claims, these issues will in turn result in substantial material disadvantages. The agents' awareness of the material and symbolical disadvantages they must bear and the psychological 'mechanisms' that motivate them to do so will not leave them indifferent, but will prompt a process of reflection that will ultimately have

practical consequences as well (or that is the hope – one without which the whole endeavour of reconstructive critique would be meaningless). If it can be shown that and how psychological tendencies operate in individual cases, there is at least the possibility that this will bring a corresponding change of attitude on the part of the agents in its train. Only when agents recognise which psychological processes underlie some of their beliefs, only when there has been a corresponding cognitive transformation, can they apply themselves to the practical transformation of the political and social situation.

The concrete critical use of system justification theory can be clarified in more detail by considering how the impact of Hurricane Katrina (2005) was dealt with in psychological and social terms (cf. Napier et al. 2006). Local and state governments and the federal government all massively failed to provide assistance to the mostly poor and black people of New Orleans. With respect to this 'system failure', it may be little wonder that the political elite, but also many journalists and citizens from other parts of the country, employed (conscious or unconscious) strategies of victim-blaming in order to shield the system from blame. But even many (though certainly not all) reactions of those affected showed a tendency to protect the system from criticism and to place the blame elsewhere – especially on themselves. This can happen in numerous fashions, for instance by invoking personal responsibility ('If only we had fled at the first warning'), through distorted memories (for instance of widespread violence that supposedly came from those who were to be evacuated themselves and that then was turned into an explanation for the minimal and chaotic rescue efforts)[88] or in the form of a weakened sense of one's legitimate claims (which manifests, for instance, in the fact that even the disadvantaged did not consider it unfair that the well-off neighbourhoods saw much more elaborate rescue efforts much sooner).

From the perspective of system justification theory and its practical significance, what is decisive is that those affected are not passive victims of these psychological mechanisms but are capable of adopting a different attitude towards them, changing their own ways of thinking and acting. This, however, will be possible for them only if they develop a deeper understanding of the relation between the social and political context, the interpretive models available in their culture and their own attitudes and conduct. Exactly this is where theory can help. It can establish the project of the critique of ideology on the empirical ground of social psychology, and at the same time engage in a dialogue with its addressees (cf. Jost et al. 2008). As system justification theory shows, critique will have to operate at various levels and take into account epistemological, functional, normative and genetic aspects, for the problems it analyses involve false beliefs (for instance about the 'natural' properties of certain groups), structures of disadvantage that contribute to the legitimation and stabilisation of these beliefs, and social conditions that lead

to structural reflexivity deficits and second-order 'pathologies' (cf. Shelby 2003, especially 184; Geuss 1981). This 'multidimensionality' of critique, in turn, means that critical theory – in keeping with its tradition – will have to go beyond its own theoretical resources, and take into account both social practices of critique and the results of empirical social research.

NOTES

1. In the context of this study, I am only concerned with forms of critique that are grounded in the *social sciences*. I shall refrain from discussing the attempts, dominant in the philosophical debate, of moral philosophy and theories of justice to justify external standards, even though they do face at least some of the objections to external critique I discuss here. The same holds for internal critique.

2. Cf. the critique of the idea of the 'illumination of the masses' in Foucault (2001 [1972], especially 1176–78; EN 207–9). According to Foucault, the problem is that the knowledge and discourse of the "masses" are structurally invalidated. As in the case of prisoners and their theories, the masses must first and foremost be given a chance to be heard: "And when the prisoners began to speak, they possessed an individual theory of prisons, the penal system, and justice" (ibid.: 1178; EN 209).

3. As I emphasised at the end of part I, I do not consider Bourdieu's theory to be paternalistic in this sense. On its own terms, however, it can hardly offer any opposition to paternalism and may actually be instrumentalised by it.

4. As examples of such forms of critique, suffice it to mention films such as Ousmane Sembène's *Moolaadé* (2004) and Abderrahmane Sissako's *Bamako* (2006).

5. Cf. Spivak's classical critique of the position of the external critic in Spivak (1988). At this point, it is often objected that such reservations are entirely unnecessary in the case of, for example, an external critique of Nazi gangs. This is certainly true, but the question is whether the preconditions for critique – in whatever form – are met in those instances in the first place.

6. For a more elaborate discussion of the limitations of internal critique cf. Jaeggi (2013: part III).

7. In adopting internal critique, the sociology of critique does justice to this context-dependency inasmuch as it distinguishes between 'reformist' and 'radical' critique; cf. part II, section 3.3. Still, Boltanski and Thévenot adhere to a model of internal critique inspired by Walzer in order to distinguish their approach both from all forms of external critique and, most importantly, from Bourdieu's critical social science.

8. Also cf. Heinich (1998: 69): "Sociology will also have to concern itself with the unequally distributed capacities of agents for relativising, for distancing themselves from certain values and for accepting their plurality [as well as with] the relativity of opportunities to relativise". In Dubet (2006: 42; EN 21), we read: "Instead of judging in its entirety a social situation that is considered unjust, let us examine the agents' opinion of the justice of their situation and the world they live in. There is no need for us to substitute our critical faculties (*capacité critique*) for those of our subjects, which are largely sufficient (*largement suffisante*), nor should we assume that

workers are misguided or alienated when they fail to meet our expectations". What, though, does "*largement suffisante*" mean here, and what happens when the "*capacité critique*" for once is not "sufficient"? Incidentally: the idea of 'critical capacities' is somewhat misleading. It would seem better to speak of reflexive capacities that are actualised in practices of critique.

9. Cf., for instance, Thompson (1990: 60ff); Jaeggi (2009). Bader (1991: 140) summarises the problem, in the context of the critique of interests, as follows: "For at least four reasons, emancipatory social movements and critical social science cannot do without a critique of the subjective interests of those who are negatively privileged. First, in societies with structural inequalities, the dominant cognitive and normative interpretations and interpretive models, which play a role in any determination of interests, are not interest-free, and it is necessary to reckon with the possibility of 'necessary false consciousness'. Second, the information that is relevant to the definition of the situation is systematically distorted, and the opportunities for acquiring information are unequal. Third, in practice, the circumstances of communication are systematically distorted, even when the freedom of political communication is legally safeguarded. Fourth, one has to reckon that those who are negatively privileged have internalised their exploitation, subordination, discrimination and exclusion. Under these conditions, the liberal formula that everyone knows best what his or her own interests are is equivalent to a systematic concealment of structural inequalities, and either consciously (and cynically) or at least unconsciously and unintentionally reinforces the status quo".

10. That the attribution of such capacities is an irreducible aspect of the way in which we interpret events as actions also follows from Daniel Dennett's analysis of the intentional stance (cf., for instance, Detel 2007: 13). The theoretical attributions, in those cases, follow the everyday mutual ascriptions by agents. Cf. part II, sections 3.1 and 3.2.

11. Another way of putting this is that we have a (second-order) capacity to develop (first-order) abilities. Or we could, with Ryle (1984 [1949]: 129), speak of the "capacity to acquire capacities by being taught". Also cf. Tully (1993 [1988]: 244): "Abilities presuppose capacities that they realize or set in motion. To have acquired an ability is to be able to engage in a range of thought and action, to participate in a practice with others. The acquisition and exercise of abilities, therefore, involves the training and education of mental and physical capacities over time in rule-governed activities until the exercise of abilities becomes more or less customary".

12. Cf. Dewey (1893: 655), as well as the discussion of this idea in Markell (2007). The empirical objection to a theory like Bourdieu's, discussed in part I, section 4.4, already points in this direction.

13. Cf. Boltanski and Bourdieu (1975: 14), as well as Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) on the educational conditions of the development and exercise of reflexive capacities and their unequal distribution. In this respect, the sociology of critique falls short of what Bourdieu achieved in his analysis.

14. Both forms of critique, of course, have long histories, and can be traced back at least to Rousseau, who attempts in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* to reveal the contingency of the conditions that contribute to the degradation of human capacities and the distortion of one's awareness of one's own interests and needs.

15. On this point, also cf. Cooke (2006: chapter 1). The notion of 'transformation' is slightly unfortunate, since it carries connotations of 'activism', while transformation in this context is – as will become clear – emphatically not a cognitive process that is directly externally induced, but a process of self-transformation (that can, under certain circumstances, be set in motion from outside). For a convincing plea in favour of a much more 'activist' conception of critique, cf. Saar (2007: 338f, 342).

16. MacIntyre (2006 [1999]) argues that certain social structures and forms of self-understanding should be understood as conditions of the capacity for moral agency. Among these is the capacity to question the social and cultural norms that normally guide action in certain contexts.

17. For an account of this "personal experience of subpersonhood" and its consequences, see Mills (1998 [1994]).

18. In France, Dejour's interpretation of the research results – and in particular his vocabulary, including the notion "banalisation of evil", an allusion to Hannah Arendt – has led to an intense debate about the appropriateness of comparing today's circumstances to National Socialism. The significance of the results, though, is not affected by this.

19. The existence of exploitative labour conditions in which those affected can no longer shift back and forth between different worlds of action is also emphasised by Boltanski and Chiapello (1999).

20. Similar findings are described in Dubet (2006). Impressive in a literary sense is the 'thick description' of Linhart's 'experiment on himself' (in which he, a critical intellectual, works for nine months in a factory) (Linhart 1981 [1978]).

21. For a similar formulation of this dilemma, cf. Bader (2007: 258f), who aptly speaks of an "incapacitation trap" (ibid.: note 60), against which critical theory will have to be on guard.

22. Some proponents of deliberative democracy recognise this problem and discuss it as the unequal distribution of deliberative capacities and discursive power, and under the heading "political poverty"; cf., for instance, Bohman (1997).

23. In its use by Hamann, Herder and later by Adorno, the term 'meta-critique' has a double meaning: critique of critique (especially of the Kantian *Critique of Pure Reason*) and identification of the conditions of critique (or of pure reason). Here, I use the term in the sense of a critical (but not transcendental) analysis of the (social) conditions of (the success and failure of) critique.

24. Cf. Boltanski et al. (2006: 51); Boltanski (2006a). Boltanski and Thévenot (1991: EN 234) speak of "the ability to open and close one's eyes, to let oneself be caught up in the nature of the situation or to avoid doing so". Of course the question, then, is whether agents – as the citation suggests – are always free to do this.

25. As I indicated above, the critical role of sociology has come to the fore in Boltanski's recent work, cf. especially Boltanski (2008e); Boltanski and Honneth (2009).

26. Cf. Honneth (2007 [2004]: 41; EN 30): critical theory "must couple the critique of social injustice with an explanation of the processes that obscure that injustice. For only when one can convince the addressees by means of such an explanatory analysis that they can be deceived about the real character of their social conditions can the wrongfulness of those conditions be publicly demonstrated with some prospect of

their being accepted". Which theoretical resources are to provide critical theory with its explicative power and what the status of these resources is will have to be clarified in more detail, but the necessity of these clarifications unavoidably binds critical theory to empirical social research.

27. The critique that Adorno here calls "immanent" would be more appropriately described as "internal", since the notion of "immanent critique" can also be understood as an attempt to overcome the very dichotomy of 'internal' and 'external' (cf. Jaeggi 2013: part III; Stahl 2013a, 2013b).

28. Cf. Honneth (2003 [1992]: 334f; EN 513f). On page 340 [EN 517], he writes: "[S]ocial criticism reconstructs the norms of recognition that are already implicit in the ways in which people in that society respond to one another's evaluative qualities, in order to make clear, *in the exchange with its addressees*, the extent to which their de facto practices and social order contradict their implicitly practised ideals" (my emphasis). As I shall articulate a bit further down, however, I doubt that Honneth's understanding of reconstruction really is sufficiently dialogical. On the complex relationship between a social critique that does not proceed in a purely constructivist manner and the experiences of agents, cf. Rössler (2008). A standard work regarding the role of experiences of injustice for critical theory is Renault (2004).

29. Habermas here draws on Freud (1999 [1937], especially page 45; EN 259), where Freud speaks of the "work of construction, or, if it is preferred, of reconstruction". Freud argues that 'construction' is more appropriate than 'interpretation' (cf. ibid.: 47; EN 261). It is no slip, then, that Habermas in this passage shifts back and forth between 'reconstruction' and 'construction'.

30. My emphases. Also compare this passage from a much later text, in which we find Habermas looking back in a particularly detached manner: "It is necessary to distinguish between the critical act of dissolving instances of self-deception that also constrain the experiencing subject himself in his epistemological achievements, and making explicit the intuitive knowledge that renders our normal acts of speaking, acting and knowing possible in the first place. The study of the conditioned nature of things that are first and foremost known naively branches out into different directions. Clearly, the analytic liberation from self-generated pseudo-objectivities requires a different procedure from the rational reconstruction of general yet implicit knowledge about how one speaks a language, performs an action or makes a judgement" (Habermas 2000a: 14).

31. Cf. Habermas (1984 [1976]: 353; EN 1): "The task of universal pragmatics is to identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible understanding".

32. Also cf. the distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' notions of reconstruction in Kauppinen (2002: 484f).

33. In particular, cf. Habermas (1984 [1974]). A further debate would now be needed to show why the critique of these communicative pathologies does not require a formal-pragmatic foundation and can always be achieved in the concrete contexts at hand, in which alone the distinction between 'consensus' and 'pseudo-consensus' can be made.

34. This kind of critique has been raised from several sides; cf., for example, the exchange between Habermas (2000b) and Rorty (2000). That

Habermas's understanding of reconstruction is rife with tensions between its 'quasi-transcendental', empirical and normative dimensions is emphasised in Peters (1994: especially 118f).

35. For a plea against universal pragmatics and in favour of historical-sociological pragmatics, see, for instance, Tully (1999; 1988: 19ff). Rorty's critique of Habermas also tends in this direction (cf. Rorty 2000).

36. The vocabulary of psychoanalysis can be understood as an aspect of this 'self-misunderstanding', insofar as concepts such as 'force', 'mechanism', 'energy' and 'structure' play a fundamental role in it. However, this vocabulary usually remains at the meta-psychological level and has almost no significance in Freud's 'technical works'. For in the analytic situation, in which identifying instances of denial and addressing the analysand as an agent are central, this vocabulary would soon come up against its limits. Cf. Schafer (1981 [1976]) for a critique of such a 'mechanistic' vocabulary and a plea for an action-theoretical reformulation of psychoanalysis.

37. Two further reservations must be made: for reasons of competence and space, the interpretation of the psychoanalytic situation will rest on a few select authors. In addition, certain fundamental features of the psychoanalytic method – such as 'free association' and 'evenly suspended attention' – will be ignored altogether, since they are irrelevant for the methodological analogy I have in mind.

38. Also cf. ibid. (61): "We help others come to better understand themselves, but how they go on with that better understanding is up to them".

39. This conception of autonomy, then, is a non-perfectionist one. This could be spelled out in reference to Harry Frankfurt's multilevel model of desire and the notion of identification, or in reference to the notion of appropriation; for the moment, though, the point for me is just to indicate a very general direction. Cf. Honneth (2007 [2006]) and Jaeggi (2005: part III). It cannot be denied, however, that psychoanalysis itself is characterised by a certain tension between its formal orientation towards self-determination and its substantive, perhaps even perfectionist ideas about what constitutes a 'functional' personality and a successful life.

40. Also cf. Freud (1999 [1919]), where he emphasises that the analyst can offer "only" an analysis (including the dissolution of false syntheses and compromises); the synthesis must be left to the analysand.

41. To use a piece of socio-pedagogical jargon, what I am advocating here is to 'help people help themselves'. Of course, such a formulation also highlights the possibility that psychoanalysis turns ideological. It is, however, psychoanalysis itself that has the best instruments to counter its own ideologisation.

42. In contrast, compare the distinction – misleading in this respect – between the role of the critical theorist as a "co-actor" and that of the analyst as an "adviser" in Giegel (2000: 69). The analyst always is a co-actor, even if she often remains silent and "merely" listens. Cf., for instance, Schafer (1992: xv), and (1992: 189), where he speaks of "spoken and unspoken dialogue". Freud himself apparently did not interpret and use the so-called rule of abstinence in his own analyses as rigidly as some of his successors suggest; cf. Pohlen (2006). On the essentially transformative and self-reflexive character of the psychoanalytical dialogue, also cf. Schafer (1992: 156, 161); Lear (2006).

43. Cf. Lorenzer (1973 [1970]: 241): "The starting point of a psychoanalysis, however, is also its trajectory and its goal: the freedom of reflection of the individual, who simultaneously wants to occupy and understand his place in the field of his social interactions".

44. On the distinction between the legislative and the interpretive stance, cf. Bauman (1992: chapter 5). Even if one agrees with Bauman's critique of the legislative stance, this does not mean that one must share his conclusions: "In defiance of the modern strategy, postmodern (interpretive) sociology refuses to adjudicate on the matter of lay knowledge and in particular refrains from the task of 'correcting' common sense" (ibid.: 133). This contrast and the plea for a sociology that refrains from judgement are misleading even if just for the fact that they paint a far too static picture of the relation between theory and common sense. These two stances engage in a multifarious process of mutual exchange and are therefore perfectly capable of correcting each other.

45. On the relationship (i.e., mutual dependency) between experience and theory in psychoanalysis, also cf. Lear (2003: 16f).

46. Schafer here draws on the Freudian idea that the analyst's interpretation constitutes a sort of translation that establishes a relation between manifest and latent meanings.

47. On the methodological and epistemological meaning of the working alliance, also cf. Fischer (1996: chapter 3.1).

48. Cf. Schafer (1980: 65): "The designation *analysand* is to be preferred over the far more familiar designation *patient*. The word *patient*, which was usually used by Freud, manifests another of his self-misunderstandings. For what Freud showed, perhaps above anything else, is that, strictly speaking, neurotic persons are not diseased and thus are not to be understood as passive sufferers or victims, as the conventional use of the word *patient* instructs us to do".

49. Once again, it can hardly be denied that Freud's case studies often read differently.

50. Cf. Bernstein (1995: 69f). Illustrative is a joke that Slavoj Žižek likes to repeat, in which the analysand in one session claims that he has finally understood that he is not a grain of wheat, only to return the next session in a petrified state reporting that he has met a chicken. When the analyst shows himself surprised, the analysand explains that while of course *he* knows he is not a grain of wheat, there is no way to be sure that the chicken does as well.

51. Detel, though, focuses the entire section on Freud almost exclusively on the substantive aspects of psychoanalysis and disregards its methodological problems.

52. Cf. Freud (1999 [1937]: 52; EN 265): the direct statements of the patient "are rarely unambiguous and give no opportunity for a final judgement. Only the further course of the analysis enables us to decide whether our constructions are correct or unserviceable". Fischer (1996: chapter 3.2.1) describes the psychoanalytic change as a dialectic process of unfolding, experience and processing as well as the resolution of contradictions.

53. Cf. Schafer (1992: 182): "Psychoanalytic claims about what is being said and why (insofar as these are distinguishable) are essentially contestable". Interpretations

can be fundamentally disputed not only between analyst and analysand but also between analysts of different schools. In both cases, the analyst must understand this as a problem and cannot afford to simply ignore it.

54. Given the current situation in the public health services, the fact that such qualitative changes do not admit of being measured quantitatively or described in a purely observational language puts psychoanalysis under enormous pressure to provide alternative evidence of the success of its treatments.

55. Also cf. Bonß (1982: 413): "For in relation to the image of the therapeutic situation, the place of the critical theorist corresponds to that of the analyst, who offers explanatory models that arise from his own self-reflection and are translated by means of an objectifying stance into structural models of social development and social pathologies. These offers of interpretation can only come to have a practical impact when the 'patient', that is, the theory's addressee, becomes aware of his suffering to such an extent that he comes to desire change and enlightenment and enters the process of self-reflection for himself ".

56. Schafer (1992: chapter 14) criticises the concept of resistance along these lines, and pleads for it to be replaced by an analysis of transference/countertransference. This, he argues, is the only way to leave open what part analyst and analysand play in the problems at hand. The idea of resistance would positively invite a hermeneutics of suspicion. Adolf Grünbaum (1984) – one of psychoanalysis' harshest critics – goes so far as to consider the clinical data from psychoanalytic practice unusable in toto, since all of it could be the product of mere suggestion by the analyst. A convincing retort to this objection can be found in Sachs (1989: especially section III). As Sachs emphasises, not only did Freud advocate a much more complex perspective on the clinical situation, he was also able to draw on other evidence to ground his insights. Also cf. Freud (1999 [1937]).

57. One only needs to call to mind the problem of 'revealed preferences' that confronts rational choice theory.

58. That these considerations do not fully solve either of these problems will become clearer later, when I discuss a number of methodological tensions to which critical theory is subject. Naturally, the controversial nature of the content of concrete hypotheses is not affected by these methodological remarks.

59. Gadamer (1991 [1967]: 249f; EN 290f; 1991 [1971]: 269), for instance, argues that psychoanalysis necessarily involves an asymmetrical doctor-patient relation, and that it is therefore not a model that can be generalised beyond the limited context of the treatment of illness. If the social critic were to take up the role of an expert who sees through social blindness, he contends, there would be a threat of elitism and authoritarianism, and of society being silenced.

60. This is why the 'normative uncertainty' regarding the question 'what is to be done?' – we simply know too little about the available options, how we can achieve them and their consequences – is not an objection to psychoanalysis or critical theory (cf. Giegel 2000: 55, 64f). For answering these questions is the task of the relevant practice; theory can 'only' help to ask them, to bring possible answers to mind and to clarify some of their implications.

61. Cf. the *locus classicus* of this theory in Festinger (1957, especially chapter 1). Festinger, however, points out that it is also possible to 'change' one's knowledge by adjusting one's beliefs to one's conduct.

62. Honneth (2007 [2004]: 52f; EN 39) argues "that the pathology of social rationality leads to cases of impairment that frequently manifest themselves in the painful experience of the loss of rational capacities. [. . .] Because their self-actualization is tied to the presupposition of cooperative rational activity, they [i.e., those concerned] cannot avoid suffering psychologically under its deformation". This also implies that any critical social theory will have to combine normative, descriptive and explanatory elements (also cf. Benhabib 1986: 142, 226, 349f). The explanatory element may be the least developed aspect of contemporary approaches within critical theory, but it still plays a central role in its demarcation from social critique grounded in moral philosophy.

63. This assumption runs through critical social theory from Marx via Adorno to Bourdieu. Cf. Rosen (1996). Of course, their work contains passages in which they controvert this simplified presentation. Within the Marxist debate, this problem – to simplify once more – is expressed in the question whether the revolution is the result of a radical change in the relations of production that (analogously to natural historical processes) takes place independently of political practice, or whether it could be advanced by means of a political practice that is informed by the right theory. But Horkheimer (1988 [1937]: 196; EN 222, translation adjusted) already emphasises that the critical theorist is not a "social diagnostician" who deals with concrete historical agents and "assign[s] them their standpoint". And Honneth (2000a [1994]: 88f; EN 63f) characterises "this particular form of normative critique" as one that "can also inform us about the pre-theoretical resource in which its own critical viewpoint is anchored extratheoretically as an empirical interest or moral experience". As I argued above, this form of critique can be called reconstructive because it takes its start from the reconstruction of these interests and this experience and remains bound to both.

64. Thompson adds that ideology is always "meaning in the service of power" (also cf. ibid.: 56, 293), and distinguishes five modes in which ideological meaning can function: legitimation, dissimilation, unification, fragmentation and reification (also cf. ibid.: 60ff). As Bernard Williams (2002: 34f) observes, functionalist explanations can play a critical role even (or in fact especially) when they are capable of showing the function of a factor that had not yet been generally recognised as functional.

65. Cf. Wellmer (1977 [1969]: 42; EN 41): critical theory is "subjected to a double standard of measurement: it exists only by virtue of the reflective recognition of those 'who speak and act for it', and it can prove itself only in successful social practice which erodes a fraction of actual constraint. In other words: the diagnosis that it offers to society, and its outline of future practice, can prove themselves ultimately only in the free acknowledgement of those individuals who have experienced as real freedom an alteration of society deriving from this theory".

66. Also cf. Horkheimer (1988 [1935]: 293; EN 190): "The verification and corroboration of ideas relating to humanity and society, however, consist not merely in

laboratory experiments or the examination of documents, but in historical struggles in which conviction itself plays an essential role".

67. That what is at stake in such situations is exclusively – or primarily – causal explanation can of course be doubted.

68. Cf. Cooke (2006: chapter 6, as well as ibid.: 196): "[Critical social theory] is a model of social analysis whose normatively guided descriptions of the deficits of a particular social order, and normatively guided explanations of how these deficits are distributed and reproduced, are not empirically verifiable propositions; rather they take the form of claims to validity that, like the theory's guiding ideas of the good society, are subject to assessment in public processes of inclusive, open-ended, and fair argumentation in a suitably historicist, comparative, and concrete manner". The difficult question when, where and how agents can become participants in such discourses, in which critical social theory sets cognitive self-transformation in motion, still lacks convincing answers (and I will not be able to provide them here either; but regarding the possible institutionalisation of such second-order reflection in the institutions of deliberative democracy, cf. Strecker 2009: chapter 6).

69. Alcoff distinguishes three types of ignorance that result from the situatedness of knowers, the influence of group identities on experiential and motivational structures and the existence of repressive systems. From the fact that subjects are exposed to these factors to varying degrees, it follows that they are in this sense "not epistemically equal". This inequality, however, ought not to be "naturalised", but must be understood as socially conditioned, so that those affected may reflect on it and transform it.

70. Also cf. McCarthy (1994: 81): "The key to avoiding both a pure 'insider's' or participant's standpoint and a pure 'outsider's' or observer's standpoint is, I have suggested, to adopt the perspective of a critical-reflective participant. As there is no God's-eye point of view available to us, we can do no better than move back and forth between the different standpoints, playing one off against the other".

71. This awareness may not entirely avoid, but certainly does significantly diminish the danger of epistemological and ethical authoritarianism associated with the idea of a standpoint outside the historical and social context that could guarantee the validity of the theoretical descriptions, interpretations and assessments of critical theory. Cf. Cooke (2005). MacIntyre (1973) was an early critic of the "epistemological self-righteousness" of theory and the corresponding "ideology of expertise".

72. Bonß adds that critical theory, however, can "ultimately only fulfil its own critical ambition when it goes beyond developing [formal-pragmatic] reconstructions and upholds psychoanalysis as a point of reference in reformulating the primacy of critique as a primacy of self-reflection".

73. This idea would have to be spelled out in a plausible way by both psychoanalysis and critical theory. Of course, the tension mentioned above has been recognised by a number of critical theorists; only cf. Horkheimer (1988 [1935]: 297f, 302f, 305; EN 193f, 197f, 200): "The concept of corroboration as the criterion of truth must not be interpreted so simply. The truth is a moment of the correct practice. But whoever identifies it directly with success passes over history and makes himself an apologist for the reality dominant at any given time".

74. This, however, means more than that critical theory must simply make a virtue out of the necessity of a lack of scientific verifiability. The point, rather, is to establish a different conception of verifiability.

75. This is one of the central methodological points of the work of James Tully (cf. Tully 2002; 2004).

76. On factors of theory choice that go beyond logic and evidence, and because of which in many cases no definite judgement of hypotheses or theories can be made, only cf. Carrier (2006).

77. To make a slogan out of it, what is at issue here are 'grounds without bedrock', or 'justification without ultimate justification'.

78. Such a pragmatics of critique raises similar questions as those asked by Michael Walzer (1993 [1987]: vii, ibid.: 21) in delineating his "understanding [of] social criticism as a social practice": "What do social critics do? How do they go about doing it? Where do their principles come from? How do critics establish their distance from the people and institutions they criticize?" The version I argue for, however, would answer these questions differently than Walzer does. I propose a conception of social critique as social practice that neither assumes a rigid distinction between social critics and 'ordinary' agents, nor considers the 'interpretation' of existing norms the only practicable alternative to the "efforts at escape" of "discovery" (of objective truths) and "invention" (in the context of rational action), or claims that social critique can easily do "without 'critical theory' ".

79. Cf. Saar (2007, especially chapters 3.3 and 7.2; 2008). Saar makes clear, moreover, that the strategic character of critical interventions ought not to be understood as if 'it all wasn't meant like that'.

80. Cf. Pollmann (2005: 30): "What must be avoided, then, is the therapeutic self-misunderstanding that social philosophy holds 'consultation hours' even when it comes to matters of treatment. Although social critics have the opportunity to introduce their diagnoses in the public discourse, the sociopolitical space they thus enter must not be mistaken for the consultation room of a physician or therapist. Not least because of the logic of democratic decision-making processes, the social diagnostician is deprived of any (narrowly understood) therapeutic instruments".

81. Cf. Jost, Banaji and Nosek (2004). For a comparison of the two answers and a plea for the first, see Heath (2000) and Kelly (2004).

82. Of course, 'the system' – that is, the social, economic and political order – consists of a number of levels, which do not necessarily add up to a homogeneous whole (but rather, as the pluralist perspective of the sociology of critique suggests, potentially conflicting orders of justification). In individual cases, it will therefore always be necessary to indicate what is the level or aspect of 'the system' at issue.

83. Here, I am adopting a manner of speaking that is common in experimental social psychology, but that certainly could be problematised from a meta-theoretical perspective.

84. In this respect, there is clear overlap with 'just world theory' and its assumption that there is a fundamental need to view the world as just (or at least not as overly unjust). Cf. the *locus classicus* of this idea in Lerner (1980).

85. On the authors' view, this is a form of false consciousness in the sense that these convictions do not correspond to reality, are at odds with the interests of the agents and contribute to the reproduction of their disadvantage.

86. These and numerous other hypotheses can be found together with empirical evidence in Jost, Banaji and Nosek (2004: 889ff).

87. A further example are gender stereotypes that suggest that men are simply better suited to the public social roles they occupy than women, who for their part are much more suitable for the household roles envisaged for them.

88. The media, too, reported rapes, shootings and looting, and even claimed that rescue helicopters were unable to land because they were being shot at. In the vast majority of cases these rumours, widespread among the victims on the ground as well, in retrospect turned out to be just that: rumours.

Conclusion

In this book, I have pursued three goals. First, to identify the normative, methodological and empirical problems that result from the orthodox model of critical social science that is based on a break with the participant perspective. Second, to reveal the complexity and theoretical relevance of the reflexive capacities of agents and the social practices of justification and critique. Third, to sketch a notion of critical theory after the pragmatic turn, which understands itself as a particular instantiation of the social practice of critique, refrains from claiming an epistemically privileged position and correspondingly does not proceed on the basis of a break with everyday practices of justification and critique, but maintains a close connection with them. I have called this model 'reconstructive critique', in order to distinguish it from external critique as advocated by the critical social science of Bourdieu and his followers, and from internal critique as sketched with reference to the sociology of critique.

The proposed model of critique is critical and emancipatory in a twofold sense: on the basis of its aims and on the basis of the way it proceeds (or, its methods). As I have made clear by the example of psychoanalysis, these dimensions belong together and condition each other. The aims of reconstructive critique are critical and emancipatory: to enable reflection and critique and thus to empower 'ordinary' agents. This meta-theoretical determination precludes any form of critique that fails to orient itself towards expanding the reflexive capacities of agents. In this sense, 'reactionary' critique is impossible. But the way in which reconstructive critique proceeds is critical and emancipatory too (as opposed to incapacitating and paternalistic), for reconstructive critique views and treats agents not as 'objects' but as addressees, not as judgemental dopes but as reflexive agents. While it appreciates that the

agents' reflexive capacities may be structurally blocked by certain social con-
ditions, it will always have to presume that its addressees are fundamentally
capable of reflexivity and are responsive to critique. For ultimately, when it
comes to judging whether there actually are any second-order 'pathologies'
at work and whether the hypotheses of reconstructive critique are appropriate,
there is no authority but the addressees of the critique themselves.

In order to diagnose obstructions to the capacity for reflection and critique,
critical theory can use a theoretical vocabulary and other resources such as
extensive empirical data, which are not necessarily immediately accessible
to the agents themselves. Regarding what the agents really do and why they
do it and what is good for them, however, critical theory does not have any
special knowledge that could be acquired independently of the agents' self-
understanding and only from an external perspective inaccessible to the
agents. The notion of the break, of an asymmetry between the *doxa* of 'ordi-
nary' agents and the sociological knowledge of the observer, between the per-
spective of the participant and that of the scientist, will therefore have to be
dispelled – and it *can* be dispelled, because critical theory is possible without
it, or in fact, as a social practice of critique, becomes possible *only* without it.

In this context, the question concerning the relation between theory and
practice here re-emerges as a question about the relation between everyday
practices of justification and critique and a critical theory that analyses the
social conditions of their possibility and may criticise any obstructions to it.
This reformulation makes clear that theory, on this view, is to be understood
as a contribution to social self-understanding, and that the relation between
practice and theory is much closer and determined by a greater variety of
forms of interaction than the model of the break suggests. Whether as every-
day practice or as critical theory, then, social critique is understood as part
of the "collective reflection upon the conditions of collective life" (Walzer
1993 [1987]: 35). For critical theory, this means that it may no longer speak
solely *about* and *on behalf of* agents, but constitutively depends on a dialogue
with them.

How, though, should this theory, given where it sees itself in a meta-
theoretical sense, respond to the fact that there hardly are any forums or
procedures in or through which the dialogue between critical theorists and
their addressees could take place? This exchange, after all, needs to be more
than a metaphor that motivates critics to engage in particularly empathetic
reflections. Referring to 'the public sphere' as a place where this discussion
could be held and where critical theorists could join in as intellectuals will
do little to remedy the fact that critical theory is somewhat at a loss here. An
answer to this question can only be found by going beyond the fundamental
methodological considerations of the present study and will have to be mir-
rored in concrete social science research and its theoretical underpinnings.[1]

On the view of social practice advocated here, theory neither is an endeavour that simply stands opposed to this practice and operates most reliably from a distance, nor does it disappear into everyday practice. Rather, its task is to articulate, explicate and 'foster' the reflexive and normative potential present in the social practices of critique and the corresponding interpretive models, in order to establish the social conditions of an egalitarian (or at least less inegalitarian) practice of critique. But it can only hope to fulfil this task if philosophy, social theory and empirical social science once again and more strongly apply themselves to the project of asserting the factual power of the normative against the normative power of the factual – a task that can only be tackled collectively. Any attempt to fulfil this task will face conflicts about self-understanding and self-*mis*understanding. It is true for the practice of social science just as much as for any practice of self-understanding that the reconstructions developed by critical theory always simultaneously function as problematisations of the self-interpretations and practices at issue, and thus make it possible for these to be transformed. For as these reconstructions confront the everyday realism of the agents with the unacceptability of reality, they make it possible for the agents to change perspectives and take up a *different* position towards the ways of acting and speaking they are used to. This allows them to understand these habits as ways of organising and representing the social world that *could be different* – that is, as contingent (cf. Tully 2002; Boltanski 2008d; 2008e).

The critique of critical social science and the orthodox forms of the critique of ideology therefore targets only its methodological self-(mis) understanding: the belief that it can lift its own position out of the domain of contested interpretations and reconstructions by projecting a supposedly scientific foundation underneath it. The fact that critique must forgo this scientific foundation and understand itself as social *practice* does not mean that critical *theory* no longer has a place in it. As I have shown in the previous part, the opposite is true. Critical theory – at least the version for which I have here argued – does, however, have to come to a kind of self-understanding that has perhaps been formulated most clearly by the early Marx:

> [W]e do not anticipate the world with our dogmas but instead attempt to discover the new world through the critique of the old. Hitherto philosophers have left the keys to all riddles lying in their desks, and the stupid, uninitiated world had only to wait around for the roasted pigeons of absolute science to fly into its open mouth. [. . .]
>
> This does not mean that we shall confront the world with new doctrinaire principles and proclaim: Here is the truth, on your knees before it! It means that

we shall develop for the world new principles from the existing principles of the world. We shall not say: Abandon your struggles, they are mere folly; let us provide you with the true campaign-slogans. [. . .]

   We are therefore in a position to sum up the credo of our journal in a single word: the self-clarification (critical philosophy) of the struggles and wishes of the age. (Marx 1976 [1844]: 344–46; EN: 206–9)

NOTE

   1. As an example of the latter, I have discussed system justification theory (part III, section 7). In order to achieve a sort of 'public reflective equilibrium', however, such a research practice would have to take into account not just the intuitions and experiences of 'ordinary' agents but also their theories. Given the current circumstances and the prevalence of forms of social disadvantage and asymmetry, critical theory will have to strive not so much for a stable equilibrium as for a permanent balancing act between its own hypotheses and their validation by the addressees, as I have described in part III, section 6. For an example of a theory of disadvantage that was developed in a dialogical fashion, cf. Wolff and De-Shalit (2007), and more generally De-Shalit (2006: chapter 3) and Miller (1999: 52f).

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