

## Chapter 3

# SOCIOLOGY AT THE SCALE OF THE INDIVIDUAL: ARCHER AND LAHIRE CONTRA BOURDIEU

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Since the turn of the century, the international reception of the work of Pierre Bourdieu has steadily gathered pace and taken on such a magnitude that we can say (with some exaggeration) that genetic structuralism now occupies the position of the hegemon within the global field of sociological theory, comparable perhaps to the one of structural functionalism in the post-war period. Nowadays, one can like or detest Bourdieu's critical sociology; however, one cannot afford to ignore it. He is the main 'attractor' in the field of sociology (with Michel Foucault playing a similar role within the rival, anti-disciplinary field of the so-called 'Studies'). His critical sociology with its highly sophisticated integration of the classics – not just Karl Marx, Max Weber and Émile Durkheim but also any major sociologist and philosopher of the twentieth century one can think of – into a unified theory of the social world, allied to a rigorous empirical exemplification of the concepts of field, habitus and symbolic violence, Bourdieu is the epitome of sociology: Mister Sociology himself. But even if – or, perhaps, precisely because – he incarnates in person what sociology stands for, his brand of sociology has also become a counter-example and a foil for all those who want to break with the scientism, rationalism, structuralism, determinism, materialism, utilitarianism and so forth. they associate with his critical sociology.

For the inveterate criticasters, his theory of reproduction represents only a hypercritical (in)version of structural functionalism that exacerbates all the defaults that were once associated with the Parsonian system: 'over-integrated vision of society' (Lockwood 1992) + 'oversocialized conception of Man' (Wrong 1994). Like its negative counterpart, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, it inverts functionalism. By putting it back on its feet, however, it reinforces its vices.<sup>2</sup> Being myself a great, though not uncritical

admirer of Bourdieu (Vandenberghé 1998), I am neither interested in principled critiques of Bourdieu nor in uncritical celebrations of his work, not to mention the unimaginative renderings of his sociology one finds in every textbook of sociology by now. There are too many of those already. Rather, what is needed, I think, is a *post-Bourdiesian* theory of the social world that is *not anti-Bourdiesian*. A respectful discussion of the great sociologist and his monumental oeuvre demands nothing less than a rigorous discussion and critical evaluation of the philosophy, the theory, the methodology and the findings of his ambitious research program.

In this chapter, I do not offer such an evaluation (see Lahire 1999a; de Fornel and Ogien 2011; Susen and Turner 2011). Instead of a discussion of Bourdieu, I focus on two European authors at the cutting edge of contemporary social theory who were significantly influenced by Bourdieu, yet have explored other avenues beyond the ones that he has opened up with so much talent, sophistication and dedication. More particularly, I take a closer look at the theories of action of Bernard Lahire and Margaret Archer, as exemplified in two landmark books: *L'homme pluriel* (Lahire 2001, translated in English in 2010) and *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation* (Archer 2003).<sup>3</sup> Archer worked at the Centre de sociologie européenne in Paris in the early sixties and although she has criticized Bourdieu for over three decades (Archer 1983, 1993, 2010b, 2012, 87–124), she is much more lenient with him than she ever was with Anthony Giddens. Lahire belongs to the next generation. Although he systematically disarticulates all of the master's categories from within, his dispositional sociology is so through and through Bourdiesian that he could well be considered the heterodox successor to the master (Loïc Wacquant being the official one).

The investigation of their work in this *Companion to Bourdieu* is justified by the fact that both authors have developed their own research programme as an open challenge and explicit alternative to critical sociology. Given that we know where they come from and what they react to, we can investigate in detail how they actually dismount some of the central assumptions of critical sociology and set up their categories so as to escape its spell. To know a theory is to know how it is constructed. To develop an alternative theory, one has to know how to deconstruct it and push it in a different direction. The exercise in comparative theory I propose is a triangular one. Through selective use of the scholastic technique of the 'compare and contrast essay', I explore convergences and divergences not only among their theories and Bourdieu's but also among their respective theories. The chapter proceeds in two moments: first, I present the contextual and dispositional sociology of Lahire and the morphogenetic explanatory framework of Archer. Following the exposition of both research programmes, I next bring them into a dialogue

and show how they can benefit from each other. The intent is not to weaken them; rather, by uncovering their hidden angles, I wish to strengthen them and indicate possibilities for the development of a post-Bourdieuian sociology of reflexive dispositions in context.

### **Lahire versus Archer: Sociology at the Scale of the Individual**

In the most recent phase of their intellectual trajectory, Archer and Lahire have started working on themes that are at the threshold of sociology and psychology. Within the French tradition, Lahire has taken up Durkheim's idea of a sociological psychology – 'the whole of sociology is psychology, but a psychology *sui generis*' (Durkheim, in Lahire 1998, 223). With her interest in internal conversations, Archer has also entered the space of the sociology of the mind, but like Norbert Wiley's (1995) pioneering investigations of internal speech, she has sought her bearings in American pragmatism (Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and George Herbert Mead rather than Durkheim, Marcel Mauss and Maurice Halbwachs, as is the case with Lahire). At the frontier between sociology and psychology, both are developing a *social psychology of a new kind*. Unlike the more traditional social psychology that analyses how individuals behave in small groups, this new social psychology reverses the perspective and investigates how groups, large and small, behave within the individual mind. To explain how the individual behaves in society, one has to understand how society behaves in the individual. Sociology turns inwards and encounters the psyche at the intersection of society and the individual.

Both Archer and Lahire have embarked on a similar quest: to understand individual biographies sociologically. They both work with the same unit of analysis – a life – and they both want to understand how and why actors make the decisions they make and live the lives they live. But albeit their quest is similar, their way of approaching their subjects is rather different in tone, style and approach. Whereas Archer wants to understand the present of her subjects through investigation of their future projects (their feasibility in the current context with its constraints and opportunities), Lahire explains the present and the future in terms of the past (dispositions and their activation in particular contexts in the present). Where she foregrounds the personal power of the individuals and thinks of internal conversations as mechanisms that empower, enlighten and help individuals to make up their minds and realize their dreams in given circumstances, he emphasizes above all the enduring power of socialization. His actors are pushed by their dispositions, while hers are pulled forward by their projects. He is a determinist, she is a voluntarist and I am a bit of both.

***Lahire: dispositions, contexts and practices***

Lahire is at once the fiercest critique of Bourdieu and his most faithful disciple. Different from the hard-liners who impersonate the master and the ‘soft-liners’ who think ‘with Bourdieu, against Bourdieu’, to use a crisp formula of Jean-Claude Passeron (2003, 124), the young sociologist has the ambition of doing something different altogether. He knows the work of Bourdieu like no one else does, and does it over as it were, pushing it in a rather different direction. Like a computer worm that infects a hard disk and takes over the operations of its host, he has installed himself deep down into the program of critical sociology, replicating, extending, correcting, subverting and, ultimately, radically rewriting it from within. Although his earlier work in the sociology of education is not centrally concerned with the work of the sociologist of the Béarn – its focal points are the reading and writing practices among popular classes (Lahire 2000) –, his later research on cultural consumption and literary production confronts Bourdieu head on.

Lahire is a Stakhanovist who turns out, on average, a book per year. Piling them up high, we find *L’homme pluriel* (The plural actor) (the only book translated so far into English), his most explicitly theoretical and programmatic book, at the base.<sup>4</sup> Assailing the concept of habitus, putting it under the microscope, it offers a systematic outline of a *contextual and dispositional sociology at the individual scale*. Each of the terms is significant, starting with sociology. Although his theme brings him close to psychology and psychoanalysis, his approach is, in fact, 110 per cent sociological. Radicalizing the gesture of Durkheim, Halbwachs, Norbert Elias and Bourdieu, Lahire has a mission: to demonstrate that sociology can understand the individual in all its complexity and explain his or her behaviour in all its details. Not afraid of imperial overreach, his ambition is to show that the social goes down all the way, that it extends its reach to the innermost core of the person and that, therefore, to vary a political slogan, the personal is social through and through. Like Bourdieu’s, his research program is not only sociological and scientific (borderline sociological and scientific) but also resolutely dispositional and contextual. As an alternative to the famous synthetic formula of Bourdieu: ‘[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practices’ (1979, 112), Lahire proposes, ‘Dispositions + Contexts = Practices’ (2012, 18, 24, passim) – or, in a slightly more expanded variation: ‘Incorporated past + Present context of action = Observable practices’ (2012, 25, passim) as the unifying formula of his scientific program for dispositional-contextualist sociology.<sup>5</sup>

This program, which responds to the question why people behave, think, feel, etc. the way they do, can be summarized in a rather simple scientific

formula: Incorporated past + Present context of action = Observable practices. It condenses the research intention to think practices at the intersection of incorporated dispositions and competences (produced by the more or less assiduous frequentation of past frames of socialization) and the always specific context of action. (2012, 12)

The most individual practices, all of them, whether they are conscious, semi-conscious or subconscious, can be understood, according to Lahire, by reference to a myriad of processes of socialization (in the family, at school, by the peers, at work and so on) that find their corporal, mental and emotional sedimentations in a stock of dispositions (tendencies, inclinations, habits, capabilities, competences and so on) of various kinds (bodily, mental, discursive, perceptive, evaluative and so forth). These dispositions may be activated or inhibited, released or suspended, reproduced or transformed in determinate contexts of action (social spaces, systems of action, situations of interaction and so on). An individual usually has multiple dispositions. Occasionally, these may work at cross purposes and be inappropriate to the situation, causing friction, fracture and even outright crisis.

While dispositions incorporate the past and refer to tendencies within the individual, the contexts of action represent constraints and enablements external to the individual that release and activate or inhibit and switch off the dispositions that produce the practices. 'Contexts' is a bit of an umbrella concept, however, that encompasses everything (class, power, organizations, institutions and so forth) that the actors encounter in their environment and that impinges on their action from without and in the present. It can refer to abstract social spaces that are vertically and hierarchically structured in terms of class and power differentials (Marx's system of classes, Weber's field of power, Bourdieu's social space), to horizontally differentiated functional or institutional domains (Weber's spheres of values, Bourdieu's fields, Howard Becker's worlds, Niklas Luhmann's subsystems and so forth) of complex societies, but, occasionally, it is also used to refer to the more concrete microcontexts (families, schools, factories, sport clubs and the like) and situations (Georg Simmel's sociations, Erving Goffmann's interaction orders, Harold Garfinkel's *Haecceities* and so forth) that form the immediate background of action. Together, the structural, institutional and interactional contexts of action that trigger or inhibit the dispositions, and the dispositions themselves are sufficient, according to Lahire, to fully explain why the actors act the way they act (or refrain from doing so), think the way they think (or not), talk the way they talk (or not), feel the way they feel (or not) – in sum: are the way they are.

In spite of the fact that the field is now replaced by a multiplicity of contexts of action, all this is still more or less compatible with Bourdieu's classical

theory of the habitus. But as soon as Lahire varies the scale, changes the focal and zooms in on the individual to analyse in detail the concrete workings of the dispositions at a microscale, everything changes.<sup>6</sup> The tribute to the master quickly turns into a masterful critique of his concept of the habitus that is so powerful that it risks bringing down the whole theoretical edifice. For generative structuralism, the change of scale is simply ‘catastrophic’ (in the sense of Benoit Mandelbrot). Putting a Google Earth into critical sociology leaves nothing unchanged. When one changes the focal length, augmenting the resolution to watch society at the individual level, one does not just see it differently; rather, at ‘street level’, one sees different things altogether. This is ‘fractal sociology’, sociology of the individual as an infinitely complex, self-similar entity that can be split into parts, each of which is a miniature of society.

At the level of the individual, one no longer sees the coherence and homogeneity of the habitus that Bourdieu attributed to individual dispositions at the class level. Rather one starts to see the individual as a complex, more or less unified and layered being with a plurality of heterogeneous habits, dispositions, schemes, competences, appetencies and capabilities that are themselves the result of multiple socializations (by the family, neighbours, teachers, friends and so on) and that may act jointly or at cross purposes. To deconstruct the habitus, the sociologist from Lyon (1998, 9 sq., 19 sq., 81 sq., *passim*; 1999a, 23–57) latches onto the more technical aspects of the definition that everybody knows by heart by now (‘systems of durable and transposable dispositions’), questions each and every word (durable? transposable? system of dispositions?), shows all the intellectual antecedents that are smuggled into the concept (Durkheim, Mauss, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean Piaget and son on), and accuses Bourdieu of abusively generalizing a particular model that only holds in exceptional situations (such as traditional societies and total institutions).

He does the same for the concept of the field (Lahire 1999a, 23–57; 2012, 143–212), asking innocuous questions about ordinary actors (such as manual workers, cleaning ladies, retirees and so forth), activities (such as domestic cooking, pub crawling, traveling on the bus and so on), populations (popular classes, housewives, unemployed) and institutional orders (first and foremost families, but also neighbourhoods, peers and other instances of primary socialization) that fall outside of the field. In *Monde pluriel* (Plural world) he offers a theoretical synthesis of his research on the fields of literary production and cultural consumption and, once again, he shows that the field represents only a particular case of the possible, accusing Bourdieu of transforming a regional model into a general theory of the social world.

The focus on the individual that comes with the variation of scale turns Bourdieu inside out: what was outside (the social as a field of struggles) now

reappears inside (the individual as a plural actor struggling with him- or herself). When the social space is thus analysed from the point of view of the individual, the latter is, literally, refracted by and in the former. In a brilliant application of the Leibnitzian baroque metaphor of the 'fold', which one also finds in Gilles Deleuze, Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, Lahire explains the incorporation of the social into the individual as a 'crumpling' of the social space:

If one represents the social space in all its dimensions (economical, political, cultural, religious, sexual, familial, moral, sportive, etc.) in the form of a sheet of paper or a piece of tissue [...] every individual is like a crumpled sheet or a rumpled rag. (1998, 233). [...]

Thus, we find within each of us the social space in crumpled state. (2005, 120)

Projected onto and folded into the individual, all the different provinces and fields of the social world, as well as all the different positions within each of the fields, can now potentially operate simultaneously within a single actor. The struggles that are waged between and within the fields now take place within the individual. The cleavage of the habitus that splits 'class defectors' (*transfuges de classe*), like Bourdieu himself, is now generalized and democratized as it were.

Although the degree of coherence varies from person to person, internal pluralism is the rule, not the exception. When the actor is considered not in bulk, but in detail, s/he becomes a 'plural actor': a man or a woman society endows with a heritage of dispositions that, depending on the context of action, may converge or diverge, be activated or switched off, temporarily or permanently. There is no reason to assume a priori that domestic or religious dispositions will automatically gel with class, professional or educative ones, and fuse into a single master disposition that controls and integrates them all into a single generative formula, as is the case in Bourdieu. Instead of a monolithic habitus that unifies all the acts of the individual in all spheres of life – from the intellectual to the carnal, from the books one reads to the food one eats – one can now sociologically analyse the actor as a plural one in all its bewildering complexity.

In the field of cultural consumption, for instance, an actor can be, without contradiction, rather highbrow in her literary choices and a real junkie when it comes to films or, to take another example, can go the opera on Friday night and to the karaoke bar with her pals the next night. As a matter of fact, the consonant profiles in cultural consumption one would expect from a Bourdieusian perspective are not statistically dominant: omnivorous consumption of culture and dissonant profiles are the rule (Lahire 2004). Once again, the variation in

scale changes everything. It allows the researcher to investigate in detail not just inter- and intraclass variations, even within a single family (Lahire 2005), but also and above all inter- and intra-individual ones. If one were to analyse the public at, say, the Comédie Française in Paris, the Metropolitan Opera in New York or the Sala Cecília Meireles in Rio de Janeiro, in detail and without preconceptions, one would, for sure, find a predominantly upper-class, culturally sophisticated and socially self-satisfied and carefully dressed up public. If instead of taking them as a class fraction, however, one were to take each of them one by one seriatim in order to register their tastes, one would discover that the same individuals who listen to erudite music are also quite likely to attend the circus, watch action films, read detective novels and listen to AC/DC. Disaggregating class data of cultural consumption and reaggregating them at the individual level, Lahire arrives at the following profile of the omnivorous consumer:

The public of the prestigious Salle Richelieu [of the Comédie française] goes definitely more often to variété spectacles [than those with less legitimate tastes] (37% against 10%) and the circus (23% against 8%), a bit more often to theme parks and just slightly less to discotheques (22% against 27%), public balls (18% against 21%) and paid football games (16% against 20%). (2004, 145)

Over the years, the logic of fractals has pushed Lahire to an ever more detailed, close-up analysis of the multiple socializations that find their sedimentation in a multiplicity of dispositions of all types. To analyse how dispositions are actualized, inhibited or transformed in a variety of contexts of action, and investigate whether schemes of action are transferred and transposed from one context to another, or not, in *Portraits sociologiques* (Sociological portraits) he has set up an unprecedented experimental methodology.<sup>7</sup> In a sequence of six rather lengthy in-depth interviews in which he has asked eight respondents detailed questions about their practices in various domains of life (school, work, family, friends, leisure, going out, food and health), he has developed a new genre of sociological biographies that convincingly proves the viability of his dispositional and contextual sociology at an individual scale. As if the fine-grained, high-resolution portraits were not yet detailed enough to make his point about the power of the past (embodied dispositions) into the present (context), more recently Lahire has also gone through the whole literature by, on and about a famous Czech novelist (all his texts, letters, diaries, all the testimonies of his contemporaries, and a good deal of the secondary literature too), and drawn an even more detailed portrait of a most singular individual: Franz Kafka. Following the travails of the full-time insurance officer and occasional novelist, his intent is to show, through close reading of some

key texts and without much reference to the literary field (Kafka is the opposite of Gustave Flaubert in that regard), that the rather difficult relations with his father, which now reappear transfigured in his novels and his nightmares, offer the main key to his work. The ambition of this vast exercise in sociological psychoanalysis is not a minor one. Lahire wants to explain everything – ‘why he writes what he writes as he writes’ (2010, 10, 69), and he wants to do it sociologically.

### ***Archer: structure, reflexivity and agency***

Archer is one of Europe’s most systematic theorists and the main representative of critical realism within sociology.<sup>8</sup> In direct association with Roy Bhaskar, the ‘founding father’ of critical realism, she has elaborated his realist theory of society and developed the *morphogenetic approach* in sociology as a methodological complement to his complex social ontology. The morphogenetic approach offers, first and foremost, a cohesive explanatory framework that analyses social structure, culture and agency, as well as their linkages, in realist, relational and processual terms. Over a period of over forty years, Archer has carefully crafted out a series of fundamental concepts, most notably analytical dualism, the morphogenetic sequence and causal emergent powers, and stuck to them to resolve some of the central problems of social theory, starting with the problem of how to link structure and agency without reduction or, as she dubs it, ‘conflation’ (1988, pt. 1; 1995, pt. 1). Against individualists who reduce structure to agency (‘upwards conflation’) and structuralists who deduce agency from structure/culture (‘downwards conflation’), the British sociologist insists on the relative independence of the strata: ‘Social life comes in a SAC – always and everywhere’, says she (2013, 5), using shorthand for structure, agency and culture.

Against Giddens and Bourdieu, who commit the fallacy of ‘central conflation’ (Archer 1988, 72–100 and 1995, 87–134), typical of praxeological theories that conceive of the whole social world (society, culture and personality) as being constituted by social practices, she argues with Bhaskar (1979) that it is essential to operate with an emergentist social ontology, a stratified conception of society and a transformational model of social action.<sup>9</sup> Over and against ontologies of practice that ignore the phenomenon of emergence, critical realism underscores the dualism of agency and structure. Structure and agency are neither different aspects of a same entity (‘duality’) nor different moments of a single process (‘practice’). Rather, they are different kinds of emergent entities, with different levels of complexity that presuppose but cannot be reduced to each other. Although the existence of social structures (systems of relations between social positions, akin to Bourdieu’s fields) and

cultural structures (systems of relations between ideas, akin to Ferdinand de Saussure's language) presuppose action and interactions as a condition of their possibility, to properly track their interrelations, it is essential to analytically distinguish the systemic levels and the interactive levels of society ('analytical dualism'). At the systemic level, we are dealing with relations between 'parts', while at the interactive level with relations between 'people' (Lockwood, 1964). Relations between parts (social positions and ideas) and interactions between people (persons and groups) function not only at a different level of complexity but also operate at different times. To the extent that sociocultural systems pre-exist the actors, one cannot say that the actors produce these; rather, through their actions, they reproduce or transform the sociocultural systems they inherit from their predecessors. As preconditions of action, social and culture structures necessarily predate the social practices that reproduce and/or transform them. Similarly, the culture and structure that are transformed and/or reproduced by these practices necessarily post-date the practices from which they result.

Borrowing some insights from Walter Buckley's cybernetic study of the feedback mechanisms of 'deviation-amplification' that trigger systemic change, the morphogenetic perspective decomposes those dynamics in a series of endless cycles of 'systemic conditioning', 'socio-cultural interaction' and 'systemic elaboration' whereby the particular configuration of the system (at T1) conditions the practices of the life world (at T2), which aim to reproduce or transform the system and lead, eventually (at T3), to a new elaboration of the system, which will be contested and modified in a second cycle, and so forth.

In a lengthy sequence of weighty books, Archer has fleshed out her morphogenetic perspective into a general social theory of culture (1988), social structure (1995) and human agency (2000). The point of the whole exercise, however, is not just to reconceptualize structure, culture and agency in the realist language of 'emergent causal powers' but also to analyse how structural, cultural and personal powers actually work together or block each other in concrete historical formations, ensuing either in morphogenesis and social change or in morphostasis and social reproduction. Archer argues that cultural systems can influence social structures and vice versa, but they can only do so indirectly and mediately by structuring the situation of actions through constraints and enablements. The force of the latter depends, objectively, on the social position of the agents and, subjectively, on their projects, the two being linked to a certain extent by what Bourdieu would call the 'causality of the probable', which adjusts projects to possibilities. As individuals and groups are acting in situations to defend their vested interests and to realize their projects, they reproduce or transform the structural and cultural conditions that

impinge on them, but in this process they are themselves being transformed from involuntarily placed agents into social actors and individual persons (double morphogenesis).

It is at this point where the structural, cultural and personal powers intersect that the sociology of the individual is fully integrated into the morphogenetic perspective and the contrast with Bourdieu's derogation of the subject becomes starker. In order to reclaim the actor from postmodernists (like Richard Rorty) and social constructivists (like Rom Harré) who dilute the subject into never-ending chains of discourses, Archer ties agency to reflexivity (2000), reflexivity to internal conversations (2003) and internal conversations to social mobility (2007) and social change (2012). This turn inward should, thus, not be disconnected from the larger concerns that have occupied her since the late 1970s, namely to offer a solid realist theory of society that solves the agency-structure problem without reduction and without dismissing the reflexive capacities of the agent. In direct opposition to her former mentor, who emphasizes the role of the unconscious and systematically downplays conscious and conscientious behavior, Archer brings the reflexive subject back into the picture to break with the semiautomatic reproduction of structures of domination one finds in critical sociology. With force and conviction, she rehabilitates reflexivity and uses it as the wedge that severs the habitus from the field and opens up the possibility of a double morphogenesis of the self and society – significant social change as a result of self-transformation on a massive scale. Through reflection and deliberation, the agents ponder what they want to do not only in their life but also *with* their life, and the differential answers they give to these existential questions have implications for the reproduction and transformation of society.

Archer's central thesis – let us call it the *thesis of the mediation of meditation* – can now be formulated: reflexivity is exercised through people holding conversations with themselves in which they clarify, organize and systematize their 'ultimate concerns' in an existential and personal project to which they commit themselves. To find out who they are and what their 'mission' is in this life, people have to decide 'what they really care about' (Frankfurt 1988), and they do so through an inner dialogue with themselves and significant others. It is this meditation of the actors on what really matters to them and what they are willing to forgo, or to invest in, in order to realize what they care about and have 'devoted' themselves to that constitutes the mediatory mechanism which links the causal powers of structure to agency.

Social structures and cultural systems exercise their causal powers, according to Archer, by structuring the situation of action through constraints and enablements, but to the extent that the activation of those causal powers depends on the existential projects that the actors forge *in foro interno* (no

projects: no constraints or enablements), actors can be said to actively mediate their own social and cultural conditioning. They are determined, but unlike in Bourdieu, only to the extent that they determine themselves and choose a project. Through internal deliberation about the feasibility of their projects in given circumstances, a deliberation that takes the dialogical form of an internal conversation between the Me (the past self), the I (the present self) and the You (the future self), they actively choose a *modus vivendi* as a living compromise between the actual and the possible. When the circumstances change, the projects may be discarded, revised or realized. Inversely, a change in the projects is likely to affect the perception and the evaluation of the concrete contexts of action and, therefore, also of what is possible and what is not. In any case, it is through internal conversations with themselves that actors interweave the past (Lahire's dispositions), the present (his contexts of action) and the future (Archer's projects) and reflect on the feasibility of possible courses of action in the given circumstances.

In her interviews with people from all walks of life, the British sociologist discovered that reflexivity comes mainly in four modes, namely the communicative, the autonomous, the meta and the fractured mode of thinking about and working through one's life course. They correspond to four types of reflexive individuals. In order to bring some developmental logic into the sequence, I order them according to their degree of consciousness, starting with fractured reflexivity – which, for drama's sake, I will call the 'ground zero' of the quest of an authentic self – and ending with full metareflexivity.<sup>10</sup> *Fractured reflexives* are lost souls. They correspond more or less to the downtrodden and the dominated at the bottom of society who operate outside or at the margins of the field. The more they think, the less they succeed in bringing order to the chaos of their lives. Their narratives are disconnected, they get lost in their thoughts, there is no flow, their dispositions work at cross purposes and their life does not lead anywhere. They are lost, depressed, alienated, in crisis or otherwise unable to function properly. To get out of this sorry state of mind, they need help from others and that is where the *communicative reflexives* come in. They are the kind souls of this world. They are mostly women (but this may be an artefact of Archer's initial sample). When asked what is most important in their life and what they care about most, they will give a domestic answer: definitely family and friends, pets and plants, perhaps also the local pub and the village. Communicative reflexives care about the others. They are willing to sacrifice their own life plans and curtail their own ambitions to stay close to the significant others who give meaning to their lives. They stay put. They are rather traditional and, with all respect, we could describe them as 'happy Bourdieusians'. They are responsible for the reproduction of the life world. They do not move up or away, but stay close to the ones they

love. They are not overly self-conscious and do not have that many internal conversations. They do not think; rather, they talk. In talking, they think. As soon as they have a new idea, they need to share it with others and talk it through (by calling their mum on the phone, for instance). Thanks to their help and their kindness, fractured reflexives can slowly recover their reflexive capabilities and become more autonomous. *Autonomous reflexives*, mostly men, are above all concerned with work. They are active minds. They think and act; they think to act. In their head, they plan and think ahead, proactively looking for solutions they encounter in their everyday life, be it at work, at home, in the car or on their holidays. Focused, they are professionals with ambition and a career plan. They are on their way up in society. They are members of the dominant fractions of society or, as *petit bourgeois*, they aspire to join them. They have not only a sense of justice and fairness but also care about others. Yet, unlike *metareflexives*, ethics is not what moves them and makes them move. *Metareflexives* have principles and values. They are idealists, not opportunists. They are dreamers. They continuously think about the good life in and for others in just institutions and how to realize it. They are searching, seeking to realize what they believe in, seeking to realize themselves. They yearn for authenticity and want to integrate their projects into a coherent narrative that makes sense and endows their lives with a purpose. They are critical, both about themselves and the contexts of action. That is their greatness, but also their drama. They are never satisfied. Not with themselves, nor with the world. Somehow, always, something is missing. Something is not right. They get into an existential crisis, fracture and move on. 'What does not kill them makes them stronger' (Friedrich Nietzsche). *Metareflexives* are fractured reflexives who, with a little help from their friends, have overcome their existential crisis, regained their autonomy and cannot stop thinking about what they want to do with their lives and how they could possibly achieve some harmony and transform their lives into a symphony of sorts.

### **Towards a Sociology of Reflexive Dispositions**

Archer's investigation of reflexivity comes at the end of a lifelong reflection on how SAC work together or at cross purposes in different social formations. While her work is more macro than Lahire's, his is more structural than hers. Even if his work is much more influenced by microsociology than hers, she seems much further removed from Bourdieu's system than he is. Instead of battling with Bourdieu, trying to trump him at his own game, she has not only introduced a level of reflexive self-determination between the field and the habitus, but also, eventually, she has discarded the habitus altogether (Archer 2010, 2012), arguing that in late modern societies, there is no space anymore

for morphostatic reproduction of traditional environments and modes of thinking. Lahire for his part has radicalized Bourdieu by bringing his sociology to the deepest recesses of the individual. In the same way as Goffman and Garfinkel transposed Durkheim's sociology to the microlevel, uncovering a microsystem of constraints that is not less, but more deterministic than the macrosystem, he seems to have transposed Bourdieu's sociology of the field within the individual, fracturing the habitus, yet still refracting the multiple determinations of society. But instead of simply opposing Archer to Lahire, let us see how we can bring them into dialogue, pair their strengths and make them work in tandem in a *reflexive, dispositional and contextual sociology at the scale of the individual*.

I discuss convergences and divergences between Archer and Lahire under three headings: philosophical anthropology, conversations and dispositions, and micro-macro:

### ***Philosophical anthropology***

A first difference, and perhaps the strongest one, is to be found in their research posture. In spite of all his critiques of Bourdieu, Lahire sees himself as heir to the master. Like the sociologist of the Collège de France, he carries the banner of science and, not afraid of polemics, he militates for sociology as a rigorous science. The standards he has set for himself and for the others are rather high, not to say exclusive. Any sociology that respects itself must necessarily exhibit 'a high degree of argumentative persuasion, methodological exigency and empirical rigor' (Lahire 2005, 18). Without the former, sociology degenerates into the sloppiness of journalism; without the latter, it becomes mere speculation, empty theory, social philosophy. Within sociology there should be no space for either, according to Lahire. Without excuses or qualifiers, he derides theorists as 'forgers (without field, without material, without method)' (2000, 12) who should be forced to work in the field or leave the discipline. Speculative sociology (social philosophy, theoretical syntheses, metatheory), postmodern essays and journalistic reports are explicitly earmarked for extinction as 'poles that should disappear from the field of a more demanding discipline' (Lahire 2002, 46n. 6). To the extent that this excommunication is mainly addressed to French competitors in the field, I like to think that it does not exclude dialogue with British-style social theorists and German social philosophers (even if they live in Latin America).

In a more constructive spirit, I would, therefore, like to suggest that sociology as a whole can actually benefit from a critique of sociology (in the sense of Immanuel Kant). By pushing sociology to its limits, Lahire helps us make clear that it needs a more philosophical approach to sustain it. While sociological

logic leads one to track the effects of socialization into the most hidden recesses of the individual, leaving no space for anything that is not social, that does not and cannot mean, of course, that there is nothing that escapes society – only that sociology cannot grasp it. To understand what sociology cannot grasp, one needs a philosophical anthropology, a vision of the human being that includes the partial vision of sociology as well as of the other sciences, but completes them by showing, be it with Simmel, Max Scheler, Helmut Plessner or Mead, that socialization can never be complete.<sup>11</sup> Philosophical anthropology completes and transcends the sciences by introducing what the sciences cannot grasp, but always already presuppose as a condition of their possibility, namely that at least some human acts are their own cause and can, therefore, not be explained by antecedent causes.

Like Bourdieu, Lahire works not with a philosophical but with a sociological anthropology in which it is society, rather than the individual, that gives meaning to life or takes it away (Peters 2012). To the extent that his vision of man can be reconstructed, one gets the impression that he considers humankind a rather dangerous species, capable of the worst against which, like in Thomas Hobbes, Bourdieu and Jean-Paul Sartre, individual subjects have to continuously protect and defend themselves. In any case, society appears more as a kind of opaque and menacing Kafkaian universe with institutional machinations and interpersonal intrigues that can hurt the individual, than a place that offers refuge, comfort and friendship. Aware of the fact that the human being is always bounded by something that transcends it, Archer avoids the hyperdeterminism of her French colleague. In accordance with Bhaskar's critical realism and rather weary of 'oversocialized' conceptions of man (Archer 2000), she not only accepts the existence of personal causal powers as a matter of principle but her philosophical credo also informs her empirical research on the 'ultimate concerns' behind the existential projects that her respondents pursue.

If we compare Lahire's formula (Dispositions + Contexts = Practices) with Archer's (Contexts + Projects = Agency), we immediately sense the difference philosophical anthropology makes. The distinction between action and practices is a subtle one (Reckwitz 2002). They have not only different pedigrees, with agency going back to Kant, Weber and Alfred Schütz and practices to Durkheim, John Dewey and Ludwig Wittgenstein, but they also have distinct associations and implications: action presupposes reflexivity and conscious deliberation about conditions, ends, means and ultimate values, whereas practices are more about the ordinary capabilities and tacit knowledges that allow actors to go through their routines without having to think all the time about how to proceed. Whereas the theory of action presumes that subjects are capable of conscious reflection and deliberation, the theory

of practices assumes that agents are driven primarily by internalized dispositions. Lahire does not deny reflexivity. To the contrary, he fully recognizes the actors' capacity for reflection, deliberation and planning, and criticizes Bourdieu for restricting reflexivity to exceptional situations of crisis. Yet, when it comes to explaining why the actors say what they say and think what they think, he reactivates Bourdieu's 'principle of non-consciousness' and explains personal practices in terms of social determinations of which the actors are not aware. Where Archer sees personal deliberations, he seeks the imprint of society. With excruciating detail, he shows the omnipresence of the social and traces it to the innermost recesses of the individual. She is more like a counsellor who carefully listens to her subjects to find out what they want to do with their life, while he is more like a psychoanalyst who tries to find out what life has done to them. Her subjects are determined to the extent they determine themselves, while his are determined by society even in their most personal determination. His are pushed, whereas hers jump.

### ***Conversations and dispositions***

With Archer, we can bring back agency, reflexivity and a modicum of freedom into Lahire's sociology of dispositions and make it less deterministic. If we assume with Archer that social structures do not directly determine conduct, but that their causal powers have to be activated by the actors themselves to be effective, the mediation of internal conversations can help better explain why actors who basically confront similar contexts may nevertheless make different choices and behave differently. Furthermore, thanks to the sociology of internal conversations, we may explore how internal conversations can lead the actors to adopt a reflexively controlled project to slowly and consciously modify their moral, mental, sentimental and corporal dispositions. Lahire recognizes the possibility of a conscious and willed transformation of one's dispositions, but due to his lack of interest in practical philosophy, he does not take up the classical idea of virtue ethics according to which we are, ultimately, responsible for our own habitus and moral character.

However with Lahire, we can make Archer's scheme not only more flexible but also more realist. It is more flexible, because instead of using the distinctions between types of reflexivity as a kind of disguised personality test, we can simply assume, as a matter of course, that all individuals display the various modes of reflexivity and investigate in detail in which contexts some particular modes are activated, put on hold or switched off. If we relax the hypothesis that individuals can be sorted out according to the different modes of reflexivity they practice in their conversations, we might think of internal conversations as the mechanism through which individuals actually decide for

themselves which mode of reflexivity they will follow. With a closer inspection of contexts and dispositions, we can investigate in what circumstances some modes of reflexivity have free play, while others are inhibited, switched off, remade or transformed.

Using the whole array of concepts that critical realism has on offer to theorize causal powers (Harré 1970, Bhaskar 1975) as tendencies that may be real, but not actual, actual but not empirical and so forth in open laminated systems (with multiple generative mechanisms operating at the same time at different levels) and applying them to analyse how society acts at an individual level will certainly enrich the close descriptions of practices one finds in Lahire. After all, like the habitus, dispositions are generative mechanisms that are not visible as such. The practices are empirically observable, but the mechanisms that cause the practices are not; rather, they have to be inferred by the analyst through 'retroduction' from the practices.

Critical realism could also benefit from a more detailed investigation of the interrelations between dispositions, projects and practices in concrete contexts and situations of action. Although one should not give up the voluntarism that is part and parcel of the realist conception of personal causal power, understood as 'capability to act otherwise and make a difference', one should not refrain from analysing how processes of socialization influence the conversations people have with themselves when they ponder how to negotiate circumstances and integrate their projects in a feasible plan (a *modus vivendi*, as Archer would say). In Archer, socialization, understood with Bourdieu and Lahire as the internalization of society and its sedimentation in dispositions, competences and schemes of action that produce practices that reproduce society, is downplayed. It is not that the actors have no history, but, more often than not, their history is something to which they more or less consciously subscribe (as is the case with communicative reflexives) or try to flee from (as with autonomous and metareflexives). Like history, culture is also something they encounter in the situation of action, something they face *a fronte* rather than something that pushes them *a tergo*. Culture structures the situation from outside, not from inside in the form of subconscious schemes of perception, judgment and interpretation that prestructure the world and canalize action, excluding some options even before the actor becomes conscious of the situation.

Somehow, a subtle articulation between dispositions and projects that does not reduce the latter to the former ('downwards conflation'), or vice versa ('upwards conflation'), must be possible. Perhaps a morphogenetic reformulation can help, not only to avoid that society and agency are collapsed into each other ('central conflation'), which is bound to happen when the individual is conceived of as a self-similar 'refraction' of society, but also to properly parse

out the linkages between agency and structure. Instead of opposing dispositions to conversations, the external to the internal, the objective to the subjective, I suggest we place them on a continuum and investigate in concrete situations of action when practical consciousness trumps reflexive consciousness, and when it is the other way around. Only when concrete situations of action are taken into account will we be able to do what Archer did for structuration theory: indicate when dispositions have the upper hand and reflexivity is relatively weak or, conversely, when dispositions are out of sync with the contexts and reflexivity is relatively strong.

### ***Micro-macro***

Lahire's work brilliantly demonstrates how variations of scale can contribute to a finer analysis of the relations between the individual and society, but to the extent that he denies the ontological difference between actors and society and has no proper theory of emergence, I am afraid his dispositional theory of socialization cannot offer a satisfying account of the 'micro-macro link'. For Lahire, micro and macro, agency and structure do not refer to differences in kind but rather to different approaches of a self-same single reality, viewed at a different scale. The whole issue of agency and structure is not solved, however, but simply sidestepped when it is considered a question of variable resolution and scale. The question is not how we investigate both at the same time, but, rather, how we can interrelate them in such a way that their interplay can be theoretically understood and empirically demonstrated. The linkage of agency and structure is not a methodological problem. It is an ontological one. Agency and structure are ontologically different moments not only of the analysis but also of the very constitution of society. The variations of scale may be continuous; however, the passage from one level to another of society is not. Society is not flat, but, as a result of emergence, it is stratified in different levels of increasing complexity (Sawyer 2001). Structures at higher levels cannot be reduced without loss to structures at lower levels, though one can, presumably, analyse structures of a given level at a higher or lower scale of resolution. As a result of relations between elements, as well as relations between relations (of first, second and higher order), structures emerge at different levels of complexity that follow their own laws and function in their own way. If that were not the case, sociology would be superfluous. It could be reduced to social psychology, which could be reduced to individual psychology, which could be reduced to neurology and so forth.

Following Buckley's early systems theory of amplification and deviation, Archer (1988, 1995, 2003) has modelled and analysed the interplay between structure, culture and agency as a morphogenetic sequence that distinguishes

analytically, yet interrelates dialectically, the past, the present and the future into a temporalized account. The question is now whether we can transfer the morphogenetic sequence to the individual level and parse the interplay between dispositions, reflections and contexts of action into a sociological theory of self- and social transformation.<sup>12</sup> Is it possible to consider dispositions as structural preconditions (T1) of internal conversations about projects-in-contexts (T2) that reconfigure and modify or reproduce and reinforce the ingrained habits of the individual person (T3)? Thanks to the interpolation of such a reflexive moment between the structural preconditions of action at the individual level and their eventual reproduction or transformation, the mediation between the field and the habitus can be understood as a personal accomplishment of the actor. Both the maintenance of an independent moment of personal reflection between ingrained dispositions and actual practices, and the conceptualization of the internal conversation as an active form of mediation highlight the personal power of self-transformation. Instead of downplaying internal conversations as actualizations of dispositions-in-contexts through which the power of society is extended deep into the psyche and the body of the individual, the morphogenetic perspective on social action aims to reintroduce the power of people and their capacity to determine themselves into sociological analysis as a matter of principle. Of course, the strength of this transformative capacity can vary. Depending on the mode of reflexivity and the circumstances of action, it can be stronger or weaker, but it cannot be dismissed by a mere reference to facts. At the limit, even the self-reproduction of fractured reflexives can be understood as an attempt at self-transformation that failed. Clinical psychoanalysts know that every repetition is a frustrated attempt to change.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed the sociologies of Bernard Lahire and Margaret Archer. Both have been explicitly formulated in opposition to critical sociology. While they are critical of Bourdieu, they are also indebted to him. Neither Archer nor Lahire could have developed her or his research programmes if Bourdieu's had not existed. Bourdieu is and remains their point of departure – the point from which they depart is also the point from which they flee. In this sense, their theories are definitely post-Bourdieuian. It is not so much by standing on the shoulders of a giant that they have seen further, as Isaac Newton would have it, but it is by embracing his work and constructively dismounting it from within to reassemble it in a different way that they have been able to see different things. Through critique and subversion they have demonstrated the productivity of critical sociology and, thereby, paid homage to Bourdieu.

## Notes

- 1 This text continues in writing the ongoing conversations I have had over many years with Margaret Archer (since 1994) and Bernard Lahire (since 2008). I thank both of them for their willingness to discuss their theories and their relation to Bourdieu with me. I have greatly benefited from detailed comments by Archer of a first version of this chapter.
- 2 The ‘overintegrated conception of society’ and the ‘oversocialized conception of Man’ are actually two sides of the same coin. What distinguishes the normative functionalism of the Harvard School from the critical functionalism of the Frankfurt School is not the analysis but the diagnosis. In the diagnosis of the Frankfurt School, Talcott Parsons’s ‘problem of the social order’ appears, indeed, as a problem – the normative-ideological integration of society and the socialization-indoctrination of its members explains why social change is necessary, yet impossible.
- 3 This chapter is part of larger piece of work in comparative theory that will also include the work of Axel Honneth, Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot. All of them have been profoundly influenced by Bourdieu.
- 4 Synthetic programmatic statements can also be found in Lahire, 1996a and b, 1999b, 2002: 389–425, and 2004: 695–736.
- 5 Both *L’homme pluriel* (Lahire, 1998) and *Monde pluriel* (Lahire, 2012) are theoretical parentheses that systematize reflections based on his empirical research. While the first reflects on dispositions (*habitus*), the second theorizes the contexts of action (*fields*).
- 6 Thanks to the reception of Italian ‘microhistory’ (*microstoria*) of Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi, historians are well acquainted by now with the variations of scale (see Revel 1996 and Ricoeur 2000, 267–301). But as far as I know, Lahire is the only sociologist who has extensively theorized and experimented with variations of scale.
- 7 Detailed sociological portraits of individual subjects are now part of his repertoire. Although the transcription of life stories can easily degenerate into a writing machine that produces texts by the meter, because of its liberating effects, I still would highly recommend his *Portraits sociologiques* to anyone. Reading the 400 pages of interviews can certainly help liberate any researcher from the inhibition that quantitative preconceptions of scientific research still impose on in-depth qualitative research.
- 8 Critical realism is a worldwide philosophical movement in the natural, social and human sciences inspired by Roy Bhaskar’s trenchant critique of positivism (see Bhaskar 1978, 1979 and Archer et al. 1998 for the essential readings; see Vandenberghe 2014 for a reconstruction of Bhaskar’s philosophical system). For a concise outline of the morphogenetic perspective, see Archer 2011; for a first-person account, see Archer 2007b; for a third-person account, see Vandenberghe 2005.
- 9 Archer has a tendency to lump together structuration theory and genetic structuralism. While Giddens is definitely guilty of ‘central conflation’, I am not convinced that Bourdieu collapses the field and the *habitus* into practices. For sure, the relation between field and *habitus* is homologous – the latter being an internalization of the former, the former an exteriorization of the latter (‘duality’) – but as deep structures without (the field) and within (the *habitus*) the individual, they are genuine generative mechanisms that operate at a different level and at a different time of the practices they regulate.
- 10 What follows is a rather free account of the modes of reflexivity one finds in Archer 2003, 2007 and 2012 – from the ‘ground zero’ of fractured reflexivity to the full

consciousness of the metareflexives. Archer eschews classifying individuals into orders of increasing self-consciousness. For her, all souls are equally near to God.

- 11 By philosophical anthropology, I do not mean to refer to all speculative visions that one finds throughout the ages in all civilizations, but to a specific perspective or, perhaps, even a discipline that investigates the specifically human relation between Life and Spirit. The discipline thrived in Weimar Germany, but has since been discontinued (though one still finds echoes of it in Honneth's work). For an overview, see Fischer 2008.
- 12 Here I will only focus on self-transformation. The program of a sociological hermeneutics of self-transformation would be to link and think through the connections between self- and social transformation – how transformed selves change interaction orders that transform institutions that transform social transformations that change the world or, in a more critical and disillusioned vein, how the reproduction of the world system percolates down all the way to the reproduction of dominant and dominated selves.

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