

Pubblicato il: aprile 2024

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Registrazione Tribunale di Frosinone N. 564/09 VG

Recensione di *Oltre l'Habitus: Dialogo a più Voci con Pierre Bourdieu, tra Destino e Progetto*, di Stefania Capogna, edizione Aracne, 2022

di

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There are multiple interpretations of the concept of habitus. The path chosen by the author hinges on a critical-innovative understanding of the concept of habitus, emphasizing its fundamental role concerning human agency, which, as the author herself writes:

"[...] what has always attracted the interest of the writer is human agency (Bandura, 1997; Archer, 2004; 2010) in its reflexive (Archer, 2009), relational and dialogical (Donati, 2006/b; 2010; 2011) form that enables the subject to place himself in a design perspective concerning his life destiny"¹ (p.15).

Her interpretation of the habitus concept results from a multi-perspective dialogue starting with elements drawn abundantly from Pierre Bourdieu, including habitus, field, structure and capital while charting new interpretive paths. Through interaction between several authors in comparison, Capogna proposes to emphasize the agency and empowerment inherent in the reflexivity of the subject. Also applied in the examination is an analysis of the structural difficulties of educational agencies in acting as emancipatory agents while highlighting the vital mission of education as a linchpin in facilitating the breaking of patterns of perpetuating inequality, especially when such

¹ translation by the author

agencies are the only opportunity for emancipation for disadvantaged subjects.

The volume proposes a reading of habitus as a mediator between social structures and individual practices (p.15, p.17, p. 84, p. 200), providing an emancipatory key for the subject. Indeed, Capogna articulates a dynamic view of habitus, presenting it not only as a factor of social reproduction but also as a platform for human agency. Crucial to the interplay between social structures and individual agency is the tension between "destiny" and "project," which is explored within an action-oriented sociological analysis against dominant structures to foster personal and collective change, thus promoting empowerment through action-research practices and transformative learning (p. 207).

The book is structured into four chapters. The first, "Reading Cultural Processes in Pierre Bourdieu" reinterprets the concept of habitus, emphasizing individual agency against social determinism. That chapter explores the tension between destiny and project, proposing a dynamic vision beyond social reproduction. Also analyzed is Bourdieu's thinking on cultural and social capital, introducing a "sociology of complexity" that illuminates the interplay between habitus, power, and emancipation. The chapter ends by inviting a reconsideration of power dynamics and educational policies to promote emancipation and social transformation. The second chapter, "The Educational Field" [translation by the reviewer] analyzes how Bourdieu uses habitus, field, and capital to explain social inequalities and their impact on education. It also explores how internalized dispositions influence social action and perpetuate inequalities and the role of educational institutions in cultural reproduction. For that matter, Bourdieu heavily critiques modern education, which fosters alienation and the maintenance of cultural control by the dominant classes, calling to challenge these mechanisms for social justice. The third chapter, "Insights and Critiques", discusses the debate on Bourdieu's concept of habitus, starting with the remarks made by Alexander, Archer and Wacquant to the French sociologist. This chapter explores the interpretation and application of his theories, proposing overcoming their theoretical limitations to enhance individual empowerment. The text illuminates different perspectives on Bourdieu, emphasizing the importance of updating his theories to respond to contemporary social challenges. Finally, in the fourth chapter, "Beyond Bourdieu", Bourdieu's concept of habitus is expanded and adapted to global and technological contexts. The chapter proposes an approach integrating neuroscience and social psychology, promoting empowerment and reflexivity. The importance of "capabilities," individual design, and a new educational vision that values authenticity and social co-construction is emphasized. This section aims to overcome Bourdieusian limitations by valuing individual freedom and social transformation.

Through the pages of the volume, critical themes related to Bourdieu's theoretical approach and its overcoming emerge frequently and consistently. Concepts such as cultural capital, human agency, social inequality, hexis and the contributions of psychology are woven tightly into the fabric of the analysis. The following exploration is devoted to deepening these themes through a detailed analysis of some issues. First, as pointed out repeatedly, Pierre Bourdieu is a constant and authoritative reference. The author chooses Bourdieu as her primary reference, given his deep dedication to investigating the mechanisms of inequality and domination through the notion of habitus (p. 30). Bourdieu's work is also chosen as a reference point because the author focuses on the relationship between habitus and fields as realizations of historical action, overcoming the dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism (p. 39). Bourdieu uses an eclectic approach to explore social structures, contributing to the sociological debate and understanding of power dynamics (p. 47). He

sees social actors as influenced by a "conservative force" within fields, emphasizing their positions rather than individual paths (p. 204), and is committed to delineating "structure" as a "structuring" force, with a focus on materialist issues and socioeconomic change (p.132). However, it is noteworthy that many criticized Bourdieu for his reduction of the individual to the material dimension, whereas Capogna's analyses converge to elevate the analysis to a multidimensional reading of the person.

Also crucial is the concept of "Cultural Capital," which, as described by Bourdieu, is intrinsically linked to habitus and social and economic capital, significantly influencing socialization, production, and cultural reproduction in social systems, acting as a structured and structuring force within a social system (p.9, p.18). It encompasses the education, knowledge, skills, and cultural practices that help define the social positions of individuals and their chances of success in different areas of social life (p. 27, p. 92). Criticizing the traditional economic approach, Bourdieu highlights how cultural capital is crucial in perpetuating inequality, operating through mechanisms of distinction and exclusion (p. 214). The relationship between cultural and digital capital underscores the evolution of the concept in the digital age, in which access to and use of digital technologies become an integral part of cultural capital accumulation and transmission strategies (p. 214). This holistic view of cultural capital as a resource that cuts across social, economic, and digital spheres highlights its central role in the sociological analysis of inequality and power dynamics. Bourdieu also delves into how taste and aesthetic appreciation vary between classes, influencing cultural practices and perceptions of lifestyles (p. 42). He identifies mature capitalist societies as class societies, introducing habitus as a mediator between structure and individual and emphasizing how internalized class values shape attitudes toward life (p. 47, p. 111). Bourdieu also notes how habitus highlights the intersection between agency and structure, adapting to contemporary changes that make social classes more fluid and less coherent due to factors such as globalization and technology (p.135). This complex view shows social class as central to identity formation and the perpetuation of inequality. However, Bourdieu has been criticized by multiple authors precisely for giving too much weight to structure while depowering the role of the subject.

Capogna's reflections build on Bourdieu and then turn to the concept of agency, which manifests itself as the capacity of individuals and collectives to actively act and influence their social and cultural context despite existing power structures and inequalities (p.15, p.74). It incorporates reflexivity, the ability to think of oneself in relation to one's environment, which is fundamental to designing and managing one's life course (p.74). In addition, the importance of interdisciplinarity and qualitative research in understanding and improving social reality is emphasized, linking agency to individual and social empowerment (p. 217). Society is analyzed through the lens of inequality, social change, the impact of globalization, and the integration of education and work (p.14, p. 17, p. 25, p. 31). These insights highlight the challenges of globalization, revisionist workforce theories, and the importance of effective triangulation between schools, society, and work for inclusive development. Modernity and capitalism are discussed for their effect on social structures, emphasizing

the need to address inequalities and promote equity and inclusion in a complex and rapidly changing social context. This multidimensional view of society emphasizes the interconnections between various domains, reflecting on the impact of global and local dynamics on social cohesion.

Another theme that forms a backdrop to the entire discussion is social inequality, as a

phenomenon rooted in educational and social structures, accentuated by cultural capital and social position (p.13, p. 15, p. 19), affecting the ability to determine one's future despite reflective agency (p.15). Bourdieu criticizes educational models that fail to consider these inequalities, limiting individual development (p.19) and calls for reviewing inequalities to overcome traditional conflicts, promoting collaborative actions for holistic changes (p.133), emphasizing the need to address the roots of inequality with inclusive solutions. In relation to inequality, education is seen in the book as a complex process that enables human reflexivity, which is essential for navigating complex contexts and developing resilience (p.170). It emphasizes the importance of human agency in responding to global changes and job insecurity, promoting skills such as managing uncertainty (p.175). The concept of empowerment emphasizes the enhancement of human resources and positive emotions in learning, integrating motivational theories and positive psychology (p.177). In response to the challenges of technological unemployment, education must prepare for the changing labour market and promote proactive adaptation to social changes (p.178). In addition, the volume links cultural and spiritual heritage to education, valuing cooperation, coexistence and authenticity as universal values for human development (p. 203).

Also relevant thematically is "hexis," which Aristotle defines as the proximate genus to which virtue, ἀρετή, (areté) belongs (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Chapter V). The author refers to hexis to propose a "recovery of the original meaning of the concept of habitus as declined in the Aristotelian tradition, as hexis, to emphasize the creative and dynamic dimension of subjective dispositions" (p.138). This notion, the author writes, "expresses the dimension of learning, of openness, of dynamism, the capacity/willingness to choose and to direct one's action freely toward the good, allows one to recognize the transformative and emancipatory force that is grafted into the form of a consciously and voluntarily assumed habit" (p. 144). Still quoting the author directly as she introduces hexis as a notion that is not overlapped with habitus:

"[...] notions (habitus, hexis; habit, habitude, diathesis) cannot be considered interchangeable or overlapping. On the contrary, they are an integral part of a very complex set of unresolved philosophical questions about human nature that are unsolvable through one-dimensional approaches. The connecting line that runs through all these assumptions can be traced in the irrepressible ambivalence experienced by the human being throughout his life, strained between: having versus being, power versus act, automatism versus reflexivity, freedom versus conditioning, reproduction versus transformation. A dichotomy that is consubstantial to the human condition which is confronted with an ineradicable dual nature: external/internal, corporeity/spirituality, memory/anticipation, unconscious/conscious, always tense between past and future but expressible only in present action" (p.143)².

Psychology provides a fertile and interdisciplinary field for intersecting cultural, social theory, and artistic phenomena, proving crucial for analyzing human and cultural dynamics (p. 9, p. 17, p. 23, p. 24, p. 25). The work of Bourdieu and Jung emerges as a valuable tool for understanding cultural processes, archetypes, and cultural heritage, enriching the analysis of social structures and the effects of modernity on the psyche. Psychology thus contributes to deciphering the complexity of human interactions, culture, and social changes, emphasizing the importance of psychological aspects in studying multidimensional phenomena. Within this conceptual framework, personal development is

² translation by the author

described as an intricate process influenced by a multitude of factors: socio-cultural (p.15), psychological (p.17), modernity, and the economy (p. 25, p. 27). This process embraces the importance of the environment in which one grows up, highlighting how it shapes perceptions and defines identity. The quest for one's place in the professional world (p.15) and adaptability to its uncertainties are vital components of development. Jung's archetypes (p.17) and the critical analysis of one-dimensional theories (p.18) enrich the understanding of how unconscious aspects influence personal growth. Finally, resilience and personal cognition (p. 26, p. 41) are emphasized as fundamental resources, while community support (p.248) is recognized, for facilitating development. This complex framework, described with meticulous rigour, while not lacking clarity and simplicity, illustrates personal development as a journey that intersects the individual with the collective, underlining the importance of a holistic approach to understanding human growth.