Thinking Beyond Disciplines:

Intellectuality, Interdisciplinarity, and Creativity in Pierre Bourdieu and Umberto Eco

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I, Sebastiano Caroni confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Thesis abstract

At the end of the twentieth century, Pierre Bourdieu and Umberto Eco were two of the most prominent intellectuals in France and Italy. Yet, in spite of the fact that France and Italy are neighbouring countries and have been, historically, exercising an on-going cultural influence upon each other, there is no systematic comparative study of these two intellectuals. This study responds to this absence by offering, within the framework of an interdisciplinary project, a thorough analysis of some of the key themes of the thought of Bourdieu and Eco. By addressing how Bourdieu's and Eco's work contributes to a better understanding of the creative and the interdisciplinary nature of intellectuality, this study explores the following hypothesis: *those scholars who become known to the general public as public intellectuals are often interested in exploring and in testing the limits of disciplinary fields. In so doing, they challenge the norms that define academic professionalism and the growing specialisation of knowledge in academia*. By highlighting the differences, as well as the similarities in the approaches of Bourdieu and Eco, this study shows that critical engagement is defined by the very disciplinary boundaries and structures it attempts to challenge and question. This study demonstrates that interdisciplinarity does neither exclude nor render obsolete existing disciplines. On the contrary, solid grounding in one discipline facilitates the production of interdisciplinary knowledge. As the examples of Bourdieu and Eco show, disciplines can be transcended only once they are fully mastered. Once fully mastered they appear in their contingency, not as absolute statements but rather as vehicles towards knowledge.

Contents

Note

In providing references to works, I have provided complete references in every chapter. When further referring to works, I have provided information about the author and the title, and page numbers when required. Sometimes I have used a shortened version of the title, but I have avoided using abbreviations. When referring to the same work several times within the same pages, I have provided page numbers within the main text. In these cases, I have duly indicated in a footnote the works to which these page numbers refer to.

In indicating quotations, I have been using single quotations marks throughout the text. I have used, sporadically, double quotation marks to denote metaphorical or non-literal uses of terms.

Introduction

Various claims have been made in the last twenty years or so about the decline of the historical figure of the public intellectual.[1] Such claims have been made against the background of global changes that have redefined the economic, the social and the cultural climate of the world we live in. These changes have largely been facilitated by the fall of communism as a political force antagonizing capitalism, by the rise of global markets, and by the emergence of the information society.

As sociologist Zygmunt Bauman maintains, societies renew themselves and their self-representing narratives by trading one set of arguments and intellectual assumptions for another. In a similar configuration (one which explores the idea that social reality is a dynamic process in which things are transformed, rather than disappear) there is ample space for reassessing the idea of the decline of the figure of the public intellectual. In place of terms such as decline, fade, or disappearance, contemporary information societies offer us another term: updating. In a world where strong oppositions such as the one between capitalism and communism have been replaced by the ideological conformism of the globalised market, one can say that intellectuals have lost some of their traditional target of political criticism. Yet, it is perhaps elsewhere other than in the sphere of political discourse that one could look in order to identify symbolic arenas within which intellectuals find a new potential for self-expression.

Against recent reshaping of Western cultures and societies, contemporary intellectuals may have had to re-invent their role, or simply adapt it to new configurations. Pierre Bourdieu and Umberto Eco have engaged, as public intellectuals, with the main questions (both local and global) that have emerged on the cultural agenda of our times. Even when such questions brought about additional categories around which to narrate (and to experience) contemporary western societies, the popularity of Bourdieu and Eco as public intellectuals not only has remained

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[1] See for instance Richard Posner, *Public Intellectuals. A Study of Decline* (Cambridge US: Harvard University Press, 2004).

unchanged, but has increased over the years. What has allowed Bourdieu and Eco to maintain the relevance of their role of public intellectuals has been their capacity to interpret such role creatively. A creative interpretation of the role of intellectual involves the capacity to reframe some of the major intellectual debates of our time, so as to present them in a novel, original and attractive way. In the case of Bourdieu and Eco, this creative reframing was initiated, crucially, in the first stages of their scholarly careers. This study plays close attention to the formative years of Bourdieu and Eco, by showing how their prominence as intellectuals has grown out of a critical engagement with intellectual movements that structured the debates in the humanities during the 60s, particularly in France.

At the end of the twentieth century, Bourdieu and Eco were two of the most prominent intellectuals in France and Italy. Yet, in spite of the fact that France and Italy are neighbouring countries and have been, historically, exercising an on-going cultural influence upon each other, there is no systematic comparative study of these two intellectuals. This study responds to this absence by offering, within the framework of an interdisciplinary project, a thorough analysis of some of the key themes of the thought of Bourdieu and Eco. This research combines these two thinkers in order to explore some of the processes of critical engagement that characterize the expression of intellectuality in contemporary Western societies. Intellectuals like Bourdieu and Eco operate as mediators between disciplinary communities composed by professionals, and a public of non-specialists. What makes an intellectual a public intellectual is, precisely, the fact that he or she writes for or speaks to a non-specialist public alongside a specialist one. Some academic disciplines, in this sense, shape the intellectual sensitivity of its members in such a way as to facilitate the passage from the academic field to a larger public debate. In semiotics, sociology, critical theory and cultural studies for instance, conceptual languages are often deployed in order to discuss social and cultural practices across society.[2] Since the 60s and 70s, such disciplines have enjoyed a high degree of interpenetration between disciplinary frameworks and questions having a widely acknowledged social, cultural and political resonance.[3]

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[2] See Bruce Robins, *Secular Vocations. Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture* (London: Verso, 1993).

[3] In some cases, disciplinary jargon can be an obstacle to the passage from academic disciplines to the public sphere.

This study combines different disciplines and research areas, in order to show how intellectuality constitutes itself through a richness and diversity of approaches and disciplinary horizons. The category of intellectual, in this sense, conceals a remarkable diversity and plurality in the ways in which critical engagement is expressed and publicly acknowledged. By highlighting the differences, as well as the similarities in the approaches of Bourdieu and Eco, this study tries to account for some of the ways in which critical engagement unfolds as a discourse of knowledge, as well as a discourse on or about knowledge. Similarly, it shows that critical engagement is, on some level, influenced by disciplinary boundaries and structures, while on another level it challenges these boundaries and structures.

Since I consider myself a sociologist who is interested in literature or a literary critic who is interested in sociology[4], comparing Bourdieu and Eco was a rather appealing option when I embarked on this research. Even if these two thinkers are in many respects quite different, they represent well the wide range of nuances in the spectrum of possible expressions of contemporary intellectuality. The rigour of Bourdieu's sociological analysis and the playfulness and indeterminacy of literature associated with Eco's fictional work, are perhaps two instances illustrating how the ways of public intellectuality are many and diverse. In the eye of the general public, Bourdieu is usually associated with the disciplines of sociology and political science, while Eco is mostly known as a novel writer and cultural journalist, and to a lesser extent as a semiotician.[5] Academic disciplines like sociology, semiotics, or literary studies are ways of looking at the world. Each discipline has its own box of tools whereby its practitioners act upon the real and frame their own considerations, concerns, arguments, and conclusions. A discipline, in this sense, is part of the experience of knowledge itself. It shapes the way in which knowledge is apprehended, produced, assembled, and ultimately ordered according to meaningful reference systems, which can then be taught as coherent and unified bodies of knowledge.

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[4] I hold a master's degree in social sciences from the University of Lausanne and one in Italian literature and philology of romance language from the University of Fribourg (Switzerland).

[5] It should be added that Eco is also widely known, in Italy, for his frequent journalistic interventions on newspapers and weekly magazines. Although less frequently than Eco, Bourdieu was also writing, like many left intellectuals in France, in *Le monde diplomatique* and less frequently in *Le monde*.

Even if Bourdieu and Eco are different intellectuals, their differences are by no means irreconcilable. They both share a scholarly interest in art and literature, continental and analytic philosophy, the study of culture and communication, and anthropology, which they apply both in their theoretical work as well as when they speak from the point of view of public intellectuals to a general public. As intellectuals, they often confront similar issues, such as the way in which the media frame public debates, or the relation between ideology and individuals. However, because of the different academic disciplines to which they are associated, Bourdieu and Eco are, as said, not easily comparable. Often regarded as two very different thinkers, they embody a different ideal type of the intellectual. Some of their career choices have led them to develop different and sometimes contrastive expressions of intellectuality. Eco for instance turned into a popular novel writer in the early 80s and became increasingly associated with and known to the wide public in this role. Bourdieu, for his part, consolidated his role as a public sociologist by becoming professor at the Collège de France in 1981, and by producing work that strengthened his theoretical concerns. Interestingly, Bourdieu would often point out how his commitment to sociological knowledge would preclude a more light-hearted experience of the world that he assigned to artists. Bourdieu's position exemplifies the idea that a specific disciplinary commitment, while it grants certain advantages such as rational or systematic rigour, at the same time excludes other ways to approach knowledge which are just as valuable and meaningful.

Bourdieu never ventured, as Eco did, in the territories of fiction writing. He was equally critical of the postmodern irony that disregards disciplinary boundaries, which is typical of intellectuals like Richard Rorty or Eco. However, while advocating a strong disciplinary identity, he often claimed a totalising role for sociology within the intellectual field, thus turning sociology into a master-discipline. Bourdieu often claimed he held the master key allowing him to access other disciplinary territories such as philosophy or the history of art. His advocacy of the epistemological power of his sociological savoir-faire is an interesting example of transdisciplinarity that will be further discussed in this study. Bourdieu's sociology is not just an instrument to expand one's knowledge beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries: Bourdieu builds a disciplined world from which one cannot escape, when one realizes that everything is social. Bourdieu's social world resembles a carefully designed labyrinth that evokes

possible comparisons with Eco's (and Borges') interest in the labyrinth as an epistemological metaphor. While Eco places a labyrinth at the very heart of the narrative mechanism of *Il nome della rosa*, Bourdieu multiplies his references to the presence of social factors accounting for the manifestation of both individuality and collectivity, thus creating a logic of practice within which there is, so to speak, no way out of culture and society.[6]

Disciplines are neither something static, nor object-like entities. They are ways to organise and reorganize encyclopaedias of contemporary and past cultures. As part of a rhetoric of knowledge, they demarcate an epistemological space on a map of knowledge whose reliefs can change according to the eye, or the mind, of the beholder. This study purports to show how the work of Bourdieu and Eco extends and widens the epistemological territories covered by the academic disciplines within which these two thinkers have been formed. In fact, Bourdieu and Eco have contributed both to the popularization of sociology and semiotics outside of academia as much as they have opened up new and exciting interdisciplinary experiences. This study tackles some of the forms and modalities whereby, by addressing the question of disciplinary limits, the work of Bourdieu and Eco produces an original intellectual output.

Throughout this study, I contend that interdisciplinarity does neither exclude nor render obsolete existing disciplines. On the contrary, the most interesting, solid and long-lasting examples of interdisciplinary experiments require a thorough knowledge and mastering of one or more academic disciplines. As I will maintain, solid grounding in one discipline, rather than being an obstacle to interdisciplinarity, facilitates it. As the examples of Bourdieu and Eco show, disciplines, like doctrines, can be transcended only once they are fully conquered. Once fully conquered they appear in their contingency, not as absolute statements but rather as vehicles for knowledge.[7] Some of the possibilities initiated by Bourdieu and Eco to create interdisciplinary ways of

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[6] As I will show in chapter two, by practicing a particular brand of self-reflexive sociology, Bourdieu scrutinizes his own professional career and examines it as a series of moves on the labyrinthine chessboard of society.

[7] It is perhaps on this ground that the different meanings of the term discipline meet and create a common space of convergence not only between academic disciplines, but also between all kinds of practices (intellectual, artistic, spiritual etc.) which revolve around the search, the production and the distribution of knowledge.

producing knowledge are still partially unexplored, and await to be shaped creatively. This study is an attempt to respond to this call for intellectual creativity and interdisciplinarity. If maps of knowledge already exist, it is still possible to draw new paths within the known territories.

In exploring the triangulation of the ideas of disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, and creativity I need to consider the following question. Do Bourdieu and Eco have something specific which makes them good candidates to illustrate the ideas of disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and creativity as defined in this study? I recognize that there are a number of intellectuals - like Michel Foucault or Roland Barthes, to name just two - which would perhaps be good examples of the kind of disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and creativity I discuss. In this sense, I am aware that the criteria which guided my choice of Bourdieu and Eco are flexible enough to accommodate other intellectuals.[8]

Yet, in another sense the choice of Bourdieu and Eco is symptomatic of one of the key issues that fostered the centrality of interdisciplinarity within academia. In the development of interdisciplinarity since the 60s, the humanities and the social sciences have influenced each other in unprecedented ways. Without losing their relative independence as autonomous fields of studies, their recurrent interactions have been very beneficial on both sides. Social scientists have become more aware of issues of representation, textuality, and interpretation, and humanists have been keener to explore and integrate within their scholarly investigations methods and insights from anthropology, sociology and political science.[9] Nonetheless, in spite of this reciprocal influence, not many intellectuals have been able to engage with both fields in the way Bourdieu and Eco have done so, showing a mastery of the conceptual language and a thorough knowledge of the key issues and debates that characterize these fields. In this

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[8] However, in arguing that the works of Bourdieu and Eco demonstrate a kind of intellectual creativity that preserves the duality of disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, I also engage with a view of creativity that might not necessarily be very helpful in the case of intellectuals such as Jacques Derrida, for whom the very notions of disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity might not even apply.

[9] See Julie Thompson Klein, *Humanities, Culture, and Interdisciplinarity* (Albany: State Univeristy of New York, 2005), especially chapters two and three.

sense, this study pays tribute to the ability of Bourdieu and Eco to foster the dialogue between the disciplines of the social sciences and the humanities.

Intellectuals have always been involved in defining who is an intellectual and what an intellectual does. The notion of intellectual, as I explain in chapter one, can be defined in different ways. A number of current understandings of the intellectual tend to crystallize around political engagement, often within the media. In this study I provide an alternative definition of the intellectual, one that is turned towards the exploration of epistemic reflexivity within the academic field rather than outside of it, in the sphere of political discourse or within the media. The reason for focusing on epistemic reflexivity within the academic field stems from the following consideration; even if the public engagement of Bourdieu and Eco is very visible, it is only the tip of an iceberg whose main body lies in the waters of the academic field. In this sense, the status of public intellectual of Bourdieu and Eco is the culmination of a long process which for the most part takes place on the academic stage.

My choice of Bourdieu and Eco was also justified by the continuity that exists between their work as scholars and their engagement as intellectuals. In this study I investigate how Bourdieu and Eco problematize the idea of academic expertise without setting apart the role of scholar from that of public intellectual. In this sense, there are a number of famous public intellectuals that would not fit this criterion. For instance, in the case of Noam Chomsky the continuity between the scholarly work and the role of public intellectual that characterizes Bourdieu and Eco does not exist. Instead, the scholar and the public intellectual are perceived as separate *personae*.

In order to dissipate potential confusion as to the object of this study, I wish to clarify that this study is not, strictly speaking, on the public engagement of intellectuals. Rather, it describes some of the ways through which knowledge is conceived and developed by individual intellectuals within the academic field, and focuses on the place of intellectuals within this field. The main focus is on how intellectual styles develop within the academic field, and on how the interplay of intellectuality, interdisciplinarity and creativity can account for it.

This study provides an analysis of knowledge practices academics are already familiar with. But what is, one might ask, the point of examining these practices?

Reflecting upon knowledge cultures places one in a position to examine things that are often taken for granted. Being familiar with something does not necessarily mean being fully aware of something. Sometimes people do things because they have learned to do them, but they are not always in a position to account for or question what they do. Doing something does not automatically entail that one knows why or what one is doing. Precisely for this reason, I am hoping to raise the awareness of the presence of knowledge cultures that are defined by practices, norms, and values that have a direct impact on the way academics conceive knowledge. The point is precisely that when one examines practice, one might be well placed to explain why we do certain things rather than others. When one knows what one is doing, one is already in a position to do things differently. The privilege of theory (if theory has a privilege) is that it allows one to observe things from a different point of view: not necessarily a better one, but a different one. Theory is the other side of practice, but it is by no means unrelated to it: the academic field is particularly fertile for showing the links between the one and the other.

The general question I am addressing concerns how intellectuals manipulate symbolic resources such as conceptual languages, theories, and methods in order to negotiate their position within the intellectual field. I am interested in looking at how thinkers come to hold prominent positions by working out an intellectual self-narrative that is both creative and interdisciplinary. Intellectuals like Bourdieu and Eco are "conceptual artists", therefore the choice of concepts that assume a central place in their theoretical orientation is of primary importance. Concepts such as open work, model reader or overinterpretation, in the case of Eco, of self-reflexivity, field and habitus in the case of Bourdieu, are not only among the most important items in the conceptual vocabularies of Bourdieu and Eco. These concepts also play a central role in this study: they are privileged routes into the examination of the work of Bourdieu and Eco.

The concepts academics develop are relevant inasmuch as they constitute an intellectual trademark. Like the signature on a work of art, concepts constitute a mark of identity, because they allow one to associate these concepts with a specific thinker. When concepts are closely associated with thinkers, they often account for intellectual originality and novelty. The concepts of Bourdieu and Eco that will be discussed in this study have been considered, in their respective contexts of elaboration, as original and novel. They have been essential in the careers of Eco and Bourdieu inasmuch as they

have allowed them to craft a powerful position within relevant intellectual debates. These concepts have appeared essential to these debates, and have been presented by their authors as the adequate response to theoretical dilemmas. The proposed solutions to these dilemmas often came, as I will argue, under the form of the possibility of unifying the contingent with the contextual, the individual with the social background, the agency with the structure. The concepts for which Bourdieu and Eco have become known have a characteristic synthesising power that allows the reconciliation of opposing views. A concept is by definition a synthesis of different elements. Concepts encode a whole explanation in one word; but not all concepts show the propensity to unify or reconcile opposing views: some may be used with the intention to question or support a given point of view, but might be lacking dialectical flexibility.

In examining Bourdieu's and Eco's concepts, I will emphasize their strong dialectical element. I will also argue that the epistemic strategies which are concealed behind Eco's and Bourdieu's concepts demonstrate a creative manipulation of intellectual resources in view of maximizing academic profit. As it sometimes happens in the case of highly sophisticated debates, it is often not clear whether a solution is proposed in order to solve a problem or if a problem is created in order to call forth and justify a solution. The same can be stated for the key concepts of Bourdieu and Eco that will be examined in this study. Have these concepts been elaborated only in order to respond to a debate or to a pre-existing problem, or have they also contributed in creating the problems they are supposedly offering the solutions to? This question is very relevant. It emphasizes the very existence of strategies whereby something is presented, from a certain viewpoint, as problematic, and underlines the fact that concepts come to be regarded as valuable and long lasting contributions to widely accepted bodies of knowledge. The academic field is a place where things are, unlike other places, often presented as problematic. Assuming a critical posture is a preferential option for academics; approaching things as being essentially complex is part of what they do.

Creating a question that challenges the state of knowledge, whether within the confines of a discipline or more globally, is one of the strategies academics employ in order to express their belonging to a particular institutional context. In many cases, both the problem and the solution to the problem are worked out interdependently. In fact, it is often said that asking the right questions is as important as finding the right answers.

Some of the concepts of Bourdieu and Eco will be analysed accordingly: they can be understood as questions as well as answers to theoretical problems. In order to work out solutions to a problem or in order to frame a problem in a new way, academics sometimes employ creativity and interdisciplinarity as preferential strategies. Interdisciplinarity and creativity thus refer to ways in which knowledge is selected, organised, combined, interpreted as well as presented. In spite of this, these notions are not generally used in order to explain the development of an intellectual style. They are often seen as merely derivative of a thought of an author, or used in order to label a thinker so as to stress his or her versatility. In this study I will consider interdisciplinarity and creativity as an integral part of the thought of Bourdieu and Eco. I propose that interdisciplinary and creativity is what makes the work of Bourdieu and Eco distinctive.

Even if thus far I pointed out that interdisciplianrity and creativity are common practices within academia, I want to stress how the work of Bourdieu and Eco constitute a rather peculiar case: a case in which interdisciplinarity and creativity also create favourable (if not ideal) conditions for the exercise of public intellectuality. Creativity and interdisciplinarity appear as rather unique when they are combined with the exercise of public intellectuality. If, as I argued earlier, this study does not engage with the practice of public intellectuality *per se*, it does nonetheless present interdisciplinarity and creativity as being somehow constitutive of public intellectuality. Furthermore, I intend to submit the notions of interdisciplinarity and creativity to an analytical exercise with the aim of re-assessing some of the current understandings of these terms. When exploring these notions, I have tried to keep a balance between applying them as an interpretative grid as opposed to considering them as the product of discourse analysis on the works of Bourdieu and Eco.[10]

When examining the intellectual styles of Bourdieu and Eco, I will refer to their extensive body of work in a selective manner. In general, I will comment on their works in accordance with the specific agenda set out by individual chapters. In most chapters, I seek a balance between the exploration of a theme in relation to Bourdieu and Eco and within the context of a more general study of intellectual styles. Chapter two and

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[10]In order to preserve a balance between an inductive and a deductive approach, it was important to have a few preliminary lines of investigations as well as a preliminary critical assessment of the notions of interdisciplinarity and creativity, which I have provided in chapter one.

chapter three illustrate this choice. In chapter five my choice of works will take into consideration a particular historical period, so as to focus on the early moments of the careers of Bourdieu and Eco. In chapter four the choice of works is subordinated to a more general theoretical aim; in this chapter I focus on some of the aspects of the work of Bourdieu and Eco I have introduced earlier in the study. In chapter six I examine some works Bourdieu and Eco published when their status of intellectuals had already been largely established. As in chapter four, I relate the analysis of Bourdieu's and Eco's key concepts to a more general line of argument.[11]

I am aware that the choice of works of Bourdieu and Eco might appear, in some chapters, rather eclectic and unsystematic. In other chapters the reader might find it easier to find a chronological line of enquiry. It seems important to me to stress that the organising principle of this study is topological rather than chronological, and that the choice of works has been subordinated to the particular thematic development this study takes. I wanted to frame my own narrative about intellectual styles, how they develop, how they become an intellectual trademark, and how they contribute to the definition of one's identity. In the landscape of post-modern aesthetics and theory, and in the artistic and intellectual movements growing out of the 70s and 80s and beyond, style is often equated with a way to carry a message forward.[12] In focusing my attention on how intellectual styles develop, I examine how Bourdieu and Eco develop some of the long lasting features of their intellectual profile by creatively combining symbolic resources present in the intellectual field.

Another point I wish to stress is that this study provides a multidisciplinary framework. This is apparent in the flexible use of conceptual languages I display, as well as in the change of perspective I adopt when I want to diversify my approach. Essentially I am pursuing a set of questions moving across disciplinary territories. Amidst the range of possible approaches available to a socio-cultural analysis of the academic field, I have largely privileged two lines of enquiry. The first tends towards literary theory and the second could be loosely defined as sociology of knowledge. I

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[11] The same concepts of Bourdieu and Eco will be discussed in different chapters. In each chapter I add something to what I have previously said about these concepts, but I also offer a different context within which I show the relevance these concepts take from different angles.

[12] The exhibition *Postmodernism. Style and Subversion, 1970-1990* held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (24 September 2011-15 January 2012) illustrates well the centrality of style in art and popular culture from 1970 to 1990.

trust that the multidisciplinary framework within which this study has been conceived will not create difficulties in following my line of reasoning: I hope that such framework will be seen as a richness, as well as suitable to the topic this study purports to explore.

In the final part of this introduction, I shall give an overview of the chapters' content. Chapter one discusses the relevance of the notion of interdisciplinarity in relation to public intellectuals' creativity and with regards to Bourdieu and Eco. This chapter offers an overview of the themes discussed in the study. It gives important information about the structure of the study and about the particular angle from which Bourdieu and Eco will be approached. It introduces the different research fields that inform the writing of this study, thus setting the stage for my discussion of intellectuality, interdisciplinary and creativity.

In chapters two and three I look at the development of the careers of Bourdieu and Eco as manifesting the interplay between intellectuality, interdisciplinarity, and creativity. I emphasize some of the dynamics whereby disciplinarity as well as interdisciplinary knowledge are constituted. Such dynamics include critical confrontations between disciplines, interpenetrations of disciplines, as well as the exploration of an epistemological *topos* across disciplines. In these chapters I also pursue the discussion on the significance of the concept of intellectual narrative developed in chapter one. By reference to the notions of self-reflexivity and intellectual polyphony, I illustrate how intellectual styles implement creative thinking and foster the development of interdisciplinary theory.

More specifically, in chapter two I discuss Bourdieu's poetics of the intellectual, suggesting that Bourdieu's sociological *savoir-faire* and his disciplinary expertise lie at the very heart of his role of intellectual. I examine how the practice of a very peculiar brand of self-reflexive sociology engages Bourdieu in posing the question of the relation between the social-scientific intellectual and the knowledge practices he engages with. I also stress the way in which Bourdieu discusses the position of sociology within the French intellectual field, how he portrays the figure of the sociologist as an *agent provocateur* challenging the disciplinary boundaries, and the

epistemological standards, of distinguished academic disciplines such as philosophy or history of art.[13]

Chapter three deals with the ways in which Eco's intellectual project has taken the shape of a flexible intellectual polyphony thanks to which Eco has been able to play, often within the same text (as in the case of *Il nome della Rosa* (1980)) the multiple roles of critic of mass culture, semiotician, fiction writer, and post-modern intellectual. The chapter examines the notion of intellectual polyphony in relation to the increase of Eco's readership. It pinpoints how Eco's intellectual profile develops within a profound continuity of his theoretical concerns. Eco's theoretical concerns revolve around the idea of culture as a fundamentally dynamic and creative process. By introducing Eco's understanding of cultural processes, this chapter will also expand on the importance of creativity with regard to the study of intellectuality. In particular, the novel combination of existing cultural matrices will be highlighted as one of the main creative components of Eco's intellectual polyphony.

The two introductory chapters on Bourdieu and Eco illustrate how individual thinkers interpret and reframe existing bodies of knowledge that sometimes coexist with the definition of a particular discipline. In chapter four, I will work along a series of conceptual couples such as singular and plural, and individual and society, in order to show the pertinence of an approach considering intellectuals and the contexts in which they operate as mutually informing dimensions of intellectuality. This chapter proposes a theoretical framework within which to explore further the considerations of the first three chapters. The aim is to illustrate how ideas, theories and arguments, thanks to which intellectuals become known to a general public, are developed within a set of networks (institutions, social groups, intellectual communities, and disciplinary structures) without which intellectuals would not be able to define their originality. While the chapter offers a theoretical framework elaborating the considerations introduced by the introductory chapters, it also provides new insights supporting the claims about the interrelations between intellectual creativity and interdisciplinarity.

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[13] My use of the French expression *agent provocateur* with regards to Bourdieu has been inspired by Michael Grenfell, *Pierre Bourdieu. Agent Provocateur* (London: Continuum, 2004).

Furthermore, this chapter introduces the main lines of research of the new sociology of ideas, a dynamic field of research that will be integrated in the final part of this study.

One of the ways whereby Bourdieu and Eco have developed interdisciplinary pathways to knowledge within their own disciplines is by confronting the shortcomings of structuralism. In chapter five on Bourdieu, Eco, and structuralism I argue that the pathways whereby academic intellectuals find their own voice go through the critical engagement between their innermost originality and the accepted authority of theories that constitute a symbolic force within the intellectual field. In so doing, I illustrate the importance of the theoretical considerations about the mutually informing concepts of individual and society elaborated in chapter four. Chapter five suggests how the critical engagement with the structural paradigm is a key in the development of Bourdieu's and Eco's intellectual trajectory.[14] Structuralism is a good example of an interdisciplinary movement that became very relevant to a range of disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences. Structuralism's interdisciplinarity was perfectly compatible with a disciplinary division of knowledge, given that individual disciplines were implementing the critical language of structuralism while preserving their disciplinary identities. Structuralism operates on the basis of a combination of potentially heterogeneous elements within a single framework, a single formula: the structure. It stresses the relation between different elements over the individual elements. As Arthur Koestler eloquently shows, creativity relies on a combination of different matrices or patterns that have, prior to the combination and taken individually, nothing particularly creative.[15] While, from this perspective, structuralism was clearly a creative force (by bringing different elements within the same framework), there was also, as Bourdieu and Eco (among others) have highlighted, something static inhibiting a creative approach to culture and agency. This chapter helps to see what, according to Bourdieu and Eco, structuralism left out of its own intellectual agenda, and how this omission resulted in a lack of creative potential. Moreover, as Bourdieu and Eco maintain, structuralism's inclination towards objectivism produced a fracture on an existing map of knowledge by setting apart two territories: the objective and the subjective. In chapter five I have recounted, among other things, the story of the attempt at reintegrating the

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[14] The chapter is intended as a specific case study demonstrating the practical implications of the considerations developed in chapter four.

[15] Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (1964) (London: Picador, 1977).

creative subject within the theoretical approaches of Bourdieu and Eco. By pinpointing the "dark side" of structuralism, Bourdieu and Eco provided the conditions that fostered the possibility to reintroduce creative agency.

Every chapter of this study illustrates how intellectuals engage with the cultures within which they operate. If I start this study by examining the notion of cultural intellectual, I conclude by examining the notion of intellectual cultures. In fact, the conclusive chapter six, by developing a meta-critical understanding of the intellectual practices that define academic work, takes a step back from the rather close-up perspective developed in chapter five. The aim of chapter six is to propose a careful generalisation of some of the observations developed in the preceding chapters while offering a consistent argument in favour of the idea that intellectual creativity can lead to a reflexive view of intellectuality. The chapter attempts to show how some of the key themes of the thought of Bourdieu and Eco lead to a reflexive awareness of the norms that regulate academic work. As recent research on creativity has shown, intellectual creativity, when adequately cultivated, can lead to the development of social wisdom informed by ethical awareness.[16] Chapter six, precisely, looks at how epistemic reflexivity fosters the development of social wisdom with regards to intellectuality.

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[16] See for instance Kevin Hilton, 'Boundless Creativity', in *The Dark Side of Creativity* , ed. by David H. Cropley, Arthur J. Cropley, James C. Kaufman, and Mark A. Runco (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.134-155.

Chapter 1: Intellectual Narratives. Intellectuals, Disciplinary Fields, and Creativity

'One does not perform acts of criticism by breaking free of the profession's norms and constraints whether in the service of timeless masterpieces or in the name of political liberation, and whenever the claim to have broken free is made you can be sure that it is underwritten, authorized, and rendered intelligible by the very disciplinary boundaries it purports to have left behind'.[17]

'L'intellectuel est quelqu'un qui se mêle de ce qui ne le regarde pas'.[18]

1.1. Introductory remarks

This study maps out an interdisciplinary territory within which existing theoretical projects converge. Some of the concerns of this study emerge directly from the analysis of a textual corpus dealing with the concept of the intellectual.[19] While this chapter draws some of its main ideas form this textual corpus, it also develops the notion of creativity, by showing that ideas are generated in a space of interaction between individual thinkers and structured bodies of knowledge. By identifying research areas in which the notion of the intellectual can be examined from an interdisciplinary perspective, this chapter introduces the main themes discussed in the study. It also gives important information about the structure of the study, about its interdisciplinary approach, its underlying hypothesis, and about the particular angle from which Bourdieu and Eco will be approached.[20]

My understanding of the expression "intellectual narratives" proposed in the title is that these narratives are both narratives *of* intellectuals (narratives that define the figure and the role of intellectuals) and narratives *by* intellectuals (narratives that are

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[17] Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), p.179.

[18] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations, VIII. Autour de 68* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p.377.

[19] Even if perhaps not exhaustive, this textual corpus was fairly representative of the main points raised by literature on intellectuals. For a list of works see general bibliography.

[20] At its inception the project was centred on the definition of the intellectual. In its most advanced developments, it is less concerned with individuals than with communicative processes. The reasons for the shift of emphasis will be examined in this chapter and thoroughly explored in chapter four.

thought of and conceptualised by intellectuals). In this double sense of the expression "intellectual narratives", intellectuals are both objects and subjects of these narratives. While intellectuals create narratives, they are also partly defined by them.

In the first sense, intellectuals narrate society and knowledge: by telling a story about society and about knowledge, they shape the very codes whereby a society describes itself. A narration, in this sense, is not just descriptive, but also prescriptive: intellectuals propose conceptions of societies and knowledge around particular values, such as reason, order, or stability. Every society, in this sense, depends upon some kind of normative frame. Normative frames designate, at various levels of social life, what is acceptable, desirable, but also conventional or deviant.

More generally, normative frames are guidelines according to which different scenarios can be interpreted against the baseline of a common set of norms. As authors like Zygmunt Bauman and Terry Eagleton maintain, modern intellectuals have had a privileged role in conceptualising and producing these guidelines and set of norms.[21]

If intellectuals can be seen as conceptual artists, they are also necessarily part of the society they describe and contribute to shaping. As such they cannot be said to be completely outside the narratives they produce. While they have a central role in writing the script of the social play, they are also part of the script and characters in this play.[22] It is precisely this dialectic between narrating society and knowledge and being narrated by society and knowledge that this study, and this chapter in particular, addresses.[23] This chapter introduces the concept of narrative as a descriptive device: the concept of narrative lays emphasis on the essentially creative component thanks to which public

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[21] See Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters. On Modernity, Post-modernity and Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), and Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin, 2004).

[22] Intellectuals find themselves negotiating their definitions of society with regards to definitions and conceptualisations that are already there, created by previous generations of intellectuals. This chapter, and more generally this study, will consider from different angles this double aspect (narrating society and knowledge, and being narrated by society and knowledge). These two aspects of the role of intellectuals are often interdependent. The role of narrators of society implies that one performs a social role that is, at least partially, defined within a social setting and against the background of existing communicative practices.

[23] The concept of intellectual narrative will be further developed in chapter two and chapter three. These chapters will introduce Bourdieu and Eco, and for this reason are quite monographic.

intellectuals narrate society whilst shaping their own social identity.[24] This chapter also addresses the fact that intellectual creativity develops in settings in which intellectuals are confronted with social constraints. These constraints tend to limit their creativity inasmuch as they provide social frameworks fostering conventionalized intellectual behaviours. However, as this study will maintain throughout its different chapters, these limits and constraints are also beneficial to intellectual activity, insofar as they provide an element of challenge and a source of motivation for intellectual engagement of a creative kind.[25]

The structure of this chapter is as follows. After introducing the main hypothesis that this study explores, it will present a historical portrait of the intellectual. This portrait is not meant to offer an exhaustive description of the history of intellectuals. Rather, it shows how history is the product of representation. Official written and spoken representations depend on which sources are considered more authoritative by a given culture at a given time, and on how these sources are approached, interpreted, and questioned. Intellectuals have largely contributed in writing and conceptualizing not just history in general: they have also largely contributed to writing their own history as well as creating their own myths. Such a role, often underscored, illustrates one of the main aspects of the definition of the intellectual: the contribution that intellectuals give to knowledge and culture transcends the narrowness of disciplinary limits in order to address a much wider public.[26]

The second part of this chapter focuses more extensively on the figure and the role of the intellectual against the background of the historical emergence of modern academia. As I will be showing, modern academia furthers and partly creates the contemporary disciplinary structures with which we are familiar nowadays. The figure

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[24] Identity is very a complex notion, and many commentators have underlined the increasingly fragmented forms that it acquires in contemporary western societies. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

[25] On the idea that social conventions are both a limiting force and a constructive challenge to the development of creativity see, among others, *The Dark Side of Creativity*, ed. by David H. Cropley, Arthur J. Cropley, James C. Kaufman, and Mark A. Runco.

[26] The expression "collective imaginary", often used to indicate a form of knowledge shared by the general public, reveals precisely this aspect of the work of intellectuals. What we call collective imaginary includes, among other things, a particular representation of history, society, and knowledge. These representations are elaborated by and large by intellectuals, and are part of the knowledge delivered by institutional systems such as schools.

of the modern intellectual, as I will show, defines itself against this growing disciplinarisation of knowledge, by both challenging it and by using the knowledge resources made available by disciplines. By discussing the presence of disciplinary structures as a mark of modern academia, I intend to show how intellectuals' interdisciplinarity constructs itself within the context of a dialogue between disciplinary communities, and in reference to the presence of a general public.

Against the background sketched out in the second part of the chapter, the third part will further discuss the interdisciplinary character of the knowledge produced by intellectuals. I will present more in detail the key research areas, such as intellectual creativity and the sociology of ideas, which this study explores in relation to the works of Bourdieu and Eco. I will also show why these research areas are relevant to the study of public intellectuality. The conclusion of the chapter will offer a synthesis of the main points addressed, and will briefly introduce the next chapters of the study by addressing the link between this first introductory chapter and the rest of the study.

1.2. Underlying Hypothesis

By addressing how Bourdieu's and Eco's work contributes to a better understanding of both the creative and the interdisciplinary nature of intellectuality, this study explores the following hypothesis. *Within a given academic discipline, scholars who become known to the general public as public intellectuals are often interested in exploring and in testing the limits of disciplinary fields. In so doing, they challenge the norms that define academic professionalism and the growing specialisation of knowledge of academia. This study illustrates how knowledge practices that explore disciplinary limits, while sometimes taking the form of explicit intellectual challenges, are often not explicitly presented as such. What the study pinpoints is that often, at the very heart of the thought of an intellectual, and of his or her attitude towards the production of knowledge, there is not only a rational, but also an emotional and existential response to these very disciplinary limits.*

This hypothesis engages with the definition of the public intellectual given by Stefan Collini and discussed later in this chapter. According to this definition, the category of intellectual, besides indicating a 'socio-professional category' also denotes 'those who are regarded as possessing some kind of cultural authority, that is, who employ an acknowledged intellectual position or achievement in addressing a broader,

non-specialist public'.[27] This study further explores these complementary definitions in the following way. It shows how creativity is an important aspect that intervenes when public intellectuals challenge disciplinary boundaries. As a result, creative intellectuals are likely to produce interdisciplinary knowledge in order to address a 'broader, non-specialist public'.[28] In this sense, this study suggests the interplay of at least three notions: intellectuality, interdisciplinarity, and creativity.

1.3. Questioning the notion of the intellectual

Even if this research is based on the work of two particular intellectuals, it does not limit itself to comparing them. While consistent parts of this study will concentrate on examining, alternatively, Bourdieu and Eco, in other parts the focus will be turned to examining some aspects of the study of intellectual processes, with the intention to move beyond the particular examples. Bourdieu and Eco will often be the starting points for examining intellectual processes and the way such processes develop. Conversely, studying the dynamics of intellectual processes will generate questions, which will be examined in light of the works of Bourdieu and Eco. The theory-oriented format of this study, and its partial autonomy from the two concrete examples, will be made sufficiently clear and intelligible throughout the arguments developed within it. Similarly, the existence of strong interdependences and links between the examples and the theory will also be made clear.

This study addresses three main areas: the works of Bourdieu and Eco, the literature on intellectuality, and the research areas considered in relation to this literature (such as creativity, the new sociology of ideas, etc.). In terms of the chronology of the study, the question of the definition of the intellectual was the starting point.[29] At the outset, I wanted to discuss the works of Bourdieu and Eco in light of this question. As the research progressed, it also became clear that this question was going to generate a slightly different set of questions, which would partly modify the methodological aim of the project. From a certain point onwards, my initial question was re-elaborated in light

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[27] Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 46-47.

[28] Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds*, p. 47.

[29] With regards to this Stefan Collini's *Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain* was particularly important in providing a few preliminary orienting lines to the project.

of some specific methodological concerns. As a result, the study became more clearly focused on the relationship between intellectuals and the social context in which they operate.

While initially my research focused on the notion of the intellectual, I realized that by putting forward the notion of the intellectual without further specification, I would lay exaggerated emphasis on the importance of the individual over the social context. The very category of public intellectual, at least when used in the singular and without further specification, presents some limits for a study that combines within a single methodological framework the singularity of specific intellectuals and the shaping influence of the social context. Historically, some of the most widely known definitions of the intellectual, like the one put forward by Karl Mannheim or by Alvin Gouldner, depict intellectuals as free-floating thinkers without consistent and limiting bonds with the social context. Looking back at Gouldner's definition of the intellectual, Frank Furedi, the author of *Where have all the intellectuals gone?,* laments that 'in retrospect, one is struck by the inflated significance attached to the role of the intellectual in the past. Gouldner's caricature of the rise of a new class of intellectuals appears today as an incomprehensible anachronism'.[30]

For the reason described above, it seemed appropriate to lay emphasis on the idea of intellectual processes, by recurring to concepts such as intellectual narrative, rather than on intellectuals as individuals. Without wanting to undervalue the idea of the free-floating thinker, it appears that, in the context of the conception and the production of ideas and theoretical worldviews shared and/or discussed by intellectual communities, intellectual freedom goes hand in hand with the existence of constraints of different kind, both practical and theoretical. As Louis Menand points out, intellectual freedom is constantly challenged by the possibility of coercion, and ultimately depends on finding a common ground between the interests of different social groups.[31] The notion of intellectual, like that of individual, focuses on individual aspects of intellectual creation at the expenses of the social and communicative dimensions, which

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[30] Frank Furedi, *Where Have all the Intellectuals Gone?* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 29-30. For the notion of the intellectual as discussed by Mannheim and Gouldner, see Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge,1936) and Alvin Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (New York: Seabury Press,1979).

[31] Louis Menand, 'The limits of academic freedom', in *The future of Academic Freedom*, ed. by Louis Menand (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) p.7.

are necessarily intersubjective and collective.[32] Moreover, the notion of intellectual, when considered from a scholarly perspective, is not exempt from the kind of criticism that reshaped the idea of author in contemporary literary theory. As Michel Foucault suggests in the very first sentence of the essay 'What is an author', 'the coming into being of the notion of "author" constitutes the privileged moment of individualisation in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences'.[33] What Foucault's sentence underlines is that the emergence of the idea of author is historically concomitant with a larger phenomenon of individualisation.[34] The notion of author is the product of the intersection of several social and disciplinary discourses, and therefore it is inextricably linked to the social background that informs the meaning of these discourses and gives them a special place at the crossroads of particular disciplinary paths. Hence, the historical emergence of the modern definition of the notion of intellectual can be seen as being part of the larger phenomenon of individualisation that Foucault is articulating.

1.4. Intellectuals and history

The collective noun intellectuals, as we understand it today, came into use in France around 1898 and shortly afterwards in Italy. It started circulating within the press at the beginning of 20th century France, when a group of artists claimed the revision of the trial against Alfred Dreyfus, and published the so-called 'manifeste des intellectuels'.[35] Since then, the meaning of the term has acquired both positive and negative connotations. This is because the intellectual provokes contrasting views; he or she generates seriousness as well as laughter, admiration as well as derision, approval as well as criticism, respect as well as disrespect. Such contrastive views are unsurprising: intellectuals are figures negotiating their roles on the borderline between normality and

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[32] On the inter-subjective nature of the notion of academic freedom see for instance Richard Rorty's contribution to the volume edited by Louis Menand; Richard Rorty, 'Does Academic freedom have philosophical presuppositions?' in *The future of Academic Freedom*, pp.21-43.

[33] Michel Foucault, 'What is an author?' in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp.101-120, p.101.

[34] See also the work of Norbert Elias on the process of individualisation in western societies: Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process. Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000)

[35] See Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli. *Les intellectuels en France. De l'affaire Dreyfus à nos jours* (Paris: Perrin, 2004); Stefan Collini. *Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain*; Zygmunt Bauman. *Legislators and Interpreters.*

eccentricity. They are often seen, rightly or not, as challenging the authority of specialists, and are deemed responsible for questioning the limits and the boundaries of knowledge.[36]

In *Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain* Stefan Collini notes that the noun intellectual can be divided into three main uses. The first one denotes a 'socio-professional category within a comprehensive classification of types of occupation'. Intellectual, in this specific sense, is often opposed to manual, on the ground that it denotes a sphere of activity in which 'a primary involvement with ideas and culture' is central. The term here often has a discriminative value against those occupations 'whose orientation and purpose are more directly practical'. The second sense of the term intellectual, as Collini notes, 'may be called "the subjective sense"'. This sense 'emphasises a particular commitment to truth seeking, rumination, analysis, argument, often pursued as ends in themselves'. Collini terms this sense subjective, as 'it is difficult to isolate any external markers of membership to this category'. The third sense of the noun intellectual 'focuses on those who are regarded as possessing some kind of cultural authority, that is, who employ an acknowledged intellectual position or achievement in addressing a broader, non-specialistic public'. This use, notes Collini, may be termed the 'cultural sense'.[37]

Without losing sight of the interplay between these three meanings, this study focuses more specifically on the interplay between the intellectual as a 'socio-professional category' and the 'cultural sense' of the noun intellectual. However, a quick look at the extensive literature on intellectuals reveals that the figure of the intellectual is a multi-faceted one. For this reason, it would be wrong to think that,

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[36] 'Initially, therefore, the term entered common currency in France carrying a freight of mocking and pejorative associations, but, as so often in such cases, those to whom the term was applied came in time to claim it proudly as a self-description'. In Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain*, p.21. Collini offers some insightful examples of linguistic usage of the word revealing the negative perception of intellectuals. Some of these examples insist on the 'particular form of pretentiousness or self-importance' of intellectuals, on their use of an 'inappropriately abstract or complex vocabulary' pointing to an 'unjustifiable intellectual superiority' (p.24). Accordingly, an intellectual is often depicted as someone who 'is occupied with theory and principles rather than practice (…) aloof from the world (…) and car(ing) little for the ordinary pleasures of the senses' (p.27). While Collini mainly surveys the linguistic usage of the word intellectual during the course of twentieth century Britain, as he rightly points out 'the layers of meaning and association deposited by the earlier evolution of the word are still available in certain contexts' (p.38). All page numbers in the footnote refer to Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain*.

[37] For the passages quoted in the paragraph see Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain*, pp. 46-47.

beyond Collini's useful categorization, there is a consensus around the definition of the term. Even if it is possible to find a common agreement around a core definition, the ways to express intellectuality are many and diverse, and cannot be inferred from a single definition.

Even if the term public intellectual often describes a modern phenomenon, intellectuals have a much longer history.[38] In fact, social figures specialised in the role of creators and mediators of cultures have existed well before the collective noun intellectual started to become of common use. Such figures have been identified with various terms. In the Middle-Ages, for instance, the Latin word *clericum* indicated a historical precursor of modern intellectuals.[39] At the time, the institution of the church, along with the emerging universities, ensured the communication and the mediation between the written culture and the people.[40] Even if the Middle-Ages did not use the noun intellectual as it is used today, the adjective intellectual, and the noun intellect, were important pieces of the philosophical vocabulary of the time, and constituted a central element in the edifice of medieval theology. In fact, the intellect designated a sphere of knowledge considered more refined than sensible experience. As a faculty allowing human beings the possibility of engaging with divine knowledge, the

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[38] 'The public intellectual has been with us for a long time, even if we ignore the ancient world. His exemplars include Machiavelli, Milton, Voltaire, and Montesquieu, and his ideologist is Kant, who linked philosophy to politics through the argument that only morally defensible politics is one based on reason'. Richard Posner, *Public Intellectuals. A study of Decline*, p.26.

[39] Respectively *chierico* (Italian) and *clerc* (French). Both the Italian *chierico* and the French *clerc* derive from the Latin clericu(m) which, following the development of medieval Latin into the romance languages, gave rise, precisely, to both *clerc* and *chierico*. The word, as used in the Middle-Ages, refers primarily to the religious sphere, and more broadly to a cultivated person who has some degree of mastering of the written culture.

[40] This idea of intellectuals bridging the gap between written and popular culture is also central, as it will be discussed in chapter two, in Antonio Gramsci's conception of intellectuals. Gramsci sees intellectuals as cultural operators ensuring the communication of ideas between social groups. In a similar way in which the *clerc* of the Middle-Ages mediates between theological culture and the people, in secularised societies modern intellectuals mediate between the culture of specialists and different publics. Besides being designated by the terms *clerc* and *chierico*, the intellectual of the Middle-Ages was also named in other ways: *magister*, *doctor*, *philosophus*, *litteratus*. All these terms refer, in substance, to someone who knows Latin, who can read and, possibly, write. As the medieval historian Jacques Le Goff notes, The Middle Age intellectual 'è un uomo di libri (che non ama prestare) e della parola e insiste su ciò che lo differenzia dal lavoratore manuale allontanandolo da lui (...)'. In Jacques Le Goff, 'L'uomo medievale', in *L'uomo medievale*, ed. by Jacques Le Goff (Roma: Laterza, 2008), pp.1-41, p. 22. Le Goff's contribution has been translated by Maria Garin.

intellect was both an instrument and a mediating point between human beings and theological truth.[41]

1.5 Intellectuals: distance and engagement

Intellectuals, as a social category, are defined in relation to society and to the values that society holds. At the same time, as creators of cultural discourses, they influence how societies represent themselves; intellectuals often set the tone of important debates on such questions as the place of individuals within society. Intellectual discourses, when fully developed, leave a mark in the way in which particular historical periods are defined and perceived by the posterity. Historical periods can be discussed, for this very reason, as intellectual narratives, in the double sense indicated in the introductory section. Sharing a common view of history organised around specific periods is possible insofar as there is a common set of cultural codes that allows for a common understanding of history. At the same time, cultural codes offer themselves to the possibility of re-interpretation and re-writing. As Eco does for the Middle-Ages, history can become a creative occasion, a pretext that not only allows a re-interpretation of history but it also enables Eco to re-deploy his general theory of semiotics within the context of a work of fiction.

While intellectuals have been able, at different historical moments, to redefine the boundaries of knowledge, they have also provided scientific and philosophical grounding for their enquiries. Knowledge needs a centre around which it can be coherently organised, refined, and expanded. Theology, and the idea of God, provided such an organisational centre in the Middle-Ages and partly beyond. With the emergence of modern science, and with the increasing authority of direct observation over the sacred texts, the concept of reason gradually sets out to become the new centre around which to organise the discourse of truth. Reason, as Descartes suggests in the seventeenth century, is the guiding idea around which both the widening and the

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[41] As M. Fumagalli Beonnio Brocchieri points out, 'la "conoscenza intellettuale"(opposta alla "conoscenza sensibile") era quel tipo di conoscere che superava lo strumento dei sensi spingendosi a cogliere le forme'. In M. Fumagalli Beonnio Brocchieri, 'L'intellettuale', in *L'uomo medievale*, pp. 203-237, p.203.

deepening of the horizon of knowledge are to be achieved. After René Descartes, such a position is more or less systematically re-enhanced.[42]

It is well known that the faith in the power of reason, and in the narrative of progress, stands at the centre of the project of the Enlightenment. Such project culminates in Denis Diderot's and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert's widely known *Encyclopédie*, an intellectual device aimed at both grounding and disseminating the politics of reason and progress. A modern encyclopaedia is both a summa of the knowledge and a very detailed statement of the dominant intellectual mood of the time. Because of their extensiveness, modern encyclopaedias are read and explored by individual readers selectively and according to their taste, needs and curiosity. Given the abundance of both implicit and explicit cross-referencing, encyclopaedias also invite and stimulate a transversal or intertextual reading. Encyclopaedias encapsulate their own ideal reader, individuals with a constant and compulsive need to know all there is to know. While extensive knowledge, and a mind capable of absorbing a great amount of information, are attributes of the ideal reader, empirical readers of encyclopaedias, motivated by a more personal and contingent intellectual endeavour, might pursue their own pathways by selecting very limited regions on the map of knowledge. As a middle way between an ideal reader and an empirical one, Diderot's description of the eclectic philosopher suggests a possible way to address the extensiveness of knowledge of encyclopaedias, without renouncing a vigorous critical sense. Interestingly, many of the traits that define Diderot's eclectic philosopher suit very well, even nowadays, the definition of a critical intellectual:

> L'éclectique est un philosophe qui, foulant aux pieds le préjugé, la tradition,
>
> l'ancienneté, le consentement universel, l'autorité, en un mot tout ce qui subjugue la
>
> foule des esprits, ose penser de lui-même, remonter aux principes généraux les plus
>
> clairs, les examiner, les discuter, n'admettre rien que sur le témoignage de son
>
> expérience et de sa raison (…) L'ambition de l'éclectique est moins d'être le

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[42] This said, alternative paradigms of knowledge, less dominated by the notion of reason, have always been available. More recently, for instance, the postmodern critique of the logocentrism of knowledge has questioned the centrality of the notion of reason in the Western world.

précepteur du genre humain que son disciple: de reformer les autres, que de se

reformer lui-même. [43]

As this passage suggests, reason grounds criticism as well as intellectual endeavour. Free critical minds, in the words of Diderot, dissipate doubt and prejudice. The outward look, which the philosopher casts on the outside world, triggers inner change; reason becomes the centre around which the reformation of the self can be achieved.

The "long" history of the intellectual offers a repertoire of ways of performing the role of the intellectual. However, by defining the intellectual field as a space of controversy, ongoing discussion and potential dissent, sociologists such as Bourdieu and Randall Collins draw attention to the fact that the intellectual field is often structured around competing positions and schools of thoughts. Along with eclecticism, critical spirit, and the capacity to unify different domains of knowledge within the frame of an individual's discourse, other important traits define the figure of the modern intellectual, as a result of the internal controversies that shape the structure of the intellectual field. The combination of detachment and engagement, for instance, figures in a number of famous modern attempts at defining the civic and ethical mission of intellectuals.

The ways in which the categories of detachment and engagement have been interpreted and claimed by different intellectuals reveal important lines of tension with regard to the understandings of the figure of the modern intellectual. In fact, salient representations of twentieth century intellectuals show a recurrent dialectic between, on the one hand, the narrative of the intellectual in the ivory tower, whose distance from society can be both conceptual and physical, and the narrative of the engaged intellectual, for whom active participation in politics is essential, on the other.[44] The engaged intellectual of the twentieth century emerges in the aftermath of the Dreyfus affair and establishes an important type, which is brought to a climax by French philosopher and writer Jean-Paul Sartre immediately after the Second World War.

[43] Denis Diderot, entry 'Eclectique' of the Encyclopédie, in Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. VII (Paris, Hermann, 1976), p.36.

[44] On the modalities of this participation see Jean-François Sirinelli, *Intellectuels et passions françaises. Manifestes et pétitions au XXe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1990).

While participation and direct intervention in the arena of political debates, often defines modern intellectuals' style, the idea of the ivory tower intellectual strongly persists as a valid counter-example of the engaged intellectual. The problem concealed under the dialectic between engagement and detachment can be expressed as follows. How can intellectuals be engaged and at the same time be detached enough as to be able to assess society from an objective point of view? Drawing on the idea of detachment, in *La trahison des clercs* (1927), Julien Benda criticises intellectuals' support for nationalistic causes during the interwar period in France and Germany. Benda argues that French and German intellectuals embraced political passions rather than trying to establish critical distance.[45] Coherent with this view, he defines his model of intellectual in terms of the capacity to oppose the contingency of history by embracing universalistic values. Against this view, Paul Nizan, in *Chiens de garde* (1932) accuses intellectuals of losing their time in abstract reasoning with no relationship to the impending problems of everyday life. Accordingly, as Nizan maintains, intellectuals prefer the comfort of the ivory tower of bourgeois culture to concrete problems of the human condition.[46]

Asserting the idea of detachment or that of engagement can be seen as part of a strategic argument in order to mark a position within the intellectual field so as to claim a privileged stance with regard to the ethical mission of intellectuals. Similarly, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the concepts of distance and engagement start to play an important role in the efforts that new emerging disciplines make in order to gain legitimacy within the modern university. The discipline of anthropology, for instance, elaborates the so-called method of participant observation, thus trying to overcome the potential contradiction deriving from being both an insider and an outsider of the culture

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[45] As Benda argues, modern intellectuals prefer to 'magnifier le monde réel –pratique- de l'existence' and 'rabaisser le monde idéal ou proprement metaphysique' ; in Julien Benda, *La trahison des clercs* (Paris: Bernard Gasset, 1927), p.123.

[46] See for instance the following passage from Nizan's *Chiens de garde*: 'Quand on entend que la Philosophie parle encore de relations et de rapports, de phénomènes et de réalités, d'élans vitaux et de noumènes, d'immanence et de transcendance, de contingence et de liberté, des âmes et des corps, quand on entend M. Brunschvig qui est le plus grand homme de cette pensée-là faire un cours sur la Technique du passage à l'absolu, on ne voit pas comment ces bacilles de l'esprit, ces produits tératologiques de la méditation pourraient expliquer aux hommes vulgaires que nous convoquerons avec une complaisance sans lassitude la tubercolose de leurs filles, les colères de leurs femmes, leur service militaire et ses humiliations, leur travail, leur chômage, leur vacances, les guerres, les grèves, les pourritures de leurs parlements et l'insolence des pouvoirs; on ne voit pas à quoi rime la Philosophie sans matière, la Philosophie sans rime ni raison'. Paul Nizan, *Chiens de garde* (Marseille: Agone, 1998), p. 43-44.

that one wants to describe.[47] A rhetoric of detachment becomes also an important aspect when attempting to define the place of literary studies in the landscape of modern academia. In this case, the idea of detachment is brought about in order to differentiate between different approaches to textual analysis, in the hope of creating something which one could call the "literary".[48]

1.6 Antonio Gramsci's organic intellectual and the organisation of culture

In spite of the strategic use to which the categories of engagement and detachments are subject, one should beware of the temptations to essentialize these two concepts, to treat them as given, or to think that these concepts function only once dichotomized. On the contrary, there is no reason why intellectuals should confine themselves to either one of these two alternatives. As it will be shown, In *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964) Eco addresses the problem of detachment and engagement in the context of the theories of mass culture. In doing so, he illustrates a specific form that debates between distance and engagement take.[49] As Eco points out, the two options of detachment and engagement are not mutually exclusive, but can be combined and asserted conjointly.[50]

Antonio Gramsci's conception of the organic intellectual, developed in the same years as those of Benda and Nizan, insists precisely on the combination of detachment and engagement. According to a famous sentence by Gramsci,'tutti gli uomini sono intellettuali (…) ma non tutti gli uomini hanno nella società la funzione di

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[47] See Mondher Kilani, *Introduction à l'anthropologie* (Lausanne: Payot, 1996), pp. 47-63.

[48] For an overview of the debates over the disciplinarization of literature at the beginning of the twentieth century see the chapter 'Interdisciplinary English' in Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity* (New York: Routledge, 2010) p. 17-44. Moran points out that literature is something extremely difficult to define in terms of a discipline with clear-cut boundaries: 'literature is about everything –love, sex, friendship, family relationships, ageing, death, social and historical change, religious faith, intellectual ideas, and so on-. In short, it is about life in all its diversity, and this is hard to accommodate within the narrow parameters of a discipline'. In Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity*, p.19.While the fact that literature, as Moran puts it, 'is about life in all its diversity' makes the field of literary study a ground for recurrent disputes about the nature of the "literary" (or about the plausibility of the existence of something called the "literary"), it also makes it an extremely dynamic and interdisciplinary space open to a wide range of approaches.

[49] Chapter three will discuss further the importance of *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964) in Eco's early career. Eco published the book in a moment in which, in Italy, the distinction between high culture and low culture was still very much operative and supported by the dominant crocean aesthetics. Eco challenges Croce's idea that the value of works of art resides beyond social or communicative practices. Against Croce, Eco de-substantializes the notions of art and literature in order to analyse them as forms of social communication.

[50] This point will be discussed in chapter three, particularly with regards to Eco's *Apocalittici e integrati*.

intellettuali'.[51] In a footnote, Gramsci specifies that 'così, perché può capitare che ognuno in qualche momento si frigga due uova o si cucisca uno strappo della giacca, non si dirà che tutti sono cuochi o sarti'.[52] The footnote adds something important to Gramsci's sentence in that it emphasizes that, even if all human beings are capable of thinking, it does not follow that they are all intellectuals. For Gramsci every person is a potential philosopher, but lacking the necessary sharpness of vision characterizing intellectuals, knowledge takes often the shape of, as Ugo Dotti points out, 'un aggregato caotico di concezioni disparate, inconsapevolmente e passivamente assorbite dai diversi ambienti sociali e culturali nei quali ciascuno è automaticamente coinvolto sino alla sua entrata nel mondo cosciente'.[53]

For Gramsci, there are two types of intellectuals: organic and traditional ones. Traditional ones, like priests or teachers, have a fixed place in society. As Barbara A. Misztal notes, Gramsci's 'traditional intellectuals, unlike organic intellectuals, do not represent or serve any group of interest; they are, like Benda's intellectuals, spiritual leaders who defend universal values'.[54] Organic intellectuals, on the contrary, define themselves by being bound to a social class. Their task is to be the leaders of a cultural process culminating in the transformation of society. Organic intellectuals represent the concerns of a specific social class to the dominant classes.[55] Since they operate within the symbolic space of superstructures, they are also mediators between theoretical and practical knowledge. This role implies that intellectuals, while dwelling in the conceptual realm of ideas, are also able to experience the conditions of the social group to which they are organic. [56]

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[51] Antonio Gramsci, *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura* (Torino: Einaudi 1966), p.6.

[52] Antonio Gramsci, *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*, p.6.

[53] Ugo Dotti, *Storia degli intellettuali in Italia,* vol. III, Temi e ideologia dagli illuministi a Gramsci (Roma: Editori Riuniti,1999), p.272.

[54] Barbara Mistztal, Intellectuals *and the Public Good* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.18.

[55] Gramsci grants intellectuals a peculiar place within society, in that he considers them to be 'funzionari delle superstrutture'. In Antonio Gramsci*, Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*, p.9.

[56] James Martin points out that Gramsci's organic intellectuals, differently from traditional ones, possess the capacity to have 'a superior grasp of a common goal that remained only implicit in the mass'. In James Martin, 'Between ethics and politics: Gramsci's theory of intellectuals' in *Antonio Gramsci. Critical Assessment of Leading Political Philosophers*, ed. by James Martin, vol. III, Intellectuals, Culture and the Party, p.136. However, Martin is right to point out that for Gramsci 'the superior cognitive capacities of these intellectuals did not diminish the necessity of their continually involving themselves in

Gramsci, as he indicates in a letter of 1931, believed to have made a substantial innovation in the study of intellectuals. Such innovation consisted in positing a definition of intellectuals that would go 'beyond denoting a restricted artistic or philosophical "intelligentsia" to include all those employed in the organisation and elaboration of ideas throughout society'[57]. In defining intellectuals in such a way, he implicitly refuses to consider, like Mannheim or Benda, intellectuals as a separate class having an autonomous status within society.[58]

Gramsci is also very much concerned with how to organise culture in such a way as to allow for a form of individual liberation within the working class. For Gramsci, one of the obstacles to an adequate organisation of culture lies in the education system, which he sees as an institution promoting an exaggeratedly ornamental and encyclopaedic culture. Moreover, Gramsci's definition of culture is set against the background of a larger polemic against positivist science. For Gramsci culture is synonymous with 'presa di coscienza di sé, del contesto sociale in cui si è inseriti, della realtà storica di cui si fa parte'.[59] His particular understanding of knowledge relies on an effort to conceptualize individual autonomy and freedom. The cultural process he fosters proceeds from individual self-knowledge and culminates in the knowledge of the historicity of the individual within the larger picture of society. As he puts it, culture is:

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the life of non-intellectuals' (p.137). Martin's line of argument brings the focus on how Gramsci's definition of organic intellectuals seeks to transcend traditional conceptions of intellectuals defined in terms of a penchant for abstract thinking. Gramsci's definition of organic intellectuals becomes interesting when it takes into account the link between practical and theoretical knowledge. Hence, Gramsci defines organic intellectuals against a certain idea of aloofness, of the non-participation in the tumultuous stream of life; Gramsci's definition of organic intellectuals questions the idea of a disembodied faculty, such as reason or the intellect, capable of accessing a superior form of knowledge. Julien Benda, a contemporary of Gramsci insists, on the contrary, on the importance of the non-involvement of intellectuals within political issues. In this sense, Gramsci precisely purports to disengage himself from such conceptions of the intellectual. He argues that social groups and their respective intellectuals are defined, as Martin puts it, in terms of a 'reciprocal and mutually informative (…) relationship between "feeling" and "knowing"'(p.137).

[57] James Martin. 'Between ethics and politics: Gramsci's theory of intellectuals', p.131.

[58] The expertise of intellectuals as conceived by Gramsci can also be, as Max Weber would put it, of bureaucratic nature. Intellectuals' expertise, since it is not located within a single social class, is distributed in different areas of society; every social class having, Gramsci believed, its specific intellectuals. Misztal also notes that Gramsci's particular contribution has been to stress 'the idea that intellectuals, not social classes, are essential to the working of modern societies' Barbara Mistztal, *Intellectuals and the Public Good*, p.18.

[59] E. Garin, *Con Gramsci* (Bari: Editori Riuniti,1997), p.82.

Organizzazione, disciplina del proprio io interiore, è presa di possesso della propria personalità, è conquista di coscienza superiore, per la quale si riesce a comprendere il valore storico, la propria funzione nella vita, i propri diritti e i propri doveri.[60]

Gramsci, in other words, stresses the importance of culture as a process through which the individual progressively conquers the knowledge of his or her own involvement within history and society.

As social commentators like Bruce Robbins point out, with the increasing professionalization of modern academia, intellectuals often perform their roles on the terrain of academia rather than, as Gramsci would have wished, across the whole social spectrum.[61] Faced with the increasing disciplinarisation of knowledge, contemporary intellectuals often re-interpret Gramsci's idea of the organic intellectual when bridging the gap between different disciplines; or, in the case of most public intellectuals, when venturing into crossing the divide which separates professional academics from a non-professional audience.

1.7 Two central concepts within this study: Bourdieu's habitus and Eco's open work

It sometimes happens, in the careers of intellectuals, artists, or scholars, that a theme dominates the experience of writing. When this happens, such a theme operates as a creative force informing a large part of the production of these intellectuals, artists, and scholars. Eco's concept of open work and Bourdieu's concept of habitus can be said to represent such a creative force. The conceptual contributions of Bourdieu and Eco within, but also beyond, their respective disciplines, is one of the central themes (a sort of narrative strand) of this study. In the introduction to this study I have, in fact, underlined the importance of some of the intellectual strategies that Bourdieu and Eco adopt within their works, and I have suggested how the ways in which they formulate theoretical problems might be relevant within the context of this study. In this section I shall give more information about the relevance of these intellectual strategies within this study. Once this clarification is put into place, it will be easier for the reader to

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[60] In Anotnio Gramsci, *Cronache torinesi 1913-1917*, ed. by S. Caprioglio, 71 (Torino: Einaudi 1980) pp.100-103. Quoted in E. Garin, *Con Gramsci*, p. 82.

[61] See Bruce Robbins' previously referenced *Secular Vocations. Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture.*

identify clearly my own particular theoretical concerns (i.e. the specific way in which I approach and make use of the works of Bourdieu and Eco).[62]

Even if the works of Bourdieu and Eco could be taken *in toto* as exemplifying creativity and interdisciplinarity, I will be addressing their theoretical contribution in a selective way. I will operate some choices whereby I will illustrate the problem-solving techniques employed by these two intellectuals when construing major theoretical debates. Mainly, I will address the theoretical dimension of the work of Bourdieu and Eco in two ways. Firstly, I discuss their works in a traditionally informed exegetical way. Secondly, I explore their works as a possibility of building a theory; in this sense, the works of Bourdieu and Eco will be both starting points as well as transition moments in the development of the more general argumentative network that sustains this study.

As pointed out in the introduction, the same theoretical aspects, and the same concepts of Bourdieu and Eco, will be explored in different chapters so as to have complementary perspectives. This repetition is a feature of this study: by addressing the same motifs in different parts of this study, I will show the different levels at which the works of Bourdieu and Eco articulate and intersect within the unfolding of my arguments. Two concepts to which this study pays close attention to are Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Eco's concept of open work. In the next sub-sections, I will argue that the way in which Bourdieu characterizes the habitus (its formation, its definition and its application) can in some respects be linked to a definition of creative intellectuality. Habitus also offers a concrete example of how concepts can be both the medium through which thinkers express their creativity, as well as a way to put forward a creative strategy. In fact, the concepts of habitus and Eco's concept of open work are means to define a creative strategy as much as keywords that Bourdieu and Eco use (when presenting their works retrospectively, for instance) in order to claim, or re-construct, a creative strategy.

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[62] The next two chapters will be largely introductory but a more specific and systematic focus on the problem solving techniques, intellectual strategies and theoretical formulations of Bourdieu and Eco will appear in the subsequent chapters.

My contention in this study is that Bourdieu's concept of habitus conceals a creative strategy that is altogether not too distant from the one that I identify through Eco's semiotic model of interpretation and through the concept of the open work (which anticipates and in a certain way creates the premises for the full articulation of Eco's model of interpretation). The concepts of habitus and open work can be examined as illustrating a creative approach of theory making. As I pointed out in the introduction, concepts, when they come to hold the function of representing a complex vision of things (as it is clearly the case for the concepts of habitus and open work), are good examples of how language offers the possibility to forge concepts and to define them in such a way that, while they facilitate the task of visualizing complex models of reality, they subsume a multi-level description in one word.

1.7.1 Bourdieu's concept of habitus and its relevance within this study

The Latin word *habitus* suggests a variety of meanings relating to the idea of habit. The word, as Bourdieu acknowledges, has been used over the centuries by classic authors such as Christian philosopher Saint Augustin and, more recently, by philosophers such as Friedrich Hegel and Edmund Husserl, by sociologists Marcel Mauss, Norbert Elias, and by art historian Erwin Panowsky.[63] In spite of its previous uses, the concept acquires, in the work of Bourdieu, an unprecedented degree of systematization that makes it one of the central pieces of his theory of the social world. While highly systematized and rigorously defined by Bourdieu, the concept still retains a lot of the semantic ground which defines the idea of habit. In fact, the definition Bourdieu gives to the concept proceeds from a few ideas commonly associated with the notion of habit, such as repetition and conventionality.

Bourdieu's theory of the social world focuses on how individuals think and act according to a logic that they have gradually acquired as part of a socializing process. This logic operates as a framework (as Bourdieu calls it, a system of categories) that, without being entirely individual or being entirely collective, is somehow in between these two alternatives. The habitus is precisely the name of the framework through which individuals experience and perceive the social world. To employ a familiar metaphor, the habitus is like a pair of glasses through which we see the world. Because

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[63] See Pierre Bourdieu, 'Fieldwork in Philosophy', in *Choses dites* (Paris: Minuit, 1987) pp. 13-47, pp.22-23.

we are so used to seeing the world through our glasses, we do not notice them anymore; they have become part of our visual as much as our existential field. In this sense, the habitus is not merely a mediating mechanism between the social and the individual, or simply some sort of super-structural reality. Because it is internalised it does not simply mediate; it also generates meaning and organizes experience. Even if culturally acquired, it is embodied to a degree to which, as Bourdieu puts it, it becomes second nature.[64] One of the main assumptions behind the habitus is that individuals have been recurrently exposed to particular models of actions and, as a result of this exposure, they have internalised them. Once internalised, these models (or frameworks) become an integral part of who they are. The habitus becomes constitutive of their identity. That is why the habitus does not only operate as a system of categories through which individuals perceive action and thought; the habitus also explains how individuals create action and thoughts as a result of processing experiences.

The habitus regulates the perception, the organization and the conception of behaviour and cognition in terms of social regularities. The recurrence of patterns in action and cognition makes it possible to identify the habitus as pertaining to actions and thoughts that could be broadly defined as conventional (i.e. not just individual but shared by a social group or class). At some level, a conventional behaviour can be called a social ritual. When sociologists and anthropologists speak of social rituals they refer, among other things, to a conventionalised set of actions or thinking processes. Thus understood, conventionality combines a collective dimension and an individual dimension. The concept of habitus, as Bourdieu points out, engages precisely with the interdependencies of agency and social structures:

Les agents sociaux, dans les sociétés archaïques comme dans les nôtres, ne sont pas

(…) des automates réglés comme des horloges, selon des lois mécaniques qui leur

échappent. Dans les jeux les plus complexes, les échanges matrimoniaux par

exemples, ou les pratiques rituelles, ils engagent les principes incorporés d'un habitus

générateur. Ce système de dispositions on peut le penser par analogie avec la

grammaire générative de Chomsky – à la différence qu'il s'agit de dispositions

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[64] See Pierre Bourdieu, 'Fieldwork in Philosophy', in particular pp. 21-22.

acquises par l'expérience, donc variables selon les lieux et les moments. Ce « sens du

jeu », comme nous disons en français, est ce qui permet d'engendrer une infinité de

« coups » adaptés à l'infinité de situations possibles qu'aucune règle, si complexe soit-

elle, ne peut prévoir.[65]

The reference to Chomsky's generative grammar, however marginal it might be when addressing Bourdieu's sociology, is particularly relevant here. In spite of the differences between the two authors, both appear to address a common question: how can one explain the idea that a finite set or rules can generate an infinite number of occurrences? Chomsky asked this question about language, enquiring after the possibility that from a limited number of (grammatical) rules a speaker can obtain an infinite number of sentences. *Mutatis mutandis*, Bourdieu asks if a limited number of perceptive categories and organisational principles can account for potentially infinite outcomes of observable social behaviours.

The strength and the originality of the concept of habitus is that, while having a strong abstract component, the coherence of its definition can be corroborated by empirical or statistical observation. Bourdieu elaborates the concept in a relatively early phase in his career, between the end of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s. It is from the combination of his ethnological work in Algeria (where he was employed as an ethnologist during the Algerian war), his fieldwork in rural France, and his early studies on artistic practices and on the education system, that the habitus emerges within Bourdieu's early writings as a unifying theme. In forging the concept Bourdieu combines a very subtle and profound theoretical reflection with a series of meticulous empirical and statistical observations drawn from very diverse social and cultural milieus. As I will argue in chapter two, as a result of engaging with a large number of social milieus and by interacting with individuals having very different (and sometimes contrastive) experiences of the social world, Bourdieu's writing becomes the meeting point of different voices and experiences otherwise scattered within the social universe. One of my contentions in this study is that the ability to combine cultural and social diversity within a coherent project is one of the main features of creativity and interdisciplinarity. Bourdieu also stresses how the concept of habitus creatively

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[65] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Fieldwork in Philosophy', p.19.

combines the theoretical knowledge resulting from reflection and the direct observation of social performance. In one of the interviews published in *Choses dites* he argues that:

Construire la notion d'habitus comme système de schèmes acquis fonctionnant à l'état pratique   comme catégories de perception et d'appréciation ou comme principes de classement en même temps que comme principes d'organisateurs de l'action, c'était constituer l'agent social dans sa vérité d'opérateur pratique …[66]

Bourdieu uses the concept of habitus in order to articulate the idea that social experience takes place in a world where individuals adopt strategies that are the expression of their habitus as well as an attempt to cope with concrete situations that require problem-solving techniques. Given the variety of situations to which an individual has been exposed throughout a personal history, the habitus can be quite differently constituted. Similarly, as it operates as a perceptive filter, the habitus is also likely to stimulate different responses to situations with which individuals engage. One of the areas where Bourdieu applies more consistently the concept of habitus (in works such as *La distinction*) is the analysis of cultural and intellectual taste.[67] When expressing an intellectual or cultural preference, the habitus becomes an instrument of social distinction whereby individuals assert their own social identity. Familiarity with canonical art and literature, and the ability to articulate this familiarity by using a sophisticated language becomes, in this context, the expression of a bourgeois habitus that "distinguishes" itself from the differently articulated habitus of the working class.[68]

The habitus is also a key concept when Bourdieu discusses literature, art, and intellectuality in works such as *Les règles de l'art*.[69] By paying attention to particular intellectuals and artists as well as to literary, artistic, and intellectual movements and theories, Bourdieu applies the concept of habitus in conjunction with the study of social, cultural, and intellectual fields. The main ideas, theories and conceptual vocabularies that define historical periods are seen as formative forces for intellectuals and artists

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[66] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Fieldwork in Philosophy', p.24.

[67] See Pierre Bourdieu. *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).

[68] See my discussion of *La distinction* in chapter two.

[69] Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (1992) 2nd edn (Paris: Seuil, 1998).

inasmuch as they present specific intellectual or artistic sensitivities as particularly desirable. While intellectuals and artists often develop a habitus which is consistent with that of a group, they might also develop a spirit of dissent whereby they distance themselves from the dominant intellectual and artistic moods of their times. As I will argue in chapter two, in describing his own intellectual itinerary Bourdieu explains some of his career choices (i.e. the way he defined the direction of his ideas and endorsed particular theoretical orientations) as stemming from dissatisfaction with the conceptual and theoretical configurations that dominated the French intellectual field in the 60s and 70s.

In the pages of *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*, Bourdieu points out how the habitus he acquired through the diversity of his life-experiences predisposed him to accept sets of ideas or world-views that had a more marginal status when compared to more "glamorous" theories. [70] Intellectuals also acquire, or sharpen, their habitus (i.e. a peculiar theoretical sensitivity) through their belonging to particular disciplinary communities. Bourdieu, in fact, crafts his own profile of public intellectual by reference to the figure of the sociologist and to the discipline of sociology. In chapter two I examine the way in which Bourdieu constructs his own profile of intellectual in relation with his particular brand of self-reflexive sociology. This process of, to paraphrase the title of James Joyce's first novel, sketching a self-portrait of an intellectual as a sociologist, is extremely complex and involves a number of mediations, some of which emerge through Bourdieu's writing process. As I will point out, Bourdieu re-appropriates his public image of intellectual and reconfigures it through a self-reflexive exercise. Self-reflexivity, I will argue, plays a central part in the construction of the ethos of the sociologist through which Bourdieu sustains his intellectual self-narrative. Bourdieu also maintains that one of the most valuables discoveries that sociologists can arrive at is the lucid awareness that personal and individual experiences are defined (and thus limited) by the constraining factor of society:

Le sociologue découvre la nécessité, la contrainte des conditions et des conditionnements sociaux, jusqu'au cœur du « sujet », sous la forme de ce que j'appelle l'habitus. Bref, il porte le désespoir de l'humaniste absolutiste à son comble

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[70] Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (Paris : Raison d'agir, 2004). See my discussion in the chapter two.

en faisant voir la nécessité dans la contingence, en relevant le système des conditions sociales qui ont rendu possible ne manière particulière d'être ou de faire, ainsi nécessité sans être nécessaire. Misère de l'homme sans Dieu ni destin d'élection, que le sociologue ne fait que révéler, porter au jour, et dont on le rend responsable, comme tous les prophètes du malheur. Mais on peut tuer le messager, ce qu'il annonce reste dit, et entendu.[71]

(…) la sociologie libère en libérant de l'illusion de la liberté, ou, plus exactement, de la croyance mal placée dans les libertés illusoires.[72]

Understood in these terms, the sociological method is for Bourdieu an instrument of liberation, even when the relative freedom the sociologist enjoys originates in the self-reflexive awareness that (personal, intellectual artistic, etc.) freedom is always subject to the constraints of society.

1.7.2 Conceptualising knowledge: From the habitus to Eco's concept of open work

Bourdieu's self-description as a sociologist is very consistent with the way he defines the concept of habitus. As I will point out in chapter two and chapter four, the habitus reflects the position that individuals hold within social spaces. Within Bourdieu's conceptual vocabulary, the habitus offers the possibility to negotiate an approach of culture and society that stresses the interdependencies and interrelations, rather than the oppositions, between individuals and social fields. In this study I examine intellectual creativity and interdisciplinarity with a similar agenda; that is, I examine creativity and interdisciplinarity as emerging against the backdrop of society (i.e. of social structures and fields) and I try to conceptualize the peculiarity of the relations that intellectual creativity and interdisciplinarity entertain with society. My line of enquiry proceeds from the assumption that the notions of society and that of the individual are commonly approached as representing separate orders of discourse. By referring to authors such as Norbert Elias, I try to reconstitute the interdependencies that are negated by the separation of these notions into two mutually distinctive realms of discourse. In doing

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[71] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Fieldwork in Philosophy', pp. 25-26.

[72] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Fieldwork in Philosophy', p.26.

this, I also underline how Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Eco's semiotic model of interpretation represent two examples of how to realize this articulation.[73]

In fact, Bourdieu's and Eco's approach to knowledge engage with a number of theoretical problems that characterize not only their discipline, but a number of other disciplines such as philosophy and literary studies. These theoretical problems have to do, by and large, with the way in which individuals and society interact with one another. In his approach to knowledge Bourdieu actively develops a kind of foucauldian archaeology of knowledge with a twofold goal. Firstly, he identifies in the history of knowledge a series of divisions, ruptures, discontinuities. He then questions the pertinence of the symbolic lines that are supposedly dividing knowledge into different factions. Divisions, discontinuities, fractions, and demarcations are part of the process of the social construction of knowledge. By identifying classificatory fractures within the intellectual world, Bourdieu intends to pose the problem of the limiting and constraining effects of such classificatory acts. Secondly, Bourdieu elaborates an approach to knowledge whose aim is to recompose the divisions that he identifies as structural as well as structuring features of the intellectual field. In practice, with the concept of habitus he proposes a creative synthesis bringing under a single conceptual vocabulary the notions of individual and society. Similarly, he proceeds to recompose the epistemic fracture between subject and object by elaborating, under the heading of his theory of practice, a dialectical understanding of these fundamental categories of modern thought.[74]

This two-fold epistemological agenda also defines my own approach to creativity and interdisciplinarity. In fact, throughout this study I consistently follow and explore two themes in conjunction with the works of Bourdieu and Eco and with some of the most relevant scholarly literature on creativity.[75] The first theme has to do with crossing the limits of individual disciplines and the second has to do with transcending mutual oppositions between opposing views. My contention is that, in spite of the different interdisciplinary pathways brought about by the works of Bourdieu and Eco,

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[73] See chapter four.

[74] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* précédé de *Trois études d'ethnologie kabyle* (1972), 2nd edn (Paris: Seuil, 2000). I will discuss Bourdieu's theory of practice in chapter five.

[75] See the next sections of this chapter for a discussion of literature on creativity.

the idea of questioning and transcending theoretical categories that are seen as mutually exclusive is common to both Bourdieu and Eco. As I discuss in chapter three, at the outset of his career Eco defines his theoretical line through the concept of open work. The concept of open work refers to what Eco identifies as one of the core features of avant-garde art and aesthetics. Eco develops it by referring it to the works of modern writers such as James Joyce and in relation to avant-garde music emerging around the 50s and in the subsequent decades with musicians such Henry Pousseur, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Luciano Berio. At the same time he makes it clear that the concept of open work can be extended, beyond the particular examples to which he refers, to artworks that encourage the interaction and direct participation of the public in the production of meaning. According to Eco, the interaction between avant-garde art and its public implies the possibility of endless transactions of meaning. In this sense, Eco sees avant-garde art, literature and music as generating a differential stream of interpretations in connection with their public. In such a configuration, work of art and public are seen as complementary moments. While being the central theme of *Opera aperta* (1962), this understanding of the mutually informing interaction between art forms and their public sets the tone to much of Eco's further theoretical contribution.

From the concept that gives the title to his early study (*Opera aperta* (1962) translated in English as *Open work*) Eco will draw further implications in his subsequent works, especially in *Il trattato di Semiotica generale* (1975), and *Lector in Fabula* (1979). As I will point out in chapter three, these two books constitute a point of arrival as well as an attempt at elucidating all the implications that can be inferred from the concept of open work. The foundational question that Eco addresses in *Opera aperta* and that he refines in subsequent works is very similar to the one that Bourdieu addresses through the concept of habitus, or the one raised by Chomsky's generative grammar. Under what conditions can an artwork (or any cultural artefact) stimulate a potentially infinite number of interpretative outcomes? One can posit that a limited number of elements, such as categories (as in Bourdieu's concept of habitus) or rules (as in Chomsky's generative grammar), can produce an unexpected number of variations, but is there a rule that can explain how this is happening? While the concept of open work emphasises how indeterminacy and openness are constitutive of much of avant-garde art, Eco also points out how such a disposition towards the proliferation of meaning does not exclude the presence of a structure though which the artwork asserts a

message. In doing so he operates a similar theoretical movement to that of Bourdieu. As pointed out, Bourdieu contends that the habitus develops in connection with the experience of social situations. As for Eco, he maintains that the experience of interpretation emerges in conjunction with textual spaces that, because they are configured in a particular way, might encourage particular interpretative strategies as more reasonable than others.

As Eco explains, the possibility that a text (piece of music, art-work, etc.) might be about the contingency, the indeterminacy, and the subject-dependent nature of truth can perfectly well coexist with the possibility of identifying a particular configuration or framework through which these ideas come to life, even when (as it turns out with avant-garde art) these frameworks are themselves objects of interpretation as well as concrete tokens of the instability that defines reality. As Eco maintains, interpretation is the result of a symbolic encounter between the work of art and its interpreters, but this encounter is defined within the limits of a pragmatic occasion. Hence, Eco maintains that the proliferation of interpretative outcomes is not subject to pure randomness but it is regulated within the confines of a semio-logic. Eco defines openness as the new cultural paradigm brought about by avant-garde art as much as by modern science and other disciplines. He contends that there is a clear distinction between openness and randomness and warns readers about potential confusions between the two.

In developing the line of enquiry of *Opera aperta* in his subsequent works, Eco will often engage with structuralist theory. In 1979, in the introduction of *Lector in Fabula*, Eco re-asserts the importance of this critical engagement within the formation of his theoretical orientation:

> Ma se la scoperta dei metodi strutturali mi apriva una strada, me ne chiudeva un'altra. Infatti era dogma corrente, in quella fase della vicenda strutturalista, che un testo andasse studiato nella propria struttura oggettiva, quale appariva nella propria struttura significante. L'intervento interpretativo del destinatario era messo in ombra quando non era decisamente espunto come impurità metodologica.[76]

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[76] Umberto Eco, *Lector in Fabula* (1979), 7th edn (Milan: Bompiani, 2000), pp.5-6.

Reader, text, objective structures, interpretation are terms that have marked in important ways intellectual debates in the history of literary theory and continue to do so. According to how these terms are manipulated, they define an intellectual strategy. As Eco points out, structuralism was marked by a tendency to obliterate the creative role of agency; texts (and cultures) were compared to crystal structures in which a number of relations would hold together as part of fixed configurations of meaning, thus overshadowing the role of the reader.[77] As Eco argues, '(p)ostulare la cooperazione del lettore non vuol dire inquinare l'analisi strutturale con elementi extra-testuali. Il lettore come principio attivo dell'interpretazione è parte del quadro generativo del testo'.[78] According to Eco, it is the text itself, and not an external intervention on the text, that creates the possibility of its own indeterminacy. For Eco, a text already includes the possibility that a structure could be subverted and reconstituted otherwise. However, without a reader, such a possibility cannot be activated. The reader is precisely the practical operator that makes interpretative choices and establishes links within the symbolic space of the text, work of art, or piece of music. But, since Eco views interpretation as essentially creative, an alternation of construction and deconstruction of structures would in no case lead to a final ontological structure presiding over the meaning of a text.

1.8 Defying binary oppositions

As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi points out, interrelations between individuals, fields, and domains shape intellectual styles.[79] The confrontation between the intellectual and his or her discipline engages elements that are the expression, on the one hand, of the individual's creativity, and of a body of knowledge that has undergone approval and enjoys the shared support of disciplinary communities on the other.[80] In this sense, the relationship between creative intellectuals and academic disciplines reflects that between originality, novelty on the one hand, and a certified body of knowledge on the

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[77] Umberto Eco, *Lector in Fabula*, p.6.

[78] Umberto Eco, *Lector in Fabula*, p.7.

[79] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity. *Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997).

[80] Michèle Lamont highlights the importance of disciplinary frameworks in Michèle Lamont, *How Professors think. Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgmen*t (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 2009).

other.[81] As I will illustrate, Bourdieu and Eco apply in different ways their disciplinary knowledge when playing the role of intellectuals. Even if they are formed in different disciplines, Bourdieu and Eco manifest, throughout their career a common interest for unifying theoretical stances that are often presented as opposed and mutually exclusive.

Over the centuries, disciplines have given different explanations and offered different sets of justifications in the effort to define the principles that drive human action and that regulate cognition; the workings of the human mind and the reasons for actions have been analysed using different vocabularies. While some of these attempts might have limited themselves to empirically circumscribed examples, some disciplines have strived to provide explanations going beyond the empirical in order to provide a foundation and a justification for human thoughts and actions. The notion of reason, as pointed out earlier in this chapter, is an example of this: over the last two and a half centuries reason has been the underlying principle of modern definitions of rationality as provided by, among others, the discipline of economics. Other disciplines such as social philosophy, sociology, or anthropology have attempted to explain human action less through the idea of rationality than by recurring to principles and notions such as society and culture. Within the sets of explanations provided by these disciplines, society and culture are sometimes seen as pre-existing realities that define and prescribe what we call the individual.[82] Whether arguing for the primacy of the social over the individual, or for the opposing case, different explanations often ensure the support of a fraction of a given discipline while attracting dissent from other fractions within the same discipline or from different disciplines. As Randall Collins and Bourdieu have shown, in spite of the various degrees to which a particular individual or disciplinary community can adhere to one position, there is a striking high frequency of debates in the history of Western thought revolving around opposing and mutually distinctive factions.

The oppositions between individual and society, between subject and object (Bourdieu) and between reader and text (Eco) are perhaps the best example of Bourdieu's and Eco's interest in defying binary oppositions. Such an intellectual

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[81] See my discussion of creativity in the next paragraphs.

[82] That is not to say that the same discipline cannot accommodate opposition theoretical paradigms. Quite on the contrary, it is precisely one of my contentions to show that theoretical and methodological divergences within disciplines constitute a starting point for a creative interpretation of existing debates.

strategy is employed in order to reframe traditional philosophical debates, so as to present them under a new light. By recurring to the opposition between subject and object Bourdieu, for instance, re-interprets the sociological tradition around key figures like Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. Eco, on his part, manipulates the notions of text and reader in such a way as to present major hermeneutical traditions from the perspective of his particular notion of interpretation.[83]

1.9 The interdisciplinary scope of the research: combining creativity and the new sociology of ideas

1.9.1 Intellectuals and interdisciplinarity

As suggested thus far, the term interdisciplinarity is used in relation to other terms, such as creativity, intellectual narrative, and public intellectuality. This study suggests that it is possible to associate the above-mentioned terms in such a way as to show some overlaps not only in their definitions, but also in the assumptions that these terms generate once placed in the context of a research that seeks to combine them. By seeking to identify the common ground between these terms, this study also intends to create some solid interrelation between domains of research that are normally explored independently.

This section will consider further the importance that the term interdisciplinarity acquires in attempting to understand the creative dimension of the work of intellectuals. In this study, I use the term interdisciplinarity to explore the dialogue between disciplines. I sometimes refer to other terms such as transdisciplinarity or multidsciplinarity. In spite of their slightly different meaning, these terms designate the co-presence of at least two disciplines within a single research agenda. Transdisciplinarity refers to the possibility of crossing the boundaries of disciplines, whereas multidisciplinarity refers to the co-presence of several disciplines. I tend to prefer the term interdisciplinarity because, in the relevant literature, it is used more often than transdisciplinarity or multidsciplinarity. Moreover, I feel that the term interdisciplinarity conveys more directly than the other two terms the creative potential fostered by the combination of disciplines. Before discussing the meaning of the term

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[83] Eco defines interpretation in terms of a convergence between texts and readers; this convergence provides a hermeneutical frame for a dialectical encounter between text and reader. Eco's understanding of interpretative practices will be discussed in the next chapters.

interdisciplinarity, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that the term discipline has two main meanings. For this reason, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that the term discipline has two main meanings. As Joe Moran notes:

> The term 'discipline' has two principal modern usages: it refers to a particular branch of learning or body of knowledge and to the maintenance of order and control amongst subordinated groups such a soldiers, prison inmates or school pupils, often through the threat of physical and other forms of punishment.[84]

Aside from the meaning of discipline as body of knowledge, the second meaning of the term (the maintenance of order and control) appears in the passage to have rather negative connotations, especially since 'maintenance of order and control' come to be associated with 'the threat of physical and other forms of punishment'. However, in spite of the negative connotations associated with the meaning of the term in the above quotation, there are examples that show how discipline (often in the form of self-discipline) can acquire a much more positive connotation, and can be seen as something rather positive and desirable. Such classic works as Saint Augustine's *Confessions* (written between AD 397 and AD 398) or Saint John of The Cross's 16th century treatise *The dark night of the soul* illustrate the positive value that discipline can assume in the context of one's spiritual paths and more in general with regards to self-knowledge.

As suggested in the introduction, a discipline should not be defined as something static. When the term discipline defines the limits proper to a branch of learning, this does not in any way exclude the possibility that the discipline is a means to attain knowledge, rather than being an end in itself. In other words, there is, potentially, something transitive in the idea of discipline as a body of knowledge. One might use a given discipline as a frame in order to channel and orient the pursuit of knowledge. But frames can also be used flexibly or even questioned. In fact, in certain areas of academia, such as philosophy, practitioners are often involved in questioning the objects, the approaches, as well as the limits proper to their own disciplines. So much

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[84] Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p.2.

so, that for many philosophers the questioning of their own discipline is a mark of their professional vocation.[85]

Against such background, one can see that disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity are not antagonistic concepts. Rather, interdisciplinarity is the consequence of a particular way of approaching disciplinarity. Interdisciplinarity, in this very sense, represents a constructive way of questioning and challenging limits within knowledge. At the same time, the term hints at the possibility of a wide-ranging and holistic knowledge. As Joe Moran observes:

> On the one hand, it (interdisciplinarity) forms part of this traditional search for a wide-ranging, total knowledge; on the other, it represents a more radical questioning of the nature of knowledge and our attempts to organize and communicate it.[86]

As chapter six will suggest, if interdisciplinarity represents a way to question effectively internal divisions of knowledge, such a questioning seems to require some sort of frame within which practices of knowledge are carried out.

Following these few introductory paragraphs about the definitions of the terms disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, the following paragraphs will address, in a more specific way, the relevance that the notions of disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity will acquire within this study. In different parts of this study I will emphasize how Bourdieu's intellectual itinerary develops through a recurrent confrontation with other academic disciplines (philosophy, history of art, cultural anthropology). In Eco's case I will, as pointed out, stress the interdisciplinary range of his intellectual profile and the multiple roles that this range of intervention implies: semiotician, public intellectual and novel writer are three identities which coexist within Eco's intellectual itinerary and together provide what I call Eco's intellectual polyphony.

In emphasizing the disciplinary component of the intellectual itinerary of Bourdieu and Eco, in the first part of this study I will address the questions of (1) how Bourdieu and Eco interpret the role of the intellectual, and (2) how this performance

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[85] On this point see Richard Rorty, 'The Philosopher as Expert', in Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Thirtieth Anniversary Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) pp. 395-423.

[86] Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity*, p.13.

reflects itself in the general problematic of the relationship between disciplinary knowledge, interdisciplinarity, and intellectuality. In addressing these questions, I will also give further depth to the concept of intellectual narrative, by showing how interdisciplinarity is a central theme around which Bourdieu's and Eco's intellectual self-narrative constitutes itself.[87]

In the second part of this study I will elaborate a framework within which I will further discuss the analyses developed in the introductory chapters. I shall argue that ideas that intellectuals produce and develop owe as much to their singularity and individuality as to organized bodies of knowledge that exist under the form of academic disciplines. In this sense I will emphasize how intellectual engagement provides the ground for challenging and questioning disciplinary boundaries. I will also discuss the relation between the intellectual and society in such a way as to establish a theoretical framework that I will progressively refine along the second part of this study. This theoretical framework will also offer further evidence supporting the relevance of the concepts of self-reflexivity and of intellectual polyphony which I explored in the first part of this study.

When I will address Bourdieu's and Eco's critical engagement with structuralism, I will highlight from the outset the constitutive interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary dimensions of structuralism's method and approach. Structuralism was initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics but rapidly spread to disciplines such as anthropology and sociology until it became, in the late 50s and the 60s, one of the dominant theoretical paradigms within the French intellectual field and beyond. Bourdieu's and Eco's critical engagement with structuralism carries the mark of this interdisciplinarity. Moreover, in order to attempt to move beyond the theoretical paradigm of structuralism, Bourdieu and Eco demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the formal strategies through which structuralism became so attractive to so many disciplines. At the same time, Bourdieu and Eco identify the weak spot of structuralism: its lack of intellectual flexibility and mobility. They see structuralist theory as unable to account for the unpredictability of history one the one hand, and for the freedom of the subject on the other. As I shall point out, Bourdieu and Eco counter what they view as

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[87]While further developing the concept of intellectual narrative, each chapter presents a separate argument in such a way as to place Bourdieu's and Eco's intellectuality within their specific context, be it historical, disciplinary or theoretical.

the shortcomings of structuralism by re-examining the dialectical relationship between the categories of subject and object and individual and social structures.[88]

Interdisciplinarity, as Moran points out, is a central theme when we advance the importance of a holistic view of knowledge over the increasing fragmentation of knowledge that characterizes contemporary Western societies. Against this backdrop, I will explore the interdisciplinary dimension of the work of Bourdieu and Eco as a means whereby they develop a holistic view of the intellectual field. In the conclusive part of this study I will discuss the work of Bourdieu and Eco from a meta-critical perspective. In this sense, I will engage with some of the ideas developed by Bourdieu and Eco beyond the localised context of their work. The aim is to understand the balance between intellectual creativity and unpredictability on the one hand, and organisation and order on the other. In particular, I will illustrate that if intellectual creativity fosters the idea that knowledge should be questioned, reorganised, and reformulated with new conceptual languages, then there needs to be a common framework flexible enough to guarantee the productivity of the intellectual field.

1.9.2 Intellectuals and creativity

The ability of intellectuals to express their own stances relies on the expression of creative thinking, and intellectuals find their own voices by using, in an original and pertinent way, the knowledge resources that are already available to them. As I shall illustrate, creativity involves, in most cases, an attempt to seek a balance between the past and the present, between the old and the new, between what already exists and what can be presented as original and innovative.

Creativity can mean different things according to the approach one takes. For instance, in Donald W.Winnicot's understanding of creativity as developed in *Playing and Reality* (1971), creativity is something inherent to human behaviour and to the human cognition.[89] In Winnicot's case creativity, when it comes to explain human behaviour, constitutes the rule rather than the exception. From Winnicot's perspective,

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[88] Eco's and Bourdieu's criticism of structuralism is the result of their particular interpretation of it. Their criticism of structuralism simplifies, to some extent, its importance as analytical method. My intention is to illustrate how this criticism fits within the intellectual agenda of Bourdieu and Eco rather than to assess structuralism *per se*. My argument is that intellectuals often simplify the complexity of existing theories and methods in order to make a better and clearer case for their own theories and conceptual models.

[89] D.W.Winnicot, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

human behaviour is by definition creative. Creativity usually refers to the capacity the mind has to create mental objects or to attribute new meaning to external objects. In this case, creativity means more or less something like "fabrication", in the sense in which the mind fabricates certain mental objects as a response to the external environment.[90]

As pointed out by Joyce McDougall, psychological states or unconscious conflicts motivate or inhibit creative behaviour. McDougall observes how individuals who are involved in creative professions sometimes suffer from creative blocks due to unsolved unconscious tensions. Managing effectively these tensions by bringing them into conscious awareness can lead to the re-establishment of a productive creative activity in the domains in which these individuals engage.[91]

According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, creativity is characterized by a particular psychological state that he calls 'flow'. If a peculiar psychological state can be identified as relevant to creative behaviour, a general understanding of creativity should not be reduced or confined to the study of mental or psychological states. Creativity is a more complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. As Csikszentmihalyi rightly points out, 'creativity does not happen inside people's heads, but in the interaction between a person's thoughts and a sociocultural context. It is a systematic rather than an individual phenomenon'[92]. Csikszentmihalyi further specifies what he means with the 'interaction between a person's thoughts and a sociocultural context' by referring to three components: the domain, the field, and the individual. The first component, the domain:

> Consists of a set of symbolic rules and procedures. Mathematics is a domain, or at a finer resolution algebra and number theory can be seen as domains. Domains are in turn nested in what we usually call culture, or the symbolic knowledge shared by a particular society, or by humanity as a whole.[93]

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[90] Creativity, in Winnicot's case, also means investing a particular object with a special meaning. Winnicot places particular emphasis on the formative role of what he calls transitional objects. In Child Psychology, a transitional object is an object highly charged with meaning, thanks to which the child manages to overcome his initial identification with the mother.

[91] Joyce McDougall, *The Many Faces of Eros: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Human Sexuality* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).

[92] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity. Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, p. 23.

[93] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity. Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, pp.27-28.

The second component of creativity, the field, 'includes all the individuals who act as gatekeepers to the domain'. In brief, the field includes those professionals who can legitimate the creativity of given individuals by influencing their success or their marginality. The third component is the individual who, 'using the symbols of a given domain', comes up with a creative idea or product.[94] Thus, the following scenario applies to the creative process as presented by Csikszentmihalyi:

> Creativity results from the interaction of a system composed of three elements: a culture that contains symbolic rules, a person who brings novelty in the symbolic domain, and a field of experts who recognize and validate the innovation.[95]

Csikszentmihalyi's understanding of creative processes is holistic rather than individualistic. In this sense it develops concerns that are shared by a number of other relevant contributions in the study of creativity. In the next few paragraphs the notion of creativity will be further presented and widened in relation to these contributions and in to the specific concerns that this study develops.

As pointed out, creativity can be understood as the capacity to pose new questions in an effective yet unconventional way. Barbara Misztal's *Intellectuals and the Public Good*, for instance, analyses creativity in mainly three ways.[96] Firstly, Misztal asks what creativity is. While identifying several models of creativity throughout history, she points out how 'the specialization of the discourse on creativity in the twentieth century has, on the one hand, fragmented and, on the other hand, enriched our understanding of the creative process'.[97] As Misztal argues, an enhanced understanding has been fostered, on the one hand, by an increased interest in the creative nature of scientific processes, especially since Charles Peirce's theory of signs. On the other hand, Robert K. Merton pioneered sociological studies of science highlighting the context-dependent origin of the scientific discourse.[98] The second question Misztal asks is where creativity can be found. She underscores the importance

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[94] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity. Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, p.28.

[95] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity. Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, p.6.

[96] Barbara Mistztal, *Intellectuals and the Public Good* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[97] Barbara Mistztal, *Intellectuals and the Public Good*, p. 44.

[98] Some of the features of Peirce's theory of signs and the implications of Merton's approach to scientific knowledge will be discussed in subsequent chapters, respectively chapter four and six.

of the holistic approach to creativity and of its attempts at unifying the various psychological approaches to creativity, which traditionally focus on 'person, process, product and environment' separately rather than conjointly. Mistztal stresses that creativity, rather than being the product of isolated moments, is a slow process that takes place over a long period of time. She also stresses the centrality of social networks in influencing the flow of creativity and the processes whereby creativity is publicly recognised. [99]

Creativity, as Misztal maintains, has seldom been integrated into a general sociological theory. There are, however, a few notable exceptions. The holistic approach to creativity has been, for instance, effectively explored by Csikszentmihalyi. As Csikszentmihalyi contends, 'creativity is (a) process that can be observed only at the intersection where individuals, domains and fields interact'.[100] Since the holistic approach aims at grasping the intersections between individuals and the social context, it thus follows, Misztal notes, that knowledge of the different moments and individuals involved in the creative process is paramount. As she puts it: '(…) creativity occurs in a wide range of situations, and in order to account for it we need to know something about both the subjective and the objective dimensions of the situation'.[101] Scholars in the psychology of creativity have also stressed the importance of cognitive factors in shaping creative processes. Teresa M. Amabile, for instance, advocates the importance of intrinsic motivation as opposed to extrinsic motivation. While intrinsic motivation, as Amabile points out, deals with the individual's self-involvement in the accomplishment of a given task or project, extrinsic motivation is generally seen as external to the creative process as such.[102]

Following the pioneering work of Arthur Koestler[103], scholars of different disciplinary backgrounds like Csikszentmihalyi, Misztal, and Margaret Boden[104] have

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[99] Barbara Mistztal, *Intellectuals and the Public Good*, p.49.

[100] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity. Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, p.50.

[101] Barbara Mistztal, Intellectuals *and the Public Good*, p.56.

[102] See Teresa M. Amabile, *Creativity in Context*, updated edn (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996). A reward would be, in this sense, an example of extrinsic motivation. However, Amabile recognizes that sometimes extrinsic motivation, when duly implemented in the creative process, can be experienced as intrinsic.

[103] Arthur Koestler, *The* Act *of Creation* (1964) (London: Picador, 1977).

emphasized how creativity consists, among other things, in the capacity to see interrelations and to operate links between different domains, as well as in the capacity to unify differences within coherently formulated artistic or intellectual frameworks. In discussing the different meanings of the term intellectual, Stefan Collini, for instance, defines public intellectuals as individuals who 'employ an acknowledged intellectual position or achievement in addressing a broader, non-specialist public'[105]. Similarly, Posner notes that 'a public intellectual expresses himself in a way that is accessible to the public, and the focus of his expression is on matters of general public concern of (or inflected by) a political or ideological cast'[106]. From this perspective intellectuals, inasmuch as they frame knowledge in such a way as to bridge the gap between specialists, or between specialists and the general public, can be legitimately considered as creative individuals in their own right.

Some of the questions that animate research on creativity, which I have summarized in the last few paragraphs, will be fruitfully integrated within the scope of this study. Another, more general question that is relevant to both this study and to most of the studies of creativity, has to do with how ideas appear, how they are shaped and refined, and how they circulate within society and social groups. With respect to this, along with the study of creativity, the other major field of study that has had an influence on this study is the so-called new sociology of ideas. The advantage of this field over other similar fields is that there exists a sort of manifesto of the new sociology of ideas written by American sociologists Charles Camic and Neil Gross, which presents in a programmatic form the main lines of research and an overall research program.

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[104] Margaret Boden, *The Creative Mind. Myths and Mechanisms* (1990) 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[105] Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain*, p. 47.

[106] Richard Posner, *Public Intellectuals. A study of Decline*, p.35.

1.9.3 The new sociology of ideas

With the label 'the new sociology of ideas', Camic and Gross set out to define an important field of study that emerged over the last two decades.[107] As the two authors point out, this field of study:

> Focuses on women and men who specialize in the production of cognitive, evaluative, and expressive ideas and examines the social processes by which their ideas –i.e. their statements, claims, arguments, concepts, beliefs, assumptions, etc. - emerge, develop, and change [108].

The new sociology of ideas, as discussed by Camic and Gross, brings together insights, theoretical orientations and arguments coming from specialist areas such as sociology of science, sociology of culture, and general sociological theory, with the aim of elaborating relevant 'tools of sociological analysis to explain why thinkers make the intellectual choices they do'[109]. Attention is given to the actual processes through which knowledge is produced and distributed, as much as on the individuals involved in these processes. The aim of the new sociology of ideas is to elaborate a general line of argument to account for the production of ideas within more or less large networks of people and institutions such as universities, the press, the media, etc., so that emphasis is placed on the intellectual actors as much as on particular institutional settings in which ideas are generated.

Perhaps because more directly oriented towards the study of intellectuals and intellectual processes, or perhaps because of the more structured and transparent research program, the influence of the new sociology of ideas on this study has been, comparatively, more systematic than that of the studies of creativity. The impact of the new sociology of ideas has also been structural, in that I have integrated and clearly outlined the theoretical and methodological propositions of the new sociology of ideas in chapter four. The impact of existing research on creativity is perhaps less evident and direct, and this is for different reasons.

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[107] Charles Camic, and Neil Gross, 'The New Sociology of Ideas', in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology*, ed. by Judith Blau (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp.236-249.

[108] Charles Camic, and Neil Gross, 'The New Sociology of Ideas', p.236.

[109] Charles Camic, and Neil Gross, 'The New Sociology of Ideas', p.236.

Firstly, intellectual processes as I discuss them in this research are one among many types of creative processes that are approached by research on creativity. Research on creativity touches upon a variety of cases where creativity is presented as not directly linked to intellectual processes but rather to artistic, scientific, or everyday life examples. Obviously, it would be possible to elaborate on how these cases could eventually be described or considered as intellectual processes, since after all they do involve, and sometimes are clearly based on, intellectually oriented activities. Secondly, differently from the new sociology of ideas, studies on creativity are not organised within a single conceptual umbrella. Therefore, it is easier to refer to single authors rather than to a constituted and structured body of work. Thirdly, studies on creativity have been explored at a relatively later stage in this research, whereas the encounter with the program of the new sociology of ideas came at a moment in which the elaboration of a methodological frame was a priority. This is also why the new sociology of ideas left a more visible trace on the methodological thread that underpins the second part of the research. However, research on creativity and the new sociology of ideas intersect at many levels, and have both been, and continue to be, equally inspirational from a methodological perspective.

1.10 Conclusion: intersecting narratives

This chapter has provided a background that will be further enriched with the observations presented in the following chapters. It has introduced some of the main questions that the study of intellectuality both implies and generates. The next two chapters will introduce Bourdieu and Eco, the two intellectuals whose work this study explores. While introducing some of the questions that will receive further elaboration in the next chapters, this introductory chapter also presented the originality of the approach employed in this study. As suggested in the introduction, knowledge is a dynamic process. Original knowledge does not arise out of nowhere but is developed in relation to existing knowledge. One of the ways of producing originality consists precisely in exploring existing maps of knowledge with a new travelling agenda.

In this chapter, I have proposed to chart intellectuality from different perspectives. In the introduction, I have given a historical overview of the figure of the intellectual. My intention was to highlight the importance of the concept of narrative, and the fact that a narrative is a process that can be constructed from different and often

contrastive points of view. In this sense the concept of narrative informs the chapter in its entirety. By suggesting a space of convergence (but also a space of tension and creative accomplishment) between the act of narrating society and the fact of being narrated by society, I have also outlined the particular approach that this study takes with regards to public intellectuality.

In the last part of this chapter, I have presented the main research areas that this study integrates. Research on creativity offers important insights into intellectually creative processes similar to those that this study will pursue in several directions and in close relationship with the works of Bourdieu and Eco. The following chapters will further elaborate on some of the considerations about creative processes that have been presented in this chapter. Creative processes have been seldom specifically associated with the study of intellectuality.[110] Similarly, the works of Bourdieu and Eco, and their intellectual self-narratives, will inspire new considerations that will confirm, extend, or question some of the basic assumptions that animate current research on creativity. As anticipated by this chapter, research on creativity reaches conclusions that are in many respects similar to the ones suggested by the new sociology of ideas. The final chapters of this study will, in fact, integrate some of the main lines of research of the new sociology of ideas in relation to the works of Bourdieu and Eco.

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[110] For a notable exception see the previously referenced Barbara Mistztal, *Intellectuals and the Public Good.*

Chapter 2: Pierre Bourdieu's Self-portrait of an Intellectual as a Sociologist. The Sociologist, the Intellectual, and the Self-reflexive Mirror

'Il y a beaucoup d'intellectuels qui mettent en question le monde; il y a très peu d'intellectuels qui mettent en question le monde intellectuel'.[111]

2.1 Introduction: Bourdieu's self-portrait of the intellectual

While the expertise of intellectuals can be associated with the practice of an academic discipline, creative intellectuals also challenge the division of knowledge into disciplines. In chapter one, I have called this element of challenge intellectual creativity. Through the exercise of creative thinking, intellectuals produce interdisciplinary knowledge. As creative thinking also contains an element of eccentricity and deviance, the thought of creative intellectuals is also likely to produce controversy, and to be the object of attentive examination and scrutiny performed by the intellectual community at large.[112]

The work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has raised a certain number of controversies that have proven the vitality and the creative aspect of his work.[113] In this chapter I will pursue further, by discussing specific aspects of the work of Bourdieu, some of the ways whereby the work of creative thinkers, while it recognizes the existence of disciplinary limits, it also questions them. Bourdieu's work, taken as a whole, suggests that there is a clear continuity between the sociologist and the intellectual. In this chapter I illustrate how Bourdieu's sociological practice provides the ground to engage in the role of the intellectual. Sociology is a discipline strongly rooted

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[111] Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (Paris : Raison d'agir, 2004), p.37.

[112] See *The Dark Side of Creativity*, ed. by David H. Cropley, Arthur J. Cropley, James C. Kaufman, and Mark A. Runco (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[113] See for instance Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, *Le Savant et la politique. Essai sur le terrorisme sociologique de Pierre Bourdieu* (Paris: Éditions Grasset, 1998). Verdès-Leroux's book unleashed a controversy that gained a considerable media attention in France.

in a methodological as well as in an empirical tradition. Bourdieu, one of the most eminent representatives of the discipline, was an intellectual whose relevance was greatly shaped by the practical and theoretical tools defined, by and large, as sociological method.[114]

This chapter expands the notion of intellectual narrative discussed in chapter one. It tackles the importance of Bourdieu's sociological method from the perspective of the notion of self-reflexivity.[115] Self-reflexivity is the ability to place the self at the centre of a reflection about intellectual practices. In Bourdieu's social theory, great emphasis is placed on the examination of the interrelations between the personal experience of individuals and the social context that informs this experience. Furthermore, Bourdieu's social theory attempts a synthesis between 'objectivism' and 'subjectivism' by seeking to integrate the experience of the social scientist within object of knowledge that he or she construes as expert. The integration of the sociologist within the process of construction of knowledge is aimed at questioning the idea of objectivity as a form of external knowledge without subject.[116] But what are the implications of placing the epistemic subject (the knowing subject but also the subject that creates the knowledge) at the very centre of an intellectual self-narrative? And how does self-reflexivity become in turn an integral part of the process whereby Bourdieu's construes his intellectual self-narrative? As I will argue, self-reflexivity is part of a more general framework through which Bourdieu defines his idea of the intellectual. In addition to self-reflexivity, other components of Bourdieu's intellectual profile will be examined, such as the way in which Bourdieu describes the role of sociology within the intellectual field, especially with reference to neighbouring disciplines like philosophy and history of art.

Bourdieu often insists on highlighting the conflicts and controversies generated by the confrontation between sociology and other disciplines. Such intellectual confrontations, as I will point out, are themselves parts of a strategy in

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[114] For a comprehensive view of Bourdieu's sociological method, see Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Chamboredon, Jean-Claude Passeron, *Le métier de sociologue* (1968), 4th edn (La Haye : Mouton, 1983).

[115] My observations about reflexivity and self-reflexivity are partly inspired by Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

[116] See Pierre Bourdieu, Esquisse *d'une théorie de la pratique* précédé de *Trois études d'ethnologie kabyle* (1972), 2nd edn (Paris: Seuil, 2000). The notions of subjectivism and objectivism and their relevance within Bourdieu's general theory will be further discussed in chapter five.

which disciplines are put into a critical and often controversial dialogue. In this sense, Bourdieu views other disciplines through his own commitment to the discipline of sociology. Against this backdrop, Bourdieu defines the sociologist as a figure able to articulate within a single discourse different and sometimes contrastive experiences of the social world. Thereby, Bourdieu describes the sociologist as an essentially creative agent able to address the extreme diversity of experiences present in the social world. Moreover, Bourdieu's self-conception as an intellectual implies a link between the figure of the sociologist and the notion of marginality. As research on creativity indicates, some of the notions that are central in the understanding of creativity, such as deviance, should be understood beyond the negative connotations with which they are at times associated. Viewed as a statistical factor rather than a moral property, deviance can be understood as an important ingredient in the appearance of recognized forms of creativity.[117] On a similar line of reasoning, this chapter will argue that marginality can be conceived as a creative factor in the production of knowledge as well as in the exercise of intellectuality.

2.1.1 The structure and the aim of the chapter

The first part of this chapter will start by comparing Bourdieu's and Gramsci's understandings of culture. Gramsci develops a view of society in which intellectuals are mediating figures between abstract ideas and empirical realities. The notion of culture, and its relevance within Gramsci's view of intellectuals, provides ground to discuss some similarities between Gramsci and Bourdieu. A comparative approach of Gramsci and Bourdieu, however briefly outlined, is relevant in that it helps to introduce some of the salient features of Bourdieu's sociology of culture that are highly relevant to his intellectual self-narrative. Bourdieu's definition of social science, as said, orients him towards assuming the role of intellectual. In this sense, disciplinary commitment is not an obstacle to public intellectuality, but it can open up important avenues for transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge. While being solidly grounded in the discipline of sociology, Bourdieu can also claim expertise in fields such as literature, art, and philosophy.

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[117] See Mark A. Runco, 'Creativity Has No Dark Side' in *The Dark Side of Creativity*, pp. 15-33, p.17.

Bourdieu's far-reaching sociological project provides a case in point for a form of transdisciplinarity that preserves the idea of discipline. Bourdieu's case illustrates how interdisciplinarity can offer its best, as Stanley Fish and Joe Moran have argued, inasmuch as it does not ignore the idea of discipline but defines itself in relation to it. [118]Against this backdrop, the second part of this chapter explores how Bourdieu's idea of sociology challenges the limits that an excessively narrow definition of the discipline would imply. In fact, Bourdieu's approach to knowledge provokes discussions with and reactions from other disciplines whose traditional objects Bourdieu' sociology examines. In this part of the chapter I also discuss how in *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*[119] Bourdieu clearly illustrates the importance of self-reflexivity when analysing his own personal and professional trajectory. In discussing *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse,* a considerable attention will be devoted to introducing Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field and to discussing these two concepts in conjunction with the exploration of Bourdieu's self-reflexive sociology.

The third and last part of the chapter will expand on the discussion of *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* in reference to Edward Said's understanding of the figure of the intellectual as he discusses it in the 1993 Reith Lectures.[120] Said's discussion of the figure of the intellectual can enrich the understanding of Bourdieu's intellectual self-portrait in one sensible way. In fact, Said's account of the role of the intellectual relies, among other things, on the notion of marginality, which is also central to Bourdieu's conception of the social-scientific intellectual.[121]However usually seen as something negative, marginality acquires an essentially positive connotation, both in Said and Bourdieu. As I will show, marginality provides a privileged point of view from which the intellectual can observe social reality.[122]

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[118] See Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally. Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989) and Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

[119] Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (Paris : Raison d'agir, 2004).

[120] Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual. The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London, Vintage, 1994).

[121] For the relevance of marginality within post-modern aesthetics see for instance Linda Hutcheon, 'De-centring the Postmodern: the Ex-centric' in Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernity. History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 57-74.

[122] The idea that marginality offers a privileged position from which to observe social reality is developed, among others, by Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969) (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2009). See chapter 3 'Liminality and Communitas', pp. 94-131, in which

2.2 The Intellectual: a social figure at the crossroad of cultural discourses

Chapter one has emphasized the contribution of intellectuals in conceptualizing frameworks within which cultures are conceived and organised. Antonio Gramsci recognised and reflected upon this specific aspect of the social identity of intellectuals. He also thought that the organisation of culture was mainly a practical task. As he points out: 'organizziamo la cultura, così come cerchiamo di organizzare ogni attività pratica. I borghesi filantropicamente hanno pensato ad offrire al proletariato le Università popolari. Contrapponiamo la solidarietà alla filantropia'.[123] James Martin, one of Gramsci's commentators, refers to what he names as the 'reciprocal and mutually informative (…) relationship between "feeling" and "knowing"' in describing one of the essential features of Gramsci's definition of organic intellectuals. [124] This is how Gramsci himself puts it:

> L'errore dell'intellettuale consiste nel credere che si possa *sapere* senza comprendere e specialmente senza sentire ed essere appassionato (non solo del sapere in sé, ma per l'oggetto del sapere) cioè che l'intellettuale possa essere tale (e non un puro pedante) se distinto e staccato dal popolo-nazione, cioè senza sentire le passioni elementari del popolo, comprendendole e quindi spiegandole e giustificandole nella determinata situazione storica, e collegandole dialetticamente alle leggi della storia, a una superiore concezione del mondo, scientificamente e coerentemente elaborata, il 'sapere'; (…)[125]

This passage renders very well the importance that Gramsci attributes to the combination of rational thinking and feeling that makes an essential part of the makeup

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Turner discusses the idea of marginality in relation to his central concepts of liminality and communitas. Turner's discussion of marginality also raises the issue of the relationship between the ethnologist and the social groups he/she studies, particularly with regards to the question of which conditions allow one to observe, construe and discuss the notion of marginality.

[123] Antonio Gramsci, *Il nostro Marx*.1918-1919, ed. by S. Caprioglio (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), p. 275. Quoted in E. Garin. *Con Gramsci* (Bari: Editori Riuniti, 1997) p.84.

[124] James Martin, 'Between ethics and politics: Gramsci's theory of intellectuals' in *Antonio Gramsci. Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers*, ed. by James Martin, vol. III, *Intellectuals, Culture and the Party* (London: Routledge, 2002) p.136.

[125] Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, 4 vols, ed. by Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi,1975) vol. II, p. 1505.

of organic intellectuals. The capacity to articulate theoretical knowledge with direct experience, which Gramsci grants to organic intellectuals, is also relevant, as I will argue, in Bourdieu's conception of the social scientific intellectual.

Gramsci thought that members of the working class possess the potential to acquire the kind of specific approach to knowledge he fostered. Hence, Gramsci argued that intellectuals had a crucial role in promoting an approach to culture based on a historical understanding of society and of the place that individuals occupy within society. Gramsci's particular description of culture is couched in a Marxist vocabulary, in that he views the realization of socialism resulting from the overcoming of class struggle:

> La realizzazione del socialismo, cioè la fine della lotta di classe, è concepita dialetticamente dal Marx, ... come interiorizzazione della lotta, come una forma di civiltà originale nella storia dell'uomo, che dal Marx viene definita energicamente e plasticamente nella concezione di 'rivoluzione in permanenza'[126].

The idea that individuals internalize the cultural and social conditions that define their place in the social hierarchy is for Gramsci (and for Marx) a central element in the overcoming of the class struggle. As discussed in chapter one, Bourdieu also recurs, through the concept of habitus, to the idea that individuals internalize the social conditions that shape their life experiences.[127] However, for Bourdieu the subtlest forms of cultural domination are not directly visible; individuals are often unaware of their involvement in certain forms of cultural as well as social struggles. As Shusterman points out, 'Bourdieu denies the ability of practicing agents to critique, reinterpret, and thereby revise their practical logic and behaviour, thus compelling them to sustain the social domination incorporated in the *habitus* that allegedly directs their practical

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[126] Antonio Gramsci, *Socialismo e Fascismo. L'Ordine Nuovo. 1921-1922* (Turin: Einaudi,1966), p.446. Quoted in E. Garin, *Con Gramsci*, p.89.

[127] See for instance David Swartz, 'Habitus: a cultural theory of action' in David Swartz, *Culture and Power. The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp.95-117. See also Michael Grenfell, 'Raison d'être', in Michael Grenfell, *Pierre Bourdieu. Agent Provocateur* (London Continuum, 2004), pp. 164-191; Jacques Bouveresse, 'Rules, Dispositions, and the Habitus', in *Bourdieu. A Critical Reader*, ed. by Richard Shusterman (Malden: Blackwell, 1999), pp.45-64.

reasoning'.[128] Accordingly, for Bourdieu the role of the sociologists implies the task of demonstrating that social reality is not always transparent as it appears to be. While a comprehensive knowledge of social reality is a possibility offered to the sociologist Bourdieu, as pointed out, does not grant this privilege to ordinary social agents. Rather, he argues that individuals experience the social world through a set of cognitive and perceptive categories (i.e. the habitus) which have been acquired by recurrent experiences of social situations and by regular interactions with given social milieus. By perceiving the real through socially acquired categories, individuals have no access to the mechanisms and social dynamics whereby these very categories have been structured.[129]

This question is crucial in the development of Bourdieu's self-conception as an intellectual. In fact, Bourdieu's sociology of culture implies the possibility that the sociologist, contrary to other social agents, is able to abstract him- or herself from the logic of practice that informs individual strategies and practices. Such a possibility is theorized by Bourdieu through the notion of reflexivity

It might be useful, at this stage, to draw attention on the two terms of reflexivity and self-reflexivity. Reflexivity, in its general meaning, involves a capacity for intellectual abstraction as well as the possibility of critically engaging with experience. Self-reflexivity aims at addressing the idea of the authorship of knowledge, by addressing the fact that reflection, and the knowledge that ensues from reflection, stems from a subject that generates this knowledge by actively interacting with interpretative frameworks. In this chapter, both terms of reflexivity and self-reflexivity will be used, with certain prevalence for the latter. Reflexivity will be used in order to make observations about the general aims of Bourdieu's sociology, while the use of the term

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[128]Richard Shusterman, ed., *Bourdieu. A Critical Reader* (Malden, US: Blackwell, 1999), pp.6-7. However, this does not necessarily imply that Bourdieu's sociology is deterministic. As Jacques Bouveresse points out, 'The fact that the behaviour of an agent is the product of a habitus is obviously not a threat for the spontaneity of his action, as the action is not the result of an external constraint, but of a disposition whose seat is in the agent himself. But insofar as the exercise of free will includes deliberation, a good part of our actions, and in particular those which are the result of a habitus, are simply spontaneous and not strictly speaking free'. In Jacques Bouveresse, 'Rules, Dispositions and the Habitus', in *Bourdieu. A Critical Reader*, pp. 45-64, p.47. I will discuss Bouveresse's article in chapter five.

[129] On this point see Jeffrey C. Alexander, 'The Reality of Reduction: The Failed Synthesis of Pierre Bourdieu', in Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Fin de Siècle Social Theory. Relativism, Reduction and the Problem of Reason* (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 128-218.

self-reflexivity, as indicated in the introduction, signals a clear emphasis on the relation between the subject or author of knowledge and the process whereby knowledge is construed. In a complementary sense, sociological reflexivity, as practiced by Bourdieu, is aimed at bridging the gap between the sociologist's view of the social world and the view that is proper to the individuals the sociologist comes across as a researcher. From this perspective reflexivity, as I will argue throughout this chapter, operates a synthesis between different experiential frameworks, and provides an intermediate level on which different frameworks conflate and generate a creative synthesis.

As Arthur Koestler notes, the combination of different frameworks giving rise to a new and original framework differentiates creativity from purely conventional thinking.[130] Bourdieu's notion of logic of practice, as I will argue more thoroughly later on in this study, describes social behaviour in reference to an explanatory framework that carefully combines scholarly knowledge with the experiential diversity stemming from the individuals with whom the sociologist engages. In fact, the ultimate goal of reflexivity is to reconstitute the symbolic structures that inform the logic of practice governing the cognitive and behavioural strategies of social agents. As Cheleen Mahar argues, Bourdieu's social theory emphasizes the importance of symbolic structures; these structures 'have to be understood like principles of vision and division, which allow us not only to create reality, but to believe in that reality, even before it might exist'[131].

As Zygmunt Bauman observes for postmodern intellectuals, mediating cultures means to be at the crossroad of multiple discourses. This role also entails that intellectuals are in a privileged position to translate the contingency of truth between social groups. Being in the position to translate particular cultural views often leads intellectuals to reflect upon the social and cultural conditions whereby groups differentiate their worldviews. This role also entails that intellectuals possess a particular ability in manipulating language and conceptual thinking.[132]As Michael

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[130] '"Creative originality" does not mean creating or originating a system of ideas out of nothing but rather out of a combination of well-established patterns of thoughts - by a process of cross-fertilization, as it were'. In Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (1964) (London: Picador, 1977), p.131.

[131] Cheleen Mahar, 'Pierre Bourdieu: the intellectual project', in *Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. by Derek Robbins (Cambridge: Sage, 2000), vol. I, p.50.

[132] Zygmunt Bauman. *Legislators and Interpreters. On Modernity, Post-modernity and Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

Grenfell observes, Bourdieu argues that 'in order to manipulate complex conceptual ideas, it is necessary to possess the requisite mental structures which are in turn a product of language'[133]. Gramsci also maintains that the specialist knowledge of intellectuals has to do with the ability to manipulate language; as James Martin points out, the symbolic authority of Gramsci's intellectuals can be described as 'the capacity of a social group to maintain its domination by consent to the extent that it succeeds in having its own language adopted by the intellectuals of other classes or groups'.[134] Gramsci, like Bourdieu, argues that institutions such as the school system or the family play a key-role in shaping the ability of individuals to use language in order to exercise symbolic power.[135]As Bourdieu's sociology of culture illustrates, linguistic capital (the ability to manipulate language in different social situations) is differently distributed within society. As I will argue in chapter six, linguistic ability in Bourdieu's sociology participates to a more general form of symbolic capital which includes the ability to manipulate argumentative strategies as well as the capacity to articulate abstract thoughts in ways that appear particularly suitable to certain forms of intellectual conversation. In works such as *La distinction* (1979), Bourdieu argues that the expression of cultural taste reflects the positions that individuals occupy within the social world. Supported by empirical cases, he shows the link between the social position of the subjects he interviewed and the aesthetic perception they express. Confronted with a picture showing the used hands of an old woman, 'les plus démunis expriment une émotion conventionnelle ou une complicité'[136]. According to Bourdieu,

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[133] Michael Grenfell, *Pierre Bourdieu. Agent Provocateur*, p.77.

[134] James Martin, 'Between ethics and politics: Gramsci's theory of intellectuals', p.133. Along the same lines, Bourdieu maintains that journalists impose particular views of political issues not only to the general public but also to intellectuals.

[135] School and family very often reinforce their reciprocal influence. As Gramsci remarks, kids often develop an early feeling for literary language due to their belonging to the intellectual groups (*ceti intellettuali*) within society: 'In una serie di famiglie, specialmente nei ceti intellettuali, i ragazzi trovano nella vita familiare una preparazione, un prolungamento e un'integrazione della vita scolastica, assorbono, come si dice, dall'"aria" tutta una serie di nozioni e attitudini che facilitano la carriera scolastica propriamente detta: essi conoscono già e sviluppano la conoscenza della lingua letteraria, cioè il mezzo di espressione e di conoscenza, tecnicamente superiore ai mezzi posseduti dalla media della popolazione scolastica dai sei ai dodici anni'. Antonio Gramsci. *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*, p.101. Bourdieu's interest in education is apparent in a number of his works. See Pierre Bourdieu, and Jean-Claude Passeron. *Les héritiers. Les étudiants et la culture* (1964), 3rd edn (Paris: Minuit, 1985) ; Pierre Bourdieu, and Jean-Claude Passeron, *La reproduction. Eléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement* (Paris: Minuit, 1970), and Pierre Bourdieu. *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement* (Paris : Minuit, 1979).

[136] Pierre Bourdieu. *La distinction*, p.46.

working class individuals empathize with the picture of the used hands of the old woman because they see it as entirely compatible with their representation of their everyday life. These hands are, so to speak, part of a world they recognize as their own; they are a symbol of their conditions as workers. At the opposite end of the social spectrum, upper class individuals display a more detached relation to the picture. As Bourdieu suggests, both reactions demonstrates how social condition influences the way in which individuals represent the world. While upper class individuals express a calculated disinterest in the picture, working individuals display an emotional response.[137]

2.3 The personal is social: Bourdieu as a self-reflexive intellectual

By laying emphasis on the importance of linguistic ability, on the capacity to manipulate conceptual and argumentative reasoning, as well as on the expression of aesthetical appreciation, Bourdieu's sociology might be seen, as Jeffrey Alexander maintains, as a form sociological reductionism viewing individual strategies and choices as the reflection of symbolic structures. Quite on the contrary, Bourdieu's sociological approach underscores the interdependencies rather than the oppositions between sociology and psychology, or between the individual and the social.[138] One of the most striking marks of Bourdieu's sociology of culture is that it challenges all the major conceptual oppositions, like subject/object, internal/external, psychological/social, individual/collective, agent/structure, etc., which, historically, have been feeding traditional debates in the humanities and the social sciences. For instance, Emile Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of the discipline of sociology, defined the object of sociology through the widely known methodological principle according to which one has to explain the social by recurring to the social. He argued that what one would consider the most individual and psychologically oriented behaviours, should be regarded as manifestations of societal logic.[139] Durkheim's thesis, by stating the primacy of the social over the psychological explanation, underscores the binary opposition

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[137] Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction*, p.46.

[138] Jeffrey C. Alexander, 'The Reality of Reduction: The failed Synthesis of Pierre Bourdieu', in Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Fin de Siècle Social Theory. Relativism, Reduction and the Problem of Reason* (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 128-218.

[139] The problem of the relationship between the "individual" and the "social" will be further examined in chapter four.

between the psychological and the social.[140] Self-reflexivity, as I shall argue in the following sections, allows Bourdieu to question the binary oppositions between the subjective and the objective, the private and the public, the personal and the social.

According to recent findings in research on creativity, dialectical and dialogical thinking define in important ways thinking styles that are highly creative and innovative. Bourdieu's thinking style, as I will maintain throughout this chapter, can be understood in relation to both dialectical and dialogical thinking. According to Robert J. Stenberg, '(d)ialogical thinking involves thinkers understanding significant problems from multiple points of view and understanding how others legitimately could conceive of things in a way that is quite different from their own.' Similarly, Stenberg notes, 'dialectical thinking involves thinkers understanding that ideas and the paradigms under which they fall evolve and keep evolving not only from the past to the present but also from the present to the future'.[141] Bourdieu's thinking style, as I will point out, appeals to both categories precisely because it presupposes the thorough understanding of different theoretical traditions and schools of thought within the discipline of sociology. Such thinking style also entails an understanding of how major thinkers in the sociological tradition such as Durkheim and Weber produced theoretical views that relied on different and often opposed meta-critical assumptions about the nature of society and about the place that individuals have within society. Similarly, a thorough knowledge of the main theoretical positions that have characterized the history of the discipline of sociology provides Bourdieu with the tools to understand better the historical contingency of these positions, as well as to operate a new creative synthesis between them.[142]

However, Bourdieu needs to draw a line between his understanding of reflexivity on the one hand and the expression of a semi-spontaneous flow of confessions on the other. In fact, self-reflexivity *à la Bourdieu* originates from the encounter between the singularity of personal experience and the routinized methods

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[140] See Emile Durkheim's *Les Règles de la Méthode Sociologique* first published in 1895.

[141] Robert J. Stenberg 'Dark Side of Creativity and How to Combat it' in *The Dark Side of Creativity*, ed. by David H. Cropley, Arthur J. Cropley, James C. Kaufman, Mark A. Runco (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 326.

[142] Arthur Koestler refers to bisociative thinking to indicate a similar intellectual operation: '(t)he bisociative act connects previously unconnected matrices of experience'. See Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, p.45.

applied by the discipline of sociology.[143] Hence, self-reflexivity allows Bourdieu to go beyond the solipsistic and self-enclosing horizon of personal experience.[144]

Bourdieu's self-reflexive method appeals to Gramsci's idea that intellectuals should 'continually involv(e) themselves in the life of non-intellectuals'.[145] Thus, self-reflexivity underscores intellectual's ability to combine 'feeling' and 'knowing'. As Bourdieu puts it:

> Sometimes I wonder where I acquired this ability to understand or even to anticipate the experience of situations that I have not known first-hand, such as work on an assembly line or the dull routine of unskilled officer work. I believe that I have, in my youth and throughout the social trajectory which caused me, as always in the case of upwardly mobile people, to cross through very varied social milieus, taken a whole series of mental photographs that my sociological work tries to process.[146]

Bourdieu employs Flaubert's formula to underline how the practice of sociology offers the possibility to cross through individual boundaries and to come into contact with the plurality and the richness of people's experience and social milieus:

> Flaubert said something like 'I would like to live all lives'. This is something that I can relate to very well, to experience all human experiences. I find that one of the most extraordinary rewards of the craft of sociology is the possibility it affords one to enter into the life of others.[147]

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[143] See Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), especially pp.36-46 for my discussion of the notion of self-reflexivity within this chapter.

[144] Wacquant makes a case out of this distinction between Bourdieu's rigorous use of reflexivity and a supposedly unsystematic idea of reflexivity as discussed by other scholars As Wacquant notes, 'Bourdieu is neither the first nor the only social theorist to invoke the idea of reflexivity. Indeed there a more than a few claims to "reflexive sociology" floating about and, left without further specification, the label is vague to the point of near vacuity'; in Pierre Bourdieu and J.D Wacquant, *An invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p. 36.

[145] James Martin. 'Between ethics and politics: Gramsci's theory of intellectuals', p.137.

[146] Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p.205.

[147] Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p.205. For a discussion of the importance of literature within Bourdieu's sociology see Jacques Dubois, 'Pierre Bourdieu and Literature', trans. by Meaghan Emery, and Pamela Sing, in *Substance*, vol. 29, no.3, issue 93 (Special Issue: Pierre Bourdieu), 2000, pp.84-102.

'Enter(ing) the life of others' as a social scientist is what allows Bourdieu to understand other people's experience. At the same time Bourdieu remains vigilant vis-à-vis his own involvement with the otherness represented by the different social milieus he dips into.

Bourdieu's public statements, including those which involve his private life, are also filtered through the method of self-reflexivity. As Loic Wacquant notes, 'Bourdieu sees no need to make resounding private revelations, for what happened to him is not singular: it is linked to a social trajectory'.[148] When Bourdieu analyses the academic field in *Homo academicus* (1984), when he examines the positions and roles that different actors take up within this field, he is, *volens nolens*, very intimately involved with his object of scrutiny. As he quite explicitly tells Wacquant in an interview: 'I say aloud the truth of others by speaking about myself (…) I can be objectivised *like anybody else* and, like anybody else, I have the tastes and preferences, the likes and the dislikes that correspond roughly to my position in social space '.[149]

As the last paragraphs have illustrated, Bourdieu's involvement with the intellectual field is marked by a strong commitment to the ethos of the sociologist. In a text entitled 'Comment libérer les intellectuels libres?' published in *Questions de sociologie* (1984), Bourdieu criticizes those intellectuals who, eager to express their views on the issues of the day, abuse their public role by speaking about topics on which they have no expertise. Bourdieu's commitment to the sociological method prevents him from having a naïve approach to the role of the intellectual. Such a disillusioned view also leads him to assume a critical distance vis-à-vis the detached intellectual who claims to have no direct involvement with the reality he or she describes. Bourdieu's sociological practice leads him to call his own subjectivity into question, as for instance when he reveals his difficult relationship with other intellectuals:

La plupart des questions que je pose, et d'abord aux intellectuels, qui ont tant de

réponses, et si peu, au fond, de questions, prennent sans doute leurs racines dans le

sentiment d'être dans le monde intellectuel un *étranger*. Je questionne ce monde parce

qu'il me met en question, et d'une manière très profonde, qui va bien au-delà du

[148] Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p.44.

[149] Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An invitation to Reflexive Sociology,* p.203.

simple sentiment de l'exclusion sociale: je ne me sens jamais pleinement justifié d'être

un intellectuel (…)'.[150]

In Bourdieu's view, the sociologist comes to assume Gramsci's ideal of mediator between "high" and "low" culture: As Bourdieu points out: '(c)e qu'on ne pardonne pas au sociologue, c'est qu'il livre aux premiers venus les secrets réservés aux initiés'[151].

In presenting his sociological practice, Bourdieu has always emphasized the unique position and role of the sociologist, and of sociology as a discipline, within the intellectual field. Bourdieu also contends that sociology has always been disregarded by more prominent disciplines such as economics or philosophy. According to Bourdieu, sociology has always been perceived as less "pure" than philosophy because of its empirical orientation. Accordingly, Bourdieu pairs the exercise of self-reflexivity with a peculiar conception of the place of sociology within the intellectual field. As he mentions in an interview with Antoine Spire: 'je pense que mon plus grand mérite dans ma trajectoire ça a été de choisir souvent le moins chic, parce que très souvent la vérité est à ce prix'.[152] Bourdieu maintains that social scientists often venture in territories, such as the study of art or literature, in which they face the hostility of those wanting to protect the "purity" of these disciplines from the intrusion of empirically oriented research methods used by sociologists. In a text entitled 'Mais qui a crée les créateurs?' in *Questions de sociologie*, he observes how the incursion of the sociologist into disciplinary territories traditionally covered by other disciplines often provoke contrasting views. The first lines of the text speak eloquently of Bourdieu's critical position with regard to the orthodoxy of a certain artistic discourse. As Bourdieu argues:

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[150] Pierre Bourdieu, *Questions de sociologie* (Paris : Minuit, 1984), p.76.

[151] Pierre Bourdieu, *Questions de sociologie*, p. 67.

[152] P. Bourdieu, *'Si le monde social m'est supportable, c'est parce que je peux m'indigner'*. Entretien avec Antoine Spire (Paris: Ed. de l'aube, 2002), p.51. Commenting on Bourdieu statement, Antoine Spire points out that Bourdieu seems to hide a part of pleasure in revealing the dynamics of the intellectual field as if he was, so to speak, external to the field. Spire suggests that this pleasure could mask an opportunistic strategy with regards to his intellectual colleagues. Bourdieu defends himself by arguing that: ' Non, non, mais la réponse classique ce serait de dire: l'amour de la vérité. Mais je n'ai plus droit à aucune réponse classique, c'est pour ça que je suis dans une position très difficile, après tout ce que j'ai écrit, je n'ai plus droit… Je condamne les autres au silence, mais moi particulièrement. Je pense à une phrase de Cage. On lui demandait: "Pourquoi faites-vous de la musique?" "Pour empêcher les autres d'en faire." Je pense qu'une partie de ce que j'écris est destinée à faire taire tout un tas de gens, qu'on ne puisse plus dire ' P. Bourdieu. *'Si le monde social m'est supportable, c'est parce que je peux m'indigner'*, p.40.

La sociologie et l'art ne font pas bon ménage. Cela tient à l'art et aux artistes qui supportent mal tout ce qui attente à l'idée qu'ils ont d'eux-mêmes: l'univers de l'art est un univers de croyance, croyance dans le don, dans l'unicité du créateur incréé, et l'irruption du sociologue, qui veut comprendre, expliquer, rendre raison, fait scandale.[153]

The illusion of art's transcendental values, rendered by Bourdieu's choice of words and expressions such as 'croyance', 'don', 'unicité du créateur', stand in patent contrast with the verbs capturing the disillusioned view of the sociologist. 'comprendre', 'expliquer', 'rendre raison' are all verbs that convey a strong sense of commitment with knowledge.[154] Bourdieu's critique of the world of art is aimed at those who hold the belief that art is a separate sphere from the rest of the social world, and therefore see no possible interest in explaining art through sociology.[155]If, on the one hand, Bourdieu insists on sociology's modest profile when compared with more prestigious disciplines such as philosophy, on the other hand he argues in favour of the solidity of sociology's empirical methods. Nonetheless, he warns against the temptation to think that such methods are in themselves a guarantee of objectivity. In his inaugural lecture at the

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[153] Pierre Bourdieu, *Questions de sociologie*, p. 207.

[154] Charles Wright Mills' notion of the sociological imagination can be invoked as a possible direction in which to extend the discussion around the versatility of Bourdieu's sociological method. Wright Mills defines sociological imagination as 'the capacity to shift from one perspective to another - from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world; from the theological school to the military establishment; from consideration of an oil industry to studies of contemporary poetry. It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self – and to see the relations between the two'. In Charles Wright Mills, *The sociological Imagination,* Fortieth Anniversary Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.7. See also p.14. 'The sociological imagination is becoming, I believe, the major common denominator of our cultural life and its signal feature. This quality of mind is found in the social and psychological sciences, but it goes far beyond these studies, as we now know them. Its acquisition by individuals and by the cultural community at large is slow and often fumbling; many social scientists are themselves quite unaware of it. They do not seem to know that the use of this imagination is central to the best work that they might do, that by failing to develop it and to use it they are failing to meet the cultural expectations that are coming to be demanded of them and that the classic traditions of their several disciplines make available to them'.

[155] Similarly to what Bourdieu observes for the study of art and art history, Charles Camic and Neil Gross note a resistance on the part of sociologists themselves in acknowledging how social factors influence the production of knowledge. See Charles Camic, and Neil Gross, 'The New Sociology of Ideas', in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology*, Judith Blau ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp.236-249 In other circumstances, Bourdieu has shown a strong interests in artists like Thomas Bernhard, an Austrian writer who caustically criticized art, literature and music, or Hans Hacke, an artist whom Bourdieu admired because he thought he expressed through art some of his own sociological views. See Pierre Bourdieu, and Hans Hacke, *Libre-échange* (Paris : Seuil, 1994).

Collège de France, he observes, for instance, that 'toutes les propositions que (la sociologie) énonce peuvent et doivent s'appliquer au sujet qui fait la science'.[156]

The idea that the personal is social is symptomatic of Bourdieu's theoretical efforts to show that what defines individuality, such as tastes in music, art, fashion as well as intellectual preferences cannot be separated from a more social and institutional dimension of social reality. For Bourdieu, subjectivity is not something one can postulate as existing in a sort of territory of total freedom, but it defines itself in relation to society. As Wacquant points out, '(s)ociological reflexivity instantly raises hackles because it represents a frontal attack on the sacred sense of individuality that is so dear to all Westerners, and particularly on the charismatic self-conception of intellectuals who like to think of themselves as undetermined, "free floating", and endowed with a form of symbolic grace'[157]. When rigorously applied, 'epistemic reflexivity invites intellectuals to recognize and to work to neutralize the specific determinisms to which their innermost thoughts are subjected and it informs a conception of the craft of research designed to strengthen its epistemological moorings'.[158] Self-reflexivity is a powerful conceptual tool not only within Bourdieu's sociological practice, but also within his intellectual self-narrative. This is so because, as it will be shown in the next sections, self-reflexivity allows for the examination of the very practices which make up the nature of intellectual work. As Wacquant points out, 'Bourdieu's brand of reflexivity (…) may be cursorily defined as the inclusion of a theory of intellectual practice as an integral component and necessary condition of a critical theory of society'[159].

2.4 *Esquisse pour une socio-analyse.* **Trajectory, social space, and habitus**

In line with Wacquant's analysis of Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, Richard Nice points out that 'the beauty of Bourdieu's own thinking is that it explains itself. It explains his

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[156] Pierre Bourdieu, *Leçon sur la leçon* (Paris: Minuit, 1982), p.7.

[157] Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p.44. For the importance of the notion of the "free-floating" intellectual in Western cultures see Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Belknap: Harvard University Press, 1998), particularly the introduction.

[158] Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An invitation to Reflexive Sociology,* p.46.

[159] Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p.36.

life. I don't think that's true of everybody's thinking'.[160] However, written before the posthumous publication of *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*, these words perfectly apply to Bourdieu's book.

Esquisse pour une auto-analyse was first published in German under the title *Ein soziologischer Selbstversuch*[161] in 2002. Although Bourdieu himself intended to rework it for the French edition, he was in fact never able to do so.[162] The book comprises a short introductory part followed by three longer parts. The absence of titles in these three parts conforms to the idea of an *esquisse* (sketch) giving the book the flavour of a project that could be further developed, or at least of something that contains, *in nuce*, the potential for further developments. In spite of the apparently undefined character of the project, Bourdieu's *intentio auctoris* is made quite clear by the epigraph: 'Ceci n'est pas une autobiographie'. The epigraph interestingly echoes René Magritte's *The Betrayal of Images*, a famous surrealist painting featuring the image of a pipe. Underneath this image a comment states: 'ceci n'est pas une pipe'.

As in Magritte's case, Bourdieu outplays the reader's expectations by suggesting that *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* is something quite different from a traditional autobiographical account. In the *incipit* of the introduction, he clearly states 'je n'ai pas l'intention de sacrifier au genre, dont j'ai assez dit combien il était à la fois convenu et illusoire, de l'autobiographie'.[163] Therefore, Bourdieu confirms his intention to present the depiction of his personal itinerary as a sort of anti-biographical manifesto. His own account develops in a series of descriptions that do not follow a chronological order.[164] Against the linear progression that one would expect from a standard autobiography, Bourdieu's descriptions follow a circular pattern, or a series of concentric circles in

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[160] Cheleen Mahar. 'Pierre Bourdieu: The intellectual project', p.33.

[161] Pierre Bourdieu. *Ein soziologischer Selbstversuch* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002).

[162] The genesis of the book can be traced back to one of Bourdieu's previous work, *Science de la science et réflexivité* (Paris: Raison d' agir, 2001), especially the last chapter. See 'Notes de l'éditeur' in Pierre Bourdieu, Esquisse *pour une auto-analyse*, pp. 7-9.

[163] Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (Paris : Raison d'agir, 2004), p.11. Page numbers in the text in the next paragraphs will refer to this edition.

[164] In an article published as 'L'illusion biographique' in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 62/3 (1986), pp.69-72, Bourdieu discusses the way in which traditional biographies are often focusing too much on the life of individuals without looking at the social and cultural context in which these individuals live. In contrast to this, Bourdieu proposes to examine the history of individuals in terms of their position within particular social fields.

which, often, the same period of his life is examined under different perspectives. To begin with, Bourdieu directs the focus on his childhood and youth in the small village of Béarn; he then moves on to describe other key moments in his life: the *internat* and the experience at the Ecole Normale Supérieure; his beginnings as an ethnologist in Algeria; his return to Paris and his re-assimilation into the Parisian world; his conversion from ethnology to sociology; his progression within the field of sociology and the development of his career as a sociologist. Bourdieu offers the reader several *tranches de vie* encompassing three different levels of experience: his personal life, his career as a social scientist, and his itinerary as a public intellectual. These three levels intermingle and complete each other, forming a coherent picture in which personal details are explained from the sociologist's point of view, and the career as sociologist illuminates Bourdieu's self-definition as an intellectual[165].

2.4.1 An 'oppositional' self-definition of the intellectual

In *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*, Bourdieu observes that, although some of the choices and decisions that played a key-role in his career may seem entirely logical and self-explanatory, he only became aware of them gradually. The discipline of sociology has been, as Bourdieu points out, a framework thanks to which he gradually came to understand those choices that shaped in very important ways his intellectual self-narrative. The next few sub-sections will discuss the way in which Bourdieu characterizes the French intellectual field in relation to his particular intellectual trajectory. Bourdieu qualifies some of his career choices as underscored by 'refus' and 'antipathies intellectuelles le plus souvent à peine articulés et (…) (qui) ne se sont exprimés de manière explicite que très tardivement' (p.12). In defining his own position as a sociologist and intellectual within the French intellectual field, Bourdieu names the particular institutions, schools of thoughts, theories or authors against which he gradually elaborated his own particular brand of sociology.

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[165] Neil Gross, in *Richard Rorty. The making of an American Philosopher* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008) points out several limitations of Bourdieu's theory when it comes to discuss the importance of intellectual self-concepts. Gross contends that his work on Rorty provides a more thorough account of how intellectuals' identity is shaped within an interplay of various 'institutional settings' such as 'the family, the church, the peer group, the graduate department, and so on'. Neil Gross, *Richard Rorty*, p.16. In spite of Gross' reservations on Bourdieu, my discussion shows how Bourdieu's *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* provides a very good example of the interplay of different institutional levels Gross is referring to.

Bourdieu's critical observations about intellectuals and the French intellectual field of the 60s and 70s are informed by two of his most notorious concepts, namely field and habitus. As Bourdieu notes: 'Comprendre, c'est comprendre d'abord le champ avec lequel et contre lequel on s'est fait' (p.15). As David Schwartz points out, 'field (*champ*) is key spatial metaphor in Bourdieu's sociology. Field defines the structure of the social setting in which habitus operates'[166]. This is how Bourdieu defines field:

> A network or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions
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> are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon
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> their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in
>
> the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession
>
> commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their
>
> objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). [167]

Field is a concept with a strong spatial and historical dimension. In *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*, it underpins the way in which Bourdieu frames the description of his own trajectory and career as a sociologist and as a public intellectual. The concept provides a coherent and explanatory frame in which different levels of description (historical, social, and spatial) combine. The concept of field can monitor the 'network of configuration, of objective relations between positions' and, more generally, the relation between individuals and social structures over a certain period of time.[168]

Field allows for the identification of spatial and temporal coordinates within a structured social space. When combined with the idea of social trajectory, the concept of field can account for the positions of individuals within the social space, and for the development and changes of these positions over a certain period of time. Bourdieu's itinerary, explored self-reflexively and sustained by the spatial and temporal dimensions of the concept of field, offers important insights into the development of his intellectual self-narrative.[169] One of the institutions that profoundly marked the early phases of

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[166] David Schwartz, *Culture and Power. The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, p.117.

[167] Pierre Bourdieu, and Loïc J. D Wacquant, *An invitation to Reflexive Sociology,* p.97.

[168] David Schwartz, *Culture and Power. The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, p.117.

[169] Charles Camic and Neil Gross consider the notion of field among the main assets of what they call the new sociology of ideas. For a discussion of 'the new sociology of ideas' see chapter four.

Bourdieu's intellectual itinerary is the Ecole Normale Supérieure, which Bourdieu defines as a sort of *passage obligé* in order to access the 'hauts lieux de la vie intellectuelle' in France (p.16). While it is well known to those familiar with France's education system that the ENS is an elitist institution, Bourdieu's description focuses on the importance that philosophy had at the time he was enrolled there. The particular language he uses to describe the 'processus de consécration' that produces France's cultural elite, suggests that Bourdieu is speaking from the point of view of an ethnologist describing institutions and rituals reinforcing the spirit of identity and of common destiny uniting a small group of selected people. Bourdieu, in fact, describes the ENS as a 'monde clos, séparé, arraché aux vicissitudes du monde réel ' (p.20).[170]

Jean-Paul Sartre and existentialism were very much in fashion in the years in which Bourdieu attended the ENS. In spite of the dominating presence of the figure of Sartre, Bourdieu observes that:

> La domination de l'auteur de *L'Etre et le Néant* ne s'est jamais exercée sans partage sur cet univers et ceux (dont j'étais) qui entendaient résister à l'existentialisme en sa forme mondaine ou scolaire pouvaient s'appuyer sur un ensemble de courants dominés: d'abord une histoire de la philosophie très étroitement liée à l'histoire des sciences (…) (p.21).

By being drawn to explore what he labels as 'courant dominés', Bourdieu's intellectual itinerary was marked, since the beginning, by alternative and less fashionable views than Sartre's existentialism. Nonetheless, by being a student of the ENS, Bourdieu was well exposed to the dominant philosophical theories of the time. In evoking the situation of the intellectual field of the period, Bourdieu explicitly draws an opposition between, on the one hand, a mundane intellectuality associated with Sartre's existentialism, and the theoretical positions that challenged this dominant intellectual trend on the other. Among possible alternatives to the 'triomphe de l'existentialisme', Bourdieu mentions

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[170] The practice of ethnological fieldwork has played a considerable role in the initial stages of Bourdieu's scholarly career. Bourdieu did his military service in Algeria during the Algerian war. In this period, he practised empirical methods such as statistics and fieldwork interviews. For the importance of ethnology and Algeria in Bourdieu's career see the first part of Marie-Anne Lescourret, *Bourdieu* (Paris: Flammarion, 2008) and Deborah Reed-Danahay. *Locating Bourdieu* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

history of science and epistemology (whose main representative of the time were François Dagognet and Gaston Bachelard) a particular interpretation of Husserl fostered, among others, by Paul Ricouer, and a rigorous scientific approach to phenomenology attempted by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (pp.23-24).

By pointing out the existence of oppositional views within the intellectual field, Bourdieu illustrates, through the concept of field, some significant moments of his intellectual self-narrative. When illustrating the turning point brought about, in the 60s and 70s, by the emergence of structuralism and by the revival of psycho-analysis fostered by Jacques Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud, Bourdieu underlines the idea that the field is not a fixed social space but that its relative balance is modified when new and important intellectual events come into play within the field itself. Against the background of the popularity enjoyed by Lacanian's psychoanalysis, sociology was often perceived negatively:

> Ce qui est sûr, c'est que la psychanalyse a été, au moins en France et dans les années soixante-dix, du côté des activités intellectuelles les plus nobles, les plus pures, bref, aux antipodes de la sociologie. Science plébéienne et vulgairement matérialiste des choses populaires, celle-ci est communément perçue, surtout dans les nations de vieille culture, comme attachée à des analyses grossières des dimensions les plus vulgaires, communes, collectives, de l'existence humaine et ses excursus vers la culture humaniste, prise comme référence ou comme objet, loin d'avoir l'effet d'une *captatio benevolentiae*, sont apparus comme des usurpations ou des intrusions sacrilèges bien faites pour redoubler l'exaspération des vrais croyants. (p.30)

Because of the devaluation of sociology within the French intellectual field throughout the sixties and seventies, Bourdieu's research group was often the target of criticism. Since it promoted empirically oriented research methods, Bourdieu's research group was openly in contrast with the 'distance au role' that characterized the posture and the self-narratives of many French intellectuals (p.34). In fact, as David Swartz notes, 'Bourdieu writes in a country where the ideal of the critical and detached intellectual

who intervenes actively in the political life of the nation is particularly strong'[171]. As said, Bourdieu was very critical as regards the figure of the detached and free-floating intellectual. He criticized in particular the *intellectuels essayistes*, the fast-thinkers, and the *doxosophes* (the opinion makers): these are particular categories of intellectuals that Bourdieu forged in order to designate those intellectuals that enjoy considerable media attention and that tend to monopolize public debates.[172] Bourdieu's representation of the intellectual, differently from the ideal of the "free-floating" intellectual, is well grounded in a network of people and institutions. Bourdieu, in fact, often worked among and was supported by a group of colleagues.[173] Moreover, Bourdieu's idea of collective intellectual implies a number of specific intellectuals, in the sense that Foucault gives to this term, working more or less as a recognized team, defining their commitment to particular research methods and capable of defining their own means of action.[174]

2.4.2 The field, the intellectual and the habitus

Why does Bourdieu insist so much, In *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* and elsewhere in his writings, in considering the centrality and the relevance of Sartre within the intellectual field of post-World War II France? While it is true that Sartre was the dominant intellectual figure at the time in France, isn't Bourdieu possibly falling into the trap of paying too much importance to the media-oriented dimension that Sartre came to assume as a leading intellectual at the time?[175] Possibly, but Bourdieu has specific reasons to give Sartre so much relevance when discussing the image of the French intellectual. As he explains in an article published in *Les Temps modernes*, the intellectual field as an autonomous social sphere emerged only gradually through

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[171] David Schwartz,*Culture and Power. The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, p.219. With regards to the topic of French intellectuals and their commitment with politics see *Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century France*, ed. by Jeremy Jennings (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), and Pascal Ory, and Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les intellectuels en France. De l'affaire Dreyfus à nos jours* (Paris: Perrin, 2004).

[172] See for instance Pierre Bourdieu, 'Les doxosophes', pp. 26-45.

[173] See Marie-Anne Lescourret, *Bourdieu*, pp.259-263, Lescourret discusses how 'Actes de la recherche en sciences socials' (the journal created by Bourdieu) by bringing together several of Bourdieu's long time collaborators allowed for the creation of a research group supporting Bourdieu's scholarship.

[174] Fabrice Fernandez, 'Intellectuel', in *Abécédaire de Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. by Jean-Philippe Cazier (Ittre, Belgium : Sils Maria, 2006), pp.101-103.

[175] For a particularly pertinent analysis of the role of the media in popularizing Sartre's status of intellectual see 'Sartre et l'autobiographie parlée' in Philippe Lejeune, *Je est un autre. L'autobiographie, de la littérature aux medias* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p. 161-202.

history. [176] Nowadays it is possible to identify a social domain in which a certain number of activities are labelled as intellectual, and in relation to which people enjoy institutional recognition and have a certain cultural authority.

According to Bourdieu, Sartre appeared on the scene of the French intellectual field at a moment in which the field as such experienced a degree of autonomy that was unprecedented. As Bourdieu maintains, the constitution of an autonomous intellectual field is also the condition for the appearance of the autonomous intellectual, 'ne connaissant et ne voulant connaître d'autres contraintes que les exigences constitutives de son projet créateur'.[177] Bourdieu also maintains that one of the conditions that allows for the autonomy of the intellectual field is the possibility one has to recognize this field among, and to distinguish it from, social fields such as the political or the religious field. Intellectuals are thus recognized for possessing the distinctive features that mark the belonging to the field.[178] As Bourdieu points out, Sartre was particularly versatile in combing such identity markers, in that he was the living example of how different intellectual traditions could converge in one single person. As Bourdieu points out:

La singularité de Sartre a consisté à rassembler, par un *coup de force* qui supposait beaucoup d'énergie et d'assurance, les éléments du *personnage social* de l'intellectuel qui existaient antérieurement, mais à l'état dispersé, et à faire ainsi converger sur lui un faisceau de traditions et de manières de vivre la vie intellectuelle qui s'étaient progressivement inventées et instituées tout au long de l'histoire intellectuelle de la France.[179]

[176] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur ', in *Les temps modernes*, n°246, 1966, pp. 865-906. Quoted in Alain Accardo, and Philippe Corcuff, *La sociologie de Bourdieu. Textes choisis et commentés* (Bordeaux: Le Mascaret, 1986), pp. 48-49.

[177] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur ', in *Les temps modernes*, n°246, 1966, pp. 865-906. Quoted in Alain Accardo, and Philippe Corcuff, *La sociologie de Bourdieu. Textes choisis et commentés* (Bordeaux: Le Mascaret, 1986), p.49.

[178] Randall Collins in *A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* discusses the symbolic elements marking the belonging to the intellectual field as having a strong ritualistic dimension. In particular, Collins uses terms such as ritual chains to describe communication processes whereby ideas circulate among intellectual communities.

[179] Pierre Bourdieu, ' Sartre : 'l'invention de l'intellectuel total' ', in *Libération,* 31 March 1983, pp. 20-21. Quoted in Alain Accardo, and Philippe Corcuff, *La sociologie de Bourdieu. Textes choisis et commentés* (Bordeaux: Le Mascaret, 1986), p. 50.

Sartre imposed himself as the total intellectual, cumulating prestige and authority as a critic, as a philosopher, as a playwright and as a novelist. He was equally at ease in his *cabinet* as in a Parisian café. As a public figure, he was the French intellectual *par excellence*.

It is especially against Sartre's image of the "total intellectual" and the popularization of the "free-floating intellectual" that Bourdieu defines his intellectual self-narrative, thus forging his own commitment as social scientist and as intellectual.[180] In the pages of *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*, Bourdieu refers to the figure of Georges Canguilhem as an alternative example to Sartre.[181] Canguilhem, who entered the Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1924, the same year as Sartre and Raymon Aron, is a major contributor to the history of science and also an intellectual figure that influenced a whole generation of scholars in France. Succeeding Gaston Bachelard, Canguilhem is appointed as professor of history of science at the Sorbonne in 1955. In the same period he also held a post as general inspector and president of the *aggrégation* jury, where he had a decisive impact in naming professors, as well as in the pedagogical organisation of the discipline of philosophy within the French teaching system.[182] The influence of Canguilhem on Bourdieu's methodological sensitivity is apparent in *Le métier de sociologue* (1968), where Bourdieu devotes much attention to the discussion of some of Canguilhem's significant texts dealing with the relationship between science (especially biology) and methodology.

Canguilhem offered Bourdieu the opportunity to conceive an alternative representation of the intellectual to that of Sartre, in that he was a figure with whom

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[180] See for instance Jean-Claude Passeron about his and Bourdieu's rejection of the notion of the free-floating intellectual: '(r)écusant le privilège d'objectivité que Mannheim voulait réserver à *l'intelligentsia*, du fait qu'elle se trouverait détachée (feischwebende) par sa formation de toutes "racines sociales", nous affirmions au contraire que les pires surdités scientifiques se rencontrent d'abord chez les "intellectuels flottants", qui sont la majorité dans les institutions lettrées ou technocratiques d'aujourd'hui, à l'Université comme chez les techniciens, les spécialistes ou les commanditaires, dans la presse, l'édition ou les appareils politiques.' Jean-Claude Passeron 'Mort d'un ami, disparition d'un penseur', in *Travailler avec Bourdieu*, ed. by Pierre Encrevé and Rose-Marie Lagrave (Paris: Flammarion, 2003) pp. 20-21.

[181] Jean-Paul Sartre and Georges Canguilhem have influenced more than one generation of intellectuals in France and are also known for their political engagement. With regards to the importance of the political engagement of Sartre and Canguilhem and on their influence on younger generations of intellectuals see Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Philosophy in Turbulent Times* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[182] *Dictionnaire des intellectuels français. Les personnes, les lieux, les moments*, ed. by Jacques Juillard, and Michel Winock (Paris: Seuil, 1996), pp. 217-218.

Bourdieu could identify. This is also because Canguilhem was known for his modesty and his scientific rigour, two qualities that clashed with Sartre's mundanity. [183] In *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*, Bourdieu refers to an affinity of habitus he experienced with Canguilhem. The habitus, as Bourdieu defines it, is a system of cognitive and perceptive categories that shape the way in which individuals think, perceive and act within the social world.[184] As pointed out in chapter one, the notion of habitus is central in Bourdieu's conceptual system in that it allows for a synthesis between macro-structures (the fields) and micro-structures (the social agents).

By drawing attention on the consonance of habitus between him and Canguilhem, Bourdieu conveys the idea that the particular way in which intellectuals take up a position within the intellectual field has to do with the way in which they conceive themselves in relation to the most prestigious theories and intellectual key figures present within the field itself.[185] In Bourdieu's account of his own position within the French intellectual field, what emerges is an intellectual style that is often informed by what researchers on creativity call divergent thinking. As Mark A. Runco points out: 'divergent thinking is often tied to the potential for creative thought. It is, however, often misunderstood. It is not a kind of creativity but merely a cognitive process that sometimes leads to creative ideas. Divergent thinking is cognition that moves in different directions'.[186]

As Runco notes, divergent thinking is not in itself a form of creativity. It can nonetheless be understood as a modality whereby, in particular conditions, intellectually creative thinking is expressed. In Bourdieu's case, divergent thinking can also hint at the intellectual reorientation whereby, from being a philosophy student at the ENS, Bourdieu gradually moves away from the dominant but also more conventional ideas

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[183] For a well-researched intellectual portrait of Canguilhem see Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Philosophy in turbulent times*, pp.1-33.

[184] This is how Bourdieu normally defines the notion of habitus. There are a number of ways in which Bourdieu gives alternative definitions; all of these definitions relate to the idea of a system of cognitive and perceptive categories shaping the way in which individuals think, perceive and act within the social world. Accordingly, Bourdieu sometimes stresses one dimension of the concept rather than another. For some examples of the variations on the common theme of the habitus see Alain Accardo, and Philippe Corcuff, *La sociologie de Pierre Bourdieu. Textes choisis et commentés*, pp. 69-83.

[185] Further attention will be devoted to the concept of habitus and its relevance within the study of the intellectual field in chapter four.

[186] Mark A. Runco, 'Creativity Has No Dark Side', in *The Dark Side of Creativity,* p.18.

present in the French intellectual field. The concept of divergent thinking hints precisely at this shifting away that opened up an alternative view and experience of the intellectual field and also brought Bourdieu towards a long-lasting intellectual engagement with ethnology and history of science.[187] As pointed out in one of the previous sections, the thinking styles of dialectical and dialogical thinking, as well as the capacity to combine existing theoretical frameworks in novel unexpected ways, feature prominently in Bourdieu's intellectual profile.

Oppositional thinking also defines in important ways Bourdieu's intellectual self-narrative, as demonstrated, for instance, by Bourdieu's reiterated critique of Sartre's intellectual style. Bourdieu's account of his itinerary in *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* suggests that his intellectual self-narrative is characterized by a slight but very distinctive tension between the state of the French intellectual field at particular moments and his own intellectual project. In order to draw attention to these elements of tension and intellectual dissonance, Bourdieu has often recurred to the idea of the marginality of the sociologist within the intellectual field. The next sections of this chapter are devoted to the question of marginality from the point of view of Edward Said's conception of the intellectual. Said integrates the figure of the intellectual within a semantic universe dominated by such notions as marginality, dissent, exile. Against this backdrop, some of the similarities between Said and Bourdieu will be examined. As I will show, the notion of marginality is particularly relevant within Bourdieu's conception of the sociologist as an intellectual.

2.5 Edward Said's conception of the intellectual: the intellectual as a privileged marginal

Said defines the intellectual as 'an individual endowed with a particular faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to as well as for, a public'.[188] Accordingly, intellectuals should be 'embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant' and display a penchant for eclecticism 'despite all sorts of barriers'. Given such a definition, Said's central argument is based on the idea that 'intellectuals are individuals with a vocation for the art of representing,

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[187] For the importance of ethnology in Bourdieu's intellectual project see chapter five.

[188] Edward Said, *Representations of Intellectuals* (London: Vintage, 1994), p.9. Page numbers in the text in the next paragraphs will refer to this edition.

whether that is talking, writing, teaching, appearing on television' (p.10). Furthermore, Said observes that existing literature on intellectuals reveals an exaggerated emphasis on elaborating a definition of the intellectual and that 'not enough stock is taken of the image, the signature, the actual intervention and performance' of the intellectual. Contrary to this tendency, Said's approach stresses the strength of the individual voice of the intellectual, as when, for instance, he evokes the case of Sartre; whether Sartre was writing philosophy or fiction, whether portrayed more in his intellectual or mundane affairs with Simone de Beauvoir, there was a sense, a unity of meaning in which 'Sartre was Sartre' in all of the above situations (p.10).

In developing his argument, Said often drew from literary examples, whether he wants to make a case out of a particular book or author, or whether he wants to use literature, and literary theory, as a way to explore the figure of the intellectual. Literature, when taken as a field for investigating the voice of the intellectual, offers a valuable point of view in that, while it allows for the exploration of the depths of the mind, it also addresses the relationship between the writer and the social context. Said draws his examples from early twentieth century writers like Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Italo Svevo, Robert Musil and Virginia Woolf, for whom the complexity of modern society was also their major source of inspiration. As a matter of fact, literary works that openly express the *malaises* of a certain society or periods are also valuable instruments to explore the subtle borderline between "normality" and eccentricity. The intellectual, if we extrapolate from Said's argument, is a figure that stands somewhere on this borderline, in that he/she challenges the status quo from a position in which he/she 'speak(s) the truth to power'.[189]

As Said points out, the main problem intellectuals have to face in contemporary society has to do with the question of whether they want to promote themselves as

[189] 'Speaking the truth to power' is the title of one of Said's Reith Lectures in *Representations of the Intellectual*, pp. 63-77. For Said, literature is indisputably a case in point for the exploration of the life-style of intellectuals, as in James Joyce's *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. As Said notes 'for young Dedalus' the main character of Joyce's *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, 'thinking is a way of experiencing the world' (the citation is from Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985) pp.75-76, quoted in Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.12. Said's use of literary sources suggests that when taking literature to illustrate the modern figure of the intellectual, one should not think about whether or not all literary characters created by Joyce and other modernists are good candidates for adequately representing the intellectual. The question is rather how literary works, and the insights they allow into consciousness, thinking processes and depictions of society can further the understanding of the distinctive sort of intellectual Said is talking about.

independent thinkers and display critical advice, or whether they want to be part of the establishment. As C. Wright Mills observed, intellectuals have to decide between facing 'a kind of despondent sense of powerlessness at their marginality' or to side within 'the ranks of institutions, corporations or governments as members of a relatively small group of insiders who ma(k)e important decisions on their own and irresponsibly'(p.15). The two options Said refers to can be described in terms of a choice to either side with the weak ones or with the more powerful. As Said points out, Wright Mills qualifies the effort of the intellectual as 'involv(ing) the capacity to continually unmask and to smash the stereotypes of vision and intellect with which modern communications (i.e. modern systems of representation) swamp us'.[190]

The idea of unmasking the mechanisms of power, as pointed out in the previous sections, is particularly present in Bourdieu's work. Bourdieu's *Sur la télévision suivi de L'emprise du journalisme* (1996), to take an example, addresses the ways in which modern mass-media fabricate the perception of reality. In this particular sense, Bourdieu shares Said's idea of intellectuals' commitment to knowledge. In fact, Said conceives the intellectual as someone who expresses a clear resistance to ready-made-clichés. Similarly, Bourdieu criticizes the fast-thinking and the journalistic habit to reproduce stereotypical perceptions of social reality.[191] Most of Bourdieu's work, as pointed out, is in fact rooted in the effort to unmask the social mechanisms through which dominant classes impose their own vision of the world on dominated classes. Bourdieu's concept of *violence symbolique* draws attention to the ways in which the dominant classes extend their power over the dominated classes by imposing a system of values that appears self-justified. Because, precisely, power is often masked under the appearance of self-justification, to unmask it implies an effort to break with a certain shared perspective so as to introduce an alternative vision or representation of things. This often implies, and Said and Bourdieu agree on this, 'to take into account the experience of subordination itself, as well as the memory of forgotten voices and persons' (p.26).

In describing the state of exile, Said provides a good metaphor for the sort of intellectual he wishes to represent. For Said, exile is not only a physical and

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[190] Charles Wright Mills, *Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, ed. by Iriving Louis Horowitz (New York: Ballantine, 1963), p.299. Quoted in Edward Said, *Representations of Intellectuals,* p. 16.

[191] P. Bourdieu, Sur la télévision suivi de L'emprise du journalisme (Paris: Liber, 1996).

geographical state but also a metaphorical one. He considers that those intellectuals who express a strong dissident position are also, in a certain way, outsiders within their own society. Drawing from the idea of metaphorical exile, Said operates a distinction between those who find themselves in tune with their society and those who, on the contrary, define themselves by 'constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others' (p.39). Furthermore, Said stresses the fact that intellectuals in exile often 'tend to be happy with the idea of unhappiness' (p.39). Accordingly, they express their identity through the means of dissatisfaction and dissent. For Said the state of exile, be it real or metaphorical, offers a potential privilege in that, as he notes, 'you tend to see things not simply as they are but as they have come to be that way' (p.45).[192]

2.6 Bourdieu: the sociologist, the intellectual, and the marginal

Marginality, as discussed by Said, can be positive insofar as it grants the intellectual a sense of autonomy and freedom from all sorts of narrowness related to professionalism but also from ready-made ideas and explanations.[193] In Bourdieu's case, the idea of intellectual autonomy is also very strong and central to his intellectual self-narrative. Intellectual autonomy is not taken for granted: it is conceived in terms of a critical distance involving an open confrontation with theories, ideas and worldviews that structure the intellectual and the media field.

Bourdieu's conception of sociology and of the role of the sociologist within the intellectual field has a lot to do, as in Said, with a certain idea of marginality. It does not follow, however, that the sociologist himself is a marginal figure. The case of Bourdieu, rather, stands as a clear example of someone who gained recognition for being, after Foucault's death, one of France's leading intellectuals.[194] As the discussion of *Esquisse*

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[192]Said argues that someone like Theodor W. Adorno was unable to compromise with the forms of contemporary culture which he saw as resulting from an industrial process. For Said, Adorno is a very good example of those intellectuals who are always haunted by a feeling of frustration and opt for the critique of contemporary society and culture rather than for a wishful and optimistic support of it. As Said observes, Adorno was 'a man entirely made up of the highest of high cultures', in that he was astonishingly eclectic and the range of his intellectual intervention was sustained by a highly refined knowledge of music, philosophy, social sciences and cultural criticism (p.40).

[193] On the other hand, intellectuals (i.e. academic intellectuals) in order to survive often had to endorse those forms of professionalism which became characteristic of the university system. See Bruce Robbins, *Intellectuals, Professionalim, Culture* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 57-84. Terry Eagleton develops a similar position in the first essays of Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin, 2004).

[194] For a good idea of the wide range of public interventions of Bourdieu throughout his career see David L. Swartz, 'From critical sociology to public intellectual: Pierre Bourdieu and politics', *Theory and*

pour une auto-analyse has shown, the importance of marginality is, within Bourdieu's trajectory, something of a privilege rather than a disadvantage. It is through a certain idea of marginality that the sociologist can offer a particular and unique knowledge that challenges other forms of knowledge present in the intellectual field.[195] Bourdieu, as pointed out, often refers to the idea of marginality to highlight sociology's and the sociologist's position within the intellectual field. In this particular sense, marginality does not imply exclusion, but rather the capacity to interact from within a sub-field of knowledge with other sub-fields. In *Question de sociologie*, as pointed out, Bourdieu expresses this idea of marginality in a number of ways.[196] Moreover, the titles of the texts that are collected in *Questions de sociologie* also suggest the interdisciplinary range of topics Bourdieu has explored in his scholarly career, such as education, history of art, literature, aesthetics, epistemology, and the media. In brief, these texts offer a comprehensive view of culture (both in its elite and popular manifestations) under the gaze of the sociological eye. Bourdieu's sociology, by offering a *modus operandi* based on the systematic questioning of social reality and its appearance, allows for the coverage of different portions of society by applying the sociological approach creatively. In order to prove the interdisciplinarity of his sociological method, Bourdieu shows how sociology is truly the science of the social. Cultural, artistic and academic discourses are part of the larger whole of society, and as such they can all be subject to sociological analysis.

Marginality should not necessarily be understood as something negative but rather as an intellectual condition that facilitates the expression of unconventional and intellectually creative thinking. Marginality, in Bourdieu's self-portrait of the intellectual, is part of a larger network of elements that includes the concept of self-reflexivity as well as the idea of sociology's transdisciplinarity. Said's and Bourdieu's

Society, 32, 2003, 791-823. See also Pierre Bourdieu *Political interventions. Social science and political action*, texts selected and introduced by Franck Poupeau and Thierry Discepolo, trans. by David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2008), and Willem Schinkel, 'Pierre Bourdieu's Political Turn?', *Theory, Culture and Society* (London: Sage), vol. 20(6), 2003, 69-93.

[195] See Pierre Bourdieu 'Mais qui a créé les créateurs', in *Questions de sociologie*, pp.207-222.

[196] *Questions de sociologie* is among the first works in which Bourdieu explicitly reveals his *intentio auctoris* to reach an audience of non-specialists. Bourdieu argues in favour of a sociology which, without giving up its claims for scientific validity, should nonetheless be accessible to non-experts: sociology, Bourdieu argues, 'ne voudrait pas une heure de peine si elle devait être un savoir d'experts reservé aux experts'. In Pierre Bourdieu, *Questions de sociologie*, p.7.

idea of marginality should be understood as a form of privileged marginality rather than a socially disqualifying one. As pointed out earlier, marginality can also be associated with the idea of deviance, provided that one uses the concept without the negative associations to which it is normally linked. Mark A. Runco, for instance, laments that:

> One explanation for the unfair treatment of the noun 'creativity' is that it is inherently deviant, and not surprisingly, the concept of 'deviance' is itself widely misunderstood. It is, too often, associated only with unfavourable things. The connotations imply something undesirable. Yet deviance is, in essence, a statistical property.[197]

Or, as Arthur Cropley observes with regards to the social perception of creativity:

> The essence of creativity is going against the crowd. The development of an individual identity by each person also involves becoming different from the crowd by 'creating' an individual self and a unique identity (…) the creative individual must fight against society's pathological desire for sameness.[198]

As these passages suggest, unconventional and deviant thinking should not be separated from the description of creative thinking but rather integrated into it. As both Cropley and Runco point out, the dark side of creativity (if there is a dark side to it) should not be seen as part of the definition of creativity. On the contrary, Cropley and Runco insist that the dark side resides in the specific application of creativity, but not in the creative process itself. *Mutatis mutandis*, the notion of marginality can be used to describe a creative process or a particular point of view on reality without necessarily being inflected with negative connotations.

2.7 Bourdieu's media criticism

The relative marginality that, according to Bourdieu, defines the position of the sociologist within the intellectual field is also the key that enables his privileged relation with knowledge. Marginality can become very flexible and dynamic insofar as it allows for a re-constitution of a holistic view of knowledge. From this perspective, marginality is also a condition for the assessment of the relation between the centre and its margins.

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[197] Mark A. Runco, 'Creativity Has No Dark Side', in *The Dark Side of Creativity*, p.17.

[198] Arthur J. Cropley, 'The Dark Side of Creativity', in *The Dark Side of Creativity*, p.8.

Bourdieu is, at the time of *Question de Sociologie*, well established as one of the dominant intellectuals in France. In 1981 his entrance at the Collège de France brought further institutional acknowledgement to his work as scholar and to his role as public intellectual. In the years following *Question de sociologie* Bourdieu increases his interventions in public debates and raises his profile as public intellectual.[199] In 1996 Bourdieu broadcasts two lectures from within the institutional walls of the Collège de France; he publishes these lectures under the title *Sur la télévision suivi de l'emprise du journalisme,* as the first of several books of the collection 'Raison d'agir' edited by Liber, of which Bourdieu himself is the director.

Sur la télévision suivi de l'emprise du journalisme is a good example of how Bourdieu operates with the specific codes of his sociological discourse in the attempt to unmask the codes, norms, conventions that operate from within the world of the media. The fundamental distinction that Bourdieu draws between the *doxa* (the opinion) produced by the media and the *doxosophes* (the opinion makers) on the one hand, and the sociological discourse on the other, enables him to speak from a point of view that questions the cultural norms and conventions set by the media. [200]Bourdieu's choice to address the study of television also draws attention to his role as public intellectual.[201] He is well aware that, as a televised speaker, his image is framed by a particular use of the camera. In order to avoid unnecessary visual effects, he asked the producer to avoid changes in format or camera angles, two important technical elements which contribute to shape the way in which spectators perceive media images.[202]

By drawing attention to the context in which his own discourse is taking place, Bourdieu intends to show that the way the media portray reality implies the split reality of visible and non-visible, under the form of the well-known distinction between the

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[199] See the previously referenced David L. Swartz, 'From critical sociology to public intellectual: Pierre Bourdieu and politics', and Willem Schinkel, 'Pierre Bourdieu's Political Turn?'.

[200] Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision suivi de L'emprise du journalisme*. See also Pierre Bourdieu, 'Les doxosophes'.

[201] With *Sur la télévision suivi de L'emprise du journalisme* Bourdieu's unusual role of televised speaker projects him at the very heart of the object of his criticism. Bourdieu's public intervention is also a clear example of what Michael Burawoy calls public sociology. See the introduction of *Public Sociology*, ed. by Andrew Abbot, Michael Burawoy, and others, pp.3-23; see also the contribution of Michael Burawoy to the same volume; 'For Public Sociology', pp. 23-67.

[202] See the first pages of Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision suivi de L'emprise du journalisme*.

scene and the behind the scene.[203] Similarly, the explicit choice to employ his sociological *savoir-faire* in discussing media discourse and, more importantly, to make use of the medium itself to present his critical arguments makes Bourdieu's standpoint more apparent and visible. In order to distinguish himself from an observer displaying a falsely disinterested look, he instead prefers the eye of the sociologist, solidly rooted in an empirical and epistemologically controlled practice of reflexive sociology.

Given the conditions that, as Bourdieu argues, submit the media to a purely economic logic, the role of the sociologist is to construct his or her own standpoint as an act of resistance with regards to the symbolic violence through which the media impose their vision of reality. Bourdieu's efforts, once more, are sustained by the intellectual project consisting in elucidating the conditions making taken-for-granted realities self-explanatory. In illustrating such a standpoint, Bourdieu seems, at times, to be calling for an attempt to change the *règles du jeu* (rules of the games) of the media by subverting its internal mechanisms. The questions that Bourdieu poses do not come only from his position as public intellectual, they also stem from his firm commitment to see sociological knowledge progress form the margins to the centre. Flaubert, Bourdieu writes, ' aimait à dire: "il faut peindre bien le médiocre". C'est le problème que rencontrent les sociologues: rendre extraordinaire l'ordinaire; évoquer l'ordinaire de façon à ce que les gens voient à quel point il est extraordinaire'. [204]

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter showed how Bourdieu's practice as a sociologist is solidly intertwined with his role of intellectual. I proposed that what makes this link so solid is Bourdieu's use of self-reflexivity. Self-reflexivity, paired with a constant and reiterated effort to define the role of the sociologist and of sociology within the intellectual field, constitutes one of the most important features of Bourdieu's intellectual self-narrative.

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[203] Bourdieu's conception of sociological truth relies on the notion of a fundamental split between visibility and invisibility, between appearance and truth. Referring to Gaston Bachelard, Bourdieu notes: ' on connaît le mot de Bachelard: "il n'y a de science que du caché". Le sociologue est d'autant mieux armé pour dé-couvrir ce caché qu'il est mieux armé scientifiquement, qu'il utilise mieux le capital de concepts, de méthodes, de techniques accumulé par ses prédécesseurs, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, et bien d'autres, et qu'il est plus "critique", que l'intention consciente ou inconsciente qui l'anime est plus subversive, qu'il a plus intérêt à dévoiler ce qui est censuré, refoulé, dans le monde social.' Pierre Bourdieu, *Questions de sociologie*, pp.22-23.

[204] Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision suivi de l'emprise du journalisme*, p.20.

The originality and the strength of Bourdieu's intellectual profile stem from the fact that the study of the intellectual field and of intellectuals stand at the centre of his intellectual project. Moreover, Bourdieu transformed his personal and sometimes conflicting relationship with the intellectual world into a substantial part of his social scientific study of intellectuals.

Bourdieu's self-portrait as an intellectual presents his social and intellectual itinerary as a marginal one, when compared with the career of more glamorous and media oriented intellectuals. Yet, Bourdieu's profile is the result of a multiform, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary journey that contributed to forge a solid commitment to a definition of the intellectual that stands, at least from Bourdieu's perspective, in clear contrast with the Parisian "mundane" intellectual style. In this respect, Bourdieu's use of the idea of marginality serves the purpose of better defining his intellectual self-narrative, by arguing from a position that grants him the role of a critical intellectual engaged in unmasking the mechanisms of domination that perpetrate social inequalities. Bourdieu belonged to those intellectuals that, like Edward Said, firmly believed that taking an oppositional stance is an essential requisite not only for the definition of the intellectual, but also in expressing an underlying solidarity with the weak and the marginal ones.

Even when Bourdieu became, after Foucault, France's major public intellectual, he continued to negotiate his identity of public intellectual between a self-description emphasizing the role of the marginal intellectual, and his ideal of sociology's unique and privileged position of *science de la science* within the intellectual field. By the time Bourdieu became France's leading intellectual he had already created, through the practice of a sociology very strongly turned towards self-reflexivity, a powerful self-reflexive mirror, which perhaps served him, also, as a protection against the intrusion of public attention in his own private life. What many people failed to see is that behind Bourdieu the public intellectual there was Bourdieu the sociologist holding a self-reflexive mirror.

Chapter 3: Umberto Eco's Intellectual Polyphony: the Critic of Mass Culture, the Intellectual, and the Fiction Writer

'La semiotica, in principio, è la disciplina che studia tutto ciò che può essere usato per mentire'. [205]

3.1 Introduction. Re-reading as a post-modern intellectual strategy

Challenging the legitimacy of existing positions or states of affair, conceptualizing alternative views of society or of social fields, or simply combining existing views in order to produce an original and challenging vision, is what defines creative intellectuals. Creative intellectuals do not simply repeat: they re-contextualize. As they re-contextualize, they innovate.[206] As producers of meta-cultural discourse, intellectuals possess the capacity to move, as Richard Rorty would say, from one language game to another. At the same time, they are also able to frame the specific language game in which meta-cultural discussions take place.[207] Some intellectuals also have a recognised ability to engage not only with the cultural narratives of the present but also with those of the past. In this sense, Umberto Eco's profound knowledge of the Middle-Ages, along with his expertise in aesthetics and his mastering of the theory and the practice of the post-modern discourse, make him an intellectual whose voice is truly polyphonic. Eco is able to access different fields of knowledge, making his intellectual enterprise a matter of a co-presence of a multiplicity of discourses solidly interlinked within an interdisciplinary framework. Thanks to his erudition and to his expertise as a semiotician and critic of popular culture, Umberto Eco has been able to produce the

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[205] Umberto Eco, *Trattato di semotica generale* (1975), 19th edn (Milan: Bompiani, 2008), p.17.

[206] This is one of the aspects most often highlighted by scholarly studies on creativity. See for instance Arthur Koestler, The Act *of Creation* (1964) (London: Picador, 1977); Margaret Boden, *The Creative Mind. Myths and Mechanisms* (1990), 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2004); Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity. Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997).

[207] As an example of the way in which Richard Rorty discusses the concept of language game in relation the figure of the intellectual see Richard Rorty, 'The last intellectual in Europe: Orwell on cruelty' in Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.169-189.

enormously successful novel *Il nome della rosa* (1980), a fascinating mix of Medieval ingredients, of popular culture in the form of a plot obeying to the conventions of a detective novel, and of post-modern chic. Such a combination of disparate elements contributed in shaping a very powerful textual matrix imbued with inter-textual links leading to an almost endless chain of references, both fictional and non-fictional.

Re-reading, or re-interpreting, the past is one of the key-features of postmodernity and of postmodern aesthetics. Eco participated extensively, both as a theorist and as a novel writer, in the post-modern mood of re-interpreting the past. The Middle-Ages constitute a key to the understanding of his international success as a semiotician, as a fiction writer, and as a public intellectual. As chapter one has shown, reading, or re-reading the past, is one of the many modalities of the exercise of intellectuality. Intellectuals define their own self-narrative in reference not only to current debates, but also in terms of a tradition and history. *Il nome della rosa* is an example of a text that, as post-modern texts often do, openly refers to other texts. This post-modern strategy is not, in the case of Eco, a purely aesthetical one. It is also part of a self-conscious commercial strategy. As Margherita Ganeri has illustrated, the success of *Il nome della rosa* can be described through the phenomenology of a well-orchestrated *caso letterario*.[208]

3.1.1 Constructing the concept of intellectual polyphony

This chapter addresses the question of the enlargement of Eco's readership that accompanied the commercial success of *Il nome della rosa* in relation to the diversification of Eco's intellectual voice. The link between the enlargement of the readership and the diversification of Eco' intellectual voice will be examined as a progressive process whose creative genesis will be retraced through Eco's previous works. In order to show how the diversification of Eco's intellectual narrative is a long-term process, I will refer to particular works so as to mark possible stages of this process. The chapter emphasizes how, in spite of a diversification, Eco's intellectual

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[208]Margherita Ganeri, *Il 'caso' Eco* (Palermo: Palumbo, 1991). Margherita Ganeri considers Eco's novel from a literary as well as an extra-literary perspective, illustrating how the success of Eco's *Il nome della rosa* constitutes a perfect illustration of how cultural products, the literary market, and the entertainment industry function interdependently. Ganeri's study is well supported by the fact that the enormous, and in many ways unexpected, success of *Il nome della rosa* constitutes 'un *primum* e per ora un *unicum* assoluti nella storia dell'editoria italiana' In fact, *Il nome della rosa* is one of the most successful event enjoyed by the Italian editorial industry. Margherita Ganeri, *Il 'caso' Eco*, p.65 for the passage quoted.

itinerary develops against the background of a profound continuity of his theoretical concerns. It does so in mainly three ways. Firstly, it explores the development and the diversification of Eco's intellectual itinerary through the concept of polyphony. Eco's authorial voice is polyphonic since it embraces a large variety of topics. As a result, Eco' intellectual project is fundamentally comprehensive of a variety of cultural manifestations that to a specialist's eye might appear heterogeneous.[209] Secondly, the chapter shows how Eco's intellectual polyphony can be examined synchronically as well as diachronically. The process whereby Eco diversifies his intellectual self-narrative is cumulative, in that intellectual diversification can be seen as developing over a period of time but is also identifiable within the same text or work. In this sense, the notion of polyphony will be used to illustrate how the same textual space, as in the case of Eco's novel *Il nome della rosa*, can contain a multiplicity of discourses self-consciously orchestrated by an author. Thirdly, this chapter examines how Eco's intellectual polyphony (the co-presence of different cultural levels and experiences) is related to intellectual creativity as well as to an interdisciplinary practice of intellectuality.

Eco's intellectual polyphony will also be addressed in relation to Eco's involvement in post-modern debates and, more generally, as illustrating some of the main characteristics of the post-modern intellectual.[210] Against this backdrop, I will discuss some of Eco's ideas on the figure of the intellectual and the understanding of intellectuality he presents in *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964).[211] In particular, I will be stressing how Eco's discussion of cultural consumerism shapes in important ways his understanding of the figure of the intellectual. As a complement to the discussion of Eco's *Apocalittici e integrati*, I will also comment on some of the essays of Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957) dealing with the figure of the intellectual.

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[209] I am referring, among other things, to the distinction between "high" and "low" culture, and to how such a distinction was implicitly at stake when a part of the Italian intelligentsia considered with scepticism Eco's initial positioning within the Italian intellectual field. See especially the introductory pages of Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964) 7th edn (Milan: Bompiani, 2003).

[210] In developing this last point, I will draw from Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and interpreters. On Modernity, post-modernity and intellectuals* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).

[211]*Apocalittici e integrati* allows for a consideration of Eco's interaction with different forms of cultural production.

3.1.2 Intellectual polyphony: a matter of creativity

As Arthur Koestler points out, the creative process usually starts as an early synthesis of symbolic matrices. In this early synthesis, the importance of intuition is paramount.[212] The initial intuition is thus followed by what Graham Wallas has termed a period of incubation, which eventually gives rise to a proper theoretical synthesis.[213] As pointed out in chapter one, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi argues that creativity develops in the space of interaction between individuals, domains and fields. In other words, the creative intuition has to undergo a more or less long process whereby it is integrated within a domain and it also needs to be recognised by the relevant gatekeepers active within a particular field of knowledge.[214] From this perspective, the critical reactions that followed the publication of Eco's *Opera aperta* (1962) and *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964*)* illustrate particularly well such dynamics. While these works are now considered decisive in defining a line of research along which Eco elaborates his critical approach to art and social communication, at the time of their publication there was a considerable resistance towards the interdisciplinary methodology Eco was elaborating.[215] Such an interdisciplinary methodology is particularly well exemplified, as I shall illustrate, by Eco's notion of open work. The idea of open work exemplifies Eco's intentions to cross the boundaries of disciplines in order to identify similarities in the way in which disciplines as diverse as music, art, and mathematics represent the world.

3.2 The notion of polyphony and the open work

This section will introduce the notion of intellectual polyphony in relation to the early stages of Eco's intellectual itinerary. The notion of polyphony derives from musical language, where it refers to the co-presence of two or more melodic voices. The term is also commonly applied to suggest how many sounds an instrument can play at once. In

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[212] Arthur Koestler, *The* Act *of Creation*, pp. 199-212.

[213] See Graham Wallas, *The Art of Thought* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1926) and more recently Howard Gardner, *Creating Minds: an Anatomy of Creativity seen through the Lives of Freud, Picasso, Stravisnki, Eliot, Graham, and Gandhi* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

[214] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity. Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), especially Part I 'The Creative Process', pp.21-127.

[215] On this point the more recent editions of *Opera aperta* and *Apocalittici e integrati* provide introductory sections with information about the reception of these works at the time of their publication as well as later.

literature, the term has been used by Mikhail Bakhtin within the context of Dostoevsky's novels. Bakhtin employed the term to render Dostoevsky's capacity to capture the multiplicity of points of view intervening within the same description.[216] The notion of polyphony, as discussed in this chapter, is partly related to these modes of writing. The understanding of the term within this chapter, however, aims more generally at underlining how Eco, along with his intellectual itinerary, diversifies his authorial voice in a progressive manner.

If the notion of polyphony in its original musical sense might not be the most relevant referent to shed light on Eco's career as an intellectual, it is nonetheless useful to remember how Eco himself showed a pronounced interest in avant-garde music and in the way in which such music expressed the idea of the open work: an idea that not only launched Eco's intellectual career, but also proved to be important and fertile throughout his career.[217] Between 1954 and 1959, Eco worked for National TV RAI as a producer of cultural programmes; during this period he also befriended Luciano Berio, an Italian composer known for his experimental work, especially in the domain of early electronic and polyphonic music. Through Berio, Eco met important composers such as John Cage, Pierre Boulez, and Henry Pousseur. Moreover, Eco collaborated with Berio in experimenting with words and sounds at the RAI's Studio di Fonologia established in 1955.[218]Partly in connection with these formative experiences, Eco develops the concept of open work. The concept, as pointed out in the first chapter, refers to a space of negotiation of meaning between the internal structure of a work of art generating semantic multiplicity, and the response that the interpreter produces from interacting with such works of art.

Given the importance that the concept of open work acquires in the first stages of Eco's intellectual itinerary and beyond, it will be helpful to further discuss the way in

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[216] Bakhtin's observations on Dostoevsky's novels in terms of polyphony can also be extended to novels, such as Virginia Wolf's or James Joyces's, which are known to feature the writing techniques known under the name of stream of consciousness.

[217] See for instance David Seed, 'The open work in theory and practice' in *Reading Eco*, ed. by Rocco Capozzi (Bloomington: Indiana University press, 1997), pp.73-82.

[218] See Michael, Caesar, *Umberto Eco. Philosophy, Semiotics and the Work of Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p.16. For a thorough discussion of the years in which Eco collaborated with Berio see Florian Mussgnug, 'Writing like Music: Luciano Berio, Umberto Eco and the New Avant-Garde', in *Comparative Critical Studies*, Feb. 2008, vol.5, no.1, pp.81-97.

which Eco defines it. In the introduction to the first edition of *Opera aperta*, Eco argues that:

> Il tema comune a queste ricerche è la reazione dell'arte e degli artisti (delle strutture
>
> formali e dei programmi poetici che vi presiedono) di fronte alla provocazione del
>
> Caso, dell' Indeterminato, del Probabile, dell' Ambiguo, del Plurivalente; la reazione
>
> quindi della sensibilità contemporanea in risposta alle suggestioni della matematica,
>
> della biologia, della fisica, della psicologia, della logica e del nuovo orizzonte
>
> epistemologico che queste scienze hanno aperto.[219]

This passage is an overall statement about the general topic as well as the theoretical aim of the book. Eco refers to a 'nuovo orizzonte epistemologico' (of which avant-garde art is one among a variety of expressions) in order to posit the existence of a theoretical sensitivity that manifests itself in different fields of knowledge such as mathematics, physics, psychology, logic, etc. What is clear is that Eco's theoretical concerns touch upon a wide range of disciplinary territories the book proposes to deal with. If knowledge can be seen as a map with a certain number of known territories, Eco's theoretical interest goes hand in hand with the idea of a comprehensiveness of a variety of disciplinary territories within a flexible theoretical framework. As the passage quoted suggests, Eco's view of knowledge is organic and interdisciplinary from the outset.

Avant-garde art, as Eco maintains, participates actively in expressing and defining the formal strategies whereby modern sensitivity elaborates its own self-representing narrative. In this context, as Eco points out, *Opera aperta*:

> Si propone un'indagine di vari momenti in cui l'arte contemporanea si trova a fare i
>
> conti col Disordine (…) Non è il disordine cieco e insanabile, lo scacco di ogni
>
> possibilità ordinatrice, ma il disordine fecondo di cui la cultura moderna ci ha
>
> mostrato la positività; la rottura di un Ordine tradizionale, che l'uomo occidentale
>
> credeva immutabile e definitivo e identificava con la struttura oggettiva del
>
> mondo.(p.2)

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[219] Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta* (1962) 7th edn (Milan: Bompiani, 2006), p.2. Page numbers in the text in the next paragraphs refer to this edition.

As this passage suggests, Eco identifies a major historical shift of sensitivity between the belief in the existence of a fixed and a-historical order, typical of the medieval world, and the lucid awareness of the fact that this order can no longer be identified anymore with an ontological structure of the world. Further on he notes:

> Il mondo delle grandi *summae* medievali ha costituito un modello di Ordine che ha permeato di sé la cultura occidentale: la crisi di quest'ordine e l'instaurazione di nuovi ordini, la ricerca di moduli 'aperti' capaci di garantire e fondare il mutamento e l'avventura, la visione infine dell'universo fondato sulla possibilità, quale suggeriscono all'immaginazione la scienza e la filosofia contemporanee, trova la sua rappreentazione – forse l'anticipazione- più provocante e più violenta nel *Finnegans Wake*. (p.4)

When the idea of an ultimate order of things is declared questionable and is indeed questioned, the indeterminacy of the real and the contingency of the notion of truth emerge in all their problematic complexity. It is precisely in relation to this very complexity and indeterminacy that, in Eco's view, takes shape the poetics of the open work and more generally lays the creative potential of avant-garde art. Literary works such as Joyce's Finnegan Wake, Eco maintains, express the fundamental indeterminacy of the modern world.[220]

In the opening pages of *Opera aperta*, Eco draws some examples from experimental music, particularly from those composers he became interested in through his acquaintance with Luciano Berio, in order to further exemplify the definition of the open work. What characterizes the open work in the case of experimental music is, as he points out, the freedom that the composer enjoys from conventional rules and norms that have defined and shaped the art of composition hitherto. This freedom is reflected by the indeterminacy that particular compositions assume. The fact that the execution of a work accommodates indeterminacy suggests the inescapable ambiguity of acts of interpretation. The idea of interpretation, in fact, covers the entire range of the process

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[220] Eco mentions Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* as perhaps the best example of a work that clearly anticipates the philosophical, aesthetic and artistic values that he ascribes to the open work. To Joyce he will dedicate a long chapter of the first edition of *Opera aperta* (1962). This long chapter will later appear in a separate volume as Umberto Eco. *Le poetiche di Joyce* (Milan: Bompiani, 1966).

that goes form the initial composition to the execution and fruition of the piece of music.[221]

Composition technique, execution, and fruition. These are the three moments that define the unfolding of the poetics of the open work in the context of the sort of experimental music Eco engages with. In front of the open work, be it in music, literature or art, the interpreter engages with the unexpected and the undefined. What was a codifiable order organised around clear patterns or values, becomes possibility, instability, and transience. In this sense the open work stands in clear contrast with the modern ideas of stability, order and reason. The open work reveals the crisis of a society that, faced with the crumbling of the system of values on which modernity is erected, dwells in a space of transition where the belief in an ordered universe has been replaced by philosophical scepticism. As Eco puts it:

> Ma accettare e cercare di dominare l'ambiguità in cui siamo e in cui risolviamo le
>
> nostre definizioni del mondo, non significa imprigionare l'ambiguità in un ordine che
>
> le sia estraneo e a cui è legata proprio quale opposizione dialettica (…). Così l'arte
>
> contemporanea sta tentando di trovare - in anticipo sulle scienze e sulle strutture
>
> sociali- una soluzione alla nostra crisi, e la trova nell'unico modo che le sia possibile,
>
> sotto specie immaginative, offrendoci delle immagini del mondo che valgono come
>
> *metafore epistemologiche*. (p.3)

As Eco maintains, avant-garde translates the particular cultural atmosphere of a period of lost certainties well in advance compared to other fields of knowledge. As Peter Bondanella's points out in *Eco and the Open Text*, the concept of open work can be considered as representative of Eco's approach not only to avant-garde art, but also to literary criticism and later to novel writing.[222] While working with the possibilities offered by the idea of the open-enedness and indeterminacy of cultural processes, Eco will soon manifest a concern for finding reasonable limits to the field of possible meanings the open work can express. As it will be shown in the next chapters, Eco

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[221] See in particular the introductory pages of the first chapter of *Opera aperta*.

[222] Peter Bondanella, *Umberto Eco and the Open Text* (New York: Cambridge Univeristy Press, 1997). The book is considered the first comprehensive intellectual biography of Eco in English.

tackles the question of these limits by defining a space of interaction between culture and its interpreters.[223] However, in spite of his growing concern for defining the limits of the interplay between the open work and its interpreters Eco remains, throughout his career, faithful to the flexibility of approach that the notion of open work allows for.

As illustrated, Eco explores the notion of open work at several levels and applies it to modern art, literature, and, precisely, to experimental music. The interdisciplinary orientation of *Opera aperta* results from Eco's already very eclectic personal and professional background. While Eco was working in the cultural program section of the RAI he also published *Il problema estetico in San Tommaso* (1956), an essay that was based on his master thesis.[224] Between the publication of *Il problema estetico in San Tommaso* and *Opera aperta* Eco initiates an important intellectual exchange with those intellectuals who would later form the *Gruppo 63*.[225] As a result of these early intellectual experiences and of the diversity of disciplines he engages with, Eco internalizes cultural and disciplinarity diversity and transforms it into an eclectic approach to art, culture and social communication.

3.3 *Apocalittici e integrati*: interplay of detachment and engagement

Opera aperta addresses a readership that, while being diversified, is also interested in a wide range of artistic expressions. As Michael Caesar notes '(i)f Eco's book was successful, it was also because there was already a public there who needed it, made use of it, was in a sense prepared for it'.[226] The interest that Eco manifests for interdisciplinarity in relation to artistic practices is also central in *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964), a work that follows closely the publication of *Opera aperta*. *Apocalittici e integrati* can be regarded as a contribution to the discussion on the role of the intellectual vis-à-vis mass culture, a topic that was very much debated immediately after

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[223] See my discussion of Umberto Eco, *I limiti dell'interpretazione* (1990) 4th edn(Milan: Bompiani, 2004) in chapter six.

[224] I will discuss *Il problema estetico in San Tommaso* later on in chapter five, in order to illustrate Eco's critical engagement with structuralism. Eco, by suggesting a comparison between scholastic philosophy and structuralism, recasts his first work in light of his subsequent critical engagement with structuralism.

[225] Italian neo-avant-garde group *Gruppo 63* was founded in 1963 and included artists and writers such as Edoardo Sanguineti, Renato Barilli, and Nanni Balestrini.

[226] Michael, Caesar, *Umberto Eco. Philosophy, Semiotics and the Work of Fiction*, p.27.

the publication of *Opera aperta*.[227] In *Apocalittici e integrati,* Eco identifies and describes two typologies of intellectuals that reflect the interplay between engagement and detachment that I have discussed in chapter one.[228] Eco uses the terms integrated intellectuals and apocalyptic intellectuals as representing two distinctive responses to mass culture. While integrated intellectuals celebrate with joy the advent of "mass" culture, the apocalyptic ones condemn every manifestation of it, considering the commodification of culture as antagonist to "high" culture. In Eco's view, both attitudes bare serious limitations in that they lay judgement on cultural phenomena without really gaining insight into the mechanisms and functions of popular culture within the larger picture of society. The apocalyptic intellectual, Eco contends, offers a consolatory view of culture, one that considers rejection of popular culture as a sign of spiritual leadership. As Peter Bondanella puts it, 'this consolatory attitude allows the reader to assume an attitude that is extremely detrimental to retaining a free and critical judgement'.[229] On the other hand, Eco warns against the propensity of integrated intellectuals to celebrate the culture industry regardless of the value of cultural products.[230]

In order to avoid being confined to one of the two categories he describes, Eco's position on culture embraces a critical approach that is quite similar to that of an anthropologist; the idea is, as Caesar suggests, 'to find a method which would enable an informed discussion of "culture industry" its products and its means of distribution

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[227] On this point the more recent editions of *Opera aperta* and *Apocalittici e integrati* provide introductory sections with some useful contextual information about these works at the time of their publication and later.

[228] As Eco shows in *Apocalittici e integrati*, the distinction between engagement and detachment is not always clear-cut. While fervent critics of mass culture claim detachment from the products of the culture industry, they also firmly promote a culture of critical engagement. Similarly, enthusiastic supporters of consumerist culture are engaged in supporting consumerist culture against what they see as a more pretentious elite culture. From this perspective, integrated intellectuals are rather alien to the nostalgic stance taken by certain intellectuals (one can think for instance of Herbert Marcuse in *One dimensional Man*) for whom art's authenticity was being violated by the culture industry and by the commodification of culture. In *Apocalittici e integrati* Eco argues that distinctions between *cultura alta*, *cultura media* and *cultura bassa* do not often reflect how these levels coexist interdependently. See Umberto Eco, 'Cultura di massa e "livelli di cultura"', in *Apocalittici e integrati*, pp.29-54.

[229] Peter, Bondanella, *Umberto Eco and the Open Text*, p.48

[230] Commentators generally agree that Eco's position on integrated intellectuals is far more difficult to convey, the reason being that Eco himself seems, at times, to be favouring a certain enthusiasm for popular culture typical of the integrated intellectuals he describes. See for instance Michael Caesar, *Umberto Eco. Philosophy, Semiotics and the Work of Fiction*, p.38-39 and Peter, Bondanella, *Umberto Eco and the Open Text*, p.48.

(…)'. Such method would also prove able to transcend the opposition between blind approval and cynical disapproval of mass culture.[231] In 'La struttura del cattivo gusto', one of the essays of *Apocalittici e integrati*, Eco examines different aspects of mass culture by looking at the concept of kitsch. Eco defines kitsch, or 'cattivo gusto', as the 'fabbricazione ed imposizione dell'effetto'.[232] In this very sense kitsch represents the antithesis of the open work. In contrast to the notion of open work, kitsch denies semantic indeterminacy, structural contingency and the free play of meaning between the work of art and its interpreters. Kitsch is what has been conceived with the clear intention to achieve a particular effect on people, and it fulfils its purpose when this intention is reached in a rather unmediated way. In this sense, what distinguishes kitsch from the open work is that the latter establishes a complex relationship with social reality whereby the work of art generates a number of mediations between society and its interpreters. These mediations in turn characterize the ground upon which different interpretations arise. On the contrary, the notion of kitsch implies that a message is interpreted without any reflection on, questioning or re-casting of the message itself.

In order to elaborate on the notion of kitsch, in 'La struttura del cattivo gusto' Eco discusses an extract of a literary pastiche that German literary theorist Walther Killy produced by combining different sentences or fragments of sentences of known German authors within a single paragraph. The paragraph in question, notes Eco, is kitsch precisely because its sentences rely on linguistic procedures whose explicit finality is to produce an overemotional response in the reader.[233] In contrast to the formal strategies, rhetorical artefacts, and expressive solutions which he identifies as kitsch, Eco is interested in studying how avant-garde art functions in terms of poetics and epistemology: he considers avant-garde art to be a field of enquiry, testing and discovery just like those scientific disciplines traditionally associated with experimental methods. Recasting the line of reasoning developed in *Opera aperta*, Eco argues that avant-garde art features the potential to become a legitimate instrument for knowing the world and its logic. In this sense avant-garde art creates a space of mediation within which the complexity of reality can be articulated. With regards to this, Eco reinstates

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[231] Michael Caesar, *Umberto Eco. Philosophy, Semiotics and the Work of Fiction*, p.39.

[232] Umberto Eco, 'La struttura del cattivo gusto', in *Apocalittici e integrati*, pp.65-129, p.66.

[233] The desired effect is reached by recurring to various semantically overloaded poetic images.

the opposition between avant-garde and kitsch. Kitsch satisfies the consumer by gratifying him with the feeling of 'perfezionare un'esperienza estetica privilegiata'.[234] On the contrary avant-garde art, according to Eco, focuses less on the immediate response of the consumer than on the process through which the work of art takes shape and meaning:

> L'avanguardia nel far arte pone in evidenza i procedimenti che portano all'opera, ed
>
> elegge questi ad oggetto del proprio discorso, il kitsch pone in evidenza la reazione
>
> che l'opera deve provocare ed elegge a fine della propria operazione la reazione
>
> emotiva del fruitore.[235]

By moving his argument along the opposition between avant-garde and kitsch, Eco is analysing cultural practices by setting a distinction between avant-garde art and popular culture. From this perspective he is, in a certain way, relying on a binary opposition between avant-garde and kitsch. At the same time, as pointed out, he seeks to maintain a balance between approval and disapproval for mass-culture. While he identifies relevant distinctions and oppositions between the artistic field and cultural consumerism, he also clearly suggests areas of interpenetration between the two:

> Non solo l'avanguardia sorge come reazione alla diffusione del Kitsch, ma il Kitsch si
>
> rinnova e prospera proprio ponendo continuamente a frutto le scoperte
>
> dell'avanguardia. Così questa, da un lato, trovandosi a funzionare suo malgrado come
>
> ufficio studi dell'industria culturale, reagisce a questa circonvenzione cercando di
>
> elaborare continuamente nuove proposte eversive (…) mentre l'industria della cultura
>
> di consumo, stimolata dalle propose dell'avanguardia, continuamente svolge opera di
>
> mediazione, diffusione e adattamento, sempre e di nuovo prescrivendo in modi
>
> commerciabili come provare il dovuto *effetto* di fronte a modi di formare che
>
> originariamente volevano farci riflettere unicamente sulle *cause*. In tal senso allora la
>
> situazione antropologica della cultura di massa si delinea come una continua dialettica

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[234]Umberto Eco, 'La struttura del cattivo gusto', p.71.

[235]Umberto Eco, 'La struttura del cattivo gusto', p.73.

tra proposte innovatrici e adattamenti omologatori, le prime continuamente tradite dai

secondi: con la maggioranza del pubblico che fruisce dei secondi credendo di adire

alla funzione dei primi.[236]

Precisely because it acknowledges both sides of the opposition, Eco's critical contribution does not run the risk of rigidly confining itself to neither the apocalyptic nor the integrated vision. Eco, in fact, was well aware of the procedures through which avant-garde art was making use of fragments of popular culture, and quite rightly he saw the possibility of approaching the relationship between popular culture and avant-garde art in a dialectical way. Mentioning the specific case of pop-art, he notes:

Oggi è la cultura di avanguardia che, reagendo alla situazione massiccia e avvolgente

della cultura di massa, prende i propri stilemi a prestito dal Kitsch: e altro non fa la

pop-art quando individua i più volgari e pretenziosi tra i simboli grafici dell'industria

pubblicitaria e li fa oggetto di una attenzione morbosa e ironica, ingrandendone

l'immagine e riportandola nel quadro di un'opera da galleria.[237]

Again, Eco illustrates the presence of artistic strategies whereby avant-garde art integrates popular culture. As Bondanella points out, 'Eco understood perfectly that in order to develop a theory of the avant-garde in aesthetics, any such theory would of necessity have to come to grips with popular culture'.[238]

3.4 Towards an intellectual synthesis of avant-garde art and popular culture

In the last two sections, I have discussed the background of the very early stages of Eco's intellectual itinerary. I have pointed out the importance of Eco's intellectual involvement with artists of neo avant-garde milieus in art, literature and music. Eco's involvement with national television RAI was also extremely formative. My observations point towards highlighting a creative process towards which a wide range of experiences converge into forming an intellectual style. The fact that Eco comes to grips with both the complexity of avant-garde art and with the communicative strategies

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[236] Umberto Eco, 'La struttura del cattivo gusto', p.76.

[237] Umberto Eco, 'La struttura del cattivo gusto', p.128.

[238] Peter Bondanella, *Umberto Eco and the Open Text*, p.49.

employed by mass-consumerism shows that Eco's approach, besides being extremely versatile, is also useful in tracking down different forms of cultural and social communication. Creativity, in the case of *Apocalittici e integrati*, is also apparent in Eco's capacity to use the opposition between a critical condemnation of mass consumerism and its opposite hedonistic approval. Precisely because he acknowledges that cultural criticism is divided in opposite fractions, Eco manages to create a third option which, dialectically speaking, is the synthesis of the options from which it emerges. In this sense, Eco reinterprets existing intellectual debates in order to produce a creative synthesis that seeks to transcend existing positions. [239]

As pointed out in chapter one, oppositions are constitutive of intellectual debates as much as of rhetorical strategies whereby intellectuals express and legitimate their particular views of society. A historical perspective, notes Eco, should also support an informed discussion of the distinctions and dichotomies that structure the intellectual field. Eco, in fact, suggests that a particular reference to kitsch and popular culture should be understood within a historical frame going beyond modernity. In stating this, he highlights how the idea of using popular culture to create a desired effect among members of a society goes back to the Middle-Ages. Accordingly, he contends that debates confronting supporters and detractors of popular culture may be traced back as far as a controversy taking place in the Middle-Ages between St. Bernard and the Abbot Suger. The subject of the controversy was the use of artistic images inside cathedrals in order to convey religious messages. While St. Bernard, favouring a more austere and severe *décor*, represents the apocalyptic intellectual, The Abbot Suger, much in favour of using images to deliver religious messages, represents the integrated intellectual.[240] Eco's use of history in order to shed light on contemporary intellectual debates is, as I will illustrate in the final sections of this chapter, a defining feature of his very engagement with knowledge and with cultural theory.

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[239] On this point see especially Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, pp. 178-224. Koestler, as I pointed out, defines creativity in terms of a combination of conventionalized cultural matrices whereby a new, unconventional matrix is produced.

[240] Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati*, pp.17-18.

3.5 Eco, Barthes, the intellectual and popular culture

As pointed out, Eco places the concerns he develops in *Apocalittici e integrati* within a larger polemic regarding the role of the intellectual vis-à-vis the realm of cultural consumerism. In order to understand the particular moment in which Eco wrote the essays of *Apocalittici e integrati*, it might be useful to discuss it alongside Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957) a collection of essays published in 1957 in which Barthes adopts a quite eclectic approach in discussing popular culture.[241]

In *Mythologies* Barthes discusses popular culture as an expression of a mythological discourse. According to Barthes, the social function of the modern myth is to evacuate the real (*évacuer le réel*) by representing social reality as if it were the expression of a natural and immutable order and not as a social construct.[242] Barthes, by defining myth as word, aims at showing how human cultures operate within a system of signs that he calls 'système sémiologique': the myth has a *signification* (p.194) and therefore it can be subjected to a *lecture* and a *déchiffrement* (201). Two of the essays of *Mythologies* also address the figure of the intellectual within popular culture.[243] In defining the place of the intellectual within the discourse of the modern myth, Barthes draws attention to particular traits of the figure of the intellectual that are reminiscent of Manheim's conception of the free-floating intellectuals: 'l'intellectuel se détache du réel, mais reste en l'air, à tourner en rond: son ascension est pusillanime, également éloignée du grand ciel religieux et de la terre solide du sense commun' (p.170). The figure of the intellectual, as reflected by the mythological discourse of popular culture, is often associated with abstract thinking or spirituality, and it is assimilated more with the air element rather than with the earthy one. The tendency of identifying the intellectual to a 'machine à penser', whose products are by essence abstracts,

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[241] *Apocalittici e integrati*, in spite of being structured around specific sections, adopts the free spirited tone typical of *Diario Minimo*, a collection of short pieces, often with a satirical tone that Eco published in 1963. See Umberto Eco, *Diario Minimo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1963). For an overview of the place of the book within Eco's further production see Margherita Ganeri, '*Da Diario minimo* (1963) a *Il pendolo di Foucault* (1988)' in Margherita Ganeri, *Il caso Eco*, pp.44-45.

[242] Roland Barthes, 'Le Mythe, aujourd'hui', in *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1970) pp.179-233. In the theoretical essay following the short and descriptive essays of *Mythologies*, Barthes notes that the discourse of the myth serves the ideological purpose of demystifying the arbitrariness of its structure, by presenting itself as ahistorical. Page numbers in the text in the next few paragraphs will refer to this edition.

[243] See in particular Roland Barthes, 'Poujade et les intellectuels', in *Mythologies*, p.170-179.

predisposes the intellectual to be perceived negatively, to be condemned for the 'lourdeur excessive' that erudition confers to his appearance and to his way of talking (p.172).

Barthes's observations on the figure of the intellectual give a good idea of the ways through which the intellectual is perceived against the background of the culture of everyday life. Moreover, a discussion on the intellectual through the lens of popular culture, gives a good measure of how the mythological discourse of contemporary cultures can best be located at the crossroad of different discourses. There is no single and unified perception of intellectuals. Rather, there exist different perceptions, some of which tend to be self-congratulatory and some which are, rightly or not, more critical and pungent.[244] Eco's *Apocalitici e integrati* and Barthes' *Mythologies* discuss the figure of the intellectual in two different yet complementary ways. On the one hand Eco is concerned with how intellectuals view and engage with popular culture. Barthes, on the other hand, is interested in how intellectuals are represented by and within the discourse of popular culture. Both texts raise the question of social and cultural representations of intellectuals in contemporary Western societies from an original angle, examining the figure of the intellectual as emerging from a cultural background shaping the way intellectuals view society as much as the way society views intellectuals. Barthes' concern to include intellectuals within the contemporary mythological discourse can also stimulate a further parallel with Eco's *Apocalittici e integrati*, considering the extent to which the two intellectual attitudes described by Eco (cynical detachment and hedonistic involvement) participate in the way society popularizes the figure of the intellectual.

By placing his viewpoint on intellectuals within the general framework of the study of social communications and its processes, Eco (as well as Barthes) discusses

[244]Barthes also points out how the contributions of intellectuals are often seen as more qualitative than quantitative; according to Barthes, this perception enhances the negative representations of intellectuals: '(s)es produits sont qualitatifs non quantitatifs. On retrouve ici l'ordinaire discredit jeté sur le cerveau (…) dont la disgrace fatale est évidemment l'excentricité meme de sa position, tout ne haut du corps, près de la nue, loin des racines ' (p.173). In another essay of *Mythologies*, 'L'écrivain en vacances', Barthes ironically describes the way in which the media portray writers on holiday, noting that: '(c)e qui prouve la merveilleuse singularité de l'écrivain, c'est que pendant ces fameuses vacances, qui'il partage fraternellement avec les ouvriers et les calicots, il ne cesse, lui, sinon de travailler, du moins de produire. Faux travailleur, c'est aussi un faux vacancier. L'un écrit ses souvernirs, un autre corrige des épreuves, le troisième prépare son prochain livre. Et celui qui ne fait rien l'avoue comme une conduite vraiment paradoxale, un exploit d'avant-garde, que seul un esprit fort peut se permettre d'afficher'. Roland Barthes, 'L'écrivain en vacances' in *Mythologies*, pp.29-32, p.30.

intellectuality beyond the frame of academic specialisation. Accordingly, Eco looks at the figure of the intellectual as much as at the background against which intellectuals develop their ideas and voice their concerns. By doing so he avoids either isolating intellectuals from the social context, or looking at intellectuals as mere reflections of social processes developing independently from them.[245] This type of framework intelligently avoids the shortcomings of either an excessively micro-sociological or an excessively macro-sociological approach. Eco's approach to mass communication, as he elaborates it in *Apocalittici e integrati*, monitors the co-existence of standardisation and inventiveness, without losing sight of the social and cultural trends that define the collective dimensions of contemporary culture.[246]

3.5.1 Eco, media criticism, and the phenomenology of Mike Buongiorno

The analysis of popular culture is also one of the areas where it is possible to find a common ground between Bourdieu and Eco. Both thinkers are very interested in exploring popular and media culture. As I have illustrated in the first chapters of this study, Bourdieu and Eco both emphatically subscribe to the idea that the intellectual ought to engage with different cultural domains across society. For example, I have underlined Bourdieu's commitment to the idea of the sociologist as someone who can dwell equally in the realm of philosophy's abstract theories as among working class people. In chapter two, I have also discussed how Bourdieu frames his criticism of media culture in his popular book *Sur la télévision*.

The ability to engage with different cultural spheres is also distinctive of Eco's intellectual self-narrative. In particular, I have insisted on Eco's early commitment to avant-garde movements in Italy and France, as well as on the importance of his discussion of the integrated and the apocalyptic intellectual, in order to show how Eco provides a framework for discussing sophisticated cultural products along with the more

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[245] A theoretical synthesis between structure and agency has been a concern that strongly marked Eco's position within the intellectual field since his early works. See for instance the introductions to the various editions of *Opera aperta*. I will turn to this question in chapter five.

[246] For a discussion of the macro-sociology and micro-sociology see, *The Micro-Macro Link*, ed. by Jeffrey Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, Richard Münch, and Neil Smelser (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

prosaic products of mass culture.[247] In the next section I will explore how Eco's eclectic conceptual vocabulary develops in a way that is very consistent with the definition of the academic discipline of semiotics.

For now, I will consider Eco's analysis of the media. Eco has developed media criticism in many of his journalistic pieces and short essays collected in works such as *Diario Minimo* (1963) and *Secondo diario minimo* (1992), *Il costume di casa* (1973), *La bustina di Minerva* (1999) and in the more recent *A passo di gambero* (2006). Many of these essays, as Eco himself suggests in *Il costume di casa*, are examples of a critical engagement that stands somewhere in between the impressionistic form of a newspaper article and the more systematic form of the theoretical treaty. As Eco notes in the introduction to *Il costume di casa*:

> Si tratta di esempi di una pratica critica, o meglio di una pratica della diffidenza quotidiana, che sta a metà tra i miei studi di carattere teorico e i vari modi dell'impegno pubblico concreto (…) Sono scritti che dai miei interessi teorici sui problemi della comunicazione traggono alimento per una curiosità vagamente missionaria, puntata sulla pratica della parola persuasiva, dai giornali agli altri mezzi di comunicazione di massa; e dalla tensione politica quotidiana traggono l'impulso a intervenire nei modi che tutto sommato mi sono più congeniali, stabilendo una specie di diario della diffidenza, smontando congegni apparentemente innocui e funzionanti, per insegnare a non crederci.[248]

In this passage Eco stresses the fact that the essays of *Il costume di casa* offer several examples of the many ways in which intellectual activity intersects with everyday culture. As Eco points out, the essays of *Il costume di casa* are the result of the happy convergence between his interest for social communication and the fleeting *nuances* of

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[247] To some readers the distinctions I am drawing between cultural products, or between cultural levels, might appear artificial. However, when placing Bourdieu and Eco's intellectual itinerary in their respective context, it is important to stress how these distinctions were much relevant at that time.

[248] Umberto Eco, *Il costume di casa* (1973) (Milan: Bompiani, 2012), p.5

what he calls the "politica quotidiana". The stream of cultural messages delivered by the mass media is the starting point for Eco's work, thus feeding his "impulso a intervenire nei modi che tutto sommato mi sono più congeniali"; with these words Eco conveys the importance of writing as his preferential strategy for examining mass media culture.

As a way of exploring the culture of the everyday, writing is for Eco a form of critical analysis that records and interprets events that are often magnified by the mass media, "stabilendo una specie di diario della diffidenza". In this very sense, the role that the intellectual assumes with regard to the stream of information delivered by the mass media consists in the reframing and in the production of a critical awareness of everyday culture. In this sense, media criticism is a meaningful arena for the development of Eco's intellectual style. Eco's early media criticism is also a decisive moment in the process of becoming a public intellectual. An interesting example of this is the essay called "Fenomenologia di Mike Buongiorno" that Eco published in 1961. In this essay Eco writes about TV presenter Mike Buongiorno in an informal style that recalls Barthes' essays of *Mythologies.* Combining humour and seriousness, Eco analyses the figure of Mike Buongiorno as a massmedia phenomenon.[249]

Approaching the subject in a way that reveals an underlying satirical intention - which Eco often displays in his journalistic writing-, Eco maintains that televised culture has allowed untalented people like Mike Buongiorno to become contemporary national celebrities. According to Eco, the success these media personalities enjoy can be explained by the fact that mass media culture provides a sense of inclusiveness with regard to celebrity culture. Hence, Eco contends that media personalities do not exemplify exceptionality, contrary to many cinema stars. Rather, the stars of the mass media embody the democratic ideal of the participation in the practices of cultural consumerism as a means of realising a social identity. Reiterating his *vis polemica,* Eco points out that media personalities become contemporary idols by virtue of the fact that they exemplify mediocrity rather than exceptionality: "(…) La TV non offre, come ideale in cui immedesimarsi, il *superman* ma *l'everyman.* La TV presenta come ideale l'uomo assoultamente medio".[250]

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[249] Mike Buongiono is especially known to Italian audiences as presenter of televised talk-shows.

[250] Umberto Eco, "Fenomenologia di Mike Buongiorno", In Umberto Eco, *Diario Minimo* (1963), 15th edn (Milan: Bompiani, 1992), pp. 29-35, p.30.

As Eco notes, Mike Buongiorno is a character without aspirations, without contradictions, someone who believes in the platitudes of the clichés, and who subscribes to the blandest nuances of common sense. He is a one-dimensional man in a truly marcusian sense. What is more, the potential irony of the character resides in the fact that he is absolutely genuine, he is not even playing at being someone like Sartre's famous *garçon de café*, who is merely acting out the role of the waiter. As Eco points out:

> Idolatrato da milioni di persone, quest'uomo deve il suo successo al fatto che in ogni atto e in ogni parola del personaggio cui dà vita davanti alle telecamere traspare una mediocrità assoluta unita (questa è l'unica virtù che egli possiede in grado eccedente) ad un fascino immediato e immediato spiegabile col fatto che in lui non si avverte nessuna costruzione o finzione scenica.[251]

Eco's essays on media culture are animated by a desire to question taken for granted realities as well as to provide new perspectives that problematize stereotypical discourses. In this very sense, Eco's essay on Mike Buongiorno is very indicative of Eco self-definition as an intellectual. The example of Mike Buongiorno illustrates, for Eco, an anti-intellectual, someone who is unable to process contradictory information and therefore merely exists at the superficial level of appearances. Mike Buongiorno is also the antithesis of the creative mind, in that he simply reproduces knowledge without possessing the ability to create something new. He is unable to imagine things differently from what they are, and he therefore does not believe that experience can be subject to multiple interpretations.

> Mike Buongiorno è privo del senso dell'umorismo. Ride perché è contento della realtà, non perché sia pace di deformare la realtà. Gli sfugge la natura del paradosso; come gli viene proposto, lo ripete con aria divertita e scuote il capo, sottolinenando

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[251] Umberto Eco, "Fenomenologia di Mike Buongiorno", p.30

che linterlocutore sia simpaticamente anormale; rifuiuta di pensare che ditero il paradosso si nasconda una verità, comunque non lo considera come veicolo autorizzato di opinione.[252]

"La fenomelogia di Mike Buongiorno" is one of the most often mentioned examples of Eco's early journalists writings. As a recent study of Eco's early work points out, Eco's use of the formula "la fenomenologia di" (the phenomenology of) followed by a person's name has been employed recurrently in Italian newspaper articles since Eco's essay.[253]

The popularity that the text enjoyed, mostly within the Italian audience, certainly comes from the fact that Eco discusses an Italian media icon in a way that is sophisticated, humorous, as well as accessible to a wide audience. On the other hand, as I suggested, the essay is a particularly interesting example of Eco's attempt to define his intellectual self-concept by referring to a popular figure that he constructs as the quintessential anti-intellectual. Like any oppositions, Eco's depiction of the anti-intellectual helps to elucidate his conception of the intellectual. Unlike the anti-intellectual, the intellectual should disrupt the self-evidence of the given, should distance us from the received ideas and platitutes that often shape public opinion and should open up new ways of perceiving reality. In the previous chapter, I have pointed out how Bourdieu defines his idea of the intellectual against the figure of Jean-Paul Sartre. In the case of Eco, the example I have discussed above shows how intellectuals define their own self-identities not only against those of other intellectuals, but also in contrast to figures that they identify as anti-intellectuals.

3.6 Eco's *Trattato di semiotica*, or the theoretical side of intellectuality

Since the work of public intellectuals like Eco addresses a wide readership, it is also important to consider that not all readers are alike. Some readers might share with Eco the same specialist perspective, the same expertise in an academic discipline, or the

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[252] Umberto Eco, "Fenomenologia di Mike Buongiorno", p.33.

[253] Some of these newspaper articles openly recognize the paternity of Eco's formula. See Michele Cogo, *Fenomenologia di Umberto Eco* (Bologna: Baskerville) 2010, p.22-23.

same interest for interdisciplinary theory. Other readers might be aware of, or concerned only with a relatively small portion of Eco's work. While some of Eco's readers are familiar with his theoretical writings, others might only be aware of Eco as a novel writer, or as a columnist for the *Espresso*, while being only dimly or not at all aware of his theoretical production. In spite of this, Eco's role as public intellectual is solidly rooted in the work he produces as a scholar. As previously pointed out, one of the factors fostering the success of intellectuals like Eco is their field of specialisation and the expertise attached to it. In order to gain a better understanding of how intellectuals develop their ideas, concepts, and theories, it is important to aknowledge that part of work that, without necessarily being their best known aspect, plays a decisive role in shaping their thinking style. Eco's *Trattato di semiotica generale*, published in 1975, is perhaps his more densely theoretical and in many ways his more systematic work. Yet its importance for Eco's intellectual itinerary is undeniable. In *Trattato di semiotica generale*, in fact, Eco sets out to define the discipline of semiotics. Thanks to semiotics he elaborates a theoretical model in which a great deal of his previous work on culture and artistic practices converge. Semiotics, as defined by Eco, is a way to explain the notion of culture by providing some key concepts which account for both the relative stability of cultural systems as well as for the possibility to question and partially redefine these systems. One of the ways in which cultural systems can be affected by partial redefinitions is, as I shall point out, artistic and creative practice.

Semiotics, simply put, is the study of signs, of the way in which signs are constituted into systems, and of how these systems are informed by operational norms whereby social communication and the making of meaning is possible. It is within the interplay of these three elements (the sign, the system of signs, and the cultural codes) that Eco defines the discipline of semiotics. More specifically, the goal of *Trattato di semiotica generale* is to 'esplorare le possibilità teoriche e le funzioni sociali di uno studio unificato di ogni fenomeno di significazione e/o comunicazione'.[254] Or, as Eco puts it a few pages later:

La semiotica ha a che fare con qualsiasi cosa possa essere ASSUNTA come segno. È

segno ogni cosa che possa essere assunto come un sostituto significante di qualcosa

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[254] Umberto Eco, *Trattato di semiotica generale* (1975) 19th edn (Milan: Bompiani, 2008), p.13. Page numbers in the text in the next paragraphs refer to this edition.

d'altro. Questo qualcosa d'altro non deve necessariamente esistere, né deve sussistere

di fatto nel momento il cui il segno sta in luogo di esso (…) la semiotica, in principio,

è la disciplina che studia tutto ciò che può essere usato per mentire. (p.17, capital

letters in the text)

Meaning, for Eco, is a field of possibilities, where relations between cultural units are contingent rather than necessary. Two things can be extrapolated from this assumption. The first one is that a sign is something that stands for something else, and the second is the fact that there is a dynamic relation between the sign and what the sign stands for. Such a definition of sign, which Eco derives from Charles Peirce, is an invitation to consider how the meaning to which a sign is connected will in turn be the starting point, or rather the continuation, of a process whereby an additional sign is required in order to explain the previous sign. In light of this, communicative processes that define culture can be seen as unstable web of signs whereby culture is continuously created and re-created by acts of interpretation that establish relationships between previously disjoined cultural units.[255]

Another term that plays a key role in *Trattato di semiotica generale* is the concept of code. While being complex and abstract, the term is all pervasive in *Trattato*. This is how, for instance, Eco defines it at the beginning of *Trattato*: '(u)n codice è un SISTEMA DI SIGNIFICAZIONE che accoppia entità presenti con entità assenti' (p.19, capital letters in the text) . This definition describes the code in its general but also most important sense. As Eco points out, one can define as sign 'tutto ciò che, sulla base di una convenzione sociale previamente accettata, possa essere inteso come QUALCOSA CHE STA PER QUALCOS'ALTRO'(p.27, capital letters in the text). The code stands for a system of conventions whereby one can associate a sign with something other than itself. In other words, the act of associating a sign with a given meaning or portion of meaning on the map of the cultural world requires the presence of a code, without which this operations would not be possible.[256] Hence, codes play a key role in the way in which acts of interpretation are carried out in a given culture. The term code, in this

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[255] Eco's understanding of the notion of sign will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter six.

[256] As Eco notes in *Trattato*, the code correlates a given expression (a sign) with a given content or meaning: 'un codice stabilisce la correlazione di un piano dell'espressione (nel suo aspetto puramente formale e sistematico) con un piano del contenuto' (p.77).

sense, has a similar function to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, in that both can be described as frameworks whereby cultural units can be assigned meaning to. In a broad sense, the habitus operates as a code, in that the term code, precisely, designates a relatively stable system of rules or norms in reference to which individuals communicate with one another. Notwithstanding their relative stability, codes can accommodate communicational flexibility. This is so because the units that compose the code can be subject to creative combinations challenging more conventional arrangements. From this perspective a code (as well as the habitus) can be prescriptive on some level while being able to accommodate creative configurations of meaning on another level.[257]

While the notion of code can account for the processes whereby the expression of a sign generates meaning, it can also account for the manner in which the production of meaning operates within a set of conventions. This set of conventions define, roughly speaking, the limits of possible (or reasonable) meanings that can be inferred from a sign or a set of signs. While it allows for a generative process in which meaning is not fixed but rather dynamically expressed, codes regulate the production of meaning; they define a space of possibility within which a culture conceives itself in relation to existing signs. As Eco points out, a code 'limita sia le possibilità di combinazione tra gli elementi in gioco che il numero degli elementi che costituiscono il repertorio (…) certe combinazioni sono possibili e altre meno' (p.66). Later on in *Trattato*, in summarizing the definition of the term, Eco argues that:

> Qui non si sta dicendo soltanto che un solo codice può produrre molti messaggi in successione, ciò che è abbastanza ovvio, né che i contenuti possono essere veicolati dallo stesso significante, secondo il codice usato, perché anche questo è ovvio; si sta invece dicendo che *usualmente un solo messaggio veicola contenuti diversi e interlacciati* e che pertanto quello che si chiama messaggio è il più delle volte un TESTO il cui contenuto è un DISCORSO a più livelli. (p.86, capital letters in the text)

While they constitute frameworks through which cultures organize their knowledge, codes also foster the conditions for elaborating new knowledge:

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[257] I will further discuss this question in chapter six.

I codici, in quanto accettati da una società, costruiscono un mondo culturale che non è né attuale né possibile (almeno nei termini dell'ontologia tradizionale): la sua esistenza è di ordine culturale, e costituisce il modo in cui una società pensa, parla e, mentre parla, risolve il senso dei propri pensieri attraverso altri pensieri, e questi attraverso altre parole. (p.92)

The term code, besides being intimately associated with the notion of culture, is equally fundamental in the understanding of creativity. As pointed out, Eco's understanding of the notion of code allows formulating questions such as how, within a given culture, creative solutions emerge from conventional frameworks. Koestler, precisely, notes that creativity emerges within the context of a set of rules that, at a given time, might be relatively fixed. As he points out, the fixity of the code does not in any way exclude the flexibility of the strategy whereby this code is interpreted.[258] Along the same lines, Eco, in *Trattato di semiotica generale*, examines the semiotic processes whereby analogies and metaphors are created, and shows how creativity emerges when conventional cultural units are combined in unexpected and unprecedented ways.[259] In *Trattato di semiotica generale* Eco also suggests how the creativity expressed by artistic disciplines 'sfida l'organizzazione del contenuto esistente e quindi contribuisce a cambiare il modo in cui una data cultura "vede" il mondo'. Hence, the presence of creativity 'stimola il sospetto che l'organizzazione del mondo a cui siamo abituati non sia definitiva'.[260] Creativity, in this context, operates at two complementary levels: firstly, it shows the contingency of the social order, and secondly, it reveals culture's tendency to generate new configurations of meanings.

3.7 The intellectual polyphony of *Il nome della rosa*

Il nome della rosa, Eco's first and best known novel, contributes to creating a whole new realm of intervention and a new literary "playground" in which Eco can apply his ideas and theoretical concerns. It is certainly not by chance that Eco, while being a very attentive interpreter and critic of mass-media communication, is also one of its most

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[258] See Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, pp.38-42.

[259] See in particular Umberto Eco, *Trattato,* pp.328-359, and Umberto Eco, *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio* (1984) (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), pp.141-195.

[260] Umberto Eco, *Trattato*, p.342.

self-conscious practitioners. Within the context of Eco's intellectual itinerary, *Il nome della rosa* adds a further dimension to Eco's already impressive range of fields of intervention. The novel marks Eco's *début* as a fiction writer, and further diversify his readership.[261] These two elements (a broader field of intellectual intervention and the achievement of a wider audience) can be seen as resulting from the enormous success of the novel. This interrelation shows that Eco proved capable of conceiving a perfectly balanced synthesis between a sophisticated and highly complex message on the one hand, and an accessible and entertaining product on the other. Giuseppe Zaccaria, in an essay called 'Avanguardia come consumo', conveys precisely this idea. He notes that in a post-industrial society, avant-garde and consumerism influence each other on many different levels and often pursue a common goal.[262]

Writing a novel set in the Middle-Ages is for Eco a matter of relating a story where the Middle-Ages is itself an open concept. *Il nome della rosa*, offering a story which is open to multiple readings, represents an implicit reflection on the act of textual interpretation. As Giuseppe Zecchini observes, *Il nome della rosa* dedicates many pages to the ways and techniques whereby Guglielmo, the central character of the novel, tries to make sense of what happens around him by appealing to the idea a cultural universe constituted by and through signs. As a result, note Zecchini, 'l'insieme della vicenda è "letta" attraverso una gamma vastissima di segni, ma il suo senso vero sarà il risultato della mediazione tra ciò che è il dato e ciò che in esso vi coglie l'intepretazione del protagonista'.[263] This is also the position that Eco holds in *Lector in Fabula* (1979), a study in which he maintains that meaning and interpretation originate from a co-production between the text and the reader.[264] Inextricably linked to the theme of interpretation, the question that polarizes the attention of many critics with regards to *Il Nome della rosa* is that of the readership. Margherita Ganeri considers, for instance, how the novel addresses different typologies of reader through what she calls a

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As Ganeri and other commentators have pointed out, there is a part of Eco's readership that might have purchased Eco's novel as a consequence of its commercial success without necessarily reading it.

[262] See Giuseppe Zaccaria, 'Avanguardia come consumo' in *Saggi su 'Il nome della rosa'*, ed. by Renato Giovannoli (Milan: Bompiani, 1999), pp.283-287.

[263] Giuseppe Zecchini, 'il medioevo di Umberto Eco' in *Saggi su 'Il nome della rosa'*, p.362.

[264] This point will be thoroughly developed in the next chapter.

'ministrategia commerciale interna'.[265] Critics usually agree that the success of the novel is to be attributed, among other things, to its capacity to satisfy the palate of different readers.[266] There are, mainly, three typologies of reader that the novel addresses. The first target group aimed by Eco's 'ministrategia commerciale' are 'the avid consumer(s) of bestsellers concentrating on plot and story line'.[267] These readers expect the novel to gratify their expectations for a narrative tension typical of the genre of the detective novel. The second target group 'see any historical treatment of the past as a thinly veiled allegory for events in the present'.[268] Such readers are particularly prone to interpreting the book in light of contemporary political events. The third target group is 'the most sophisticated category and would include the educated reader as well as the scholar specialist or critic such as the author himself'.[269] These readers, while being able to enjoy the novel as a best seller as well as a statement on contemporary culture, are also particularly keen in interpreting the novel as a re-casting of Eco's semiotic theory into a work of fiction.[270]

While *Il nome della rosa* addresses different typologies of readers, one could argue that the success of the novel in Italy and outside partly contradicts Eco's early criticism -which he shared with members of *Gruppo 63* - of some of the Italian writers enjoying great popularity in the 60s, such as Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, Giorgio Bassani and Carlo Cassola. However, his early reservations with regard to the logic of the culture industry did not last long. As pointed out in the early sections of this chapter, in *Apocalittici e integrati* Eco already withdraws such negative views of the culture

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[265] Margherita Ganeri, *Il caso Eco*, p.70.

[266] As Ganeri indicates, the presence of a diversified readership was widely anticipated and thoroughly planned around specific marketing strategies.

[267] Peter Bondanella, *Umberto Eco and the Open Text*, p.96.

[268] Peter Bondanella, *Umberto Eco and the Open Text*, p.96. What is implied here are references to episodes of Italian political history, such as the murder of Aldo Moro. In discussing how the culture of the Middle-Ages becomes a concern for contemporary societies, Eco has used the term of neo-medievalism in the essay 'Dreaming the Middle-Ages' in Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1986), pp.61-72.

[269] Peter Bondanella, *Umberto Eco and the Open Text*, p.98.

[270] The three typologies of reader targeted by *Il nome della rosa* are not mutually distinctive. However, the more cultivated the reader is, the more he or she is potentially capable of accessing the novel from different perspectives. The contrary cannot be said of the "naïve" reader who reads the book only as a detective novel. In other words, while the novel explicitly encourages different modalities of reading, only a reader capable of accessing these different levels of reading is also able to understand the full complexity of the work.

industry in favour of the idea that commercial success and artistic value are not mutually exclusive.[271] *Il nome della Rosa* confirms precisely the possibility, theorized by Eco in *Apocalittici e integrati*, of a cultural product that, while conceived within the logic of specific market strategies, retains a high degree of artistic value.

3.8 Eco, the Middle-Ages, and the post-modern intellectual

With *Il nome della rosa*, Eco reinstates his idea of intellectuality. Even when conceptions of medieval intellectuals traditionally stress the centrality of detachment from worldly events, Guglielmo, the central character of the novel, represents an intellectual type that cannot be equated to neither detachment nor commitment.[272] Guglielmo represents an intellectual type at the crossroad of spirituality, erudition, science, and practical knowledge; because his *modus operandi* combines different ways of knowing and experiencing the world, Guglielmo also represents an intellectual type whose sphere of action cannot be reduced solely to one particular cultural domain. Rather, he has an eclectic mind capable of combining apparently heterogeneous and incompatible fields of knowledge. From this perspective, Eco translates his concern for cultural diversity and interdisciplinarity into creative writing.

As Teresa Coletti notes, Eco's re-reading of the Middle-Ages constitutes one of the elements of a wider intellectual system. Coletti, in particular, examines the extension of Eco's expertise in medieval culture into the realm of the post-modern discourse[273]. Being a medievalist herself, Coletti's examination of Eco's re-reading for the Middle-Ages is very careful in 'address(ing) the relationship between the novel's medievalism and its preoccupation with signs, focusing on the thorough grounding of its

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[271] In *Postille al nome della rosa*, Eco is fairly clear in maintaining that commercial success and artistic value can co-exist harmoniously: '(v)olevo che il lettore si divertisse. Almeno quanto mi stavo divertendo io. Questo è un punto molto importante, che sembra contrastare con le idee più pensose che crediamo di avere circa il romanzo'; a few paragraphs later he notes how '(è) indubbio che se un romanzo diverte, ottiene il consenso di un pubblico'. See '*Postille al nome della rosa*', in *Il nome della rosa* (1980), 52nd edn (Milan: Bompiani, 2006), pp.525-526.

[272] Julien Benda, for instance, when using the word *clerc* instead of the word *intellectuel*, implicitly refers to the medieval model of the intellectual. The French *clerc* (Italian: chierico) refers primarily to the religious sphere and secondly to a more general meaning of cultivated person. Both the French *clerc* and the Italian *chierico* derive from the Latin clericu(m) following the development of medieval Latin into the romance languages. Benda defines his idea of intellectual as someone embracing moral values that are not associated with practical concerns. See Julien Benda, *La trahison des clercs* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1927).

[273] Teresa Coletti, *Naming the Rose* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

semiotics concerns in its representation of medieval culture'.[274] Coletti's study does justice to the *jeu de mirroirs* of Eco's polyphonic discourse while keeping a solid grounding in the study of medieval culture, thus pointing out how 'Eco substantively crafts a distinctly contemporary statement about language and meaning, responsible intellectual activity, and the nature of critical discourse'.[275] Coletti's observation points to one of the main characteristics of post-modern intellectuals as described by Zygmunt Bauman:

> The typical post-modern strategy of intellectual work is one best characterised by the
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> metaphor of the 'interpreter' role. It consists of translating statements, made within
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> one communally based tradition, so that they can be understood within the system of
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> knowledge based on another tradition.[276]

Intellectuals, notes Bauman, are the uncontrasted creators of the post-modern discourse, and aesthetics - the domain of cultural tastes - is still relatively unchallenged by non-intellectuals. Apart from aesthetics, the other major area covered by the post-modern discourse comprises, as Bauman notes, 'philosophical discourses which are concerned with the issue of truth, certainty and relativism, and those which deal with the principle of societal organisation'.[277]

Eco is well grounded in all areas mentioned by Bauman. If, as Bauman notes, the task of post-modern intellectuals 'consists of translating statements, made within one communally based tradition, so that they can be understood within the system of knowledge based on another tradition', it should also be noted that particular statements are also re-contextualised under the sign of eclecticism and irony.[278] As Eco notes in relation to *Il nome della rosa*, post-modern intellectual strategies involve substantial 'ironic rethinking of the past'.[279] When translating his expertise in medieval culture within the context of contemporary theoretical debates, Eco warns readers against

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[274] Teresa Coletti, *Naming the Rose*, p.4.

[275] Teresa Coletti, *Naming the Rose*, p.5.

[276] Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters. On Modernity, Post-modernity and Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p.5.

[277] Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters*, p.140.

[278] Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters*, p.5.

[279] Umberto Eco, *Reflections on the Name of the Rose* (1985) (London: Minerva, 1994), p.68.

indulging in a unilateral reading of Middle Age culture. Here is where Eco is truly practising the post-modern discourse, by pointing to the fact that the culture of the Middle-Ages is as much an open text as contemporary culture is. Yet, Eco's comprehensive definition of culture suggests that if historical discourse is a conceptual web, creativity (the very element through which culture renews itself) is both beyond and within the limits of this web. As Eco notes, 'if a character of mine, comparing two medieval ideas, produces a third, more modern, idea, he is doing exactly what culture did'. [280]

3.9 Conclusion: intellectual polyphony and creativity

Culture, as a creative process, is constantly in its making. As Koestler points out in *The act of creation*, the combination of different cultural and cognitive matrices is at the heart of the expression and of the recognition of creativity. Matrices can be disciplinary, relative to a particular field of experience or, more broadly, encompassing cultural spheres. Eco's intellectual itinerary, I have argued, provides a good example of how different cultural matrices, such as avant-garde art and cultural consumerism, interact within the same intellectual project. Cross-fertilization (the combination of different cultural and cognitive matrices) involves a process of combination of already existing matrices resulting in a creative output:

> 'Creative originality' does not mean creating or originating a system of ideas out of
>
> nothing but rather out of a combination of well-established patterns of thoughts - by a
>
> process of cross-fertilization, as it were.[281]

It is precisely the novel combination of well-established patterns of thoughts that fosters creative thinking and intellectual originality. The combination of different cultural matrices plays a crucial role in Eco's intellectual itinerary. His definition of the discipline of semiotics in *Trattato di semiotica generale* suggests the inclusion of cultural diversity within the same theoretical framework. What allows such comprehensiveness is, as I have pointed out, the concept of code. The concept of code implies the existence of a common framework articulating manifestations of culture that

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[280]Umberto Eco, *Reflections on the Name of the Rose*, p.76.

[281] Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, p.131.

are often perceived as distinctive. Eco's *Trattato di semiotica generale* gives an account of cultural phenomena by looking at culture as an essentially dynamic object, whose stability of meaning is never a fixed but rather a transient phenomenon. As chapter six will point out, Eco's definition of culture emphasizes how culture is something that is always in the process of becoming something else. This is so since culture is continuously created and re-created by acts of interpretation that modify its internal structure and establish relationships between previously disjoined cultural units. In elaborating this understanding of culture, Eco develops a theoretical view that can also account for the basic mechanisms whereby creativity is produced. Creativity also marks Eco's intellectual itinerary on two complementary levels: that of the cultural theorist and that of cultural practitioner. These two levels converge in *Il nome della rosa*. In this novel Eco recasts his early theoretical considerations within the framework of a work of fiction. Hence, fiction writing reinstates creativity as one of the major trait defining Eco's intellectual profile.

As this study has illustrated thus far, providing a common communicative framework for otherwise different discourses offers, under particular circumstances, an example of intellectual creativity. In fact, the combination of two aspects or elements pertaining to two distinctive domains of knowledge presupposes the presence of an analogy functioning as a sort of symbolic bridge between two previously distinct domains of knowledge. As Koestler points out, an analogy is ' "created" by the imagination; and once an analogy has been created, it is of course there for all to see – just as a poetic metaphor, once created, soon fades into a cliché'.[282]As Eco has shown since some of his early works, artistic imagination and stereotyped language might coexist within the same cultural expression. Cultures often incorporate some of the artistic strategies of the past to such an extent that these strategies, once perceived as unique, original, and creative, become part of the symbolic establishment.

Once it becomes conventional, creativity needs to find new paths.

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[282] Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, p.200.

Chapter 4: The Singular and the Plural: Theorizing Intellectual Engagement

'Certain difficulties are repeatedly encountered whenever one tries to arrive at a convincing solution to the problem of the relationship between that which we call individual and that which we call society. These difficulties are certainly closely connected with the nature of these two concepts. In trying to free our minds from the limitations imposed by the ideas these concepts foster, the first thing to notice is that they are based on one simple fact. One concept refers to people in the singular, the other to people in the plural'.[283]

4.1 Introduction: The self as a social construct. Individuals and social contexts

In Western cultures, the self is usually regarded as one of the most intimate things we possess. It is something private, which belongs to us and only to us. We build our own identity around it, and we view other people as the expression of other, equally autonomous, selves. However, if examined attentively, the notion of self loses its clear-cut boundaries, and the private and intimate space of enclosure covered by the term gradually fades away. Similarly to what happens when we move our eyes close to a TV screen, and we realize that the people we see on the screen are nothing but little dots, the concept of self loses its immediate intelligibility once we bring it under close examination. Sociology has a similar story to tell. It is the story of the constructed nature of the individual. This story reveals the essentially relational ground without which the individual would be unthinkable; without which the notion of individual would not exist. The network, in its more general sense, is society, and the individual is part of it. Society is *within* the individual as much as it is composed *by* individuals. There is no dividing line where society stops, and where the individual starts. The singular merges with the plural as much as the plural merges with the singular. The individual accommodates society as much as society accommodates the individual: one defines the other.

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[283] Norbert Elias, *What is Sociology?*, trans. by Stephen Mennel and Grace Morrissey (London: Hutchinson, 1978), p.121.

In this chapter I shall argue that, in order to understand how intellectuals come to be recognized as creative thinkers, it is essential to acknowledge some of the dynamics that define intellectual engagement. Confrontations between intellectuals sometimes take the form of well-orchestrated debates, taking place either at a conference or on the pages of a scholarly article.[284] Interactions among intellectual fractions, between intellectuals and particular theories, and between thinkers of the present and thinkers of the past, account for a number of possible intellectual engagements. Another form of engagement, apparently more individual than the previous ones, takes place in the hermeneutical space in which readers interact with texts. To some extent all these interactions are, I shall argue, related to those between the individual and society and between the singular and the plural.

As sociologist Randall Collins notes, creators of ideas are, most often, not lonely and isolated creatures, but 'it is possible to demonstrate that the individuals who bring forward such ideas are located in typical social patterns: intellectual groups, networks, and rivalries'.[285] In spite of the fact that Western societies cherish such figures as the genius, the neglected thinker, the *artiste maudit* or, more prosaically, the capitalist self-made man, it is possible to demonstrate that such figures are in fact social constructs. Historically, these figures often fully emerge and become social icons only after several generations.[286] Similarly, the notion of the individual, as we understand it today, can be seen as the result of an historical process that has increasingly promoted the cult of individual freedom over social constraints. We often forget how professionals of the marketing industry make a considerable effort to suggest ways to re-fashion or re-define our self-image. "New" and "exciting" practices associated with technological gadgets such as smart phones, I-pods, and personal computers, are constantly associated with

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[284] As Collins notes: '(i)ntellectuals are especially oriented towards the written word. Especially in the modern world, they experience their creativity alone and on paper, though they might at some point report it orally'. In Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Belknap: Harvard University Press, 1998), p.25.

[285] Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, p. 2. According to Collins, 'thinking would not be possible at all if we were not social; we would have no words, no abstract ideas, and no energy for anything outside of immediate sensuality'. Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, p.7.

[286] Nathalie Heinich in *La Gloire de Van Gogh. Essai d'anthropologie de l'admiration* (Paris: Minuit, 1991) shows the processes through which, generation after generation, the figure of Vincent Van Gogh has assumed the characteristic elements of the cult of saints. Heinich shows how historians of art, by making consistent use of notions like martyr or neglected artist, have created a religious aura around the artist. The pseudo-sanctification of Van Gogh, as Heinich points out, is also apparent in the pilgrimages recently created in his honour.

the possibility to re-define one's style.[287] In a world where reality and fiction seem irrevocably intertwined, the individual is presented, almost everywhere, as the source of every freedom and independence, master of infinite joys and *locus* of endless possibilities.

As I will argue in this chapter, intellectual voices emerge in the symbolic space of engagement between a singularity (something that cannot be easily subsumed into a descriptive framework) and a number of symbolic resources made available by existing social contexts and institutional settings. From this perspective, *singularity is not something external to society but rather a particular expression of society.* There are a number of elements that might define, by and large, the symbolic space in which intellectual engagements take place. As this study illustrates, one of the ways of theorizing intellectual engagement consists in focusing on confrontations between opposed positions in view of gaining symbolic prestige.[288] As the recent history of the humanities has shown, post-structuralists have criticized structuralism's tendency to view individual freedom as a simple reflection of a social structure or a system. From a different angle, post-modern sociologists have criticized phenomenology on the ground that it does not take enough stock of how social factors shape personal experiences. Post-modern aesthetics has often argued in favour of the ephemeral, the transient, and the constructed nature of reality, thus making it difficult to sustain the validity of theoretical frameworks whose aim is, precisely, to go beyond such transience and contingency. One could argue that postmodernism has moved, or so it seems, beyond a certain number of theoretical positions. Yet, in spite of the way in which theoretical positions succeed one another, there seems to be something whereby oppositional stances resurface more or less recurrently within theoretical debates.[289] As Collins maintains for the case of sociology, even when a considerable effort has been made in

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[287] For an historical overview of how the advertising industry revolutionized the lives of millions of Americans see the seminal work of Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976). For a more contemporary analysis of consumerist cultures see Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia. Love and Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[288] As Collins points out, 'intellectual life is first of all conflict and disagreement. Teaching might give the opposite impression, when initiates relate to novices what we claim to know; but the forefront where ideas are created has always been a discussion among oppositions'. Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, p.1.

[289] As Collins notes, post-modernism in its 'rejection of any fixed standpoint from which an explanation might be made (…) is itself an explanation'. In Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, p.11.

order to transcend theoretical oppositions such as internal and external, micro-social and macro-social, local and global, 'any sociology which attempts to abolish such terms soon finds itself smuggling these distinctions back in under other words'.[290]

4.1.1 The structure and the aim of the chapter

In theorizing intellectual engagement, this chapter will refer to existing debates in literary theory, philosophy and social theory. The different strands of my argument, while venturing in a number of theoretical debates, meet and fall in place around the idea of the relational aspect of the individual and the social context. When discussing the relationship between notions such as individual and society, singular and plural, or reader and text, it is easy to be under the impression that the bipolar structure that these notions designate corresponds to a natural order of things. But in fact such dichotomisations of reality are first and foremost conceptual ones. Even when many conceptual divisions seem to be supported by common-sense knowledge, there is no reason why they should match a natural order of things. In fact, as I will argue in this chapter, synthetic or relational thinking (the ability to see the relations between concepts) has a certain advantage over thinking styles that privilege divisions over relations. Namely, I will argue that relational thinking, as a conceptual strategy, fosters a holistic approach to knowledge which entails both intellectual creativity as well as interdisciplinarity. In presenting such a view, I will illustrate that it is possible to conceive that that the relational aspect of notions such as individual and society, reader and text, and singular and plural precedes rather than proceed from their separation.

In organising my interdisciplinary enquiry, I will start by introducing Norbert Elias' understanding of the relationship between the individual and society. From there I will move on to discuss the debate about literature and singularity; I will then pursue my reflection on the notion of singularity by referring to how Terry Eagleton and Zygmunt Bauman understand the relation between intellectuals and society. While arguing that intellectuals experience an increasing irrelevance in defining the direction of contemporary societies, Eagleton and Bauman highlight some of the defining tensions between modern intellectuals and Western cultures. The arguments put forward by Eagleton and Bauman are also about the different social and cultural contexts in which

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[290] Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, p.13.

post-modern intellectuals carry out their role of cultural mediators.[291] When engaging with theoretical narratives that define intellectual debates, intellectuals often turn into *bricoleurs* of ideas, creatively combining elements from different areas in the intellectual field. In the second part of this chapter, I will argue that Eco's idea of textual interpretation and Bourdieu's concept of habitus foster an approach that combines the individual and the social, the singular and the plural. Bourdieu and Eco have proven to be very versatile in the art of linking elements drawn from different theoretical traditions, as well as in interpreting intellectual debates under a new light. In the third and final part of this chapter I will discuss the new sociology of ideas. The new sociology of ideas examines the place of intellectuals with regards to the conception, elaboration and diffusion of intellectual products.[292] Under this label, sociologists Charles Camic and Neil Gross express a concern for studying the processes of production and distribution of ideas, and for the role that intellectuals play within such constellations. As I will argue, one of the main concerns of Camic and Gross is to examine the interactions between intellectuals and institutional (i.e. academic) contexts.

4.2. Society and the individual

As German sociologist Norbert Elias points out, even if it is not difficult to see that society and individuals exist interdependently, the explanatory frameworks developed by social scientists often obfuscate the dialogical relationship of these two notions. In an essay called *What is sociology?* Elias develops a critique of the notions of individual and society as developed by the dominant sociologists of the first half of the twentieth century.[293] The failed synthesis of these two concepts, notes Elias, 'is found in the theories of many sociologists, who strain themselves in vain to discover how such an "individual" might be related to "society" which they conceive as a static entity'

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[291] See in particular Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin, 2004) and Zygmunt Bauman. *Legislators and Interpreters. On modernity, Post-modernity and Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

[292] See Charles Camic, and Neil Gross, 'The New Sociology of Ideas', in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology*, ed. by Judith Blau (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp.236-249. See also Neil Gross, *Richard Rorty. The Making of an American Philosopher* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[293] Norbert Elias. *What is Sociology?* Trans. by Sthephen Mennel and Grace Morrissey (London: Hutchinson, 1978). The book originally appeared in 1970 in German under the title of *Was ist Soziologie?*. Page numbers in the text in the next paragraphs refer to the English edition.

(p.116).[294] In modern times, argues Elias, sociologists have sought to build their theories on the principles of order and stability, often viewing social change in terms of instability. Such a view of society cannot come to grips with the idea that society is a process rather than a stable entity. As Elias points out, separating the understanding of the notion of the individual from that of society often leads to misinterpretation of these notions. As Elias observes, a somehow simplistic understanding of the notion of the individual is not uncommon in sociology. So much so, that he wonders:

> Then why do scholars so often use traditional concepts like the individual, which
>
> makes each person seem like a completely self-reliant adult, forming no relationship
>
> and standing quite alone, never having being a child, and therefore never having
>
> *become* an adult? (p.118)

As pointed out in the introductory paragraphs, there exist a number of epistemological obstacles to a dialectical understanding of the relationship between the individual and society. Elias, on his part, notes that:

> The traditional concept of the individual conveys a mental image. From infancy we are brought up to become independent, perfectly self-reliant adults, cut off from everyone else. We end up believing and feeling we actually *are* what we ought to be and what we may even want to be. More precisely, we confuse fact with ideal, that which *is* with that which *ought to be*. (p.118)

As Elias points out, the separation between the individual (and the personal states characterising this individual) and society is rendered by the Latin notion of *homo clausus*, a self-enclosed being. Languages reflect this cultural propensity to conceive of the individual as an isolated being on a number of other levels. For instance, the personal pronoun 'I' and the concept of 'Ego' suggest the idea of an entity existing outside of any social context. However, as Elias rightly points out, the 'I' as well as

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[294] For Elias, the problem of the conceptual couple individual-society lies as much in the polarity that these concepts suggest, as in the idea of stable entities that informs their meaning, making it difficult to conceive of society as an open process subject to changes and modifications. Within the sociological tradition, Max Weber tried to overcome this difficulty by suggesting that forms of social reality (the family, groups, various institutional organisations, the State, etc.) are abstract representations that have a theoretical value without necessarily corresponding to empirical realities. Such abstract representations are particularly well illustrated by Max Weber's concept of *idealtyp*. The *idealtyp* refers to a stylised description, a generalization applicable to historical and social realities. For an overview of Weber's sociology see Raymond Aron, *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), pp.497-600

other personal pronouns define themselves within a system of positions, a structure, and a communication network. Hence, such interdependences *within* a structured system illustrate how individuals do not exist *per se*, but within a network of multiple relationships giving them the possibility to say 'I', thus singling out a self in relation to other individuals. It thus follows that each personal pronoun has a profoundly social significance (pp.123-128).[295]

Behind the dichotomy individual-society, one finds that 'one concept refers to people in the singular, the other to people in the plural' (p.121). The concept of individual implies the idea of singularity, and the concept of society implies that of plurality of individuals. However, as Elias points out:

> Contemporary usage would lead us to believe that the two distinct concepts, 'the
>
> individual' and 'society', denote two independently existing objects, whereas they
>
> really refer to two different but inseparable levels of the human world. (p.129)

As this section has illustrated, Elias addresses the problem of how to articulate two seemingly different and mutually distinctive concepts within a complex but essentially unified reality. The next sections will explore some of the ways to account for such conceptual interdependences.

4.3. Singularity in literature and philosophy

As pointed out in the previous section, the notion of individual is strongly connected with the idea of singularity. On a very immediate level, singularity refers to that which is individual as opposed to that which is plural or collective. Beyond this first level, the term singular has several other meanings. As an adjective, it denotes something that is 'individual, in contrast to what is common and general', or 'above the ordinary in amount, extent, worth or value, unique'. Singular also means 'different from or not complying with that which is customary, usual, general; strange, odd, peculiar'.[296]

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[295] Norbert Elias, *What is Sociology?*, pp.123-128. In spite of the relational aspect of personal pronouns, argues Elias, the mental habits of clinging to the notion of a profound self beyond the reach of social bonds subsists in various ways. On this point, see also the introduction of the previously referenced Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*.

[296] 'Singular', *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2 vols, second ed., II, p.1899.

Singularity appears as a relevant theme in a number of contemporary philosophers and literary theorists. For Derrida, the philosophical quest for being is always and necessarily synonym with a quest for an ontological difference, so that ultimately the notion of being can never be reduced to an identity, in that being is intrinsically different from itself. If being is constituted by and through a fundamental difference, it is not possible to trace back its origin to a stable unity, a singularity. What can be found, and what language can express, is but a mere trace of this original being. For Derrida the task of language, and in particular of writing, is to access being through the careful and manifold analysis of its ontological difference, which is also the only means whereby we can access its authenticity and its singularity.[297] Derrida conceives singularity as opposed to repetition. If repetition is a property of a machine or a machine-like organism, singularity is inscribed in the living and characterizes the idea of a non-repeatable event. However, Derrida also contends that singularity and machine-like repeatability are, by no means, clearly and completely distinct.[298]As Jonathan Culler observes, 'singularity is necessarily divided: it takes part in the generality of meaning, without which it could not be read, and so is not closed in on itself, *ponctuelle*, but iterable. The singularity of a work is what enables it to be repeated over and over in events that are never exactly the same.'[299] As Culler points out, Derrida's idea of iterability stresses the fact that a work of literature can be repeated, and thus in a certain way reproduced, either synchronically or diachronically, by subsequent or synchronised acts of reading.

As Culler argues, the singularity of literature can be preserved beyond its iterability precisely because literature, as Derrida contends, poses a serious challenge to

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[297]See Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967). In classic phenomenology, the theme of singularity has been developed, among others, by Soren Kirkeegard, who saw singularity as something that, because deeply experiential, was beyond the reach of concepts or rational explanations. Similarly, Karl Jaspers interprets the theme of singularity by reference to an irrevocable ethical and existential dimension of life. In phenomenology, singularity often refers to the fact that the perceiving subject constitutes the very ground upon which personal experience arises. For a good overview of phenomenology, see the introduction of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945). For general information about phenomenology and singularity, I have also consulted the *Enciclopedia Filosofica Bompiani*, vol. Se-Teol, 'singolo' (Milan: Bompiani, 2006), pp.10675-1676.

[298] As the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy points out '(c)ontamination, in Derrida, implies that an opposition consisting in two pure poles separated by an indivisible line never exists'. See 'Derrida', in SEP, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/derrida/ (accessed 8 March 2012).

[299] Jonathan Culler, 'Derrida and the Singularity of Literature', in *Cardozo Law Review*, vol. 27-2, Nov. 2005, 869-877, p.871.

conventional or reified thinking. As Culler suggests '(t)hinking the literary text as a singularity, a singularity that challenges the generality of truth that it nevertheless makes possible, goes along with thinking of it as an event'.[300] In this instance, the fact that literature is experienced and performed as an event creates the conditions whereby singularity and repetition coexist dialectically.

In *The Poetics of Singularity: The Counter-Culturalist Turn in Heidegger, Derrida, Blanchot and the later Gadamer*, Timothy Clark refers to the 'cultural politics paradigm' as a trend of literary criticism, which places the discourses of literary texts within a larger cultural and political context.[301] As Clark argues, this type of contextualisation or political reading of literature is deeply criticized by the 'deconstructive' school of thought, inasmuch as literature is conceived as a 'singularity' defying conceptualization. As Clark puts it:

> Singularity names the specific being of a text or work, inflected so as to underline its resistance to being described in general categories or concepts. Its resistance may also be understood as upsetting the distinction between the realm of the conceptualisable, that which is masterable by thought, and that of passion, which is necessarily not so mastered. (pp.2-3)

According to the deconstructive approach, Clark argues, meaning cannot be completely mastered by reason and language. Accordingly, the value of literature resides in its being 'outside' rational discourse, in its being irreducible, a-causal and anti-deterministic. In being, precisely, a singularity. By consequence, a deconstructive reading poses singularity as 'the specific being of a text or work, inflected so to underline its resistance to being described in general categories or concepts' (p.2). Hence, the literary text comes to be strongly linked, as in Culler's discussion of Derrida, to the idea of an 'event', thus exceeding, by its very singularity, the attempt to frame it within the limits of a conceptual discourse:

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[300] Jonathan Culler, 'Derrida and the Singularity of Literature', p.872.

[301] Timothy, Clark, *The Poetics of Singularity: The Counter-Culturalist Turn in Heidegger, Derrida, Blanchot and the later Gadamer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005). Page numbers in the text in the next few paragraphs will refer to this edition. On the topic of singularity and literature, see also Derek Attridge. *The Singularity of Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

The literary may be singular as a mode of discourse whose inventiveness, while being based on certain conventions or rubrics, may also exceed being understood in terms of any pregiven linguistic or political or cultural norm. The literary may be an 'event', that is something that cannot be fully understood theoretically, but must be engaged in its specific performance…[302]

Further on, Clark singles out two different ways of approaching the notion of singularity. The first one, which he condemns and which he attributes to a particular way of loosely adopting a 'deconstructive' posture, consists in merely proclaiming singularity against any attempt to frame the literary within a constellation of meaning:

To defend literature and the poetic as that which, by definition, escapes critical appropriation is surely a strategy with a limited future. One cannot go banging on indefinitely about the ever-elusive strangeness of the literary without giving the impression that one has nothing more to say. The greatest difficulty here is that in itself, 'singularity' is necessarily an empty and purely relational term. Everything is 'singular' in some sense, even the tiny blotches on a desk or the intestines of a greenfly. To say of anything that is 'singular' is the least one can say of it, short of saying nothing at all. (p.7)

The second line of argument, which Clark strongly advocates, is more positive in that it strives to preserve singularity in relation to a given set of interpretative norms and not merely for its own sake.[303] For Clark, the fact that singularity can be expressed through an artistic event which is unique, does not exclude a subsequent and

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[302]Timothy, Clark, *The Poetics of Singularity*, p.3. As Clark suggests, there is a basic tension in literary texts between the conceptual, or what can be generalized, and the inexplicable, that which is unique. This tension often creates an epistemological impasse, given the impossibility to know for certain what a text is about, its relationship to the reality that it represents.

[303] Clark refers to Kant as being a decisive voice shaping philosophical debates around the notion of singularity. As he points out: 'for Kant (…) the reflective openness of the act of judgment, in art and elsewhere, was still finally determined by other arguments about the likely purposiveness of nature and of human transcendence- i.e. a speculative metaphysics that contemporary thinkers have not felt able to follow. Without this further framing, the singularity of the literary or aesthetic is in danger of becoming merely negative' (pp.7-8).

retrospective analysis of its meaning. The two things, the uniqueness of the event and its semantic contextualisation are, in Clark's view, interdependent.

By positing the importance of an interpretative frame against which to examine singularity, as Clark does, the singularity of the text accommodates the idea of plurality of interpretations. Similarly, as Culler suggests with regards to Derrida's notion of iterativity, the repetition of an event, and the fact that the event manifests itself in a slightly different way each time, keeps alive the possibility of a plurality of interpretations. Iterativity, from this perspective, suggests a subtle dialectics between sameness and difference, in that the "literary" comes to be viewed as a process rather than a self-enclosed space. Instead of looking for a meaning that is impermanent and immutable Derrida, as Culler notes, considers the specificity of literature, its singularity, its eccentricities and curiosities, as a starting point for further contextualisation and iterations. Singularity, in order to be recognised, is subject to a process of framing that confers meaning, even when this meaning is identified with some form of social or textual marginality. Singularity, both in the sense of 'individual, in contrast to what is common and general', 'above the ordinary', and 'different from or not complying with that which is customary, usual, general, strange, odd, peculiar', can be discussed as a process, or a strategy. Different forms of singularity can be analysed in terms of strategies developed against structured spaces such as texts, cultures, intellectual communities, or societies.[304]

4.3.1 Singularity and the fragmentation of the notion of culture

As Bauman maintains in *Legislators and interpreters*, the project of modernity has been developed around the idea of reason, and social order has often been construed around the centrality of reason. Hence, modern intellectuals have enjoyed the role of privileged spokesperson of universal values; invested by this legislating role, they have shaped the very idea of social order, and have had a major role in defining the hierarchy of values according to which one could draw a line between reason and passion, culture and nature, the spiritual and the vulgar. Many important and meaningful distinctions such as the one between "high" culture and "low" culture were among the products of intellectuals' minds. As Bauman contends, this social role of intellectuals was still

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[304]'Singular', Shorter *Oxford English Dictionary*, p.1899.

clearly discernible for a good part of the twentieth century. However, with the progressive fading away of the project of modernity, the identification between intellectuals and culture is severely questioned. With the emergence of the society of consumption as the dominant force fashioning cultural trends as much as thinking styles, the very notion of culture, and the salience that it occupies on contemporary maps of knowledge, undergo a transformation. [305]

This transformation, as authors like Eagleton, Eco, and Bauman himself underline, leads to a fragmentation of the notion of culture resulting in a plurality of discourses. As Eco illustrates in *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964), with the advent of mass consumerism, culture functions as a notion in the name of which to oppose consumerist society.[306] Yet in another sense culture also designates a new life-style colonized by consumption, inflated by the centrality of the markets of cultural entertainment. This form of institutionalized consumption assumes a central role in the life of individuals, and in the dynamics whereby individuals construct their identity and their sense of belonging to a society.[307] As pointed out in the previous chapter, Eco demonstrates the importance of avoiding an excessively moralistic and monolithic assessment of cultural markets. In the period in which Eco writes *Apocalittici e integrati*, the distinction between champions and critics of consumerist culture becomes increasingly porous, and the divide between the critical value of culture, and its more sensuous experience, is increasingly under attack. At the same time, the notion of culture is in the process of acquiring new relevance in many disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences. In this sense, disciplines such as cultural studies, semiology, or sociology of culture reflect the right of inclusion of both popular and elite culture within their research agendas.[308]

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[305] See also the essays in Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

[306] Chronologically, Eco's *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964) can be situated at the beginning of the transformation of the notion of culture discussed above. Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters. On modernity, Post-modernity and Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989) and Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin, 2004) discuss many of the ideas associated with post-modern theory that will emerge only subsequently.

[307] For a discussion of notion of identity see Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

[308] On the relevance of the notion of culture within academia see Bruce Robbins, *Secular Vocations. Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture* (London: Verso, 1993). On the question of the rise of semiology, or semiotics, in the academic field see Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs* (London: Routledge, 2001).

4.4. Intellectuals, theory, and singularity

As a result of discursive fragmentation, the notion of culture, from being relatively cohesive and unified, undergoes a diversification, which creates some potentially contradictory uses of it. As I have noted above, one direction in which the notion is redefined implies a levelling down of distinctions such as that between "high" and "low" culture. Within this context, those intellectuals who, for one reason or another, wish to withhold the role of critical thinkers often endorse a certain form of singularity. Since intellectuals claim a particular strategic use of the notion of culture that retains some of its critical and oppositional value, their singularity symptomatizes the marginal position and the increasing difficulty in embracing the contradictory meanings that culture assumes in contemporary Western societies. Moreover, as many commentators point out, intellectuals are not always likely to identify themselves with narrow fields of specialisation. While often solidly grounded in an academic discipline, their approach tends to be transdisciplinary from the outset.[309]

With the relevance of culture being increasingly associated with practices of cultural consumption highlighting the self-fashioning potential of individuals, another concept, theory, appears in the critical vocabulary of intellectuals. The concept of theory, as Eagleton notes, stands for a very flexible and almost all-encompassing label constituting one of the vantage points from where modern intellectuals speak:

> What academic label, for example, could be pinned on writers like Raymond Williams, Susan Sontag, Jurgen Habermas, Julia Kristeva or Michel Foucault? There is no obvious term to describe the kind of thinkers they are, which is one reason why the rather vague word 'theory' floated into existence. And the fact that their work cannot be easily categorized is a central part of its significance. [310]

Perhaps theory is the very term that allows intellectuals to re-state the notion of culture as an alternative to the increasingly global trends imposed by the market. Since culture and theory are by essence transdisciplinary notions, modern intellectuals need to

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[309] As Terry Eagleton notes, 'a snap definition of intellectuals might be that they are the opposite of academics'. In Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, p. 81.

[310] Terry Eagleton, *After Theory,* p.82.

beware of potential contradictions deriving from 'falling back into the blithe amateurism of the gentleman scholar on the one hand, or capitulating to the short-sighted scholar on the other'.[311] In fact, from the point of view of its detractors, the notions of culture and theory represent a generalist point of view of society. As such, these notions lose relevance in favour of the growing importance of intellectual expertise.[312] On the other hand, when adequately manipulated, these notions can still offer a vantage point from which to articulate a holistic viewpoint on society. As Bauman maintains, the increasing irrelevance of the notion of culture is part of a process that recasts the role of intellectuals from that of legislators to that of interpreters.[313]

The discourse of culture, which served as one of the main legislating tools of modern intellectuals, sees its field of application confined to the insularity of academic disciplines and departments. Or, ceasing to be the domain of a particular elite, culture becomes increasingly embedded in the mechanisms that shape and diversify individual styles and social identities. As pointed out in the previous chapter, in discussing popular culture Eco shows that formal strategies formerly associated to avant-garde art are implemented at different cultural levels. In this sense, it is no longer intellectuals (or artists) who spell out the discourse of culture; the markets themselves mostly take up such a legislative role. Hence, with the gradual decline of the legislating role of intellectuals, cultural markets become powerful agents offering self-shaping tools to re-define life-styles; the ethos of consumerism is promoted to the role of lingua franca of global societies. In consequence, as Bauman suggests in his analysis of consumerist culture, individuals increasingly seek comfort in a form of hedonism, inspired by the promises of happiness delivered by the market.

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[311] Terry Eagleton, *After Theory,* p.82. On the relation between intellectuals, professionalism and academia see the previously referenced Bruce Robbins, *Secular Vocations. Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture*. Robbins discusses at some length the context in which culture becomes a central concept in academic disciplines across the Humanities.

[312] As Eagleton notes, 'if culture could be critical', in the sense in which modern intellectuals such as Roland Barthes or Michel Foucault gave to the term, 'it was partly because of its increasing irrelevance'. Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, p.83. Contradictory images also characterize, in a number of ways, popular representations of intellectuals: 'if they (intellectuals) are censured as cold-hearted, they are also denounced as passionately partisan', Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, p.85.

[313] Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters*, chapters eight and nine.

Against the backdrop of the pervasiveness of cultural markets, singularity is perhaps what allows intellectuals to stand out, to be recognised by refusing ready-made categories delivered by consumerist culture. As studies of creativity have shown, there is an element of unconventionality and social deviance in the way in which individuals express creativity.[314] As Robert J. Sternberg shows, non-conformist thinkers and scientists have to struggle before their creativity is fully acknowledged. Their attempts to have their creativity recognised can be explained as an effort to break free from conventional patters set by their intellectual communities.[315] Bourdieu's critique of television discussed in chapter two is a case in point in this sense. As an intellectual, Bourdieu claims a marginal position when he casts a critical gaze on the deontology that defines TV journalists. Bourdieu's marginal position when denouncing the ready-made clichés of the journalistic field represents a discursive strategy allowing him to position himself "outside" of the discourse he criticizes. Bourdieu's example illustrates how intellectual creativity defines itself both in relation *as well as* in opposition with symbolic strategies employed by the media. Hence, singularity can be viewed as a communicative strategy challenging conventional thinking patters of social conformity.

4.5. Relational thinking: individuals, social contexts, texts, and readers

Oppositions between individual and society or text and reader have been the centre of multiple debates in a number of disciplines across the humanities. These debates have often triggered discussions about the relation between individual freedom and social, textual, or literary norms. In literary criticism, for instance, many important recent debates have gravitated around the question of the relation between the freedom of the reader and the constraints of the text. The debate between Umberto Eco, Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler and Christine Brooke-Rose at the occasion of the 1990 Tanner Lectures is a good example of this. The debate illustrates a number of aspects with regard to the *vexata quaestio* of textual interpretation. More specifically, the question discussed in the 1990 Tanner Lectures revolves around the difference between interpretation and over-

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[314] See *The Dark Side of Creativity*, ed. by David H. Cropley, Arthur J. Cropley, James C. Kaufman, and Mark A. Runco (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[315] See Robert J. Sternberg, Todd I. Lubart. *Cultivating Creativity in an Age of Conformity* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

interpretation of literary texts.[316]The debate engages with the definition of interpretation as well as with the symbolic operations leading the reader to confer meaning to a text. Eco, in this sense, develops a careful distinction between interpretation and overinterpretation, illustrating what discriminates one from the other. The starting point for Eco's discussion of interpretation is the idea that language establishes a conventional relationship between words and things. As Eco argues, language, under certain conditions, offers the possibility of establishing simultaneous associations between words and things which might lead one to construe different representations of reality, none of which might be said to be neither entirely true nor entirely false. As Eco points out, such a possibility is particularly well illustrated by Second-century hermetic traditions: for tenants of these traditions, language can only suggest, but never define, truth. As Eco points out, Second-century Hermetism:

> Is looking for a truth it does not know, and all it possesses is books. Therefore, it imagines or hopes that each book will contain a spark of truth and that they will serve to confirm each other. In this syncretistic dimension, one of the principles of Greek rationalist models, that of the excluded middle, enters a crisis. It is possible for many things to be true at the same time, even if they contradict each other. But if books tell the truth, even when they contradict each other, then their each and every word must be an allusion, an allegory. They are saying something other than what they appear to be saying. Each one of them contains a message that none of them will be able to reveal alone. In order to be able to understand the mysterious message contained in books, it was necessary to look for a revelation beyond human utterances (…). [317]

As Eco argues further on, the idea that language is the medium whereby cultures organize knowledge is not incompatible with the notion that the relation between words and things is open, at any time, to multiple interpretations. When a string of words is turned into a text, it is also more prompt to be subject to multiple readings over a certain period of time. As noted earlier, each repetition of a literary text is a recasting of

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[316] Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. With Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, Christine Brooke-Rose, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[317] Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, p.30.

meaning; as Culler suggests, Derrida's approach to the dialectic of singularity and repetition reveals how the "literary" negates the possibility of reified meaning. Literature, in this sense, contains difference, plurality. As such, it is a symbolic space that accommodates the multiplicity of subjective experiences. As Eco suggests, one could say that a text is an open-ended reality 'float(ing)' between an author and a reader:

> Someone could say that a text, once it is separated from its utterer (as well as from the utterer's intention) and from the concrete circumstances of its utterance (and by consequence from its intended referent) floats (so to speak) in the vacuum of a potentially infinite range of possible interpretations.[318]

In Eco's view, the text and the reader are interdependent poles; it is, precisely, in the space where readers and texts "converge" that interpretation arises. For Eco interpreting a text involves turning it into a virtual system whose signifying units are associated in virtue of a range of possible meanings established by cultural conventions. From such a perspective, overinterpreting a text for Eco implies the act of making a series of textual inferences that logically contradict each other and therefore do not hold together as a coherent system. In this sense Eco's idea of interpretation requires that interpretation is tested not only against the coherence of the text, but principally against a system of cultural conventions the text refers to in virtue of a set of rules and norms. These rules and norms define legitimate uses of language, as well as legitimate ways to understand and to establish associations between signifying units. However, rules and norms can often be interpreted quite creatively. In this sense, the more a language user possesses an active competence of these rules and norms, the more she or he will able to recast conventional meaning into original configurations:

> When a text is produced not for a single addressee but for a community of readers (…) the author knows that he or she will be interpreted not according to his or her intentions but according to a complex strategy of interactions which also involve the readers, along with their competence in language as a social treasury. I mean by social treasury not only a given language as a set of grammatical rules, but also the whole

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[318] Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, p.41

encyclopaedia that the performances of that language have implemented, namely, the cultural conventions that that language has produced and the very history of the previous interpretations of many texts, comprehending the text that the reader is in the course of reading. (…) Thus every act of reading is a difficult transaction between the competence of the reader (the reader's world knowledge) and the kind of competence that a given text postulates in order to be read in an economic way.[319]

Contrary to what Eco maintains, Rorty contends that interpretation is no more than a description of a given situation to which a reader applies a linguistic frame. In illustrating such a stance, Rorty demarcates himself from Eco for whom not all interpretative frames that readers apply are equally valid or epistemologically sound. In fact, Rorty contends that it is not the text (or the idea of a privileged object) that orients what a reader or community of readers say about it, but the specific interests that people pursue. These interests are independent from the idea of the text-object. Rorty argues that the idea of internal coherence leads to the assumption that the text has an essence, thus triggering the illusion that there is something that the text really wants to say; that the interpreter's task consists in decoding this very meaning. For Rorty, one cannot sustain the idea of a limit dividing valid interpretations from unreasonable ones, since interpretation constitutes an operation that is part of a larger context in which people do things with texts rather than interpret them. Rorty suggests that interpreting a text does not entail the preservation of an internal coherence, as it does for Eco.[320]

Following the initial Eco-Rorty confrontation, Culler and Brooke-Rose propose intermediate positions moderating Eco's and Rorty's views. As it often happens when scholars debate fundamental questions such as that of interpretation, the positions offered do not only illustrate the possibility of formulating oppositional stances, but also that oppositions foster the expression of new theoretical stances.[321] Like a cubist

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[319] Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, pp.67-68.

[320] Richard Rorty, 'The pragmatist's progress', in Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, pp.89-109. See also Richard Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[321] According to Collins, 'there is always a small number of rival positions at the forefront of intellectual creativity; there is no single chamber, but there are rarely more than half a dozen'. Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies,* p. 42.

painting in which the representation of an object originates from different points of views, a debate between scholars is likely to give rise to many and different formulations which are the expression of different theoretical sensitivities.[322] In Eco's understanding, as noted above, interpretation results form an encounter, a dialectical relationship, between a text and a reader. This richly symbolic encounter, as pointed out, involves much more than just a reader and a text. It also postulates a background of acquired competence and of encyclopaedic knowledge that allow individuals to produce new meaning by interacting with multi-layered systems of conventions. The meaning that results from these interactions might reproduce *ipso facto* these conventions, as cultural stereotypes or bland common-sense tend to do; or it might contribute in extending, through creative manipulation of cultural conventions, the 'treasury' of meaning which define cultures.

Symbolic interactions between texts and readers can be useful when examining the notions of singularity and plurality. As pointed out in the section on singularity and literature, a literary text can fully signify its singularity insofar as it participates in a general meaning: insofar as it lends itself to different interpretations that confer it the property of being singular in the different senses of the term. Interpretative practices also figure prominently in the descriptions of the role and the social figure of the intellectual, as most of the works on intellectuality show. This is so precisely because, as authors such as Collins or Bourdieu clearly show, interpretative practices capture the essential dynamism defining intellectual fields. In the more specific and localized context of literary texts, Eco describes interpretation as a symbolic encounter between texts and readers. As shown, such interactions engage a much wider competence of the cultural, symbolic and historical codes that orient the production of meaning within a given culture.

4.6. The sociology of the self and Bourdieu's notion of habitus

The relation between intellectuals and society can be addressed in different ways, using a number of conceptualizations and argumentative frames.[323] While some approaches

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[322] The fact that a given topic gives rise to multiple interpretations is a good example of how singularity and plurality can coexist.

[323] See for instance the previously referenced Neil Gross. *Richard Rorty. The making of an American Philosopher* and Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*. On the negative impact that societal

might focus more on either individuals or their contexts, other approaches present a clearer attempt to articulate the interactions between intellectuals and the social settings in which they operate.[324] Bourdieu's concept of habitus, as shown in the previous chapters, is construed in such a way as to account for the way in which the individuals are embedded in social spaces. As pointed out, the habitus structures individual experience, as well as individual strategies and actions in view of attaining symbolic prestige. The habitus is, for Bourdieu, a point of view on the social space; like any point of view it is by necessity partial, contingent to a particular experience of the social world. Hence, social contingency expresses the singularity of the individual, and the uniqueness of an individual itinerary. For this reason singularity, through which individuals distinguish themselves from one another, is itself inscribed in the social world.

The habitus unmistakably addresses the individual-society dichotomy. It also highlights how emotional states are socially constituted. As Deborah Reed-Danahay points out, Bourdieu's concept of habitus 'focuses on the cultural construction of emotions and on discursive practices associated with emotions'.[325] While individuals learn to identify the value of particular experiences that are filtered through their habitus, they also learn to recognize certain emotions when they engage in social practices.[326] As already highlighted, the concept of habitus posits that the position of individuals within the social world is connected to a set of cognitive and behavioural dispositions orienting cognition and action. Bourdieu's habitus, as Jacques Bouveresse suggests, relies on the idea of social regularity without necessarily implying a deterministic logic. In an essay called 'Rules, Dispositions, and the Habitus',

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changes have on the public image of intellectuals see for Frank Furedi, *Where have all the intellectuals gone?*, 2nd edn (London: Continuum, 2006).

[324] With regards to this, Bourdieusian sociology, Collins' theory of intellectual change, and the new sociology of ideas all share a concern for offering effective ways to account for the interactions between intellectuals and the social settings in which they operate.

[325] Reed-Donahay stresses how the debate between structures and agency has often overshadowed this particular aspect of the concept of habitus. Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Locating Bourdieu* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p.99. It is also important to stress how the study of emotions has been an early concern in Bourdieu's career as a scholar, as testified by the title of his doctoral thesis 'The Temporal Structure of Emotional Life' to which Reed-Danahay rightly alludes. Bourdieu never completed such project. Valuable information about Bourdieu's doctoral thesis can be found in the first part of the biography of Bourdieu by Marie-Anne Lescourret. *Bourdieu* (Paris: Flammarion, 2008).

[326] The link between feeling and thinking is particularly well explored in the chapter 'Habitus and Emotions' in Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Locating Bourdieu,* pp.99-129.

Bouveresse suggests that Bourdieu distances himself from the concept of (social) rule. Instead, he proposes that regularities in behaviour and cognition occur without the presence of explicit rules. Regularities are, simply put, part of the social world itself. Hence the habitus, as Bouveresse points out, accounts for a 'generative spontaneity';[327] individuals are neither like robots nor totally self-determined. In fact, as Bourdieu points out in the previously quoted passage of 'Fieldwork in Philosophy':

> Les agents sociaux, dans les sociétés archaïques comme dans les nôtres, ne sont pas (…) des automates réglés comme des horloges, selon des lois mécaniques qui leur échappent. Dans les jeux les plus complexes, les échanges matrimoniaux par exemples, ou les pratiques rituelles, ils engagent les principes incorporés d'un habitus générateur. Ce système de dispositions on peut le penser par analogie avec la grammaire générative de Chomsky – à la différence qu'il s'agit de dispositions *acquises par l'expérience*, donc variables selon les lieux et les moments. Ce « sens du jeu », comme nous disons en français, est ce qui permet d'engendrer une infinité de « coups » adaptés à l'infinité de situations possibles qu'aucune règle, si complexe soit-elle, ne peut prévoir.[328]

The flexibility of the concept of habitus allows one to apply it to the specific reality of individuals, as well as to the collective spaces individuals belong to. A correct understanding of the concept of habitus resides, as David Swartz puts it, in 'the basic insight of the classical sociological tradition that maintains that social reality exists both inside and outside of individuals, both in our minds and in things'[329]. In such a context, the habitus explains how social competence, as in language for instance, exists both under the form of internalised knowledge (in the specific form of grammatical rules but also with regards to how language ought to be used in different social milieus or situations) and under the externalised or objective form of grammar books and texts. Moreover, Swartz remarks that, 'Bourdieu's approach to understanding the relationship

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[327] Jacques Bouveresse, 'Rules, Dispositions, and the Habitus', in Richard Shusterman. *Bourdieu. A Critical Reader* (Malden: Blackwell, 1999), pp.45-64, p.62.

[328] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Fieldwork in Philosophy', in *Choses dites* (Paris: Minuit, 1987) pp. 13-47, p.19.

[329] David L. Swartz, *Culture and Power. The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p.96

between actors and structures builds on one key idea: that objective structures have subjective consequences is not incompatible with the view that the social world is constructed by individual actors'[330]. The concept of habitus, when applied to the study of linguistic practices, leads to conclusions which are very similar to the ones Eco draws from his idea of textual interpretation. In particular, Bourdieu argue that linguistic ability does not only entail a theoretical mastering of rules and norms that define preferential uses of language. Linguistic ability it is also the product of social performance, in that performance actualizes individual competence within socially informed situations:

> En effet, l'habitus n'est pas moins lié au marché par ses conditions d'acquisitions que par ses conditions d'utilisation. Nous n'avons pas appris à parler seulement en entendant parler un certain parler mais aussi en parlant, donc en offrant un parler déterminé sur un marché déterminé, c'est-à-dire dans les échanges au sein d'une famille occupant une position particulière dans l'espace social et proposant de ce fait à la mimesis pratique du nouvel entrant des modèle et des sanctions plus ou moins éloignés de l'usage légitime.[331]

Sociologist Jean-Claude Kaufmann also stresses the relevance of Bourdieu's concept of habitus when it comes to explain the ways in which individuals internalise a set of acquired competences which they then externalise in concrete social situations.

By articulating individuality and social structures within a single theoretical frame Bourdieu interprets, in an original and pertinent way, the question of habits informing everyday life.[332]According to Kaufmann, the interest that sociology invested in the study of social habits has been strongly encouraged by the return, on the scene of sociological discourse, of the everyday as a legitimate object of study.[333] Against this

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[330] David L. Swartz, *Culture and Power. The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, p.97

[331] Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce que parler veut dire. L'économie des échanges linguistiques* (1982) (Paris: Fayard, 2005), p.83

[332]Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *Ego. Pour une sociologie de l'individu* (Paris: Nathan, 2001), especially pp.127-129. Page numbers within the text in the next paragraphs refer to this edition.

[333] For the importance of the notion of the "everyday" in philosophy during that period see in particular the importance of the works of French philosopher Henri Lefebvre. See Henri Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie*

backdrop, Kaufmann discusses some of the limits of the concept of habitus. In doing so, he joins other critics; Philippe Corcuff and Bernhard Lahire, for instance, have shown how the concept of habitus, by the frequent generalisations it leads to, 'apparaît très mal adapté pour rendre compte de la dynamique individuelle, notamment de son caractère mouvant, ouvert et pluriel'[334]. The concept of habitus is nonetheless, as Kaufmann points out, a manifold concept rich of insightful implications both at a theoretical and at an empirical level (p.135). Kaufmann claims that the concept of habitus can be associated with two distinctive theories. In the first instance, habitus operates as a 'système de schèmes capable d'orienter les pratiques' (p.137). As Kaufman suggests, the 'système de schèmes' the concept of habitus refers to often comes across as having an immanent presence, as Michel de Certeau notes in *L'invention du quotidien*.[335] In the second instance, the concept of habitus, observes Kaufman, encourages another theoretical approach that, along with the first use of the concept (the habitus as a framework generating individual practices), explains individual practices by recurring to empirical data. These data are usually gathered so as to illustrate observable regularities disseminated within the social space. According to Kaufman, the first theory locates the habitus within the individual, while the second extends it in a multitude of empirical data. In light of this, the habitus can ideally operate as a mediator between individual schemes of perception and action and the norms that define the collective *ethos* of a social group. However, Kaufmann argues that by denoting both objective structures as well as individual schemes of cognition and action, the concept inevitably ends up privileging one dimension over the other, for example when it indicates the ethos of a social group.[336]As Kaufmann points out, the concept of habitus oscillates between

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quotidienne (Paris: L'Arche, 1947) and *Critique de la vie quotidenne II. Fondements d'une sociologie de la quotidienneté* (Paris: L'Arche, 1961).

[334] See for instance Philippe Corcuff, 'Le collectif au défi du singulier; en partant de l'habitus' in Bernhard Lahire, *Le travail sociologique de Pierre Bourdieu. Dettes et critique* (Paris: La decouverte, 1999), and Bernard Lahire, *L'homme pluriel. Les ressorts de l'action* (Paris: Nathan, 1998), referenced in Jean- Claude Kaufmann, *Ego. Pour une sociologie de l'individu*, p.133.

[335] Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien. Tome 1, Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002)

[336]As Kaufman points out, '(l)'habitus accède plus souvent au pluriel (l'infinité des habitus catégoriels), et en perdant le singulier, perd aussi sa place centrale qui tenait dans la "formule génératrice" ' (p.140).

denoting individual experience and the logic through which a given society gives itself a signifying order by means of social structures (pp.144-145).

In spite of the criticism it can be subject, the habitus remains a very powerful concept that underlines how individual action and cognition is informed by social configurations whose logic is partly beyond individual understanding. Against this background, singularity emerges in the negotiation between individual experience and a system of categories organising and orienting actions. The outcome of the encounter of the singularity of individual experience and the plurality of the possibilities whereby the habitus generates actions is not predetermined. The habitus implies, as Bouveresse points out, regularities rather than rules. Like Eco's account of the interactions between texts and readers, the habitus preserves the idea that creative action emerges within the space of the encounter between individual experience and the organised space of social norms and conventions.

4.7. The contribution of the new sociology of ideas

A very relevant contribution to the individual-society debate comes from what American sociologists Charles Camic and Neil Gross have called 'the new sociology of ideas'. The two American sociologists define an important method that has emerged over the last few decades.

The new sociology of ideas, as discussed by Camic and Gross, brings together insights, theoretical orientations and arguments coming from scholarly areas such as sociology of science, sociology of culture, and general sociological theory, with the aim of elaborating relevant 'tools of sociological analysis to explain why thinkers make the intellectual choices they do'.[337] The new sociology of ideas 'focuses primarily on those (men and women) who are relatively *specialized* in the production of scientific, interpretive, moral, political or aesthetic ideas' (p.237). Attention is given to the actual processes through which knowledge is produced and distributed, as much as to the individuals involved in these processes. What is at stake is, in other words, the possibility to elaborate a general line of argument to account for the production of ideas within a more or less large network of people and institutions such as universities, the

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[337] Charles Camic, and Neil Gross, 'The New Sociology of Ideas', in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology*, ed. by Judith Blau (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp.236-249, p. 236. Page numbers in the text in the next few paragraphs refer to this article.

press, the media, etc., so that emphasis is laid on the intellectual actors as much as on the particular institutional setting in which ideas are generated.

Camic and Gross argue that earlier generations of sociologists of ideas assumed 'an unproblematic distinction between the content of ideas, their "internal" substance, and the social and therefore "external" factors that condition this content' (p.238). This tendency to view the distinction between internal and external as unproblematic often resulted in the inability to see connections between the content of ideas and their context of production.[338]As the two sociologists suggest, much of the descriptions offered by Karl Manheim, Lewis Coser or Alvin Gouldner, rested on the assumption that intellectuals were part of a homogenous social category and that 'in most societies, and certainly in modern societies, groups of persons can be found exhibiting the defining properties of intellectuals' (pp.241-42). Without disqualifying the idea that intellectuals might, in fact, be grouped according to certain homogeneous criteria, Camic and Gross point out some of the inherent limitations that such a generalisation is inclined to generate. For instance, they argue that 'the old sociology of ideas tended to efface important forms of variation among specialized knowledge producers'. This generalisation resulted in the fact that the 'old sociology of ideas tended to occlude the extent to which the attributes identified in different definitions of intellectuals may systematically vary across groups of knowledge producers' (p.242).

As pointed out, Camic and Gross identify sociology of science, the study of ideology, sociology of culture, intellectual history and general sociological theory as the key areas of research fostering the emergence new methods for addressing the study of ideas (p.242). Camic and Gross contend that new sociologists of ideas challenge the assumption that scientific ideas are developed autonomously and away from social constraints. This aspect is particularly relevant in the work of authors like David Bloor, a key thinker in the field of the sociology of scientific knowledge. According to Bloor,

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[338] Hence, the content of cognitive processes was often taken to represent a realm in itself, 'the realm of an asocial, scientific rationality about which sociology could have little to say' (p.239). Camic and Gross argue that early sociologists of knowledge did not venture beyond a certain point in addressing social components of scientific knowledge. Most often they would not analyse what they thought was a hard ground on which rested the content of scientific thought. As Camic and Gross point out, some sociologists of knowledge, would find relatively unproblematic that no social explanations should be included in accounting for the development of ideas: 'even when dealing with ideas in the humanities and social sciences, the point remained that many intellectual choices rest on free and rational grounds' (p.239).

the processes whereby ideas are produced and circulate within scientific communities are sustained by 'rhetorical tactics and vocabularies that acquire their efficacy and meaning within historically specific frameworks of scientific convention and understanding'.[339] David Bloor has argued that "scientific" standards might not be enough to settle controversies over scientific truths, but that there is, indeed, an important social component that intervenes in selecting particular arguments and in granting value to them over other competing arguments.

David Bloor is also a strong advocate of an approach to knowledge that carefully considers the relationship between the individual and the social. He maintains that there are a number of different ways in which social constraints infiltrate those practices which are very much associated with the production of knowledge:

> Does not individual experience, as a matter of fact, take place within the framework of assumptions, standards, purposes and meanings which are shared? Society furnishes the mind of the individual with these things and also provides the conditions whereby they can be sustained and reinforced. If the individual's grasp of them wavers, there are agencies ready to remind him; if his view of the world begins to deviate there are mechanisms which encourage realignment. The necessities of communication help to sustain collective patterns of thought in the individual psyche. As well as the individual's sensory experience of the natural world, there is, then, something that points beyond that experience, that provides a framework for it and gives it a wider significance. It fills out the individual's sense of what the overall Reality is, that his experience is experience of.[340]

In light of such awareness, the old distinctions between internal and external explanation are replaced by an interdependence of social factors and rational explanations. New sociologists of ideas pay specific attention to those values and norms which regulate the exchange of ideas among and within scientific communities, as well

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[339] David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery*, 2nd edn (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), p.24

[340] David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery*, p. 15. An outline of the strong program in the sociology of science is given in the first chapter of the book.

as to other social factors that might play a role in the presentation and communication of scientific ideas.[341]Hence, the new sociology of ideas is closely concerned with how ideas are produced within particular contexts, and with the ways in which texts (or similar supports on which ideas are inscribed) are part of a larger network formed by other texts or supports for ideas.[342] The meaning of a text, an idea, a theory etc., does not come to be viewed as transparent, or self-sufficient, but is considered in the light of the interaction with contextual elements.[343] For Camic and Gross a careful reconstruction of the context in which ideas take shape 'must have a strong local focus', laying emphasis on an almost ethnographic approach of the study of how ideas come to be what they are, in particular by positing that ideas should be understood within the specific communities (academic, mediatic, etc.) in which they acquire meaning.[344] In contrast to traditional sociological approaches, new sociologists of ideas are concerned with those processes whereby intellectuals come to hold a position of authority within and without their scientific communities:

> Whereas contributors to the old sociology of ideas tended to view intellectuals as 'special custodian of abstract ideas', new sociologists of ideas see the women and the men who produce ideas as engaged in historically specific struggles with one another, and with various audiences, to establish their legitimacy and respectability as intellectuals of particular types (scientists, humanists, etc.) – struggles that can have a significant effect on the ideas that these actors produce and on the fate of the ideas that they generate.[345]

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[341] Charles Camic, and Neil Gross, 'The New Sociology of Ideas', p.244. Along with Bloor, sociologists like Collins and Bourdieu have shown how the intellectual field tends to organise itself into intellectual factions, and how the confrontation between these factions influence the content that ideas take within the public space.

[342] See in particular Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the social. An introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) proposes to treat social actors and objects, such as scientific machinery, as equally important in examining the formation of the "social" in local contexts.

[343] Such a position is very similar, in its main implications, to the idea of field as understood by Bourdieu. See my discussion of field in chapter two.

[344] Charles Camic, and Neil Gross, 'The New Sociology of Ideas', p.246

[345]Charles Camic, and Neil Gross, 'The New Sociology of Ideas', p.248

This also implies considering what kind of demands an institutional setting (i.e. the academic world) imposes on intellectuals and also how intellectuals manage to make a name for themselves by responding to the different codes, moral obligations and scientific norms through which these demands are imposed. Moreover, the weight that 'various audiences' have in consecrating the legitimacy and popularity of intellectuals' voices within the public sphere is also taken into account.[346]The new sociology of ideas addresses confrontations between intellectuals not as purely abstract disputes between disinterested men and women, but rather as symbolic strategies contributing to the establishment of prominent positions within the intellectual field.

4.8. Conclusion

When discussing intellectual engagement within symbolic as well as concrete *loci* in which ideas and people come together and exert a reciprocal influence, it becomes possible to see the production of ideas as being part of a larger picture in which intellectual activities function in relation with one another. This chapter sought to integrate Bourdieu and Eco within a common theoretical framework constructed around a set of interconnected questions. These questions, as I hope to have shown, complemented the arguments developed in the first three chapters. Conceptual couples such as individual and society, singular and plural, and reader and text are often construed by academic practioners in terms of binary oppositions. I have suggested that it is possible to reframe these oppositions around the relational aspect that characterizes them. In so doing I have illustrated how relational thinking provides the possibility to establish a dialogue between oppositions. This chapter has explored various forms of intellectual engagement such as that between intellectuals and society or that between readers and texts. Another type of intellectual engagement, which will be addressed in the next chapter, is that between intellectuals and bodies of knowledge constituted as theories.

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[346] Ideas emerging within a particular intellectual community can also be viewed as a response to a demand for clarification imposed by the intellectual community. Similarly, ideas can be seen as an elaborate response to a set of problems concerning society as a whole. Bourdieu's work on Heidegger, *L'Ontologie politique de Martin Heidegger* (Paris: Minuit, 1988), illustrates how Heidegger's philosophical positioning in the German intellectual field and the peculiar vocabulary associated with his philosophy can be analysed in relation to a major changes affecting German society before and during National socialism.

The topic of the next chapter is Bourdieu's and Eco's critical engagement with structuralism.

Chapter 5: The order and the Structure: Pierre Bourdieu, Umberto Eco, and Structuralism

'L'identité sociale se définit et s'affirme dans la différence.'[347]

5.1 Introduction

It is generally assumed that fashions are transient, ephemeral. Nevertheless, they often become representative of historical periods and characterize the way people think, and do things. Moreover, fashions never fade away completely. Often combined with new ideas, they resurface within new stylistic, intellectual, or artistic paradigms. Structuralism was often seen, in its heyday, as an example of methodological rigour, offering scholars the impression that disciplines in Arts and Humanities could claim a truly "scientific" knowledge. While some of the most prominent intellectual voices to emerge out of this period would soon turn against it to construct new theoretical claims, the intellectual appeal of structuralism is still very strong today. The promise to bring methodological rigour into fields such as literary studies - where the hermeneutical approach is traditionally dominant - has never completely faded. Even if for many academics structuralism is a thing of the past, some of its main ideas are still very much alive today, disguised under new names or conceptual labels.[348]

This chapter investigates how intellectuals elaborate their conceptual contributions by manipulating theories in a creative way.[349] It proposes to chart the

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[347] Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement* (Paris : Minuit, 1979), p.191.

[348] The resurgence of theoretical and methodological schemata within intellectual fields, even when these schemata are declared inaccurate and inappropriate by some of their detractors, is not only frequent but also something that underlies the functioning of intellectual fields themselves. Some elements of a theoretical paradigm can often reappear under new forms even when a theoretical paradigm is declared obsolete. On this point, see for instance the attempts made by Franco Moretti to introduce network theory into literary studies. Network theory, which is an empirical and quantitative method of analysis, bears many similarities with various forms of structuralist analysis. See Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005).

[349] Bourdieu's and Eco's intellectual engagement with structuralism is one possible interpretation of structuralism among many others. The aim of the chapter is not to assess structuralism as a theory or as a

importance of structuralism in Bourdieu's and Eco's intellectual itinerary by showing how structuralism has been relevant in the formation of their thought. As I shall argue, Bourdieu's and Eco's critical engagement with structuralism is a decisive factor in fashioning the direction of their theoretical and conceptual contributions. Furthermore, the chapter shows that in spite of their criticism of structuralism, Bourdieu and Eco never completely abandoned some of its salient ideas. This ambivalence offers a privileged angle from which to investigate what might be implied when two thinkers claim to be moving beyond a theory. In particular, I shall argue that Bourdieu's and Eco's intellectual engagement with structuralism might have implied not only a criticism, but also a recasting of structuralism within a new conceptual agenda. As pointed out, structuralism has been a renewing force in the Humanities during the 1960s. It influenced in a variety of ways the new theories that were soon to emerge out the critique of its limits and shortcomings. Thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Paul Ricoeur have all engaged, at some point, with the structuralist paradigm.[350]

The genesis of structuralism can be traced back to the first half of the 20th century, when Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure introduced the idea of structure in the *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916). Saussure viewed language as a system composed of many units functioning interdependently, and defining themselves in relation to a whole.[351] Before becoming a trademark in a number of disciplines ranging from anthropology to literary analysis and semiotics, the idea of structure was

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method, but it is to show how theories and methods are interpreted in such a way so as to contribute to the establishment of new theoretical models. In this sense, scholars often tend to simplify certain aspects of the theories they criticize in order to make a better case for the theories and conceptual models they promote. Some of the points of Bourdieu's and Eco's engagement with structuralism I discuss in this chapter should be seen in this light.

[350] See for instance Michel Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* (1966), Jacques Derrida's *L'écriture et la différence* (1967), Gilles Delueze's *Différence et répétition* (1968) and Paul Ricoeur's *Le conflit des interpretations* (1969). For a general introduction to the thought of these four and other French thinkers of the period see Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism: the Philosophy of Strucutralism and Post-Structuralism* (New York: Methuen, 1987); Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory* (Malden (MA): Blackwell, 1983); Vincent Descombes, *Le même et l'autre: Quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française (1933-1978)* (Paris: Minuit, 1979); Johnathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (1975) (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[351] While the idea of a wholeness composed of interdependent elements was to become one of the central motifs of structuralism, it is significant to note that Saussure employed the term system to convey this idea much more often than the term structure. See Jonathan Culler, *Saussure* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1976).Generally speaking, the word system and the word structure are used as complementary terms, the word system designating the presence of more than one structure.

symptomatic of a theoretical reorientation investing several disciplines. As Jonathan Culler points out: 'Saussure's theory of language is an exceptionally clear expression of formal strategies by which a whole series of disciplines, from physics to painting, transformed themselves in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and became modern'[352]. The notion of structure slowly became the centre-piece around which to organize a unifying scientific language for a number of disciplines concerned with the study of culture, language and literature, such as anthropology, semiotics and literary analysis. French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss was the first to import the model of structural phonology in a field other than linguistics. He was rapidly followed by scholars working in other disciplines, such as Michel Foucault (history and history of knowledge), Louis Althusser (Marxist philosophy), and Jacques Lacan (psychoanalysis).[353] The diffusion of the model of structural phonology was certainly helped by the importance of the social phenomenon of language (language is everywhere), its foundational character (a society could not possibly exist without some language) and by the increasing association between language and the notion of culture. As Levi-Strauss points out, language is 'un phénomène de groupe, il est constitutif du groupe, il n'existe que par le groupe, car le langage ne se modifie, ne se bouleverse pas à volonté'.[354]

In line with the idea of a collective dimension of language and culture, structuralist anthropology develops a method oriented towards the study of cultural phenomena which are often presented as objective, as opposed to more subjective ways of perceiving and experiencing the world. As Mondher Kilani argues, 'le structuralisme est d'abord une activité intellectuelle qui sépare le sujet de la science. Il évacue toute finalité subjective ou méta-sociale comme Dieu, l'histoire, la morale, l'homme, pour tenter d'accéder aux seules formes'.[355] As Kilani points out, structuralism's intellectual program contemplates form over content, recurrence over historical development. Accordingly, structuralism is heavily based on the assumption that social, cultural and symbolic practices function within a specific logic that can be inferred from a number of

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[352] Jonathan Culler, *Saussure*, p.115.

[353] Mondher Kilani, *Introduction à l'anthropologie* (Lausanne: Payot, 1992), p.280.

[354] Georges Charbonnier, *Entretiens avec Claude Levi-Strauss* (Paris : Julliard, 1992), pp.72-73.

[355] Mondher Kilani, *Introduction à l'anthropologie*, p.281.

objective variables. Structures are often presented, be in anthropology, semiology or literature, as located under the effervescence of immediate social activity, and below the surface of individual awareness. On this very ground, the understanding of the notion of structure is not incompatible with the notion of the unconscious, inasmuch as both notions refer to something that, dwelling below the surface of human activity, nonetheless informs its very meaning . As Levi-Strauss points out:

> L'activité inconsciente de l'esprit consiste à imposer des formes à un contenu, et si ces formes sont fondamentalement les mêmes pour tous les esprits, anciens et modernes, primitifs et civilisés (…) il faut et il suffit d'atteindre la structure inconsciente, sous-jacente à chaque institution ou à chaque coutume, pour obtenir un principe d'interprétation valide pour d'autres institutions et d'autres coutumes.[356]

As this passage suggests, both notions of structure and of the unconscious refer to a level of reality that resists historical development and persists beyond cultural and individual difference.[357]

5.2 Eco and structuralism: the background

In the introductory section of this chapter, I have pointed out how structuralism provides an explanatory framework accounting for how cultural practices function within the larger whole of societies. Within this explanatory framework, the notion of structure is the keyword around which to organise and describe the real. In what follows, I shall investigate the importance of structuralism within the early developments of Eco's intellectual itinerary. As Eco himself acknowledges, the critical engagement with structuralism constitutes one of the main intellectual events of his career. In several works, such as *La struttura assente* (1968) and *Il problema estetico in Tommaso d'Aquino* (1970) Eco explicitly engages with structuralism. Eco's critical engagement with structuralism is also related to the development of the discipline of semiotics. As one of the major contributors in the development of semiotics, Eco

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[356] Claude Levi-Strauss. *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris: Plon, 1958), p. 28. Quoted in Mondher Kilani, *Introduction à l'anthropologie*, p.285.

[357] See for instance Sigmund Freud. *The Unconscious* (London: Penguins, 2005).

engaged with structuralism as a necessary step in the process of laying the institutional bases of the discipline.[358]

By 1962, year of the publication of *Opera aperta*, Eco had already established contacts with some of some of the key exponents of the French journal *Tel Quel*, who offered to translate and publish a two-part essay on Joyce, originally included in *Opera aperta* and that Eco would subsequently publish a separate volume as *Le poetiche di Joyce* (1966).[359] Eco's essay on Joyce addresses the way in which artistic expression, by thematizing the dialectic between order and disorder, operates on the symbolic borderline between chaos and system. [360] The essay illustrates how the relationship between order and disorder, while being a recurrent concern for Joyce, is also at the origin of a creative tension that the Irish writer brings to a new and more expressive level with each major work. Through the dialectic between order and disorder, and between unity and multiplicity, Eco explores literary and philosophical ways of engaging with the idea of order, while showing an intense fascination with possible ways of accounting for the dissolution, and the internal destruction, of this order. The essay on Joyce indicates how Eco was, on the one hand, organising his intellectual agenda around the limits of the notion of order. On the other hand, he was also drawn towards ideas, theories, and creative approaches that explicitly stated the implausibility of this notion. In fact, as Eco argues in the introduction to the first edition of *Opera aperta*.

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[358] As Culler points out, '(t)he establishment of a new discipline within the system of academic research is not a frequent event. Generally new arrivals explicitly identify themselves as subdivisions of old disciplines and simply undertake to organise more rationally and to pursue more vigorously an existing line of research. The emergence of a discipline like semiotics, however, cannot be guaranteed to leave other disciplines unaffected'. In Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.22.

[359] Umberto Eco, *Le poetiche di Joyce* (Milan: Bompiani, 1966) Notwithstanding Eco's early involvement with French intellectual milieus, *Opera aperta* was principally engaging with the specific situation of Italian culture of the period. As De Lauretis point outs: 'Eco ci tiene a far notare la sua diversa formazione pre-semiotica, ed ha ragione, perché solo tenendola presente si può da un lato apprezzare la portata del suo progetto critico e del suo lavoro – l'avere "aperto" la cultura italiana ad altri sistemi di pensiero e, cosa più importante, l'averne dato una lettura critica in base ad essi-; e dall'altro vedere le inevitabili limitazioni, i punti ciechi, del suo stesso sistema in prospettiva storica, e quindi utlizzarlo effettivamente come mezzo di conoscenza'. In Teresa de Lauretis, *Umberto Eco* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1981), p.25.

[360] Lubomir Dolezel identifies in the tension between open work and closed work one of the main themes of Eco's early works. See Lubomir Dolezel, 'The Themata of Eco's Semiotics of Literature' in *Reading Eco. An Anthology*, ed. by Rocco Capozzi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) pp.111-12.

(*Opera aperta*) propone una indagine di vari momenti in cui l'arte contemporanea si trova a fare i conti col Disordine. Che non è il disordine cieco e insanabile, lo scacco di ogni possibilità ordinatrice, ma il disordine fecondo di cui la cultura moderna ci ha mostrato la positività; la rottura di un Ordine tradizionale, che l'uomo occidentale credeva immutabile e definitivo e identificava con la struttura oggettiva del mondo.[361]

As this passage illustrates, Eco makes an important distinction between a disorder that precludes any forms of harmony, and a positive and productive disorder. The latter is, precisely, the kind of disorder Eco is determined to describe with the notion of the open work. It follows that, from a methodological perspective 'si tratta di elaborare modelli di rapporti in cui l'ambiguità trovi una giustificazione e acquisti un valore positivo'[362]. As Sanjin Park notes, often critics have emphasized the fact that 'from the beginning, Eco has generally shown a nostalgia for the ordered world of the Middle-Ages', particularly in the long essay on Joyce.[363] Eco will return to the Middle-Ages with *Il Nome della Rosa* as well as in some of the essays devoted to popular culture published in *Faith in Fakes* (1986).[364] According to Park, in spite of advocating the philosophy of the open work, Eco maintains an on-going commitment with the notions of order and stability. So much so that, when discussing how critics examine Eco's 'nostalgia for the ordered world of the Middle-Ages', Park argues that '(w)hat matters here, however, is the nature of Eco's interest in an ultimate order or structuralist inclination'.[365]

In spite of Eco's early involvement with French intellectual milieus, it was not until a relatively late stage in the composition of *Opera aperta* that Eco got introduced to structuralism by to François Wahl, who at the time was preparing the French translation of *Opera aperta* well in advance of its publication in Italy.[366] Wahl suggested

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[361] Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta* (1962), 7th edn (Milan: Bompiani, 2006), p.2.

[362] Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta*, p. 3.

[363] Sangjin Park, 'Reconsidering the Implications of the "Pre-Semiotic" Writings in Umberto Eco', in *Illuminating Eco. On the Boundaries of Interpretation*, ed. by Charlotte Ross, Rochelle Sibley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp.123-137.

[364] See for instance the two consecutive essay 'Dreaming the Middle-Ages' and 'Living in the New Middle-Ages' in Umberto Eco *Faith in Fakes* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1986), pp. 61-87.

[365] Sangjin Park, 'Reconsidering the Implications of the "Pre-Semiotic" Writings in Umberto Eco', p.131.

[366] '(Wahl) mi chiese di tradurre il libro prima ancora che fosse apparso in Italia. Così la traduzione iniziò subito, ma prese tre anni e fu rifatta tre volte, con Wahl che la seguiva riga per riga, anzi per ogni riga mi

that Eco should read some of the structuralist literature that was available in France. This suggestion turned out to be vital. In fact, as As Eco points out: 'sollecitato da Wahl mi misi a studiare questi "strutturalisti" (…) ed ebbi tre shock, tutti più o meno intorno al 1963. La *Pensée sauvage* di Levi-Strauss, i saggi di Jakobson pubblicati da Minuit e i formalisti russi…'(p.viii).[367] Five years after this 'shocking' encounter, Eco dedicates a long section of *La struttura assente* (1968) to the development of a criticism of structuralism.[368]. Eco's discussion of structuralism in *La struttura assente* proceeds from a distinction between methodological and ontological structuralism. As Eco argues, the notion of structure can be conceptualised in two ways. In the first case, a structure operates as an intellectual instrument employed to approach a given reality by means of an analytical framework. However, as Eco points out, Levi-Strauss develops a second understanding of structuralism, which informs the term structure with an ontological meaning. While in the first instance the notion of structure designates an interpretative grid that one applies on reality, in the second case structures become constitutive of reality itself. As Eco points out, the second case represents an example of ontological structuralism. According to Eco, ontological structuralism posits the existence of structures that, because inscribed in reality, are also *by necessity* antecedent to its contingent manifestations.

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mandava una lettera di tre pagine folta di questioni, oppure io andavo a Parigi a discutere, e andò avanti così sino al 1965. Fu un'esperienza preziosa in vari sensi'. Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta* (1962), 7th edn (Milan: Bompiani, 2006), p.vii. François Wahl played a decisive role in the promotion of structuralism in France. Elisabeth Roudinesco, in her biography of Lacan points out how 'Wahl, who edited several different series, really ran the human sciences section at Seuil until 1989 and so contributed to the rise of French structuralism in the sixties'. *Elisabeth Roudinesco, Jacques Lacan. An Outline of a Life and a History of a System of Thought* (Cambridge: Polity press, 1999), p. 323.

[367] Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta*, p.viii. Eco also writes, in 1963, two articles entitled 'Per una indagine sulla situazione culturale' and 'Modelli descrittivi e interpretazione storica' , in which he urges Italian left intellectuals criticizes, among other things, the cultural politics of the Italian left to take stock of the importance of structuralist methodologies. These two articles unleash a series of polemic responses, one of which, interestingly, is an article in two-parts signed by Louis Althusser cautioning against the danger of combining Marxism with structuralism. In Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta*, p. xviii.

[368] At that moment, Eco also discovers the first signs of post-structuralist thought in the works of Derrida and Michel Foucault: 'le opere che stavano uscendo di Derrida e Foucault (Deleuze non aveva ancora pubblicato Différence et répétition) mi spingevano ad identificare la nascita di un post-strutturalismo che conduceva a una anti-ontologia proprio sulla base delle contraddizioni dell'ontologia strutturalista (…) Scrivevo sull'onda di letture fresche e di discussioni in atto: non elaboravo uno studio critico; intervenivo nel vivo di un dibattito'. In Umberto Eco, *La struttura assente. La ricerca semiotica e il metodo strutturale,* 6th edition (1968) (Milan: Bompiani, 2004), p.v.

Given that structural models can be transposed to different domains of experience there must be a meta-code, Eco suggests, allowing the occurrence of such permutations:

> Per consentire queste trasformazioni, la trasposizione di modelli da sistema a sistema, occorre una garanzia dell'operazione, data dalla elaborazione di un sistema di sistemi. In altri termini, se esiste un sistema di regole che permettono l'articolarsi di una lingua (codice linguistico) e un sistema di regole che permettono l'articolarsi degli scambi di parentela come modi della comunicazione (codice della parentela), deve esistere un sistema di regole che prescrive l'equivalenza tra il segno linguistico e il segno parentale, stabilendone l'equivalenza formale, il medesimo valore posizionale dei segni, termine a termine; e questo sistema sarà quello che, usando un termine non impiegato dal nostro autore, chiameremo *metacodice*, nel senso che è un codice che permette di definire e nominare altri codici sottoposti.[369]

In contrast to ontological structuralism, in methodological structuralism, as pointed out, structures come to be seen as intellectual instruments rather than as constitutive of reality. In *La struttura assente* Eco illustrates this understanding of methodological structuralism within the context of avant-garde art. As pointed out in the previous chapters, Eco considers that avant-garde art participates, along with other disciplines, in addressing the indeterminacy and open-endedness of meaning that informs modern societies. In this context, stability is a possibility but not a *de facto* reality. As I illustrated in chapter three, Eco's understanding of avant-garde art (and, more generally, of culture) relies on the dialectic between indeterminacy and stability. While Eco thematizes this dialectic in *Opera aperta* (1962), in *La struttura assente* he further elaborates it through a thoroughly informed discussion of Levi-Strauss' structuralism. Against such backdrop, Eco introduces a further important distinction between structuralism and seriality. As Eco envisages it, the concept of seriality revolves around the presence of artistic or compositional techniques offering the freedom to rearrange existing elements outside the prescription of norms. This approach to artistic creation is

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[369] Umberto Eco, *La struttura assente*, p. 289.

illustrated by, among others, composer Pierre Boulez. As Eco points out, Boulez's serial music relies precisely on a musical system that can be rearranged and interpreted by the musician's own sensitivity. [370]

Since openness and indeterminacy manifest themselves by taking particular forms, such forms might also be apprehended as structures; but this can only be the case if, as Eco maintains, structures are in turn defined as open and indeterminate. This is how Eco views the fundamental dialectic between the indeterminacy of seriality and the determinacy of structures.

> Pensiero seriale come produzione di una struttura aperta e polivalente: nella musica come nella pittura, nel romanzo come nella poesia e nel teatro. Ma la stessa nozione di opera aperta, nel momento in cui viene tradotta (ragionevolmente, anche se rischiosamente, come 'struttura aperta') porta con sé un problema: gli strumenti che lo strutturalismo ci offre per analizzare una struttura aperta, possono coesistere con la nozione di polivalenza e di serialità? Cioè, è possibile pensare strutturalmente la serie? Vi è omogeneità tra pensiero strutturale e pensiero seriale?[371]

The tension between the finitude of structures, and the indeterminacy of creative solutions stemming from serial compositions, is part of a strategic argument Eco employs in order to define the shortcomings of ontological structuralism. In fact for Eco ontological structuralism blurs the dialectic between the singularity of the creative project, and the structures whereby artistic activity participates to a general societal meaning. Taken to it extreme consequences, ontological structuralism implies a dissolution of the dialectic between subject and object (i.e. between the subject that perceives the world and the world perceived as object). Subliminal mental structures and universal structures are made to coincide. As de Lauretis points out:

> Nel momento in cui Levi-Strauss si pone il problema epistemologico e si pone il prolema fra soggetto e oggetto, ricercatore e fenomeno, egli postula una identità di

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[370] Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta*, p.304.

[371] Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta*, p. 304.

struttura fra pensiero e mondo che sarà poi solo spiegabile con la nozione di una Ur-

struttura primaria costituita dai meccanismi universali della mente umana.[372]

On the other hand, methodological structuralism, as Eco suggests, can be very useful when examining contemporary artistic solutions, precisely because it provides a framework for conceptualising difference, unexpectedness and open-endedness. As Michael Caesar points out 'the values of flexibility, openness and experimentation (…) must be balanced against the urgent need to construct a system that is as complete and has as much explanatory power as possible'.[373]

5.3 Eco's comparison between scholasticism and structuralism

In a moment of his intellectual itinerary (the end of the 60s and beginning of the 70s) in which he gradually gives a more systematic elaboration to his ideas, Eco republishes *Il problema estetico in San Tommaso* (1956), his master thesis and his first relevant published work. In the new edition, Eco proposes a seemingly capricious comparison between scholasticism and structuralism. In spite of its more modest proportions (compared to the lengthy discussion of structuralism developed in La *struttura assente*), this comparison is symptomatic of the efforts whereby Eco reinvents one of his earliest intellectual engagement within a new critical paradigm. In spite of the fact that, as said, the comparison between scholasticism and structuralism is much less elaborate than the discussion of structuralism in *La struttura assente*, it nonetheless illustrates particularly well how intellectual creativity proceeds from the unexpected combination of different frameworks.[374]

In *Il problema estetico in San Tommaso* (1956) Eco proposes to chart Thomas Aquinas' conception of beauty. Contrary to certain narrow views maintaining that beauty became a relevant topic only in the Renaissance and not before, Eco demonstrates that defining beauty was a central concern for the medieval philosopher.[375]As Eco shows, the scholastic philosopher conceives of the experience of

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[372] Teresa de Lauretis, *Umberto Eco*, p.30.

[373] Michael Caesar, *Umberto Eco, Philosophy, Semiotics and the Work of Fiction*, p.52.

[374] See Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (1964) (London: Picador, 1977).

[375] As Eco notes, the culture of the Middle-Ages is 'ricca di documenti che ci mostrano come esistesse una attenzione verso il bello sensibile, la bellezza delle cose di natura e degli oggetti d'arte (…) Paradossalement non è il medioevo che non aveva un'estetica: è il mondo moderno che ne ha una troppo

beauty as a concrete realization of a metaphysical order; according to this view, reality proceeds from this metaphysical order to the realm of direct experience and manifests itself through a number of meaningful categories that are hierarchically ordered as a system. When Eco republishes the book in 1970 as *Il problema estetico in Tommaso d'Aquino*, he adds a concluding section presenting a comparison between scholasticism and structuralism. In the wake of his exhaustive analysis of the place that beauty holds among the concerns of the medieval philosopher, Eco argues that:

> Sarebbe interessante rileggere tutta la speculazione scolastica alla luce della sensibilità strutturale: l'operazione non sarebbe inutile, dato che il pensiero scolastico consentirebbe assai bene di ridurre i vari aspetti della realtà, che pretende di definire, a modelli esplicativi. In realtà il pensiero scolastico ad altro non ha mai preteso se non a risolvere la realtà in modelli esplicativi, salvo la persuasione che questi modelli non fossero costruzione dell'intelligenza ma aspetti della realtà. (p.259)

The idea of 'ridurre i vari aspetti della realtà (…) a modelli esplicativi' is what allows Eco to envisage a comparative frame within which to discuss scholasticism and structuralism. Eco points out how both positions are inclined to reduce the multiplicity of the real to the intelligibility of general models. Hence, Eco posits the presence of formal strategies, common to scholasticism and structuralism, whereby experience and subjectivity are explained as manifesting an underlying system of interdependent categories. Moreover, Eco points out how both systems of thought develop a method of enquiry that strongly relies on a synchronic, rather than a diachronic, logic:[376]

> Lo strutturalismo trova non poche ascendenze nella forma mentis scolastica: è scolastica la pretesa strutturalista al discorso interdisciplinare, a una logica universale,

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angusta. Questo almeno per rispondere alle diffidenze della critica idealistica' in Umberto Eco, *Il problema estetico in Tommaso d'Aquino* (1970)(Milan: Bompiani, 1998), p.22. Here Eco is also making a case against Benedetto Croce, for whom'i problemi estetici non formavano un vero e proprio ogetto di interessamento, né per il medioevo in generale, né in particolar per San Tommaso (…)', in Umberto Eco, *Il problema estetico in Tommaso d'Aquino*, p.15. Page numbers in the text in the next paragraphs refer to this edition.

[376] See for instance Teresa de Lauretis, *Umberto Eco*, p.13 : 'Si vedrà più avanti come la critica di Eco allo strutturalismo si fondi su questa stessa obiezione a "un'estetica del sincronico"; anche il modello strutturalista è incapace di fare "i conti" con il momento diacronico, e quindi con la comunicazione in genere e quella artistica in special modo'.

alla riduzione di tutte le scienze umane a una scienza leader (che per lo strutturalismo

è la linguistica), di cui le altre siano 'ancillae'. (p.258)

In further elaborating his argument, Eco suggests that there are three areas where scholasticism and structuralism converge. Firstly, both scholasticism and structuralism employ a single conceptual vocabulary to apprehend different objects of knowledge, thus favouring the idea that diversity and contingency can be articulated within a single representational model. Eco argues that scholasticism relies on explanations that can easily subsume heterogeneous phenomena within a single explanatory frame. Similarly, structuralism addresses different domains of knowledge (from the study of language to the study of culture and social practices) by transposing the same methodological principles into these different domains. Secondly, both philosophical positions aim at universalizing knowledge by trying to identify invariables in the reality they investigate. Thirdly, both theories claim the existence of one area of knowledge (in the case of scholasticism theology, and in the case of structuralism linguistics) whose conceptual language should serve as a model for all other disciplines.

As pointed out earlier, Eco suggests that scholasticism and structuralism focus on the synchronic as opposed to the diachronic. Consequently, both systems tend to overshadow the historical development of those realities they scrutinize. As Eco suggests 'il pensiero medievale sviluppa sino alla sottigliezza le possibilità di un'analisi sincronica di una struttura generalissima delle cose, ultimo comun denominatore di ogni altro fenomeno' (p.259). For Eco this 'struttura generalissima delle cose' that defines the intellectual project of scholasticism does not necessarily make structuralism its equivalent. However, Eco argues that 'non è del tutto chiaro sino a qual punto oggi lo strutturalismo rifiuti di qualificare ontologicamente i modelli conoscitivi che maneggia'(260). In other words, Eco suggest that structuralism might in fact presuppose the presence of an underlying structure of reality upon which all knowledge would depend. While scholasticism subscribes unambiguously to the idea of a universalistic logic, the same cannot be said for structuralism. As Eco points out, when structuralism refers to such things as the 'universali del linguaggio', it is not clear whether what is meant is some kind of physical and cerebral structures existing beyond the historical development of languages and cultures (p.260).

While, according to Eco, a "medieval" reading of structuralism can highlight 'le tendenza più pericolose' of the structuralist paradigm, re-reading scholasticism from a structuralist point of view reveals that scholasticism, by defining reality as the combination of invariable elements (*substantia*), adopts representational models which are similar to those of modern sciences such as chemistry, biology, or physics (p.260). In fact, these scientific disciplines conceive of reality as the aggregation of elements whose combination gives rise to particular substances that can be catalogued (p.262). In light of the cross-examination of scholasticism and strucutrualism, Eco suggests how the synchronic methodologies employed by scholasticism and structuralism might lead one to ignore possible contradictions undermining the possibility of conceptualising order and stability. When approaching culture diachronically, notes Eco, the presence of contradictions is inevitable; Eco thinks that 'la riduzione sincronica, indispensabile per parlare del campo di eventi, ha impoverito gli eventi stessi e gli ha opportunamente "falsificati"' (p.263). In order to return to the complexity and manifold texture of social, cultural and esthetical phenomena, Eco believes in the importance of considering history as a decisive factor informing the identity as well as the meaning of all phenomena.

Eco's criticism of structuralism gravitates around the idea that structuralism not only reduces the multiplicity of the real to uniform explanatory models but that, as said, its ontological version might take these models to be constitutive of the reality they describe. By pointing out how scholasticism identifies an underlying order of things below the surface of experience, Eco warns against possible *impasses* that would result if structuralism were to adopt *ipso facto* such views. As Eco puts it:

> Oggi le scienze umane lavorano su strutture formali e usano, criticamente e non
>
> acriticamente come il pensatore medievale, una metodologia del sincronico. Allora,
>
> rileggere Tommaso potrà significare a un tempo individuare degli strumenti
>
> adoperabili e individuare delle aporie già patite per evitare di patirle di nuovo. (p.258)

As this passage shows, Eco approaches scholasticism and structuralism less from the point of view of their object than from that of the underlying assumptions that guide their representations of reality. However, in spite of the similarities outlined in these paragraphs, it should also be noted that Eco identifies important distinctions between the two systems of thought. In particular, he argues that structuralism is relatively open

to the idea that the different units constituting structures might be interchangeable.[377] Scholasticism is much more essentialist on this point, and therefore much less inclined to accept this idea of interchangeability. As Eco observes:

> Nella visione strutturalista odierna la struttura come sistema mette in tensione valenze *vuote*, la cui individualità si definisce solo in opposizione con le altre valenze (e proprio per questo diventa modello astratto applicabile interdisciplinarmente a vari fenomeni); mentre la struttura 'culturale' di Tommaso mette in tensione elementi *pieni*, forme sostanziali. Quindi Tommaso non era un precursore dello strutturalismo. Ma l'analogia non è *solo* brillante, perché mostra come di fronte a un problema particolare (la definizione del prodotto di cultura) il filosofo lavorasse inventando (inventando, non applicando) un modello esplicativo che, svuotato del suo contenuto, è il modello strutturale, è cioè la possibilità di pensare un composto come sistema di valenze. (p.261)

As illustrated by the first part of this chapter, between the first edition of *Il problema estetico in San Tommaso* of 1956 and the second edition of 1970 (*Il problema estetico in Tommaso d' Aquino*), Eco develops his criticism of structuralism in various ways. As pointed out in this section, the comparison between scholasticism and structuralism allows Eco to creatively recast his early interest for medieval philosophy in a subsequent phase of his intellectual itinerary. Eco's comparison between scholasticism and structuralism is certainly less substantial than the criticism of structuralism he develops in *La struttura essente*. However, my intention was to illustrate that intellectuals often employ creative strategies in order to address prominent theories within the intellectual field. In the case of Eco's comparison of scholasticism and structuralism, I have underlined the way in which Eco also succeeds in updating his very early interest for Thomas Aquinas within the frame of a contemporary debate on the importance of structuralism.

In order to fully develop his theoretical view of interpretation, Eco had to define the shortcomings of structuralism. Eco's view of ontological structuralism as described

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[377] One of the works that illustrates particularly well this is Jean Baudrillard's *Le système des objects* (1968)

in the previous sections would also lead him to insist on structuralism's tendency to overshadow the creative potentials of readers. As he notes in the introduction to *Lector in fabula* (1979):

> Ma se la scoperta dei metodi strutturali mi apriva una strada, me ne chiudeva un'altra. Infatti era dogma corrente, in quella fase della vicenda strutturalista, che un testo andasse studiato nella sua struttura oggettiva, quale appariva nella propria superficie significante. L'intervento interpretativo del destinatario era messo in ombra, quando non era decisamente espunto come impurità metodologica.[378]

Some years after he elaborates a thorough criticism of structuralism in the 1960s, Eco reminds his readers of the importance that such engagement took for in his intellectual itinerary. This stands as a further proof of the centrality of structuralism in the development of his intellectual self-concept.[379]

5.4 Bourdieu and structuralism: an ambivalent relationship

On a general level, Eco's engagement with structuralism attests to the importance that interactions between intellectuals and particular theories have in the expression of intellectual creativity. However different the circumstances might be, the intellectual engagement with structuralism also plays a very important part in Bourdieu's intellectual itinerary. As David Swartz note, 'Bourdieu forges his concepts as a corrective to opposing viewpoints. His work can be read as an ongoing polemic against positivism, empiricism, structuralism, existentialism, and grand theory.'[380] Bourdieu, as I will illustrate, forges his own conceptual approach around the idea of defining the limits of objectivism (structuralism being a particular instance of objectivism) and subjectivism. After explaining what Bourdieu means by objectivist and subjectivist modes of knowledge, I will show how Bourdieu strategically employs these categories in order to overcome these positions by means of a conceptual synthesis. As pointed out

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[378] Umberto Eco, *Lector in Fabula. La cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi* (1979), 7th edition (Milan: Bompiani, 2000), pp.5-6.

[379] The notion of intellectual self-concept is developed by Neil Gross in *Richard Rorty. The Making of an American Philosopher* (Chicago: The Univeristy of Chicago Press, 2008). See especially the chapter 'The Theory of Intellectual Self-Concept', pp. 234-277.

[380] David Swartz, *Culture and Power. The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p.5.

in the previous chapters, Bourdieu proposes an approach of the social world focusing on the dialectical interaction between individuals and social structures.

However, even if Bourdieu's approach highlights structuralism's tendency to obliterate individuals' creativity, Bourdieu still maintains, throughout his career, an underlying commitment with structuralism. As I will point out, Bourdieu frequently combines a substantial critique of structuralism with the employment of structuralist *topoi*. In works such as *La distinction* (1979), Bourdieu represents society as an all-encompassing system of signs which define themselves interdependently; this idea, as I pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, defines the core of structuralist theory. I will illustrate this point by analysing a chapter of *La distinction* in which Bourdieu discusses the social phenomenon of life-styles and the way in which life-styles reflect not only a social condition but also a way to think and conceive the world. If Bourdieu's criticism of structuralism allows him to present his theoretical position as particularly attractive, such a strategy does not hinder him to employ a structuralist approach in a in a number of his writings, in particular at the very beginning of his career. The next section will further develop this point by considering 'La maison ou le monde renversé' (1969), one of Bourdieu's early essays. The essay, in which Bourdieu applies structuralist methodology, was produced before the first substantial presentation of Bourdieu's theoretical approach in *Esquisse pour une théorie de la pratique* (1972). [381]

5.5 Bourdieu's structuralist house

'La maison ou le monde renversé' will allow me to clearly locate a structuralist Bourdieu in a relatively early stage of his intellectual itinerary. I will then be able to put this early text in relation to other texts by Bourdieu, in particular those in which he crafts his own criticism of structuralism. 'La maison ou le monde renversé' first appeared in *Echanges et communications. Mélanges offerts à Claude Levi-Strauss* (Mouton: 1969); it was republished, along with two other texts, as *Trois etudes d'éthnologie kabyle* in *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* in 1972. [382] In 'La maison

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[381] In 'La maison ou le monde renversé' Bourdieu takes Levi-Strauss' structuralism as a model. Claude Levi-Strauss is the most prominent representative of structuralist anthropology.

[382] Bourdieu elaborates relatively early in his career a full-fledged conceptual system. Raymond Aron, one of the first to fully recognize Bourdieu's potential as a scholar, warned him against possible problems arising from having such a "premature" conceptual system: 'Vous êtes comme Sartre, vous avez un

ou le monde renversé' Bourdieu analyses the way in which the organisation of the space within a typical Kabylian house reflects the presence of social order. As Bourdieu suggests, the Kabylian house can be conceived as a micro-society. Beyond the purely functional organisation, the domestic pace reproduces symbolic divisions and organisational principles defining traditional Algerian society. The interior of the Kabylian house, as Bourdieu illustrates, is arranged in such a way as to render meaningful a set of binary oppositions such as masculine and feminine, clarity and darkness, day and night, outside and inside. According to Bourdieu, the most fundamental of these divisions is that between masculine and feminine:

> Est sans doute une des plus simples et des plus puissantes que puisse utiliser un système mythico-rituel puisqu'elle ne peut opposer sans unir simultanément, tout en étant capable d'intégrer dans un ordre unique un nombre infini de données, par la simple application indéfiniment réitérée du même principe de division. [383]

Further on, Bourdieu points out how the same attribute, such as /light/, can signify either /masculine/ or /feminine/ but that, in all cases, /masculine/ and /feminine/ remain strictly separate. In fact, while external light signifies /masculinity/, internal light, via the association with domesticity, signifies /femininity/. Moreover, Bourdieu's analysis shows how the domestic space of the Kabylian house participates in a larger symbolic system whereby the domestic sphere, associated with femininity and privacy, opposes the outdoor environment, traditionally associated with masculinity and with social activity:

> Microcosme organisé selon les mêmes oppositions et les mêmes homologies qui ordonnent tout l'univers, la maison entretient une relations d'homologie avec le reste de l'univers; mais, d'un autre point de vue, le monde de la maison pris dans son ensemble est avec le reste du monde dans une relation d'opposition dont les principes

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système de concepts trop tôt' In Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* (Paris : Raison d'agir, 2004) p. 48.

[383] Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* précédé de *Trois études d'ethnologie kabyle* (1972), 2nd edn (Paris: Seuil, 2000), p71. Page numbers in the next paragraphs in the text refer to this edition.

ne sont autres que ceux qui organisent tant l'espace intérieur de la maison que le reste

du monde et, plus généralement, tous les domaines de l'existence. (p.71)

The way in which Bourdieu describes the kabylian house In 'La maison ou le monde renversé' indicates that Bourdieu uses the structuralist method and approach almost *à la lettre*. Against this backdrop, henceforth I will consider examples which express a less literal application of the structuralist method. In some works, for instance, Bourdieu recurrently employs the notion of structure without explicitly subscribing to the structuralist method. Or, in other cases, some of Bourdieu's texts might be informed by a kind of structuralist method without any direct acknowledgement of it.

5.6 Bourdieu's critique of structuralism

During the 60s Bourdieu had gained attention for his ethnographic work in Algeria. At the time, structuralism was well established as one of most innovative theoretical paradigms in the French intellectual world, especially thanks to Claude Levi-Strauss. As Louis Pinto points out, Bourdieu's early ethnographic experience has been particularly important in defining his early intellectual itinerary:

In turning to ethnology at the end of the 1950s, the young philosopher Bourdieu could have easily kept up the illusion of scholarly universalism, while accumulating the external trappings of academic excellence. His work on Kabylian society would have allowed him to expect scientific recognition, above all from the ruling authorities in the world of anthropology. Here his study of the idea of the 'home'(examining the homologies between different regions of space, domestic space and the body) might be considered exemplary as it both made use of recent structuralist theory, and drew up a coherent program for further investigation.[384]

However, Bourdieu was soon to invest his own ethnographic experience into a questioning of structuralism and of other intellectual postures enjoying relevance in the social sciences and in philosophy. Bourdieu's intellectual project, as Pinto argues, aims much further than the 'respectful subversions performed by some individuals of the same generation'[385]. As Pinto indicates, Bourdieu's theoretical propositions at the time

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[384] Louis Pinto, 'Theory in Practice', in Richard Shusterman, *Bourdieu. A Critical Reader* (Malden MA: Blackwell), 94-113, p.97.

[385] Louis Pinto, 'Theory in Practice', p.95.

of *Esquisse pour une théorie de la pratique* reveal an ambition to change not only the way philosophical problems are formulated, but also the way in which the label "theoretical problem" should be understood by sociologists, anthropologists and philosophers. Certainly, the strength of Bourdieu's position was due to his capacity to be at the forefront of theoretical debates: as such, he was able to capitalize his fieldwork experience as an ethnologist in Algeria, which gave a him a potential advantage over those intellectuals of his generation that had a more orthodox intellectual formation and a more traditional approach to philosophical problems. As Pinto notes:

> Pierre Bourdieu's enterprise seemed to strike right at the heart of philosophy itself. It not only implied a confrontation with a concrete 'terrain' at a time when writers at the forefront of philosophy were either proposing other sort of texts for examination, or were simply looking at canonical texts in a different manner, but it also adjourned *sine die* the philosophical discourse of transcendence by means of which any product which was labelled a theoretical text would normally have been received.[386]

In spite of his early commitment to the structuralist method, Bourdieu's criticism of structuralism is a sort of theoretical *topos* allowing him to present his own approach as a direct response to the limitations and the impasses inherent in the structuralism method. As I will illustrate in the following sections, Bourdieu inaugurates a thorough criticism of structuralism in 1972, the date of publication of *Esquisse pour une théorie de la pratique* .[387]From *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* onwards, Bourdieu is very much concerned with thematizing the difference between his sociological approach and what he refers to as the objectivist approach, a category under which he subsumes theoretical schools such as Marxism and structuralism. While Bourdieu strongly opposes the objectivist approach of Levi- Strauss or Althusser, he is also a fervent critic of subjectivist approaches giving exaggerated credit to the idea of the rational individual.

The argumentative strategies Bourdieu employs to conceptualize his approach rely on the idea of that the intellectual field is divided by a very important fracture between objectivist approaches on the one hand, and subjectivist ones on the other.

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[386] Louis Pinto, 'Theory in Practice', p.95-96.

[387] For this reason, the publication of *Esquisse pour une théorie de la pratique* can be regarded as an important event in Bourdieu's intellectual itinerary.

Bourdieu's approach is best exemplified by what he calls the theory of practice. Bourdieu theory of practice, as he presents it in *Esquisse pour une théorie de la pratique*, offers the first thorough and systematic discussion of the concept of habitus and of the way in which the habitus, as a conceptual tool, provides an alternative to both objectivism and subjectivism.[388]As a corollary of his criticism of structuralism, Bourdieu also questions the way in which scholarly literature represent the figure of the ethnologist as an external agent to the culture he/she studies. Bourdieu questions the tendency to represent the ethnologist as a spectator who stands outside of the experience he or she describes. Bourdieu's critical target is, as he puts it, the 'spectateur impartial' (p.229).

The critique of objectivism, as conducted by Bourdieu, is a critique of the supposedly externality of the researcher vis-à-vis his or her research object. It is also, more generally, a critique of the possibility to acquire a view of reality from which to claim impartiality. According Bourdieu, anyone wishing to acquire any kind of scientific knowledge should start by questioning common-sense knowledge. Following French epistemologists like Gaston Bachelard and Georges Canguilhem, Bourdieu thinks that there is something about ordinary common-sense that hampers the way to scientific knowledge.[389] Hence, he suggests two ways to break from the common-sense knowledge of the social world. One way consists in adopting an intellectual posture allowing for the establishment of a conceptual distance; however, as Bourdieu maintains, while the deontology of critical distance prevents, in principle, from indulging into naïvely subjective judgments, it also creates a discrepancy between the logic that informs the world as experienced by individuals, and the representation of the world resulting from the disciplinary frame scholars apply on social reality.[390]In order to

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[388] On this point see for instance Deborah Reed-Danahay. *Locating Bourdieu* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 10.

[389] On this point see Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Chamboredon, and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Le métier de sociologue* (1968), 4th edn (La Haye: Mouton, 1983), particularly in reference to the notion of *rupture épistémologique* (epistemological break).

[390] See the following passage: ' je crois que j'étais guidé par une sorte de sens théorique, mais aussi et peut-être avant tout par le refus, assez viscéral, de la posture éthique qu'impliquait l'anthropologie structuraliste, du rapport hautain et lointain qui s'instaurait entre le savant et son objet, c'est-à-dire les simples profanes, à la faveur de la théorie de la pratique, explicite chez les althusseriens, qui faisaient de l'agent un simple support (Träger) de la structure (la notion d'inconscient remplissant la mêmes fonction chez Levi-Strauss).'. In Pierre Bourdieu, 'Filedwork in Philosophy', in Pierre Bourdieu, *Choses dites* (Paris: Minuit, 1987), pp. 13-46, p.31.

avoid such a representational dilemma, Bourdieu proposes a double epistemological break that he describes as follow:

> C'est dire que l'anthropologie ne doit pas seulement rompre avec l'expérience indigène, et la représentation indigène de cette expérience; par une seconde rupture, il lui faut mettre en question les présupposés inhérents à la position d'observateur étranger qui, préoccupé d'*interpréter* des pratiques, incline à importer dans l'objet les principes de sa relation à l'objet, comme en témoigne le privilège qu'il accorde aux fonctions de communication et de connaissance (…). (p.228)

In the next section I will discuss the way in which Bourdieu pursues his criticism of structuralism within the context of a critique of the objectivist and of the subjectivist modes of knowledge.

5.7 Three modes of knowledge of the social world

In the section of *Esquisse pour une théorie de la pratique* called 'Les trois modes de connaissance théorique' Bourdieu maintains that there are three distinct modes of scholarly understanding of the social world. The first mode of knowledge is the phenomenological approach; this approach is characterized by 'la relation de familiarité avec l'environnement familier, appréhension du monde social comme monde naturel et allant de soi, qui, par définition, ne se réfléchit pas et qui exclut la question de ses propres conditions de possibilité' (p.234). Bourdieu objects to this type of knowledge that it does not contemplate the existence of a societal logic operating beyond subjective understanding. The phenomenological knowledge of the social world, as Bourdieu points out, does not allow for a possible questioning of the 'conditions de possibilité' that inform individual experience. In other words, the phenomenological approach does not take into account of external factors that might not fall under direct awareness but that might nonetheless inform our perception and our understanding of the social world. While describing things as they "appear", the phenomenological approach, as described by Bourdieu, does not question how things came to be the way they are, nor wonders whether things could be different from what they appear to be.

The second mode of knowledge described by Bourdieu is 'la connaissance qu'on peut appeler objectiviste', of which structuralism is, as pointed out, a particular

instance. This second mode of knowledge focuses on identifying objective relations between variables (be it linguistic, cultural, social, economic, etc.) 'qui structurent les pratiques et les représentation des pratiques, c'est-à-dire, en particulier, la connaissance première, pratique et tacite, du monde familier, au prix d'une rupture avec cette connaissance première, donc avec les présupposés tacitement assumés qui confèrent au monde social son caractère d'évidence et de naturel' (p.234). Bourdieu points out that objectivist knowledge, while it reveals objective relations between phenomena, it also provides knowledge of the representational character of social practices, thus showing the interconnectedness of social practices and symbolic representations.

By combining insights from his fieldwork experience as an ethnologist, the intellectual resources deriving from his philosophical formation, and his knowledge of the major debates structuring the intellectual field, Bourdieu elaborates a third mode of knowledge which he differentiates from the objectivist and the subjectivist modes of knowledge.[391] In fact, Bourdieu interprets in an original way the foundational intellectual debate between engagement and objectivity. In anthropology (the discipline to which Bourdieu's theory of practice is usually associated) this debate - particularly acute in the first part of the 20th century - takes the shape of an opposition between the idea of the armchair anthropologist and the idea of fieldwork. These two conceptions are not mutually exclusive and Claude Levi-Strauss, in more than one way, offers a synthesis of the two. However, in updating the debate Bourdieu claims that conceptual vocabularies and research techniques that support scholarly definitions of objectivity, instead of enhancing the understanding of the symbolic interactions between social structures and individuals, strengthen the epistemological divide between them.[392]

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[391] On this point see for instance Michael Grenfell, Pierre *Bourdieu. Agent Provocateur* (London: Continuum, 2004), p.189.

[392] Bourdieu maintains that the transition from his ethnological fieldwork in Algeria to other fieldwork experiences such as the one pursued in his native region of Béarn have been crucial in sharpening his criticism of the deontology of critical distance of academic scholarship: 'il a fallu d'abord que je découvre, par le retour à des terrains familiers, d'une part la société béarnaise, d'où je suis originaire, d'autre part le monde universitaire, les presupposés objectivistes – comme le privilège de l'observateur par rapport à l'indigène, voué à l'inconscience - qui sont inscrits dans l'approche structuraliste. Et ensuite il a fallu, je crois, que je sorte de l'ethnologie comme monde social, en devenant sociologue, pour que certaines mises en question impensables deviennent possibles. (…) L'appartenance à un groupe professionnel exerce un effet de censure qui va bien au-delà des contraintes institutionnelles ou personnelles: il y a des questions que l'on ne pose pas, que l'on ne peut pas poser, parce qu'elles touchent aux croyances fondamentales qui sont au fondement de la science, et du fonctionnement du champ scientifique'. Pierre Bourdieu, 'Fieldwork in Philosophy', p. 18.

Hence, Bourdieu introduces praxeological knowledge as his preferential mode of knowledge of the social world:

> La connaissance que l'on peut appeler *praxéologique* (et qui) a pour objet non seulement le système de relations objectives que construit le mode de connaissance objectiviste, mais les relations dialectiques entre ces structures objectives et les *dispositions structurées* dans lesquelles elles s'actualisent et qui tendent à les reproduire, c'est-à-dire le double processus d'intériorisation de l'extériorité et d'extériorisation de l'intériorité. (p.235)

As Bourdieu maintains, the praxeological mode of knowledge offers an ideal synthesis of the subjectivist and the objectivist modes of knowledge, hence avoiding the shortcomings that characterize them. While it integrates the exploration of the limits of both the subjectivist and the objectivist approach, praxeological knowledge explores the view that all forms of knowledge are social constructs; moreover, this form of knowledge explicitly addresses the question of the social, theoretical, and methodological assumptions that inform processes of knowledge production. [393] As noted earlier, Bourdieu's conceptual strategies are construed in view of challenging well-known and generally quite important theoretical positions in the intellectual field.[394] However, as I will argue in the next section, while Bourdieu intends to elaborate his conceptual approach beyond the shortcomings which he sees as inevitable in theoretical positions like structuralism, his intellectual vocabulary remains, arguably, open to the influences of the very positions he criticizes. While Bourdieu claims that this theory of the social world is more accurate than that of rival positions, his theoretical arguments, as Swartz points out, 'draw from a wide variety of intellectual influences including Marxism, structuralism, phenomenology, the philosophy of science and the classical sociological tradition'[395].

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[393] *The social Construction of Reality* (1966) by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman illustrates particularly well this epistemological approach to social reality.

[394] For an account of some of the most the important intellectual options Bourdieu confronts himself with during the crucial period between the sixties and the seventies see my discussion of *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* in chapter two.

[395] David Swartz, Culture *and power*, p.8.

5.8 The order and the structure: society as a system

As I will point out in this section, in spite of the criticism to which it is subjected, structuralism will continue to impregnate Bourdieu's critical language in more than one way. My argument will proceed by making a number of circumscribed observations on one chapter of *La distinction* in which Bourdieu explores the link between lifestyles and social positions. In *La distinction* Bourdieu argues that social groups such the *bourgeoisie* and the *classes populaires* distinguish themselves from one another by adopting different life-styles as well as by adopting different attitudes with regard to life. Lifestyles and attitudes are part of the way in which they define their group ethos, their social identities. As Bourdieu writes in the introductory pages of *La distinction* 'on ne sort pas du jeu la culture'; there is no way out of the game of culture. [396] As I shall illustrate, in *La distinction* Bourdieu conceptualises social identity (the experience of living in a society) within a culturally defined system of signs configured in such a way as to produce meaningful differences and oppositions between groups that compose society.

In particular, I am interested in exploring the following question; in what ways has Bourdieu *not* gone beyond structuralism? A similar question could also be asked about Eco's case. When investigating Eco's pre-semiotic work, Sangjin Park discusses the relationship between the concrete examples Eco selects from avant-garde art, and the terminology Eco employs to elaborate the concept of open work. [397] In particular, Park is interested in how Eco conceptually explains a world that is traversed by contradictions, indeterminacy, and ambiguity. How does Eco "resolve" the problem of describing a world that resists description and conceptualisation? As pointed out, Eco's observations underline the constitutive openness and indeterminacy characterizing artistic expression. However, Park wonders how far the conceptualisation of openness and indeterminacy can be pushed, and whether subsuming the indeterminacy of artistic expression into an explanatory frame does not imply the danger of construing a theoretical model where, precisely, such a model ought to be avoided:

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[396] Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction*, p. 10

[397] See the previously referenced Sangjin Park, 'Reconsidering the Implications of the "Pre-Semiotic" Writings in Umberto Eco'. The term pre-semiotic refers here to Eco's work up to *Trattato di semiotica generale*.

If 'the open work' tries to resolve the world, it means raising a conscious debate about the world, whereas if semiotics tries to resolve it, it might mean nothing more than modelling it. This is the stage at which we can criticize Eco' semiotic devices, such as the encyclopaedia, and the inferential walk, for their objectivist properties.[398]

In the case of Bourdieu, the question could be expressed as follows; can Bourdieu's conceptualisations be questioned on the ground that they reintroduce an objectivist mode of knowledge that has been, supposedly, overcome? There are, it seems, various ways to depart from structuralism, some of which might not fully implement the criticism of structuralism shortcomings.[399] While Bourdieu and Eco question, at several levels, structuralism's tendency to rely on representational models that are quite systematic, don't they also rely, at some point in their career, on conceptual models which also happen to be quite systematic?[400] As Park notes: 'if one is absorbed in constructing a system, one may well lapse into the play of that system'.[401] Is it not precisely the fact of being a system, or model, one of the problematic characters that Bourdieu and Eco attribute to structuralism? In introducing Bourdieu's idea of culture, Derek Robbins argues that:

> It is one of the defining characteristic of the human condition for people to be situated in culture. Culture is enacted by everyone. It is a game in which there are no non-participating spectators. It is a *huis clos* from which no one is excluded and from

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[398] Sangjin Park, 'Reconsidering the Implications of the "Pre-Semiotic" Writings in Umberto Eco', p.125.

[399] Derrida's criticism of structuralism, for instance, which he develops in works such as *L'écriture et la différence* (1967) is very different from both Bourdieu's and Eco's criticism of structuralism, in the sense that Derrida, differently than Bourdieu and Eco, expresses a radical rejection of the idea of order which is central to structuralism.

[400] This is certainly true for Bourdieu's major theoretical works, which all rely on the basic set concepts Bourdieu starts to develop from *Esquisse pour une théorie de la pratique* (1972) onwards. In the case of Eco, one can observe how at the stage of *Trattato di semiotica* generale (1975) Eco's model reaches its highest peak of formalisation and systematicization. As Robey notes in the introduction to the Open work, 'Eco's semiotic theory has an ordered, comprehensive, rationalist, architectural character that bares comparison with that of the Thomist Summae'; in David Robey, *The Open Work*, trans. By Anna Cancogni (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p xvi; quoted in Sangjin Park, 'Reconsidering the Implications of the "Pre-Semiotic" Writings in Umberto Eco', p.131. However, after *Trattato di semiotica generale,* Eco's theoretical work takes a less systematic and programmatic shape.

[401] Sangjin Park, 'Reconsidering the Implications of the "Pre-Semiotic" Writings in Umberto Eco', pp.132-133.

which there is no escape. It is a self-contained phenomenological enclosure which has

no point of reference beyond or outside itself.[402]

In *La distinction* as well as elsewhere, Bourdieu defines culture as a complex and multi-layered system that exists both under the objective form of norms and institutions and under the subjective form of internalised knowledge. Bourdieu's concept of habitus precisely focuses on the presence of homologies between individual experience and social structures. Similarly, Bourdieu maintains that there exist a number of interconnected homologies between individuals' positions within society, life-styles, level of education and artistic preferences. As Bourdieu argues in ' L'habitus et l'espace des styles de vie', Chapter 3 of *La distinction*:

> La relation qui s'établit en fait entre les caractéristiques pertinentes de la condition économique et sociale (le volume et la structure du capital appréhendés synchroniquement et diachroniquement) et les traits distinctifs à la position correspondante dans l'espace des styles de vie ne devient une relation intelligible que par la construction de l'habitus comme formule génératrice permettant de rendre raison à la fois des pratiques et des produits classables et des jugements, eux-mêmes classés, qui constituent ces pratiques et ces œuvres en système de *signes distinctifs* (…).[403]

This passage conveys the impression of an on-going circularity whereby a series of homologies are interlinked with one another. As Bourdieu points out, social practices are performed in accord with the habitus. The habitus, in turn, expresses the social position that individuals occupy within society. When describing the meaning and the relevance that life-styles acquire within society, Bourdieu recurs to formulations revealing a "structuralist" inclination of his conceptual views. Bourdieu represents society as an all-encompassing system in which units acquire meaning not in themselves, but through the differences and oppositions whereby they distinguish themselves from one another:

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[402] Derek Robbins. *Bourdieu and Culture* (London: Sage, 2000), p. xi.

[403] Pierre Bourdieu. *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement* (Paris : Minuit, 1979), p. 190. Page numbers in the text in the next paragraphs will refer to this edition.

Chaque condition est définie, inséparablement, par ses propriétés intrinsèques et par les propriétés relationnelles qu'elle doit à sa position dans le système des conditions qui est aussi un *système de différences*, de positions différentielles, c'est-à-dire par tout ce qui la distingue de tout ce à quoi elle s'oppose: l'identité sociale se définit et s'affirme dans la différence. (p.191)

As this passage shows, in spite his criticism of structuralism, Bourdieu frequently returns to a structuralist conceptual imagery. But what is, one could ask, the role of this conceptual imagery in Bourdieu's view of society? Perhaps, one could argue, the structuralist approach favours stability and order as rhetorical strategies over strategies that emphasize instability, change, and indeterminacy.[404] In any case, Bourdieu's prolonged, and never quite broken, relationship with structuralism is apparent in his insistent use of a structuralist conceptual imagery, such as the idea that society operates as a system of signs. In chapter 3 of *La distinction*, for instance, Bourdieu approaches the study of life-styles in the same way in which a structuralist scholar would view linguistic systems:[405]

Les styles de vie sont ainsi les produits systématiques des habitus qui, perçus dans leurs relations mutuelles selon les schèmes de l'habitus, deviennent des systèmes de signes socialement qualifiés (comme 'distingués', 'vulgaires', etc.). (p.192)

As this passage suggests, 'produits systématiques', 'relations mutuelles', 'systèmes de signes socialement qualifiés' are formulations which, orchestrated within the same sentence, convey an underlying structuralism in a supposedly post-structuralist Bourdieu. Moreover, the system of life-styles that Bourdieu elaborates in *La distinction* seems almost perfectly self-sustained:

Toutes les pratiques et les œuvres d'un même agent sont objectivement harmonisés entre elles, en dehors de toute recherche intentionnelle de la cohérence, et

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[404] Perhaps there is something reassuring in the possibility of "controlling" the real by means of an interpretative grid. Other approaches, such as functionalism in sociology and anthropology, also draw on the ideas of order and stability in construing their representational models. On this point see for instance Jean- Michel Berthelot, 'Schèmes d'intelligibilité' in Jean- Michel Berthelot, *Sociologie. Epistémologie d'une discipline: Textes fondamentaux* (Bruxelles: De Boeck, 2000), pp. 311-317.

[405] See for istance Roland Barthes, *Système de la mode* (1967).

objectivement orchestrées, en dehors de toute concertation consciente, avec celles de

tous les membres de la même classe (…) (p.192)

Hence, each individual practice reveals an underlying objective logic. A systemic logic whereby the detail of the practice, the micro-strategy behind the decision, the minimal movement or action, fall in place within a self-orchestrated social universe. As Bourdieu maintains by invoking the figure of an old artisan:

Chaque dimension du style de vie 'symbolise avec' les autres, comme disait Leibnitz,

et les symbolise: la vision du monde d'un vieil artisan ébéniste, sa manière de gérer

son budget, son temps ou son corps, son usage du langage et ses choix vestimentaires,

sont tout entier présents dans son éthique du travail scrupuleux et impeccable, du

soigné, du fignolé, du fini et son esthétique du travail pour le travail qui lui fait

mesurer la beauté de ses produits au soin et à la patience qu'ils ont demandés. (pp.

193-194)

Each detail of the social universe is but a small element, a note in the symphony of the social universe.

5.9 Conclusion

My discussion has shown how Bourdieu and Eco highlight structuralism's shortcomings in a number of different ways. Their criticism of structuralism touches upon a number of areas such the relationship between individual agency and social structures, artistic practice, and social communication, while engaging with questions about the value and the limits of representational models conceptualizing reality in relation to ideas of stability, order, and objectivity. My analysis suggests that, in spite of their criticism of structuralism, Bourdieu and Eco never completely abandon the attractiveness that ideas of stability, order, and objectivity offer when employed as conceptual strategies. While informing the intellectual project of structuralism, these ideas also participate, as I will illustrate in the next chapter, in Bourdieu's view of the social world as well as in Eco's concerns for art, literature, and social communication.

Chapter 6: Order and the Deontology of Knowledge: Umberto Eco and Pierre Bourdieu on Interpretative Practices and Cultural Conventions

> **Order**: noun. **1.** The arrangement or disposition of people or things according to a particular sequence or method. A state in which everything is in its correct place. A state in which the laws and rules regulating public behaviour are observed (…) **2.** An authoritative command or direction. A verbal or written request for something to be made, supplied, or served. **3.** a social class. A particular social, political, or economic system. A rank in the Christian ministry, especially that of bishop, priest or deacon. (…)**Theology** any of the nine grades of angelic beings in the celestial hierarchy **4. Biology** a principal taxonomic category that ranks below class and above family **5.** a society of monks, nuns or friars living under the same rule. (….) (OED)[406]

> « Comme si, s'affranchissant pour une part de ses grilles linguistiques, perceptives, pratiques, la culture appliquait sur celles-ci une grille seconde qui les neutralise, qui, en les doublant, les font apparaître et les excluent en même temps, et se trouvait du même coup devant l'être brut de l'ordre. C'est au nom de cet ordre que les codes du langage, de la perception, de la pratique sont critiqués et rendus partiellement invalides. C'est sur fond de cet ordre, tenu pour sol positif, que se bâtiront les théories générales de l'ordonnance des choses et les interprétations qu'elle appelle. Ainsi entre le regard déjà codé et la connaissance réflexive, il y a une région médiane qui délivre l'ordre en son être même. »[407]

6.1 Order and discourse

Order can be something one wishes for, strives towards, aims to achieve or tries to preserve, but also something one would want to challenge and question. Social or political order, for instance, appears as something that intellectuals like Bourdieu and Eco show an interest in challenging, while wishing for an order based on alternative sets of values. Figures like philosophers, critical intellectuals, or religious leaders often embody this double standard. On the one hand, they point out the inadequacy of the social, political or cultural order, while, on the other, they propose an alternative order. As Michel Foucault suggests in *Les mots et les choses* (1966), whether on the written

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[406] The list of meaning is somehow longer. However, the main meanings of the word 'order' addressed in this chapter are conveyed by the list above.

[407] Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (1966) (Paris : Gallimard, 2005), p. 12

page or through the spoken word, order is organized through language, which is also the main symbolic vehicle through which intellectuals, spiritual figures, and artists make their voice public. Before pointing to the world by means of the referential function of language, order is shaped by coherence of argument, organization, and by the particular way in which ideas are presented.[408]

As Rudolf Arnheim argues in *Entropy in art. An essay on Order and Disorder* (1971), order is a state of things that renders phenomena intelligible, allowing them to be described, discussed, and analysed:

> Order is a necessary condition for anything the human mind is to understand. Arrangements such as the layout of a city or buildings, a set of tools, a display of merchandise, the verbal exposition of facts and ideas, or a painting or a piece of music are called orderly when an observer or listener can grasp their overall structure in some detail.[409]

As Arnheim's passage suggests, order lies as much in the patterns whereby different elements are arranged, as in the capacity of an observer, listener, or reader to perceive an 'overall structure', while being able to identify, within this structure, meaningful details. Similarly, when intellectuals express themselves, there needs to be a symbolic intersection where intellectual voices converge towards a public giving resonance to these voices. As pointed out in chapter four, intellectual engagements take place within particular social, communicational and institutional settings. Both the academic and the intellectual field, as sociologists like Bourdieu and Randall Collins point out, are highly structured spaces in which schools of thought challenge each other. As such, these fields imply norms that regulate intellectual exchange.[410]

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[408] The discipline of rhetoric (the art of using language to communicate effectively) focuses very much on the idea of order, organisation, control and balance in discourse. Explanatory, argumentative practices, alongside with abstract and empirical reasoning, presenting data, challenging commonly accepted views on a certain topic, theory or school of thought, are among the concerns of rhetoric.

[409] Rudolf Arnheim, *Entropy in art. An essay on Order and Disorder* (1971) (London: University of California press, 1974), p.1.

[410] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art* (Paris, Seuil, 1992) and Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Belknap: Harvard University Press, 1998)

In this chapter I will explore the idea that it is in the lines of tension dividing order from disorder that original intellectual discourses appear.[411] Order can be viewed, on the one hand, as a process, something that needs be attained, established. In the case of academic, artistic and scientific discourses, order is often the result of an act of interpretation whereby meaning is put into motion. This chapter will address the relationship between order and interpretation from the point of view of Eco's idea of interpretation. It will show how interpretation is an intellectual activity necessary for apprehending the real as well as for redefining and reshaping the boundaries of knowledge. Once established, order can be maintained by different means. While operating as a framework through which intellectuals organize and produce knowledge, social order can also be reproduced through discourse and ideology. This chapter will also examine this second, complementary, understanding of the notion of order in relation to some of the works of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's critical sociology discusses how order infiltrates every interstice of society, from institutions and social structures to individual practices, experiences, strategies, and expectations.

This chapter illustrates that intellectual engagement operates in accordance with deontological norms and codes by means of which knowledge is addressed, analysed and understood. Academics are often involved in discussions about which criteria one should use to assess the quality of academic work and the scientific soundness of it.[412] One way to address the question the reliability of knowledge is to try to understand those intellectual processes whereby knowledge is produced and assessed. Most of these processes revolve, by and large, around interpretative practices. As illustrated in chapter four, Eco argues in favour of a distinction between interpretation and overintepretation.[413]The first part of this chapter will further discuss Eco's understanding of interpretation inasmuch as it points towards the possibility to examine practices of interpretations within academia.[414] However, as Mieke Bal points out in a

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[411] As Rudolf Arnheim points out '(a) revolution must aim at the destruction of a given order and will succeed only by asserting an order of its own'. Rudolf Arnheim, *Entropy in Art,* p. 3.

[412] Michèle Lamont, *How Professors think. Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgmen*t (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[413] See Umberto Eco, I *limiti dell'interpretazione* (1990), 4th edn (Milan: Bompiani, 2004).

[414] In order to get an overview of the some of the main epistemological issues that have characterised the history of sociology and philosophy of science see Jean-Michel Berthelot, *Sociologie. Epistemologie d'une discipline. Textes fondamentaux* (Brussels: de Boek, 1990).

review of *I limiti dell'intepretazione*, Eco's semiotics, while focusing on interpretation *per se*, often falls short in discussing how social factors might contribute in defining interpretative models within specific cultural communities.[415] Bourdieu's works on cultural taste and on the education system tackle precisely the question of how intellectual engagements are embedded in social contexts.[416] Bourdieu's reflexive sociology addresses the problem of the social conditions forming the background against which intellectual engagement is played out.[417] By reflecting on professional practices of knowledge-making, Bourdieu marks a decisive contribution not only in the field of sociology but also in that of philosophy, alongside thinkers such as J.L. Austin and Ludwig Wittgenstein.[418] In the second part of this chapter I will focus on some of the works by Bourdieu that specifically address the link between social order, the education system, and the production of knowledge. In discussing these works, I will highlight the presence of cognitive, intellectual and deontological frameworks by means of which knowledge is expressed and assessed. In Bourdieu's sociology, these frameworks have an essentially internalised dimension, which I will emphasize against the background of Eco's discussion of hermeneutical practices.

6.2 Reading practices and the academic field

In a few images describing an eye moving along the page, creating its own trajectory on the surface of the text, this is how Michel de Certeau defines the act of reading:

> From analyses that follow the activity of reading in its detours, drifts across the page,
>
> metamorphoses and anamorphoses of the text produced by the travelling eye,
>
> imaginary or meditative fights taking off from a few words, overlapping of spaces on
>
> the militarily organised surfaces of the text, and ephemeral dances, it is at least clear,

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[415] Mieke Bal, 'The Predicament of Semiotics', *Poetics Today*, vol.13, No. 3 (Atumn, 1992), pp.543-552.

[416] See Pierre Bourdieu, and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Les héritiers. Les étudiants et la culture* (1964), 3rd edn (Paris: Minuit, 1985); Pierre, Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *La reproduction. Eléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement* (Paris: Minuit, 1970); Pierre, Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Paris: Minuit, 1984) ; Pierre Bourdieu, *Méditations pascaliennes* (Paris : Seuil, 1997). These are the works that I will discuss in this chapter.

[417] See Richard Shusterman, *Bourdieu. A critical Reader* (Malden MA (USA). Blackwell, 1999), and David Swartz, *Culture and Power. The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[418] For a discussion of Bourdieu's specific contribution to the field of philosophy see the previously referenced Richard Shusterman, *Bourdieu. A Critical Reader*.

as a first result, that one cannot maintain the division separating the readable text (a book, image etc.) from the act of reading. Whether it is a question of newspapers or Proust, the text has a meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them; it is ordered in accord with codes of perception that it does not control. [419]

The manifold reading operations and reading tricks that Michel de Certeau enumerates along the passage quoted might suggest, in quite an intuitive yet very precise manner, some of the intellectual operations whereby academics come to be recognised as official knowledge producers. Reading paradigms and techniques are fundamentally and intrinsically bound with intellectual engagement. Academia is the very place in which reading techniques, approaches and paradigms are discussed, analysed, and institutionalised. In academia, reading represents a very sophisticated intellectual game, a way through which a host of disciplinary communities claim to make knowledge progress and strive to make contributions towards better and clearer understandings of ourselves and of the world we live in.

'Appropriating or reappropriating' a text means, as de Certeau's words suggest, working on the flexibility of its texture by testing out possibilities for the recasting of meaning. In academia, where reading is bound to analysing, discussing, examining, and truth seeking, reading practices unfold as acts of reading reality.[420] De Certeau's emphasis on reading and reading tricks draws attention to the fact that 'one cannot maintain the division separating the readable text (a book, image etc.) from the act of reading'.[421] Furthermore, one could argue that intellectual engagement has to be

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[419] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p.170.

[420] The idea that a text is a metaphor of the world and that the world can be read as a text is explicitly taken up by Eco's semiotic projects. See for instance Umberto Eco, *I limiti dell'intepretazione*, p.235 and p. 241.

[421] According to Michel de Certeau's discussion of the act of reading developed in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, cultural consumption has often been understood in terms of a passive public. The notion of public, as de Certeau points out, has been neglected until the development of reader-response theory and criticism. Accordingly, the reception of cultural messages has often been viewed as a cognitive operation assuming that '"assimilating" necessarily means "becoming similar to" what one absorbs, and not "making something similar" to what one is, making it one's own, appropriating or reappropriating it' Traditional theories of communication, notes de Certeau, generally assume a strict distinction between producers and consumers, by 'distinguish(ing) and privileg(ing) authors, educators, revolutionaries, in a word "producers", in contrast with those who do not produce'. In Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.166. For these reasons, consumption was often identified as the passive end of the

orchestrated, organised around norms of communication; converging and dissenting voices have to be in accord with particular discursive practices. As De Certeau notes, a text 'is ordered in accord with codes of perception that it does not control'. (p.170) De Certeau's assertion poses a certain number of questions regarding the presence of codes of perception orienting the experience of reading. It is not implausible to posit that these 'codes of perception that (the text) does not control' might in fact operate according to cultural codes that, while allowing the emergence of a fully articulated experience of reading, might also revolve around a certain idea of order. As Arnheim notes:

> Order makes it possible to focus on what is alike and what is different, what belongs
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> together and what is segregated. When nothing superfluous is included and nothing
>
> indispensable left out, one can understand the interrelation of the whole and its part, as
>
> well as the hierarchic scale of importance and power by which some structural
>
> features are dominant, other subordinate.[422]

As Eco argues in *I limiti dell'intepretazione* (1990), the reader is relatively free to wonder on the written page in search for multiple layers of interpretations, for different ways to arrange the semantic units within the text. However, this does not make every interpretation as valuable as any other. As Eco points out, 'se un testo è potenzialmente senza fine non significa che ogni atto di intepretazione possa evere un lieto fine'.[423] As pointed out in chapter four, Eco envisages interpretation as a symbolic interaction between texts configured in a certain way, and readers possessing a degree of competence not only about these texts, but also about the world. While being essential to the production of knowledge, interpretative techniques employed by academic communities may become, at times, object of debate and controversy. Eco's discussion of 'la deriva ermetica' in *I limiti dell'intepretazione* suggests precisely this possibility. In particular, Eco's distinction between hermetic semiosis and Pierce's notion of unlimited semiosis offers a possible framework within which to address interpretative

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spectrum of social communication. Reading, in de Certeau, becomes an active process in the communication process, and the reader becomes a cultural operator who creates his or her own text.

[422] Rudolf Arnheim. *Entropy in art,* p.1.

[423] Umberto Eco, *I limiti dell'intepretazione*, p.14.

techniques commonly used in academia.[424] By referring to the interdependent reactiveness of signs, both hermetic semiosis and unlimited semiosis indicate a process whereby meaning is put in motion by the interplay of different signs. As Eco suggests, while Peirce's unlimited semiosis is, ultimately, an oriented process, hermetic semiosis is subject to rather 'random' associations between signs:

> Sembra così che la semiosi ermetica identifichi ogni testo, così come nel Grande Testo del Mondo, la Pienezza del Significato, non la sua assenza. Nonostante ciò, questo mondo invaso dalle segnature, e governato dal principio della significanza universale, dava luogo a effetti di continuo slittamento e differimento di ogni possibile significato. Infatti, posto che il significato di una parola o di una data cosa non erano che un'altra parola o un'altra cosa, qualsiasi cosa fosse detta non era che un'allusione ambigua a qualcos'altro. Il significato di un testo veniva così sempre posposto, e il significato finale non poteva che essere un segreto inattingibile.[425]

According to Eco, interpretation rests on a process whereby knowledge is expanded. Unlimited semiosis, as Eco understand it, operates through a selection of potential meanings which are defined against the background of a world constituted by and large through cultural conventions. Similarly, intellectual engagement occurs within the frame of intellectual practices requiring norms regulating the exchange of ideas. Such norms can be used to identify differences between similar ideas, or in order to advocate a higher degree of pertinence of an argument over another.

As I shall illustrate in this section and in the next, Peirce's theory of signs is crucial in understanding Eco's semiotic project, in that it allows Eco to capitalize on the tension between order and unpredictability. As Louis Menand points out in *The Metaphisical Club,* Peirce theory of signs implies the representational character of signs:

> Peirce thought that our representations can be classified, filled out, and elaborated in all sorts of ways, that they can even become 'better', in the sense of 'more useful', as

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[424] In line with his historical approach, Eco discusses a variety of interpretative traditions and paradigms, thus making his approach to reading, reading strategies and interpretative tactics all the more pertinent.

[425] Umberto Eco, *I limiti dell'interpretazione*, p.326.

we peel off their metaphysical husks. But we can never (as individuals) say that they are identical to their objects.[426]

As Menand points out, for Peirce there is no reality outside the web of signs through which we experience the world, since reality itself is made up of signs: 'the distinctive feature of Peirce's theory of signs (…) (is that) there are no prerepresentational objects out there. Things are themselves signs: their being sign is a condition of their being things at all'.[427] In the continuously generated chains of signs, everything is filled with, or expected to be filled with meaning. For Peirce it is not possible to clearly distinguish between the possibility of knowing something "out there" and the semiotic processes whereby we interpret reality, in that reality is itself an act of interpretation. As Menand points out, 'for Peirce, knowing was inseparable from what he called semiosis, the making of signs, and of the making of signs there is no end'.[428] Furthermore, Peirce's theory of signs encapsulates a whole epistemic view of the universe that openly challenges deterministic views based on straightforward relations of causality. As Menand notes, in Peirce's theory of signs '(t)he problem boils down to this question: What does it mean to say that a statement is "true" is a world always susceptible to "a certain swerving"?'[429] Truth is, for Peirce, something that emerges within an interplay of signs that is not predetermined, but open to unpredictability. However, as I will point out, unpredictability can be examined in relation to a field informed by social and cultural conventions.

6.3 Peirce's theory of signs and Eco's encyclopaedia

Interpretation, as Eco maintains, operates on a map of knowledge that is not only defined by the agenda of the reader. It is also matter of a system of culturally defined conventions. As pointed out in the previous section, in *I limiti dell'intepretazione* Eco establishes an important distinction between what he calls hermetic semiosis, a notion which he often uses in relation to the idea of overinterpreting texts, and unlimited

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[426] Louis Menand, *The metaphysical Club* (London: Flamingo, 2002), p.364.

[427] Louis Menand, *The metaphysical Club*, p.364.

[428] Louis Menand, *The metaphysical Club*, p.364.

[429] Louis Menand, *The metaphysical Club*, p. 223.

semiosis, a notion that Eco derives from Charles Peirce.[430] Peirce conceives of the relation between signs in such a way that one sign is represented by another sign, which in turn gives rise to another representing sign. Moreover, Pierce's theory of signs revolves around three interdependent elements: the object, the representantem and the interpretant. As the SEP indicates:

> In Peirce's theory the sign relation is a triadic relation that is a special species of the genus: the representing relation. Whenever the representing relation has an instance, we find one thing (the 'object') being represented by (or: in) another thing (the 'representantem') to (or:in) a third thing (the 'interpretant'); moreover, the object is represented by the representantem in such a way that the intepretant is thereby 'determined' to be also a representantem of the object yet to another interpretant. That is to say, the interpretant stands in the representing relation to the same object represented by the original representantem, and thus represents it to yet another interpretant.[431]

While Peirce's chain of signs might be virtually endless, one might start wondering whether there is a logic that governs the shifting of signs.

In order to address this question I shall turn again to Peirce's and Eco's understanding of the notion of sign. As pointed out above, a sign is something that stands for something else. This is true for Peirce as well as for Charles Morris whose definition of sign is often taken to be a foundational definition for practitioners of semiotics. As Eco maintains, such an understanding implies the presence of an interpreter who makes the transaction from the sign to its interpretation possible.[432] A sign can be defined as such insofar as it means something to/for someone. Peirce's unlimited semiosis reflects the continuous interrelation between signs and their interpreters. As Menand notes, the meaning of Peirce's signs is by their very nature

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[430] See my discussion of Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. With Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, Christine Brooke-Rose, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) in chapter four.

[431] http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce/, p. 17. Consulted on 13/01/2010.

[432] Umberto Eco, *Trattato de semiotica generale* (1975) 19th edn (Milan: Bompiani, 2008), pp. 26-28.

changing and unstable, as a sign is already oriented towards other signs. As Eco puts it in *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio* (1984):

> Non c'è modo, nel processo di *semiosi illimitata* che Peirce descrive e fonda, di stabilire il significato di una espressione, e cioè di interpretare quella espressione, se non *traducendola* in altri segni (appartengano essi o no allo stesso sistema semiotico) e in modo che l'interpretante non solo renda ragione dell'interpretato sotto qualche aspetto, ma dell'intepretato faccia conoscere qualcosa in più.[433]

In drawing from Peirce's theory of signs, Eco discusses the notion of unlimited semiosis within the context of his own personal semiotic investigations. From *Trattato di semiotica generale* (1975) onwards, Eco often refers to the distinction between dictionary and encyclopaedic definitions of signs. In *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*, he defines the notion of encyclopaedia as:

> L'insieme registrato di tutte le interpretazioni, concepibile oggettivamente come la libreria delle librerie, dove una libreria è anche l'archivio di tutta l'informazione non verbale in qualche modo registrata, dalle pitture rupestri alle cineteche.[434]

The notion of encyclopaedia is a powerful model for knowledge that refers to what we know about the world at any given time. Historically speaking, one of the most relevant and perhaps the most illustrious example of encyclopaedia that springs to mind is the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts, et des Métiers* (1751-65) edited by Diderot and D'Alambert. Diderot's and D'Alambert's endeavour produced a powerful vehicle for communicating the most advanced practical, philosophical and scientific knowledge, thus creating a new readership which brought about 'the ideal of transposable knowledge across national boundaries, with individuals of whatever social status able to participate in a universal conversation'.[435]

In his semiotic investigations, Eco links the vast territories of knowledge suggested by the encyclopaedia to localised acts of interpretations practiced on

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[433] U. Eco, *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio* (1984) (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), pp.107-108.

[434] U. Eco, *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*, p.109.

[435] Mike Feartherstone and Couze Venn, 'Problematizing Global Knowledge and the New Encyclopaedia project', in *Theory, Culture and Society* (Sage Publications: London), 2006, vol. 23(2-3), pp.1-20, p.6.

particular texts, words, visual objects, etc. In so doing, he refers to the idea that texts and other cultural supports are portions of an encyclopaedia; a given text or cultural support is part of a network of many texts and cultural supports that confer meaning to each other.[436] Differently from the encyclopaedia, the dictionary, as a model for knowledge, is much more restrictive and contains a limited amount of information.[437] As Mike Feartherstone and Couze Venn observe, '(a)n encyclopaedia is a flexible type of ordering somewhere between a system and a list. Many of the entries refer to each other in a coherent way and could be extracted to reconstruct a systematic disciplinary order, such as, for example, the discipline of physics'[438]. Featherstone and Venn emphasize, as Eco does, the essential flexibility allowed by the ordering operated by the encyclopaedia. Similarly, the encyclopaedia allows for the definition of particular areas of knowledge, as in the case of academic disciplines. However, according to Eco, a particular portion of encyclopaedia remains only virtually mapped out as long as it is not actualized by the concrete intervention of a reading act performed by an individual.

From Eco's perspective, the idea of encyclopaedia acquires relevance mainly against the background interpretative intentions that link particular portions of a text to other texts and thus to a larger constellation of meaning. Or, to put it in other words, the macro-territory covered by the encyclopaedia cannot be dissociated from the micro-territory highlighted by a concrete interpretative act. In light of this, Eco's understanding of the notion of encyclopaedia can be discussed as:

Un'ipotesi regolativa in base alla quale, in occasione di un'interpretazione di un testo

(sia esso una conversazione all'angolo della strada o la Bibbia), il destinarario decide

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[436] According to this understanding, the encyclopaedia virtually contains the totality of the information about texts, including the way in which these texts are related to one another.

[437] For the word 'structuralism', for instance, the dictionary would register the meaning of the term by mentioning that the word designates a theoretical school particularly relevant in the field of humanities in the sixties. The encyclopaedia would include a lot more information about the history of structuralism; it would contemplate the different contexts in which the word structure or structuralism has been referred to, and would hint at the different meanings that the word structuralism assumes in these different contexts. In other words, an encyclopaedic account of structuralism would encompass the repertoire of contexts in which the word appears as well the uses of the term in these different contexts.

[438] Mike Feartherstone and Couze Venn, 'Problematizing Global Knowledge and the New Encyclopaedia project', p.5.

di costruire una porzione di enciclopedia concreta che gli consenta di assegnare al testo o all'emittente una serie di competenze semantiche.[439]

In this instance, Eco employs the notion of encyclopaedia to describe the process whereby a text gets contextualized, through an act of interpretation, within the intertextual matrix comprising other texts to which the first text indirectly or directly refers. In this respect, Eco's use of the notion of encyclopaedia as 'ipotesi regolativa' draws attention to the movements and shifts occurring on the surface of the map of knowledge in virtue of which links are drawn, resemblances constituted, and correspondences between texts established; Eco leaves these movements and shifts to the competences of the readers and to the interpretative actions they perform on the written page. In this sense, Eco's understanding of the encyclopaedia, by underlining the importance of localised acts of interpretations and by emphasising, to use de Certeau's words, the importance of 'detours, drifts across the page, metamorphoses and anamorphoses of the text produced by the traveling eye'[440], recasts the traditional idea of encyclopaedia. From a taxonomic device creating order through an alphabetical grid, as the traditional models of Diderot and D'Alambert's suggest, Eco turns the idea of encyclopaedia into a more dynamic and less predictable notion that 'contempla anche interpretazioni contraddittorie'.[441] Eco's implicit model of encyclopaedia resembles less a carefully and linearly ordered tree than a rhizomatic structure of the type suggested by Gilles Deleuze.[442] As Featherstone and Venn point out:

> According to Eco, the encyclopaedia, contrary to Enlightenment thinkers, does not reflect an ordered universe in a univocal and rational way, but supplies rules which are generally myopic and only agree with some provisional criterion of order. In effect, encyclopaedias attempt to give meaning to a disordered world whose criteria of order escape us. This contrasts with the type of order produced by the dictionary, which works to register the properties of words in a succinct manner. Encyclopedic

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[439] Umberto Eco, *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*, p.111.

[440] Michel de Certeau, *The Practise of Everyday Life*, p.170.

[441] Umberto Eco, *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*, p. 109.

[442] Umberto Eco, *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*, p.112.

competence, on the contrary, excludes the possibility of hierarchizing the semantic marks, the linguistic properties and the seme in a single, uncontroversial way in its endeavour to map the life of a culture as a system of inter-semiotic systems.[443]

Eco's understanding of the encyclopaedia as a model for global knowledge underscores, as Peirce's unlimited semiosis does, the unpredictability of meaning and interpretation. In the last two sections, I started by pointing out how Eco's understanding of interpretative practices underscores a distinction between interpretation and overintepretation. From the perspective of this distinction, Eco's discussion of interpretation can be examined against the background of an epistemological tradition of philosophers and sociologists of science who raised the question of how scientists determine the validity of knowledge. In fact, Eco applies to the domain of textual interpretation Karl Popper's idea that a theory can be considered truly scientific only inasmuch as one can prove that it is falsifiable. From Popper's perspective not every theory applies to such criteria as falsifiability, but only those who are enunciated through formal strategies that can undergo experimental validation.[444] Similarly, as suggested in chapter four, Eco tests different interpretations and different readings against the principle of textual validation as well as against the wider reservoir of knowledge of cultural encyclopaedias. In so doing, he draws a line between interpretations that are confirmed by textual coherence and those which, by relying solely on the free play of hermetic semiosis, do not appear to be good candidates for textual validation. However, as I pointed out in the discussion of Peirce's theory of signs and in the case of Eco's understanding of the encyclopaedia as a model for knowledge, interpretation can also be understood as a much more fluid, unpredictable, and unstable process. While Eco's distinction between interpretation and overinterpretation suggests a useful framework for the validation of knowledge, Eco's discussion of Pierce offers a complementary and more dynamic view of interpretative practices which suggest that coherence of meaning is an open process rather than a state.

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[443] Mike Feartherstone and Couze Venn, 'Problematizing Global Knowledge and the New Encyclopaedia project', p.9.

[444] See Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1934) (New York: Basic Books, 1959).

6.4 Interpretation, academic judgment, and social background

The idea that interpretations should be, ideally, corroborated by specific hermeneutical criteria, is not only a central concern for Eco, but it is also paramount to academic communities. As Michèle Lamont points out in *How Professors Think*, when academics are asked to justify their own assessment, it becomes possible to discern criteria which inform academic judgment.[445] However, while criteria of academic judgement are often employed as part of an argument to support or justify assessments, they are much less often employed in order to raise questions about the very conditions that make academic assessments possible. Against this backdrop, Lamont's work addresses the relationship between disciplinary cultures and academic judgment. By showing that the way in which academic judgment works is not monolithic, Lamont points out that there is a degree of variation in the self-conceptions, images and understandings of the figure of the researcher and of research practices across disciplines. Lamont's work addresses the multiple ways in which researchers approach knowledge and perform the role of gatekeepers of disciplinary communities.

Criteria of academic judgement constitute a framework for elaborating different and often diverse judgments. They also allow for a considerable saving of resources in a context, that of academia, where the striving for balance between quality, quantity and time often produces highly stressful situations and a considerable pressure in order to meet both internal and external demands.[446]Lamont's work shows that criteria that inform academic judgement often operate at a rather implicit level. Nevertheless, while they orient the way in which academics weight their assessments, these criteria also ensure that academic judgements are regarded as coherent, credible and reasonable. Since they operate on a long-term basis, criteria of academic judgment are often quite routinized. For this reason, it is plausible to think that they have been sufficiently

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[445] Michèle Lamont, *How Professors Think. Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment*. Lamont's work focuses on the peer-reviews done on research proposals; such reviews are generally kept strictly confidential. Beyond the particular example of the research proposals, Lamont's analysis focuses on some general aspects defining academic disciplines.

[446] Whether the conditions fostered in the last few decades by the model of the global university have produced a more stimulating intellectual environment is all but obvious. Quite on the contrary, critical thinkers like Frank Furedi lament a deterioration of the traditional values that ensured that academia remained a highly stimulating intellectual environment without directly depending upon market demands. See Frank Furedi, *Where have all the intellectuals gone*?, 2nd edn (London: Continuum, 2006).

internalized by individuals so that they readily operate as interpretative grids allowing one to read a situation in ways which disciplinary communities view as appropriate.

Until now, I have observed how interpretative practises, as Eco understands them, are generative rather than static or predetermined. From this perspective, the establishment of knowledge is the result of formal strategies by means of which meaningful symbols are arranged in relation to cultural codes. In the rest of my discussion, I will raise the question of how such codes operate once they have been internalised. More specifically, I will tackle the problem of how perception of reality might in fact result from the existence of cultural conventions through which individuals organize reality as coherent narratives.

6.5 Education, culture, and cognitive frameworks

As I have pointed out in different parts of this study, from early on in his career Bourdieu is interested in finding a conceptual language to account for how individual experience relates to the collective dimension of society. In particular, Bourdieu is interested in how the concept of habitus can account for this relation. Bourdieu argues that individual experience relates to the acquisition of socially acquired perceptive categories through which individuals make sense of their place in the social universe. As illustrated, the acquisition of these perceptive categories comes as a result of a long process of socialisation by means of which individuals come to be exposed, more or less recurrently, to situations or social milieus that are likely to have a long-lasting influence on their social identity. Following the formative experience of his ethnological fieldwork in Algeria, Bourdieu elaborates a full-fledged theory of practice that underlines how the social background also informs, in many ways, scholarly approaches to knowledge. [447]

Even before elaborating his theory of practice, Bourdieu had produced, along with some fellow sociologists, *Un art Moyen* (1965), a work in which he clearly articulates an account of how individuals express aesthetic taste through the practice of photography. Bourdieu elaborates a study of the social uses of photography at a moment in which photography has not yet emerged as a fully recognised artistic practice.

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[447] See my discussion of Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* précédé de *Trois études d'ethnologie kabyle* (1972), 2nd edn (Paris: Seuil, 2000) in chapter four.

However, photography is of particular interest for Bourdieu, in that it shows how appreciations and definitions of the category of the aesthetic vary across social groups. Supported by empirical cases, Bourdieu illustrates an important distinction between a relatively small group of individuals practicing photography as a way to express an artistic interest, and large group who, without associating the practice of photography to artistic intentions, practice photography as a means to document salient moments of their life. Bourdieu argues that social background, and the position individuals occupy in social space, are likely to influence their receptivity to potentially artistic uses of photography. Interestingly, Bourdieu observes how a great number of individuals engage in reproducing the dominant social perceptions of photography whereby certain situations (like a marriage) make a much better photographic subject than other settings falling outside highly ritualized social situations.[448]

The empirical research carried out in *Un art Moyen* is indicative of how Bourdieu became familiar, throughout his fieldwork experience in Algeria, with research techniques that he readily applied in his first important works on cultural and artistic practices like photography but also, more importantly, in several studies on the French education system. In *La reproduction. Eléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement* (1970) Bourdieu and fellow sociologist Jean-Claude Passeron expand on some of the considerations developed in some of their previous studies by integrating them within a theory of education.[449]The academic system, as the two sociologists already argued in *Les héritiers. Les étudiants et la culture* (1964) favours a particular approach to culture by encouraging certain ways of manipulating symbols (as in abstract thinking or in argumentative strategies for instance), while disqualifying approaches regarded as less legitimate by the gatekeepers of official culture (professors and those employed by the education system). [450]

Supported by empirical data, Bourdieu and Passeron observe important correlations between the cultural capital possessed by students, and their chances of

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[448] Pierre Bourdieu, ed., *Un art moyen. Essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie* (1965), 2nd edn (Paris: Minuit, 1993).

[449]Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *La reproduction. Eléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement* (Paris: Minuit, 1970).

[450] See especially Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Les héritiers. Les étudiants et la culture* (1964), 3rd edn (Paris: Minuit, 1985).

achieving excellence in their academic programs. As the two sociologists argue, linguistic capital (a particular form of cultural capital), is highly correlated to academic distinction, particularly in fields such as humanities. Linguistic capital indicates not only linguistic capabilities but, more broadly, the presence of intellectual and cognitive ones. As Bourdieu and Passeron point out:

> Le style reste toujours pris en compte, implicitement ou explicitement, à tous les niveaux du cursus et, bien qu'à des degrés divers, dans toutes les carrières universitaires, même scientifiques. Plus, la langue n'est pas seulement un instrument de communication, mais elle fournit, outre un vocabulaire plus ou moins riche, un système de catégories plus ou moins complexe, en sorte que l'aptitude au déchiffrement et à la manipulation de structures complexes, qu'elles soient logiques ou esthétiques, dépend pour une part de la complexité de la langue transmise par la famille.[451]

Linguistic capital, as described in this passage, is related to the mastering of 'un système de catégories plus ou moins complexes' providing the conditions to enjoy specific aesthetic experiences and also, seemingly, particular techniques of reasoning which come to be viewed as privileged forms of logical thinking by the education system.[452]

In *Homo academicus* (1984) Bourdieu further develops his criticism of the education system by providing a description of the university system by means of the concept of field. *Homo academicus* is a study about the French university system around 1968, largely conceived to illustrate, support and analyse data gathered from sociological research and already presented in their previous publications. The book seeks to analyse how the dramatic increase in the number of students in '68 France created the possibility to remap the field of knowledge by introducing, among other

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[451] Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *La reproduction*, p.92.

[452] According to the empirical studies conducted by Bourdieu and Passeron, the knowledge of Latin and Greek, and the historical heritage associated with such languages, come to be seen as a sign of social distinction conferring an aura of intellectual charisma. Students who demonstrate proficiency in Latin and Greek and following certain academic careers, such as literary studies, also appear to satisfy more readily the expectations of their professors. See Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, *La reproduction*, p.106.

things, new disciplines in the university. However, as Bourdieu maintains, in spite of the increase in the number of students, some of the hierarchical structures of the university have remained intact. With arguments similar to those used in his previous studies about education and culture, Bourdieu illustrates how the social background of students, and their degree of mastering of particular cultural codes, enhance either the motivational stirring or the frustration they experience with regards to the education system. The academic system, the argument goes, privileges a specific type of symbolic capital, which is also the type of capital that students from socially and economically privileged families are likely to possess.[453]

6.6 Academic field and deontology of knowledge

In *Homo academicus*, Bourdieu places the academic field between the economic field and the artistic field. The economic field, consisting mainly of the industry and the commerce, is where traditionally money and material resources are concentrated, whereas the artistic field is much more based on cultural capital. The academic field occupies an intermediate position between them; while it is often "dominated" by the economic power, it also enjoys some privileges with regards to the artistic field:

> En tant que 'capacités', dont la position dans l'espace social repose principalement sur la possession de capital culturel, espèce dominée de capital, les professeurs d'université se situent plutôt du côté du pôle dominé du champ du pouvoir et s'opposent nettement sous ce rapport aux patrons de l'industrie et du commerce. Mais, en tant que détenteurs d'une forme institutionnalisée de capital culturel, qui leur assure une carrière bureaucratique et des revenus réguliers, ils s'opposent aux écrivains et aux artistes.[454]

As Bourdieu argues, different social fields tend to attract different types of symbolic capital. University professors, for instance, like artists and writers, possess a lot of

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[453] The university system, as analysed by Bourdieu, embodies a particular approach to culture that favours students who access it having already acquired its basic capital of core skills. The encounter between those students and the school expectations is likely to generate a positive response that affect the positive experience of the student.

[454] Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Paris: Minuit, 1984), p. 55.Page numbers in the text in the next paragraphs refer to this edition.

cultural capital recognised institutionally. But unlike many writers and artists, they often enjoy a fixed salary and their professional role is carried out within specific institutional settings such as universities or research centres. If its position within the social space is characterized by a number of relations to other fields (such as the artistic or the economic field), the academic field also enjoys a relative autonomy from neighbouring fields. However, despite this relative autonomy, Bourdieu points out that some faculties recognize a more immediate application of their knowledge into the world of business, while others rely on a more research oriented paradigm:

> Les mots communs, recherche, enseignement, direction de laboratoire, etc., recouvrent des réalités profondément différentes, et sont sans doutes d'autant plus trompeurs aujourd'hui que la diffusion du modèle scientifique, sous les effets combinés de la mode et des contraintes homogénéisantes de l'administration de la recherche, ont conduit l'ensemble des membres de l'enseignement supérieur à rendre cet hommage obligé à la science qu'est l'emploi d'un langage emprunté aux sciences de la nature pour designer des réalités souvent très éloignés des choses de la science (je pense par exemple à la notion de laboratoire).(p.77)

As Bourdieu notes, writing and argumentative styles also express different ideas of knowledge. In some disciplines one might find a preference for one writing style over another:

> En fait, les prises de positions dans l'espace des styles correspondent étroitement aux positions dans le champ universitaire. (…) Si les géographes et les sociologues ont en commun de montrer plus d'indifférence envers les qualités littéraires, les premiers manifestent l'humilité des dispositions qui conviennent à leur position en prenant le parti du style neutre qui est l'équivalent dans l'ordre de l'expression de l'abdication empiriste à laquelle ils se résignent la plupart du temps. Quant aux sociologues, ils trahissent souvent leur prétention à l'hégémonie (inscrite dès l'origine dans la classification comptiste des sciences) en empruntant alternativement ou simultanément aux rhétoriques les plus puissantes dans les deux champs par rapport auxquels ils sont obligés de se situer, celle de la mathématique, souvent utilisée comme signe extérieur

de scientificité, ou celle de la philosophie, souvent réduite à des effets de lexique. (pp. 45-46)

Some disciplines are more inclined to value literary and artistic experiences, while others have a more immediate, pragmatic, and interested relationship to knowledge and knowledge practices.

From the development of his theory of practice in the early 70s, Bourdieu relies more systematically on concepts such as field, habitus, and logic of practice to examine intellectual and artistic practices. As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, Bourdieu's commitment to developing his theory of practice also leads him to formulate a criticism of the deontology of critical distance adopted by academic disciplines such as anthropology or philosophy. In fact Bourdieu will often critically address the very notion of reason that informs scholarly practices of knowledge. As Richard Shusterman notes, Bourdieu, by linking the notion of practical reason to the concept of habitus, suggests the internalised dimension of practical reason:

> Practical reason requires the idea of regulative norms and conscious rules that the non-reflective, anti-intellectualistic notion of *habitus* aims to supplant. By making *habitus'* essential logic of practice unreflective, Bourdieu denies the ability of practicing agents to critique, reinterpret, and thereby revise their practical logic and behaviour, thus compelling them to sustain the social domination incorporated in the *habitus* that allegedly directs their practical reasoning.[455]

As this passage illustrates, for Bourdieu the habitus is so deeply internalised that it operates beyond individuals' conscious intentions. Bourdieu defines 'practical reasoning' as combining cognition and action; thereby he regards practices of knowledge as stemming from practical activities as much as from intellectual frameworks defining norms of scientificity.[456] By emphasizing aspects of intellectual work that, because highly routinized, are often taken for granted, Bourdieu's theory of

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[455] Richard Shusterman, ed., *Bourdieu. A Critical Reader*, pp.6-7.

[456] See in particular Pierre Bourdieu, *Science de la science et réflexivité* (Paris : Raisons d' Agir, 2001) as an example of Bourdieu's contribution to sociology of science.

intellectual practices clearly draws attention to the normative component that orient intellectual and scholarly enquiry.

As this study has illustrated, intellectual creativity involves questioning, challenging, and sometimes transgressing disciplinary boundaries. [457] If there is an academic discipline that Bourdieu has admittedly challenged while remaining closely attached to it, to its tradition and to its spirit, it is certainly philosophy. In *Méditations Pascaliennes* (1997) Bourdieu develops a criticism of the intellectual posture characterizing academic philosophy. Bourdieu's sociology of the academic field purports to cast a critical gaze on the limits and boundaries of the academic discourse. As Shusterman notes:

> Bourdieu's metaphilosophical project of tracing philosophy's limits is advanced by
> his very practice of going outside philosophy's conventional limits (as if to view them
> from the outside) in pursuing his theoretical inquiries through the methods of
> sociology and anthropology.[458]

When analysing the deontology of professional philosophers in *Méditations Pascaliennes* Bourdieu adopts the metaphor of the game. As Bourdieu maintains, individuals dispose of a sense of the game under the form of internalised schemes of action and cognition (i.e. the habitus); their sense of the game allows them to adopt social strategies which reveal their adaptability to both predictable and unpredictable situations. Just like the habitus, the sense of the game is internalised and embodied, and it operates in conjunction with social conventions defining the field:

> La logique spécifique du champ s'institue à l'état incorporé sous la forme d'un habitus
> spécifique, ou, plus précisément, d'un sens du jeu, ordinairement désigné comme un

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[457] As Stanley Fish note, challenging the growing compartmentalization of knowledge is one of the main points on the agenda of those intellectuals who defend interdisciplinarity. See Stanley Fish, 'Being interdisciplinary is so hard to do' in Stanley Fish, *There is no such Thing as Free Speech* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.231-243.

[458] Richard Shusterman,'Introduction. Bourdieu as a Philosopher', in *Bourdieu. A Critical Reader*, ed. by Richard Shusterman (Malden (US): Blackwell, 1999), pp. 1-13, p.11

'esprit' ou un 'sens' ('philosophique', 'littéraire', 'artistique', etc.) qui n'est

pratiquement jamais posé ni imposé de manière explicite.[459]

When individuals intend to be part of particular fields, Bourdieu argues, they might experience either a degree of empathy with the field or a feeling of misplacement due to the lack of convergence between the way in which the field is structured and their psychological or intellectual dispositions. When individuals are successfully integrated within a field, this is generally due, as Bourdieu points out, to the long social apprenticing during which they incorporate a particular type of *savoir faire* which happens to be fostered by the field they enter.

In the pages of *Médiations pascaliennes* Bourdieu underscores the relation between institutional configurations and the intellectual dispositions that individuals develop over time. As pointed out, Bourdieu argues that cognitive and intellectual dispositions individuals acquire along their biographical itinerary allow them not only to be successful within the field of their choice, but also to experience a feeling of self-satisfaction deriving from playing an active and self-rewarding role in this field.[460] For Bourdieu the social role of the professional philosopher is defined in terms of a socially acquired intellectual posture as much as by an attitude towards life in general. As Bourdieu point out:

> La situation scolastique (dont l'ordre scolaire représente la forme institutionnalisée)
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> est un lieu et un moment d'apesanteur sociale où, défiant l'alternative commune entre
>
> jouer (paizein) et être sérieux (spoudazein), on peut jouer sérieusement (spoudaiôs
>
> paizein), comme dit Platon pour caractériser l'activité philosophique, prendre aux
>
> sérieux des enjeux ludiques, s'occuper sérieusement de questions qu'ignorent les gens
>
> sérieux, simplement occupés et préoccupés par les affaires pratiques de l'existence
>
> ordinaire. (p.28)

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[459] Pierre Bourdieu, *Médiations pascaliennes* (1997), 2nd edn (Paris: Seuil, 2003), p.25. Page numbers in the text in the next paragraphs refer to this edition.

[460] See also Randall Collins's notion of emotional energy as developed in *The Sociology of Philosophies* in order to account for the energy that intellectuals receive from successfully participating to debates within academia.

The professional posture of the philosopher, his or her relationship with knowledge and material culture, as Bourdieu points out, is not based on pure material necessity, but presupposes the possibility of playfully engaging with ideas. This playful relationship would not be possible without the leisure to adopt a detached stance at things; but such opportunity is not often given to someone who would live under the sole obligation of 'les affaires pratiques de l'existence ordinaire'. Bourdieu points out that 'il faut (donc) rapporter les différents espèces de *"worldmaking"* aux conditions économiques et sociales qui les rendent possibles' (p.32). Historically speaking, the disciplinary framework of contemporary philosophy has emerged gradually within the process of the autonomisation of disciplinary territories within the academic field. As Bourdieu argues, a feature of this historical development is the opposition between the intellect, seen as a privileged instrument of knowledge, and the body.

6.7 Bourdieu's self-reflexive epistemology

Bourdieu contends that the social factors impacting upon the conception and the production of knowledge can be transformed, by the self-reflexive gaze of the researcher, into occasions to refine (and perhaps redefine) disciplinary frameworks by means of which knowledge gets conceptualized. The goal of this self-reflexive exercise is to be able to objectify the very instruments of knowledge that the researcher utilizes in order to frame his or her research object.[461] To this end Bourdieu in *Homo academicus* proposes a methodological approach that aims to address a set of un-reflexive and unconscious practices or deontological codes that inform scholarly practices of knowledge. As Bourdieu argues, the social scientist should, ideally, be able to perceive him or herself at the centre of a network of social forces contributing to the shaping of his or her experience of the social world:

En réalité, la liberté à l'égard des déterminismes sociaux qui pèsent sur lui est à la

mesure de la puissance de ses instruments théoriques et techniques d'objectivation et

surtout, peut-être, de sa capacité de les retourner, en quelque sorte, contre lui-même,

d'objectiver sa propre position au travers de l'objectivation de l'espace à l'intérieur

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[461] For an illustration of Bourdieu's attempt to objectify the context within which knowledge is produced see Bourdieu's inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, Pierre Bourdieu. *Leçon sur la leçon* (Paris: Minuit, 1982).

duquel se définissent et sa position et sa vision première de sa position et des positions opposes; de sa capacité d'objectiver du même coup l'intention même d'objectiver, de prendre sur le monde, et notamment sur le monde dont il fait partie, un point de vue souverain, absolu, et de travailler à exclure de l'objectivation scientifique tout ce qu'elle peut devoir à l'ambition de dominer en se servant des armes de la science; de sa capacité enfin d'orienter l'effort d'objectivation vers les dispositions et les intérêts que le chercheur doit lui-même à sa trajectoire et à sa position et aussi vers sa pratique scientifique, vers les présupposés qu'elle engage dans ces ses concepts et ses problématiques, et dans toute les visées éthiques ou politiques associées aux intérêts sociaux inhérents à une position dans le champ scientifique.[462]

There is something in this passage that speaks about Bourdieu's methodological rigour when discussing notions such as objectivation and objectivity. There is also an attempt at diversifying critical detachment into several operations. Bourdieu's call for what seems to be an act self-disengagement from the social world introduces a certain number of potential questions aimed at redefining the accuracy of the sociological method. Nevertheless, Bourdieu's methodological reflections also raise potential paradoxes such as: how can the knowledge of the social world be the result of an act of detachment and at the same time claim to preserve, in some form or another, the logic whereby social actors do what they do and act as they act?

Conforming to the principle of self-reflexivity that lies at the heart of his sociological approach, Bourdieu concedes that in order to be able to successfully objectify the logic that governs the academic field, it is necessary to include the methodological operations carried out by the researcher to construe his or her conceptual view. As Bourdieu points out:

Je ne suis pas loin de penser que la vertu principale du travail scientifique d'objectivation consiste en ce qu'il permet, à condition, bien sûr, qu'on sache en

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[462] Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo academicus*, pp.27-28.

analyser le produit, d'objectiver l'objectivation. En effet, pour le chercheur soucieux

de savoir ce qu'il fait, le code, d'instrument d'analyse devient objet d'analyse.[463]

As Bourdieu notes, the epistemic codes that the sociologist uses in order to construe knowledge can be turned into objects of analysis. When this condition is met, the objectivation is maximised. However, insofar as it tries to capture the ways in which the practice of scientific objectivation is carried forward by the researcher, this operation constitutes in itself yet another form of objectivation. From here, there are two possibilities. Firstly, this form of objectivation, one could argue, provides the researcher with a more accurate view of the social world and a more thorough understanding of intellectual practices through which knowledge is construed. This is the view that Bourdieu underscores, and it is also the view that provides ground to introduce the practise of self-reflexivity as a ground-breaking research technique. On the other hand, introducing an explicit self-reflexive perspective into the routinized practice of doing research might also produce the opposite effect. That the researcher gets involved in a solipsistic exercise supported by some rhetorical arguments calling forth a more solid form of objectivation.

6.8 Conclusion

In the first part of the chapter I have examined closely how Eco's understanding of interpretative practices can offer a framework for addressing some of the ways in which academic knowledge results from acts of interpretation of reality. Eco's notion of limits of interpretation raises the question of the somewhat difficult and complex tasks of (1) defining criteria, methods and procedures against which knowledge can be tested and (2) setting epistemological limits within which an academic community can define a conceptual space in which to address new developments and new directions (some of which, unexpected) of knowledge. Eco's understanding of the limits of interpretation, as well as Eco's notion of encyclopaedia, can also be discussed against a certain idea of order. In the case of Peirce's unlimited semiosis and Eco's understanding of encyclopaedia, order is approached under the sing of unpredictability, creativity and impermanence. The notion of order also appears particularly important in Eco's strategic approach towards establishing a difference between hermetic semiosis and

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[463] Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo academicus*, p.18

unlimited semiosis, while allowing to fully preserving the idea (very dear to Eco) that meaning is subject to unpredictability.

In the second part of the chapter I have started out by referring to Lamont's work on academic judgment. I have pointed out how criteria of academic judgement, because they are deeply internalised, might function in an often non-reflexive way so as to provide the conditions for academic judgment to be carried out without too many disruptions. From there onwards, I have discussed the work of Bourdieu by emphasising the links between the education system and the institutional recognition of intellectual dispositions. While interpretative practices as discussed in the first part of the chapter leave ample space for conceptualizing creativity within knowledge, Bourdieu's work on education and culture draws attention on how intellectual frameworks (and the ability to manipulate meaningful symbols in ways that are institutionally relevant) are often associated with an exclusive form of cultural capital that is distinctive of particular social groups.

This chapter has deepened the analysis of intellectual narratives. It has enriched the description of the different modes of intellectual engagement endorsed by Bourdieu and Eco. In Bourdieu's case, the discussion developed in this chapter has emphasized the importance of the education system in the social reproduction of cultural values. Bourdieu is very emphatic in stressing that the biographical trajectories of individuals need to be assessed in relation to the particular institutions and cultural fields individuals engage with, precisely because it is the role of the institutions (i.e the education system) to provide individuals with the cultural resources that in the last instance allow them to respond positively to the standards and requirements of social fields.

In light of Bourdieu's sociological analysis of education, it is possible to articulate the relation between the importance that Bourdieu gives marginality and singularity for the role of the intellectual, as I explore it in the first chapters of this study, with the realization of the embeddedness of interpretation and thinking in social contexts as I discuss it in this chapter. The notion of habitus makes this articulation possible, in that it allows Bourdieu to reconcile two different conceptions of culture. Through the first one Bourdieu presents culture as a process in which the value of culture results from the negotiation of externality (i.e. social structures, institutional

systems) and internality (i.e. cognitive frameworks and perceptive categories). However, because the education system plays a key role in the social reproduction of culture, of cognitive mechanisms and mental structures, in the second conception of culture the articulation of internality and externality does not offer much scope for social change and for intellectual innovation.

Bourdieu's intellectual self-narrative stands somewhere in between these two conceptions of culture. On the one hand, Bourdieu's intellectual itinerary is the result of great social and intellectual mobility. From the periphery of his native Béarn a very young Bourdieu moves to the intellectual, cultural and political centre of Paris in order to become a student at the ENS. A second key moment occurs when Bourdieu explores the discipline of ethnology through his fieldwork in Algeria. Thirdly, Bourdieu moves back to France and undertakes his scholarly career as a sociologist. The underlying mobility that defines Bourdieu's intellectual itinerary has fostered the idea of a sociology that is both strongly rooted in the tradition of the discipline, as well as open to confront and engage with other disciplines such as psychology, history of art, and philosophy. In spite of the diversity of social and intellectual experiences that characterize Bourdieu's itinerary, one finds that Bourdieu's intellectual self-concept is strongly defined through the ideas of marginality and singularity. Singularity and marginality, as I suggested in the first chapters of this study, hold a positive value for Bourdieu. These notions are not socially and intellectually disqualifying, but they have to be understood as elective strategies that allow Bourdieu to define the intellectual as the spokesperson of the unorthodox, the alternative, and sometimes the radical. To acknowledge this means to accept the idea that cultural differences serve as a foundation for different ways of experiencing the world we inhabit. In Bourdieu's intellectual self-concept, the themes of singularity and marginality are crucial in establishing the self-narrative of the intellectual who turns his peripheral position into a privileged point of view for the production of the discourse of truth and objectivity.

My discussion of the notion of interpretation in this chapter has also highlighted the presence of two slightly different conceptions of culture within Eco's exploration of the interactions between readers and text. On the one hand Eco insists on a conception of culture in which the reader is a creative agent that can interpret a text in multiple ways, thus promoting cultural and intellectual innovation within culture. On the other hand, For Eco a text constitutes a cultural world in which the number of possible

interpretations might be regulated by logical and semantic inferences as well as by systems of cultural conventions. This said, Eco's general understanding of cultural processes does not consider the idea of social reproduction as directly as Bourdieu's sociology does. This is perhaps because Eco has focused much of his intellectual career in studying possible ways to account for the potential art and literature have to transcend narrowly conceived definitions of meaning and interpretation. In Eco's intellectual self-narrative, the complexity of art and literature fosters the ability of the intellectual to move freely on cultural maps in order to challenge one-dimensional views of reality.

General Conclusion

Put to the test of creativity and interdisciplinarity, the work of Bourdieu and Eco has shown how disciplines are brought together in a constructive dialogue. Sometimes interdisciplinarity has appeared to be already constitutive of the development of a discipline, approach, or theoretical sensitivity. As the case of Eco suggests, interdisciplinarity is implied in a research agenda that, from the outset, tackles the discursive homologies of disciplines across the spectrum of modern culture. In this context, Eco crafts his own theoretical approach on a systematic bridging of different disciplines whereby he defines the discipline of semiotics. In Eco's semiotics the notion of code, as pointed out, plays a vital role in promoting an approach that focuses on the iterative as much as on the creative aspects of culture.

At times interdisciplinarity can be less diffuse than what Eco's case suggests, manifesting itself in a confrontation between disciplines. The "clash" of disciplines triggered by Bourdieu's idea of sociology's place within the intellectual field results in specific forms of interdisciplinarity that are different from the ones exemplified by Eco's semiotic approach. Bourdieu's interdisciplinary approach is traversed by epistemological tensions that mirror those between disciplines such as sociology, philosophy and history of art. As Bourdieu's sociological project illustrates, one does not need to conflate disciplines in a tension-free territory in order to produce interdisciplinarity. Tensions between disciplines, questioning of discipline's territories, or transdisciplinary practices in the name of a redefinition of a discipline are equally productive in the development of creative interdisciplinarity.

This study has illustrated that disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity develop as parallel forms of knowledge. The cases of Bourdieu and Eco show that disciplinarity can open up to the possibility of interdisciplinarity, as much as interdisciplinarity can co-exist with the exploration of a disciplinary agenda. Whether one is trying to strengthen the knowledge of one discipline, attempts to widen its horizon or tries to bring a new point of view within it, disciplinarity constitutes a positioning within a field of knowledge, and represents an implicit statement about the boundaries of disciplines. The awareness of disciplinary boundaries often brings one to challenge the very *raison d'être* of disciplines. My initial hypothesis was, precisely, that creative intellectuals have an interest in questioning and challenging the idea of disciplinary limits: in this

study I have illustrated some of the forms that this questioning and challenging can take. I have claimed, in particular, that by questioning disciplinary limits, creative as much as interdisciplinary knowledge is enhanced.

I would like to conclude by drawing attention to some of the implications of interdisciplinarity this study has brought to light. In at least one way this study has confirmed my initial intuition: that *in order to be interdisciplinary and to display intellectual creativity, one needs to be thoroughly familiar with at least one discipline and have an interest in confronting this discipline's framework with that of other disciplines*. From this perspective, the existence of disciplines has proven to be a major guarantee for the development of creative thinking. Studies on creativity stress that creativity originates from a combination of different cultural, social, and cognitive frameworks. For this reason, conceiving of interdisciplinarity as a combination of two or more disciplinary frameworks makes the creative component of interdisciplinary, its originality and its novelty all the more apparent.

Because creativity is indissociable from a combination of more or less well established cultural, social, and cognitive frameworks, it is hard to see how the very idea of interdisciplinarity can be preserved without acknowledging that disciplines are the initial framework whose combination results in an original way of producing knowledge. Furthermore, as many commentators point out, disciplines have a differential value. They designate a domain of knowledge in relation to or in opposition to the domain of knowledge of neighbouring disciplines. This differential and oppositional value enhances, rather than hinders, the creative approach to knowledge that informs interdisciplinarity. If one were to do without the differential value of disciplines, it would be difficult to see exactly what is combined, who combines what and how, and most importantly why disciplines are combined. One cannot do without the very idea of discipline, for the very simple fact that the history of knowledge is indissociable from the history of disciplines.

This study has illustrated how disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity are interlinked sides of a dialogue within the history of knowledge. By highlighting a fragment of this vast dialogue, I have stressed the importance of creativity within contemporary academia. Creativity is not an easy thing to attain. It requires intuition and perseverance. Since it defines itself both in relation and in opposition with the

213

normative, it is paramount, for a thorough understanding of its processes, that one is able to locate the normative as a discourse: that is, one ought to be able to identify existing disciplines, as well as to codify those epistemological practices that regulate research cultures within academia. To this end, in my conclusive chapter I have stressed the importance of the dialectical interplay between creativity and order, between harmony and randomness, between tradition and novelty. One of the lessons that can be drawn from this chapter is that Bourdieu and Eco, while highly creative intellectuals in their respective domains, are also highly aware of the existence of boundaries that shape the discourse of knowledge within and without academia.

The awareness of such boundaries, and the ability to integrate this awareness within a coherent intellectual agenda, is peculiar to both Bourdieu and Eco. The kind of self-reflexivity developed by Bourdieu and Eco shows, precisely, that knowing where the limit is, being able to identify it, and in a subsequent move being able to verbalize it, to discuss and elaborate on it, goes hand in hand with the possibility to transcend it and to reformulate it. Creative interdisciplinarity consists in a balance between a *part destruens* (the critique of disciplines) and a *part construens* (the constructive dialogue between disciplines). I hope this study has succeeded in bringing to light both a critique of disciplinarity as well as a more optimistic approach to it; one where disciplinarity is, precisely, interpreted as a starting platform for the exercise of creative interdisciplinarity.

Interdisciplinary, some might say, is the future of academia. However, many obstacles might prevent the development of interdisciplinary practices that are truly creative and not merely nominal. Some of these obstacles have to do with the protocols, techniques of investigations and methodologies that have been the object of chapter six. These methodologies, protocols and techniques often revolve around the idea that new knowledge adds an extra value to a capital of existing knowledge. Academic contributions are often regarded as bricks that are added to an edifice called Progress. The problem is, progress, besides being an extremely ideologically charged notion, might not always be creative.

A few final questions might be relevant here. Should academics be more critical of idea of progress of knowledge? Should they be more inclined to question and redefine the meaning of progress? Should they explore the idea that progress is an

historical category and, for this reason, only one of the possible ways of conceiving something we call history and something we call knowledge? Should the idea of progress be reassessed, and should academia be open to ways of knowledge that might not relate to the idea of progress?

This is perhaps the big challenge of creative interdisciplinarity. Creativity is a game that constantly questions and sometimes redefines its rules.

Selected Bibliography

The following bibliography is a list that includes the works cited in this study and a number of works that I have read and that have inspired, directly and indirectly, the writing of this study. I have divided the bibliography in five sections: works by Pierre Bourdieu, critical studies on Pierre Bourdieu, works by Umberto Eco, critical studies on Umberto Eco, and a final section with studies on intellectuality, creativity, interdisciplinarity and other works. While the sections on the works by Bourdieu and Eco are ordered chronologically, the other sections follow an alphabetical order. In the sections on the works by Bourdieu and Eco I have also provided, when different from the edition I used, the year in which the works have been first published. The aim is to give a chronological framework to situate the works of Bourdieu and Eco in the context of an intellectual itinerary.

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