

**To cite text:**

Jovanović, Miloš (2021), "Bourdieu's Theory and the Social Constructivism of Berger and Luckmann", *Philosophy and Society* 32 (4): 518–537.

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## BOURDIEU'S THEORY AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM OF BERGER AND LUCKMANN<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The paper compares Pierre Bourdieu's sociological approach with the one developed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. The aim of the paper is to identify the complementarities and incongruences of these approaches. The main similarity consists in the intention to "dialectically" overcome/bridge the gap between "objectivism" and "subjectivism" in social theory. Another parallel includes a negative attitude towards the relativistic tendencies of postmodernism. These authors share the thematization of: the body as a locus of social influences, the centrality of language in social life, the social functions of knowledge, and the importance of power in social relations. Differences in theorizing are attributed to the different intellectual, theoretical, and socio-cultural contexts in which these scientists operated. The divergences of these theoretical approaches become evident when one examines the different meaning and significance attached to the concepts of individuation, structure, action, habitus and habitualization, structure of relevance and relation of common-sense and scientific knowledge. Finally, there is a visible difference in political views: Bourdieu was a critic "from the left," while Berger and Luckmann were self-proclaimed liberal conservatives.

### KEYWORDS

Bourdieu, Berger & Luckmann, objectivism/subjectivism, body, language, power, knowledge, political views

## Introduction

The importance of Pierre Bourdieu for contemporary sociology, as well as other scientific disciplines, probably needs no particular emphasis. Bourdieu was a highly respected public intellectual in France, who enjoyed immense popularity. Pierre Carles followed him from 1998 to 2001 and made the film: *Sociology is a Martial Art (La sociologie est un sport de combat)*, in order to help people

<sup>1</sup> The research for this paper was supported by the Ministry of education, science and technological development of the Republic of Serbia (Contract N<sup>o</sup> 451-03-9/2021-14/200165). The author wishes to thank two anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions which helped improve and clarify this manuscript.

understand his research and encourage their social engagement. The book *La Misère du monde*<sup>2</sup>, which was published by Bourdieu and his associates in 1993

sold over 100,000 copies in three months and stood atop the bestseller list for months; it was extensively discussed in political circles and popular magazines alike (conservative Prime Minister Balladur publicly ordered his cabinet members to read it); it has been adapted for the stage and is widely used by school-teachers, social workers and grassroots activists. (Wacquant 1998: 322–323 n11)

Numerous papers dedicated to Bourdieu undoubtedly speak of his status as a modern sociological classic.

[T]rying to keep up with the wide spectrum of research done in a Bourdieusian vein is a bit like Sisyphus continuously rolling his unruly stone up the hill: as soon as you think you're on top of it, a fresh wave of publications comes out proposing all sorts of new concepts and applications. (Atkinson 2020: ix)

Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann are best known for their “Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge”: *The Social Construction of Reality* (1991), first published in 1966.<sup>3</sup> In 1997, according to the votes of the members of the *International Sociological Association*, this publication entered the list of the most important books in the 20th century sociology, taking the fifth place, just above Bourdieu's *Distinction*.<sup>4</sup> One should mention here that, on the 25th anniversary of its publication, Berger and Luckmann's book saw a bulletin of the theoretical section of the *American Sociological Association: Perspectives* 15(2) dedicated to it, while three scientific journals: *Cultural Sociology* 10(1), *Human Studies* 39(1) and *Sociální studia* 13(3), dedicated separate issues to their theory on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. In Serbia, one issue of *The Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnography SASA (Glasnik etnografskog instituta SANU)* 67(1) was titled: “Theoretical legacy of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann” („Teorijsko nasleđe Pitera Bergera i Tomasa Lukmana“).

Translated into more than 20 languages, *The Social Construction of Reality* is considered one of the key works (Schlüsselwerke) of constructivism (Loenhoff 2015). The book is labeled “a bible for social constructivists” (Collin 1997: 66), “the original explicitly ‘constructionist’ study” which “established ‘social

2 English translation: *Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (1999).

3 Berger and Luckmann published their first co-authored paper “Sociology of Religion and Sociology of Knowledge” in 1963, sketching in it the ideas that would later be further developed in the book that made them famous. Before it, Berger published several more papers, either solely or together with Luckmann, Hansfried Kellner and Stanley Pullberg, in which segments of the *Social Construction of Reality* were elaborated in more detail (for the list and short comments on these papers see: Berger 2011: 83).

4 See: <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/about-isa/history-of-isa/books-of-the-xx-century>. Besides *Distinction*, his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* also earned great recognition within his field, and was selected as one of the five most influential works in the last 25 years in *Contemporary Sociology* 25(3) (Calhoun 1996).

construction' as a permanent part of the vocabulary of social science" (Hjelm 2014: 17)<sup>5</sup>, and promoted Berger and Luckmann as the "pioneers of 'social constructionism'" (Endress 2005: 53).

Before considering the similarities and parallels, that is, differences and divergences between Bourdieu's and Berger-Luckmann's theory, one should first clarify what the term "social constructivism" actually implies and outline the relation of the two American<sup>6</sup> theoreticians towards it.

## Social Constructivism: the World is not Discovered, but Socially Created

We will provide a quite concise outline of the social constructivist approach, as not to go out of the context of this paper. We will not deal with Bourdieu's theory in this section, as we believe that this elaboration would be redundant, considering that the entire issue of this journal is dedicated to his theorizing.<sup>7</sup>

At the very beginning one finds the linguistic dilemma: "constructivism" or "constructionism"? English-speaking authors prefer the term *constructionism*, although there are exceptions (Collin 1997; Detel 2001), while German-speaking ones use the term *Sozialkonstruktivismus* and in their papers published in English one can find *social constructivism* (Pfadenhauer and Knoblauch [eds.] 2019).

The spatial limitations of this paper do not allow for a comprehensive overview of different understandings of the essential characteristics, genealogy, classifications and critiques of social constructivism, i.e. a detailed examination on whether it represents a (meta)theory, paradigm, worldview or a specific type of theoretical sensibility.<sup>8</sup> What is certain is that this *is not* the case of a "unique specified doctrine" (Detel 2001: 14264), but rather of "many constructionisms" (Hjelm 2014: 3).<sup>9</sup>

5 The first to use the phrase *social construction* was Lester Frank Ward in an article from 1905 (Knoblauch and Wilke 2016: 54), but it was only after the publication of Berger and Luckmann's book that it became ubiquitous to the extent that Hacking considers it a "tired metaphor" (1999: 35).

6 Having written their *magnum opus* in English and published it in New York, they are considered American theoreticians here, even though both Berger and Luckmann are Austrians by birth – Berger was born in 1929 in Vienna, while Luckmann was born in 1927 in Jesenice, Kingdom of Yugoslavia (his mother was Slovene). They both emigrated to America shortly after World War II and began their academic careers there. Berger remained in the USA, while Luckmann returned to Europe in 1965 having earned professorship at the University of Frankfurt, from where he moved to the University of Konstanz in 1970.

7 As well as the, already mentioned, ever growing abundance of articles, chapters and books that deal with his sociological work.

8 For various (re-/de-)constructions of "the constructionist mosaic" see: Burr 2015; Elder-Vass 2012; Gergen 1999; Weinberg 2014.

9 More than a few authors can rightfully, to a greater or lesser degree, be categorized as constructivists (Bourdieu included). The following are most often mentioned as such: Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, David Bloor, Barry Barnes, Steve Woolgar, Bruno

The vocable *constructivism*<sup>10</sup> will be used here, primarily because that is the variant used by Luckmann and Berger themselves, but also by their direct, self-proclaimed and most prolific descendants – modern German sociologists gathered around the theoretical and research programs of hermeneutic sociology of knowledge (hermeneutische Wissenssoziologie) and communicative constructivism (kommunikativer Konstruktivismus)<sup>11</sup>.

Simply put: „[s]ocial constructionism argues that the human world is not as simple and obvious as it seems and that people, you and I, take part actively in producing and reproducing – constructing – it” (Hjelm 2014: 2). The existence of “objective” facts<sup>12</sup> independent from human practices is questioned.

Language is observed as a precondition to thought, shaping it. Language occupies a prominent role in constructivist research because it serves a performative, and not only a descriptive function.

Hacking emphasizes the idea of contingency – a belief that “things” are not necessarily given, nor unchangeable – as typical for social constructivism (1999: 48).

The attractiveness of the constructivist argument lies precisely in the ironic relation towards that which is “taken-for-granted”, as a phenomenon which “not only could be otherwise but that its ‘local’ form has a history that can be written to show a collection of interests, actions, and flows of power that have created and that sustain it” (Schneider 2005: 724). What is insisted upon is the socio-cultural-historical specificity of knowledge, focusing on the processuality of social interactions and world-building practices. Thus Howard S. Becker says that for him the social construction of reality means

simply that people talk to each other, in person or otherwise, and decide what to call things around them and how to understand those things. Other people might decide those questions differently and that’s why the notion of social construction has some traction, because it makes you see that what you think is real, isn’t necessarily real for some other people, and that that creates a very fruitful area for research and understanding. (Ralón and Ralón 2013)

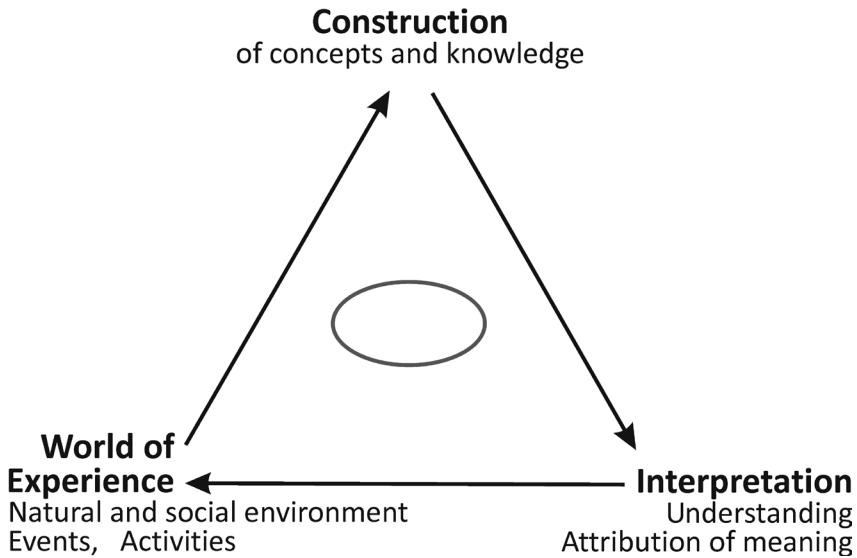
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Latour, Karin Knorr Cetina, Ludwik Fleck, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Mary McCanney Gergen & Kenneth J. Gergen, Rom Harré, John Shotter, Jonathan Potter, ... For a chronological overview of the thinkers who influenced the development of constructivism, from Giambattista Vico to the “postmodern” theoreticians, see: Lock and Strong 2010. *The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* cites William Isaac Thomas, Alfred Schütz and sociologists of “the Chicago school” as forerunners of constructivism in sociology (Scott 2014: 692).

10 However, in the quotations from the texts, we will retain the original variant.

11 See: Hitzler *et al.* 2017; Keller *et al.* 2013.

12 Compare with Nietzsche who, as a constructivist *avant la lettre*, writes: “Against positivism, which halts at phenomena – ‘There are only facts’ – I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact ‘in itself’: perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing” (1968: 267).



*Figure 1:* Construction and interpretation as means of access to the world of experience (Flick 2004: 90)

Berger and Luckmann make a decisive departure from social constructivism. Berger considers it as one of the “impressive illustrations of the unintended consequences of publishing one’s ideas” (2011: 93). In the text that depicts interesting details of their collaboration, Luckmann asks: “Who in heaven or hell, more likely hell, invented (social) ‘constructivism?’” (2001: 23). Berger explicitly denies any affinity for constructivism, which he considers a “child” from “the orgy of ideology and utopianism that erupted all over the academic scene in the late 1960’s” and he expresses the lack of “any sympathy with this *Zeitgeist*” and an assuredness that his and Luckmann’s “sort of sociology was not what all these putative revolutionaries were clamoring for” (Berger 1992a: 2).

Berger correctly assesses that this is not the case of a coherent school of thought, but rather of a set of theories with similar tendencies, and wrongly identifies Foucault and Derrida, who dwell in the “long shadow” of Nietzsche (Berger 2011: 94), as direct progenitors of constructivism, while locating constructivism (not entirely unjustifiably) within the framework of “doctrinary fashionable” postmodern theories, which to him are “each more obscurantist and intellectually barbaric than its predecessor” (Berger 1992b: 18). He calls constructivism in its most radical form a “type of nihilism” and emphasizes that Luckmann and he were repeatedly forced to declare: “We are not constructivists” (Berger 2011: 95).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Like Marx, who had a need to distance himself from Lafargue and Guesde: « ce qu’il y a de certain c’est que moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste » (“what is certain is that [if they are Marxists], [then] I myself am not a Marxist”).

This distancing is caused by their ideological, but also epistemological position. As descendants of the modernist enlightenment project, Berger and Luckmann do not question the existence of objective reality and facts, and the possibility of knowing them.<sup>14</sup> However, between *Social Construction of Reality* and later constructivism there are significant lines of continuity – Berger and Luckmann’s theoretical setting, having “flowed” into the sociological mainstream, continued to develop through various forms of constructivism, perhaps in the directions and to an extent not really suitable to them, yet in such a way so as to rightfully claim that their book represents the origin of constructivism (Spasić 2019).

By examining the similarities with Bourdieu’s theorizing, the above “flowing” into modern sociology will be illustrated, since it has made everyone dealing with social studies a constructivist to a greater or lesser extent.

### With and against Bourdieu

Even though they did not completely ignore each other, as was the case with Émile Durkheim and Max Weber<sup>15</sup>, who were also contemporaries whose interests overlapped significantly, it cannot be said that Bourdieu paid much attention to Berger and Luckmann and *vice versa*. Thus in the text *Sur le pouvoir symbolique (On Symbolic Power)*, in a footnote Bourdieu mentions Schütz and Berger as exponents of *la tradition néo-phénoménologique* (1977: 411 n2), and in the introductory chapter of *An invitation to reflexive sociology* one can find a reference to Berger and Luckmann (Bourdieu, Wacquant 1994: 9 n17) in relation to the shortcomings of the concept of social structure “as the mere aggregate of individual strategies and acts of classification”<sup>16</sup>.

On the other hand, Berger and Luckmann bring up Bourdieu only in the interviews given at the end of their lives: Luckmann in the context of the expansion of the concept of “knowledge” that encompasses the one that is incorporated,<sup>17</sup> and Berger in a commentary on other attempts at “reconciliation” between subjectivism and objectivism in sociological theory.<sup>18</sup>

14 Bourdieu also opposed relativistic (and postmodernist) views of science (Birešev 2014: 139–169), and he considered “postmodernists” to be, in essence, conservative thinkers “whom the reactivation of the old prejudices of the philosophers against the social sciences has often led to the verge of nihilism” (Bourdieu 2008: 79).

15 See: Tiryakian 1966.

16 In a lecture held on October 19 1982 in *Collège de France* Bourdieu speaks of Schütz “who inaugurated the phenomenological school in the United States” (Bourdieu 2019: 63), where he certainly has Berger and Luckmann in mind, although he does not explicitly mention them.

17 “Bourdieu’s work is certainly consistent with much of our thinking. I don’t particularly appreciate his concept of ‘habitus,’ partly because of the word that he uses for the category, partly also because of the category itself. His work is quite interesting, definitely” (Dreher Göttlich 2016: 39).

18 “I’m sympathetic. I’ve read Bourdieu and I’ve read Giddens, and I have no big quarrels with this. Doesn’t interest me very much. I wasn’t interested in these ‘fine

It is precisely this intention to overcome or bridge the gap between the objectivist and subjectivist approach, this “false antinomy” between structure and action, that the first similarity can be observed when comparing Bourdieu’s and Berger/Luckmann’s theory.

The dialectical approach of Berger and Luckmann is a peculiar precursor to Bourdieu’s integrative solution (Dreher 2019: 237), which helped shape Giddens’ theoretical framework within which later readers found ideas and terms, without knowing their original source (Calhoun 1996: 303)<sup>19</sup>. Theoretical integration, according to Berger and Luckmann, “requires a systematic accounting of the dialectical relation between the structural realities and the human enterprise of constructing reality – in history” (1991: 208). They conceive the solution to the fundamental sociological problem of the relationship between an individual and a society as a constant dialectical process of creation, transmission and reproduction of “reality”. In that process, one can analytically differentiate between three moments: externalization, objectivization, and internalization.

Externalization<sup>20</sup> is a segment of the dialectic in which “human beings jointly ‘think up’ a social world” (Berger 2011: 90). “Every human society is an enterprise of world-building” (Berger 1990: 3), and the “‘stuff’ out of which society and all its formations are made is human meanings externalized in human activity” (8). Subjective meanings are constituted<sup>21</sup> in consciousness and then externalized, “which explains individual sociality anthropologically and phenomenologically” (Schnettler, Knoblauch, Raab 2017: 254).

Objectivization<sup>22</sup> is the moment “in which this social world attains a seemingly ‘hard’ reality over and beyond the individuals interacting within it” (Berger 2011: 90). During objectivization the content which was “externalized becomes

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distinctions,’ to use a Bourdieuan concept, between this theory and that theory. I was interested, or *I’m* interested and had been from the beginning, in: what makes people tick? What makes a society tick? And is a theory useful for understanding? And I found the approach in *Social Construction enormously useful*” (Steets 2016b: 17).

19 Giddens, on his part, considers that the analysis developed in *The Social Construction of Reality* “quite fails in its attempt to reconcile a theory of action with one of institutional organization” (1976: 171 n6).

20 *Externalization* as a concept has its origin in Hegel’s *Entäußerung*, a notion with three aspects: creating something new, giving/rejecting something of one’s own and self-opening from the inside out.

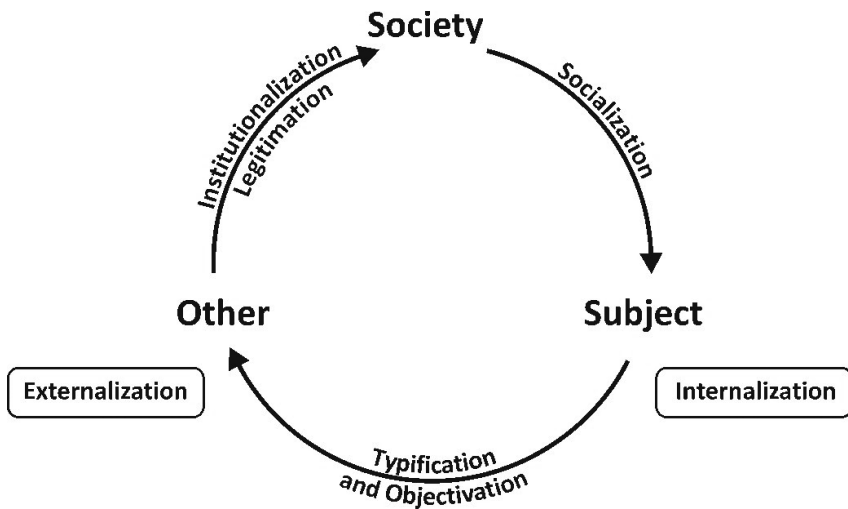
21 The subjective *constitution* of meaning in acts of consciousness (such as selection and typification), which is dealt with by phenomenological “protosociology”, is (as its precondition) distinguished from the social *construction* of reality, which is the subject of sociology “proper”.

22 *Objectivization* is a translation of the German *Versachlichung*, which has three logical stages: 1) the conversion (*Verkehrung*) of relations between persons into those of things (*Sachen*); 2) the conversion of reified relations of *Sachen* into the socio-natural properties of things (*Dinge*) – *thingification*; and 3) the conversion of production relations among persons into the reified-thingified relations of things (*Sachen-Dinge*) that embody socio-natural properties and thereby acquire a “phantom objectivity” or “phantasmagorical form” (Tairako 2017).

a reality through social processes of institutionalization and legitimation” (Schnettler, Knoblauch and Raab 2017: 254).

Internalization is the „process by which this objective ‘outside’ world is re-projected into the consciousness of individuals through various experiences of socialization, beginning in childhood but continuing throughout life” (Berger 2011: 90). Making socially objectified patterns of action and meanings attached to them “internally” enables the creation and permanent establishment of personal identity (Jovanović 2019), which is the process through which individuals finally integrate into the world.

Berger and Luckmann formulate the fundamental dialectic using the following sequence of assertions: *Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product.* (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 79). One can easily perceive a similarity with what Bourdieu writes on the construction of a theory on the manner of practice creation, which is the precondition for the establishment of “an experimental science of the *dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*, or, more simply, of incorporation and objectification” (Bourdieu 2010: 72).



*Figure 2:* The Dialectics of Social Construction in Berger and Luckmann (Knoblauch 2011: 140)

Any analysis of the social world that leaves out any of the three mentioned moments leads to a skewed viewpoint, since the expressing of subjective meaning and social channelling of that activity are “*both indispensable, interwoven and inseparable moments of the social process of The Social Construction of Reality*” (Endress 2019: 54; italics M. J.).

Thus, for example, neglecting externalization leads to a reified perspective of social reality, where it remains hidden that it is a result of an ongoing



and continuous human production, therefore, social phenomena are observed as “thing-like”, as being part of “the natural” (or “god-given”) world (Berger, Luckmann 1991: 222 n29; 106–109)<sup>23</sup>, thus negating the empirical existence of social order only as a product of human activity.

Bourdieu also believes that objectivism is an incomplete “mode of theoretical knowledge”, bearing in mind that objectivist knowledge neglects the mutual conditioning between a subject (who knows) and an object (as the object of knowledge) and perceives their relationship as *fait accompli* (Bourdieu 2010: 79), thereby reducing “history to a ‘process without a subject’” (Bourdieu 1990b: 41). In his critique of objectivism, Bourdieu (2010: 30) uses Marx’s remark addressed to Hegel, who according to him obscures the distinction between “the things of logic and the logic of things”.

Nevertheless, even though Bourdieu manages to overcome objectivism and subjectivism, through a “praxeological mode of knowledge”, his theory, which he himself labels “constructivist structuralism” or “structuralist constructivism” (Bourdieu 1990a: 123)<sup>24</sup>, certainly emphasizes the structural moment to a greater extent. An actor who can improvise and who is capable of invention and innovation finds his place in Bourdieu’s theory, albeit with his role remaining very limited since “invention is intentionless; the improvisation is regulated by structures” (Ritzer 2010: 183). Therefore, in a monograph dedicated to Bourdieu, Jenkins, perhaps not fully justifiably, says:

My strongest criticism of his work is probably that he consistently says he is doing one thing while actually doing something else (and usually something which negates or undermines his stated project). He seeks, for example, to transcend the objectivist-subjectivist dualism while remaining firmly rooted in objectivism. (2007: 175)

Berger and Luckmann offer a solution that leaves more room for the agency of the subject. In their conceptualization, focused on the bidirectionality of the relationship between the social and the individual, persons “*actively acquire* specific segments of the social knowledge and *sediment it in a unique way* into their own subjective knowledge” (Meyer 2008: 523; italics M. J.). At that, socio-cultural facts are fully acknowledged:

What the individual represents as his life-world and what he thinks he knows about it are the result of subjective experiences, social actions and, above all, socialized experiences. In the standard empirical case, the latter is derived from a social stock of knowledge: from the meaning reservoir that the subject encounters as something historically pre-given and socially imposed – as a ‘socio-historical a priori’. (Schnettler, Knoblauch, Raab 2017: 248)

23 Berger accepts the distinction made by Marx between *objectivation* (*Versachlichung*), *externalization* (*Entäußerung*), *reification* (*Verdinglichung*), and *alienation* (*Entfremdung*), as well as “notion that the latter two processes, unlike the first two, are not to be understood as anthropological necessities” (Berger 1990: 197 n10).

24 Bourdieu’s theory is more often referred to as “genetic structuralism”.

Individuals “designed” in this way are not reduced to Garfinkel’s *judgmental dopes* – “actors as constrained or determined by social structures and institutions and able to exercise little or no independent judgment” (Ritzer 2010: 150).

If individuation and agency, activity, and creativity of a subject<sup>25</sup> are places in which Bourdieu is theoretically “weaker”<sup>26</sup>, then theorizing the (class) structure – particularly the structure of social inequalities and institutional order – is his strong suit. This comes as no surprise since he had to creatively fight against a direct and strong influence of French structuralism, embodied primarily in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Louis Althusser, and by using the concept of *field*<sup>27</sup> reconceptualize the structure of “social space” in a relational manner.

Berger and Luckmann see social structure as a mere sum of separate classification strategies and acts, which is rightfully criticized by Vandenberghe as a problematic reduction of structure to culture through an “idealistic conception of social structure as a constraining system of typifications (reduction of structure to culture)” (Vandenberghe 2018: 413 n6). Furthermore, he also sees as problematic the overemphasis on meanings to the detriment of norms and expressions (reduction of culture to symbols and signs), reduction of alienation and reification to modes of consciousness and states of mind (reduction of social pathologies to psychological ones), and finally, conservative conception of the social order (reduction of social order to social control) (Vandenberghe 2018: 413–414 n6).

By focusing on the “Hobbesian problem of order” Berger and Luckmann cannot be differentiated from Parsons and the functionalists, towards whom they were actually very critically inclined.

Drawing from Arnold Gehlen’s philosophical anthropology, they see the basis of social order in biological facts which “do not imply any *particular* social order”, but the “fundamental necessity of social order in general” (Abercrombie

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25 In a conversation held in 1999 Bourdieu “confesses”: “The whole phenomenological obscurantism; Sartre and existentialism; the heroic aesthetics in Nietzsche; the salvation of a philosophy of the subject – I have always found all of this quite dumb. I have never really been on this *trip*” (Bourdieu *et al.* 2012: 124).

26 There is a clear bias in Bourdieu’s work towards structuralism: “Unlike the approach of most others (e.g., phenomenologists, symbolic interactionists), Bourdieu’s constructivism *ignores subjectivity and intentionality*. He does think it important to include within his sociology the way people, on the basis of their position in social space, perceive and construct the social world. *However, the perception and construction that take place in the social world are both animated and constrained by structures*. What he is interested in is the relationship between mental structures and social structures. Some microsociologists would be uncomfortable with Bourdieu’s perspective and would see it as little more than a more fully adequate structuralism. They would be particularly upset by his *unwillingness and inability to deal with subjectivity*” (Ritzer 2010: 183; italics M. J.).

27 The field is a relatively autonomous sphere of society in which the actors and their social positions are located. The position of each particular actor is the result of an interaction of: the special rules of each field, the habitus of the actors, and the quantity and structure of capitals at their disposal.

1986: 18). According to Gehlen's understanding, institutions make human behavior "predictable" and "regular", by reducing human *world-openness* (*Welttoffenheit*), "plasticity" and "instability" to entrenched and habitual actions. Social institutions possess the function of "external supports" and "compartments" for behavior, thus forming a stable background for human activities (*Hintergrundserfüllung*), for the *relief* (*Entlastung*) of creativity and inventiveness. "Although it is, in a sense, biologically *required*, social order is constructed *socially*" (Abercrombie 1986: 18).

While theorizing "the problem of order" Luckmann and Berger appear conservative<sup>28</sup> when they concentrate on the "social processes which stabilize reality"<sup>29</sup> and "conceive of social change as rather a threat to the social order than as a chance for progress" (Eberle 2019: 148). They see the world as "endemicly, fundamentally, and systematically chaotic and precarious" (Abercrombie 1986: 19), and justify the need for order as a shield against the ever-threatening "dark side" of anomie – "social life abhors disorder as nature abhors a vacuum" (Berger 1971: 3).

Their theory, however, does not lack potential for debunking of order and the accompanying hierarchy<sup>30</sup>, which Berger wrote about as early as in *Invitation to Sociology* (2004: 25–53), and particularly singled out in a symposium speech "Sociology and Freedom". Here he presents his understanding that sociology is subversive (when it comes to entrenched patterns of thought) and conservative (in its implications on the institutional order):

it should be emphasized that the conservatism in question is of a peculiar kind. It is *not* a conservatism based on the conviction that the institutions of the status quo are sacred, inexorably right, or empirically inevitable. The aforementioned subversive impulse of sociology precludes this type of conservatism. Rather, it is a conservatism based on skepticism about the status quo in society *as well as* about various programs for new social orders. It is, if you wish, the conservatism of the pessimist. (Berger 1971: 4)

Bourdieu occupied the position of an optimist's activism,<sup>31</sup> but not before the 1980s.<sup>32</sup> Even though close to the French left (advocating the achievements

28 "Nostalgic about the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, he (Berger) was always critical of the Left. Towards the end of his life, he was closely associated with the neo-conservative magazine *Commentary* and the neo-liberal *American Enterprise Institute* in Washington, DC. The postings on his blog on the site of *American Interest* (<https://www.the-american-interest.com/v/peter-berger/> – M. J.), which he continued until the very last moment, point to a possible vote for Donald Trump" (Vandenberghe 2018: 408–409).

29 "We are more interested [...] in the *nomie* rather than the *anomie* processes in society" (Berger, Luckmann 1991: 226 n71)

30 "It can be said that the first wisdom of sociology is this – things are not what they seem" (Berger 2004: 23).

31 Which is ironic considering that his theory is often criticized for being too deterministic (Swartz 2005: 362 n49).

32 If the data available from the *HyperBourdieu* website are accurate, Bourdieu began to sign petitions (only) in 1980 (<http://hyperbourdieu.jku.at/hyperbourdieuPetitions.htm>).

of the welfare state, such as state pension system, job safety, open access to higher education, etc.), he was never a member of the communist party. During the 1968 protest he maintained his position on the sidelines (Eribon 1991: 298) and criticized the heroic role of the “total intellectual”, played, with an irresistible *chic radical*, by Sartre.

In the first part of his career, Bourdieu was a scientist interested above all in establishing sociology as a rigorous research and scientifically legitimate (but not a positivist) endeavor, concentrating on internal struggles in the French intellectual field, which was at the time dominated from “an extremely preferential position” by philosophy (Bourdieu 2008; Swartz 1997: 28–30) and an undemocratic way of thinking: “Althusser would refer disparagingly to the ‘so-called social sciences’. It was a manner of making visible a sort of invisible separation between the true knowledge – the possessor of science – and false consciousness. That, I think, is very aristocratic” (Bourdieu, Eagleton 1992: 113)<sup>33</sup>.

When he reached the established position<sup>34</sup> and greatly contributed to securing sociology’s place as “the critical conscience of the society” in France and a science that uses the results of experiential research to lay down a normative vision that “rightfully” expects certain political effects, Bourdieu dedicated himself to the critique of neoliberalism, pointing to the negative social and economic consequences suffered by those most directly affected by the “disassembly” of the social security system. He became an “active participant in numerous strikes directed against the neoliberal policy of the then French government, but also in protests organized as a way of support for immigrants and sexual minorities” (Birešev 2014: 13).

Bourdieu perceives the task of scientific research as “unmasking and debunking hidden, taken-for-granted power relations shaping social life” through which “new possibilities for individual and collective arrangements become possible” (Swartz 2005: 338). Contrary to Luckmann and Berger who remained value-neutral Weberians until the end, Bourdieu (with Passeron) criticized that principle as early as in *Reproduction*:

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In 1981 together with Foucault he organized the action for the support of the Polish trade union *Solidarność* (Eribon 1991: 298–303). Bourdieu was also the initiator of the French petition against the bombing of Yugoslavia: «Arrêt des bombardements, autodétermination» published on 31 March 1999 in *Le Monde* ([https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1999/03/31/arret-des-bombardements-autodetermination\\_3560545\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1999/03/31/arret-des-bombardements-autodetermination_3560545_1819218.html)), and his name was the first on the list of intellectuals from around the world who signed the appeal: “Why we oppose Nato’s war in the Balkans”, published on 10 May of the same year in *New Statesman* (<https://www.newstatesman.com/node/149110>).

33 On Sartre’s disdain for the sciences of man and his avoidance of even mentioning sociology see: Bourdieu 2008: 23.

34 Bourdieu’s academic career reached its summit in 1981 when he was elected full professor in the Department of Sociology at *Collège de France*, the most prestigious research institution in France.

scientific sociology must, in this case, in order to find its object, take as its object that which stands in the way of the construction of the object. To refuse such a project is to consign oneself to blind or complicitous adherence to the given as it gives itself, whether this theoretical surrender be masked under the flaunted rigor of empirical procedures or legitimated by invocation of the ideal of 'ethical neutrality', a mere non-aggression pact with the established order. (1990: 218 n34)

Ana Birešev deems that in "the foundation of the entire Bourdieu's theoretical construction lies the intention to debunk and examine the mechanisms of production and reproduction of domination relations in the society" (2014: 17), which gives the notion of *power* a crucial role.

According to Bourdieu, power is "present" in all social spheres, with a *meta-field* of power existing and influencing divisions and conflicts in all other fields. Here Bourdieu becomes an orthodox Weberian when he sees *struggle* (*Kampf*) as a foundation for the dynamic of social life. The struggle for power is at the core of all social relations – the struggle for control over material and symbolic resources, which transform into different forms of capital in that way. Therefore, examining the field of power is necessary and crucial for discovering and understanding the origin, meaning and consequences of power relations in any society.

For Bourdieu the class conflict becomes a "classification struggle" where that which is at stake is power over classification schemes and systems that form the basis for the ideas about different groups and in turn their (de)mobilization. He develops the notion of "symbolic violence" that relates to governing by "naturalization" – a process through which the conventional, arbitrary and class-based seem "natural" and "objective", resulting in power appearing, through misrecognition (*méconnaissance*), invisible and thus more efficient (Bourdieu 2001: 1–2), since legitimacy "results from the fact that agents apply to the objective structures of the social world structures of perception and appreciation that have emerged from these objective structures and tend therefore to see the world as self-evident" (Bourdieu 1990a: 135).

Berger and Luckmann do not elaborate on the notion of power, yet acknowledge its importance in society nevertheless:

the success of particular conceptual machineries is related to the power possessed by those who operate them [...] The historical outcome of each clash of gods was determined by those who wielded the better weapons rather than those who had the better arguments [...] He who has the bigger stick has the better chance of imposing his definitions of reality. [...] power in society includes the power to determine decisive socialization processes and, therefore, the power to *produce* reality. (Berger, Luckmann 1991: 126–127; 137)

Berger/Luckmann's conceptual frame is a convenient basis for the development of the theory of power, particularly the subjective dimension of the constitution of power based on systems of relevances,<sup>35</sup> which makes it possible to

35 The problem of relevance refers to the question why is something chosen as important from the totality of the lived experience – how a certain topic attracts attention,

explain the resistance of actors towards the established power structures (Dreher 2016), otherwise a problematic moment in Bourdieu's theory.

Another topic common to these theoreticians is the body as a place of social reproduction. Mastering practices is, for Bourdieu, located directly in the body and it does not include consciousness – only subconscious processes together with permanent bodily dispositions produce action. Through the notion of habitus (a system of perception, thought and action schemes), which represents the form of the embodied history,<sup>36</sup> Bourdieu theorizes the input of objective structures into the body, which gets shaped by upbringing into a permanent “reminder”<sup>37</sup> of the “appropriate” place and behavior of individuals – “[b]odily hexis is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking” (Bourdieu 1990b: 69–70)<sup>38</sup>.

In dealing with the body, Berger and Luckmann begin from Plessner's understanding of *eccentricity* – “man's experience of himself always hovers in a balance between being and having a body, a balance that must be redressed again and again” (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 68). This is consequential for the analysis of action in a material environment and the externalization of subjective meanings: “Through acts of externalization, human beings establish a relationship with their bodies and their physical and social environments” (Steets 2016a: 100). One could speak of the common objective reality when there are fundamentally similar ways of thinking and worldviews related to similar bodily techniques and movements. Through internalization the objective (non)material reality transforms into bodily practices.

While Berger and Luckmann deal with the body in a society on a philosophical-anthropological level, Bourdieu considers different “bodily techniques” in the context of perpetuating social (class, gender, ...) inequalities. Similar differences exist in dealing with language and common-sense knowledge.

The English translation (and a later French edition) of one of Bourdieu's books links language and symbolic power in its title,<sup>39</sup> which undoubtedly points to the treatment of language as an instrument in social struggles. In the chapter “Language and Knowledge in Everyday Life” (1991: 49–61), Luckmann and Berger write about language as the most important sign system of the human

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which aspects of the topic are recognized as important, which parts of an individual's stock of knowledge are used for interpretation and which motives influence this process? Relevance structures refer to the principles of selection that can be used to explain the specific choices, attitudes, decisions, and actions that an actor is prepared to perform.

36 “[E]mbodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history” (Bourdieu 1990b: 56).

37 “[T]he body is thus constantly mingled with all the knowledge it reproduces” (Bourdieu 1990b: 73).

38 For more on “social construction of bodies” see: Bourdieu 2001: 7–42.

39 *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), *Language et pouvoir symbolique* (2001); title of the first French edition: *Ce que parler veut dire: l'économie des échanges linguistiques* (1982).

society. Common objectivations of everyday life are made possible and kept together primarily by language signification. Understanding language is important for any understanding of the reality of everyday life. Due to its ability to transcend “here and now”, language builds bridges between different zones within the reality of everyday life and integrates them into a meaningful whole. Language enables objectivation, preservation and accumulation of biographical and historical experience and its transfer to new generations.

When it comes to common sense knowledge, Berger and Luckmann turn it into a central problem: “sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for ‘knowledge’ in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such ‘knowledge’” (Berger, Luckmann 1991: 15). Their approach was labeled *the new sociology of knowledge* precisely because it meant the “democratization” of the subject of this discipline, which was until then focused on the “products” (doctrines, ideas, ideologies) of professional thinkers. While a small group of people deals with theorizing and creating worldviews (which do not cover all that is “real” to people), everyone in society lives in a “world” and “participates in its ‘knowledge’ in one way or another” (27) – possess a pre-theoretical “certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics” (13). This “knowledge” constitutes the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist (27).

Bourdieu, like Durkheim, sharply separates common sense knowledge from the scientific one, and approaches it over the notion of *doxa* – “natural attitude” of the dominated groups, that is, the pre-verbal apprehension of the social world as self-evident, “taken for granted” – beliefs characterized by a seemingly perfect coincidence of the objective order and the subjective principles of the organization (resulting in) natural and social world appearing as (self-)evident (Bourdieu 1990b: 23; 26). *Doxa* is not subjected to reflection and its function is to determine the sense of belonging and “someone’s place”, i.e. set the boundaries to social mobility, and as such it

represents the most radical form of acceptance of the world, the most absolute form of conservatism. This relation of prereflexive acceptance of the world grounded in a fundamental belief in the immediacy of the structures of the *Lebenswelt* represents the ultimate form of conformism. There is no way of adhering to the established order that is more undivided, more complete than this infrapolitical relation of doxic evidence. (Bourdieu, Wacquant 1994: 74)

Bourdieu, together with Wacquant, here demonstrates the connection between cognitive and political. His theory of knowledge represents a dimension and an essential part of his political theory.

## Conclusion

This paper’s (modest) aim was to identify the levels at which Bourdieu and Berger/Luckmann “come close” to each other by identifying the same problems they tackled, albeit in different ways and with different results.

We will start the summary by considering the structure/action dichotomy our theoreticians consider. As already pointed out, Bourdieu, ultimately, stands on the side that emphasizes the restrictions of structures imposed on human action. This strong social pre-structuring is aptly illustrated by his citation of Leibniz in according to whom “we are automatons in three-quarters of what we do” (Bourdieu 2002: 474), where the remaining quarter of our doings is unintentional, and eventual improvisation is, in the final instance, regulated by objective circumstances (i.e. structures).

On the other hand, Berger and Luckmann’s dialectics paves the way for the shift from subjectivism to relationality – the conceptualization of decentred, that is, not substantiated subject. Social action forms the (logical) link that overcomes the alleged polarization of objective and subjective. The dialectical relationship between subject and object is replaced by the process between different subjects in which objective social reality is created, whereas the analytical primacy is bestowed upon the relation between subjects. The foundations of relational theorizing, laid down by Elias and Mannheim, innovatively continued by Berger and Luckmann, are today taken on by Knoblauch in his project of communicative constructivism. As subjects in Berger and Luckmann’s conception are never completely socialized, the room is left for conflict and change, in contrast to the reproduction of social routines, which is the inexorable effect of the determinism in Bourdieu. It might be valuable for the theoreticians involved in the agency/structure debate encompassing the issue of reflexivity (Archer, Sayer, Elder-Vass) to (re)consider Berger/Luckmann’s hint at the “solution” of this central sociological problem.

As for the thematization of the somatic, Berger and Luckmann make a strong case for the corporal in their theory, although they restrict the analysis of the body as a requirement for social action without considering its performative role, which is of utmost importance for Bourdieu. While Berger and Luckmann present language as the essential objectivation of knowledge, Bourdieu stresses its role in social struggles. He makes a sharp cut between common-sense and scientific knowledge, whereas Berger and Luckmann stress their continuity.

The spatial limitations of this paper did not allow for a more detailed comparison of Bourdieu’s and Berger/Luckmann’s theory. Questions related to research methodologies that stem from these theoretical approaches have, unfortunately, remained unanswered.<sup>40</sup> The foundation of Bourdieu’s comprehension on phenomenology, a philosophical standpoint that greatly affected Berger and Luckmann, has not been given appropriate attention.<sup>41</sup> What was done, hopefully informatively enough, was to provide an insight into two ways of synthesizing ideas that are part of the heritage of the classics of sociology, with specific intertwining and different emphasis.

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40 As introductory literature for Bourdieu’s and Berger/Luckmann’s methodology, see respectively: Bourdieu *et al.* 1991; Berger, Kellner 1981.

41 For considerations of the relationship between Bourdieu and phenomenology see: Atkinson 2020; Crossley 2001; Frère 2012; Robbins 2016.



Finally, two short general assessments of these theories can be presented here. On the one hand, *complementarity* stands out, at least when it comes to the relationship between the subjective and the objective, and the idea related to habitus and habitualization (Knoblauch 2003). On the other, one finds the *incongruence* of these approaches, due to insurmountable differences in the theoretical “architecture” and “attitude”, yet with leaving room for one theory to “learn” from the other, albeit within the boundaries of each of these theoretical frameworks (Bongaerts 2019).

Passing the final judgment on Bourdieu's and Berger/Luckmann's theory was not the intention of this paper, but it is a recommendation for readers. The openness of both approaches, which defines their conceptual potential, can make such an attempt particularly interesting and beneficial for the contemporary sociological theorizing.

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## Bourdieu's Theory and the Social Constructivism of Berger and Luckmann

### Apstrakt

U radu se poredi sociološki pristup Pjera Burdijea sa onim koji su razvili Peter Berger i Tomas Lukman. Cilj rada je da se identifikuju komplementarnosti i razilaženja ovih pristupa. Glavna sličnost se sastoji u nameri da se „dijalektički“ prevaziđe/premosti jaz između „objektivizma“ i „subjektivizma“ u društvenoj teoriji. Druga paralela uključuju negativan stav prema relativističkim tendencijama postmodernizma. Ono što je zajedničko za ove autore je tematizacija: tela kao mesta društvenih uticaja, centralnosti jezika u društvenom životu, društvenih funkcija znanja i značaja moći u društvenim odnosima. Razlike u teoretisanju se pripisuju različitim intelektualnim, teorijskim i socio-kulturnim kontekstima u kojima su ovi naučnici delovali. Razilaženja ovih teorijskih pristupa postaju očigledna kada se ispita različito značenje i značaj koji se pridaje konceptima individuacije, strukture, delanja, habitusa i habitualizacije, strukture relevantnosti i odnosa zdravorazumskog i naučnog znanja. Konačno, vidljiva je razlika u političkim stavovima: Burdije je bio kritičar „s leva“, dok su Berger i Lukman bili samoproglašeni liberalni konzervativci.

**Ključne reči:** Burdije, Berger i Lukman, objektivizam/subjektivizam, telo, jezik, moć, znanje, politička gledišta