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# Preface

This book was initially inspired by a seminar given by Fredric Jameson at Duke University in 1995, which aroused my passion for what is called ‘Theory’ today – the critical debate in the social sciences and the humanities led by seminal figures from Europe and the U.S. such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek. While pursuing my PhD under Dominique Maingueneau’s supervision in Paris 12, Créteil (2000–3), I became interested in Theory as a discourse which refers to its social contexts of reception. When I arrived at École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in 2012, where some of Theory’s pioneers such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida once taught, I felt it was time to account for Theory as a historical phenomenon, having fired the imagination of generations of followers and commentators and now canonized in the disciplines.

This book starts out with a socio-historical account of the rise and decline of structuralism in France against the background of Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory of symbolic production. By contextualizing a body of rather exclusive theoretical knowledge, this study takes Theory as a discourse originating in a certain time and place, namely in France in the late 1960s. Theory started with the controversial debates over structuralism, which have mostly been received under the banner of poststructuralism in other parts of the world. In the light of the different ways the protagonists of Theory have been received inside and outside France, this book insists on the social and institutional contexts in which the same body of theoretical texts can be written and read. Yet Theory will also be taken as a source of inspiration for current social theory. What this book aims to do then is to situate Theory socially and historically – no longer in the closed, constituted order of society, but in the social as an uneven and shifting terrain of fragile links and ties, of heterogeneous practices and processes, of polyphonic identities and subjectivities.

This book is the product of the many encounters I have had with my friends and colleagues in Paris, among whom I would especially like to mention

Dominique Maingueneau and many others who I first met at *CEDITEC* in Paris 12. I benefited immensely from the Lacan reading group led by Guy Pariente, the *Groupe d’analyse du discours philosophique*, led by Frédéric Cossutta, the seminars I organize at *EHESS* with Josiane Boutet, Marc Glady, Juliette Rennes and François Leimdorfer and the kind support from Albert Ogien. Daniel Marwecki and Clare Simmons have helped translate parts of this manuscript. Valuable remarks and help have come from members of my research team at Warwick and *EHESS*, Johannes Beetz, Julian Hamann, Ronny Scholz, Marta Wróblewska as well as from Jens Maeße, Iro Konstantinou, Jaspal Singh and Veit Schwab.

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Introduction: The Intellectual Field in France

## ‘Poststructuralism’: An international misunderstanding?

For thirty years now, French theorists of the 1960s and 1970s, such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, have been discussed in international intel- lectual discourse as representatives of a paradigm commonly known as ‘poststructuralism’ (and sometimes as [French] Theory, ‘postmodern theory’, or ‘deconstruction’, less frequently as ‘constructivism’ or ‘anti-humanism’). Yet, in France itself the label ‘poststructuralism’ is unfamiliar. It is undisputed that theorists such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes enjoyed widespread attention during the structuralist, Freudian and Marxist controversies of the 1960s and 1970s. But in France, one wonders why these theorists, whose theoretical projects reached the peak of public interest around 1970 and who otherwise have little to do with one another, are given the peculiar prefix ‘post’ by international observers. Why are they grouped into one movement, headed by figures as different as Foucault and Derrida (cf. Angermuller, 2007b)? An interview with Michel Foucault, which appeared in 1983 in the American journal *Telos* under the title ‘Structuralism and Post-Structuralism’, documents the lack of understanding on the part of the supposed leader of this intellectual movement. While the American interviewer insisted that Foucault position himself in relation to ‘poststructuralism’, Foucault replied somewhat surprised and irritated, ‘that behind what was known as structuralism, there was a certain problem – broadly speaking, that of the subject and the recasting of the subject. [Yet I] do not see what kind of problem is common to those

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referred to the people we call “postmodern” or “poststructuralist”’ (Foucault, 1994c: 447 [448]).1, 2 What a tragedy: a leader of a movement who knows nothing of his movement!

Despite additional protests from other French theorists, including Derrida, who denounced the identification of his theoretical project with ‘“post- modernism”, “post-structuralism” and the critique of “meta-narrative”’ as ‘gross error’ (1999: 241f.), the label ‘poststructuralism’ established itself in the intellectual debate of the 1980s and 1990s in the Anglo-American world, in Central, Southern and Eastern Europe, in Central and South America and in East Asia – in short, everywhere but in France. Thus, Slavoj Žižek emphasizes ‘the crucial but usually overlooked fact that the very term “poststructur- alism”, although designating a strain of French Theory, is an Anglo-Saxon and German invention. The term refers to the way the Anglo-Saxon world perceived and located the theories of Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, etc. – in France itself, nobody uses the term “poststructuralism”’ (Žižek, 1991: 142). And even today, the reactions of French intellectuals tend to range from astonishment to irritation when they hear their international colleagues talk of ‘French poststructuralism’. And when François Dosse, in a major portrayal of current tendencies in the French human and social sciences, sees a ‘post-structuralist intellectual sphere’ (Dosse, 1995: 19)3 emerging in France, international readers must rub their eyes in disbelief, for the French intellectual historian classes coming under the term of ‘poststructuralism’, precisely those liberal political theorists and neo-Kantian moral philosophers of the 1980s who, by emphatically standing up for human rights, for liberal democracy and the free, autonomous individual, are trying to put an end once and for all to the theoretical ‘sectarianism’ and the political ‘irresponsibility’ of a Jean-Paul Sartre, a Michel Foucault, or a Pierre Bourdieu.

Is the talk of ‘French poststructuralism’ perhaps the product of a huge international misunderstanding? That the theories of Foucault, Derrida & Co. circulate in a multitude of contexts is one thing. How these theories are appropriated in their various contexts is another matter, and we may ask ‘why have American literary scholars devoted so much energy to importing French scholarship, given that literary studies in the two countries are so out of step intellectually?’ (Duell, 2000: 118). Indeed, the phenomenon of poststructur- alism is a textbook example of the role of context in which theoretical ideas

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are received. Are these theories not considered to be the products of an intel- lectual group or movement (‘poststructuralism’) in the international debate, whereas in France they are counted rather as the products of individual theorists of a certain period (specifically ‘the 1970s’)?

Thus, by looking into the socio-historical conditions in which intellectual discourses on structuralism and poststructuralism have emerged, this book responds to the discontent that sometimes arises from the uneven and asymmetrical circulation of certain texts, from whose contexts of origin just as much is abstracted in the international debate as from their international reception in the French context (cf. Angermuller, 2004a). A telling example is the reaction of many feminist theorists from North America who, after their return from France, expressed surprise about the lack of prominence of theorists like Derrida and Foucault. Claire Goldberg Moses points out that French intellectuals like Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, who in the French feminist movement in France represent marginal figures at most, are often perceived in the USA as representatives of ‘French feminism’ *tout court*: ‘let us acknowledge that the “French feminism” known in the U.S. academy has been made in America’ (Moses, 1998: 254, 257). In contrast, Naomi Schor reminds us of the critical attention that so-called political correctness and multiculturalism in the USA have received from the French media. These encounters have sometimes called into question the fascination with French theorists in the USA, and ‘what was once a loose leftist alliance of American and French intellectuals has now been broken, just as on the national level, Franco-American intellectual relations are at a (cyclical?) all-time low’ (Schor, 1992: 32). Likewise, a Canadian observer expresses her astonishment by saying that ‘if some had complained at the outset that “literary criticism” over here was looking more “French” than “American”, the converse held equally true as well: “deconstruction” was in many ways starting to look more American than French’ (Comay, 1991: 47).

The huge interest in French Theory in the USA does not go unnoticed by observers in France either. For Joëlle Bahloul the export of French Theory to the USA is associated with a change in perspective, during which ‘the great French thinkers were reappropriated according to the intellectual Anglo- American tradition […] more is spoken of Foucault, Derrida and Lévi-Strauss in Berkeley and in particular Texan universities than in the anthropological

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seminars at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales* [where Derrida and Barthes taught]. I, for my part, was perplexed by this radical poststructur- alist change of the 1980s’ (1991: 49, 52).4 And Jean-Philippe Mathy diagnoses the ‘strange fate of French Theory’ in the USA, for ‘what was originally a corpus of very demanding, and more often than not arcane, philosophical and critical texts from a foreign culture has given rise over the course of the last decade to one of the most hotly debated domestic issues in recent American history, carrying in its wake debates on multiculturalism, the state of the nation’s universities, and the very future of the American moral and social fabric’ (Mathy, 2000: 31).

Even if they do not perhaps cause the stir in France that they have generated elsewhere in light of their poststructuralist reception, theorists like Foucault, Deleuze, Lacan, Derrida and Barthes can meanwhile be classed, in the French human sciences (*sciences humaines*) and in parts of philosophy, as theoretical standard references. The seminars at the *Collège international de philosophie*, which was co-founded by Jacques Derrida, the ‘decades’ of Cerisy/Pontigny, the numerous reading groups in Lacanian psychoanalysis, journals like *Multitude* testify to the widespread presence of these theorists, who have become more established in specialized academic research fields as well as in wider intellectual discourse since the turn of the millennium. In his monograph *French Theory*, François Cusset makes a first attempt to render the American debate about ‘(post)structuralism’ more accessible to a French audience. For Cusset ‘the translation that took place was significant and lasting, and cannot be reduced to an ephemeral fashion trend’ (2003: 285 [271]).5 The names of the French theorists subsequently ‘became intensely overcoded as they were gradually Americanised and their French accents faded […], whereas in their country of origin the scope of this phenomenon was never truly appreciated’ (2003: 12 [2]).6 Thus, the international debate on ‘French poststructuralism’ is having more and more repercussions on the intellectual agenda in France. This applies in particular to some political philosophers, who have again opened the intellectual chapter which seemed to end with the neo-liberal turn of the 1980s, such as Antonio Negri, who together with Michael Hardt made a name for himself with a political theory of globalization (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 2000), Jacques Rancière – in 1965 one of the co-authors of *Reading Capital* (Althusser et al., 1965) and today one

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of the prolific critics of political and social exclusion (cf. Rancière, 1995) and Alain Badiou. Today, their seminars have become places where the intellectual movement of the post-war period is witnessing a renaissance. The theoretical achievements of this time therefore continue to have a wider effect, which, in the words of Badiou, ‘*toute proportion gardée*, bears comparison to the examples of classical Greece and enlightenment Germany’ (Badiou, 2005: 67).

* 1. Structuralism and poststructuralism in the sociology of intellectuals

That Foucault, Derrida & Co. have today become standard references in the theoretical discourse of the arts and humanities is no longer the subject of controversial debates – neither in the USA, where they have established themselves as figureheads of Cultural Studies, nor in Germany, where the invectives against their ‘nihilism’ and ‘young-conservatism’ have come to bear the yellowed varnish of the 1980s. The ideas of these theorists have entered a variety of disciplinary terrains. Yet, how is the specific configuration of the intellectual field in France around 1970 to be taken into consideration when one fashion rapidly succeeded another? The current academic literature gives little information about the specific historical contexts of production in which the intellectual effervescence of structuralism took place in the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, a peculiar imbalance between the debate on Theory on one hand and intellectual history on the other seems to have prevented a thorough consideration of the historical context of this intellectual phenomenon until now.

Concerning Theory, the debate has grown into a field – at least in the North American arts – with its own sub-disciplinary division of labour. Countless titles have been produced in the style of ‘Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze …’ and in/and/for ‘Gay, Biblical, Science, Postcolonial Studies, Identity, Problem *…*’ (cf. Lamont and Witten, 1988). Harvard University’s library catalogue (as of February 2006) testifies to the astounding success that these theorists have seen in different languages.

In most cases, the existing secondary literature on these French theorists is predominantly in English, whereby Baudrillard and Irigaray represent

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Table 1. Primary and Secondary Literature on French Theorists

**Name N English French German Italian Spanish**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Foucault | 652 | 56% | 15% | 13% | 7% | 5% |
| Derrida | 494 | 61% | 15% | 14% | 8% | <1% |
| Lacan | 444 | 45% | 40% | 11% | 6% | 2% |
| Barthes | 230 | 49% | 33% | 11% | 7% | 2% |
| Lévi-Strauss | 219 | 47% | 24% | 9% | 13% | 6% |
| Deleuze | 201 | 49% | 26% | 17% | 8% | 2% |
| Althusser | 119 | 34% | 26% | 16% | 13% | 8% |
| Lyotard | 118 | 53% | 14% | 20% | 6% | 2% |
| Bourdieu | 118 | 51% | 25% | 18% | 2% | 6% |
| Kristeva | 94 | 77% | 12% | 5% | 3% | 3% |
| Baudrillard | 89 | 75% | 3% | 15% | 2% | 2% |
| Irigaray | 76 | 83% | 4% | 5% | 4% | 0% |

almost exclusively an Anglo-American phenomenon. Moreover, in the cases of Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard and Kristeva, the French portion of the inter- national secondary literature rarely exceeds 15 per cent. The authors with the largest share of French secondary literature are Lacan (40 per cent) and Barthes (33 per cent). The international resonance of French theorists easily bears comparison with major German theorists. ‘Habermas’, for example, appears in 509 titles (of these 45 per cent are in English, 37 per cent in German, 6 per cent in Italian, 4 per cent in French and 3 per cent in Spanish), whereas ‘Luhmann’ appears in 117 (of these, 69 per cent are in German). Interestingly enough, a search for the ‘poststru\*’ syntagma yields 234 titles, of which 82 per cent are English and none is from France!

There is also no shortage of overviews and introductions to the theoretical ideas of poststructuralism. Among the numerous detailed accounts, a few outstanding examples are noteworthy: in the USA, Jameson (1972), Lentricchia (1980), Kurzweil (1996), Culler (1982), Leitch (1983), Berman (1988) and Jay

(1994); in the UK, Eagleton (1983), Norris (1982), Easthope (1988) and Sarup (1988); in the German-speaking world, Frank (1983), Schiwy (1985), Zima (1994), Welsch (1987), Münker/Roesler (2000), Bossinade (2000) and Stäheli (2000a) and in Italy, Ferraris (1984) and Tarizzo (2003).7

Less extensive, however, is the range of research on the social and historical contexts of these theorists. In the poststructuralist theory debate, there is virtually no attempt made to place these theorists in their socio-historical

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contexts (cf. Turkle 1992; Starr 1995). Also, the widespread anti-historical and anti-empirical reflex must be noted which has become a hallmark of the poststructuralist debate (cf. for a ‘textualist’ historiography of Theory: ffrench, 1995). Yet, concerning the history of ideas and the sociology of intellectuals, poststructuralism represents a largely blank page in most cases. Historians often prefer the ‘closed’ chapters of French intellectual history (Charle, 1990; Karady, 1986; Ringer, 1992; Sirinelli, 1988). On the other hand they may emphasize the political dimension (in the narrow sense) of intellectual practice, which explains a certain preference for ‘engaged’ intellectuals, from Dreyfus to Sartre (Bering, 1982; Chebel d’Appolonia, 1991; Collini, 2006: 248*ff* ; Darke, 1997; Dufay and Dufort, 1993; Ory and Sirinelli, 1992; Sirinelli, 1995; Sirinelli, 2005; Winock, 1999), as well as for the relationship of the intellectuals to the French Communist Party (PCF) and Maoism (Bowd, 1999; Christofferson, 2004; Hazareesingh, 1991; Judt, 1986; Khilnani, 1993; Matonti, 2005; Verdès- Leroux, 1983; Wolin, 2010) or for the events of May 1968 and after (Brillant, 2003; Combes, 1984; Long, 2013; Hamon and Rotman, 1987; Reader, 1993; Ross, 2002).8 Thus, the classical sociology of intellectuals seems at times to maintain a weakness for ‘the heroic intellectual figure’ (Leymarie, 2001: 3)9 who takes a stance in the great national debates on existential questions and ultimate values, which frequently allows the often unpredictable refractions and resonances in the less transparent realm of the transnational public sphere to recede into the background.10 Yet, the classical model of the engaged intel- lectual, which privileges the political dimension of intellectual practice in a national public sphere, can hardly account for the intellectual generation formed during the 1960s and 1970s in the controversy over structuralism. For one, the theorists of this intellectual generation, understand themselves by no means as merely political intellectuals. They also distinguish themselves by their stances on theoretical and aesthetic questions (for perspectives that also include aesthetic problems cf. Mongin, 1998; Ross, 2002; Kauppi, 2010). Secondly, the debate they engender soon oversteps merely national bound- aries and takes on those hardly localizable, teeming discursive dimensions which we associate today with the term poststructuralism.

Some intellectual biographies (*Jacques Lacan*: Roudinesco, 1993; *Michel Foucault*: Eribon, 1994; Pestaña, 2006; *Louis Althusser*: Boutang, 2002; *Jacques Derrida*: Peeters, 2010; Baring, 2011; Mikics, 2009; *Lévi-Strauss*: Wilcken,

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2010; *Pierre Bourdieu*: Lescourret, 2008; *Roland Barthes*: Calvet, 1990; *Michel de Certeau*: Dosse, 2002; *Jean-Paul Sartre*: Cohen-Solal, 1989; *Raymond Aron*: Baverez, 1993) offer good access to the intellectual context of the time. Likewise a number of monographs, dealing with the intellectual clusters around certain intellectual journals prove to be useful (Hourmant, 1997; Poel, 1992; *Tel Quel*: Kauppi, 1990; Forest, 1995; *Esprit*: Boudic, 2005; *Critique*: Patron, 2000; *Nouvelle Critique*: Matonti, 2005; *Les Temps modernes*: Boschetti, 1984; *Socialisme ou Barbarie*: Gottraux, 1997; *Annales*: Dosse, 1987; Raphael, 1994). Yet, as informative as these works prove to be with regard to the intellectual contexts of single historical personalities or a particular intel- lectual cluster, they are scarcely able to account for the general intellectual configuration of the time.

Among the accounts which seek to put the numerous intellectual trends and theoretical projects of the 1960s and 1970s in their wider intellectual context, we may cite François Dosse’s *History of Structuralism* (1992), which gives a substantial overview of the intellectual tendencies of the time. Unfortunately, this work lacks sufficient analytical precision at times to justify its claim to be a reference work (cf. Eribon’s critique, 1994: 95–7). Rémy Rieffel, in *La Tribu des Clercs* [*The Tribe of the Scribes*] (1993), by contrast, deals thoroughly with the places and institutions of intellectual life in France. Yet, he does not pay due attention to the symbolic dimension of intellectual practice. Finally, Niilo Kauppi’s monographic essay *French Intellectual Nobility* (1996) must be mentioned, for it is both well-informed and borne upon a substantial theoretical basis. Kauppi draws on a theorist who regards reflection on the socio-historical conditions of intellectual practice not only as the core of his theoretical project, but who has also become a paradigmatic figure of intel- lectual discourse in France since the mid-1980s: Pierre Bourdieu.

Not everybody would count Bourdieu among the representatives of the intellectual generation of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, for such a classification, which is shared by observers as different as Dosse (1992), Ferry (1988b: 22 [xviii]) and Kauppi (1996: 136),11 at least two reasons can be given. First, Bourdieu is one of those pioneers who participated in the boom of the human and social sciences in the 1960s and set up one of the important schools in the French social sciences after the war (alongside Raymond Aron, Michel Crozier, Raymond Boudon and Alain Touraine). Second, Bourdieu’s sociology

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is also influenced by the reign of linguistic and semiotic theory of the time. That Bourdieu pays homage to ‘the construction of a cultural theory modelled after Saussure’s *langue*’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 41)12 is particularly apparent in his earlier anthropological works (cf. the ‘three studies’ in Bourdieu, 1972), which clearly draw on Lévi-Strauss. Even though Bourdieu, by introducing the ‘habitus’, accounts for the practical performance of the performer or the speaker, as opposed to the abstract code of social and symbolic structures (cf. Bourdieu, 1972: 174ff.), he does not call into question the Saussurian principle whereby the social space is seen as a universe ‘where to exist is to be different’ (Bourdieu, 1992: 223 [157]; cf. Bourdieu, 1979).13

Nevertheless, the distance between Bourdieu and most of the other repre- sentatives of the structuralist generation must be stressed. With his emphatic plea for empirical social research, Bourdieu stands apart from Althusser’s visionary Marxist philosophy, Derrida’s reflexive style of writing, Deleuze’s experimental metaphors or Lacan’s apodictic manner. There is certainly an array of affinities, in particular with Foucault, who supported the appointment of his ex-classmate from *École Normal Supérieure* (*ENS*) to the *Collège de France* and shared Bourdieu’s interest in questions of power, the body and language. But more than Foucault, Bourdieu relies on a strategy that assumes a firm anchoring in academic institutions, as well as on a theoretical project serving the research needs of the academic field. A further distinctive feature is the fact that Bourdieu’s significance in general political, intellectual discourse reached its peak only in the 1990s during the general strike of 1995 and the establishment of the anti-globalization network, ‘Attac’. Therefore, as perhaps the last intellectual grandmaster of his generation, Bourdieu’s more academic–scientific ethos stands in contrast to the visionary, prophetic style that characterizes the intellectual projects of around 1970.

Thus, a sociology of French intellectuals of the post-war period must consider Bourdieu not only as a sociological object, but also as the initiator of a research approach which has become widely established in intellectual sociology: the field theory of symbolic production.14 Bourdieu emphasizes the social constraints that affect the symbolic producers in their field, such as, for example, in the fields of avant-garde art (cf. *The Rules of Art*, 1992), elite education (*State Nobility*, 1989), philosophy (*Pascalian Meditations*, 1997b; *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, 1988) or (natural) sciences (1997a). Further fields are discussed in a

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number of articles (1966, 1971, 1973, 1976, 1981, 1984b, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1996,

1999; Bourdieu and Boltanski, 1975; Bourdieu and de Saint Martin, 1987).

While Bourdieu does not offer any standard definition of the field, the following characteristics derived from his writings can be given. As a microcosm within a macrocosm (the social space), the field constitutes a structured terrain where the symbolic producers compete for the highest profits (such as symbolic and institutional recognition). In placing their symbolic stakes and products on the symbolic markets of the field, the symbolic producers aim to expand their capital volume, which consists of various more or less convertible resources, for example, of cultural capital (education) or economic capital (such as a stable salary). The battle for distinction and recognition is not a dispute among equals. Equipped with a certain amount of resources and assets, the symbolic producers enter the field and place their symbolic stakes (i.e. texts, works, statements) on the market of symbolic goods in order to increase their invested capital and to dominate their competitors. A field distinguishes itself through relative autonomy, i.e. through rules which are defined in the field and by which the legitimacy of the symbolic products and the success of the symbolic producers can be assessed. Over time, the differences and rules organizing the field seep into the habitus of the producers. As an internalized, relatively stable, and more or less unconscious system of dispositions, the habitus guarantees the homology of the sphere of socio-economic positions and the sphere of cultural lifestyles, tastes and symbolic forms of expression. The habitus structures the perceptions and the actions of the producers by synchronizing them with the constitutive oppositions of the field. As a mediating mechanism between the structure of the field and the praxis of the producers, the habitus allows the producers to decipher the social significance of the cultural practices and symbolic products of other symbolic producers and thus enables them to produce spontaneous reactions to and appropriate solutions for new situations. The field is distinguished not only by vertical hierarchies, established by the producers’ unequal volumes of capital; there are also horizontal differences, which result from the specific composition of their capital. While cultural capital (such as education) dominates among producers in those regions of the field generally identified by Bourdieu as ‘left’, economic capital or institutional power dominate the ‘right’ poles of the field. The difference between ‘left’ and ‘right’ can turn into a conflict between a ‘spiritual’ (cultural) and a ‘temporal’

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(economic and institutional) fraction of the ruling class. This opposition tends to be accompanied by different normative preferences and strategies of the producers. While defending the autonomy of the field against encroachments from outside, the producers of the ‘spiritual’ fraction follow the ‘proper’ rules of the field – the rules that organize the production of intellectual, scientific, and aesthetic power. ‘Spiritual’ producers, therefore, tend toward strategies that aim at ‘pure’ symbolic dominance, e.g. symbolic projects with an avant-gardist claim, which is typical for most members of the structuralist generation. In contrast, their counterparts at the ‘temporal’ pole, who have the institutional and economic means to decide on the careers of others, tend to be committed to more conservative cultural values. Lacking ‘proper’ cultural legitimacy, they tend toward heteronomous strategies of tapping into power resources external to the field. Bourdieu’s own normative preferences become clear when he favours autonomous rather than heteronomous production strategies and understands the defence of autonomous conditions as the primary mission of the intellectual. With the theory of the mediation of structure and practice, Bourdieu pleads for a sociology of the symbolic producers, which focuses on the unequal distribution of capital, at the expense of a sociology of the symbolic products. While rejecting an ‘internal reading’ of symbolic products which abstracts from the social contexts of their production, Bourdieu points out the social constraints and relations of power affecting the symbolic producers, no matter whether they follow ‘autonomous’ or ‘heteronomous’ production strat- egies. However, according to Bourdieu, an ‘external reading’, by tracing the meaning of symbolic products back to their social contexts of origin, does not represent a convincing solution either, since this makes texts a mere function of their contexts. As an alternative, Bourdieu suggests a procedure which, via a constant to and fro between internal and external readings, reconstructs the structures of the field and thereby seeks to overcome the division between the

social context and the symbolic text (Bourdieu, 1992: 288 [205]).

Thus, while the symbolic production of intellectuals is subject to social and institutional forces, their positions are not absolutely pre-determined by the structure of the field. Rather, the field must be understood as a structure whose objectivity is limited and which continuously demands institutional as well as symbolic reorganization. To the extent that the symbolic production of intellectuals is a prime example of forced innovation, originality and

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singularity on a quite stable institutional terrain of social relations, Bourdieu’s theoretical framework turns out to be helpful. And in light of the specific conditions of intellectual practice in France, Bourdieu’s approach may be downright ineluctable.

At least three points may be cited which make Bourdieu’s field theory an especially apposite instrument for analysing the situation of intellectuals in France. First of all, the opposition *centre* versus *periphery* is particularly pronounced in France. It is in fact so pronounced, that intellectual life in Paris sometimes becomes synonymous with intellectual life in France, especially if we think of intellectual fads like existentialism and structuralism. With symbolic production being highly centralized, this centralization leaves its mark on the habitus of the producers, who are inclined to look for their most important role models, competitors and allies in a rather limited geographical area: in the ten-square-mile area between the *Porte de Clignancourt* in the north and the *Porte d’Orléans* in the south, between the *Bois de Vincennes* in the east and the *Bois de Boulogne* in the west. Indeed, few places are inhabited by so many academics, artists and independent scholars as the agglomeration of Paris (Île-de-France). There are approximately 600,000 students (*Ministère Éducation Nationale*, 2007), almost 80,000 researchers in the public and private sectors (that is about 40 per cent of all researchers in France, see *Ministère Éducation Nationale*, 2005: 326), 60,000 high school teachers, 16,000 university lecturers and researchers (which does not even include the numerous other institutions of higher education! See *Préfecture Ile-de-France*, 2006), at least the same number of lecturers and researchers who live in the capital but work in the ‘provinces’, as well as a vast and unknown number of artists, journalists and independent scholars. Is it any wonder that scientific communication occurs more rapidly here than elsewhere? Is it any wonder that the personal relationships between intellectuals run the entire affective gamut from close friendship to deeply culti- vated antipathy? If the capital resembles at times a highly concentrated, more or less self-sufficient intellectual universe, is it any wonder that trends from outside Paris – whether from non-French-speaking countries or from elsewhere in France, or the Francophone world – sometimes take decades to gain a foothold? Second, intellectuals in France may be rather unique in their relatively high level of willingness to organize themselves nationwide, in institutionally more or less consolidated groups, with more or less exclusive memberships.

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In these clans, the producers not only exist on the symbolic front stage, but also operate on the institutional backstage. Only after becoming a member of a group is an individual able to gain access to the necessary positions, resources and information. Only as the public spokesperson of a group does an individual have the chance to gain symbolic and institutional influence at a national level.

Third, there is a developed market for symbolic goods (i.e. for books, magazines and works of art), which can procure high public visibility for certain producers. Due to protective laws for books and the book trade, due to a differentiated system of independent bookshops and not least due to a lack of decent research libraries, sales figures for academic publications often eclipse those in other countries. Even in the social sciences and humanities, book production can prove to be a lucrative business, as the readership is not always restricted to specialized academic circles.

These three features – centralization and concentration; the role of groups and networks; a developed market for symbolic goods – illustrate the unique conditions of intellectual life in France. I do not mention these points, however, to support the thesis of an *exception française* or the myth of ‘the French intellectuals’. Instead, I want to recall the specific social forces affecting the symbolic producers, the presence of the other symbolic producers which cannot be avoided by the individual who wants to be active as an intellectual. In the French context, it seems, the field’s lines of differen- tiation (above/below, inside/outside) are comparatively effective, stable and palpable. This is why it is perhaps especially difficult for the single individual not to develop the impression of being confronted with the field as a whole. The field is *there*, every day and in different situations, regardless of the position the producer occupies. As a North American observer expressed, ‘in France one is obliged, whatever his position, to speak to the field as a totality’ (Lemert, 1981: 651).

How can we account for the field that has given birth to Theory? Sidestepping the theoretical contents, this book prefers to ask how theoretical texts are read and associated with their contexts. Thus, what follows is not a history of Theory, but, in a certain way, its ‘prehistory’, which began in France in the 1960s and 1970s under the slogan ‘structuralism’ and was then received inter- nationally under the label ‘poststructuralism’.

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This book presents a historical tableau of the French intellectual field after the war by following the rise and decline of the structuralist generation. After a look at the international reception of ‘poststructuralism’ (Section 2.1), Chapter 2 will point out the institutional lines of conflict which make it difficult to consider ‘poststructuralist’ theorists as a group with a common programme in the French context (Section 2.2). Chapter 3 will give an historical account of the institutional evolution of the intellectual field in France, constituted between three major poles of symbolic production: arts and sciences, mass media, aesthetics. After presenting a model of socio-cultural change (Section 3.1), I will sketch the rise and fall of Theory in France (Sections 3.2–3.4). In Chapter 4, I will discuss how Theory in France has turned into ‘French Theory’ in the North American humanities. If Chapters 1 to 4 rely on Bourdieu’s field theory to account for the making of Theory in France and abroad, the final Chapter 5 will reflect on the post-classical perspectives Theory can help open up in thinking the social.