Introduction

Key Concepts of Relational Sociology
as Tools of Hermeneutics

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More than one hundred and fifty years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the history of slavery still looms large in the United States. The notion of a post-racial society that prospered under the nation's first black president mistook the admittedly significant advancement embodied by a political icon for a substantial decline of discrimination against African Americans. Quite to the contrary, under the Obama presidency systemic racism returned with a vengeance, most obviously in the substantial increase of police brutality – from targeting black youth with stop-and-frisk practices to the notorious cases of the killing of unarmed black men by police officers. The idea that a black family in the White House would lead to the colorblindness of the nation may have been nourished by wishful thinking. To hold on to the illusion of colorblindness has become more difficult under the Trump presidency, as white supremacist groups increasingly feel encouraged to come to the fore. Ultimately, however, the widespread denial of a deeply ingrained racism rests on the powerful ideology of individualism that constructs the individual as essentially free and thus fully responsible for his or her fate. What on the one hand forms the core of the staunch American belief in upward mobility, known as the American Dream, on the other hand leads to the prevalent conviction that poverty, poor education, and bad housing must be mainly the responsibility of those who did not try hard enough to escape the unfavorable living conditions into which they

were born. Thus, black inequality – today manifested most obviously by what Loïc Wacquant has defined as the "hyperghetto" (cf. "Deadly Symbiosis") – has frequently been blamed on African American culture rather than on structural conditions. In his discussion of the controversy between American liberals who commonly lean toward structural factors and conservatives who rather focus on aspects of culture, William Julius Wilson maintains:

It is an unavoidable fact that Americans tend to deemphasize the structural origins and social significance of poverty and welfare. In other words, the popular view is that people are poor or on welfare because of their own personal shortcomings. Perhaps this tendency is rooted in our tradition of "rugged individualism." (Wilson 43)

It is undoubtedly for this very belief in individualistic explanations that, notwithstanding the fact that "the majority of poor people in the United States are white, […] the public face of American poverty is Black" (Taylor 49). As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor notes, "ideologies do not work when they are only imposed from above. The key is widespread acceptance, even by the oppressed themselves" (25). Taylor does not address the question why the oppressed would accept an ideology that not only enhances discrimination against themselves but also contributes to the reproduction of the inequalities of the given social order. Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias, the sociologists on whose concepts the authors of this collection draw, do pose this question, and both formulate their answers on the basis of relational theories of power.

In Bourdieu's oeuvre it is the concept of "symbolic violence" that – interrelated with the concepts of "habitus," "field," and "capital" – serves to explain why "the established order, with its relations of domination, its rights and prerogatives, privileges and injustices, ultimately perpetuates itself so easily, apart from a few historical accidents, and that the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural" (*Masculine Domination* 1). As "a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims" (1), it contributes to the misrecognition of domination and thus to the reproduction of the established order.

The normalization of unequal power relations is also a concern of Elias. In his essay "Towards a Theory of Established-Outsider Relations," a conceptualization of the field study *The Established and the Outsiders* he had

earlier undertaken together with John L. Scotson, he explicates various mechanisms meant to ensure that the uneven balance of power between two interdependent groups remains stable so that the group with a higher power ratio (called the "established") manages to preserve its power superiority over the group with a lower power ratio (called the "outsiders"). According to Elias, an important means of the established to maintain their dominance is the application of "mechanics of stigmatisation" (9) that in the long run lead to the outsiders' resignation, their acceptance of their allegedly lesser human worth. The effect of what Elias defines as "group disgrace" – complementary to the self-assigned "group charisma" of the established – resembles Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence and its consequences, namely naturalization: "Give a group a bad name and it is likely to live up to it." (13) Like Bourdieu, Elias insists, then, on the longevity and rigidity of relations of domination. The "emotional barrier" that the established erect *vis-à-vis* outsiders, which defines closer contact with them as a taboo, "accounts for the often extreme rigidity in the attitude of established groups towards outsider groups – for the perpetuation of this taboo [...] for generation after generation, even if their social superiority, or, in other words, their power surplus diminishes" (8).

One of the examples Elias gives for the effectiveness of such an emotional barrier is the relation between the established in the United States, especially the descendants of slave-masters, and "the formerly enslaved group" (8), which causes the continuation of "a very uneven balance of power" (6) that notoriously lags behind all efforts on part of the state of providing institutional equality by legislation. It is not by accident that Elias avoids terms referring to 'race' or ethnicity to designate the outsiders of this figuration. "By using them," he claims, "one singles out for attention what is peripheral to these relations (for example, differences of skin colour) and turns the eye away from what is central (for instance, differences in power ratio and the exclusion of a power-inferior group from positions with a higher power potential)." (16) Accepting Elias's understanding of so-called "'race relations'" (16) as established-outsider relations and regarding 'racial' conflicts as "at the core [...] always balance-of-power struggles" (22) makes us comprehend that the assessment of the relation of groups with an uneven power balance depends on considering the long-term development of their social dynamics as well as the longevity of power imbalances. This insight will prevent us from overestimating the effect that the social rise of

certain segments of the outsiders (such as the black bourgeoisie) or the rise of individuals to positions of power has on the situation of the great majority of outsiders.

It is not by coincidence, then, that both sociologists would refer to the situation of Blacks in the United States in order to exemplify the long-term effects of domination. Just as Elias used Harper Lee's best-selling novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) – set in segregated Alabama in the 1930s – to further develop his theory of established-outsider relations and to discuss the difference between the European and the American civilizing processes ("Further Aspects of Established-Outsider Relations: The Maycomb Model"),[1] Bourdieu drew on a passage in James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* (1963) to show the traumatic consequences that the exertion of symbolic violence has on the black family and how it shapes the habitus of African Americans (*Pascalian Meditations* 170; cf. Kopp in this volume, p. 229). What Bourdieu and Elias also have in common, as these examples illustrate, and what is of special interest to literary scholars, is that in their sociological analyses they quite frequently make use of literary texts.[2] Elias claimed that "used critically, novels can help to reconstruct a past society and its power structure for us" (*The Germans* 47). And Bourdieu, in one of

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1   In comparison with Elias's main work, *The Civilizing Process*, which traces the European development toward the formation of unified nation states with firmly established monopolies of physical force and the correlating long-term transformation of modes of behavior toward an increasing self-control, his theory of established-outsider relations is a much neglected part of his oeuvre. The more important it is to understand what Cas Wouters points out in the editorial note to his edition of *The Established and the Outsiders*, i.e., that both theories "complement each other," the former focusing on "developments in the balance of *controls*" (external and internal), the latter concentrating on "developments in *power* balances" ("Note" xiii, my emphasis). Furthermore, Wouters states that from the essay "Towards a Theory" "it is obvious that Elias had the ambition of formulating a general theory of power relations" (xiv). On Elias's sociological reading of Harper Lee's novel, see Franke and Hirschfelder.

2   For a record of Bourdieu's writings on writers and literature, see Bourdieu and Wacquant 206n167; see Kuzmics for a survey and discussion of Elias's references to fiction.

his reflections on the "translation" of the social world into the literary work, comments as follows:

The sensitive translation conceals the structure, in the very form in which it presents it, and thanks to which it succeeds in producing a *belief effect* (more than a reality effect). And it is probably this which means that the literary work can sometimes say more, even about the social realm, than many writings with scientific pretensions [...]. But it says it only in a mode such that it does not truly say it. (*Rules of Art* 32, original emphasis)[3]

From the point of view of the literary scholar, Stefanie Mueller suggests that "it is the relevance he grants the acting agent's perspective from which the usefulness of Bourdieu's theory for literary studies stems" (16).

While the affinity of Bourdieu and Elias to literary texts is of special interest to the discipline of the sociology of literature, the more important question for the current project is what, in turn, must be considered the methodological function of concepts of relational sociology for African American studies in general and, as is the case in this collection, for the interpretation of (literary) texts by black authors, in particular. As this volume focuses on issues of power, the above-mentioned concepts of Bourdieu's and Elias's theories of power are pivotal to our approach.[4] What do they have to offer in comparison, for example, with the more widely known and, certainly in the discipline of cultural studies, more frequently applied

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3   Cf. also "Understanding," an essay on sociological hermeneutics, wherein Bourdieu points out similarities between transcribed interviews and literary texts: "By virtue of the exemplification, concretization and symbolization which they effect, and which at times give them a dramatic intensity and an emotional force close to those of a literary text, the transcribed interviews can have the effect of a *revelation* [...]. Like parables of prophetic speech, [...] they render tangible the objective structures which scientific work strives to expose, doing so even by way of the most individual characteristics of enunciation." What Bourdieu asserts of transcribed qualitative interviews, literary scholars also claim of literary texts: "Being able to touch and move the reader, to reach the emotions, without giving in to sensationalism, they can produce the shifts in thinking and seeing that are often the precondition for comprehension." (*Weight* 623)

4   See Fowler for a differentiated comparison of the two theories of power.

Foucauldian power theory? As useful as Michel Foucault's theorizing of the disciplinary power exerted by institutions is for an understanding of the coercion of the modern subject, he does neglect in his influential *Discipline and Punish* "forms of social constraint much more subtle than those that operate through the drilling (*dressage*) of bodies" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 196). Those concepts of subtle forms of violence direct the attention to the necessity of "revealing the wellsprings of power,"[5] hidden to the extent that they are not recognized by social agents who tend to take the order of things for granted and thus, without being aware of it, become complicit in their own domination (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 167). Bourdieu's and Elias's power theories offer concepts that draw our attention to forms of domination that – in literature as well as in life – are often overlooked or misrecognized and that with our perspective sharpened by the theoretical tools of relational sociology we are then capable of discovering and dissecting (cf. Buschendorf and Franke 101).

However, the most fundamental principle of relational or figurational sociology[6] is relational thinking itself. In its attempt to transcend the false antinomy of objectivism and subjectivism (cf. Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* 188-89), the relational mode of thought breaks with "all forms of methodological monism that purport to assert the ontological priority of structure *or* agent, system *or* actor, the collective *or* the individual," against which both Bourdieu and Elias insist on the "*primacy of relations*"

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5   In his eponymous essay, Bourdieu maintains a structural resemblance between sociology and comedy: "Sociology has an affinity with comedy, in that it reveals the wellsprings of authority. Through disguise [...], parody [...] or caricature, Molière unmasks the hidden machinery that makes possible the production of the symbolic effects of imposition and intimidation, the tricks and dodges that make up the powerful and important of all ages ..." (135; cf. Buschendorf and Franke 80)

6   Elias introduced the term "figuration" as a simple tool that would allow conceptualizing "individual" and "society" not as two different or even antagonistic objects, but relationally. As a term supposed to characterize his theory, Elias preferred "process sociology" to "figurational sociology" (Mennell 20). For a comparison between "fields" (Bourdieu) and "figurations," see Dépelteau 278-79, 285-88.

(Wacquant, "Social Praxeology" 15).[7] Both these "resolute advocate[s] of the relational conception of the social" (15) see in ordinary language with its structural preference for expressing things rather than relations, states rather than processes, a major obstacle for the systematic development of relational thinking (cf. 15). Thus, Elias expounds, "we always feel impelled to make quite senseless conceptual distinctions, like 'the individual *and* society,' which makes it seem that 'the individual' and 'society' were two separate things, like tables and chairs, or pots and pans" (*What is Sociology?* 113). Elias's study, *The Society of Individuals*, condenses in its title a statement that another radical relational thinker, Karl Marx, expressed in *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* as follows: "Society does not consist of individuals; it expresses the sum of connections and relationships in which individuals find themselves." (qtd. in Wacquant, "Social Praxeology" 16)

According to Bourdieu, the challenge of the social scientist becomes to "*hold together*, so as to integrate them, both the point of view of the agents who are caught up in the object and the point of view on this point of view which the work of analysis enables one to reach by relating position-takings to the positions from which they are taken" (*Pascalian Meditations* 189).[8] Consequently, the object of sociology is neither the 'individual,' "naively crowned as the paramount, rock-bottom reality by all 'methodological individualists'" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 126), nor 'society,' but rather the relation between "a socialized subjectivity" that Bourdieu calls "habitus" and the social space divided into "fields," "defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions" (97). There is a historical

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7   For comparative analyses of the two relational thinkers, see Paulle, van Heerikhuizen, and Emirbayer; Dépelteau (with further references).

8   The integration of the "subjectivist" and the "objectivist vision" (*Pascalian Meditations* 188) takes a conscious effort of methodological reflection on the part of the sociologist. Thus, Bourdieu demands "epistemic reflexivity" (Wacquant, "Social Praxeology" 36-46) and insists on an epistemological break or rupture with commonsense perceptions. Elias shares this concern, to which attest the numerous methodological reflections throughout his work; on the special problem of social scientists who in contrast to natural scientists are simultaneously objects and subjects of the investigation, see especially the title essay in *Involvement and Detachment*.

dimension in these two interrelated key concepts; both are "*realizations of historical action*" (126, original emphasis). As Bourdieu writes, "[t]he *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history." (*Logic* 54) Understood as incorporated history and embodied social structure, habitus can account for the fundamental factor in the lives of African Americans: the continuity of the past in the present.

As the contributions to this volume demonstrate, applied to African American literature and culture, the conceptual tools of relational sociology heighten our awareness of the power dynamics that have dominated the lives of Blacks in the United States for centuries. What Bourdieu finds with regard to gender power relations in Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*, i.e., "an incomparably lucid evocation of the female gaze" (*Masculine Domination* 69), the contributors to this essay collection reveal in African American texts. Black Americans are also disposed to evoke the lucid gaze of the oppressed and, like Woolf, they of course do so with the help of aesthetic devices, so that the artwork, to repeat Bourdieu's comment, "says it only in a mode such that it does not truly say it."[9]

Thus, in addition to drawing on the concepts of relational sociology, it takes the tools of hermeneutics to bring to light what the texts "truly say." This collection's purpose is twofold. On the one hand, its articles contribute to the ongoing debate about relations of domination in the experience of Blacks in the United States; on the other hand, the essays are – in part implicit – theoretical explorations of the approach of relational sociology to African American studies. While Elias and Bourdieu are among the most highly renowned sociologists of the 20th century and while they have

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9   The narrative instrument Bourdieu finds particularly efficient in Woolf's novel is indirect free speech with its "'fade-in, fade-out' technique" (*Masculine Domination* 72, 74); cf. Mueller's narratological discussion of this type of focalization in Morrison's *Paradise* (50-53). As I pointed out elsewhere, "the fusion of outer with inner reality which is an essential feature of the third-person narrated monologue, is the ideal point of view for rendering the interrelation of a character's position in social space and the person's habitus" ("Narrated Power Relations" 236). Interestingly, in her contribution to this volume Astrid Franke demonstrates that the use of narrated monologue is not limited to fiction, but may occur in poetry as well (47 ff.).

figured prominently in the sociology of literature, they have so far not inspired many scholars to use their conceptual tools of relational sociology in literary and cultural studies.[10] It is for this reason that the following summaries emphasize the articles' methodological aspects and, by quoting extensively especially from Bourdieu's writings, provide the opportunity to become further acquainted not only with the various instruments of relational-sociological thinking, but also with modifications of their meaning. Although many contributors refer to Elias's established-outsider theory, he figures less prominently than Bourdieu. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that one of the basic principles of the approach is the assumption that the two theories are complementary and that in the practice of interpretation their conceptual tools have proven compatible.

Most articles trace and interpret power dynamics in literary texts by such classic black writers as Gwendolyn Brooks, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison, as well as two contemporary authors, Colson Whitehead and Percival Everett. Then there is a series of three articles dealing with diverse power struggles under the conditions of neoliberalism: from the role of self-commodification in position-takings in the field of rap and the fabrication of an idealized type of black homeless man to the demonization of a victim of police brutality. The penultimate contribution defines the outsider position of Civil Rights activist Bayard Rustin. The volume ends with a theoretical and political intervention, a discussion of the critique of Bourdieu from the perspective of Jacques Rancière.

The first article addresses a desideratum of the approach, namely the evidence of its applicability beyond the genre of realist fiction. Astrid Franke pursues the introductory reflections on method further by voicing major challenges the lyrical genre presents to the literary critic who interprets African American poetry on the basis of concepts of relational sociology. In Bourdieu's theory of the literary field, Franke states, poetry marks the most autonomous of literary genres; however, African American poets used to be highly dependent on a literary market dominated by whites, from patrons to publishers. Furthermore, the question arises whether the

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10 In the United States, the fragmentary reception of Elias and the ambiguous reception of Bourdieu have certainly hindered any substantial transdisciplinary efforts. For reasons responsible for reservations in the American academy, see Wacquant, "Bourdieu in America"; Buschendorf, Franke, and Voelz 3-5.

homology between the world of fiction and the world of the author which Bourdieu posits in *The Field of Cultural Production* can be detected in a genre known for its scarcity of references to reality. In a similar vein, Franke claims, we may ask whether poetry "with its traditionally more limited scope of the social, may yet contribute to a detailed analysis of it" (35). Finally, and more generally, she wonders what influence the author's position-taking in the literary field may have on the acuity of the vision of the social laid out in the text, and she asks whether it is possible to keep apart what Bourdieu considers interdependent, namely "a sociology of the literary (field) and a literary (text) sociology"?

Franke starts out by localizing Gwendolyn Brooks's position in the field of African American poetry. It is characterized by a propensity for the reigning style of modernism and simultaneously a marginal position with regard to the male writers (represented by Langston Hughes and Richard Wright) dominating the field. This position, Franke maintains, correlates with Brooks's highly ironic style which prevents the reader from defining the poet's moral and political stance in the dilemmas exposed in the two selected poems, "The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith" from her first volume of poetry, *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945), and "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon" (1960), a daring juxtaposition of the mother of Emmett Till and Carolyn Bryant, the woman at whom the black teenager had allegedly whistled and whose husband and brother-in-law thereupon lynched him. While both lyrical texts have been objects of highly controversial (political) debates, Franke opts for going beyond the existing alternative interpretations – on the basis of relational sociology. "The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith," she claims, "might be called a sociological dissection of the habitus of a lower-class black man from Chicago in the 1940s" (36). As she shows in her close reading, Brooks's portrait of Satin-Legs Smith offers not only a very detailed depiction of his taste, but also conveys the origin of that taste in the collective history of African Americans and his social environment. "Brooks," Franke states, "anticipates a number of central claims Bourdieu formulates in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979): Taste is 'the product of upbringing and education' (xxiv) and 'art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences' (xxx)." (39) Yet the precision of Brooks's definition of Smith's taste is juxtaposed with utter indeterminacy

in the question of the evaluation of this taste, when the poet introduces a counter-voice in the form of an addressed "you," an audience that represents a more conservative taste, yet remains ultimately indistinct with regard to race and class. Brooks keeps a distance by ironizing both Smith and "you" in a similar way that she seems to stay aloof from both women in her poem on Emmett Till's murder. She has the political courage to offer a very detailed and complex "socio-psychological portrait of a white woman" (46) the sheer ambiguity of which makes it impossible for the reader to decide to what extent Brooks sympathizes with this "victim of a racist patriarchal order" (47). As Franke argues by drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic violence and habitus, Brooks confronts us with a carefully documented case of masculine domination, with a protagonist misrecognizing the very power structures that lead to the racial physical violence as well as the interdependent symbolic gender violence.

Stephan Kuhl's reconstruction of Richard Wright's literary practice, which combines Freud's psychoanalytical concept of "sublimation" with Bourdieu's relational-sociological theory of practice and its core concept of "bodily knowledge," addresses a question raised by both: How is the sexual instinct transformed into a social libido? (cf. Bourdieu, *Practical Reason* 78-79; 57-58) Kuhl's focus is on the constituting factors that went into the writing of the key scene of Wright's *Native Son*, wherein – based on a childhood memory recovered by the psychoanalyst Frederic Wertham – Bigger Thomas unintentionally kills Mary Dalton. His analysis not only unearths information of interest about the author, but, more generally, proposes a theory of creativity. In great detail, Kuhl examines the social and psychological conditions responsible for producing what in modification of Bourdieu's concept of split habitus he defines as Wright's "oppositional habitus" (65). The oppositional structure of Wright's dispositions derives from the two contradictory forces shaping his early life. There was the intellectual encouragement he received from his mother, a schoolteacher, and there was the experience of poverty and Jim Crow oppression in the 1930s South. As Kuhl explains, the former led to Wright's intellectual disposition and the acquisition of incorporated cultural capital, whereas the latter severely limited his access to institutional cultural capital and furthermore subjected him to the effects of symbolic violence exerted in the name of racial segregation. Based on Bourdieu's methodological assumptions in *The Rules of Art*, i.e., that "the practices of writers [...] are the product of the

meeting of two histories, the history of the production of the position occupied [in the literary and artistic field] and the history of the production of the dispositions of its occupants" (256; cf. 59), Kuhl then examines Wright's position in the literary field of the Harlem Renaissance and finds him suspended between the two rival positions represented by the "proletarian intellectualism" of Langston Hughes and the "academic intellectualism" of W. E. B. Du Bois (66). Corresponding to his opposition to the major positions of the literary field, his oppositional habitus was "the structuring principle of Wright's literary practice in 1940 – and thus the structuring principle of *Native Son*," (68) which Kuhl – by combining relational-sociological and psychoanalytic arguments – defines as "dispositional sublimation" (71). It suggests that Wright's oppositional habitus allows for the integration of both his intellectual and his bodily knowledge into the creative process and its product. "Wright's bodily writing," Kuhl argues, "allows for an equally bodily reading of his text, a reading that, however, has as its necessary condition the reader's own incorporated disposition to undergo the effects of symbolic violence, in particular as they relate to the ongoing histories of racism and capitalism, the two major forces in the structuring of the bodily disposition that Wright inscribed into his text." (73)

Nicole Lindenberg's interpretation of Ralph Ellison's unfinished novel focuses on the prominent theme of father-son-relations and their significance for (African) American history. In addition to the work's edited version, published under the title *Three Days Before the Shooting…* in 2010, Lindenberg draws on drafts and notes from the author's extensive papers in the Ellison Archive. On the basis of her selection of published and unpublished material Lindenberg develops her central thesis: In his narrative of three generations of fathers and sons, Ellison creates on a psychological level a repetition of typical generational conflicts; at the same time he suggests that on a historical level this repetitive pattern reproduces the existing social order. With the aid of the tools of relational sociology – focusing on Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence and his habitus-field theory – Lindenberg highlights the interrelation between family history and national history. On the level of familial relations, she concentrates on the symbolic violence exerted by the father upon the son in the form of charisma. As her analysis of numerous father-son encounters shows, they follow what Bourdieu defines as an effect of symbolic violence, namely, "the transfiguration of relations of domination and submission into affective relations, the

transformation of power into charisma or into the charm suited to evoke affective enchantment," which, he adds, "can be seen particularly well in relations between generations" (*Practical Reason* 102; cf. 80). In contrast to Bourdieu, who due to his interest in the reproduction of domination emphasizes the force of symbolic power rather than the potential of resistance, Ellison stresses the struggles of the sons against the strong emotions evoked by the fathers' charisma. But while the sons at first manage to distance themselves from the fathers, the latters' charismatic power proves its long-lasting impact when the sons, owing to their primary habitus, turn into charismatic fathers themselves: "[A]t the very moment when Hickman becomes a father himself," Lindenberg writes, "he experiences a change that confuses him the more as it turns him into a father who resembles his own father." (95) Ellison links family history explicitly to national history through the father figure of Abraham Lincoln. Confronted with the Lincoln memorial in Washington, D.C., the most prominent of the novel's fathers, Reverend Alonzo Zuber Hickman, displays the typical ambiguity of the son. The scene reveals an inner conflict with regard to habitus formation, in Bourdieu's terms, a "split habitus." As the archival material enables Lindenberg to show, Ellison conceived of Hickman's split habitus as a consequence of the confrontation with his own charismatic preacher father. The last son in the novel's sequence of generations seems to break the chain by killing his politically powerful, racist father. However, the circular structure of the narrative – the published novel starts with the scene of the murder followed by the long narration of events that occur "three days before the shooting" – suggests the presence of the past, that is, the reproduction of domination.

In his analysis of *Sag Harbor* (2009), Marlon Lieber juxtaposes Colson Whitehead's novel with Touré's 2011 book *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?*, in which the writer and TV host propagates "post-Black rugged individualism." As his review of *Sag Harbor* reveals, Touré reads the novel as a document of post-blackness, that is, committed to the notion of the black individual's allegedly limitless choice of identity options. However, claiming the freedom of choice and potential success for all Blacks, as Touré does, means ignoring social conditioning. In contrast, Lieber argues, Whitehead's work is not a *Bildungsroman* focusing, like Touré's own text, on the educational process of one individual, but rather "a novel about a particular class fraction and their manners" (104). As such it lends itself

particularly well to an interpretation drawing on Bourdieu's relational soci-
ology, "which is essentially a theory of the reproduction of class differ-
ences" (104). In his close readings of representative scenes from *Sag Har-
bor*, Lieber shows how the African American protagonist, 15-year-old
Manhattan-raised Benji, struggles during his summer vacation in an upper-
middle-class black Long Island community to come to terms with the class
positions of the various groups around him (the established of the neighbor-
ing white community, the norm-setting older generation of Blacks, the
black youth drawn to the cultural practices of the ghetto). For example, as
much as he would like to join in the complicated handshake routines and
"the grammatical acrobatics" (111) of black slang perfected by a group of
friends not socialized in private schools, Benji's habitus of the black bour-
geoisie prevents him from adapting their ghetto lifestyle. As Lieber claims,
Whitehead's novel does not support the post-black notion of the individu-
al's free choice and responsibility, but rather "is fully committed to the
(Bourdieusian) idea that individuals possess embodied dispositions that tac-
itly shape the manner in which they perceive the world, think, and act"
(104). *Sag Harbor* clearly portrays the distinctions that mark the boundaries
between different social spaces that promote the reproduction of a class so-
ciety.

Like Whitehead's *Sag Harbor*, the satiric novel *I Am Not Sidney Poitier*
(2009) by Percival Everett takes up current debates about 'race' in the
United States by alluding, for example, to the notion of an alleged "post-
racialism" or the so-called "culture of poverty." More generally, it deals
with dynamics of racial oppression within the group of the dominated. As
Johannes Kohrs shows in detail, Everett uses a great range of literary de-
vices that he takes from the great reservoir of black humor – ranging from
the hyperbolic, such as satire or farce, often overlapping with the absurd, to
more subtle forms, such as parody or irony. They all function as strategies
of subversion in that they draw attention to the mechanisms of power rela-
tions. The comic as well as other forms of humor are capable of unmasking
symbolic violence (cf. Buschendorf and Franke 80-82). Everett's satire fo-
cuses on the social complexity evoked by symbolic violence to which the
dark-skinned protagonist, Not Sidney, is exposed during a visit to his girl-
friend's upper-class, color-conscious family and their posh home. For his
analysis, Kohrs employs "Bourdieu's theoretical dyad of symbolic violence
and habitus [...] as an interpretative prism to zoom in on the social nuances

of Not Sidney's negotiation of his own 'place' in the racial order" (131). The protagonist's pre-conscious, bodily reactions to the situation, which culminate in contradictory emotions of "uneasy fascination" (135), insecurity, and ambivalence, can be explained, Kohrs contends with Bourdieu, by the "effect of symbolic domination [...] exerted not in the pure logic of knowing consciousness but in the obscurity of the dispositions of habitus, in which are embedded the schemes of perception and appreciation which, below the level of the decisions of the conscious mind and the controls of the will, are the basis of a relationship of practical knowledge and recognition that is profoundly obscure to itself" (*Pascalian Meditations* 170-71; 132).

Skin color is also at the core of Toni Morrison's latest novel, *God Help the Child* (2015). Bride, the protagonist, is a thriving business woman in the black beauty industry whose success "is crucially based on her self-marketing [...] focused on her very dark skin which she highlights by wearing only white clothes" (146). As Stefanie Mueller reminds us in a brief survey of the history of the rise of black business men and women and its representation in Morrison's novels, success stories of black female entrepreneurship have been rare in American history and, accordingly, in the author's oeuvre. The question whether the exceptional economic agency granted to the protagonist ("the fact that she is doing the selling herself – rather than being sold as African slaves were for centuries," 154) can be seen as a sure sign of autonomy and self-identity and thus as a model of contemporary black womanhood, Mueller answers by drawing on Bourdieu's interrelated concepts of habitus and field. "Specifically," she states, "this article borrows the idea of agency as emerging from the interrelationship between institutions and habitus, between history objectified and history embodied [...]. Bourdieu's understanding of agency stresses practical knowledge, embodiment, and history in a way that accounts for the endlessly creative acts and strategies by which agents navigate social fields – at the same time that it takes serious the limited horizon of possibilities available to any agent at any moment in his or her trajectory." (147) In her analysis, Mueller demonstrates that throughout Morrison's novels female economic agency connected to the black beauty industry is dominated both by white beauty ideals and consumer capitalism. As much as Bride may strive for self-possession in order to acquire genuine agency, she is bound to fail as

she and her partner Booker cannot escape a past that is "inscribed in their bodies and that structures the world that is available to them" (159).

Timo Müller's contribution on rap music is based on the assumption that there is a remarkable structural homology between Bourdieu's concept of "field" and the concrete field of hip hop. By definition, a field is "methodologically inseparable from the field of stances or position-takings (*prises de position*), i.e., the structured system of practices and expressions of agents" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 105). In a field defined as a "*space of conflict and competition*" (Wacquant, "Social Praxeology" 17, original emphasis), all players engage in struggles for power or authority in order to improve their access to the kind of profits that are at stake in the respective game, or field. But while commonly such position-takings in the "struggles for usurpation and exclusion" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 106) remain preconscious, the field of rap differs from other fields in that position-taking is at the very core of the cultural practice of rapping. Thus, Müller argues, "Bourdieu's sociology of fields is particularly useful for a literary-sociological analysis of rap music [...] because it foregrounds an aspect of social interaction that rappers have continually discussed and performed: position-taking" (165). Jay Z's intro to the album *In My Lifetime, Vol. 1* (1997), from which the title of the essay is taken, illustrates how rap lyrics thematize position-taking as an essential strategy in the game and, at the same time, are themselves position-takings in the field, "drawing on various markers of status and legitimacy specific to the field" (166). As Müller points out quoting Bourdieu, position-takings "challenge the alternative between an internal reading of the work and an explanation based on the social conditions of its production or consumption" (*Rules of Art* 231; cf. 169), that is, the concept allows combining the aesthetic with the sociological dimension of the songs. In the second part of his essay, Müller sketches historical transformations in the field of rap since the mid-1990s – when "a new generation of rappers began to redefine the popular perception of rap music by incorporating strategies from other fields, especially from pop music and the economic field" (176) – and addresses the changes in the kind of capital considered indispensable for profitable position-taking in three case studies: Kool Moe Dee's rap battle with Busy Bee Starski (1981), Ice-T's "O.G. Original Gangster" (1991), and Jay Z's "Empire State of Mind" (2009).

While Timo Müller analyzes the self-fashioning of successful rappers in the field of hip hop, Wibke Schniedermann focuses on the opposite pole of the African American social scale, drawing attention to the use of the mad-genius stereotype in narratives about black homelessness. The stories she examines depict a highly-gifted violinist who due to mental illness drops out of the renowned Juilliard School of Music, thereby tapping into the widely accepted concept of the mad genius that falsely correlates creativity with insanity. As Schniedermann argues based on Bourdieu's critical reflections in *The Field of Cultural Production*, the "insistence on unconditioned, 'uncreated' creativity [...] presupposes a relation of mutual dependence between giftedness and inherent (and thus naturalized) illness. It therefore dismisses out of hand any attempt at situating both artist and artwork within the context of the conditions that rendered them possible and of the structures of which they are the product." (139; cf. 185) Positioning the black homeless man in the field of artistic production, "in which the glorification of 'great individuals'" is particularly common (29), is then a pertinent strategy of individualization which allows to regard the homeless-turned-artist as being separate from society. While the marketing of these texts emphasizes that they are based on "true stories," the mad-genius stereotype suppresses both the bleak reality of the lives of black homeless men and any discussion of its systemic foundation. In her survey of the American history of homelessness and its public image, Schniedermann highlights the shift from white male to black male homelessness and provides the major reasons (ghettoization and criminalization) for the current overrepresentation of black men among the U.S. homeless population. In the second part of her article, she renders close readings of two versions of the mad-genius stereotype, Steve Lopez's *The Soloist* (2008), which is based on the author's factual meeting with the homeless African American Juilliard dropout Nathaniel Ayers, and the movie adaptation (2009) starring Jamie Foxx and Robert Downey Jr. The construction of the protagonist as a 'true artist' idealizes the life of the homeless by suggesting, for example, that he has the great privilege of endless free time and thus enjoys an enviable freedom. In other words, *The Soloist* transforms Ayers's underprivileged status into a source of his happiness. As Schniedermann concludes, the "frame of the mad genius elicits sympathy for the individual while at the same time facilitating a tacit dismissal of race, class, and social conditionality" (200).

With Luvena Kopp's article "Understanding Ferguson," we move from the individualized and romanticized image of black homelessness to the case of a demonized victim of state violence, 18-year-old Michael Brown who was killed in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014 by police officer Darren Wilson. Schniedermann's and Kopp's contributions expose the logic of "methodological individualism" (Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* 155) whose function it is to hide systemic racism and its historical, economic, and legal causes. While both articles draw on the seminal article "Deadly Symbiosis" by Wacquant, "a rigorous contemporary proponent of relational sociology" (207), Kopp also highlights his *Punishing the Poor*, as she interprets Ferguson's law enforcement and penal system as an example of the neoliberal "establishment of a *new government of social insecurity*" (11). She devotes the first part of her analysis to a historical sketch of the racialized divisions in St. Louis and its suburb Ferguson, from the racial policing of Jim Crow sundown towns to today's claims for domination over public space, for example, by persecuting jaywalking and generating city revenue by extracting (traffic) fines and fees mainly from its poor black population. As Kopp argues with Bourdieu, social space is contested as a significant site of power struggles: "Because social space is inscribed at once in spatial structures and in the mental structures that are partly produced by the incorporation of these structures, space is one of the sites where power is asserted and exercised, and, no doubt in its subtlest form, as symbolic violence that goes unperceived as violence." (*Weight* 126; cf. 211) Social divisions that are objectified in physical space are in turn translated into categories that reproduce the very dividing lines in the perceptions of social agents. Kopp demonstrates this interrelation between the materialist and the symbolic dimensions of domination on the basis of statements by witnesses and an extended analysis of officer Wilson's grand jury testimony. As these testimonies reveal, symbolic violence is exerted by attributing to Blacks as a group of outsiders cultural deviance, for instance, with respect to their alleged irresponsibility or the imagined threat emanating from the demonized black body. This strategy of 'blaming the victim' has the function of legitimizing state violence, a mechanism that ultimately leads to the reproduction and naturalization of racialized power. As Kopp summarizes the legal outcome of the case in Bourdieusian terms, "the grand jury's decision not to indict Wilson for the killing of Brown [...] was the *socio-logical* outcome of the lawful 'encounter between [the subjective

structures of] the *habitus* and [the objective structures of] a field, between incorporated history and an objectified history'" (*Logic* 66, original emphasis; cf. 223-24). Thus, "Wilson's exoneration can be read as an official consecration of his (symbolic) power: of his authority, his representation, and, ultimately, of the murder itself" (224).

Nicole Hirschfelder's article on the symbolic struggles of definition concerning Civil Rights activist Bayard Rustin and his legacy draws primarily on Elias's theory of established-outsider relations. Rustin belonged to the inner circle of Martin Luther King, Jr. and was a major organizer of the movement, responsible, for example, for the famous March on Washington in 1963; and yet, despite his undoubtedly eminent position, he was ignored until the 1990s and since then still has been largely neglected in historiography. The common explanation for this so-called "silencing" is: No wonder, not only was he gay, but a former communist as well, two qualities sufficient to ostracize any American, let alone a black man. However, Hirschfelder argues, the case is more complicated than it may at first appear and, in addition, qualifies for the more general question what kind of power dynamics lead to a transformation of oppression that ultimately guarantees its reproduction. Following Elias's principle of considering long-term developments in relations of interdependent groups, Hirschfelder looks at the impact of the constructs of both 'race' and 'class' on the fabrication of Rustin's legacy in (African) American collective memory. The complexity of his case arises above all from his membership in one of the most renowned American religious denominations: He was socialized as a Quaker. Hirschfelder argues that the image of Rustin's political activism is forged by changing processes of selection, most importantly, the neglect of his Quakerism. Rustin's upbringing as a black Quaker not only accounts for his influence on King's pacifist stance; more importantly, it makes him a member of a highly privileged group of the established among the established who "in hindsight were considered the spiritual founding fathers" of the nation (248). To be raised as a Quaker means sharing their habitus and their we-ideal as well as participating in the cultural and social capital ascribed to the Religious Society of Friends. Rustin, then, profited from the group charisma of the established which made him less vulnerable to the stigmatization that he experienced as a black homosexual. Not surprisingly, Rustin became known for his untiring efforts of mediating between the groups to which he belonged; however, his attempts to transcend the

boundaries between the respective established and outsiders challenged their very we-identity and necessarily met with resistance. As Hirschfelder argues, it is Rustin's Quaker habitus "that makes his development into one of the great Civil Rights leaders more plausible than mere contingence" (248). On the other hand, it is the same sense of empowerment and privilege derived from participating in the Quaker group charisma that led both the established and the various outsider groups to which he belonged to suspect him of being a traitor and consequently to distort his legacy.

The volume concludes with a critical intervention by Dennis Büscher-Ulbrich who, by presenting Jacques Rancière's anti-sociological disagreement with Bourdieu's relational concepts, raises the fundamental "question of the relationship between social science and emancipation" (259). Rancière's critique is above all directed against Bourdieu's concepts of "symbolic violence" and "misrecognition," as they imply that the dominated cannot perceive their own domination and consequently, according to him, are denied political agency. More generally, Rancière criticizes what he sees as the hierarchical structure of Bourdieu's thinking that places the sociologist above the excluded, turning the latter into a mere object of investigation. From the point of view of a theory of politics, then, the power theory of relational sociology is ineffective, since it necessarily prevents emancipation. In contrast, Rancière holds the fundamental assumption of unconditional equality, which ascribes equal powers of speech and thought to everybody. As Büscher-Ulbrich points out, Rancière derives the core idea of his philosophical project from Kant's and Schiller's belief in the emancipatory potential of aesthetics. Against Bourdieu's allegedly deterministic view of the transformative potential of the dominated, a charge he shares with many of Bourdieu's critics, Rancière insists on the possibility of emancipatory social transformation by rethinking politics from the perspective of the excluded who, in the formulation of Büscher-Ulbrich, are said to be capable of "disrupt[ing] not only the power arrangements of the social order, but also its perceptual and epistemic underpinnings, the obviousness and naturalness that attaches to it" (258). With its epistemologically different stance, Rancière's radical critique of relational sociology provides a valuable opportunity to reflect upon the fundamentally opposing assumptions of the two theories. It may be the more surprising that Rancière's concept of racism as "a passion from above" is comparable to Wacquant's thesis of the "neoliberal government of social insecurity." Linked to Kopp's

interpretation of Ferguson as a paradigm of the neoliberal state's systemic racism, the last contribution of this volume leads the debate on power relations beyond the problem of racial domination, asking "the pressing questions of what material and symbolic constraints on subjectivity and agency exist today that help reproduce a consensual post-political formation" (274).

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