

## **Psyche in the Habitus?**

Thursday, 27 September 2012 10.00am – 4.15pm

Birkbeck, University of London, Room 414, Birkbeck Main building, Malet Street,  
London WC1

Travel details at: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/maps>

£15.00 BSA members/£10.00 Post-grad BSA members

£18.00 Non-BSA/£12.00 non-BSA post-grads

Book at: [the BSA Sociology, Psychoanalysis and the Psychosocial Study Group webpage](#) or follow the links from the BSA website (<http://www.britisoc.co.uk/>).

Organizer: Elizabeth Silva

The aim of this workshop is to explore the ideas proposed by Pierre Bourdieu about the workings of the habitus in social life. It intends to address his proposition in *Pascalian Meditations* (2000:166, original French 1997) that sociology and psychology should combine their efforts to analyse the genesis of investment in a field of social relations – like the domestic space – where a complex process of socialization is initiated. In what ways can the psyche in the habitus be manifested and captured? How do sociological tools and psychoanalytical ones enable researchers to identify the workings of the habitus?

## **Programme**

10.00 – Arrival – tea and coffee

10.30 – Welcome and opening: Sasha Roseneil

SESSION 1 – Chair: Peter Redman

10.40 – Elizabeth Silva

**Fragmentation, Gender and the Workings of the Habitus**

11.30 – Diane Reay

**Habitus and the Psychosocial: Bourdieu with Feelings**

12.20 – short break

12.30 - Helene Aarseth

**Family Cultures and the Feel for the Game: Anxieties and Desires in the Academic and the Business Elite**

13.20 – LUNCH

SESSION 2 – Chair: Gail Lewis

14.20 – Steve Pile

**Lawrence of Arabia and the Uninhabitable Geographies of Skin**

15.10 – Helene Aarseth, Lynne Layton and Harriet Nielsen

**Conflicts in the habitus: the emotional work of becoming modern**

16.00-16.15 – Final discussion and end of workshop

Workshop sponsored by the British Sociological Association (BSA) Sociology, Psychoanalysis and the Psychosocial Study Group; the Open University, Centre for Citizenship, Identity and Governance (CCIG), Psychosocial Research Programme (CCIG funding); and the Birkbeck Institute for Social Research

## ABSTRACTS:

### **Fragmentation, Gender and the Workings of the Habitus**

The paper addresses three key issues: (1) the individualised social, (2) the gendered social and (3) the repercussions of these accounts for the notion of the habitus and its operation in view of social change. It presents Bourdieu's changing notion of the habitus, some of the criticisms to its conception and outlines the implications of this notion as presented by recent theoretical engagements with Bourdieu's work in relation to the account of the individual, including some feminist academic critiques in relation to gender. The discussion is centred on how the habitus works in contemporary social life if complexities of gender and individual selves are accounted for within a view of relationality that takes interiority and lateral relationships into consideration. Arguments about the current operations of the habitus are made on the basis of an empirical exploration of class and gender locations of individuals in couples' relationships. Does habitus explain the practices encountered and their relationality? How useful is the concept to account for a notion of the self in interdependencies and within social patterns?

Presenter: **Elizabeth B. Silva**, Professor, Dept of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, [e.b.silva@open.ac.uk](mailto:e.b.silva@open.ac.uk)

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### **Habitus and the Psychosocial: Bourdieu with Feelings**

There has been a great deal of criticism of Bourdieu and particularly his concept of habitus for not engaging sufficiently with the domain of the affective but I would argue that the gap lies in the criticisms, not in Bourdieu's theory. This paper explores the potential of habitus to develop a holistic understanding of the lived, embodied, affective experiences of inequalities in contemporary society. It draws on two very different social class tales to illustrate not only how habitus might contribute to psychosocial theorizations and understandings of the workings of the psyche but also how the psycho-social might enhance understandings of habitus.

Presenter: **Diane Reay**, Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, 184, Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 2PQ, [dr311@cam.ac.uk](mailto:dr311@cam.ac.uk)

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### **Family Cultures and the Feel for the Game: Anxieties and Desires in the Academic and the Business Elite**

In his later work, Bourdieu seemed increasingly occupied by emotional drives, anxieties and desires that enable the agents to take advantage of the possibilities offered by particular fields. He emphasizes the role of familial socialization in constituting what he describes as "a specific libido" or "a feel for the game". This paper explores the relationship between familial socialization and field requirements. Drawing on free association narrative interviews with parental

couples in the business elite (i.e. one or both of the parents work as proprietors, investors, CEOs or partners in high income enterprises ) and in the academic elite (i.e. both parents have a MA or PhD and work with production and distribution of knowledge and ideas) respectively, I describe divergent patterns of everyday practices, love and socialization in the two class fractions. Drawing on relational theories I suggest that these divergent family cultures do not simply echo the requirements of the field in which the family is situated but are generated through emotional dynamics of anxieties and desires that emerge at the juncture between the family and the field.

Presenter: **Helene Aarseth**, Post Doctor, Department of Sociology and Human Geography University of Oslo, Pb 1096 Blindern, N-0317 Oslo, [helene.aarseth@sosgeo.uio.no](mailto:helene.aarseth@sosgeo.uio.no)

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### **Lawrence of Arabia and the Uninhabitable Geographies of Skin**

This paper explores the relationship between skin and self. It does so conceptually by re-examining Freud's suggestion, in 'The Ego and the Id' (1923), that the ego is first and foremost a bodily entity, while also being a projection of a surface (i.e. skin). Against this is placed the experiences of T. E. Lawrence during his military service in Arabia (c.1917), as he describes them in his autobiographical account 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom' (1926). A spatial understanding of the notion of the ego, and of Lawrence's skinly experiences, suggests a complex and dynamic set of interactions between skin, ego and second skins. Indeed, Lawrence seems to revel in the uninhabitability of his various skins, and mutably so. This hints at more than the idea that bodies and psyches do not always occupy habitats easily. It might suggest a chafing of psyche, space and habitus – sometimes deliberately, sometimes opportunistically, sometimes pleasurably.

Presenter: **Steve Pile**, Professor, Dept of Geography, Faculty of Social Sciences, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, [s.j.pile@open.ac.uk](mailto:s.j.pile@open.ac.uk)

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### **Conflicts in the habitus: the emotional work of becoming modern**

Theorists have suggested that Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus could be rendered more open to agency and change by amplifying his own concept of reflexivity. However, this leaves us with a dichotomous concept of change as something that either emerges through adjustments occurring outside of consciousness or through reflexive uncovering. In this paper, we argue that an object relational concept of emotional conflicts in the habitus, one that draws on relational psychoanalytic theory in general and, specifically, on Christopher Bollas' concepts of the unthought known and transformational objects, may enable a move beyond this dichotomy. The argument is substantiated by findings from a qualitative study of intergenerational transmission of ways of being and relating in a time of rapid

change. We identify “a third space” beyond non-conscious adjustments and cognitive lucidity, manifested as desire for change and anxiety about change. A consideration of emotional ways of handling these conflicts points to a more agentic, yet socially situated concept of habitus.

**Presenters:**

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