

R E V I E W S

Damian Wolski

DOI: 10.15584/anarres.2021.16.9

ORCID: 0000-0002-9814-2618

(review) S. Kadrow and J. Müller (eds.). *Habitus? The Social Dimension of Technology and Transformation (= Scales and Transformation 3)*. Leiden 2019: Sidestone Press, 230 pages, 15 figures (bw), 65 figures (fc).

Let us assume at the outset that in the process of making conclusions concerning research on prehistory, the cognizing subject is “contaminated” by their own reality (Pawleta 2016, 13–14), and we are dealing with objectivist thinking (i.e. a closed, unchanging system; e.g. Hetmański 2015). Therefore, achieving an interpretative optimum, one devoid of superficial explanations, requires the adoption of a specific theoretical perspective: *the assessment of any work on the distant past should take into account not so much the truthfulness of pronounced judgments, which are unverifiable due to the absence of the past, but the coherence and logic of interpretation and argumentation, as well as the strength of its persuasion and contention* (Pawleta 2009, 457). Hence, when trying to refer to phenomena in prehistoric times, in fact – through the remnants of the available materials – only fragmentarily available, one should take into account not the authenticity of the cited narrative, unverifiable due to the lack of the presence of the cognizer in prehistoric ages, but the transparency and logic of the argument as well as the power of an intentional, even quasi-performative influence on the scientific community (in the sense expressed not only in speech, but also in writing, in the creation of a bygone reality, using appropriate imagery; on performative statements: cf. Austin 1993; Brożek and Kasprzyk 2007).

In the monograph edited by Sławomir Kadrow and Johannes Müller, entitled *Habitus? The Social Dimension of Technology and Transformation*, published by Sidestone Press as part of the Collaborative Research Center series (CRC 1266, *Scales of Transformation in Prehistoric and Archaic Societies*), texts on social changes in the aspect of technology are present-

ed by various authors representing different research centres – from Scandinavia to the Balkans, from the British Isles and France to Ukraine and the North Caucasus. The content of the chapters is not limited in time and territory to a specific prehistoric period or archaeological culture. On the contrary, by showing a broad perspective, including a fragmentary ethnological perspective, the publication deals with a very important issue of the social interpretation of various views and shades of technological behaviour, including, importantly, that which is innovative in nature. The link between the individual parts of the work which might not necessarily seem thematically coherent is the title *Habitus* and what emerges from behind this concept.

The *Habitus* concept, developed since the 1970s by Pierre Bourdieu (e.g. 1977), is characterized by the editors of the volume as follows: 1) [*Habitus* – ed. DW] *is a system of permanent dispositions, functioning as structuring structures*; 2) [*Habitus* can be understood as – ed. DW] *principles generating and organizing practices and ideas*; 3) *Habitus is the internalization of external structures (norms, moral orders) and generates strategies that allow a person to deal with different situations in a consistent and systematic way. Habitus leaves some space for improvisation [...]* (Kadrow and Müller 2019, 11).

The author of the introductory theoretical chapter on *Habitus*, Vesa Arponen, highlights the intentions of Bourdieu in relation to the approach to the interpretation of social life in general, holistically taking its particular components as a whole: *With Bourdieu we are to think of social life as a vast set of processes that are continually unfolding in time and space, which*

he calls the ‘field’. *Interlocking in the temporal and spatial unfolding of the fields of practice are agential deliberation as well as dispositions and practical (embodied) know-how together with the societal structures, all fitting each other, as if puzzle pieces, to generate, regenerate and reproduce social life and daily basis* (Arponen 2019, 15). Moreover, an attempt to outline a somewhat idealistic vision of a synthetic idea of social relations in ancient times is irresistibly associated with the need to reconcile with each other concepts that seem to be contradictory: *subjectivism and objectivism, internal agency and external structure, dynamism and change as well as durability and structured reproduction, practical and embodied as well as reflective and deliberative reason* (Arponen 2019, 15). The holistic approach proposes to conceptualize the integral framework for understanding human action as arising, on the one hand, from human agency and, on the other, from social structures external to the acting subject. Action is to take place in a context in which subjectivity and structure come together to nourish social life (Arponen 2019, 15; cf. Giddens 1979; 1984).

The author of one of the subsequent texts in the reviewed volume, Bisserka Gaydarska, defines a similar system of interactions: [...] *the habitus – is not characterized by causation but it is rather a dynamic set of principals that are shaped by people and are simultaneously shaping people* (Gaydarska 2019, 49), as well as P. Bourdieu himself: [...] *habitus is a relationship of ontological complicity of the world* (Gaydarska 2019, 49 after Bourdieu 1985, 14).

Let the thought of Willard O. Quine, whose influence on the contemporary perception of the philosophy of science is overwhelming, serve as a classic model for this type of comprehensive approach to the problem of empirical reaching the cognitive optimum: [In accordance with the dogma of reductionism – ed. DW] [...] *each sentence, considered in isolation from the rest of the sentences, can be confirmed or debated. The opposite position [...] is that our claims about the outside world are brought before the tribunal of sense experience not individually but collectively* (Quine 2000, 70).

Like any theory that appears in the humanities and social sciences, that of Bourdieu’s inevitably enters into a relationship, and often also into controversy, with other concepts – both on the theoretical level and when a given issue moves from the sphere of dry theoretical scrutiny. to the area of practice. The limitation of applicability seems to be the risk of excessive generalizations and simplifications, as well as the fact that Habitus and other terms related to it (“field”,

“social capital”, “social violence”, “maintaining”: Kadrow and Müller 2019, 11) as strongly embedded extrapractically and naturally functioning theoretically-descriptively, may show poor empirical translatability: *the synthesis is so comprehensive that it rather describes a set of problems than provides a solution for dealing with them* (Arponen 2019, 16).

This review is also intended to persuade the reader to different perceptions, which I will try to explain in an appropriate way, referring to the selected texts contained in the volume. The point is not to quote the content of each of the dozen or so articles here in abbreviated form (because the editors have already done so in the introduction: Kadrow and Müller 2019, 11–14). It is rather my intention to familiarize the reader with examples of the application of the Habitus concept on archaeological grounds – discussing specific attempts of such applications presented by the authors.

An interesting attempt to deal with the concept of Habitus as a potential driving force of change is made by Gaydarska in relation to – as it is sometimes referred to – the protocivilization of Cucuteni-Tripillia (5200–2700 BC). The author points to the integrity of the socio-cultural system manifested in ceramics and figural art throughout the entire period of functioning of mega-sites, even with the expansion of their areas (sometimes up to 200 ha). The essence of Cucuteni-Tripillia, reflected in the relative uniformity of material culture for hundreds of years, was to be constituted, according to the quoted researcher, rather in elements of the so-called “Big Other” concept, characterized as follows: *The symbolic Big Other also can refer to (often fantasmatic/fictional) ideas of anonymous authoritative power and/or knowledge (whether that of God, Nature, History, Society, State, Party, Science [...])* (Johnston 2013). According to the author of the chapter, elements of the Big Other can also be found in the material dimension of everyday life, and this concept goes far beyond the level of individuals themselves.

On the other hand, the concept of Habitus is largely part of the personal, community and intercommunal commitment of each individual to the surrounding world. The mutual interaction of these two spheres may explain the Cucuteni-Tripillia paradox – namely, changes could have occurred on the basis of Habitus, but the dominant symbolic order had to remain the domain of Big Other (Gaydarska 2019, 50). In the context of the sudden appearance and disappearance of mega-settlements, as shown by the frequency analysis of figural art and spatial distribution of sites, the stimulus of social transformation was neither technological innovation nor environmen-

tal changes, but rather changes within the Big Other (Gaydarska 2019, 66).

Interestingly, the less theorizing and archaeologically more traditional approach to the problem of socio-cultural change in Cucuteni-Tripillia gave rise to a different kind of conclusions by Aleksander Diachenko, where Habitus could play a fundamental role. According to this author, along with the demographic growth and territorial expansion, there was also the development of technological and economic innovations, most of which were introduced as a result of the external influences of neighbouring communities. The researcher also points to the migration pressure from the outside, which was to contribute to the formation of mega-settlements, as well as to climate change as other factors determining the changes in the population structure (Diachenko 2019, 80).

In another interesting chapter of the book, Sabine Reinhold reflects on the possible connection of some technological innovations (metallurgy, military, wheeled transport) with the manifestations of Habitus listed by herself: a) as the elite of warriors in the Black Sea, the Eneolithic Maykop culture, b) as the steppe Habitus in the Yamna culture (Reinhold 2019, 104–105).

On the other hand, the article by Valentin Pankowski deals with the problem of the relationship of centres and peripheries in the Bronze Age of Eastern Europe in terms of innovation and technology (mainly metallurgical), which is to be the main driving force of social change. According to the author, the outlined concepts of genesis and cultural and social transformation focused on technological progress receive additional support thanks to the Habitus concept in assessing their integrity and cohesion (Pankowski 2019, 224–225).

Noteworthy is the only chapter in the monograph in the field of ethnoarchaeology, the author of which is Christian Jeunesse. Although Habitus is not mentioned by name even once, its shadows can be found in the text on archaeological grounds (Hallstatt/early La Tène) and in reference to a selected ethnographic parallel (among others, in the observation of the communities inhabiting the Indonesian island of Sumba). In both cases, the researcher describes the socio-political system as dual, without clearly referring to the mechanisms of cultural change, but rather looking for internal differences among the populations/archaeological units selected for research. Jeunesse believes that when trying to understand the principles of social organization in prehistory, one should be very careful about the cultural ranges distinguished on the basis of the features of artifacts. Forms of social behaviour

may have much broader frames, and social situations may paradoxically occur without any reflection in the material sphere. This is well reflected in the field research among communities in Southeast Asia. The fact that the participants of social life use exactly the same or similar products in formal terms, or live in houses that are similar in terms of architecture, does not completely reflect the truly diversified population structure and complex socio-political relations (Jeunesse 2019, 191–210).

To sum up, the considerations in all the texts of the monograph reviewed here concern the complex relationship between technology and social changes in different places and times, which is an evident unifying element in this publication. At the same time, it is worth noting that not all authors refer to the term Habitus *expressis verbis*, and some do so only casually. As a result, the reader has to decide for himself whether the concept is applicable in a given case and to what extent. When reading a few of the works, one gets the impression that Habitus is only an addition to previously prepared texts rather than a driving force behind the published content. Thus, some chapters, which remain – which should be emphasized – at a very high scientific level in their subject areas, lack direct references to the theory and do not seem to be directly inspired by the thought of Bourdieu. Despite such an impression, on the other hand, it can be concluded that all components of the monograph can be conceptually located – at least by assumption – on the theoretical axis of Habitus, sometimes only being poorly visible explicitly.

The reviewed book does not provide for an ending, although an extensive editorial introduction compensates for the lack of conclusive content. The multi-author work *Habitus? The Social Dimension of Technology and Transformation* is certainly one of the few works in the field of archaeology in the scale of all produced, in which – with the very individual research focus of individual authors – an attempt to look at the diverse and different-time source materials in a certain way has been successful. Undoubtedly, the effect of the work's coherence was achieved thanks to the special attention of the editors of the volume. I consider this work as important reading for those interested in archaeological research at the macro level, in the context of technology and society. Assuming, from the theoretical point of view, a creative construction of the reality that has passed by contemporary pre-historians rather than its reconstruction, I would encourage the reader to pay attention not only to the texts that fit the Habitus concept

in the reviewed publication, but also to the chapters prepared as interpretative counterproposals to Bourdieu's thought.

References

- Arponen V. P. J. 2019. Habitus as a theoretical concept. In S. Kadrow and J. Müller (eds.), *Habitus? The Social Dimension of Technology and Transformation* (= *Scales and Transformation* 3). Leiden: Sidestone Press, 15–18.
- Austin J. L. 1993. Jak działać słowami? In J. L. Austin (ed.), *Mówienie i poznawanie. Rozprawy i wykłady filozoficzne*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, s. 550–708.
- Bourdieu P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu P. 1985. The genesis of the concepts of *habitus* and of *field*. *Sociocriticism* 2(2), 11–24.
- Brożek A. and Kasprzyk Z. 2007. O performatywach i generowaniu. *Filozofia Nauki* 15(2), 115–130.
- Diachenko A. 2019. Does the social field cause or accelerate social and cultural changes? The case of Eneolithic Cucuteni-Tripolye cultural complex. In S. Kadrow and J. Müller (eds.), *Habitus? The Social Dimension of Technology and Transformation* (= *Scales and Transformation* 3). Leiden: Sidestone Press, 71–85.
- Gaydarska B. 2019. 'If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change': the case of Trypillia. In S. Kadrow and J. Müller (eds.), *Habitus? The Social Dimension of Technology and Transformation* (= *Scales and Transformation* 3). Leiden: Sidestone Press, 47–69.
- Giddens A. 1979. *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. London: Macmillan.
- Giddens A. 1984. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hetmański M. 2015. Proceduralno-kognitywny charakter ideału obiektywności. *Zagadnienia Naukoznawstwa* 51/2, 97–110.
- Jeunesse Ch. 2019. Dualist socio-political systems in South East Asia and the interpretation of late prehistoric European societies. In S. Kadrow and J. Müller (eds.), *Habitus? The Social Dimension of Technology and Transformation* (= *Scales and Transformation* 3). Leiden: Sidestone Press, 181–213.
- Johnston A. 2013. Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan/> (access: 22.09.2021)
- Kadrow S. and Müller J. 2019. Habitus? The social dimension of technology and transformation – an introduction. In S. Kadrow and J. Müller (eds.), *Habitus? The Social Dimension of Technology and Transformation* (= *Scales and Transformation* 3). Leiden: Sidestone Press, 11–14.
- Pankowski V. 2019. The diversity in a theory of cultural genesis for the eastern European Bronze Age. In S. Kadrow and J. Müller (eds.), *Habitus? The Social Dimension of Technology and Transformation* (= *Scales and Transformation* 3). Leiden: Sidestone Press, 215–228.
- Pawleta M. 2009. (review) Aleksander Dzbyński. 2008. Rytuał i porozumienie. Racjonalne podstawy komunikacji i wymiany w pradziejach Europy Środkowej/ Ritual and understanding. Rational bases of communication and exchange in prehistoric Central Europe (= *Collectio Archaeologica Ressoiviensis* 8, Instytut Archeologii Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego). *Sprawozdania Archeologiczne* 61, 451–463.
- Pawleta M. 2016. *Przeszłość we współczesności. Studium metodologiczne archeologicznie kreowanej przeszłości w przestrzeni społecznej*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.
- Quine W. V. 2000. Dwa dogmaty empiryzmu. In W. V. Quine (ed.), *Z punktu widzenia logiki*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 49–77.
- Reinhold S. 2019. The Maykop legacy – new social practice and new technologies in the 4th millennium BCE in the North Caucasus. In S. Kadrow and J. Müller (eds.), *Habitus? The Social Dimension of Technology and Transformation* (= *Scales and Transformation* 3). Leiden: Sidestone Press, 87–113.

Damian Wolski

(private)

e-mail: wolski.damian@outlook.com