

The Relevance of Bourdieusian Theory for a “Sociology of Love” – A Critical Discussion

La relevancia de la teoría bourdieusiana para una "sociología del amor": una discusión crítica

A relevância da teoria bourdieusiana para uma “sociologia do amor” - uma discussão crítica

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Abstract: The paper starts with the assessment that Pierre Bourdieu’s “theory of practice” has become a central point of reference for contemporary studies on love. I argue that several answers to the question of why Bourdieu occupies such a central place in contemporary studies on love can be found within his theoretical as well as methodological contributions: By transforming interpretative and structural accounts into a conclusive theory of practice (I) and bridging the “subjectivist-objectivist” gap (II), Bourdieu’s theory has cleared a path for systematically analyzing romantic love from a genuinely sociological point of view. More specifically, the paper will show how Bourdieu’s concepts of “practice”, “symbolic systems”, “habitus” and “forms of capital” add to an understanding of love as an embodied social practice (1), a societal order of knowledge (2), a practice of distinction and power struggles (3), and how it serves an important function in stabilizing as well as transforming social orders (4). Ultimately, it shows that while Bourdieu’s theory provides a useful lens for studying love as a site of social distinction, it tends to over-emphasize objective accounts of knowledge. Accordingly, based upon an internal critique of Bourdieu’s work, I argue that Bourdieu’s theory rather presents an analytical toolkit than a conclusive theory for studies on love.

Keywords: Bourdieusian Theory; Sociology of Love; Bourdieu; Critical Discussion; Love.

Resumen: El artículo comienza constatando que la teoría bourdieusiana del campo se ha convertido en un punto central de referencia de los estudios contemporáneos sobre el amor. Se argumenta que esto se debe a la capacidad de la posición de Bourdieu para superar los desafíos teóricos y metodológicos que el fenómeno del amor le plantea a la teoría social convencional,

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especialmente el problema del estatus y la función del amor romántico en las sociedades tardomodernas. Más específicamente, la teoría de la práctica y conceptos como los de sistema simbólico, habitus y formas de capital sirven para analizar el amor desde la teoría social. Dado que Bourdieu no realizó un estudio sistemático del amor, se ofrece aquí una reconstrucción de su teoría y se la extrapola al estudio de este fenómeno. El artículo sistematiza también abordajes sociológicos contemporáneos del amor que se inspiran en la posición bourdieusiana. Finalmente, se sostiene la siguiente tesis: la teoría bourdieusiana ofrece una perspectiva útil para estudiar las relaciones amorosas como un sitio de distinción social, pero no da cuenta del amor como una fuente de comprensión intersubjetiva ni como un modo de trascendencia postreligiosa. El artículo sostiene entonces que la teoría de Bourdieu brinda un conjunto de herramientas analíticas fructíferas para analizar el amor, pero no una teoría definitiva sobre el mismo.

Palabras clave: Teoría Bourdieusiana; Sociología del amor; Bourdieu; Discusión crítica; Amor.

Resumo: O artigo parte da avaliação de que a teoria bourdieusiana do campo se tornou uma referência central para os estudos contemporâneos sobre o amor. Argumenta-se que isto se deve à capacidade da contribuição de Bourdieu para superar os desafios teóricos e metodológicos centrais que o fenômeno do amor coloca para a teoria social convencional, a saber, o status e a função do amor romântico para as sociedades da modernidade tardia. Especificamente, os conceitos de Bourdieu de sistema simbólico - habitus, formas de capital e sua teoria da prática - correspondem aos problemas da teoria social convencional em conceituar o amor. Visto que Bourdieu não forneceu um estudo sistemático do amor, o artigo oferece uma reconstrução de sua teoria e a extrapola para o fenômeno do amor. O artigo, ainda, sistematiza as abordagens bourdieusianas contemporâneas do amor. Em última análise, mostra que, embora a teoria de Bourdieu forneça uma lente útil para estudar o amor como um local de distinção social, ela também fecha os olhos ao amor como uma fonte de compreensão intersubjetiva, bem como de transcendência pós-religiosa. Consequentemente, o artigo argumenta que a teoria Bourdieusiana apresenta um conjunto de ferramentas analíticas, em vez de uma teoria conclusiva para estudar o amor.

Palavras-chave: Teoria Bourdieusiana; Sociologia do Amor; Bourdieu; Discussão crítica; Amor.

1. Introduction

In contrast to “class”, “social relationship” or “power”, “love” is not one of sociology’s classical key terms – and this not only within Max Weber’s classical outline of the discipline’s

terminology (Weber 1978:3ff.). In fact, it is a rather novel development that love has become an object of sociological interest (cf. Rusu 2018:5). Despite its clear social implications, in “conventional social theory”², love has largely been marginalized and was left to other disciplines like psychology or anthropology to make sense of it (Rusu 2018:3; Haller 2016:154; Goode 1959:38).

It was, in fact, not until the 1990s that a “sociology of love” appeared on the disciplinary landscape as a distinct field of inquiry (Rusu 2018:5; Iorio 2014:33-59; Owens 2007:266). Within this sub-field, the theoretical framework of one of the “most influential sociologists worldwide from the 1970s on” (Joas and Knobl 2009:371), namely of Pierre Bourdieu, seems to have become a central point of reference (Illouz 2018, 2011, 1998; Schmitz 2018; 2012; Schütze 2008; Johnson/Lawler 2005). Nonetheless, Bourdieu himself did not extend his multifaceted theoretical framework to a systematic study of love (Illouz 1998:214).³ Yet, what are the central contributions that Bourdieu’s theory provides for a sociology of love? Which insights do his core concepts of *practice*, *habitus* and (*forms of*) *capital* offer? What makes his theory useful for sociologists of love? But also, what are limitations of such an enterprise? While Bourdieu’s theory is frequently deployed for analyzing love, questions like these have not been addressed in a systematic approach. Thus, the objective of this paper is to explore the implications of a Bourdieusian framework for a sociological analysis of love and to offer lines of inquiry for such an enterprise.

Starting with the question of what makes Bourdieu’s theory suitable for studying love and its “historic codification” as “romantic” love⁴, this paper, in a first step, reconstructs the classic

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² I use the term “conventional social theory” to stress Bourdieu’s enterprise of overcoming the “subjective” and “objectivist” traditions of social theory that he diagnosed for his time of writing. More specifically, he assesses the theoretical body of the disciplinary knowledge of his time as unilaterally biased: As providing either objectivist or subjectivist accounts for the social world. In contrast to these “conventional” approaches, he seeks to establish a double-reflexive social theory that dialectically considers “subjective” human experience as well as the “objective” map of (power-)relations (Bourdieu 1977:3ff, 87ff).

³ Most references to love can be found in Bourdieu’s famous *Distinction* (1979) but he also revisits the topic e.g. in *Masculine Domination* (2001) or even *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977).

⁴ As love (its expression, its social function, its symbolic representation) proves to be historically changing (Luhmann 1986; Gay 1984; De Rougemont 1974), this paper builds upon a heuristic “model of romantic love” (Kerschbaumer 2018). As Luhmann shows, romantic love only emerged in the 18th century and continued to exist up until (at least) the late 20th century as a specific “semantic” (Luhmann 1986:43), constituting a horizon of experience that actors turn and gear themselves towards (Luhmann 1986:43). According to this, an ideal-type of “romantic love” can be constructed from its historical situatedness (Luhmann 1986:3; cf. for a more fundamental understanding Schütz 1962:40), which encompasses an affective, a cognitive, a corporal as well as a spiritual dimension (Kerschbaumer 2018:66.). Scholz and Lenz, in fact, identify seven characterizing features for the social relationship of romantic love: 1) The uniqueness or singularity of the actors involved, 2) a devaluation of other social relations, 3) the expectation of

and conventional sociological literature on love and outlines its limitations. Here, theoretical problems and limitations of conventional social theory become observable: For conventional and classical social theory love, in fact, appeared as an “evasive” phenomenon, which could not systematically be integrated into conventional social theory (Rusu 2018:5).

In a second step, by extrapolating four of Bourdieu’s core concepts, namely *practice*, *symbolic systems*, *habitus* and *forms of capital* to romantic love, I will show how Bourdieu’s approach addresses conventional theory’s problems from a new perspective: by transforming interpretative and structural accounts into a conclusive theory of practice (Joas/Knobl 2009:373f.) and bridging the “subjectivist-objectivist” gap, Bourdieu’s *praxeological* theory clears a path for systematically analyzing former marginalized cultural and seemingly “individual” phenomena as sites of social practices and relations – amongst them, romantic love. Accordingly, it is argued that his contributions were able to fruitfully respond to and readjust central theoretical and methodological problems that occurred in conventional social theory.

In a third step, the paper briefly systemizes contemporary studies on love that draw upon Bourdieu’s approach and shows how his framework is used. In a fourth step it is argued that while Bourdieu’s theory can be considered a useful lens, limitations of his perspective become salient as well: as through his perspective love is primarily conceptualized as a site of power struggles and distinctions, he seems to relapse into an objectivist mode of analysis, which undermines his own project of consolidating objective and subjective modes of knowledge within his theory of practice. Accordingly, I will proceed with an internal critique. Ultimately, I argue that, instead of throwing Bourdieusian theory fully overboard, his theory provides an important starting point for a sociology of love.

2. Classic Approaches to a “Sociology of Love”:

In classical social theory, love presents a rather marginal than central problem

eternal communication and continuity (Lenz/Scholz 2014:98), 4) the unity of sexual desire and affectual sympathy, 5) the unity of love and marriage, 6) the expectation of parenthood and 7) a constitutive and essential difference between the partners (whether or not this is tied to gender is discussed in the article itself. cf. Lenz/Scholz 2014:99f.). In this paper, romantic love is used as a specific focus for two reasons: Firstly, romanticism serves as a “cultural template” (Lenz and Scholz 2014:97) that is argued to still be operative in contemporary narratives of love (a.o.: *ibid.*; Kerschbaumer 2018:9; Illouz 1998:109). Secondly, because the emergence and formation of romantic love can historically be placed within the “high-modernist period” (Giddens 1992:3,39), which in itself is the background for social theory in general (Berman 1982:92; Giddens 1990:48). From here on, I will use love and romantic love – instead when explicitly marked – as a synonym. However, this also circumscribes the scope and the limits of this paper as other forms of love, e.g. ideas on political love, religious love or non-romantic love concepts are not systematically considered.

(Haller 2016; Lenz 2009; Collins 1971; Waller 1952).⁵ In fact, in the article “Theorising love in sociological thought: Classical contributions to a sociology of love” (2018) Mihai Stelian Rusu argues that this has to do with Classic Sociology’s theoretical preoccupation with positivism – leading us all the way back to Emile Durkheim’s and Auguste Comte’s conception of sociology: It not only seems hard to “measure” love (Rusu 2018:5), but moreover to constitute it as a genuinely *social* and thus “objective” fact in the sense that it is “existing outside the consciousness of the individual” (Durkheim 1982:50f.). Drawing on this position, in the time of the classics, love was mostly left to other disciplines and thus presented a “thematic conundrum for classical sociology” (Rusu 2018:5).⁶

Nonetheless, even from the writings of the classics important insights on love can be excavated: As Rusu shows, Durkheim discusses familial love as a social rule and a normative imperative that actors comply to (Rusu 2018:4f.), while Weber attributes an important place to “sexual love” [geschlechtliche Liebe] in the “erotic sphere” – which is one of his five value-spheres that are constituted within differentiated modern societies (Weber 2000:548).⁷ For Weber, the sphere of love offers a buffer to, and an escape from, the dominance of instrumental rationality, acquiring the status of a post-religious order of meaning (Rusu 2018:8; Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 1995:168ff.; Weber 2000:552). The existence of the erotic sphere is, however, threatened by the irresistible force of rationalization, bureaucratization and the proceeding “disenchantment” of the world (Weber 2000:549).

Georg Simmel, on the other hand, discusses love in his essays on the “On love” (Simmel 1984[1923]:153ff.) and “Flirtation” (Simmel (1984[1909]:133ff.) from a more “micro-sociological” stance.⁸ He stresses the ontological character of love as a fundamental “relationship

⁵ I would like to add here that who can be considered a “classic” is an important and ongoing negotiation process, which requires critical reflection (cf. Connell 1997).

⁶ I cannot provide an en detail discussion of the classics here as this would exceed the scope of this paper. I only wish to highlight that love in fact did play a role for the classics, however not in a systematic way as well as love was not “systematized” for social theory by any of the sociological classics (cf. Rusu 2018).

⁷ Weber, who traces the constitution of the social order and society back to the action of individuals (Weber 1978:4), has famously introduced a typology of action in which actions differ on their degree of rationality and reflexivity (Joas 1992:74; Weber 1978:24). Following his taxonomy, religious love seems to follow “value-rational” motives (ibid.), whereas “erotic love” represents “affectual action” (ibid.:25), which is less rational and an almost automatic reaction (ibid.). However, this perspective seems to falls short in grasping the meaning and degree of rationality that (modern) love relationships, e.g. as “secular religions” do seem to entail (Gross 2005:302; Illouz 1998:28; Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 1995:168).

⁸ Simmel did pay close attention to the role of emotions, e.g. in his famous essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life by” (1971) and apparently had plans to work on a “sociology of emotions”, which, however, remained unfinished (Nedelmann 1994:95).

between the I and the world” (Simmel 1984:180). This existential quality of love, however, changes within the process of life itself: Simmel argues that it transforms from a means – a bridge – to another person, into an end or an enterprise in itself – it takes on a “reified” shape – and ends up turning the other person into a means (Simmel 1984:170).⁹ Simmel argues that in the “intellectual mode”, which becomes incrementally dominant in modern times, we are also increasingly inclined to think of others as abstract “means” (Simmel 1984:160) – to use the other for fulfilling abstract desires, rather than experiencing the concreteness of the other person (Simmel 1984:168). This process ultimately spoils the conditions under which love relationships can develop and grow (Simmel 1984:154). A problem that Charlotte Perkins Gilman examines from a different stance: for her, drawing upon Marx’s analysis of the political economy, capitalist love represents an alienated form of loving that traps women within the private sphere of reproduction (Perkins Gilman 2018:56, 176). Love is thus steeped in societal ideologies and tightly interwoven with the societal conditions of production.¹⁰

Accordingly, while insights to a sociology of love can be found in classical Sociology, it, at the same time, – connected to its positivistic paradigm – seems to suffer from two major problems:

1) Love is not systematically historicized: although love is operationalized quite differently in the theories presented above – which is evidenced within the different semantics deployed (e.g. sensual, platonic, erotic, capitalist love etc.) – the *sociohistoric* character of love is neglected and reduced to a static anthropological or psychologic function or even “drive” (cf. Rusu 2018:17; Simmel 1984:162; Weber 2000:551; Perkins Gilman 2018[1898]:53).¹¹

⁹ This figure of thought of “objectification as instrumentalization” is typical for Simmel’s philosophy of life and theory of culture, as it embodies the fundamental tension between life and form of life (Frisby 1992:64; Oakes 1984:13). It also holds implications of a theory of love under modern conditions, as, for Simmel, in modern life the distance between form and content is progressively enhanced.

¹⁰ For a comparable perspective on love, which in fact sees love as a means of subordination of women by men, which moreover functions as the motor, the first expropriation and exploitation mechanism of the capitalist society, also see Engels 1978:734ff.

¹¹ Most sociological analyses of love that emerged in the early 90s and after are based upon theoretical assumptions of the process of differentiation processes of modern societies, which seems supported by the emergence of the phenomenon itself (Giddens 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Luhmann 1986). Before this background, theorists of love agree that love – its expression, its social function and its symbolic representation – is a historical formation with its modern codification and forming of “romantic love” (Luhmann 1986; Gay 1984; De Rougemont 1974). Romantic love is accordingly a sociohistorically changing part of modern societies that serves a specific function within them (Luhmann 1986:19). Love’s structure as an “anthropological constant” however can be considered to be changing in the course of different transformational historical stages. Niklas Luhmann e.g. traces it from the early modern phase of “l’amour passion” to a late-modern stage of “partnership-love” (Luhmann 2010, 1986).

2) Love tweaks the rationalist-action paradigm of the Classics. As Simmel states: "This [the “miracle of love” (Simmel 1984:155)] is a completely irrational phenomenon that resists the categories of logic, which in other respects hold valid." (ibid.). The proclaimed irrationality of love (cf. e.g. Weber 2000:551) has turned it into an almost “mystical” phenomenon and therefore into a residual category for social theory.

Certainly, in these classical writings one can find first steps towards a sociology of love. Yet, the prevailing positivist and rationalist paradigms have limited a thorough discussion of love as a sociological problem. Standing on the shoulders of these classical giants, “conventional social theory” fed upon these paradigms, yet extending its scope to a more systematic study of love, as I will show in the next section.

3. Love as a Theoretical Problem to “Conventional Approaches”

While the question of what constitutes a classical text and what demarks the starting point of contemporary theory in sociological theory is certainly dynamically posed and a contested matter (cf. Camic/Gross 2002; Connell 1997; Alexander 1996), Talcott Parson’s contributions can be considered a tipping-point (Joas/Knobl 2009:20): perhaps the most influential sociologist on the American landscape within the 20th century (ibid.), Parsons created a canon of classical texts that “determined the future development of sociology to an extent almost impossible to grasp today” (ibid.) and demarked a cesura in the history of sociological thought. This is due to the fact that Parsons introduced a specific “postpositivist” (Camic 1987:422) reading of the classics that colored the reception history of Weber, Durkheim, Simmel as well as it shaped social theory for several decades (Joas 1992:42ff.)

However, in Parson’s analysis of the modern society, romantic love plays a crucial role¹²: he describes how the marital organization of the “pre-modern” kinship structures have eroded in the course of structural differentiation i. e. the historical evolution from “traditional” and feudal social orders to “modern” ones (Parsons 1955:9).¹³ In modern societies, he argues, people marry

¹² Parsons turned the “problem of order” into the central question of social theory (Parsons 1966:89). Parsons critics have shown how the “problem of order” was none that Parsons just “discovered” but in fact tailored (for a detailed discussion cf. Joas 1992:19-56). The “problem of order” is accordingly considered a “founding myth” of modern social theory (Giddens 1976:706). Nonetheless, despite the critique’s claim that classic social theory had not fundamentally and primarily been concerned with an abstract problem of order, discussions of the “problem of order” have notably shaped conventional social theory (Lockwood 1992; Giddens 1976:715; Dahrendorf 1959).

¹³ Parsons also describes, how this change also impacts the family structure: Whereas in pre-modern societies large kinship-groups prevailed, the modern society consists mainly of “nuclear family[ies]” (cf. Parsons 1955).

not due to economic calculation but because of “romantic love” (Parsons 1943:31), a decision based upon an ascribed “freedom of choice” (ibid.).¹⁴ Romantic love thus functions as an integration device to maintain the social order of the modern social system, insofar as it effectively mediates social reproduction.¹⁵

Accordingly, in Parsons’ theory and also in his sociological legacy, love was elevated to an important factor for functional analyses of modern societies.¹⁶ Yet, for Parsons romantic love also carries an inherent threat: as it is closely tied to “sexual” love, it carries the potential of invoking “extra-marital activity” which imposes “regression” and threatens existing family structures and ultimately the social order in general (cf. Rusu 2018:15f.; Parsons 1955:21f.). This thought continued to play an important role for the “conventional”¹⁷ sociological analysis of romantic love (cf. Giddens 1992:202; Greenfield 1965; Goode 1959; Beigel 1951:326) as the phenomenon of romantic love accordingly seems to impose a “problem of disorder”.

As Parsons highlights, love seems to carry the potential of unpredictably facilitating social change and motivating people to leave their family linages while the existing social order is threatened to be overthrown as well (Goode 1959:42). Accordingly, William Goode took up Parsons notion and, in his conception, love functions as a core element of social structure that is capable of radically transforming the social order as well. While Goode stresses the inherent threat of love to disbalance a social equilibrium, he emphasizes that people “magically” end up marrying

¹⁴ For Parsons the “romantic-love complex” encompasses affective and emotional achievements (Parsons 1943:36). It is based upon a freedom of choice, absence of coercion (ibid.:31f.), an assumed equality and responsibility of both partners (ibid.:36) as well as an idealization of the partner and the relationship. Moreover, romantic love bears a pre- as well as a post-marital function as it socializes adolescents into roles and social action systems, as well as it stabilizes established ones (Rusu 2018:14; Parsons 1943.:33). It thus is a normative system of prescriptive expectations and role sets.

¹⁵ Romantic love for Parsons thus represents a “value attitude”, an end in itself that serves as a normative end to people (Parsons 1935:311).

¹⁶ Another important Harvard scholar at the time, Pitrim A. Sorokin developed a theory of love in his notable book *The Ways and Power of Love* (1954). Here, he for example sets up a taxonomy in order to “measure” the intensity of different love-relationships (ibid: XIXf.). However, the book did not acquire a lot of attention on the sociological landscape of his time as he was considered to drift into rather metaphysical or at most philosophical ideas love (cf. Rusu 2018:9f.). Nonetheless, his work could serve as a useful starting point for theorizing the general experience of love for different realms (political, religious, familial etc. love).

¹⁷ A conclusive canon for a “sociology of love” does not exist. Nonetheless, in their book *Sociology of Love* (2014), which is only available in German so far, Kuchler and Beher classify four different streams of social theories that provided theories of love: 1) societal and differentiation theories, 2) Interaction theories and Social Constructivism, 3) Rational Choice and exchange theories, 4) theories that conceptualize the inherent paradox or delusional character, which I term “critical” here (cf. Kuchler/Beher 2014:8). For the scope of this paper, I try to take an even broader perspective in schematically distinguishing “objective” and “subjective” theories: Whereas I argue that (1),(3) and (4) tend to look at love from a functional and “objectivist” perspective, interaction theory and social constructivism (2) on the other take a more “subjective perspective”. For further information see also the next section.

people from their strata. Accordingly, romantic love seems to follow a logic of “homophily”, taming the imposed social turbulences (cf. McPherson et al. 2001; Greenfield 1965:363). Yet, the factors of how this patterned transmission of order is structured itself, remains unclear to the scholars of structural functionalism.

Building and diverting from Parsons’ functional perspective, love progressively entered the sociological landscape: especially in the 60s and 70s, love was further integrated into the sociology of family and marriage, demography or even social conflicts (Zhao 1993:12f.), where it was nevertheless treated as a somewhat amorphous matter: as a condition for, or a product of, family relations (Reiss 1960; Waller 1952), an inhibitor, or motor for social reproduction (Collins 1971:13; Beigel 1951:326), or as a function of, or a risk for, the social order (Greenfield 1965:361ff.; Goode 1959:42f.). Nonetheless, the ways in which love operates as a genuinely social process and not as a variable external to social explanation, remained unclear.

In contrast to this, in the 1970s Neo-Marxist¹⁸ and feminist approaches discussed romantic love: here, it was identified as an almost entirely human-made entity, as a “trapping of bourgeois morality” and ultimately an “ideology” (Dixon 1977:21). These approaches treat love as result of objective coercion, as a powerful cultural ideology that is forced upon people and especially women (ibid.). Furthermore, romantic love is conceptualized as a ruling instrument of specific groups of people – the bourgeois patriarchy – deployed within a patriarchist structure in order to keep the subordinated – women – invisible and tied to the realm of (social) reproduction (Firestone 1971:126, Federici 1974:74-78). As a consequence, the ideological content of love is identified as a relationship of gendered domination, used to legitimize and veil the economically founded domestication and exploitation of women (Firestone 1971:130). From this perspective, romantic love is thus entirely functional to the patriarchic, chauvinistic system (Rosaldo 1974; Leacock 1971:24; Reed 1969).

Accordingly, both perspectives seem to take up a primarily functionalist analysis of love that seemed to prevail in a Post-Parsonian social theory tradition¹⁹ – in accordance, or in strict opposition to him. However, in the sociological discourse of the 50s, 60s and 70s, love did become

¹⁸ Cf. Manza/McCarthy for a discussion of “Neo-Marxism” (2011).

¹⁹ Love did also play an extraordinary important role within the attempts of the early Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School from a Neo-Freudian perspective, e.g. for Erich Fromm (1989[1956]) and Herbert Marcuse (1955). Nonetheless, it seems that mainly due to Parsons – who built on Freud as well – that love entered the sociological discourse and found a place within social theory.

a sociological problem, yet, it remained a rather marginal one: it remained a rather external factor that could not be conceptualized sociologically beyond its normative implications and its functions. For the critical approaches, romantic love itself is even entirely functional to social structure and holds no independence from it. Altogether, in these “conventional theories”, love remains blurry and unspecified: It is either an invariant element or independent variable of social structure that shapes dating, marriage and family outcomes, or it is an inseparable part of social structure. From these theoretical perspectives, the specific formation and sociocultural composition, but especially how love is (also non-normatively) acted out, remains a “blackbox”.

Furthermore, “conventional” approaches also seem to fall short in explaining the persistence of romantic love in “late-modern” societies²⁰: while these theories show how love serves a merely societal function as it facilitates and reproduces a specific social structure of *modern* societies, the persistence of the phenomenon in *late-modern* societies seems, from this perspective, dubious: despite fundamental structural transformations of the “productive sphere” in the twentieth and early twenty-first century e.g. women entering the labour market and “high-skilled” labour, the role and status of romantic love has decidedly not decreased, as contemporary scholars argue (Illouz 1998; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995:45). Thus, even though economic dependence has been considered a central reason for women to stick to the concept of romantic love as a form of “self-deception”, the increased inclusion of women into the labor market as well as into the educational field, has not led to renunciation of it (Illouz 1998:27).

Consequently, an analysis that reduces the explanation of love to mere economic factors or normative functions seems to fall short in grasping the persistence as well as the “hidden constants” of romantic love (Bourdieu 2001:54) for the (late-) modern age. Rather, the answer to why romantic love still seems to play a role for people in modern times seems to lie in a relative independence of cultural ideas from the economic structure (Illouz 1998:3; Swidler 2001:19ff., 1986:276ff).²¹ Conventional theory has not addressed the changes in the concept of romantic love

²⁰ Starting with Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, it is argued that modernity has entered a phase, in which – unlike the processes within early or classical modernity – the consequences of modernity show themselves more radically, meaning that modern institution – religion, family or the national state – are eroding. Accordingly, Giddens argues within his book *Transformation of Intimacy* (1992) that romantic love as a modern institution is superseded by “confluent love” (cf. Giddens 1990:3; but cf. also Beck/Giddens/Lash 1994).

²¹ Accordingly, in her 1986 paper *Culture in Action*, Swidler outlines how culture and action are linked together through cultural actions schemes that become available to actors in their pragmatic orientations (ibid.). Here Swidler states: “Culture has an independent causal role because it shapes the capacities from which such strategies of action are constructed”, (Swidler 1986:276f.).

that may have occurred over the past 200 years (Luhmann 1986).²² Accordingly, when Bourdieu’s theory entered the sociological landscape, it did seem to shed a new perspective for an adequate theoretical approach to an analysis of the “concrete structural circumstances [that] affect the relative success of competing cultural systems” (Swidler 1986:283). Before I introduce Bourdieu’s perspective, also the methodological problems of conventional theory are discussed below.

4. Love as a Methodological Problem: Two Modes of Knowledge in Conflict

In his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), Bourdieu explicitly sets the ground for his theoretical project of overcoming both, subjectivist, as well as objectivist positions, in favor of a comprehensive social theory that does not fall short in either dismissing the objective regulating impact of social structure, nor neglecting the category of social sense and meaning, which, however, is only available by taking the first-world perspective of actors into account (Joas/Knobl 2009:394). Bourdieu thus seeks to develop a “praxeological” approach to sociological inquiry, in which he overcomes “subjectivist” and “objectivist” accounts. By (re)introducing the concept of “practice” to social theory, in which he sees the objective and subjective as always already intertwined, (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2006:11), he tries to develop a theoretical mediation for the two modes of knowledge in conflict.

Bourdieu’s analysis here seems fruitful for “conventional theories” of romantic love as well. It seems like there is not too much tweaking needed to arrange the positions presented above within such an “objectivist-subjectivist” field as conceptualized and critiqued by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1977:3)²³: Within the one stream, *the life-worldly experience of love* is stressed as a moment that bears the possibility of intersubjective recognition and an opportunity to transcend, suspend or even overcome existing inequalities (Luhmann 1986; Davis 1973; Berger/Kellner 1965; Sorokin 2002; Simmel 1984).²⁴ On the other hand, a vast stream of literature stresses the *objective relations of love that structure its practice of maintaining social positions* and securing status and group boundaries (Greenfield 1965; Blau 1964; Goode 1959; Elliott/Merril 1934).²⁵

While the former stream of literature seems to try to reconstruct the *experience of love*, it

²² Or, as in the case of Luhmann who states that the stage of romantic love had pretty much been over by the 1970, it seems almost inaccurate (Luhmann 1986:155ff.).

²³ The “objectivist” and “subjectivist” positions, however, seem to rather present ideal-types than existing positions that are always more complex than such a clear-cut scheme.

²⁴ Broadly, these theorists can be classified as “interaction theorists” or “social constructivists. Cf. Footnote “15”.

²⁵ Broadly speaking, these theorists can be classified as the “differentiation” (Greenfield, Goode) or “exchange” (Blau), or what I called “critical theorists” (Elliott and Merrill). Cf Kuchler/Neher 2014.

seems to fall short in pointing to the *different experiences that* lovers may make due to their different social milieu, status, gender, race or sex (Ahmed 2006:97). While these theories do take the life-worldly experiences of lovers into consideration and try to clarify the social structures that give rise to the specific experiences of sympathy, empathy, intimacy and love, as a sphere of recognition, they however remain implicit – not about situational rules and social processes – but about the different ways that people may experience the same due to their social positionality in *multiple ways and constellations*. Thus, they seem to ignore broader structural and societal regulations that shape the life world and structure the conditions under which love and sympathy may rise in specific ways (Davis 1973; Sorokin 2002; Simmel 1984).

The other line of inquiry – even though more attentive to the different modes of experience – seems to analyze the made experiences primarily as “biographical illusions” (Bourdieu 2004) that presume and indicate a clear underlying systemic logic of loving, as e.g. of capitalism or of patriarchy. The functionalist approaches discussed in the chapter above can be seen as illustrations of this. These authors seem to lean towards an “objectivist position” that “presupposes a break with primary knowledge, whose tacitly assumed presuppositions give the social world its self-evident, natural character” (Bourdieu 1977:3). These approaches aim to outline the objective relations of love, e.g. as motivational structures for marriage in the sense of almost universally valid laws (Collins 1971:7; Blau 1964). Or, love is just represented as another arena in which people choose to perform in and seek their benefits (Elliott/Merril 1934) (an arena which, however, is not always beneficial). Or, love is considered merely by its societal function (Leacock 1971; Beigel 1951). While these studies hence focus on the structures that determine the experience of love, they however do not engage with “the objective truth of primary experience” (Bourdieu 1997:3), as the life worldly experience of actors is neglected or marginalized.

Whereas the more subjectivist theories of love are entrenched in experience insofar as they focus on systemizing the subjective experiences of love, which then takes an almost utopic or even metaphysical status that, however, is not reflected upon before the background of larger “macro” societal structures, the objectivist positions, in contrast, seem to privilege the observer’s over a participant’s perspective. In contrast, subjectivist theories seem to conflate the description to the sole experience of participants (cf. Habermas 1984:106). Objectivist positions, however, seem to entirely dismiss this important mode of knowledge or to, at least, fall short in understanding and describing the ways in which love in fact becomes relevant to people, or operates on a practical

level.

Bourdieu, who specifically aimed at reconciling such subjectivist with objectivist positions, stresses that it is only through dialectically relating the two positions, of subjective and objective modes of knowledge, that an “adequate science of practice” can be established (Bourdieu 1977:3). Only in dialectically reflecting the two modes, including theoretical, as well as empirical findings, he argues, this dualism can be overcome (ibid.).

Based on his approach, this paper argues that love is circumscribed by theoretical and methodological problems in conventional theories that both have been introduced by now, namely the *status of romantic love in relation to social structure* and the *modes of knowledge* that can be deployed for an adequate study of love and ultimately for sociological inquiries more generally. Ultimately, Bourdieu’s attempt of carving out a methodological territory for merging discourse and practice seems a promising approach that I will elaborate upon in the next section.

5. Not A Theorist of Love? Love as a Social Practice

Bourdieu did not explicitly extend his theory to an analysis of love. Yet, he alludes to romantic love within some of his works²⁶, most notably in *Distinction* but also in his more programmatic writings as *Outline Of A Theory of Practice* (1977). Here, love serves as an illustration for the transmission of the “social sense” within “personal” taste, which in fact – as Bourdieu emphasizes – is socioculturally shaped (Bourdieu 1984:241-244). Accordingly, he states:

Even those forms of interaction seemingly most amenable to description in terms of "intentional transfer into the Other", such as sympathy, friendship, or love, are dominated (as class homogamy attests), through the harmony of habitus, that is to say, more precisely, the harmony of ethos and tastes - doubtless sensed in the imperceptible cues of body hexis - by the objective structure of the relations between social conditions. (Bourdieu 1977:82).

As illustrated in the quotation above, for Bourdieu, love first and foremost represents a “habitus-dominated” *social practice*.²⁷ What does this mean? For Bourdieu, practices are not isolated “acts” or even sequences of actions, but *routinized patterns of actions*. Moreover, practices have a socializing effect on actors as they are *enacted, repeated* and even *incorporated*. Also, they

²⁶ In a short chapter in his book *Masculine Domination* (2001) called the “Postscript on domination and love”, Bourdieu also outlines – from a more subjective and experience-based, not to say phenomenological perspective, - the transgressive potential of love in suspending the fundamental struggle for domination and power (Bourdieu 2001:109-112).

²⁷ “Practice” means – critiquing the terminology of rationalist and utilitarian social theory – a pattern of routinized actions that encompass implicit as well as explicit knowledge. Examples for practices may be loving, writing, eating, thinking, researching etc. In this understanding, every idea, every thought – and this goes back to Marx’s theory of practice is situated within practices and social situations (cf. Reckwitz 2009:173; Marx/Engels 1978:143-145).

are repetitively learned and trained e.g. as practicing piano, or dancing salsa. Practices accordingly entail internalized, embodied practical orders of knowledge, which are not always “discursively” available to the actors themselves (cf. Reckwitz 2009:173). The embodied and internalized practical stocks of knowledge entail classifying and classificatory, cognitive and sensual schemes as well as certain habitual ways of enacting, embodying and performing (ibid.).

From this stance, love represents a specific form of “inter-action”, yet not in the sense of intertwined, isolated actions but as routinized practices based upon implicit and embodied knowledge (cf. Bourdieu 1977:17ff.). Accordingly, Bourdieu insists that love is neither an abstract or metaphysical idea(1) nor a static, never-changing biological or societal function. For him, love is a sociocultural practice acted out between people (Bourdieu 1977:81ff.). Hence it almost seems like a “by-product” of habitually mediated interactions, which are always situated within specific social *spaces*. Accordingly, Bourdieu introduces – in contrast to the functional analyses of “conventional social theory” – a new perspective that is able to circumscribe how romantic love is appropriated, re-enacted and also transformed by people, while it - due to its habitual embodiment and, more broadly speaking its materialization effects – proves to be a durable structure as well.²⁸

At this point, I would like to offer an extrapolation of Bourdieu’s theory to the phenomenon of love. As I have argued before, Bourdieu’s theoretical framework is frequently used as a central point of reference in contemporary studies on love (Illouz 1998:78, 2012:54). Consequently, this paper proceeds to show, how a theory of love can be established within Bourdieu’s theoretical framework. In order to establish such a “praxeologic theory of love” (cf. Reckwitz 2009), I introduce three major concepts of Bourdieu in addition to “practice” that provide a heuristic framework for such an enterprise: 1) Bourdieu’s concept of “symbolic systems”, which allows us to analyze the persistence of romantic love as a cultural code; 2) the “habitus concept”, which sheds a light on the embodied, internalized and learned – the subjectification – side of romantic love²⁹, and 3) the “forms of capital”, which highlight, how love is based upon implicit and explicit stocks of knowledge and resources that enable people to engage in specific practices.

²⁸ For romantic love a whole material infrastructure can be considered: starting with the paper of a marriage-contract, wedding rings, to “romantic hotels” or lawyers, consultants etc. a whole “sub—infrastructure” can be identified.

²⁹ For a discussion of the four moments of praxeological theory in a Bourdieusian reading that I build upon here, see Reckwitz 2009.

6. The Symbolic System of Romantic Love

Symbolic systems can generally be understood as sets of rules that are operative inside of social fields as symbolic representations of the underlying structures. Within symbolic systems specific “cultural codes” or semantics are crystallized (Bourdieu 1993:129; Luhmann 1986:41-47). They serve as compressed orders of knowledge³⁰, as ideal representations and templates that people orient themselves to. The symbolic system of romantic love e.g. is materialized and referenced in novels, (Hollywood)-movies or advertisements (cf. Illouz 1998:46, Bailey 1989:7). Romantic rules prescribe a proper, normative way for actors to relate themselves and their relationships to the broader social world including specific practices that are acted out and also possibly sanctioned (Luhmann 1986:129).

Symbolic systems however do not simply mirror social relations but constitute them (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2006:14). They thus contribute to the making of the world as it is experienced by actors. Romantic love in this sense is not only a specific relationship norm or a social rule but colors the ways in which people experience the world *in toto*. Moreover, symbolic systems codify and shape the ways people develop and deploy strategies in social fields as well as legitimize the thus produced social order (Bourdieu 1977:34). They provide people with specific orders of knowledge on both, a discursive, as well as a practical level, by constituting “models of” and “models for” the social world (Bourdieu 1984:77, cf. Swidler 2001:21).³¹

Accordingly, symbolic systems in fact contribute to the construction of the daily life world (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2006:73f.; Berger/Kellner 1965). Symbolic systems shape cognitive acts by providing classificatory schemes, forms of classification, rules and modes of interaction and ultimately the self- and world-intelligibility to the actors (Bourdieu: 1977:77). They can be identifiable as such for the actor and referenced by them – e.g. in a movie – but they can also just appear as a part of the “natural world” (Bourdieu 1977:164). Applied to romantic love, this means that people are provided with reservoirs of knowledge and schemes of typifications that allow them to recognize and identify different accounts of romantic love as such, e.g. a couple holding hands,

³⁰ Here, the term of knowledge is used as referring to the tradition of a phenomenologically based sociology of knowledge (Schütz 1962). Bourdieu states that knowledge refers to both, tacit and primary knowledge of experience as well as professional knowledge that is acquired and recognized within specific fields (Bourdieu 1984:74).

³¹ Here Bourdieu introduces the idea of actor’s “strategies” in strict contrast to the law-like understanding of structures in his time (Joas/Knobl 2009:374; Bourdieu/Wacquant 2006:223; Bourdieu 1977:3-9). Swidler explains this point very clearly: for him, cultural patterns provide the structure against which individuals can develop their particular strategies (1986:276).

or the performative act of a spousal vow, while, at the same, it also offers a classificatory scheme that people orient themselves to (cf. Swidler 2001:21). Symbolic systems thus can be conceptualized as constituting horizons of meanings for actors, in contrast to a fixed prescriptive set of rules that determines action (as e.g. from a Parsonian or conventional theory perspective).

Normative beliefs or orders of knowledge are represented and materialized within symbolic systems that smoothly and sometimes even seemingly “naturally” shape the way people see and relate to their worlds. Symbolic systems in this sense impose taken-for-granted normative orders and taxonomies of legitimacy and justifications that people appropriate. Here it becomes evident, how Bourdieu diverts from a structural causal top-down logic as symbolic systems do not operate as determining laws, but as “rules” which leave a degree of elasticity, of creatively diverging from norms, to the actors. The orientation towards symbolic systems and their orders of knowledge are however not voluntarily or self-selected by the actors, but operate on initially pre-reflexive levels of familiarity. They are also sedimented over time – people are socialized into them (Bourdieu 1984:472). Bourdieu terms this pre-reflexive alignment of symbolic orders with the actor’s experience, the “uncontested acceptance of the daily lifeworld” (Bourdieu 1984:73), “doxa”.³²

Symbolic systems which operate on a doxic level, render their specific orders of knowledge and their social construction, their history, invisible through which they also remain uncontested.³³ For love, such orders of knowledge can for example be found in religious, legal, educational or conduct systems that codify specific understandings of love. To illustrate this with a very fundamental example: the experience of “falling in love” as a regular moment of portrayals of love experiences can be traced back to (only) the mid-17th century (Luhmann 1986:72). However, operating on this doxic level – falling in love and the passionate foundation of “romantic”

³² Bourdieu defines doxa as “a pre-scientific and pre-reflexive ‘natural’ perspective on the world through which the dominant order occurs as naturalized as well” (Bourdieu 2001:122). Furthermore doxa represents “Schemes of thought and perception can produce the objectivity that they do produce only by producing misrecognition of the limits of the cognition that they make possible, thereby founding immediate adherence, in the doxic mode, to the world of tradition experienced as a “natural world” and taken for granted.” (Bourdieu 1977:164). He stresses, how “doxa” is the neutralized state of orthodox beliefs: While beliefs are still recognizable as such, doxa is recognized by the actors as an objective mode of experience and, thus, appears naturalized as “the ordinary acceptance of the usual order which goes without saying and therefore usually goes unsaid” (Bourdieu 1984:424). This has two implications. Firstly, that only within a doxic mode, symbolic systems function as structures in a conventional understanding as established by Lévi-Strauss (Joas/Knobl 2009:347ff). Secondly, by taking elasticity in relation to the rule, or structure, into account, Bourdieu is also able to explain variance within behavior.

³³ Bourdieu sees this exemplified within the symbolic domination of men over women, where the culturally constructed exploitation and power balance is attributed to a “natural” order of legitimization (Bourdieu 2001).

love is, in fact, experienced as an (super)-natural and ontological truth by the lovers. Hence, “falling in love” has become a normalized, essentialized part of love experiences, which is also evidenced within the semantic construction itself. It thus is a specific order of knowledge that is, however, in its expectation and experience structure shaped by the symbolic system of “romantic love”. Nonetheless, once symbolic belief systems are rendered recognizable as such, they are also threatened to lose their “magical”, “natural” and uncontested status (Bourdieu 2001:122).

Up to here I have laid down, why it seems reasonable to speak of romantic love as a socially constructed order of knowledge or simply as a social construction of the (love-)world.³⁴ Yet, what does it mean to understand love in terms not only of a social but a symbolic order of knowledge and ultimately system? To answer this question, I need to return to Bourdieu’s theory of the symbolic economy (Bourdieu 1985): in this text, Bourdieu argues that “cultural” logics serve as symbolic representation of the “economic” logic, they are dialectically related by their mutual negotiation (Bourdieu 1985:4).³⁵ Symbolic orders represent negations of the economic order and logic, which Bourdieu sees as the ultimate structuring dynamic of modern societies (ibid.:1). Symbolic fields serve as a complement and also as a buffer to the ruthless logics of the economic field, in which rivalry, egoism and utility maximization are expected. Accordingly, the characteristics that Bourdieu stresses for the symbolic order, which is acted out in the “symbolic fields” of arts, or religion are altruism, aesthetics or devotion (1985:4).

Romantic love seems to follow this logic as well: for romantic love, calculation free modes and disinterested semantics are deployed, legitimized and even morally standardized (cf. Luhmann 1986:43).³⁶ Also, love is conceptualized as a “scarce” and sacred good that depends on the singularity of the other person. From an historic perspective it also seems plausible to think of love as a part of the symbolic economy, as a veiling of economic processes, since up to the 17th century “marital love” was embedded within larger socio-economic structures. However, in the 18th century and in the course of the rise of romantic love, love appeared free from a logic of rational choice

³⁴ The social construction of a common lifeworld within love and marriage is something that Berger and Kellner prominently alluded to within their essay “Le manage et la construction de la réalité” (1965) or more generally also in Berger/Luckmann’s *Social Construction of Reality* (1966).

³⁵ According to Bourdieu, modernity is not only characterized by the differentiation and proliferation of different social fields with distinct logics and semantics (Bourdieu 1993:14), but moreover through the constitution of a capitalist field, organized by laws of rationality, calculation and profit maximization (Bourdieu 2008:202ff.). He thus outlines a dialectic relationship between symbolic and economic systems consisting of negation and denial (Bourdieu 2008:3).

³⁶ As Luhmann shows (Luhmann 1986:3), love builds on precisely the logical structure of communicating altruistic, emotional and seemingly unpredictable motives (Luhmann 1986:20ff.).

and calculations and successively also seemed autonomous from other codifications of morality or ethicity (e.g. religion).³⁷

As I have argued, the symbolic system of love seems to favor the obviation of calculations, following an overall “uneconomic” logic (Bourdieu 2001: 187). In fact, it seems to present a negation and through that an inversion of the structure and codifications of the economic field. This is exactly what Bourdieu finds characteristic for the “symbolic economy”, which negates and at the same time stabilizes the modern hegemony of the economic sphere and through that social order in general (Bourdieu 1983:320). Altogether, while the economic field represents the only sphere in which interested and calculated actions can be carried out legitimately (Bourdieu 2008:7), for the symbolic logic of love, calculated reasoning is disqualified. Thus, the cultural logic circumscribing love seems shaped by the practices of the symbolic economy: as an inversion of an economic logic (Bourdieu 1980) and ultimately as a form of “symbolic power” (cf. Bourdieu 2001:4).

Extrapolating Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic systems, the paper accordingly argues that the code of romantic love can be thought of as a specific culturally shaped order of knowledge that is structured over a symbolic system of romantic love providing orders of legitimate practices, worth and morality (Bourdieu 1984:387). Yet, romantic love does not appear as a fixed, normative system, but is experienced by the actors on the level of an “ontological truth”. Moreover, from a praxeological perspective, symbolic systems comprise the specific codifications of romantic love. Accordingly, the way romantic love is experienced and enacted is not a mere situational or interactional coincidence, but a relegated, routinized pattern or aggregate of practice that equips actors with cognitive and habitual action schemes that they can accordingly deploy within given situations. Hence, on the one hand, from this perspective, love can be conceptualized as culturally shaped and dynamic, on a *discursive* as well as *practical* level, while, on the other hand, love is – usually – contributing to the maintenance of social order, as not a linear, but a dialogic and processual relationship between the code and practice of love, structure and action, is assumed (Bourdieu 1977:36ff.).

³⁷ The emergence of “romantic” love can itself be seen as a product of fundamental socio-economic transformations within the modern society: Driven by the modern expansion of education, as a reaction to the Industrial Revolution (Bourdieu 1993:113) the full formation of the phenomenon of romantic love can be traced to the second half of the 17th century (Lenz/Scholz 2014:94; Luhmann 1986:43ff.).

7. Bourdieu’s Habitus Concept: The Subjectification and Embodiment of Love

The process of how order is (usually or “habitually”) maintained on an interpersonal as well as societal level can be better understood by turning to another of Bourdieu’s key concepts – the concept of “habitus”. With the concept of the habitus, Bourdieu provides an analytical instrument of dissecting the different layers and dimensions of the “seamless” reproduction of the social order through (inter-)personal relations and in social constellations. Bourdieu uses the concept of habitus to describe how the objective social structure is incorporated and materialized by social actors. For in the concept of the habitus, objective conditions are thought to be reflected within actor’s dispositions and even within their bodies.³⁸ The habitus is not acted out in the sense of an abstract consensus between individual actors, it is formed in practice.³⁹ The habitus operates as an almost automatic and unconscious force (Bourdieu 1977:218). Social structures are embodied and transformed within the habitus into dispositions, which in turn structure social action (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2006:223). The inscription of social structures as a process of actors’ socialization and biographical acquisition, however, happens almost automatically (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2006:24).

More precisely, Bourdieu shows how the perception of the world is mediated through cognitive schemes that are sediments of the objective conditions – of the social constellations and fields – that actors are embedded in. Accordingly, the habitus is both, “structured and structuring structure” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2006:121). Preference structures, desires and tastes hence need to be understood as complex reflections of the social positionalities that actors inhabit. It is thus not only that taste “classifies”, e.g. in the act of selecting a significant other, but reciprocally “classifies the classifier” (Bourdieu 1984:7), by which taste also becomes a public and performative

³⁸ To illustrate this point: in an extremely insightful ethnographic essay, Bourdieu describes how peasants are deprived on the dating market, which is organized on “bachelor balls” – As the rural peasants walk due to their daily practices with “legs bowed” (Bourdieu 2004:582) and figuratively stumble over their feet while trying to keep up with the young urban bachelors (Bourdieu 2004).

³⁹ The enterprise of conceptualizing action can be considered central to social theory (Habermas 1984:274). As action theories have often been built on an underlying assumption of either a rational or normative model, which, in turn, imposes a rationality/irrationality dichotomy (Joas 1996:146). This dichotomy has especially been made productive within “rational actor theories”, in which rationality is considered as channeled within a means-end-scheme (Becker 1976; Parsons 1966; Blau 1964). However, not only since Parsons such utilitarian rational action theories have been increasingly criticized for their underlying assumptions of either free-floating actors or the fungibility of values (Joas 1992:23). It can further be argued that such perspectives systematically neglect situational components of temporality, corporality, alterity and emotionality that in fact constitutively shape social action (Gugutzer 2013; Joas 1996:146ff.; Sewell 1992:4; Giddens 1984:174ff.; Bourdieu 1977:20). They seem to mistake a model of the social world for the existing social world and downgrade people to “cultural dopes” (Garfinkel 1967:68).

matter. The habitus, thus, not only prescribes certain “stylizations” and life-style choices, as e.g. in partner choice, but, structures more broadly, how humans perceive, order and classify their experienced worlds. The world is experienced through those orders of knowledge and schemes of perception that actors are socialized into, and these habitually acquired dispositions shape orders of morality, aesthetics or worth – what and who we like and what not – as well as also more unconscious desires, wants and feelings of actors.

Before this background, love relationships and love can be considered as sites of habitus-mediated practices (in fact, any practice is habitus based), as the objective social positions of actors within social spaces are reflected in their subjective dispositions that shape orders of attraction and desire. Partner choices for example are then classificatory and classified practices of distinction: “Choosing” a partner cannot be conceptualized as an act of “rational choice” of a free-floating actor (Bourdieu 1974:83), but rather needs to be understood as practice that is mediated through stable dispositions of preferences, which individuals acquire and have acquired, internalized and even embodied through socialization and biographical experiences. Desire, taste and attraction are therefore not merely “natural” features but represent *social* dispositions that are refined within schooling and socialization practices (Schütze 2008:79).

From this perspective, falling in love with somebody does not present a “miracle” or happens just out of “chance”, but appears as a structural probability: falling in love signifies the process in which an actor’s socially acquired romantic desires and wishes are aligned with their objective field position in relation to another person (Bourdieu 1984:377).⁴⁰ Attraction and desire are accordingly shaped by the positions a person takes within social space, which is reflected within their subjectified dispositions and cognitive schemes, their ways of perceiving others and themselves (Schütze 2008:81).⁴¹ Moreover, falling in love, in this sense, can be understood as a “euphemism” – analogically to Bourdieu’s description of how the appreciation of an art piece is perceived as “love at first sight” (Bourdieu 1984:3) – as it is not a lucky coincidence, but a semantic encoding that “symbolically” veils an experience that is just likely to happen that way: as it is due to already acquired cognitive schemes and structures of preferences that a person is drawn to a

⁴⁰ Accordingly, a temporal and processual analysis of “being in love” seems crucial, which I cannot systematize here, as I only attempt to offer lines of inquiry of a Bourdieusian framework for a general analysis of love.

⁴¹ As much as Bourdieu argues that the “pure gaze” is a historical invention linked to the growing dominance of a bourgeois culture, it can be argued that the “pure heart”, the romantic idea of love as being the fusion and salvation of two lost souls under a divine framing, which seems to ultimately still be relevant in how love relationships are formed today (Illouz 1998), needs to be understood analogically.

specific other person, in which, however, also interpretative and cultural tools are deployed as well (Swidler 2001:22).⁴²

Starting from the conception of symbolic systems regulating the experience of love, love represents an embodied social practice that always also reflects social positions – the objective and subjective existences are mediated and aligned in practice(s). Bourdieu emphasizes this corporal pre-reflexive dimension, which he considers as already socially qualified and building the basis for further classificatory acts (Bourdieu 1977:87). The social experiences are sedimented within a person’s body, however they are not necessarily reflexively or theoretically available or transformable as such. For Bourdieu, “history” in this sense is inscribed into the body and the cognitive schemes that color actors’ experiences (Bourdieu 2004:582; Taylor 1993:51f.). The body carries social sense, meaning and practical reason (ibid.). Thus, also corporal attraction and desire – in love relationships often comprised in the “ability” to “smell” the other person – seem reflective of the social positions and practices of actors.

Ultimately, Bourdieu’s theoretical conception of love is built around the idea of status distinction. For him, dominance and power cannot be suspended through the logic of love, but are in fact covered up by the same. Distances inside the social space are hence covertly reproduced in love, but in an implicit, almost automatic and “natural” seeming mode of operation that relies and is built upon the social sense of the body (Bourdieu 2001:110). Extending Bourdieu here, love can thus be considered a classified practice that is shaped by and shapes the habitus. Accordingly, social positions are immediately acted out in love and distinctions are drawn explicitly as well as implicitly. This shows in the finding of “homophily” (Schmitz 2016; McPherson et al. 2001), in which it is found that actors match with people who share structural socioeconomic and thus dispositional similarities – the same habitus –, e.g. they like the same movies, have the same plans for life and family planning and share excitement for the same exclusive cuisine.⁴³ In considering the habitus, it can be shown how love is an ongoing enterprise of acting in tune with one’s objective opportunity structures, while engaging in a struggle for distinction at the same time.

⁴² This seems to find empirical evidence: As having an equal level of cultural resources, interests and appreciations for the same social activities and shared “world-views” increases the likelihood of falling in love (Schmitz 2016:94; Schütze 2008:81; McPherson 2001).

⁴³ Within *Distinction* Bourdieu identifies different patterns of taste due to social milieu or class: While the lower class follows the “taste of necessity”, the “upper class” employs a “taste of liberty” (Bourdieu 1984:6).

8. Amorous Capital: An unevenly distributed resource

In Bourdieu's conception, symbolic systems are not fully independent systems or "media" that transcend material positions, like for example in a Luhmannian conception (2010). Rather, symbolic systems are enacted within fields and linked through the concept of habitus. However, social fields are also inter-linked: Inside fields people struggle and compete for field-specific scarce resources⁴⁴: for "field-capital". Inside and across these fields, however, unequal capital distributions exist. In order to theoretically account for the different social positions and resources people inhabit inside, and across fields, Bourdieu broadens the economic concept of capital to fit other forms of unequally distributed resources, e.g. education as "cultural" or social ties as "social capital". These forms of capital represent resources that enhance the opportunities of actors to succeed within fields (Bourdieu 1986:46).⁴⁵

The recognition, conversion and circulation of the different types of capital is organized by field-inherent economies, which are organized over their field specific symbolic systems that inscribe value to specific goods and practices (Bourdieu 1986), e.g. money may be very helpful within the economic field, but within love relationships – at least within the imposed logic of the symbolic system of romantic love –, money seems much harder to be effectively put into action. However, money may be transferred or converted into a currency that can be employed better for the logic of love relationships, e.g. a movie ticket. In order to analytically account for this process, Bourdieu defines "capital" not in its mere monetary meaning, but as "accumulated labor". It enables its proprietor to appropriate "social energy" within the social world (Bourdieu 1986:241). With the concept of capital, Bourdieu is offering a tool to explain the continuity, persistence and reproduction of capital accumulation and unequal distributions across different fields (ibid.). The concept of "capital" accordingly helps to analytically account for the different logics of

⁴⁴ Bourdieu suggests four forms of capital, namely the economic, the social, cultural and symbolical (Bourdieu 2002) that help him operationalize his field theory in relation to dominance. However, it seems that for the "symbolic system of love" two sub-forms of capital can further be specified: "emotional" and "erotic capital", both as sub-forms of symbolic capital that can appear as embodied, institutionalized or objectified (Bourdieu 2002:243). Whereas the emotional capital can be conceptualized to entail the trans-situational appropriate mastery of emotions and feelings, (which can be also acquired through family support, coaching, consulting etc.; cf. Illouz 2007:40), the idea of "erotic capital" encompasses "sexual competence", in relation to a culturally exalted norm of erotic desire (which can be acquired through a knowledge of and expertise in different sexual practices, with different partners). For love relationships, erotic capital seems to play a role as romantic love seems to be tied to physical intimacy and (cf. Scholz/Lenz 2014; Hakim 2011). Green also develops the concept "sexual capital", the currency of "sexual fields", which nonetheless may also prove beneficial for an analysis of love relationships (Leschziner/Green 2013:125).

⁴⁵ The acquisition and distribution follow field-specific logics of "worth" and field-specific economies (cf. Bourdieu 1985).

transmission of inequalities across different fields.

Through linking different fields in the concept of capital, Bourdieu, however, not only outlines a cohesiveness of the social world in the experiences of actors but is able to further stress power structures and the, by these structures implied, success chances that hence can be determined “objectively” (ibid.). A person, owing a lot of money, may convert it into education from costly schools or may choose to run for presidency, their chances of succeeding in either of these fields are proportionally higher to the amount of capital possessed. While the different forms of capital, like in this example, can be derived from economic capital, they are only re-convertible at the cost of the basic unit of “labor time”: The time put into the accumulation of a specific forms of capital, but also the time it takes to transform one type into another (Bourdieu 1986:54), determines the “exchange rate”.⁴⁶ This rate is, however, structured by the symbolic systems as they prescribe different orders of worth, as well as different temporalities of capital acquirement. Accordingly, symbolic systems stipulate the conversion rates amongst the forms of capital.

Applying this to love seems odd at first, since I have tried to outline before that love usually seems to follow a logic of the “symbolic economy”, a suspension of rational calculations and unequal positions: people would deny to fall in love with another person because of their money (at least they do not use these vocabularies of motives to justify their love relations). However, resources do seem to play a role and perhaps to enhance the chances. This is furthermore evidenced in the finding that spending time, vacation or activities together, which requires the mobilization of vast forms of capital, seems to account for “better” relationships (Schmitz 2016:94; Schütze 2008:81; Illouz 1998:132). Nevertheless, it is due to the logic of the symbolic system of romantic love that monetary capital is disqualified and that cultural and symbolic capital, which effectively disguise economic capital, come into play. For example, cultural capital seems to enhance the attractiveness and “worth” of a potential partner, as well as it also seems to increase the success chances for maintaining love relationships (Illouz 1998:132). Also, symbolic capital can effectively constitute charisma or authority, which in contrast to economic capital is a currency recognized on dating markets (cf. Schütze 2008:82).

Here, again, the historical perspective seems insightful: distinct from romantic love, up until the early nineteenth century, decisions about marriage and partnership were generally based

⁴⁶ Bourdieu also points out how different forms of capital impose different temporal logics of convertibility (Bourdieu 1986:54).

upon economic decisions (Illouz 2012:18ff.). Only in the course of the codification of passionate and romantic love, an economic calculation was disqualified for love. This shift of the codification of love, therefore, reflects a transformation of the orders of worth, embedded within the symbolic system of love: as economic motives were disqualified for love, they were replaced by cultural and symbolic ones, vailing unequal material positions. This process has also enhanced the role of “cultural capital”, which can be “appropriated” and spent more covertly, (not only in love relationships) (Bourdieu 2008:57). Cultural capital seems to hold the advantage that it can be naturalized easily and attributed to the unique “nature” or “authentic” character of a person— and since the ideal of romantic love consists of the “unspoiled” experience of the unique individuality of another person (Luhmann 1986:22), knowing which wine tastes best and which song to play for creating a romantic atmosphere, gets attributed to the “taste” and “singularity” of the person. Nonetheless, the here performed taste preferences need to be seen as socially acquired and supplemented by forms of symbolic and cultural capital, which is ostentatiously mobilized in this example.

In his conception of the different forms of capital, Bourdieu, nevertheless, does not impose a “structural identity” but stresses the “structural homology” between the different social fields in which capital can be acquired (Bourdieu 1993:8). Subsequently, the success rate of actors within a field can then be considered in relation to the position held inside the “field of power”, which portrays the opportunity structure one holds, for converting different forms of capital into field specific currencies, which can be put to use. However, the positions only facilitate and do not determine opportunity structures in which people act. To sum up, in the concept of capital, Bourdieu offers a differentiated tool to describe and trace e.g. partner choice before the background of social inequality, despite the ceasing relevance of economic capital on (late-)modern dating markets. Yet, while it seems more likely for actors with high economic capital to accumulate other forms of capital, and, therefore, to possess a higher success rate for their projects – ultimately also for initiating and maintaining love relationships – it only represents a probability and not facticity.⁴⁷

9. Bourdieu’s Take On Love: A Romantic Illusion?

Altogether, in contrast to Parsons, Bourdieu seems to solve the “problem of social order”, by stressing how social order is not a normative static system but is in fact dynamically internalized,

⁴⁷ The position that wealth causally determines happiness is frequently critiqued within the social sciences (a.o. cf. Rosa 2019; Ahmed 2010; Honneth 1995b).

(re-)appropriated, embodied and put into action on a level of practice. For Bourdieu social order is always maintained on an interpersonal level and not an abstract problem. Moreover, even though actors pressure the social order by competing for better positions within social fields, unequal power relations and resource distributions – distributions of capital – are frequently reproduced on the level of practice „supplemented by habitual tastes and preferences (Bourdieu 2001:4). Bourdieu’s praxeologic framework thus provides a heuristic lens for studying love relationships from four analytical perspectives: 1) the perspective of love as a *practice*, 2) love on the level of *symbolic systems* and its changing codification, 3) as a *habitus*-based and *habitus*-transforming practice of subjectification and 4) the ways love is materialized and resources come into play through the different *forms of capital*. Ultimately, love, from this perspective, seems a socio-culturally practice that paradoxically – and depending on how it is enacted – contributes to the making of the social world in the sense of order maintenance in stabilizing the status quo – yet, also dynamically transforming the same.

In his own analysis of love, Bourdieu, however, takes a slightly different path: He emphasizes the ideological potential of romantic love. As I have shown before, in his theory of “symbolic goods” and his theory of “symbolic power”, he shows, how in love seemingly altruistic, aesthetic and calculation-free logics are deployed, transmitted and favored, before the background of the symbolic economy. This logic of “veiling” is naturalized in a “doxic” perception (Bourdieu 2001:34), which manifests the existing unequal power structures: As on symbolic fields, domination and subordination appear “suspended”, they remain unrecognized and hence are legitimized and (re-)produced (Bourdieu 2008:186ff.). This systematic form of misrecognition constitutes an “illusion” (Bourdieu 1984:254), which is carried out, enacted and consolidated inside of social fields.⁴⁸

In this sense, love is considered an “illusion” (Bourdieu 2001:48) that serves to maintain a specific status quo and to veil existing inequalities, domination and violence, which in love are naturalized, essentialized and legitimized by an order that is experienced on the level of an ontological truth. As Bourdieu states: “Love is domination accepted, unrecognized as such and

⁴⁸ Thus, change for the better, a “symbolic revolution”, from Bourdieu’s perspective can start by making inequalities visible, known and ultimately recognized. Yet, he does not follow a new “idealism”, but emphasizes the power of social structures, material inequalities and their persistence and, accordingly, articulates a crucial need a progressive transformation of material conditions, which ultimately may lead to a common “symbolic class interest” and the constitution of a revolutionary subject (Bourdieu 2001:120).

practically recognized, in happy or unhappy passion.” (Bourdieu 2001:109). The illusionary potential of love, thus, serves for both sides, for the dominator and the subordinated, as a binding force. It is perceived as a natural state that, however, in practice has unequal and exploitive consequences: the relationship that is entrenched in “symbolic violence”⁴⁹ is misrecognized and veiled as “love”.⁵⁰ The practical recognition is then always one of “misrecognition”, or of objectification (Sartre 1966:211ff).

Moreover, love from this perspective appears not only as a misleading idealization or mere deception, but in fact as an “ideology”⁵¹: it appears to systematically cover up unequal relations between classes, genders or races (cf. Firestone 1971:146). In this sense, love is productive in maintaining the socioeconomic order by rendering processes of exploitation invisible, as they are naturalized. In Bourdieu’s conception, love thus not only masks, but in fact legitimizes the existing socioeconomic (bourgeois) order through a “doxic” recognition of a love order that is not built upon equal terms (Bourdieu 2001:94). In the concept of romantic love, the persistence of bourgeois taste, culture and, ultimately, its economic organization, show (Bourdieu 1984:5). Therefore, romantic love seems to take the form of “symbolic domination” (Bourdieu 2001:66), as a symbolic force that appears “gentle” and invisible to both, the dominator and the dominated, tying them together in an unjust relationship. Both are “love-victims” of the romantic love ideology, who follow, enact and thus reproduce a mere illusion of equality, liberty and mutual recognition (Bourdieu 2001:1).⁵²

⁴⁹ Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as “To speak of domination or symbolic violence is to say that, except in the case of a subversive revolt leading to inversion of the categories of perception and appreciation, the dominated tend to adopt the dominant point of view on themselves.” (Bourdieu 2001:119).

⁵⁰ Looking at the “production-milieu” of romantic love, it shows that it was constituted, shaped and institutionalized by bourgeois culture (Luhmann 1986:81; cf. Foucault 1990:120ff).

⁵¹ This is ultimately derived from Marx’s ideology concept. Building on Marx’s idea that “the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of the ruling class” (Marx/Engels 1978: 489). Accordingly, the concept of romantic love can be traced back to being produced by a specific class, which thus can be classified as an “ideology” (Marx/Engels 1978: 146). Love, in this understanding, seems to serve as an ideology, proclaiming universal pretenses, while only bringing profit to certain classes and genders.

⁵² Bourdieu highlights, the sociopolitical transformations that occurred in the 60s and 70s and in the course of the women’s and sexuality movement – as the liberalization and disassociation of love and sexuality, the emancipation of women in the public sphere – a processing differentiation process of love- and lifeforms. The “hidden constants”, namely of family, education and the gendered separation of the production and reproduction sphere, which manifest social and gendered inequalities, are however still covered up and tied together by powerful doxic assumptions transmitted through romantic love (Bourdieu 2001:54). Moreover, Bourdieu also emphasizes, how women are forced to stick to romantic love, as it offers them the opportunity of upward social-mobility, since they can possibly “marry-up” (Bourdieu 2001:67).

10. Contemporary (Bourdiesian) Approaches To Love:

Since the late 1980s, and in the course of the “Cultural Turn(s)” in the social sciences (Alexander 1988:77f.), research on love as a distinct, sociohistorical phenomenon has increased (Illouz 2018, 2012, 1998; Haller 2016; Lenz and Scholz 2016; Lenz 2009; Schütze 2008; Hochschild 2003; Swidler 2001). Love has ever since not only been studied as an independent cultural discourse (Hall et. al. 2010:351; Swidler 2001), but has also been identified as a realm in which the fundamental transformations of modernity can be demonstrated and showcased as well (Bauman 2003; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1992). Since the 1990s, sociological literature has therefore increasingly focused on the idiosyncrasies of romantic love, which are investigated as a cultural form specific to processes of modernization, individualization and rationalization (Bauman 2003; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1992).⁵³

However, in contemporary studies of the early 2000s, love has increasingly been tied to social “distinction” (Schütze 2008:76ff): (late-) modern love is outlined as an arena, in which “positional” consumption is acted out (Illouz 1998:71). It is considered as a specific social practice aimed at status-display within a competitive system of social stratification (Schütze 2008:82; Illouz 1998:71). Building on Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, love is increasingly conceptualized as a realm in which the unequal resource-equipment of modern lovers comes into play and is put into action (Illouz 1998:191ff.). It thus represents a site of the (re-)production of social inequalities (Illouz 2018, 2012,1998; Schmitz 2016; 2012; Schütze 2008; Johnson and Lawler 2005). Here, I would like to show how the Bourdieusian framework is used in contemporary theoretical approaches to love:

Most prominently, Eva Illouz emphasizes the role that the capitalist political economy plays in organizing love as a cultural ideology as well as a material practice (Illouz 1998:2). Notably, her books provide thorough discussions of the phenomenon of love in relation to late-modernity. Bourdieu’s field theory lies at the core of her analysis and represents a common point

⁵³ Modernity here is used within its conceptual and not in an epochal meaning. Modernity can be described, accordingly to Weber, Simmel and Durkheim through the differentiation of different values spheres, through which new forms of social organization and cohesion have emerged. Building on classical theory, Giddens defines modernity in a more historical classification as “modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence” (Giddens 1990:1). More precisely however, the structure of today’s societies can be classified as “late-modern”, in the sense, that here not only the processes, but the “consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalised and universalised than before” (ibid.:3).

of reference for her argumentation (Illouz 1998:214f., 240f., 245f.).⁵⁴ As Illouz shows, her use of Bourdieu's theory proves fruitful to transcend the problems of conventional theory: She neither reduces love to an invariant element of social structure that determines people in uniform ways (Illouz 2012:54), nor does she over-emphasize subjective experiences but in fact pays close attention to the “social limits” of the lifeworld (Illouz 1998:18).

Also, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is central to Illouz's line of thought. She shows how the powerful logic of social reproduction that shows in love is not due to an external distortive illusion that subjugates people. Rather, she shows, how desire, attraction and taste are habitual dispositions that are socially acquired through socialization and schooling processes (Illouz 1998:214).⁵⁵ Building upon Bourdieu's theory of milieu-specific patterns of taste (Bourdieu 1984:178), she also shows, how romantic love manifests class divides by matching “compatible partners by way of free choice” (Bourdieu 1984:243). While “compatible” means that the lovers share similar socio-economic positions (*ibid.*), the *habitus* unconsciously harmonizes people's “romantic desires with their objective chances to pair with others” (Illouz 1998:214).

Furthermore, Illouz argues in favor of a *capital*-oriented analysis of modern love relationships (Illouz 2012:55ff.). Extending Bourdieu's concept of the four forms of capital, Illouz in fact suggests a new form of “emotional capital” as a measure for the emotional capability of actors that facilitates the managing of intimate relationships (Illouz 2012:57). She shows how emotional capital plays out in the field of sexuality to invoke love, and how it reflects the “objective relations”, and privileges those with higher capital, by enhancing their chances (Illouz 2018:113ff.; 2012:51). This, however, also opens up a new perspective for thinking about love and social inequality, as it introduces ways to analytically capture social inequality in love: The engagement in cultural practices can be described in aggregate measures of forms of capital that determine social advantages (Tzanakis 2013).

Another point is emphasized in contemporary theories on love: Bourdieu's notion of the social formation of dispositions and tastes is used to emphasize how love is carried out in *collective social spaces* – within social fields (Bethmann 2013:12). According to Bourdieu, social fields, are not only an analytical lens but in fact present social spaces, in which actors “rub elbows on regular basis in shared sites” (Green 2014:28). Fields are characterized by an internal struggle and

⁵⁴ This already shows in her conception of love as a cultural, embodied social practice (Illouz 1998:2).

⁵⁵ Illouz circumscribes *habitus* as a “macroscopic process (social reproduction) [that] is sustained through the microscopically variable practices of individuals.” (Illouz 1998:214).

competition for field-specific scarce and finite goods, resources and interests (Bourdieu 1993:6). As recent studies on love aim to critically reflect and dismantle the so-often deployed semantics of social dis-interestedness, personal preferences and taste in love relationships (Schmitz 2016:4; Schütze 2008:83), they also point to the role of capital and habitus, and how they play an *implicit* and *vailing* part in shaping preference structures within competitive social fields.⁵⁶

Within recent years, accordingly, also a “field of dating” is outlined (Schmitz 2016; Illouz 2012). Inside the field of dating, love seems to play an important point of reference, as the initiation process is – at least sometimes – the starting point for love relationships and, thus, also demarks a crucial point of passage for a theory of love. While Bourdieu himself provided an ethnographic analysis of dating practices in his essay “The peasant and his body” (Bourdieu 2004), recent approaches have shown how the fields have been transforming and proliferating from the “bachelor balls” – the field Bourdieu observed in the Béarns –, to late-modern fields of dating-café, clubs, or of the virtual space in dating apps, or of dating platforms (Schmitz 2016:18f.). Here, actors compete for idealized partner(ship)s in which ideas on love and intimacy are put into play and negotiated (Schmitz 2016:23, Illouz 2012:241).

Within the social field of dating, love is the prize people compete for. Accordingly, they deploy specific strategies that are organized around the accumulation of field-specific capital (such as money, to go “out on a date”, table manners, dancing skills, but also humor, charisma and ultimately time, cf. Illouz 2012:69). Accordingly, a Bourdieusian perspective helps to illuminate the resource- and thus class- or milieu-segmented struggle for “falling and being in love”. It also outlines underlying collective and symbolic orders of interaction, aesthetics and worth that structure the dating-field. Contemporary studies, finally, also reaffirm Bourdieu’s notion that within modern dating-markets economic capital, as the ultimate structuring principle for the initiation of intimate relationships, is superseded by symbolic forms (Schmitz 2016:15). Lastly, social fields seem marked by field-specific, highly codified rules and norms – *symbolic systems of love* – that regulate the ways people navigate the social space, which on a discursive level can be

⁵⁶ Another line of inquiry of field approaches can be found within the sexual-fields literature (Green 2014, 2008; Leschziner/Green 2013): Sexual fields can be considered a specific site on which practices of dating may, but not necessarily do, take place. Here, actors seek out, evaluate and match up with partners in accordance to a specific “logic of desire” (Green 2014:28). Even though the emphasis here is rather put on sex, than on finding partnerships, which differentiates it from the dating field, actors within the field acquire understandings and concepts of desire and intimacy that can be carried over within the social field of dating and reflects back on symbolic orders surrounding love and intimacy.

tracked, e.g. on specific internet platforms or conduct books (Lenz and Scholz 2014:93). While all these studies take on different aspects of Bourdieu's theoretical framework, I have additionally tried to propose four analytical moments in order to systematize the different approaches to a praxeological theory of love.

11. Discussion: Love as a Practice of Distinction?

This far, the paper has shown how Bourdieusian theory has significantly contributed to the understanding of love from a sociological perspective. However, certain gaps show as well that I will try to summarize in an internal critique to Bourdieu's own claims: In his own, as well as within the by him inspired analyses, love tends to be primarily conceptualized as struggle for power and distinction. It is thus merely investigated in its social "functions" and from an "objectivist" position, which neglects subjective experiences of love as a source of mutual understanding, recognition or "resonance" (cf. Honneth 1995; Rosa 2019). Accordingly, Bourdieu seems to relapse into an objectivist mode of analysis, falling short to his own standard which explicitly lies in consolidating objective and subjective modes of knowledge within his "theory of practice" (Bourdieu 1977:4).

Bourdieu's perspective is certainly an important one: love is not acted out within a domination free space and certainly does contribute to a (re-)production or even manifestation of inequalities. As any other practice, it entails struggles for distinction, power and recognition. However, Bourdieu's theory does not allude to (romantic) love's potential of acknowledging, accepting and recognizing the other (Honneth 1995:100ff.). The peculiarity of a potentially emerging "we-relationship", as a dialogical relation, carrying the opportunity of social understanding (Schütz 1962:16), seems too often overlooked and omitted in Bourdieusian approaches. Hence, he seems to fall into an "intersubjective pessimism", in the sense that the extraordinary role that romantic love, or any sort of sympathy, may play within people's lives as an experience of "trans-vitality" (Simmel 1984:180), of eccentricity⁵⁷ or of transcendence, or of "reflexive sacrality" (Joas 2017), seems hard to capture through a Bourdieusian lens.

⁵⁷ Helmuth Plessner characterized within his anthropology the status of "eccentric positionality" to human beings as always reaching beyond their material conditions (du Mul 2014). Also, Simmel within his concept of transvitality seems to point within the same direction (Simmel 1984). While the paper here does not seek to justify or legitimize this line of argument, it however seems to represent an important cultural accomplishment of humans to transcend the to themselves available horizons in favor of transcendent experiences. Accordingly, the cultural content as such seems crucially relevant to sociology.

Moreover, in Bourdieusian approaches, love is often conceptualized as a means of social distinction, rather than a means for social inclusion. Bourdieu’s theory is used in order to understand love as a force of societal exclusion, considering strategies of class reproduction and its mechanisms of transmission. Yet, in order to analyze love adequately, it seems necessary to also consider, how it represents an intersubjective relation, in which people also seek and find value and meaning. Also, the power or creativity that people may exert over social structures (something that seems central to Bourdieu’s theoretical contribution to the discussion of structure and agency) is not considered (LiPuma 1993:20).

The objectivist tendency of his approach is, furthermore, reflected within one of his core concepts: the economist metaphor of the forms of capital. In his theory of the forms of capital, he is able to observe the persistence of certain power structures across fields. Nonetheless, the metaphor seems to carry an undeclared normative dimension: the descriptive claim of the capital-oriented social inequality perspective, in fact, imposes an accumulative and thus quantitative logic for a phenomenon that, however, also seems to require *qualitative* determinations (Rosa 2019:56; Honneth 1995:178). Accordingly, the capital-approach not only seems to descriptively grapple with sufficiently getting ahold of love as a “qualitative relationship to the world” (ibid.), but, to also reintroduce an in fact normative logic, implying a ranking order that determines, classifies and orders good, happy or healthy relationships by the discrete amount of capital accumulated (Rosa 2019:46). Furthermore, while a capital-based perspective proves beneficial in understanding social inequalities that are carried out on different planes, in and across different fields, the category of “symbolic capital” also runs the risk of being stretched beyond recognition, or to affirm an iteration.

Altogether, research on love that primarily builds upon a resource-oriented perspective seems to also fall short in paving the path to an answer to how love and love relationships are not only domains of power and distinction but also seem to contribute to a “successful” or “well-lived” life (cf. Rosa 2019). The objectivist tendencies within Bourdieu’s theory thus run the risk – if not systematically reflected or complemented by qualitative dimensions –, to spoil Bourdieu’s enterprise of a praxeological social theory that he had set out, in order to take the social world and its inhabitants serious.

12. Conclusion:

Sociological research on love has increased in recent years. For the newly emerging sub-field, a Bourdieusian framework has become a central point of reference. This paper has outlined,

how research on love encountered theoretical and methodological problems that had restrained conventional theory in understanding and explaining the phenomenon adequately. Furthermore, the article has argued that the increasing use of a Bourdieusian theoretical framework is not just a “fashionable theory” (Crane 1969), but that his concepts have, in fact, have proved useful in offering new perspectives to problems that conventional social theory had encountered, while studying love.

Accordingly, the paper has introduced Bourdieu’s concept of 1) practice, 2) symbolic systems, 3) habitus and 4) forms of capital, in order to show four different “moments” for a praxeologic theory of love, tracing the practice, codification, materialization and subjectification of love, within a Bourdieusian framework (cf. Reckwitz 2009). The paper has offered an extrapolation of Bourdieu’s theory, showing how, for Bourdieu, romantic love ultimately represents a doxic or perhaps even ideological mechanisms and a delusional experience. Furthermore, I have outlined contemporary uses of his theory in relation to love and shown how the prevailing ones are grounded on Bourdieu’s field approach and theory of practice.

Ultimately, Bourdieu himself described love as an “exception, the only one, but of the first order of magnitude” (Bourdieu 2001:109) to social order in general. However, while his theory provides a useful starting point for outlining specific aspects of love, such as distinction, class reproduction and the social character of desires, the specific form and content of love as “an expectation of the first order of magnitude” (ibid.) is, lost out of sight. While Bourdieu provides scholars of love with a useful theoretical tool kit, his own thoughts on love seem to not fully live up to his own standard articulated within his “theory of practice”. Finally, love (again) seems to hint to theoretical and methodological problems – this time of contemporary social theory and the presented theoretical approach – which seem to require further explanations and refinements. This paper can be seen as a starting point towards such a project.

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