

PIERRE BOURDIEU *

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CHAPTER 16: PIERRE BOURDIEU

by
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I. DRIVING IMPULSES

Pierre Bourdieu was born in 1930 and raised a remote mountain village of the Pyrénées in Southwestern France where his father was a sharecropper and then the postman. At the close of the 1940s, he moved to Paris to study at the prestigious *École normale supérieure*, at a time when philosophy was the queen discipline and the obligatory vocation of any aspirant intellectual. There he quickly grew dissatisfied with the “philosophy of the subject” exemplified by Sartrean existentialism --then the reigning doctrine-- and gravitated towards the “philosophy of the concept” associated with the works of epistemologists Gaston Bachelard, Georges Canguilhem, and Jules Vuillemin, as well towards the phenomenologies of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Shortly after graduation, however, Bourdieu forsook a projected study of affective life mating philosophy, medicine, and biology and, as other illustrious *normaliens* such as Émile Durkheim and Maurice Halbwachs had done before him, he converted to social science.

This conversion was precipitated by the conjunction of two events. On a personal level, the first-hand encounter with the gruesome realities of colonial rule and war in Algeria (where he had been sent to serve his mandatory stint in the military) prompted Bourdieu to turn to ethnology and sociology in order to make sense of the social cataclysm wrought by the clash between imperial capitalism and homegrown nationalism. Thus his first books, *The Algerians*, *Work and Workers in Algeria*, and *The Uprooting: The Crisis of Traditional Agriculture in Algeria* (Bourdieu 1958/1962, Bourdieu et al. 1963, Bourdieu and Sayad 1964), dissected the social organization and culture of the native society and chronicled its violent disruption under the press of wage labor, urbanization, and the so-called pacification policy of the French military, in an effort to illumine and assist in the painful birth of an independent Algeria. At about the same time, Bourdieu turned the newfound instruments of social science back onto his own childhood village in seeking to understand both the collapse of the European peasant society accelerating in the postwar decades and the specificity of the sociological gaze itself (Bourdieu 2002/2007).¹

These youthful inquiries bear the hallmark of Bourdieu’s lifework: they are the product of an *activist science*, impervious to ideological bias yet attuned to the burning sociopolitical issues of its day and responsive to the ethical dilemmas these entail. And they translate the grand questions of classical philosophy and social theory into precise empirical experiments pursued

¹ “From the outset, I had designed this research on my own region of origin as a kind of epistemological experiment: to analyze as an anthropologist, in a familiar universe. . . , the matrimonial practices that I had studied in a far-away universe, Algerian society, was to give myself the opportunity to objectivize the act of objectivation and the objectivizing subject” (Bourdieu 1985/1986: 112). For a discussion of the pivotal role of this “paired ethnography” of Kabylia and Béarn in the formation of Bourdieu’s intellectual project and theory and key texts from that period, see the special issue of *Ethnography* (2004) on “Pierre Bourdieu in the Field.”

with the full array of methods supplied by the scientific tradition and fearlessly applied to the sociologist himself.

On an intellectual level, Bourdieu's break with philosophy was made possible by the demise of existentialism and the correlative rebirth of the social sciences in France after a half-century of eclipse. Under the broad banner of "structuralism," the Durkheimian project of a total science of society and culture was being revived and modernized by Georges Dumézil in comparative mythology, Fernand Braudel in history, and Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology. It was now possible to fulfill lofty intellectual ambitions, and to express progressive political impulses outside of the ambit of the Communist Party, by embracing the freshly reinvigorated empirical disciplines.² Thus Bourdieu took to reestablishing the scientific and civic legitimacy of sociology in its motherland where it had been a pariah science since the passing of Durkheim and the decimation of his students by the First World War.

In the early sixties, Bourdieu returned from Algiers to Paris where he was nominated Director of Studies at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* as well as director of its newly formed Center for European Sociology. There he pursued his ethnological work on ritual, kinship, and social change in Algeria (as recorded in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and *Algeria 1960*, Bourdieu 1972/1977 and 1977) and took to the sociology of schooling, art, intellectuals, and politics. These domains attracted him because he sensed that, in the prosperous postwar societies of the West, "cultural capital" --educational credentials and familiarity with bourgeois culture-- was becoming a major determinant of life chances and that, under the cloak of individual talent and academic meritocracy, its unequal distribution was helping to conserve social hierarchies. This he demonstrated in *The Inheritors* and *Reproduction in Education, Culture, and Society* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1964/1979 and 1970/1977), two books that impacted the scholarly and policy debate on the school system and established him as the progenitor of "reproduction theory" (a misleading label, as shall be seen shortly).

During the seventies, Bourdieu continued to mine a wide array of topics at the intersection of culture, class, and power, to teach at the *École*, and to lead the research team which edited *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, a transdisciplinary journal he founded in 1975 to disseminate the most advanced results of social research and to engage salient social issues from a rigorous scientific standpoint. In 1981, the publication of his major works *Distinction* and *The Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu 1979/1984 and 1980/1990) earned him the Chair of Sociology left vacant at the Collège de France upon Raymond Aron's retirement as well as worldwide renown. In the 1980s, the painstaking research conducted over the previous two decades came to fruition in such acclaimed volumes as *Language and Symbolic Power*, *Homo Academicus*, *The State Nobility* and *The Rules of Art* (Bourdieu 1982/1990, 1984/1988, 1989/1997, 1992/1997).

In the final decade of his life, Pierre Bourdieu extended his inquiries in the sociology of symbolic goods (religion, science, literature, painting, and publishing) and tackled new topics, among them social suffering, masculine domination, the historical emergence and contemporary functioning of the bureaucratic state, the social bases and political construction of the economy, journalism and television, and the institutional means for creating a European social policy (Bourdieu et al. 1993/1998, Bourdieu 1996/1998, 1998/2001, 2001/2005). He restated and amplified his theory of practice in *Pascalian Meditations* (Bourdieu 1997/2000), his most

² Bourdieu (1980/1990: 8) recalls that the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss "imposed upon a whole generation a new manner of conceiving of intellectual activity" that held out the hope of "reconciling theoretical with practical intentions, the scientific vocation with the ethical or political vocation."

ambitious book, in which he also offers a critique of scholastic reason and a sociological resolution to the antinomy of rationalism and historicism. He engaged in extensive dialogues with neighboring disciplines and returned to his youthful interest in the study of science (Bourdieu 2001/2005).

During the same period, Bourdieu grew more visibly active on the French and European political scenes, as new forms of social inequality and conflict linked to the rising hegemony of market ideology spread that challenged the traditional goals and organization of the Left and called for novel forms of intellectual intervention. In spite of his congenital shyness and deep-seated reluctance to play the “media game,” he was soon given the mantle of master-thinker previously held by Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault, and became one of the world’s foremost public intellectuals and best-known critic of neoliberalism.³ This was in keeping with one of the abiding purposes animating his work, namely, to make social science into an effective *countervailing symbolic power* and the midwife of social forces dedicated to social justice and civic morality (Wacquant 2005). It explains why his sudden passing in January 2002 triggered a flood of homages from political leaders, trade unionists and activists, scientists and artists from across Europe and myriad messages of grief from around the world (historian Carl Schorske compared its effect on the elites of Europe to that of the death of Voltaire).

II. CENTRAL ISSUES

1) A SCIENCE OF PRACTICE AND A CRITIQUE OF DOMINATION

With thirty-seven books and some four hundred articles oft couched in a difficult technical idiom, Bourdieu’s thought might seem on first look dispersed and daunting, if not intractable. But beneath the bewildering variety of empirical objects he tackled lie a small set of theoretical principles, conceptual devices, and scientific-cum-political intentions that give his writings remarkable coherence and continuity. Bourdieu’s sprawling *oeuvre* is inseparably a *science of human practice* in its most diverse manifestations and a *critique of domination* in both the Kantian and the Marxian senses of the term.

Bourdieu’s sociology is critical first of inherited categories and accepted ways of thinking and of the subtle forms of rule wielded by technocrats and intellectuals in the name of culture and rationality. Next, it is critical of established patterns of power and privilege as well as of the politics that supports them. Undergirding this double critique is an explanatory account of the manifold processes whereby the social order masks its arbitrariness and perpetuates itself by extorting from the subordinate practical acceptance of, if not willed consent to, its existing hierarchies. This account of *symbolic violence* --the subtle imposition of systems of meaning that legitimize and thus solidify structures of inequality-- simultaneously points to the social conditions under which these hierarchies can be challenged, transformed, nay overturned.⁴

³ Both Bourdieu’s coyness and his wide public impact are deftly captured in the documentary movie by Pierre Carles, *Sociology is a Martial Art* (2000).

⁴ Bourdieu (1998/2001) sees masculine domination as the paradigm of symbolic violence, “this soft violence, indetectible and invisible to its very victims, which is wielded essentially through purely symbolic channels or, more precisely, through recognition and misrecognition, or even through sentiment,” insofar as women perceive themselves through a web of homological categories that operate to naturalize their subordinate relations to men. The family, the church, the school, and the state (as “public patriarchy”) work in tandem to effect the “historical

Four notations can help us gain a preliminary feel for Bourdieu's distinctive intellectual project and style. First, his conception of social action, structure, and knowledge is resolutely monist or *anti-dualistic*. It strives to circumvent or dissolve the oppositions that have defined perennial lines of debate in the social sciences: between subjectivist and objectivist modes of theorizing, between the material and symbolic dimensions of social life, as well as between interpretation and explanation, synchrony and diachrony, and micro and macro levels of analysis.

Secondly, Bourdieu's scientific thought and practice are genuinely *synthetic* in that they simultaneously straddle disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological divides. Theoretically, they stand at the confluence of intellectual streams that academic traditions have typically construed as discordant or incompatible: Marx and Mauss, Durkheim and Weber, but also the diverse philosophies of Cassirer, Bachelard, and Wittgenstein, the phenomenologies of Merleau-Ponty and Schutz, and the theories of language of Saussure, Chomsky, and Austin. Methodologically, Bourdieu's investigations typically combine statistical techniques with direct observation and the exegesis of interaction, discourse, and document.⁵

Thirdly, like Max Weber's, Bourdieu's vision of society is fundamentally *agonistic*: for him, the social universe is the site of endless and pitiless competition, in and through which arise the differences that are the stuff and stake of social existence. Contention, not stasis, is the ubiquitous feature of collective life that his varied inquiries aim at making at once visible and intelligible. Struggle, not "reproduction," is the master metaphor at the core of his thought.

Lastly and relatedly, Bourdieu's philosophical anthropology rests not on the notion of interest but on that of *recognition* --and its double, misrecognition. Contrary to a common (mis)reading of his work, his is not a utilitarian theory of social action in which individuals consciously strategize to accumulate wealth, status, or power. In line with Blaise Pascal, Bourdieu holds that the ultimate spring of conduct is the thirst for dignity, which society alone can quench. For only by being granted a name, a place, a function, within a group or institution can the individual hope to escape the contingency, finitude, and ultimate absurdity of existence. Human beings become such by submitting to the "judgement of others, this major principle of uncertainty and insecurity but also, and without contradiction, of certainty, assurance, consecration" (Bourdieu 1997/2001: 237). Social existence thus means difference, and difference implies hierarchy, which in turn sets off the endless dialectic of distinction and pretention, recognition and misrecognition, arbitrariness and necessity.

2) CONSTRUCTING THE SOCIOLOGICAL OBJECT

One of the main difficulties in understanding Bourdieu resides in the fact that the philosophy of science he draws on is equally alien --and opposed-- to the two epistemological traditions that have dominated Anglo-American social science and the German *Geisteswissenschaften*, namely, positivism and hermeneutics. This conception of science takes after the works of the French school of "historical epistemology" led by philosophers Bachelard and Canguilhem (under

labor of dehistoricization" that effaces the arbitrariness of the masculine vision of the world inculcated to men and women alike.

⁵ Unlike most scholars of like stature, Pierre Bourdieu conducted much of the primary data collection and analysis for his research himself. This constant contact with the mundane practicalities of the research routine helped shelter him from the conceptual reification and dessication that often affects the work of social theorists.

whom Bourdieu studied), mathematician Jean Cavaillès and intellectual historian Alexandre Koyré.⁶

This school, which anticipated many of the ideas later popularized by Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific paradigms, conceives truth as "error rectified" in an endless effort to dissolve the preconceptions born of ordinary and scholarly common sense. Equally distant from theoretical formalism as from empiricist operationalism, it teaches that facts are necessarily suffused with theory, that laws are always but "momentarily stabilized hypotheses" (in the words of Canguilhem), and that rational knowledge progresses through a polemical process of collective argumentation and mutual control. And it insists that concepts be characterized not by static definitions but by their actual uses, interrelations, and effects in the research enterprise. For science does not mirror the world: it is a material activity of production of "purified objects" -- Bachelard also calls them "secondary objects," by opposition to the "primary objects" that populate the realm of everyday experience.

In *The Craft of Sociology*, a primer on sociological epistemology first published in 1968, Bourdieu adapts this "applied rationalism" to the study of society.⁷ He posits that, like any scientific object, sociological facts are not given ready-made in social reality: they must be "conquered, constructed, and constated" (Bourdieu, Passeron and Chamboredon 1968/1990: 24). He reaffirms the "epistemological hierarchy" that subordinates empirical recording to conceptual construction and conceptual construction to rupture with ordinary perception. Statistical measurement, logical and lexicological critique, and the genealogy of concepts and problematics are three choice instruments for effecting the necessary break with "spontaneous sociology" and for actualizing the "principle of non-consciousness," according to which the cause of social phenomena is to be found, not in the consciousness of individuals, but in the system of objective relations in which they are enmeshed.

When it comes to the most decisive operation, the construction of the object, three closely related principles guide Bourdieu. The first may be termed *methodological polytheism*: to deploy whatever procedure of observation and verification is best suited to the question at hand and continually confront the results yielded by different methods. For instance, in *The State Nobility*, Bourdieu (1989/1996) combines the results gained by tabular and factorial analyses of survey data, archival accounts of historical trends, nosography, discourse and documentary analysis, field interviews, and ethnographic depiction to uncover how elite schools contribute to stabilization the division of the labor of domination among the ruling class. A second principle enjoins us to grant *equal epistemic attention to all operations*, from the recollection of sources and the design of questionnaires to the definition of populations, samples, and variables, to coding instructions and the carrying out of interviews, observations, and transcriptions. For every act of research, down to the most mundane and elemental, engages in full the theoretical framework that guides and commands it. This stipulates an organic relation, indeed a veritable *fusion*, between theory and method.

The third principle followed by Bourdieu is that of *methodological reflexivity*: the relentless self-questioning of method itself in the very movement whereby it is implemented (see

⁶ Michel Foucault's work is also rooted in, and an extension of, this school of "historicist rationalism." Many of the affinities or convergences between Bourdieu and Foucault can be traced back to this common epistemological mooring.

⁷ This is particularly visible in the selection of texts in the philosophy of science that make up the second part of the book and illustrate its core propositions: of the 45 selections, five are by Bachelard and four by Canguilhem (as against six by Durkheim, three by Weber, and two by Marx).

in particular Bourdieu 1984/1988: chapter 1, “A Book for Burning?”). For, just as the three fundamental moments of social scientific reason, rupture, construction, and verification, cannot be disassociated, the construction of the object is never accomplished at one stroke. Rather, the dialectic of theory and verification is endlessly reiterated at every step along the research journey. It is only by exercising such “surveillance of the third degree,” as Gaston Bachelard christened it, that the sociologist can hope to vanquish the manifold obstacles that stand in the way of a science of society.

3) OVERCOMING THE ANTINOMY OF OBJECTIVISM AND SUBJECTIVISM: HABITUS, CAPITAL, FIELD, DOXA

Chief among these obstacles is the deep-seated opposition between two apparently antithetical theoretic stances, objectivism and subjectivism, which Bourdieu argues can and must be overcome. *Objectivism* holds that social reality consists of sets of relations and forces that impose themselves upon agents, “irrespective of their consciousness and will” (to invoke Marx’s well-known formula). From this standpoint, sociology must follow the Durkheimian precept and “treat social facts as things” so as to uncover the objective system of relations that determine the conduct and representations of individuals. *Subjectivism*, on the contrary, takes these individual representations as its basis: with Herbert Blumer and Harold Garfinkel, it asserts that social reality is but the sum total of the innumerable acts of interpretation whereby people jointly construct meaningful lines of (inter)action.

The social world is thus liable to two seemingly antinomic readings: a “structuralist” one that seeks out invisible relational patterns operating behind the backs of agents and a “constructivist” one that probes the commonsense perceptions and actions of the individual. Bourdieu contends that the opposition between these two approaches is artificial and mutilating. For “the two moments, objectivist and subjectivist, stand in dialectical relationship” (Bourdieu 1987/1994: 125). On the one side, the *social structures* that the sociologist lays bare in the objectivist phase, by pushing aside the subjective representations of the agent, do mould the latter’s practices by establishing constraints and prescribing possible paths. But, on the other side, these representations, and the *mental structures* that underpin them, must also be taken into account insofar as they guide the individual and collective struggles through which agents seek to conserve or transform these objective structures. What is more, social structures and mental structures are interlinked by a twofold relationship of mutual constitution and correspondence.

To effect this synthesis of objectivism and subjectivism, social physics and social phenomenology, Bourdieu forges an original conceptual arsenal anchored by the notions of habitus, capital, field, and doxa. Habitus designates the system of durable and transposable *dispositions* through which we perceive, judge, and act in the world.⁸ These unconscious schemata are acquired through lasting exposure to particular social conditions and conditionings, via the internalization of external constraints and possibilities. This means that they are shared by people subjected to similar experiences even as each person has a unique individual variant of

⁸ Habitus is an old philosophical concept, used intermittently by Aristotle (under the term *hexis*), Thomas Aquinas, Hegel, Weber, Durkheim, Mauss, and Husserl, among others. Bourdieu retrieved it in a 1967 reinterpretation of art historian Erwin Panofsky’s analysis of the connection between Scholastic thought and gothic architecture in the medieval era and refined it afterwards, both empirically and theoretically, in each of his major works. His most sophisticated explication of the concept is in *Pascalian Meditations* (Bourdieu 1997/2000: esp. 131-146 and 208-237).

the common matrix (this is why individuals of like nationality, class, gender, etc., spontaneously feel “at home” with one another). It implies also that these systems of dispositions are malleable, since they inscribe into the body the evolving influence of the social milieu, but within the limits set by primary (or earlier) experiences, since it is habitus itself which at every moment filters such influence. Thus the layering of the schemata that together compose habitus displays varying degrees of integration (subproletarians typically have a disjointed habitus mirroring their irregular conditions of living while persons experiencing transnational migration or undergoing great social mobility often possess segmented or conflictive dispositional sets).⁹

As the mediation between past influences and present stimuli, habitus is at once *structured*, by the patterned social forces that produced it, and *structuring*: it gives form and coherence to the various activities of an individual across the separate spheres of life. This is why Bourdieu defines it variously as “the product of structure, producer of practice, and reproducer of structure,” the “unchosen principle of all choices,” or “the practice-unifying and practice-generating principle” that permits “regulated improvisation” and the “conductorless orchestration” of conduct. Habitus is also a principle of *both social continuity and discontinuity*: continuity because it stores social forces into the individual organism and transports them across time and space; discontinuity because it can be modified through the acquisition of new dispositions and because it can trigger innovation whenever it encounters a social setting discrepant with the setting from which it issues.¹⁰

The system of dispositions people acquire depends on the (successive) position(s) they occupy in society, that is, on their particular endowment in *capital*. For Bourdieu (1986), a capital is any resource effective in a given social arena that enables one to appropriate the specific profits arising out of participation and contest in it. Capital comes in three principal species: economic (material and financial assets), cultural (scarce symbolic goods, skills, and titles), and social (resources accrued by virtue of membership in a group). A fourth species, symbolic capital, designates the effects of any form of capital when people do not perceive them as such (as when we attribute lofty moral qualities to members of the upper class as a result of their “donating” time and money to charities). The position of any individual, group, or institution, in social space may thus be charted by two coordinates, the *overall volume and the composition of the capital* they detain. A third coordinate, variation over time of this volume and composition, records their *trajectory* through social space and provides invaluable clues as to their habitus by revealing the manner and path through which they reached the position they presently occupy.

But in advanced societies, people do not face an undifferentiated social space. The various spheres of life, art, science, religion, the economy, the law, politics, etc., tend to form distinct microcosms endowed with their own rules, regularities, and forms of authority --what Bourdieu calls fields.¹¹ A field is, in the first instance, a structured space of positions, a *force*

⁹ This was the case of Bourdieu (2001/2004: 111) himself, who acknowledges having “a cleft habitus” in the sketch for a self-socioanalysis offered in *Science of Science and Reflexivity*.

¹⁰ For an empirical illustration and conceptual elaboration setting the theory of habitus against structuralism, rational choice, and symbolic interaction, see Wacquant’s (2000/2004: esp. 77-99) study of prizefighting as embodied practical reason.

¹¹ The concept of field (*champ*) was coined by Bourdieu in the mid-sixties for purposes of empirical inquiry into the historical genesis and transformation of the worlds of art and literature. It was later extensively modified and elaborated, by Bourdieu and his associates, in the course of studies of the intellectual, philosophical, scientific, religious, academic, poetic, publishing, political, juridical, economic, sporting, bureaucratic, and journalistic fields.

field that imposes its specific determinations upon all those who enter it. Thus she who wants to succeed as a scientist has no choice but to acquire the minimal “scientific capital” required and to abide by the mores and regulations enforced by the scientific milieu of that time and place. In the second instance, a field is an arena of struggle through which agents and institutions seek to preserve or overturn the existing distribution of capital (manifested, in the scientific field, by the ranking of institutions, disciplines, theories, methods, topics, journals, prizes, etc.): it is a *battlefield* wherein the bases of identity and hierarchy are endlessly disputed over.

It follows that fields are historical constellations that arise, grow, change shape, and sometimes wane or perish, over time. In this regard, a third critical property of any field is its *degree of autonomy*, i.e., the capacity it has gained, in the course of its development, to insulate itself from external influences and to uphold its own criteria of evaluation over and against those of neighboring or intruding fields (scientific originality versus commercial profit or political rectitude, for instance). Every field is thus the site of an ongoing clash between those who defend autonomous principles of judgement proper to that field and those who seek to introduce heteronomous standards because they need the support of external forces to improve their dominated position in it. That autonomy is always in danger and can be curtailed is demonstrated by the evolution of the scientific field at the turn of the century, which Bourdieu (2001/2004) saw as doubly threatened, by the reassertion of economic interests on the outside and by the “internal denigration” of reason fostered by “postmodern rantings” on the inside.

Just as habitus informs practice from within, a field structures action and representation from without: it offers the individual a gamut of possible stances and moves that she can adopt, each with its associated profits, costs, and subsequent potentialities. Also, position in the field inclines agents toward particular patterns of thought and conduct: those who occupy the dominant positions in a field tend to pursue strategies of conservation (of the existing distribution of capital) while those relegated to subordinate locations are more liable to deploy strategies of subversion. Established members have a vested interest in preserving the existing order and criteria of judgement, new entrants an interest in challenging them.

In lieu of the naive relation between the individual and society, then, Bourdieu substitutes the *constructed relationship between habitus and field(s)*, that is, between “history incarnate in bodies” as dispositions and “history objectified in things” in the form of systems of positions. The crucial part of this equation is “relationship between” because neither habitus nor field has the capacity unilaterally to determine social action. It takes the *meeting* of disposition and position, the correspondence (or disjuncture) between mental structures and social structures, to generate practice.¹² This means that, to explain any social event or pattern, one must inseparably dissect both the social constitution of the agent and the makeup of the particular social universe within which she operates as well as the particular conditions under which they come to encounter and impinge upon each other. Indeed, for the constructivist or “genetic structuralism” advocated by Bourdieu (1989a: 19),

The most accessible and compact source on the uses and effects of the concept is the collection of essays entitled *The Field of Cultural Production* (Bourdieu 1993: esp. Part II, “Flaubert and the French Literary Field”).

¹² The two most common misinterpretations of Bourdieu’s theory of practice are those that omit either term of the equation, and thus their varied relationship: the “structuralist” misreading overlooks habitus and deducts conduct mechanically from social structure while the “utilitarian” misreading misses field and condemns itself to construe action as the purposeful pursuit of the agent’s interest (ironically, the very philosophy of action against which Bourdieu deployed the concept of habitus).

the analysis of objective structures --those of the various fields-- is inseparable from the analysis of the genesis within biological individuals of the mental structures which are for a part the product of the internalization of these very social structures and from the analysis of the genesis of these structures themselves.

The concepts of habitus, capital, and field are thus internally linked to one another as each achieves its full analytical potency only in tandem with the others. Together they enable Bourdieu to sociologize the notion of *doxa* elaborated by Edmund Husserl: first, they suggest that the “natural attitude of everyday life” which lead us to take the world for granted is not an existential invariant, as phenomenologists claim, but hinges on the close fit between the subjective categories of habitus and the objective structures of the social setting in which people act; second, that each relatively autonomous universe develops its own *doxa* as a set of shared opinions and unquestioned beliefs (such as the sacred devotion to reason among scientists) that bind participants to one another. This conceptual triad also allows us to elucidate cases of reproduction --when social and mental structures are in agreement and reinforce each other-- as well as transformation --when discordances arise between habitus and field-- leading to innovation, crisis, and structural change, as evidenced in Bourdieu’s early work on cultural disjuncture and social transformation in war-torn Algeria and rural Béarn (*Ethnography* 2002) as well as in two of his major books, *Distinction* and *Homo Academicus*.

4) TASTE, CLASSES, AND CLASSIFICATION

In *Distinction* and related studies of cultural practices (notably *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* and *The Love of Art: European Museums and their Public*), Bourdieu offers not only a radical “social critique of the judgement of taste” (the subtitle of the book, in reference to Immanuel Kant’s famous critiques of judgement), a graphic account of the workings of culture and power in contemporary society, and a paradigmatic illustration of the uses of the conceptual triad of habitus, capital, and field. He also elaborates a theory of class that fuses the Marxian insistence on economic determination with the Weberian recognition of the distinctiveness of the cultural order and the Durkheimian concern for classification.

First, Bourdieu shows that, far from expressing some unique inner sensibility of the individual, aesthetic judgement is an eminently *social faculty*, resulting from class upbringing and education. To appreciate a painting, a poem, or a symphony presupposes mastery of the specialized symbolic code of which it is a materialization, which in turn requires possession of the proper kind of cultural capital. Mastery of this code can be acquired by osmosis in one’s milieu of origin or by explicit teaching. When it comes through native familiarity (as with the children of cultured upper-class families), this trained capacity is experienced as an individual gift, an innate inclination testifying to spiritual worth. The Kantian theory of “pure aesthetic,” which philosophy presents as universal, is but a stylized --and mystifying-- account of this particular experience of the “love of art” that the bourgeoisie owes to its privileged social position and condition.

A second major argument of *Distinction* is that the aesthetic sense exhibited by different groups, and the lifestyles associated with them, define themselves in opposition to one another: *taste is first and foremost the distaste of the tastes of others*. This is because any cultural practice --wearing tweed or jeans, playing golf or soccer, going to museums or to auto shows, listening to

jazz or watching sitcoms, etc.-- takes its social meaning, and its ability to signify social difference and distance, not from some intrinsic property it has but from its location in a system of like objects and activities. To uncover the social logic of consumption thus requires establishing, not a direct link between a given practice and a particular class category (e.g., horseback riding and the gentry), but the structural correspondences that obtain between two constellations of relations, the space of lifestyles and the space of social positions occupied by the different groups.

Bourdieu reveals that this space of social positions is organized by *two crosscutting principles of differentiation, economic capital and cultural capital*, whose distribution defines the two oppositions that undergird major lines of cleavage and conflict in advanced society.¹³ The first, vertical, division pits agents holding large volumes of either capital --the dominant class-- against those deprived of both --the dominated class. The second, horizontal, opposition arises among the dominant, between those who possess much economic capital but few cultural assets (business owners and managers, who form the dominant fraction of the dominant class), and those whose capital is preeminently cultural (intellectuals and artists, who anchor the dominated fraction of the dominant class). Individuals and families continually strive to maintain or improve their position in social space by pursuing strategies of reconversion whereby they transmute or exchange one species of capital into another. The conversion rate between the various species of capital, set by such institutional mechanisms as the school system, the labor market, and inheritance laws, turns out to be one of the central stakes of social struggles, as each class or class fraction seeks to impose the hierarchy of capital most favorable to its own endowment.

Having mapped out the structure of social space, Bourdieu demonstrates that the *hierarchy of lifestyles is the misrecognized retranslation of the hierarchy of classes*. To each major social position, bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, and popular, corresponds a class habitus undergirding three broad kinds of tastes. The “sense of distinction” of the bourgeoisie is the manifestation, in the symbolic order, of the latter’s distance from material necessity and long-standing monopoly over scarce cultural goods. It accords primacy to form over function, manner over matter, and celebrates the “pure pleasure” of the mind over the “coarse pleasure” of the senses. More importantly, bourgeois taste defines itself by negating the “taste of necessity” of the working classes. The latter may indeed be described as an inversion of the Kantian aesthetic: it subordinates form to function and refuses to autonomize judgement from practical concerns, art from everyday life (for instance, workers use photography to solemnize the high points of collective life and prefer pictures that are faithful renditions of reality over photos that pursue visual effects for their own sake). Caught in the intermediate zones of social space, the petty bourgeoisie displays a taste characterized by “cultural goodwill”: they know what the legitimate symbolic goods are but they do not know how to consume them in the proper manner --with the ease and insouciance that comes from familial habituation. They bow before the sanctity of bourgeois culture but, because they do not master its code, they are perpetually at risk of revealing their middling position in the very movement whereby they strive to hide it by aping the practices of those above them in the economic and cultural order.

¹³ While Bourdieu’s demonstration is carried out with French materials, his theoretical claims apply to all differentiated societies. For pointers on how to extract general propositions from Bourdieu’s specific findings on France and to adapt his models to other countries and epochs, see “A Japanese Reading of Distinction” (Bourdieu 1990/1991) and the preface to the English translation of *The State Nobility* (Bourdieu 1989/1996).

But Bourdieu does not stop at drawing a map of social positions, tastes, and their relationships. He shows that the *contention between groups in the space of lifestyles is a hidden, yet fundamental, dimension of class struggles*. For to impose one's art of living is to impose at the same time principles of vision of the world that legitimize inequality by making the divisions of social space appear rooted in the inclinations of individuals rather than the underlying distribution of capital. Against Marxist theory, which defines classes exclusively in the economic sphere, by their position in the relations of production, Bourdieu argues that classes arise in the conjunction of shared position in social space and shared dispositions actualized in the sphere of consumption: "The *representations* that individuals and groups inevitably engage in their practices is part and parcel of their social reality. A class is defined as much by its *perceived being* as by its being" (Bourdieu 1979/1984: 564). Insofar as they enter into the very constitution of class, social classifications are instruments of symbolic domination and constitute a central stake in the struggle between classes (and class fractions), as each tries to gain control over the classificatory schemata that command the power to conserve or change reality by preserving or altering the representation of reality (Bourdieu 1985).

5) *THE IMPERATIVE OF REFLEXIVITY*

Collective representations thus fulfill political as well as social functions: in addition to permitting the "logical integration" of society, as Emile Durkheim proposed, classification systems serve to secure and naturalize domination. This puts intellectuals, as professional producers in authoritative visions of the social world, at the epicenter of the games of symbolic power and requires us to pay special attention to their position, strategies, and civic mission.

For Bourdieu, the sociology of intellectuals is not one specialty among others but an indispensable component of the sociological method. To forge a rigorous science of society, we need to know what constraints bear upon sociologists and how the specific interests they pursue as members of the "dominated fraction of the dominant class" and participants in the "intellectual field" affect the knowledge they produce. This points to the single most distinctive feature of Bourdieu's social theory, namely, its obsessive insistence on *reflexivity*.¹⁴ Reflexivity refers to the need continually to turn the instruments of social science back upon the sociologist in an effort to better control the distortions introduced in the construction of the object by three factors. The first and most obvious is the personal identity of the researcher: her gender, class, nationality, ethnicity, education, etc. Her location in the intellectual field, as distinct from social space at large, is the second: it calls for critical dissection of the concepts, methods, and problematics she inherits as well as for vigilance towards the censorship exercised by disciplinary and institutional attachments.

Yet the most insidious source of bias in Bourdieu's (1990) view is the fact that, to study society, the sociologist necessarily assumes a contemplative or scholastic stance that causes her to (mis)construe the social world as an interpretive puzzle to be resolved, rather than a mesh of

¹⁴ This insistence finds a paradigmatic (and dramatic) illustration in Bourdieu's inaugural lecture at the Collège de France. In this "Lecture on the Lecture," the freshly consecrated professor dissects "the act of delegation whereby the new master is authorized to speak with authority" so as to emphasize this fundamental property of sociology as he conceives it: "Every proposition that this science formulates can and must apply to the subject who produces it" (Bourdieu 1982/1991: 8). It is also actualized in Bourdieu's last lecture course at the Collège de France, in which he trained his theory of practice on his own social and intellectual making and in the "outline of a self-socioanalysis" that grew out of it (Bourdieu 2004/2007).

practical tasks to be accomplished in real time and space --which is what it is for social agents. This “scholastic fallacy” leads to disfiguring the situational, adaptive, “fuzzy logic” of practice by confounding it with the abstract logic of intellectual ratiocination. In *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu (1997/2000) argues that this “scholastic bias” is at the root of grievous errors not only in matters of epistemology but also in aesthetics and ethics. Assuming the point of view of the “impartial spectator,” standing above the world rather than being immersed in it, pre-occupied by it (in both senses of the term), creates systematic distortions in our conceptions of knowledge, beauty, and morality that reinforce each other and have every chance of going unnoticed inasmuch as those who produce and consume these conceptions share the same scholastic posture.

Such *epistemic reflexivity* as Bourdieu advocates is diametrically opposed to the kind of narcissistic reflexivity celebrated by some “postmodern” writers, for whom the analytical gaze turns back onto the private person of the analyst (Bourdieu 2002). For its goal is to strengthen the claims of a science of society, not to undermine its foundations in a facile celebration of epistemological and political nihilism. This is most evident in Bourdieu’s dissection of the structure and functioning of the academic field in *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu 1984/1988).

Homo Academicus is the concrete implementation of the imperative of reflexivity. Much like Bourdieu’s early paired study of kinship in Kabylia and Béarn, it is, firstly, an epistemological experiment: it seeks to prove empirically that it is possible to know scientifically the universe within which social science is made, that the sociologist can “objectivize the point of view of objectivity” without falling into the abyss of relativism. Secondly, it maps out the contours of the academic field (a subfield within the broader intellectual field) to reveal that the university is the site of struggles whose specific dynamic mirrors the contention between economic capital and cultural capital that traverses the ruling class. Thus, on the side of the “temporally dominant disciplines,” law, medicine, and business, power is rooted principally in “academic capital,” that is, control over positions and material resources inside academe, while on the side of the “temporally dominated” disciplines, anchored by the natural sciences and the humanities, power rests essentially on “intellectual capital,” that is, scientific capacities and achievements as evaluated by peers. The position and trajectory of professors in this dualistic structure determine, through the mediation of their habitus, not only their intellectual output and professional strategies, but also their political proclivities.

This becomes fully visible during the student uprising and social crisis of May 1968, that is, in an entropic conjuncture apparently least favorable to the theory propounded by Bourdieu. Yet it is at this very moment that the behavior and proclamations of the different species of *homo academicus gallicus* turn out to be the most predictable. Bourdieu shows how the “structural downclassing” and collective maladjustment experienced by a generation of students and professors, led them to form expectations that the university could no longer fulfill, triggered a series of local contestations that abruptly spread from the academic field to the field of cultural production to the political field. The “rupture of the circle of subjective aspirations and objective chances” caused diverse agents to follow homologous strategies of subversion based on affinities of dispositions and similarities of position in different fields whose evolution thereby became synchronized. Here again we discern how the same conceptual framework that served to explore

reproduction in inquiries of class and taste can be employed to explain situations of rupture and transformation.¹⁵

III. SCIENCE, POLITICS, AND THE CIVIC MISSION OF INTELLECTUALS

Bourdieu insists on putting intellectuals under the sociological microscope for yet another reason. In advanced society, wherein elite schools have replaced the church as the preeminent instrument of legitimation of social hierarchy, reason and science are routinely invoked by rulers to justify their decisions and policies --and this is especially true of social science and its technical offshoots, public opinion polls, market studies, and advertising. Intellectuals must stand up against such misuses of reason because they have inherited from history a civic mission: to promote the “corporatism of the universal” (Bourdieu 1989b).

Based on a historical analysis of its social genesis from the Enlightenment to the Dreyfus affair, Bourdieu argues that the intellectual is a “paradoxical, bi-dimensional, being” composed by the *unstable but necessary coupling of autonomy and engagement*: s/he is invested with a specific authority, granted by virtue of the hard-won independence of the intellectual field from economic and political powers; and s/he puts this specific authority at the service of the collectivity by investing it in political debates. Contrary to the claims of both positivism and critical theory, the autonomy of science and the engagement of the scientist are not antithetical but complementary; the former is the necessary condition for the latter. It is because she has gained recognition in the struggles of the scientific or artistic field that the intellectual can claim and exercise the right to intervene in the public sphere on matters for which she has competency. What is more, to attain its maximum efficacy, such contribution must take a collective form: for scientific autonomy cannot be secured except by the joint mobilization of all scientists against the intrusion of external powers.

Bourdieu’s own political interventions have typically assumed an indirect (or sublimated) form.¹⁶ His major scientific works have repeatedly sought to expand or alter the parameters of public discussion by debunking current social myths --be it school meritocracy, the innateness of taste, or the rationality of technocratic rule-- and by spotlighting social facts and trends that belie the official vision of reality. The collective research undertaking that culminated in the book *The Poverty of Society* is exemplary in this regard (Bourdieu et al. 1993/1998). The avowed aim of this thousand-page ethnographic study of social suffering in contemporary France was not only to demonstrate the potency of a distinctive kind of socioanalysis. It was also to circumvent the censorship of the political field and to compell party leaders and policy makers to acknowledge new forms of inequality and misery rendered invisible by established instruments of collective voice and claims-making.¹⁷

¹⁵ The theory of “symbolic revolution” adumbrated in the closing chapter of *Homo Academicus* is fully developed in *The Rules of Art* (Bourdieu 1992/1997), which contains both an account of the historical invention of the institution of modern literature and a sociological theory of intellectual innovation that does away with the charismatic notion of “genius” once and for all by elucidating it.

¹⁶ For a discussion of Bourdieu’s personal politics, his analyses of political institutions, and his working theory of democratic politics and their implication for contemporary civic struggles, see the essays in Wacquant (2005).

¹⁷ The book had an immediate impact unmatched by any social science book in recent memory: it sold over 100,000 copies in three months and stood atop the best-seller list for months; it was extensively discussed in political circles and popular magazines alike (conservative Prime Minister Balladur publicly instructed his cabinet members to read it); it was later adapted for the stage and is widely used by school teachers, social workers, and grass-roots activists.

By the 1990s, however, Bourdieu felt the need to intervene directly in the political arena because he held that we were witnessing a “conservative revolution of a new type which claims the mantle of progress, reason, and science (in particular economics) to justify restoration and which thereby tries to reject progressive thinking and action on the side of archaism” (Bourdieu 1998/2000: 3). In his eyes, the recent *fin-de-siècle* was pregnant with the possibility of immense social regression: “The peoples of Europe today are facing a turning point in their history because the gains of several centuries of social struggles, of intellectual and political battles for the dignity of workers and citizens, are being directly threatened” by the spread of a market ideology that --like all ruling ideologies-- presents itself as the end of ideology and the inevitable end-point of history.

In accordance with his view of the historic mission of intellectuals, Bourdieu put his scientific authority at the service of various social movements of the “non-institutional Left,” helping to lend public legitimacy and symbolic force to newly formed groups defending the rights of the jobless, the homeless, paperless immigrants, and homosexuals. He famously clashed with Hans Tietmeyer, the President of the German Bundesbank and “high priest of the rule of markets,” to advocate the creation of a “European welfare state” capable of resisting the onslaught of deregulation and the incipient privatization of social goods. He also intervened against the persecution of intellectuals in Algeria and elsewhere by spawning the birth of the International Parliament of Writers, and against the tolerance of Western states for the banalization of prejudice and discrimination.

Pierre Bourdieu also devoted considerable energy to the creation of institutions of intellectual exchange and mobilization on an transnational scale. In 1989, he launched *Liber: The European Review of Books*, a quarterly published simultaneously in nine European countries and languages, to circumvent national censorship and facilitate the continental circulation of innovative and engaged works in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. In the wake of the December 1995 mass protests against the downsizing of the French welfare state, he founded the collective *Raisons d’agir* (“Reasons for Action”) which brought together researchers, artists, labor officials, journalists, and militants of the unorthodox left (with branches in several European countries). In 1997, Bourdieu launched a publishing house, *Raisons d’agir Editions*, that puts out short books aimed at a wide audience on topics of urgent civic interest --starting with his own biting analysis of the willful submission of journalism to political and economic power, *On Television* (Bourdieu 1996/1999).¹⁸

In his many interventions before fellow scientists, unionists, social activists of various stripes and in editorial pieces published in the major dailies and weeklies of France, Germany, Argentina or Greece, as well as in his ostensibly scientific works, Bourdieu doggedly pursued a single aim: to forestall or prevent abuses of power in the name of reason and to disseminate weapons for resistance to symbolic domination. If social science cannot stipulate the political goals and moral standards we should pursue, as Emile Durkheim had hoped, it can and must contribute to the elaboration of “realistic utopias” suited to guiding collective action and to promoting the institutionalization of justice and freedom. The ultimate purpose of Bourdieu’s sociology, then, is nothing other than to foster the blossoming of a new, self-critical, *Aufklärung* fit for the coming millenium. By directing us to probe the foundations of knowledge, the structures of social being, and the hidden possibilities of history, it offers us instruments of

¹⁸ Bourdieu also sought to make his own theories more accessible to a broad educated public in several collections of lectures and talks, notably *Sociology in Question*, *In Other Words*, and *Practical Reasons* (Bourdieu 1980/1993, 1987/1994, 1994/1998).

individual and collective self-appropriation and thus of wisdom --it helps us pursue, as it were, the originary mission of philosophy.

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