

KEY SOCIOLOGICAL THINKERS



edited by Rob Stones



ways about society. It would be all too easy to dismiss these themes as the vehicles of so much unnecessary jargon, so much mystification of the essentially simple processes of society. But this would be a grave mistake. A retreat into common-sense superficiality may make us feel better in the short term, reassure us, cheaply, that we know as much as the experts about the social life we inhabit, but it is a false comfort. There is a large price to pay for anti-intellectualism, for social philistinism. The great sociological themes all speak to important dimensions of society that we do not routinely speak about, that we do not have an everyday language for. Those themes listed above, and others, will appear and reappear throughout the book, approached in remarkably different ways by different key thinkers. We will have come a long way if ever these themes, and the language in which they are expressed by the key thinkers, make their way into everyday thinking about society, into everyday language.

Each key thinker gives the social world his or her own distinctive perspective, shining a torch on parts of that world and leaving other parts in the dark, leaving them ready for the arrival of another theorist holding her torch at a slightly different angle. Each of them colours the social world with the sort of quirky and obsessional brilliance that is necessary in order to illuminate aspects of our social world that would otherwise go by unnoticed. They are the chemists and physicists of the social world, perceiving and describing social elements, forces, particles and compounds, explaining reactions, behaviours and mechanisms, mapping the statics of social orders and disorders that need a creative, technical, specialist eye to fathom.

Clarity, Accessibility and a Spirit of Openness

The aim of *Key Sociological Thinkers* is to introduce readers to these riches of sociological thought by providing a clear, accessible and manageable overview of many of the major developments in the area from Marx onwards, and to do so in a manner that will create a thirst to read and study more sociology and to be able to make connections between its lessons and everyday lives. The relative brevity of the individual chapters is designed to make it easier for readers new to the field, or new to particular thinkers, to stay the course, while also allowing them to develop a clear idea of the particular significance of a given key theorist. While the chapters have been kept short enough to be accessible to the sociological beginner, readers are nevertheless also encouraged to dig further and a reading list is provided at the end of each chapter in order to facilitate this. The common format for the chapters that contributors were asked to follow, as far as they felt was appropriate, was structured with an eye more on capturing the imagination of readers rather than on any attempt at an exhaustive coverage of topics. It was felt that if the former is achieved then a broader and more protracted engagement with a range of

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Pierre Bourdieu

Loïc Wacquant

Driving Impulses

Born and raised in a remote mountain village of the Pyrénées in southwestern France, Pierre Bourdieu moved to Paris in the early 1950s to study at the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure at a time when philosophy was the queen discipline and the obligatory vocation of any aspiring intellectual. There he quickly grew dissatisfied with the ‘philosophy of the subject’ exemplified by Sartrean existentialism – then the reigning doctrine – and gravitated toward the ‘philosophy of the concept’ associated with the works of epistemologists Gaston Bachelard, Georges Canguilhem, and Jules Vuillemin, as well as to the phenomenology 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 **Durkheim** and **Foucault** 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 native nationalism. Thus his first books, *The Algerians*, *Work and Workers in Algeria*, *The Uprooting: The Crisis of Traditional Agriculture in Algeria* (Bourdieu 1958/1962, Bourdieu *et al.* 1963, Bourdieu and Sayad 1964), dissected the 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 army, in an effort to illuminate and assist in the painful birth of an independent Algeria. These works of youth bear the hallmark of Bourdieu’s writings since: 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.

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 fulfil lofty intellectual ambitions and to express progressive political impulses outside of the ambit of the Communist Party, by embracing the freshly reinvigorated empirical disciplines.¹ Thus Bourdieu took to re-establishing the scientific and civic legitimacy of sociology in its motherland where it had been a pariah science since the passing of Durkheim.

In the early 1960s, Bourdieu returned from Algiers to Paris where he was nominated Director of Studies at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes 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 Kabylia (as recorded in *Outline of a Theory of Practice and Algeria* 1960, Bourdieu 1972/1977 and 1976/1977) and took to the sociology of schooling, art, intellectuals, and politics. These domains attracted him because he sensed that, in the prosperous post-war 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 hierarchy. 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 1970s, Bourdieu continued to mine a wide array of topics at the intersection of culture, class, and power, to teach at the Ecole, and to lead the research team which edited *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, a 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 at the Collège de France as well as world-wide 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 1990, 1984/1988, 1989/1997, 1992/1997).

Pierre Bourdieu has since extended his inquiries in the sociology of symbolic goods (religion, science, literature, painting, and publishing) and broached onto additional topics: among them, social suffering, masculine

domination, the historical genesis of the state, the political construction of the economy, journalism and television, and the institutional means for creating a European social policy. He has also become 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, challenging the traditional goals and organization of the Left and calling for novel forms of intellectual intervention. This is in keeping with one of the most constant purposes behind Bourdieu's 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.

Key Issues

A Science of Practice and a Critique of Domination

With over thirty books and nearly four hundred articles oft couched in a difficult technical idiom, Bourdieu's thought might seem on first sight daunting if not intractable. But beneath the bewildering variety of empirical objects he has 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 *œuvre* 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 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.

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 *antidualistic*. 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.

Second, 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.²

Third, 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 counterpart, 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 1997a, p. 280). 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.

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 the philosophers Bachelard and Canguilhem (under whom Bourdieu studied), the mathematician Jean Cavailles and the intellectual historian Alexandre Koyré.³

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.⁴ 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 1968/1991, p. 24). He reaffirms the 'epistemological hierarchy' that subordinates empirical recording to conceptual construction and pressures 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 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. 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 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 Bachelard christened it, that the sociologist can hope to vanquish the manifold obstacles that stand in the way of a science of society.

Overcoming the Antinomy of Objectivism and Subjectivism: Habitus, Capital, Field

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 **Blumer** and **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 and a 'constructivist' one that probes the common-sense perceptions 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'. 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 constrain the latter's practices. 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, and field. Habitus designates the system of durable and transposable *dispositions* through which we perceive, judge, and act in the world.⁵ 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 the common matrix (this is why individuals of like nationality, class, gender, and so on, spontaneously feel 'at home' with one other). 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 as 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 undergoing great social mobility often possess segmented or conflictive dispositional sets).

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 '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.

The system of dispositions people acquire depends on the 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 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, politics, and so on, tend to form distinct microcosms endowed with their own rules, regularities, and forms of authority – what Bourdieu calls fields.⁶ A field is, in the first instance, a structured space of positions, a *force 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, and so on): 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*, that is, 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.

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 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.

In lieu of the naïve relation between the individual and society, Bourdieu substitutes the *constructed relationship between habitus and field*, 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 the phrase '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.⁷ This means that, to explain any social event or pattern, one must 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 on each other. Indeed, for the constructivist or 'genetic structuralism' advocated by Bourdieu (1989a, p. 19)

the analysis of objective structures – those of the various fields – is inseparable from the analysis of the genesis within biological individuals of their mental structures which are in 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 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 two of Bourdieu's major books, *Distinction* and *Homo Academicus*.

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 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, and so on – 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 practices. To uncover the social logic of consumption thus requires establishing, not a direct link

between a given practice and a particular class category (for example 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 cross-cutting 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.⁸ 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 pre-eminently 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 come 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.

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 visions 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, p. 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).

The Imperative of Reflexivity

Collective representations thus fulfil 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 of 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 speciality 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*.⁹ 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, and so on. 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 toward 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 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 *Méditations Pascaliennes*, Bourdieu (1997a) 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, preoccupied 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 which the analytical gaze turns back on to the private person of the analyst. For Bourdieu's 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 his 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. It is, first, 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. Second, 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, 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 habitus, not only their intellectual output and professional strategies, but also their political proclivities.

This became 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 was at this very moment that the behavior and proclamations of the different species of *homo academicus gallicus* turned out to be the most predictable. Bourdieu shows how the ‘structural downclassing’ and collective maladjustment experienced by a generation of students and professors, resulting in expectations that the university could no longer fulfil, 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 synchronous. Here 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.¹⁰

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 pre-eminent instrument of the 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 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).

From an 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*: 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 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 contributions 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. 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 research undertaking that culminated in the book *The Poverty of Society* is exemplary in this regard. The avowed aim of this thousand-page 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 compel party leaders and policy makers to acknowledge new forms of inequality and misery rendered invisible by established instruments of collective voice and claims-making.¹¹

In recent years, however, Bourdieu has felt the need to intervene directly in the political arena because he holds that we are 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). In his eyes, the present *fin-de-siècle* is 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, the inevitable end-point of history.

In accordance with his view of the historic mission of intellectuals, Bourdieu has 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, 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 has 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 has devoted considerable energy to the creation of institutions of intellectual exchange and mobilization on a 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 protest against the downsizing of the French welfare state, he founded the collective 'Raisons d'agir' which brings together researchers,

artists, labor officials, journalists, and militants of the unorthodox Left (with branches in different European countries). In 1997, he created a publishing house, Editions Liber, that puts out short books aimed at a wide audience on topics of urgent civic interest – starting with Bourdieu’s (1997b) own best-selling analysis of the wilful submission of journalism to political and economic power, *Sur la Télévision*.¹²

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, Italy, or Greece, as well as in his ostensibly scientific works, Bourdieu has doggedly pursued a single aim: to forestall or prevent abuses of power in the name of reason and to disseminate instruments of resistance to symbolic domination. If social science cannot stipulate the political goals and moral standards we should pursue, as 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 millennium.

Further Reading

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