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THE SOCIAL SPACE AND THE GENESIS OF GROUPS

PIERRE BOURDIEU

Constructing a theory of the social space presupposes a series of breaks with Marxist theory.[1] First, a break with the tendency to privilege substances – here, the real groups, whose number, limits, members, etc., one claims to define – at the expense of *relationships;* and with the intellectualist illusion that leads one to consider the theoretical class, constructed by the sociologist, as a real class, an effectively mobilized group. Secondly, there has to be a break with the economism that leads one to reduce the social field, a multi-dimensional space, solely to the economic field, to the relations of economic production, which are thus constituted as co-ordinates of social position. Finally, there has to be a break with the objectivism that goes hand-in-hand with intellectualism, and that leads one to ignore the symbolic struggles of which the different fields are the site, where what is at stake is the very representation of the social world and, in particular, the hierarchy within each of the fields and among the different fields.

It is clear that I could easily minimize the difference with Marx, by, for example, tugging in my direction the notion of "position in the relations of production" through one of those structuralist "readings" that make it possible to produce a Marx revamped for modern tastes and yet more Marxist than Marx, and so to combine the gratifications of belonging to the circle of believers with the profits of heretical distinction. But we are all so imbued, willy-nilly, consciously or not, with the problems that Marx has bequeathed to us, and with the false solutions he brought to them – class-in-itself and class-for-itself, working class and proletariat, and so on – that one must not be afraid to "twist the stick in the opposite direction."

The Social Space

Initially, sociology presents itself as a *social topology*. Thus, the social world can be represented as a space (with several dimensions) constructed on the

basis of principles of differentiation or distribution constituted by the set of properties active within the social universe in question, i.e., capable of conferring strength, power within that universe, on their holder. Agents and groups of agents are thus defined by their relative positions within that space. Each of them is assigned to a position or a precise class of neighboring positions (i.e., a particular region in this space) and one cannot really – even if one can in thought – occupy two opposite regions of the space. Inasmuch as the properties selected to construct this space are active properties, one can also describe it as a field of forces, i.e., as a set of objective power relations that impose themselves on all who enter the field and that are irreducible to the intentions of the individual agents or even to the direct *interactions* among the agents.[2]

> The active properties that are selected as principles of construction of the social space are the different kinds of power or capital that are current in the different fields. Capital, which may exist in objectified form – in the form of material properties – or, in the case of cultural capital, in the embodied state, and which may be legally guaranteed, represents a power over the field (at a given moment) and, more precisely, over the accumulated product of past labor (in particular over the set of instruments of production) and thereby over the mechanisms tending to ensure the production of a particular category of goods and so over a set of incomes and profits. The kinds of capital, like the aces in a game of cards, are powers that define the chances of profit in a given field (in fact, to each field or sub-field there corresponds a particular kind of capital, which is current, as a power or stake, in that game). For example, the volume of cultural capital (the same thing would be true, mutatis mutandis, of the economic game) determines the aggregate chances of profit in all the games in which cultural capital is effective, thereby helping to determine position in social space (to the extent that this is determined by success in the cultural field).

> The position of a given agent within the social space can thus be defined by the positions he occupies in the different fields, that is, in the distribution of the powers that are active within each of them. These are, principally, economic capital (in its different kinds), cultural capital and social capital, as well as symbolic capital, commonly called prestige, reputation, renown, etc., which is the form in which the different forms of capital are perceived and recognized as legitimate. One can thus construct a simplified model of the social field as a whole that makes it possible to conceptualize, for each agent, his or her position in all possible spaces of competition (it being understood that, while each field has its own logic and its own hierarchy, the hierarchy that prevails among the different kinds of capital and the statistical link between the different types of assets tends to impose its own logic on the other fields).

The social field can be described as a multi-dimensional space of positions such that every actual position can be defined in terms of a multi-dimensional system of co-ordinates whose values correspond to the values of the different pertinent variables. Thus, agents are distributed within it, in the first dimension, according to the overall volume of the capital they possess and, in the second dimension, according to the composition of their capital – i.e., according to the relative weight of the different kinds of assets within their total assets.[3]

The form that is taken, at every moment, in each social field, by the set of distributions of the different kinds of capital (embodied or materialized), as instruments for the appropriation of the objectified product of accumulated social labor, defines the state of the power relations, institutionalized in long-lasting social statuses, socially recognized or legally guaranteed, between social agents objectively defined by their position in these relations; it determines the actual or potential powers within the different fields and the chances of access to the specific profits that they offer.[4]

Knowledge of the position occupied in this space contains information as to the agents' intrinsic properties (their condition) and their relational properties (their position). This is seen particularly clearly in the case of the occupants of the intermediate or middle positions, who, in addition to the average or median values of their properties, owe a number of their most typical properties to the fact that they are situated *between* the two poles of the field, in the *neutral* point of the space, and that they are balanced between the two extreme positions.

Classes on Paper

On the basis of knowledge of the space of positions, one can separate out *classes,* in the logical sense of the word, i.e., sets of agents who occupy similar positions and who, being placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, have every likelihood of having similar dispositions and interests and therefore of producing similar practices and adopting similar stances. This "class on paper" has the *theoretical* existence that is that of theories: insofar as it is the product of an explanatory classification, entirely similar to those of zoologists or botanists, it makes it possible to *explain* and predict the practices and properties of the things classified – including their group-forming practices. It is not really a class, an *actual* class, in the sense of a group, a group mobilized for struggle; at most, it might be called a *probable class,* inasmuch as it is a set of agents that will present fewer hindrances to efforts at mobilization than any other set of agents.

Thus, contrary to the *nominalist relativism* that cancels out social differences by reducing them to pure theoretical artifacts, one must therefore assert the existence of an objective space determining compatibilities and incompatibilities, proximities and distances. Contrary to the *realism of the intelligible* (or the reification of concepts), one must assert that the classes that can be separated out in social space (for example, for the purposes of the statistical analysis which is the only means of manifesting the structure of the social space) do not exist as real groups although they explain the probability of individuals constituting themselves as practical groups, in families (homogamy), clubs, associations, and even trade-union or political "movements." What does exist is a *space of relationships* that is as real as a geographical space, in which movements are paid for in work, in efforts and above all in time (moving up means raising oneself, climbing, and acquiring the marks,

the stigmata, of this effort). Distances within it are also measured in time (time taken to rise or to convert capital, for example). And the probability of mobilization into organized movements, equipped with an apparatus and spokespersons, etc. (precisely what leads one to talk of a "class") will be in inverse ratio to distance in this space. While the probability of assembling a set of agents, really or nominally – through the power of the delegate – rises when they are closer in social space and belong to a more restricted and therefore more homogeneous constructed class, alliance between those who are closest is never *necessary,* inevitable (because the effects of immediate competition may act as a screen), and alliance between those most distant from each other is never *impossible*. Though there is more chance of mobilizing the set of workers than the set composed of workers and bosses, it is possible, in an international crisis, for example, to provoke a grouping on the basis of links of national identity (partly because, by virtue of its specific history, each national social space has its specific structure – e.g. as regards hierarchical distances within the economic field).

Like "being," according to Aristotle, the social world can be uttered and constructed in different ways. It may be practically perceived, uttered, constructed, according to different principles of vision and division – for example, ethnic divisions. But groupings grounded in the structure of the space constructed in terms of capital distribution are more likely to be stable and durable, while other forms of grouping are always threatened by the splits and oppositions linked to distances in social space. To speak of a social space means that one cannot group just *anyone* with *anyone* while ignoring the fundamental differences, particularly economic and cultural ones. But this never entirely excludes the possibility of organizing agents in accordance with other principles of division – ethnic or national ones, for example – though it has to be remembered that these are generally linked to the fundamental principles, with ethnic groups themselves being at least roughly hierarchized in the social space, in the USA for example (through seniority in immigration).[5]

This marks a first break with the Marxist tradition. More often than not, Marxism either summarily identifies constructed class with real class (in other words, as Marx complained about Hegel, it confuses the things of logic with the logic of things); or, when it does make the distinction, with the opposition between "class-in-itself," defined in terms of a set of objective conditions, and "class-for-itself," based on subjective factors, it described the movement from one to the other (which is always celebrated as nothing less than an ontological promotion) in terms of a logic that is either totally determinist or totally voluntarist. In the former case, the transition is seen as

a logical, mechanical, or organic necessity (the transformation of the prole-
tariat from class-in-itself to class-for-itself is presented as an inevitable effect
of time, of the "maturing of the objective conditions"); in the latter case, it is
seen as the effect of an "awakening of consciousness" (*prise de conscience*)
conceived as a "taking cognizance" (*prise de connaissance*) of theory, per-
formed under the enlightened guidance of the Party. In all cases, there is no
mention of the mysterious alchemy whereby a "group in struggle," a person-
alized collective, a historical agent assigning itself its own ends, arises from
the objective economic conditions.

A sleight of hand removes the most essential questions: First, the very
question of the political, of the specific action of the agents who, in the name
of a theoretical definition of the "class," assign to its members the goals
officially best matching their "objective" – i.e., theoretical – interests; and of
the work whereby they manage to produce, if not the mobilized class, then
belief in the existence of the class, which is the basis of the authority of its
spokesmen. Secondly, the question of the relationship between the would-be
scientific classifications produced by the social scientist (in the same way as a
zoologist) and the classifications that the agents themselves constantly pro-
duce in their ordinary existence, and through which they seek to modify their
position within the objective classifications or to modify the very principles
that underlie these classifications.

Perception of the Social World and Political Struggle

The most resolutely objectivist theory has to integrate the agents' representa-
tion of the social world; more precisely, it must take account of the contribu-
tion that agents make towards constructing the view of the social world, and
through this, towards constructing this world, by means of the *work of*
representation (in all senses of the word) that they constantly perform in
order to impose their view of the world or the view of their own position in
this world – their social identity. Perception of the social world is the product
of a double social structuration: on the "objective" side, it is socially struc-
tured because the properties attached to agents or institutions do not offer
themselves independently to perception, but in combinations that are very
unequally probable (and, just as animals with feathers are more likely to have
wings than are animals with fur, so the possessors of a substantial cultural
capital are more likely to be museum-goers than those who lack such
capital); on the "subjective" side, it is structured because the schemes of
perception and apppreciation available for use at the moment in question,
especially those that are deposited in language, are the product of previous
symbolic struggles and express the state of the symbolic power relations, in a

more or less transformed form. The objects of the social world can be perceived and uttered in different ways because, like objects in the natural world, they always include a degree of indeterminacy and fuzziness – owing to the fact, for example, that even the most constant combinations of properties are only founded on statistical connections between interchangeable features; and also because, as historical objects, they are subject to variations in time so that their meaning, insofar as it depends on the future, is itself in suspense, in waiting, dangling, and therefore relatively indeterminate. This element of play, of uncertainty, is what provides a basis for the plurality of world views, itself linked to the plurality of points of view, and to all the symbolic struggles for the power to produce and impose the legitimate world-view and, more precisely, to all the cognitive "filling-in" strategies that produce the meaning of the objects of the social world by going beyond the directly visible attributes by reference to the future or the past. This reference may be implicit and tacit, through what Husserl calls protention and retention, practical forms of prospection or retrospection without a positing of the future and the past as such; or it may be explicit, as in political struggles, in which the past – with retrospective reconstruction of a past tailored to the needs of the present ("La Fayette, here we are"[6]) – and especially the future, with creative forecasting, are endlessly invoked, to determine, delimit, and define the always open meaning of the present.

To point out that perception of the social world implies an act of construction in no way entails acceptance of an intellectualist theory of knowledge: the essential part of the experience of the social world and of the act of construction that it implies takes place in practice, below the level of explicit representation and verbal expression. More like a class unconscious than a "class consciousness" in the Marxist sense, the sense of the position occupied in social space (what Erving Goffman calls the "sense of one's place") is the practical mastery of the social structure as a whole that reveals itself through the sense of the position occupied within that structure. The categories of perception of the social world are, as regards their most essential features, the product of the internalization, the incorporation, of the objective structures of social space. Consequently, they incline agents to accept the social world as it is, to take it for granted, rather than to rebel against it, to counterpose to it different, even antagonistic, possibles. The sense of one's place, as a sense of what one can or cannot "permit oneself," implies a tacit acceptance of one's place, a sense of limits ("that's not for the likes of us," etc.), or, which amounts to the same thing, a sense of distances, to be marked and kept, respected or expected. And it does so all the more strongly where the conditions of existence are most rigorous and where the reality principle most rigorously asserts itself. (Hence the profound realism that generally

characterizes the world view of the dominated; functioning as a sort of socially constituted instinct of conservation, it can be seen as conservative only in terms of an external, and therefore normative, representation of the "objective interest" of those whom it helps to live, or survive.)[7]

If objective power relations tend to reproduce themselves in views of the social world that contribute to the permanence of these relations, this is therefore because the structuring principles of a world view are rooted in the objective structures of the social world: power relations are also present in people's minds, in the form of the categories of perception of these relations. However, the degree of indeterminacy and fuzziness in the objects of the social world, together with the practical, pre-reflexive and implicit nature of the schemes of perception and appreciation that are applied to them, is the Archimedean leverage point that is objectively offered for political action proper. Knowledge of the social world and, more precisely, the categories that make it possible, are the stakes, par excellence, of political struggle, the inextricably theoretical and practical struggle for the power to conserve or transform the social word by conserving or transforming the categories through which it is perceived.

The capacity to make entities exist in the explicit state, to publish, make public (i.e., render objectified, visible, and even official) what had not previously attained objective and collective existence and had therefore remained in the state of individual or serial existence – people's malaise, anxiety, disquiet, expectations – represents a formidable social power, the power to make groups by making the *common sense,* the explicit consensus, of the whole group. In fact, this work of categorization, i.e., of making-explicit and of classification, is performed incessantly, at every moment of ordinary existence, in the struggles in which agents clash over the meaning of the social world and of their position within it, the meaning of their social identity, through all the forms of benediction or malediction, eulogy, praise, congratulations, compliments, or insults, reproaches, criticisms, accusations, slanders, etc. It is no accident that the verb *kategoresthai,* which gives us our "categories" and "categoremes," means to accuse publicly.

It becomes clear why one of the elementary forms of political power, in many archaic societies, consisted in the quasi-magical power to *name* and to make-exist by virtue of naming. Thus in traditional Kabylia, the function of making-explicit and the work of symbolic production that the poets performed, particularly in crisis situations, when the meaning of the world slips away, conferred on them major political functions, those of the warlord or ambassador.[8] But with the growing differentiation of the social world and

the constitution of relatively autonomous fields, the work of producing and imposing meaning is carried on in and through the struggles within the field of cultural production (particularly the political sub-field); it becomes the particular concern, the specific interest, of the professional producers of objectified representations of the social world or, more precisely, of methods of objectification.

If the legitimate mode of perception is such an important prize at stake in social struggles, this is partly because the shift from the implicit to the explicit is in no way automatic: the same experience of the social may be uttered in very different expressions. And partly it is because the most marked objective differences may be masked by more immediately visible differences (e.g., those between ethnic groups). It is true that perceptual configurations, social *Gestalten,* exist objectively, and that the proximity of conditions, and there-fore of dispositions, tends to be translated into durable linkages and group-ings, immediately perceptible social units, such as socially distinct regions or neighborhoods (with spatial segregation), or sets of agents endowed with entirely similar visible properties, such as Weber's *Stände.* But the fact remains that socially known and recognized differences only exist for a subject capable not only of perceiving differences but of recognizing them as significant, interesting, i.e., only for a subject endowed with the capacity and inclination to *make* the distinctions that are regarded as significant in the social universe in question.

Thus, particularly through properties and their distributions, the social world achieves, objectively, the status of a *symbolic system,* which, like the system of phonemes, is organized according to the logic of difference, differential deviation, thereby constituted as significant *distinction.* The social space, and the differences that "spontaneously" emerge within it, tends to function symbolically as a *space of life-styles* or as a set of *Stände,* of groups characterized by different life-styles.

Distinction does not necessarily imply the pursuit of distinction, as is often supposed, following Veblen and his theory of conspicuous consumption. All consumption and, more generally, all practice, is "conspicuous," visible, whether or not it is performed *in order to be seen;* it is distinctive, whether or not it springs from the intention of being "conspicuous," standing out, of distinguishing oneself or behaving with distinction. As such, it inevitably functions as a *distinctive sign* and, when the difference is recognized, legitimate and approved, as a *sign of distinction* (in all senses of the phrase). However, because social agents are capable of perceiving as significant distinctions the "spontaneous" distinctions that their categories of perception lead them to regard as pertinent, it follows that they are also capable of intentionally underscoring these spontaneous differences in life-style by what Weber calls "the stylization of life" (*die Stilisierung des Lebens*). The pursuit of distinction – which may be expressed in ways of speaking or the refusal of misalliances – produces separations intended to be perceived or, more precisely, known and recognized, as legitimate differences, which most often means differences in nature ("natural distinction").

Distinction – in the ordinary sense of the word – is the difference inscribed in the very structure of the social space when perceived through categories adapted to that structure; and the Weberian *Stand,* which is often contrasted with the Marxist class, is the class constructed by an adequate division of social space, when perceived through categories derived from the structure of that space. Symbolic capital – another name for distinction – is nothing other than capital, in whatever form, when perceived by an agent endowed with categories of perception arising from the internalization (embodiment) of the structure of its distribution, i.e., when it is known and recognized as self-evident. Distinctions, as symbolic transfigurations of de facto differences, and, more generally, ranks, orders, grades, and all other symbolic hierarchies, are the product of the application of schemes of construction that, like (for example) the pairs of adjectives used to utter most social judgements, are the product of the internalization of the structures to which they are applied; and the most absolute recognition of legitimacy is nothing other than the apprehension of the everyday world as self-evident that results from the quasi-perfect coincidence of objective structures and embodied structures.

It follows, among other things, that symbolic capital goes to symbolic capital, and that the – real – autonomy of the field of symbolic production does not prevent it being dominated, in its functioning, by the constraints that dominate the social field, so that objective power relations tend to reproduce themselves in symbolic power relations, in views of the social world that help to ensure the permanence of these power relations. In the struggle to impose the legitimate view of the social world, in which science itself is inevitably involved, agents yield a power proportionate to their symbolic capital, i.e., to the recognition they receive from a group. The authority that underlies the performative efficacy of discourse about the social world, the symbolic strength of the views and forecasts aimed at imposing principles of vision and division of the social world, is a *percipi,* a being-known and being-recognized (this is the etymology of *nobilis*), which makes it possible to impose a *percipere.* Those most *visible* in terms of the prevailing categories of perception are those best placed to change the vision by changing the categories of perception. But also, on the whole, those least inclined to do so.

The Symbolic Order and the Power to Nominate

In the symbolic struggle over the production of common sense, or, more precisely, for the monopoly of legitimate *naming,* that is to say, official – i.e., explicit and public – imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world, agents engage the symbolic capital they have acquired in previous struggles,

in particular, all the power they possess over the instituted taxonomies, inscribed in minds or in objectivity, such as qualifications. Thus, all the symbolic strategies through which agents seek to impose their vision of the divisions of the social world and their position within it, can be located between two extremes: the insult, an *idios logos* with which an individual tries to impose his point of view while taking the risk of reciprocity, and *official nomination*, an act of symbolic imposition that has behind it all the strength of the collective, the consensus, the common sense, because it is performed by a delegated agent of the State, the holder of the *monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence*. On the one hand, there is the world of particular perspectives, singular agents who, from their individual viewpoint, their personal position, produce particular, self-interested namings, of themselves and others (nicknames, by-names, insults, even accusations, slanders), that lack the capacity to force recognition, and therefore to exert a symbolic effect, to the extent that their authors are less authorized and have a more direct interest in forcing recognition of the viewpoint they seek to impose.[9] On the other hand, there is the authorized viewpoint of an agent authorized, in his personal capacity, such as a "major critic," a prestigious prefacer or a consecrated author (cf. Zola's "J'accuse"), and, above all, the legitimate viewpoint of the authorized spokesman of the mandated representative of the State, the "plane of all perspectives," in Leibniz's phrase – official nomination, the "entitlement" (*titre*) that, like the academic qualification (*titre scolaire*), is valid on all markets and that, as an official definition of official identity, rescues its holders from the symbolic struggle of all against all, by uttering the authorized, universally recognized perspective on all social agents. The State, which produces the official classifications, is in a sense the supreme tribunal to which Kafka refers in *The Trial* when he has Block say of the advocate and his claim to be one of the "great advocates": "Any man can call himself 'great,' of course, if he pleases, but in this matter the Court tradition must decide." The fact is that scientific analysis does not have to choose between perspectivism and what has to be called absolutism; the truth of the social world is the stake in struggle between agents very unequally equipped to achieve absolute, i.e., self-fulfilling, vision and forecasting.

One could analyze in this light the functioning of an institution like the French national statistics office, INSEE, a state institute that produces official taxonomies, invested with quasi-legal authority, particularly, in relations between employers and employees, that of the *title*, capable of conferring rights independent of actual productive activity. In so doing, it tends to fix the hierarchies and thus to sanction and consecrate a power relationship between the agents with respect to the names of trades and occupations, an essential component of social identity.[10] The management of names is one of the ways of managing material scarcity, and the names of groups, especially occupational groups, record a state of the struggles and bargaining over official designations and the material and symbolic

advantages associated with them. The occupational name that is conferred on agents, the title they are given, is one of the positive or negative retributions (on the same footing as their salary), inasmuch as it is a *distinctive mark* (an emblem or stigma) that receives its *value* from its position in a hierarchically organized system of titles and that thereby helps to determine the relative positions of agents and groups. Consequently, agents have recourse to practical or symbolic strategies aimed at maximizing the symbolic profit of naming: for example, they may decline the economic gratifications provided by one job in order to occupy a less well-paid but more prestigiously named position; or they may try to move towards positions whose designation is less precise and so escape the effects of symbolic devaluation. Similarly, in stating their personal identity, they may give themselves a name that includes them in a class sufficiently broad to contain agents occupying positions superior to their own: for example, in France, a primary school teacher, an *instituteur,* may refer to himself as an *enseignant,* thereby implying that he might be a *lycée* teacher or a university teacher. More generally, they always have a choice between several names and they can play on the uncertainties and the effects of vagueness linked to the plurality of perspectives so as to try to escape the verdict of the official taxonomy.

But the logic of official naming is most clearly seen in the case of all the symbolic property rights that in French are called *titres* – titles of nobility, educational qualifications, professional titles. Titles are symbolic capital, socially and even legally recognized. The noble is not just someone who is known (*nobilis*), noteworthy, well-regarded, recognized; the noble also is someone recognized by an *official,* "universal" tribunal, in other words known and recognized by all. The professional or academic title is a kind of legal rule of social perception, a "being-perceived" guaranteed as a right. It is symbolic capital in an institutionalized, legal (and no longer merely legitimate) form. Increasingly inseparable from the academic qualification, since the educational system increasingly tends to represent the ultimate and only guarantee of professional titles, it has a value in itself and, although it is a "common noun," it functions like a "great name" (the name of a great family or a proper name), securing all sorts of symbolic profits (and assets that cannot be obtained directly with money).[11] It is the symbolic scarcity of the title in the space of the names of professions that tends to govern the rewards of the occupation (and not the relationship between the supply of and demand for a particular form of labor). It follows from this that the rewards of the title tend to acquire autonomy with respect to the rewards of labor. Thus, the same work may receive different renumeration depending on the titles of the person who does it (e.g., tenured, official post-holder (*titulaire*) as opposed to a part-timer (*intérimaire*) or someone "acting" (*faisant fonction*) in that capacity, etc.). Since the title is in itself an *institution* (like language) that is more durable than the intrinsic characteristics of the work, the rewards of the title may be maintained despite changes in the work and its relative value. It is not the relative value of the work that determines the value of the name, but the institutionalized value of the title that can be used as a means of defending or maintaining the value of the work.[12]

This means that one cannot conduct a science of classifications without conducting a science of the struggle over classifications and without taking account of the position occupied, in this struggle over the power of knowledge, for power through knowledge, for the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence, by each of the agents or groups of agents who are involved in it, whether they be ordinary individuals, exposed to the vicissitudes of the everyday symbolic struggle, or authorized (and full-time) professionals, which includes all those who speak or write about the social classes, and who are distinguished according to the greater or lesser extent to which their classifications commit the authority of the State, the holder of the monopoly of *official naming,* correct classification, the correct order.

While the structure of the social world is defined at every moment by the structure of the distribution of the capital and profits characteristic of the different particular fields, the fact remains that in each of these arenas, the very definition of the stakes and of the "trump cards" can be called into question. Every field is the site of a more or less overt struggle over the definition of the legitimate principles of division of the field. The question of legitimacy arises from the very possibility of this questioning, of a break with the doxa that takes the ordinary order for granted. Having said this, the symbolic strength of the participants in this struggle is never completely independent of their position in the game, even if the specifically symbolic power to nominate constitutes a strength relatively independent of the other forms of social power. The constraints of the necessity inscribed in the very structure of the different fields continue to bear on the symbolic struggles aimed at conserving or transforming that structure. The social world is, to a large extent, what the agents make of it, at each moment; but they have no chance of un-making and re-making it except on the basis of realistic knowledge of what it is and what they can do with it from the position they occupy within it.

In short, scientific work aims to establish adequate knowledge both of the space of objective relations between the different positions constituting the field and of the necessary relations set up, through the mediation of the *habitus* of their occupants, between these positions and their corresponding stances (*prises de position*), that is to say, between the points occupied within that space and the points of view on that very space, which play a part in the reality and the evolution of that space. In other words, the objective delimitation of constructed classes, i.e., of *regions* of the constructed space of positions, makes it possible to understand the principle and the efficacy of the classificatory strategies by means of which agents seek to conserve or modify this space, in the forefront of which is the constituting of groups organized with a view to defending their members' interests.

Analysis of the struggle over classifications brings to light the political ambition that pervades the epistemic ambition of producing the correct classification – the ambition that defines the *rex*, to whom it falls, according to Emile Benveniste, to *regere fines* and *regere sacra*, to set forth the frontier between the sacred and the profane, good and evil, the vulgar and the distinguished. If sociologists are not to make social science merely a way of pursuing politics by other means, they must take as their object the intention of assigning others to classes and of telling them thereby what they are and what they have to be (this is the whole ambiguity of forecasting); they must analyze, in order to repudiate, the ambition of the creative world view, a kind of *intuitus originarius* that would make things exist in accordance with its vision (this is the whole ambiguity of the Marxist conception of class, which is inextricably an "is" and an "ought"). They must objectify the ambition of objectifying, of classifying from outside, objectively, agents who struggle to classify others and to classify themselves. If they do classify — by making divisions, for the purposes of statistical analysis, in the continuous space of social positions — they do so precisely so as to be able to objectify *all* forms of objectification, from the particular insult to the official nomination, not forgetting the claim, characteristic of science in its positivist, bureaucratic definition, to arbitrate in these struggles in the name of "axiological neutrality." The symbolic power of agents, understood as the power to make things seen – *theorein* – and to make things believed, to produce and impose the legitimate or legal classification, in fact depends, as the case of the *rex* reminds us, on the position occupied in the space (and in the classifications potentially inscribed in it). But to objectify objectification means, above all, to objectify the field of production of objectified representations of the social world, in particular, of the law-making taxonomies, in a word, the field of cultural or ideological production, a space and a game in which the social scientist too is caught, like all those who argue about the social classes (and who else talks about them?).

The Political Field and the Effect of the Homologies

It is this field of political struggles, in which the professional practitioners of representation, in all senses of the word, clash with one another over another field of struggles, that has to be analyzed if one wants to understand (without subscribing to the mythology of the "awakening of consciousness") the shift from the practical sense of the position occupied, itself amenable to being made explicit in different ways, to specifically political manifestations. Those who occupy the dominated positions within the social space are also located in dominated positions in the field of symbolic production, and it is not clear where they could obtain the instruments of symbolic production that are

needed in order to express their specific viewpoint on the social space, were it not that the specific logic of the field of cultural production, and the particular interests that are generated within it, have the effect of inclining a fraction of the professionals involved in this field to supply the dominated, on the basis of homology of position, with the means of challenging the representations that arise from the immediate complicity between social structures and mental structures and that tend to ensure the continuous reproduction of the distribution of symbolic capital. The phenomenon that the Marxist tradition calls "consciousness from outside," i.e., the contribution that some intellectuals make to the production and diffusion, particularly to the dominated, of a view of the social world that breaks with the dominant view, cannot be understood sociologically unless one takes account of the homology between the dominated position of the producers of cultural goods within the field of power (or in the division of the work of domination) and the position in social space of those agents who are most completely dispossessed of the means of economic and cultural production. But constructing the model of the social space that supports this analysis presupposes a radical break with the one-dimensional, unilinear representation of the social world that underlies the dualistic view in which the universe of the oppositions constituting the social world is reduced to the opposition between the owners of the means of production and the sellers of labor power.

The inadequacies of the Marxist theory of classes, in particular its inability to explain the set of objectively observed differences, stems from the fact that, in reducing the social world to the economic field alone, it is forced to define social position solely in terms of position in the relations of economic production and consequently ignores positions in the different fields and sub-fields, particularly in the relations of cultural production, as well as all the oppositions that structure the social field, which are irreducible to the opposition between owners and non-owners of the means of economic production. It thereby secures a one-dimensional social world, simply organized around the opposition between two blocs (and one of the major questions is then that of the *boundary* between these two blocs, with all the associated, endlessly debated, questions of the "labor aristocracy," the "embourgeoisement" of the working class, etc.). In reality, the social space is a multi-dimensional space, an open set of fields that are relatively autonomous, i.e., more or less strongly and directly subordinated, in their functioning and their transformations, to the field of economic production. Within each of these sub-spaces, the occupants of the dominated positions are constantly engaged in struggles of different forms (without necessarily constituting themselves into antagonistic groups).

But the most important thing, from the standpoint of the problem of breaking the circle of symbolic production, is the fact that, on the basis of the homologies between positions within different fields (and the invariant, or indeed universal, content of the relationship between the dominant and the dominated), *alliances* can be set up that are more or less lasting and always based on a more or less conscious misunderstanding. Homology of position between intellectuals and industrial workers – with the former occupying within the field of power, i.e., vis-à-vis industrial and commercial employers, positions that are homologous to those that industrial workers occupy within the social space as a whole – is the basis of an ambiguous alliance, in which the cultural producers, dominated agents among the dominant, divert their accumulated cultural capital so as to offer to the dominated the means of objectively constituting their view of the world and the representation of their interest in an explicit theory and in institutionalized instruments of representation – trade-union organizations, parties, social technologies for mobilization and demonstration, etc.[13]

> But one must be careful not to treat homology of position, a resemblance within difference, as an identity of condition (as happened in France, for example, with the ideology of the "three P's" – *patron, père, professeur* – boss, father, teacher – developed by the ultra-left movement of the late 60s). It is true that the same structure – understood as the invariant core of the forms of the different distributions – reappears in the different fields, and this explains the fertility of analogical thought in sociology; but the principle of differentiation is different each time, as are the stakes and the nature of the interest, and therefore the *economy* of practices. It is important to work out the correct hierarchy of the principles of hierarchization, i.e., of the different forms of capital. Knowledge of the hierarchy of the principles of division enables one to define the limits within which the subordinate principles operate, and therefore the limits of the similarities linked to homology. The relations of the fields to the field of production are at once relations of structural homology and relations of causal dependence: the form of the causal determinations is defined by the structural relations and the strength of the domination is that much greater when the relations within which domination occurs are closer to the relations of economic production.

One would have to analyze the specific interests that mandated representatives owe to their position in the political field and in the sub-field of their party or union, and demonstrate all the "theoretical" effects that these interests produce. A number of academic discussions of the "social classes" – I am thinking, for example, of the problem of the "labor aristocracy" or the French "managerial" (*cadre*) class – do no more than pursue the practical questionings that force themselves on political leaders. Such leaders are always confronted with the (often contradictory) practical imperatives that arise from the logic of the struggle within the political field, such as the need to prove their representativeness, or to muster the largest possible number of votes or mandates while asserting the irreducibility of their project to those of the other mandate-holders, and are therefore forced to pose the question of

the social world in the typically substantialist logic of the boundaries between groups and the volume of the group available to be mobilized. They may therefore be tempted to resolve the problem that arises for any group needing to know and demonstrate its strength, in other words its existence, by resorting to variable-geometry concepts such as "the working class," "the people," or "the workers."

But above all it would become clear that the effect of the specific interests associated with the position they occupy in the field and in the competition to impose views of the social world, inclines professional theoreticians and spokesmen, i.e., all those who are called in everyday language "full-time" or "permanent" officials, to produce differentiated, distinctive products that, because of the homology between the field of professional producers and the field of the consumers of opinions, are quasi-automatically adjusted to the different forms of demand – this demand being defined, especially in this case, as a demand for difference, for opposition, which they actually help to produce by helping it to find expression. It is the structure of the political field, in other words the objective relationship to the occupants of the other positions, and the relationship to the competing stances that they offer, which, as much as the direct relationship to their mandators, determines the stances they take, i.e., the supply of political products. Because the interests directly involved in the struggle for the monopoly of the legitimate expression of the truth of the social world tend to be the specific equivalent of the interests of the occupants of homologous positions in the social field, political discourses have a sort of structural duplicity. They seem to be directly addressed to the mandators, but in reality they are aimed at competitors within the field.

The political stances taken at a given moment (e.g., those expressed in election results) are thus the product of an encounter between a political supply of objectified political opinions (programs, party platforms, declarations, etc.) which is linked to the whole previous history of the field of production, and a political demand, itself linked to the history of the relations between supply and demand. The correlation that can be observed at a given moment between stances on a particular political issue and positions in the social space cannot be fully understood unless it is seen that the classifications that the voters implement in making their choices (right/left, for example) are the product of all the previous struggles, and that the same is true of the classifications the analyst implements in order to classify not only opinions but also the agents who express them. The whole history of the social field is present, at each moment, both in a materialized form – in institutions such as the permanent machinery of parties or unions – and in an

embodied form – in the dispositions of the agents who operate these institu-
tions or fight against them (with past loyalties exerting hysteresis effects). All
the forms of recognized collective identity – the "working class" or the CGT
union, the "independent craftsmen," the "*cadres*" or the *agrégé* category of
teachers, etc. – are products of a long, slow, collective building operation.
Without being completely artificial (if it were, the building would not have
been completely successful), each of these representational bodies, which
give existence to represented bodies endowed with a known, recognized
social identity, exists by virtue of a set of institutions that are so many
historical inventions – a "logo" (*sigle* in French), *sigillum authenticum*, as the
canonists put it, a seal or rubber stamp, an office and a secretariat having a
monopoly over the corporate signature and *plena potentia agendi et loquen-
di*, etc. This representation – a product of the struggles that have taken place
both within and without the political field, particularly over State power –
owes its specific characteristics to the particular history of a particular
political field and State (which explains, for example, the differences in the
representations of the social divisions, and therefore of the groups represent-
ed, between one country and another). If one is not to be misled by the effects
of the work of *naturalization* that every group tends to produce in order to
legitimate itself, to justify its own existence, one therefore has to reconstruct
in each case the *historical labor* of which the divisions and the social vision of
these divisions are the product. Social position, adequately defined, is what
gives the best prediction of practices and representations; but, to avoid
conferring on what used to be called "estate," on social identity (which is
nowadays more and more completely identified with occupational identity),
the place that "being" had in the old metaphysics, i.e, the function of an
essence from which all aspects of historical existence are seen as deriving (in
accordance with the formula *operatio sequitur esse*), it must never be forgot-
ten that this *status*, and the habitus that is generated within it, are products of
history that can be changed, with more or less difficulty, by history.

Class as Representation and as Will

But to establish how the power to constitute and institute that is held by the
authorized spokesman – a party leader or trade-union leader, for example –
is itself constituted and instituted, it is not sufficient to give an account of the
specific interests of the theoreticians or spokesmen and of the structural
affinities that link them to their mandators. One must also analyze the logic
of the process of institution, which is ordinarily perceived and described as a
process of delegation, in which the mandated representative receives from
the group the power to make the group. Here, making the necessary transpo-
sitions, we may follow the historians of law (Kantorowicz, Post, and others),

when they describe the mystery of "ministry" – the *mysterium* of *ministerium*, a play on words much favored by the canonists. The mystery of the process of transsubstantiation whereby the spokesperson becomes the group that he or she expresses can only be understood through a historical analysis of the genesis and functioning of *representation,* through which the representative makes the group that is represented. The spokesperson endowed with full power to speak and act in the name of the group, and first of all to act *on* the group through the magic of the slogan, the password (*mot d'ordre*), is the substitute of the group that exists only through this surrogacy. Personifying a fictitious person, a social fiction, he raises those whom he represents from the state of separate individuals, enabling them to act and speak, through him, as one man. In exchange, he receives the right to take himself for the group, to speak and act as if he *were* the group made man: "*Status est magistratus,*" "*l'État c'est moi,*" "the Union thinks that...," etc.

The mystery of ministry is one of those cases of social magic in which a thing or a person becomes something other than what it or the person is, so that a person (a government minister, a bishop, a delegate, a member of parliament, a general secretary, etc.) can identify, and be identified, with a set of persons, the People, the Workers, etc. or a social entity, the Nation, the State, the Church, the Party. The mystery of ministry culminates when the group can only exist through delegation to a spokesperson who will make it exist by speaking for it, i.e., on its behalf and in its place. The circle is then complete: the group is made by the person who speaks in its name, who thus appears as the source of the power which he or she exerts on those who are its real source. This circular relationship is the root of the charismatic illusion in which, in extreme cases, the spokesperson can appear to himself or herself and others as *causa sui.* Political alienation arises from the fact that isolated agents – the more so the less strong they are symbolically – cannot constitute themselves as a group, i.e., as a force capable of making itself heard in the political field, except by dispossessing themselves in favor of an apparatus; in other words, from the fact that one always has to risk political dispossession in order to escape political dispossession. Fetishism, according to Marx, is what happens when "the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own"; political fetishism lies precisely in the fact that the value of the hypostatized individual, a product of the human brain, appears as charisma, a mysterious objective property of the person, an impalpable charm, an unnameable mystery. The minister – a minister of religion or a Minister of State – is related metonymically to the group; a part of the group, the minister functions as a sign in place of the whole of the group. It is the minister who, as an entirely real substitute for an entirely symbolic being, induces a "category mistake," as Ryle would have said,

rather like that of the child who, after seeing the soldiers composing a regiment march past, asks where the regiment is. By the minister's mere visible existence, he or she constitutes the pure serial diversity of the separate individuals (*collectio personarum plurium*) into an "artificial person" [*une personne morale*], a *corporatio*, a constituted body, and, through the effect of mobilization and demonstration, may even make it appear as a social agent.

Politics is the site par excellence of symbolic efficacy, the action that is performed through signs capable of producing social things, and, in particular, groups. Through the potency of the oldest of the metaphysical effects linked to the existence of a symbolism, the one that enables one to regard as really existing everything that can be *symbolized* (God, non-being), political representation produces and reproduces at every moment a derived form of the case of the bald king of France, so dear to the logicians: any predicative proposition having "the working class" as its subject disguises an existential proposition (*there is* a working class), More generally, all utterances that have as their subject a collective noun – People, Class, University, School, State, etc. – presuppose the existence of the group in question and conceal the same sort of metaphysical boot-strapping that was denounced in the ontological argument. The spokesperson, in speaking of a group, on behalf of a group, surreptitiously posits the existence of the group in question, institutes the group, through the magical operation that is inherent in any act of naming. That is why one must perform a critique of political reason, which is intrinsically inclined to abuses of language that are also abuses of power, if one wants to pose the question with which all sociology ought to begin, that of the existence and the mode of existence of collectives.

A class exists insofar – and only insofar – as mandated representatives endowed with *plena potestas agendi* can be and feel authorized to speak in its *name* – in accordance with the equation "the Party is the working class," or "the working class is the Party," a formula that reproduces the canonists' equation: "The Church is the Pope (or the Bishops), the Pope is (or the Bishops are) the Church" – and so to make it exist as a real force within the political field. The mode of existence of what is nowadays called, in many societies (with variations, of course), "the working class," is entirely paradoxical: it is a sort of *existence in thought,* an existence in the thinking of a large proportion of those whom the taxonomies designate as workers, but also in the thinking of the occupants of the positions remotest from the workers in the social space. This almost universally recognized existence is itself based on the existence of a *working class in representation,* i.e., of political and trade-union apparatuses and professional spokespersons vitally interested in

believing that it exists and in having this believed both by those who identify with it and those who exclude themselves from it, and capable of making the "working class" *speak,* and with one voice, of invoking it, as one invokes gods or patron saints, even of symbolically manifesting it through *demonstration,* a sort of theatrical deployment of the class-in-representation, with on the one hand the corps of professional representatives and all the symbolism constitutive of its existence, and on the other the most convinced fraction of the believers, who, through their presence, enable the representatives to manifest their representativeness. This working class "as will and representation" (in the words of Schopenhauer's famous title) is not the self-enacting class, a real group really mobilized, that is evoked in the Marxist tradition. But it is no less real, with the magical reality that (as Durkheim and Mauss maintained) defines institutions as social fictions. It is a "mystical body," created through an immense historical labor of theoretical and practical invention, starting with that of Marx himself, and endlessly re-created through the countless, constantly renewed, efforts and energies that are needed to produce and reproduce belief and the institution designed to ensure the reproduction of belief. It exists in and through the corps of mandated representatives who give it material speech and visible presence, and in the belief in its existence that this corps of plenipotentiaries manages to enforce, by its sheer existence and by its representations, on the basis of the affinities objectively uniting the members of the same "class on paper" as a probable group.[14]

The historical success of Marxist theory, the first would-be scientific social theory to have realized itself so fully in the social world, thus helps to bring about a paradoxical situation: the theory of the social world least capable of integrating the *theory effect* – which Marxism has exerted more than any other – nowadays no doubt represents the most powerful obstacle to the progress of the adequate theory of the social world, to which it has, in other times, contributed more than any other.

NOTES

1. A shorter version of this text was presented as a lecture, one of the "Vorlesungen zu den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften," at the University of Frankfurt in February 1984. This translation is by Richard Nice.
2. One may imagine that one has rejected substantialism and introduced a relational mode of thought when one is in fact studying real interactions and exchanges. (In fact, practical solidarities, like practical rivalries, linked to direct contact and interaction – neighborhood – may be an *obstacle* to constructing solidarities based on proximity in the theoretical space.)
3. Statistical inquiry cannot grasp this power relation except in the form of *properties,* sometimes legally guaranteed through *titles* of economic, cultural, or social property: title deeds, qualifications, aristocratic titles, etc. This explains the link between empirical research on the social classes and theories of the social structure as a *stratification* described in the language of distance from the means of appropriation (Halbwachs's "distance from the focus of cultural values") which Marx himself uses when he speaks of the "property-less mass."

4. In some social universes, the principles of division that, like volume and structure of capital, determine the structure of the social space, are reinforced by principles of division relatively independent of economic or cultural properties, such as ethnic or religious affiliation. In such cases, the distribution of the agents appears as the product of the intersection of two spaces that are partially independent: an ethnic group situated in a lower position in the space of the ethnic groups may occupy positions in all the fields, including the highest, but with rates of representation inferior to those of an ethnic group situated in a higher position. Each ethnic group may thus be characterized by the social positions of its members, by the rate of dispersion of these positions, and by its degree of social integration despite this dispersion. (Ethnic solidarity may have the effect of ensuring a form of collective mobility.)

5. The same thing would be true of the relationship between geographical space and social space. These two spaces never coincide completely, but a number of differences that are generally attributed to the effect of geographical space, e.g., the opposition between center and periphery, are the effect of distance in social space, i.e., the unequal distribution of the different kinds of capital in geographical space.

6. The words of General Pershing on landing in France in 1917 (translator).

7. This *sense of realities* in no way implies a *class consciousness* in the socio-psychological sense, the least unreal meaning that can be given to this term, i.e., an *explicit representation* of the position occupied in the social structure and of the corresponding collective interests. Still less does it imply a *theory of the social classes,* i.e., not only a system of classification based on explicit and logically coherent principles but also a rigorous knowledge of the mechanisms responsible for these distributions. In fact, to have done with the metaphysics of the "awakening of consciousness" and of class consciousness, a sort of revolutionary cogito of the collective consciousness of a personified entity, one only has to examine the economic and social conditions that make possible that form of distance from the present of practice that is presupposed by the conception and formulation of a more or less elaborate representation of a collective future. (This is what I sketched out in my analysis of the relationship between temporal consciousness, particularly the capacity for rational economic calculation, and political consciousness, among Algerian workers – see Pierre Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960* [Cambridge/Paris: Cambridge University Press and Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1979]).

8. In this case, the production of common sense consists essentially in endlessly reinterpreting the common stock of sacred discourses (proverbs, sayings, gnomic poems, etc.), in "purifying the dialect of the tribe." Appropriating the words in which everything a group recognizes is deposited means gaining a considerable advantage in struggles for power. This is seen clearly in struggles for religious authority: the most precious word is the sacred word and, as Gershom Scholem observes, mystical challenges to tradition can be "recuperated" by the tradition precisely because they have to re-appropriate the symbols in order to gain recognition. The words of the political lexicon are stakes in struggle that bear polemic within themselves in the form of the *polysemy* that is the trace of the antagonistic uses that different groups make or have made of them. One of the most universal strategies of the professional manipulators of symbolic power – poets in archaic societies, prophets, politicians – thus consists in putting *common sense* on their side by appropriating the words that are invested with value by the whole group because they are the repositories of its belief.

9. As Spitzer has convincingly shown with reference to *Don Quixote,* in which the same character is given several names, polynomasia, i.e., plurality of the names, nicknames, etc. attributed to the same agent or institution, together with the polynomasia of the words and phrases designating groups' fundamental values, is the visible trace of the struggles for the power to name that go on in all social universes (see Leo Spitzer, "Linguistic Perspectivism in the *Don Quijote,*" in *Linguistics and Literary History* [New York: Russell and Russell, 1948].

10. The French "directory of occupations" is the materialized form of the social neutralism that cancels out the differences constituting the social space by treating all positions uniformly as *occupations,* by means of a constant shift in the definitional point of view (qualifications, nature of the activity, etc.). When Americans call doctors *professionals,* they emphasize the fact that these agents are defined by their profession, which for them is an *essential attribute;* by contrast, a "railroad coupler" is only marginally defined by this attribute, which designates the coupler simply as the occupant of a particular work post; the *professeur agrégé,* like the railroad coupler, is defined by a task, but also by a qualification and title, like the doctor.

11. Entry into an occupation endowed with a title is increasingly subordinated to possession of an educational qualification (*titre scolaire*), and there is a close relationship between educational qualifications and remuneration, in contrast to untitled occupations in which agents doing the same work may have very different qualifications.

12. The possessors of the same title tend to constitute themselves into a group and to equip themselves with permanent organizations – medical associations, alumni associations, etc. intended to ensure the group's cohesion – periodic meetings, etc. and to promote its material and symbolic interests.
13. The most perfect illustration of this analysis may be found, thanks to the admirable work of Robert Darnton, in the history of the "cultural revolution" that the dominated figures in the developing intellectual field – Brissot, Mercier, Desmoulins, Hébert, Marat, and many others – carried out within the revolutionary movement (destruction of the Academies, dispersion of the *salons,* suppression of pensions, abolition of privileges). Deriving its principle from the status of "cultural pariahs," it principally attacked the symbolic foundations of power, contributing, through "politico-pornography" and often scatological pamphlets, to the work of "de-legitimation" that is no doubt one of the fundamental dimensions of revolutionary radicalism (see Robert Darnton, "The High Enlightenment and the Low-life of Literature in Pre-Revolutionary France," *Past and Present,* no. 51 (1971), 81–115; on the exemplary case of Marat of whom it is little known that he was also, or initially, a mediocre physicist, see also C. C. Gillispie, *Science and Polity in France at the End of the Old Regime* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980], 290–330).
14. For a similar analysis of the relationship between the kinship group "on paper" and the practical kinship as "will and representation," see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) and *Le sens pratique* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1980).