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Pierre Bourdieu

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SOCIAL SPACE AND SYMBOLIC POWER*

PIERRE BOURDIEU

Collège de France

I would like, within the limits of a lecture, to try and present the theoretical principles which are at the base of the research whose results are presented in my book *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984a), and draw out those of its theoretical implications that are most likely to elude its readers, particularly here in the United States, due to the differences between our respective cultural and scholarly traditions.

If I had to characterize my work in two words, that is, as is the fashion these days, to label it, I would speak of *constructivist structuralism* or of *structuralist constructivism*, taking the word structuralism in a sense very different from the one it has acquired in the Saussurean or Lévi-Straussian tradition. By structuralism or structuralist, I mean that there exist, within the social world itself and not only within symbolic systems (language, myths, etc.), objective structures independent of the consciousness and will of agents, which are capable of guiding and constraining their practices or their representations. By constructivism, I mean that there is a twofold social genesis, on the one hand of the schemes of perception, thought, and action which are constitutive of what I call habitus, and on the other hand of social structures, and particularly of what I call fields and of groups, notably those we ordinarily call social classes.

I think that it is particularly necessary to set the record straight here: indeed, the hazards of translation are such that, for instance, my book *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) is well known, which will lead certain commentators—and some of them have not hesitated to do so—to classify me squarely among the structural-

ists, while works that come from a much earlier period (so old, in fact, that they even precede the emergence of the typically “constructivist” writings on the same topics) and which would probably make them perceive me as a “constructivist” have characteristically been ignored. Thus, in a book entitled *Pedagogic Relationship and Communication* (Bourdieu et al. 1965), we showed how the social relation of understanding in the classroom is constructed in and through misunderstanding, or in spite of misunderstanding; how teachers and students agree, by a sort of tacit transaction tacitly guided by the concern to minimize costs and risks, to agree on a minimal definition of the situation of communication. Likewise, in another study entitled “The Categories of Professorial Judgment” (Bourdieu and de Saint Martin 1975), we tried to analyze the genesis and functioning of the categories of perception and appreciation through which professors construct an image of their students, of their performance and of their value, and (re)produce, through practices of cooptation guided by the same categories, the very group of their colleagues and the faculty. I now close this digression and return to my argument.

I

Speaking in the most general terms, social science, be it anthropology, sociology or history, oscillates between two seemingly incompatible points of view, two apparently irreconcilable perspectives: objectivism and subjectivism or, if you prefer, between physicalism and psychologism (which can take on various colorings, phenomenological, semiological, etc.). On the one hand, it can “treat social facts as things,” according to the old Durkheimian precept, and thus leave out everything that they owe to the fact that they are objects of knowledge, of cognition—or misrecognition—within social existence. On the

* This is the text of a lecture delivered at the University of California, San Diego, in March of 1986, translated from the French by Loïc J. D. Wacquant. A French version appeared in Pierre Bourdieu, *Choses dites* (Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1987, pp. 147–166).

other hand, it can reduce the social world to the representations that agents have of it, the task of social science consisting then in producing an “account of the accounts” produced by social subjects.

Rarely are these two positions expressed and above all realized in scientific practice in such a radical and contrasted manner. We know that Durkheim is no doubt, together with Marx, the one who expressed the *objectivist* position in the most consistent manner. “We believe this idea to be fruitful, he wrote (Durkheim 1970, p. 250), that social life must be explained, not by the conception of those who participate in it, but by deep causes which lie outside of consciousness.” However, being a good Kantian, Durkheim was not unaware of the fact that this reality can only be grasped by employing logical instruments, categories, classifications. This being said, objectivist physicalism often goes hand in hand with the positivist proclivity to conceive classifications as mere “operational” partitions, or as the mechanical recording of breaks or “objective” discontinuities (as in statistical distributions for instance).

It is no doubt in the work of Alfred Schutz and of the ethnomethodologists that one would find the purest expression of the *subjectivist* vision. Thus Schutz (1962, p. 59) embraces the standpoint exactly opposite to Durkheim’s: “The observational field of the social scientist—social reality—has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the human beings living, acting, and thinking within it. By a series of common-sense constructs, they have pre-selected and pre-interpreted this world which they experience as the reality of their daily life. It is these thought objects of theirs which determine their behavior by motivating it. The thought objects constructed by the social scientist in order to grasp this social reality have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men, living their daily life within their social world. Thus, the constructs of the social sciences are, so to speak, constructs of the second degree, that is, constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene.” The opposition is total: in the first instance, scientific knowledge can

be obtained only by means of a break with primary representations—called “pre-notions” in Durkheim and “ideologies” in Marx—leading to unconscious causes. In the second instance, scientific knowledge is in continuity with common sense knowledge, since it is nothing but a “construct of constructs.”

If I have somewhat belabored this opposition—one of the most harmful of these “paired concepts” which, as Reinhard Bendix and Bennett Berger (1959) have shown, pervade the social sciences—it is because the most steadfast (and, in my eyes, the most important) intention guiding my work has been to overcome it. At the risk of appearing quite obscure, I could sum up in one phrase the gist of the analysis I am putting forth today: on the one hand, the objective structures that the sociologist constructs, in the objectivist moment, by setting aside the subjective representations of the agents, form the basis for these representations and constitute the structural constraints that bear upon interactions; but, on the other hand, these representations must also be taken into consideration particularly if one wants to account for the daily struggles, individual and collective, which purport to transform or to preserve these structures. This means that the two moments, the objectivist and the subjectivist, stand in a dialectical relationship (Bourdieu 1977) and that, for instance, even if the subjectivist moment seems very close, when taken separately, to interactionist or ethnomethodological analyses, it still differs radically from them: points of view are grasped as such and related to the positions they occupy in the structure of agents under consideration.

In order to transcend the artificial opposition that is thus created between structures and representations, one must also break with the mode of thinking which Cassirer (1923) calls *substantialist* and which inclines one to recognize no reality other than those that are available to direct intuition in ordinary experience, i.e., individuals and groups. The major contribution of what must rightly be called the structuralist revolution consists in having applied to the social world the *relational* mode of thinking which is that of modern mathematics and

physics, and which identifies the real not with substances but with relations (Bourdieu 1968). The “social reality” which Durkheim spoke of is an ensemble of invisible relations, those very relations which constitute a space of positions external to each other and defined by their proximity to, neighborhood with, or distance from each other, and also by their relative position, above or below or yet in between, in the middle. Sociology, in its objectivist moment, is a social topology, an *analysis situs* as they called this new branch of mathematics in Leibniz’s time, an analysis of relative positions and of the objective relations between these positions.

This relational mode of thinking is at the point of departure of the construction presented in *Distinction*. It is a fair bet, however, that the space, that is, the system of relations, will go unnoticed by the reader, despite the use of diagrams (and of correspondence analysis, a very sophisticated form of factorial analysis). This is due, first, to the fact that the substantialist mode of thinking is easier to adopt and flows more “naturally.” Secondly, this is because, as often happens, the means one has to use to construct social space and to exhibit its structure risk concealing the results they enable one to reach. The groups that must be constructed in order to objectivize the positions they occupy hide those positions. Thus the chapter of *Distinction* devoted to the different fractions of the dominant class will be read as a description of the various lifestyles of these fractions, instead of an analysis of locations in the space of positions of power—what I call the field of power. (Parenthesis: one may see here that changes in vocabulary are at once the condition and the product of a break with the ordinary representation associated with the idea of “ruling class”).

At this point of the discussion, we can compare social space to a geographic space within which regions are divided up. But this space is constructed in such a way that the closer the agents, groups or institutions which are situated within this space, the more common properties they have; and the more distant, the fewer. Spatial distances—on paper—coincide with social

distances. Such is not the case in real space. It is true that one can observe almost everywhere a tendency toward spatial segregation, people who are close together in social space tending to find themselves, by choice or by necessity, close to one another in geographic space; nevertheless, people who are very distant from each other in social space can encounter one another and interact, if only briefly and intermittently, in physical space. Interactions, which bring immediate gratification to those with empiricist dispositions—they can be observed, recorded, filmed, in sum, they are tangible, one can “reach out and touch them”—mask the structures that are realized in them. This is one of those cases where the visible, that which is immediately given, hides the invisible which determines it. One thus forgets that the truth of any interaction is never entirely to be found within the interaction as it avails itself for observation. One example will suffice to bring out the difference between structure and interaction and, at the same time, between the structuralist vision I defend as a necessary (but not sufficient) moment of research and the so-called interactionist vision in all its forms (and especially ethnomethodology). I have in mind what I call strategies of condescension, those strategies by which agents who occupy a higher position in one of the hierarchies of objective space symbolically deny the social distance between themselves and others, a distance which does not thereby cease to exist, thus reaping the profits of the recognition granted to a purely symbolic denegation of distance (“she is unaffected,” “he is not highbrow” or “stand-offish,” etc.) which implies a recognition of distances. (The expressions I just quoted always have an implicit rider: “she is unaffected, for a duchess,” “he is not so highbrow, for a university professor,” and so on.) In short, one can use objective distances in such a way as to cumulate the advantages of propinquity and the advantages of distance, that is, distance and the recognition of distance warranted by its symbolic denegation.

How can we concretely grasp these objective relations which are irreducible to the interactions by which they manifest

themselves? These objective relations are the relations between positions occupied within the distributions of the resources which are or may become active, effective, like aces in a game of cards, in the competition for the appropriation of scarce goods of which this social universe is the site. According to my empirical investigations, these fundamental powers are economic capital (in its different forms), cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital, which is the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate (Bourdieu 1986a). Thus agents are distributed in the overall social space, in the first dimension, according to the overall volume of capital they possess and, in the second dimension, according to the structure of their capital, that is, the relative weight of the different species of capital, economic and cultural, in the total volume of their assets.

The misunderstanding that the analyses proposed particularly in *Distinction* elicit are thus due to the fact that classes on paper are liable to being apprehended as real groups. This realist (mis)reading is objectively encouraged by the fact that social space is so constructed that agents who occupy similar or neighboring positions are placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, and therefore have every chance of having similar dispositions and interests, and thus of producing practices that are themselves similar. The dispositions acquired in the position occupied imply an adjustment to this position, what Goffman calls the "sense of one's place." It is this sense of one's place which, in interactions, leads people whom we call in French "*les gens modestes*," "common folks," to keep to their common place, and the others to "keep their distance," to "maintain their rank", and to "not get familiar." These strategies, it should be noted in passing, may be perfectly unconscious and take the form of what is called timidity or arrogance. In effect, social distances are inscribed in bodies or, more precisely, into the relation to the body, to language and to time—so many structural aspects of practice ignored by the subjectivist vision.

Add to this the fact that this sense of one's place, and the affinities of habitus experienced as sympathy or antipathy, are at the basis of all forms of cooptation, friendships, love affairs, marriages, associations, and so on, thus of all the relationships that are lasting and sometimes sanctioned by law, and you will see that everything leads one to think that classes on paper are real groups—all the more real in that the space is better constructed and the units cut into this space are smaller. If you want to launch a political movement or even an association, you will have a better chance of bringing together people who are in the same sector of social space (for instance, in the northwest region of the diagram, where intellectuals are) than if you want to bring together people situated in regions at the four corners of the diagram.

But just as subjectivism inclines one to reduce structures to visible interactions, objectivism tends to deduce actions and interactions from the structure. So the crucial error, the theoreticist error that you find in Marx, would consist in treating classes on paper as real classes, in concluding from the objective homogeneity of conditions, of conditionings, and thus of dispositions, which flows from the identity of position in social space, that the agents involved exist as a unified group, as a class. The notion of *social space* allows us to go beyond the alternative of realism and nominalism when it comes to social classes (Bourdieu 1985): the political work aimed at producing social classes as *corporate bodies*, permanent groups endowed with permanent organs or representation, acronyms, etc., is all the more likely to succeed when the agents that it seeks to assemble, to unify, to constitute into a group, are closer to each other in social space (and therefore belonging to the same theoretical class). Classes in Marx's sense have to be made through a political work that has all the more chance of succeeding when it is armed with a theory that is well-founded in reality, thus more capable of exerting a *theory effect*—*theorein*, in Greek, means to see—that is, of imposing a vision of divisions.

With the theory effect, we have escaped

pure physicalism, but without foresaking the gains of the objectivist phase: groups, such as social classes, are *to be made*. They are not given in "social reality." The title of E.P. Thompson's (1963) famous book *The Making of the English Working Class* must be taken quite literally: the working class such as it may appear to us today, through the words meant to designate it, "working class," "proletariat," "workers," "labor movement," and so on, through the organizations that are supposed to express its will, through the logos, bureaus, locals, flags, etc., is a well-founded historical artefact (in the sense in which Durkheim said that religion is a well-founded illusion). But this in no way means that one can construct anything anyhow, either in theory or in practice.

II

We have thus moved from social physics to social phenomenology. The "social reality" objectivists speak about is also an object of perception. And social science must take as its object both this reality and the perception of this reality, the perspectives, the points of view which, by virtue of their position in objective social space, agents have on this reality. The spontaneous visions of the social world, the "folk theories" ethnomethodologists talk about, or what I call "spontaneous sociology," but also scientific theories, sociology included, are part of social reality, and, like Marxist theory for instance, can acquire a truly real power of construction.

The objectivist break with pre-notions, ideologies, spontaneous sociology, and "folk theories," is an inevitable, necessary moment of the scientific enterprise—you cannot do without it, as do interactionism, ethnomethodology, and all these forms of social psychology which rest content with a phenomenal vision of the social world, without exposing yourself to grave mistakes. But it is necessary to effect a *second and more difficult break with objectivism*, by reintroducing, in a second stage, what had to be excluded in order to construct objective reality. Sociology must include a sociology of the perception of the social world, that is, a sociology of the construc-

tion of visions of the world which themselves contribute to the construction of this world. But, having constructed social space, we know that these points of view, as the word itself suggests, are views taken from a certain point, that is, from a determinate position within social space. And we also know that there will be different or even antagonistic points of view, since points of view depend on the point from which they are taken, since the vision that every agent has of the space depends on his or her position in that space.

By doing this, we repudiate the universal subject, the transcendental ego of phenomenology that ethnomethodologists have taken over as their own. No doubt agents do have an active apprehension of the world. No doubt they do construct their vision of the world. But this construction is carried out under structural constraints. One may even explain in sociological terms what appears to be a universal property of human experience, namely, the fact that the familiar world tends to be "taken for granted," perceived as natural. If the social world tends to be perceived as evident and to be grasped, to use Husserl's (1983) expression, in a doxic modality, this is because the dispositions of agents, their habitus, that is, the mental structures through which they apprehend the social world, are essentially the product of the internalization of the structures of that world. As perceptive dispositions tend to be adjusted to position, agents, even the most disadvantaged ones, tend to perceive the world as natural and to accept it much more readily than one might imagine—especially when you look at the situation of the dominated through the social eyes of a dominant.

So the search for invariant forms of perception or of construction of social reality masks different things: firstly, that this construction is not carried out in a social vacuum but subjected to structural constraints; secondly, that structuring structures, cognitive structures, are themselves socially structured because they have a social genesis; thirdly, that the construction of social reality is not only an individual enterprise but may also become a collective enterprise. But the so-called

microsociological vision leaves out a good number of other things: as often happens when you look too closely, you cannot see the wood from the tree; and above all, failing to construct the space of positions leaves you no chance of seeing the point from which you see what you see.

Thus the representations of agents vary with their position (and with the interest associated with it) and with their habitus, as a system of schemes of perception and appreciation of practices, cognitive and evaluative structures which are acquired through the lasting experience of a social position. Habitus is both a system of schemes of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practices. And, in both of these dimensions, its operation expresses the social position in which it was elaborated. Consequently, habitus produces practices and representations which are available for classification, which are objectively differentiated; however, they are immediately perceived as such only by those agents who possess the code, the classificatory schemes necessary to understand their social meaning. Habitus thus implies a "sense of one's place" but also a "sense of the place of others." For example, we say of a piece of clothing, a piece of furniture, or a book: "that looks pretty bourgeois" or "that's intellectual." What are the social conditions of possibility of such a judgment? First, it presupposes that taste (or habitus) as a system of schemes of classification, is objectively referred, via the social conditionings that produced it, to a social condition: agents classify themselves, expose themselves to classification, by choosing, in conformity with their taste, different attributes (clothes, types of food, drinks, sports, friends) that go well together and that go well with them or, more exactly, suit their position. To be more precise, they choose, in the space of available goods and services, goods that occupy a position in this space homologous to the position they themselves occupy in social space. This makes for the fact that nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies. Secondly, a classificatory judgment such as "that's petty bourgeois" presupposes that, as

socialized agents, we are capable of perceiving the relation between practices or representations and positions in social space (as when we guess a person's social position from her accent). Thus, through habitus, we have a world of common sense, a world that seems self-evident.

I have so far adopted the perspective of the perceiving subject and I have mentioned the principal cause of variations in perception, namely, position in social space. But what about variations whose principle is found on the side of the object, in this space itself? It is true that the correspondence that obtains, through habitus (dispositions, taste), between positions and practices, preferences exhibited, opinions expressed, and so on, means that the social world does not present itself as pure chaos, as totally devoid of necessity and liable to being constructed in any way one likes. But this world does not present itself as totally structured either, or as capable of imposing upon every perceiving subject the principles of its own construction. The social world may be uttered and constructed in different ways according to different principles of vision and division—for example, economic divisions and ethnic divisions. If it is true that, in advanced societies, economic and cultural factors have the greatest power of differentiation, the fact remains that the potency of economic and social differences is never so great that one cannot organize agents on the basis of other principles of division—ethnic, religious, or national ones, for instance.

Despite this potential plurality of possible structurings—what Weber called the *Vielseitigkeit* of the given—it remains that the social world presents itself as a highly structured reality. This is because of a simple mechanism, which I want to sketch out briefly. Social space, as I described it above, presents itself in the form of agents endowed with different properties that are systematically linked among themselves: those who drink champagne are opposed to those who drink whiskey, but they are also opposed, in a different way, to those who drink red wine; those who drink champagne, however, have a higher chance than those who drink whiskey, and a far

greater chance than those who drink red wine, of having antique furniture, playing golf at select clubs, riding horses or going to see light comedies at the theater. These properties, when they are perceived by agents endowed with the pertinent categories of perception—capable of seeing that playing golf makes you “look” like a traditional member of the old bourgeoisie—function, in the very reality of social life, as signs: *differences function as distinctive signs* and as signs of distinction, positive or negative, and this happens outside of any intention of distinction, of any conscious search for “conspicuous consumption.” (This is to say, parenthetically, that my analyses have nothing in common with those of Veblen—all the more so in that distinction as I construe it, from the point of view of indigenous criteria, excludes the deliberate search for distinction). In other words, through the distribution of properties, the social world presents itself, objectively, as a symbolic system which is organized according to the logic of difference, of differential distance. Social space tends to function as a symbolic space, a space of lifestyles and status groups characterized by different lifestyles.

Thus the perception of the social world is the product of a *double structuring*: on the objective side, it is socially structured because the properties attributed to agents or institutions present themselves in combinations that have very unequal probabilities: just as feathered animals are more likely to have wings than furry animals, so the possessors of a sophisticated mastery of language are more likely to be found in a museum than those who do not have this mastery. On the subjective side, it is structured because the schemes of perception and appreciation, especially those inscribed in language itself, express the state of relations of symbolic power. I am thinking for example of pairs of adjectives such as heavy/light, bright/dull, etc., which organize taste in the most diverse domains. Together, these two mechanisms act to produce a common world, a world of commonsense or, at least, a minimum consensus on the social world.

But, as I suggested, the objects of the social world can be perceived and expressed

in a variety of ways, since they always include a degree of indeterminacy and vagueness, and, thereby, a certain degree of semantic elasticity. Indeed, even the most constant combinations of properties are always based on statistical connections between interchangeable characteristics; furthermore, they are subject to variations in time so that their meaning, insofar as it depends on the future, is itself held in suspense and relatively indeterminate. This objective element of uncertainty—which is often reinforced by the effect of categorization, since the same word can cover different practices—provides a basis for the plurality of visions of the world which is itself linked to the plurality of points of view. At the same time, it provides a base for symbolic struggles over the power to produce and to impose the legitimate vision of the world. (It is in the intermediate positions of social space, especially in the United States, that the indeterminacy and objective uncertainty of relations between practices and positions is at a maximum, and also, consequently, the intensity of symbolic strategies. It is easy to understand why it is this universe which provides the favorite site of the interactionists and of Goffman in particular).

Symbolic struggles over the perception of the social world may take two different forms. On the objective side, one may act by actions of representation, individual or collective, meant to display and to throw into relief certain realities: I am thinking for instance of demonstrations whose goal is to exhibit a group, its size, its strength, its cohesiveness, to make it exist visibly (Champagne 1984); and, on the individual level, of all the strategies of presentation of self, so well analyzed by Goffman (1959, 1967), that are designed to manipulate one’s self-image and especially—something that Goffman overlooked—the image of one’s position in social space. On the subjective side, one may act by trying to transform categories of perception and appreciation of the social world, the cognitive and evaluative structures through which it is constructed. The categories of perception, the schemata of classification, that is, essentially, the words, the names which construct social reality as much as

they express it, are the stake par excellence of political struggle, which is a struggle to impose the legitimate principle of vision and division, i.e., a struggle over the legitimate exercise of what I call the "theory effect." I have shown elsewhere (Bourdieu 1980, 1986b), in the case of Kabylia, that groups—households, clans, or tribes—and the names that designate them are the instruments and stakes of innumerable strategies and that agents are endlessly occupied in the negotiation of their own identity. They may, for example, manipulate genealogy, just as we, for similar reasons, manipulate the texts of the "founding fathers" of our discipline. Likewise, on the level of the daily class struggle that social agents wage in an isolated and dispersed state, we have insults (which are a sort of magical attempt at categorization: *kathegorein*, from which our word "category" comes, originally means to accuse publicly), gossip, rumours, slander, innuendos, and so. On the collective and more properly political level (Bourdieu 1981), we have all the strategies that aim at imposing a new construction of social reality by jettisoning the old political vocabulary, or at preserving the orthodox vision by keeping those words (which are often euphemisms, as in the expression "common folks" that I just evoked) designed to describe the social world. The most typical of these strategies of construction are those which aim at retrospectively reconstructing a past fitted to the needs of the present—as when General Flemming, disembarking in 1917, exclaimed: "La Fayette, here we are!"—or at constructing the future, by a creative prediction designed to limit the ever-open sense of the present.

These symbolic struggles, both the individual struggles of everyday life and the collective, organized struggles of political life, have a *specific logic* which endows them with a real autonomy from the structures in which they are rooted. Owing to the fact that symbolic capital is nothing other than economic or cultural capital when it is known and recognized, when it is known through the categories of perception that it imposes, symbolic relations of power tend to reproduce and to reinforce the power relations that constitute the

structure of social space. More concretely, legitimation of the social world is not, as some believe, the product of a deliberate and purposive action of propaganda or symbolic imposition; it results, rather, from the fact that agents apply to the objective structures of the social world structures of perception and appreciation which are issued out of these very structures and which tend to picture the world as evident.

Objective relations of power tend to reproduce themselves in relations of symbolic power. In the symbolic struggle for the production of common sense or, more precisely, for the monopoly over legitimate naming, agents put into action the symbolic capital that they have acquired in previous struggles and which may be juridically guaranteed. Thus titles of nobility, like educational credentials, represent true titles of symbolic property which give one a right to share in the profits of recognition. Here again, we must break away from marginalist subjectivism: symbolic order is not formed in the manner of a market price, out of the mere mechanical addition of individual orders. On the other hand, in the determination of the objective classification and of the hierarchy of values granted to individuals and groups, not all judgments have the same weight, and holders of large amounts of symbolic capital, the *nobiles* (etymologically, those who are well-known and recognized), are in a position to impose the scale of values most favorable to their products—notably because, in our societies, they hold a practical *de facto* monopoly over institutions which, like the school system, officially determine and guarantee rank. On the other hand, symbolic capital may be officially sanctioned and guaranteed, and juridically instituted by the effect of official nomination (Bourdieu 1982). Official nomination, that is, the act whereby someone is granted a title, a socially recognized qualification, is one of the most typical expressions of that monopoly over legitimate symbolic violence which belongs to the state or to its representatives. A credential such as a school diploma is a piece of universally recognized and guaranteed symbolic capital, good on all markets. As an official definition of an official

identity, it frees its holder from the symbolic struggle of all against all by imposing the universally approved perspective.

The state, which produces the official classification, is in one sense the supreme tribunal to which Kafka (1968) refers in *The Trial* when Block says to the attorney who claims to be one of the "great attorneys:" "Of course, anybody can say he is 'great', if he likes to, but in these matters the question is decided by the practices of the court." Science need not choose between relativism and absolutism: the truth of the social world is at stake in the struggles between agents who are unequally equipped to reach an absolute, i.e., self-fulfilling vision. The legal consecration of symbolic capital confers upon a perspective an absolute, universal value, thus snatching it from a relativity that is by definition inherent in every point of view, as a view taken from a particular point in social space.

There is an official point of view, which is the point of view of officials and which is expressed in official discourse. This discourse, as Aaron Cicourel has shown, fulfils three functions. First, it performs a diagnostic, that is, an act of knowledge or cognition which begets recognition and which, quite often, tends to assert what a person or a thing is and what it is universally, for every possible person, thus objectively. It is, as Kafka clearly saw, an almost divine discourse which assigns everyone an identity. In the second place, administrative discourse says, through directives, orders, prescriptions, etc., what people have to do, given what they are. Thirdly, it says what people have actually done, as in authorized accounts such as police records. In each case, official discourse imposes a point of view, that of the institution, especially via questionnaires, official forms, and so on. This point of view is instituted as legitimate point of view, that is, a point of view that everyone has to recognize at least within the boundaries of a definite society. The representative of the state is the repository of common sense: official nominations and academic credentials tend to have a universal value on all markets. The most typical effect of the *raison d'Etat* is the

effect of codification which is at work in such mundane operations as the granting of a certificate: an expert, physician or jurist, is someone who is appointed to produce a point of view which is recognized as transcendent over particular points of view—in the form of sickness notes, certificates of competence or incompetence—a point of view which confers universally recognized rights on the holder of the certificate. The state thus appears as the central bank which guarantees all certificates. One may say of the state, in the terms Leibniz used about God, that it is the "geometral locus of all perspectives." This is why one may generalize Weber's well-known formula and see in the state the holder of the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence. Or, more precisely, the state is a referee, albeit a powerful one, in struggles over this monopoly.

But in the struggle for the production and imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world, the holders of bureaucratic authority never establish an absolute monopoly, even when they add the authority of science to their bureaucratic authority, as government economists do. In fact, *there are always, in any society, conflicts between symbolic powers that aim at imposing the vision of legitimate divisions*, that is, at constructing groups. Symbolic power, in this sense, is a power of "world-making." "World-making" consists, according to Nelson Goodman (1978), "in separating and reuniting, often in the same operation," in carrying out a decomposition, an analysis, and a composition, a synthesis, often by the use of labels. Social classifications, as is the case in archaic societies where they often work through dualist oppositions (masculine/feminine, high/low, strong/weak, etc.), organize the perception of the social world and, under certain conditions, can really organize the world itself.

III

So we can now examine under what conditions a symbolic power can become a *power of constitution*, by taking the term, with Dewey, both in its philosophical sense and in its political sense: that is, a

power to preserve or to transform objective principles of union and separation, of marriage and divorce, of association and dissociation, which are at work in the social world; the power to conserve or to transform current classifications in matters of gender, nation, region, age, and social status, and this through the words used to designate or to describe individuals, groups or institutions.

To change the world, one has to change the ways of world-making, that is, the vision of the world and the practical operations by which groups are produced and reproduced. Symbolic power, whose form par excellence is the power to make groups (groups that are already established and have to be consecrated or groups that have yet to be constituted such as the Marxian proletariat), rests on two conditions. Firstly, as any form of performative discourse, symbolic power has to be based on the possession of symbolic capital. The power to impose upon other minds a vision, old or new, of social divisions depends on the social authority acquired in previous struggles. Symbolic capital is a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition. In this way, the power of constitution, a power to make a new group, through mobilization, or to make it exist by proxy, by speaking on its behalf as an authorized spokesperson, can be obtained only as the outcome of a long process of institutionalization, at the end of which a representative is instituted, who receives from the group the power to make the group.

Secondly, symbolic efficacy depends on the degree to which the vision proposed is founded in reality. Obviously, the construction of groups cannot be a construction *ex nihilo*. It has all the more chance of succeeding the more it is founded in reality, that is, as I indicated, in the objective affinities between the agents who have to be brought together. The "theory effect" is all the more powerful the more adequate the theory is. Symbolic power is the power to make things with words. It is only if it is true, that is, adequate to things, that description makes things. In this sense, *symbolic power is a power of con-*

secration or revelation, the power to consecrate or to reveal things that are already there. Does this mean that it does nothing? In fact, as a constellation which, according to Nelson Goodman (1978), begins to exist only when it is selected and designated as such, a group, a class, a gender, a region, or a nation begins to exist as such, for those who belong to it as well as for the others, only when it is distinguished, according to one principle or another, from other groups, that is, through knowledge and recognition (*connaissance et reconnaissance*).

We can thus, I hope, better understand what is at stake in the struggle over the existence or non-existence of classes. The struggle over classifications is a fundamental dimension of class struggle. The power to impose and to inculcate a vision of divisions, that is, the power to make visible and explicit social divisions that are implicit, is political power par excellence. It is the power to make groups, to manipulate the objective structure of society. As with constellations, the performative power of designation, of naming, brings into existence in an instituted, constituted form (i.e., as a "corporate body," a *corporatio*, as the medieval canonists studied by Kantorovicz [1981] said), what existed up until then only as a *collectio personarum plurium*, a collection of varied persons, a purely additive series of merely juxtaposed individuals.

Here, if we bear in mind the main problem that I have tried to solve today, that of knowing how one can make things (i.e., groups) with words, we are confronted with one last question, the question of the *mysterium* of the *ministerium*, as the canonists liked to put it (Bourdieu 1984b): how does the spokesperson come to be invested with the full power to act and to speak in the name of the group which he or she produces by the magic of the slogan, the watchword, or the command, and by his mere existence as an incarnation of the collective? As the king in archaic societies, *Rex*, who, according to Benveniste (1969), is entrusted with the task of *regere fines* and *regere sacra*, of tracing out and stating the boundaries between groups and, thereby, of bringing them into existence as

such, the leader of a trade union or of a political party, the civil servant or the expert invested with state authority, all are so many personifications of a social fiction to which they give life, in and through their very being, and from which they receive in return their power. The spokesperson is the substitute of the group which fully exists only through this delegation and which acts and speaks through him. He is the group made man, personified. As the canonists said: *status*, the position, is *magistratus*, the magistrate who holds it; or, as Louis XIV proclaimed, "*L'Etat, c'est moi*;" or again, in Robespierre's words, "I am the People." The class (or the people, the nation, or any other otherwise elusive social collective) exists if and when there exist agents who can say that they are the class, by the mere fact of speaking publicly, officially, in its place, and of being recognized as entitled to do so by the people who thereby recognize themselves as members of the class, people or nation, or of any other social reality that a realist construction of the world can invent and impose.

I hope that I was able, despite my limited linguistic capabilities, to convince you that complexity lies within social reality and not in a somewhat decadent desire to say complicated things. "The simple, wrote Bachelard (1985), is never but the simplified." And he demonstrated that science has never progressed except by questioning simple ideas. It seems to me that such questioning is particularly needed in the social sciences since, for all the reasons I have said, we tend too easily to satisfy ourselves with the commonplaces supplied us by our commonsense experience or by our familiarity with a scholarly tradition.

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