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

Driving Impulses

This conversion was precipitated by the conjunction of two events. On a personal level, the first-hand encounter with the gruesome realities of colonial rule and war in Algeria (where he had been sent to serve his mandatory stint in the military) prompted Bourdieu to turn to ethnology and sociology in order to make sense of the social cataclysm wrought by the clash between imperial capitalism and home-grown nationalism. Thus his first books, The Algerians, Work and Workers in Algeria, and The Uprooting: The Crisis of Traditional Agriculture in Algeria, dissected the social organization and culture of the native society and chronicled its violent disruption under the press of wage labour, urbanization and the so-called pacification policy of the French military, in an effort to illumine and assist in the painful birth of an independent Algeria. At about the same time, Bourdieu turned the new-found instruments of social science back onto his own childhood village in seeking to understand both the
collapse of the European peasant society accelerating in the postwar decades and the specificity of the sociological gaze itself.²

These youthful inquiries bear the hallmark of Bourdieu’s lifework: they are the product of an activist science, impervious to ideological bias yet attuned to the burning sociopolitical issues of its day and responsive to the ethical dilemmas these entail. And they translate the grand questions of classical philosophy and social theory into precise empirical experiments pursued with the full array of methods supplied by the scientific tradition and fearlessly applied to the sociologist himself.

On an intellectual level, Bourdieu’s break with philosophy was made possible by the demise of existentialism and the correlative rebirth of the social sciences in France after a half-century of eclipse. Under the broad banner of ‘structuralism’, the Durkheimian project of a total science of society and culture was being revived and modernized by Georges Dumézil in comparative mythology, Fernand Braudel in history and Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology. It was now possible to fulfil lofty intellectual ambitions, and to express progressive political impulses outside the ambit of the Communist Party, by embracing the freshly reinvigorated empirical disciplines.³ Thus Bourdieu took to re-establishing the scientific and civic legitimacy of sociology in its motherland where it had been a pariah science since the passing of Durkheim and the decimation of his students by the First World War.

In the early 1960s, Bourdieu returned from Algiers to Paris where he was nominated director of studies at the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales as well as director of its newly formed Centre for European Sociology. There he pursued his ethnological work on ritual, kinship and social change in Algeria (as recorded in Outline of a Theory of Practice and Algeria 1960)⁴ and took to the sociology of schooling, art, intellectuals and politics. These domains attracted him because he sensed that, in the prosperous postwar societies of the West, ‘cultural capital’ – educational credentials and familiarity with bourgeois culture – was becoming a major determinant of life chances and that, under the cloak of individual talent and academic meritocracy, its unequal distribution was helping to conserve social hierarchies. This he demonstrated in The Inheritors and Reproduction in Education, Culture, and Society,⁵ two books that impacted the scholarly and policy debate on the school system and established him as the progenitor of ‘reproduction theory’ (a misleading label, as shall be seen shortly).

During the 1970s, Bourdieu continued to mine a wide array of topics at the intersection of culture, class and power to teach at the Ecole, and to lead the research team that edited Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, a transdisciplinary journal he founded in 1975 to disseminate the most advanced results of social research and to engage salient social issues from a rigorous scientific standpoint. In 1981, the publication of his major works Distinction and The
Logic of Practice\textsuperscript{6} earned him the chair of sociology left vacant at the Collège de France upon Raymond Aron’s retirement, as well as worldwide renown. In the 1980s, the painstaking research conducted over the previous two decades came to fruition in such acclaimed volumes as Language and Symbolic Power, Homo Academicus, The State Nobility and The Rules of Art.\textsuperscript{7}

In the final decade of his life, Pierre Bourdieu extended his inquiries in the sociology of symbolic goods (religion, science, literature, painting and publishing) and tackled new topics, among them social suffering, masculine domination, the historical emergence and contemporary functioning of the bureaucratic state, the social bases and political construction of the economy, journalism and television, and the institutional means for creating a European social policy.\textsuperscript{8} He restated and amplified his theory of practice in Pascalian Meditations,\textsuperscript{9} his most ambitious book, in which he also offers a critique of scholastic reason and a sociological resolution to the antinomy of rationalism and historicism. He engaged in extensive dialogues with neighbouring disciplines and returned to his youthful interest in the study of science.\textsuperscript{10}

During the same period, Bourdieu grew more visibly active on the French and European political scenes, as new forms of social inequality and conflict linked to the rising hegemony of market ideology spread that challenged the traditional goals and organization of the Left and called for novel forms of intellectual intervention. In spite of his congenital shyness and deep-seated reluctance to play the ‘media game’, he was soon given the mantle of master-thinker previously held by Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault, and became one of the world’s foremost public intellectuals and best-known critic of neoliberalism.\textsuperscript{11} This was in keeping with one of the abiding purposes animating his work, namely, to make social science into an effective countervailing symbolic power and the midwife of social forces dedicated to social justice and civic morality.\textsuperscript{12} It explains why his sudden passing in January 2002 triggered a flood of homage from political leaders, trade unionists and activists, scientists and artists from across Europe and myriad messages of grief from around the world (historian Carl Schorske compared its effect on the elite of Europe to that of the death of Voltaire).

Key Issues

With 37 books and some 400 articles oft couched in a difficult technical idiom, Bourdieu’s thought might seem on first look dispersed and daunting, if not intractable. But beneath the bewildering variety of empirical objects he tackled lie a small set of theoretical principles, conceptual devices and scientific-cum-political intentions that give his writings remarkable coherence and continuity. Bourdieu’s sprawling oeuvre is inseparably a science of
human practice in its most diverse manifestations and a critique of domination in both the Kantian and the Marxian senses of the term.

A Science of Practice and a Critique of Domination

Bourdieu’s sociology is critical first of inherited categories and accepted ways of thinking and of the subtle forms of rule wielded by technocrats and intellectuals in the name of culture and rationality. Next, it is critical of established patterns of power and privilege as well as of the politics that supports them. Undergirding this double critique is an explanatory account of the manifold processes whereby the social order masks its arbitrariness and perpetuates itself by extorting from the subordinate practical acceptance of, if not willed consent to, its existing hierarchies. This account of symbolic violence – the subtle imposition of systems of meaning that legitimize and thus solidify structures of inequality – simultaneously points to the social conditions under which these hierarchies can be challenged, transformed, nay overturned.13

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

Secondly, Bourdieu’s scientific thought and practice are genuinely synthetic in that they simultaneously straddle disciplinary, theoretical and methodological divides. Theoretically, they stand at the confluence of intellectual streams that academic traditions have typically construed as discordant or incompatible: Marx and Mauss, Durkheim and Weber, but also the diverse philosophies of Cassirer, Bachelard and Wittgenstein, the phenomenologies of Merleau-Ponty and Schutz, and the theories of language of Saussure, Chomsky and Austin. Methodologically, Bourdieu’s investigations typically combine statistical techniques with direct observation and the exegesis of interaction, discourse and document.14

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

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

Constructing the Sociological Object

One of the main difficulties in understanding Bourdieu resides in the fact that the philosophy of science he draws on is equally alien – and opposed – to the two epistemological traditions that have dominated Anglo-American social science and the German Geisteswissenschaften, namely, positivism and hermeneutics. This conception of science takes after the works of the French school of ‘historical epistemology’ led by philosophers Bachelard and Canguilhem (under whom Bourdieu studied), mathematician Jean Cavaillès and intellectual historian Alexandre Koyré. This school, which anticipated many of the ideas later popularized by Thomas Kuhn’s theory of scientific paradigms, conceives truth as ‘error rectified’ in an endless effort to dissolve the prenotions born of ordinary and scholarly common sense. Equally distant from theoretical formalism as from empiricist operationalism, it teaches that facts are necessarily suffused with theory, that laws are always but ‘momentarily stabilized hypotheses’ (in the words of Canguilhem), and that rational knowledge progresses through a polemical process of collective argumentation and mutual control. And it insists that concepts be characterized not by static definitions but by their actual uses, interrelations and effects in the research enterprise. For science does not mirror the world: it is a material activity of production of ‘purified objects’ – Bachelard also calls them ‘secondary objects’, by opposition to the ‘primary objects’ that populate the realm of everyday experience.

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

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

The third principle followed by Bourdieu is that of methodological reflexivity: the relentless self-questioning of the method itself in the very movement whereby it is implemented. For, just as the three fundamental moments of social scientific reason, rupture, construction and verification, cannot be disassociated, the construction of the object is never accomplished at one stroke. Rather, the dialectic of theory and verification is endlessly reiterated at every step along the research journey. It is only by exercising such ‘surveillance of the third degree’, as Gaston Bachelard christened it, that the sociologist can hope to vanquish the manifold obstacles that stand in the way of a science of society.

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

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

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

To effect this synthesis of objectivism and subjectivism, social physics and social phenomenology, Bourdieu forges an original conceptual arsenal anchored by the notions of ‘habitus’, ‘capital’, ‘field’ and ‘doxa’. Habitus designates the system of durable and transposable **dispositions** through which we perceive, judge and act in the world. These unconscious schemata are acquired through lasting exposure to particular social conditions and conditionings, via the internalization of external constraints and possibilities. This means that they are shared by people subjected to similar experiences even as each person has a unique individual variant of the common matrix (this is why individuals of like nationality, class, gender and so on spontaneously feel ‘at home’ with one another). It implies also that these systems of dispositions are malleable, since they inscribe into the body the evolving influence of the social milieu, but within the limits set by primary (or earlier) experiences, since it is habitus itself which at every moment filters such influence. Thus the layering of the schemata that together compose habitus displays varying degrees of integration (subproletarians typically have a disjointed habitus mirroring their irregular conditions of living, while persons experiencing transnational migration or undergoing great social mobility often possess segmented or conflictive dispositional sets).
As the mediation between past influences and present stimuli, habitus is at once structured, by the patterned social forces that produced it, and structuring: it gives form and coherence to the various activities of an individual across the separate spheres of life. This is why Bourdieu defines it variously as ‘the product of structure, producer of practice, and reproducer of structure’, the ‘unchosen principle of all choices’, or ‘the practice-unifying and practice-generating principle’ that permits ‘regulated improvisation’ and the ‘conductorless orchestration’ of conduct. Habitus is also a principle of both social continuity and discontinuity: continuity because it stores social forces into the individual organism and transports them across time and space; discontinuity because it can be modified through the acquisition of new dispositions and because it can trigger innovation whenever it encounters a social setting discrepant with the setting from which it issues.24

The system of dispositions people acquire depends on the (successive) position(s) they occupy in society, that is, on their particular endowment in capital. For Bourdieu, a capital is any resource effective in a given social arena that enables one to appropriate the specific profits arising out of participation and contest in it.25 Capital comes in three principal species: economic (material and financial assets), cultural (scarce symbolic goods, skills and titles) and social (resources accrued by virtue of membership in a group). A fourth species, symbolic capital, designates the effects of any form of capital when people do not perceive them as such (as when we attribute lofty moral qualities to members of the upper class as a result of their ‘donating’ time and money to charities). The position of any individual, group or institution in social space may thus be charted by two coordinates, the overall volume and the composition of the capital they detain. A third coordinate, variation over time of this volume and composition, records their trajectory through social space and provides invaluable clues as to their habitus by revealing the manner and path through which they reached the position they presently occupy.

But in advanced societies, people do not face an undifferentiated social space. The various spheres of life, art, science, religion, the economy, the law, politics and so on, tend to form distinct microcosms endowed with their own rules, regularities and forms of authority – what Bourdieu calls fields.26 A field is, in the first instance, a structured space of positions, a force field that imposes its specific determinations upon all those who enter it. Thus she who wants to succeed as a scientist has no choice but to acquire the minimal scientific capital required and to abide by the mores and regulations enforced by the scientific milieu of that time and place. In the second instance, a field is an arena of struggle through which agents and institutions seek to preserve or overturn the existing distribution of capital (manifested, in the scientific field, by the ranking of institutions, disciplines, theories, methods, topics, journals, prizes and so on): it is a battlefield wherein the bases of identity and hierarchy are endlessly disputed.
It follows that fields are historical constellations that arise, grow, change shape and sometimes wane or perish over time. In this regard, a third critical property of any field is its degree of autonomy, that is, the capacity it has gained, in the course of its development, to insulate itself from external influences and to uphold its own criteria of evaluation over and against those of neighbouring or intruding fields (scientific originality versus commercial profit or political rectitude, for example). Every field is thus the site of an ongoing clash between those who defend autonomous principles of judgement proper to that field and those who seek to introduce heteronomous standards because they need the support of external forces to improve their dominated position in it. That autonomy is always in danger and can be curtailed is demonstrated by the evolution of the scientific field at the turn of the century, which Bourdieu saw as doubly threatened, by the reassertion of economic interests on the outside and by the ‘internal denigration’ of reason fostered by ‘postmodern rantings’ on the inside.27

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

In lieu of the naive relation between the individual and society, then, Bourdieu substitutes the constructed relationship between habitus and field(s), that is, between ‘history incarnate in bodies’ as dispositions and ‘history objectified in things’ in the form of systems of positions. The crucial part of this equation is ‘relationship between’ because neither habitus nor field has the capacity unilaterally to determine social action. It takes the meeting of disposition and position, the correspondence (or disjuncture) between mental structures and social structures, to generate practice.28 This means that, to explain any social event or pattern, one must inseparably dissect both the social constitution of the agent and the makeup of the particular social universe within which she operates as well as the particular conditions under which they come to encounter and impinge upon each other. Indeed, for the constructivist or ‘genetic structuralism’ advocated by Bourdieu,

the analysis of objective structures – those of the various fields – is inseparable from the analysis of the genesis within biological individuals of the mental structures which are for a part the product of the internalization of these very social structures and from the analysis of the genesis of these structures themselves.29
The concepts of habitus, capital and field are thus internally linked to one another as each achieves its full analytical potency only in tandem with the others. Together they enable Bourdieu to sociologize the notion of doxa elaborated by Edmund Husserl: first, they suggest that the ‘natural attitude of everyday life’, which leads us to take the world for granted, is not an existential invariant, as phenomenologists claim, but hinges on the close fit between the subjective categories of habitus and the objective structures of the social setting in which people act; second, that each relatively autonomous universe develops its own doxa as a set of shared opinions and unquestioned beliefs (such as the sacred devotion to reason among scientists) that bind participants to one another. This conceptual triad also allows us to elucidate cases of reproduction – when social and mental structures are in agreement and reinforce each other – as well as transformation – when discords arise between habitus and field – leading to innovation, crisis and structural change, as evidenced in Bourdieu’s early work on cultural disjuncture and social transformation in war-torn Algeria and rural Béarn as well as in two of his major books, *Distinction* and *Homo Academicus*.

**Taste, Classes and Classification**

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

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

A second major argument of Distinction is that the aesthetic sense exhibited by different groups, and the lifestyles associated with them, define themselves in opposition to one another: taste is first and foremost the distaste of the tastes of others. This is because any cultural practice – wearing tweed or jeans, playing golf or soccer, going to museums or to auto shows, listening to jazz or watching sitcoms and so on – takes its social meaning, and its ability to signify social difference and distance, not from some intrinsic property it has but from its location in a system of like objects and activities. To uncover the social logic of consumption thus requires establishing, not a direct link between a given practice and a particular class category (for example horseback riding and the gentry), but the structural correspondences that obtain between two constellations of relations, the space of lifestyles and the space of social positions occupied by the different groups.

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

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

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

The Imperative of Reflexivity

Collective representations thus fulfil political as well as social functions: in
addition to permitting the ‘logical integration’ of society, as Emile Durkheim
proposed, classification systems serve to secure and naturalize domination.
This puts intellectuals, as professional producers in authoritative visions of
the social world, at the epicentre of the games of symbolic power and requires
us to pay special attention to their position, strategies and civic mission.
For Bourdieu, the sociology of intellectuals is not one specialty among others but an indispensable component of the sociological method. To forge a rigorous science of society, we need to know what constraints bear upon sociologists and how the specific interests they pursue as members of the ‘dominated fraction of the dominant class’ and participants in the ‘intellectual field’ affect the knowledge they produce. This points to the single most distinctive feature of Bourdieu’s social theory, namely, its obsessive insistence on reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to the need continually to turn the instruments of social science back upon the sociologist in an effort to better control the distortions introduced in the construction of the object by three factors. The first and most obvious is the personal identity of the researcher: her gender, class, nationality, ethnicity, education and so on. Her location in the intellectual field, as distinct from social space at large, is the second: it calls for critical dissection of the concepts, methods and problematics she inherits as well as for vigilance towards the censorship exercised by disciplinary and institutional attachments.

Yet the most insidious source of bias in Bourdieu’s view is the fact that, to study society, the sociologist necessarily assumes a contemplative or scholastic stance that causes her to (mis)construe the social world as an interpretive puzzle to be resolved, rather than a mesh of practical tasks to be accomplished in real time and space – which is what it is for social agents. This ‘scholastic fallacy’ leads to disfiguring the situational, adaptive ‘fuzzy logic’ of practice by confounding it with the abstract logic of intellectual ratiocination. In *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu argues that this ‘scholastic bias’ is at the root of grievous errors not only in matters of epistemology but also in aesthetics and ethics. Assuming the point of view of the ‘impartial spectator’, standing above the world rather than being immersed in it, preoccupied by it (in both senses of the term), creates systematic distortions in our conceptions of knowledge, beauty and morality that reinforce each other and have every chance of going unnoticed inasmuch as those who produce and consume these conceptions share the same scholastic posture.

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

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

This becomes fully visible during the student uprising and social crisis of May 1968, that is, in an entropic conjuncture apparently least favourable to the theory propounded by Bourdieu. Yet it is at this very moment that the behaviour and proclamations of the different species of *homo academicus gallicus* turn out to be the most predictable. Bourdieu shows how the ‘structural downclassing’ and collective maladjustment experienced by a generation of students and professors led them to form expectations that the university could no longer fulfil, and triggered a series of local contestations that abruptly spread from the academic field to the field of cultural production to the political field. The ‘rupture of the circle of subjective aspirations and objective chances’ caused diverse agents to follow homologous strategies of subversion based on affinities of dispositions and similarities of position in different fields whose evolution thereby became synchronized. Here again we discern how the same conceptual framework that served to explore reproduction in inquiries of class and taste can be employed to explain situations of rupture and transformation.40

Science, Politics and the Civic Mission of Intellectuals

Bourdieu insists on putting intellectuals under the sociological microscope for yet another reason. In advanced society, wherein elite schools have replaced the church as the pre-eminent instrument of legitimation of social hierarchy, reason and science are routinely invoked by rulers to justify their decisions and policies – and this is especially true of social science and its technical offshoots, public opinion polls, market studies and advertising. Intellectuals must stand up against such misuses of reason because they have inherited from history a civic mission: to promote the ‘corporatism of the universal’.41
Based on a historical analysis of its social genesis from the Enlightenment to the Dreyfus affair, Bourdieu argues that the intellectual is a ‘paradoxical, bi-dimensional, being’ composed by the unstable but necessary coupling of autonomy and engagement: she is invested with a specific authority, granted by virtue of the hard-won independence of the intellectual field from economic and political powers; and she puts this specific authority at the service of the collectivity by investing it in political debates. Contrary to the claims of both positivism and critical theory, the autonomy of science and the engagement of the scientist are not antithetical but complementary; the former is the necessary condition for the latter. It is because she has gained recognition in the struggles of the scientific or artistic field that the intellectual can claim and exercise the right to intervene in the public sphere on matters for which she has competency. What is more, to attain its maximum efficacy, such contribution must take a collective form: for scientific autonomy cannot be secured except by the joint mobilization of all scientists against the intrusion of external powers.

Bourdieu’s own political interventions have typically assumed an indirect (or sublimated) form.42 His major scientific works have repeatedly sought to expand or alter the parameters of public discussion by debunking current social myths – be it school meritocracy, the innateness of taste, or the rationality of technocratic rule – and by spotlighting social facts and trends that belie the official vision of reality. The collective research undertaking that culminated in the book The Weight of the World is exemplary in this regard.43 The avowed aim of this 1,000-page ethnographic study of social suffering in contemporary France was not only to demonstrate the potency of a distinctive kind of socioanalysis. It was also to circumvent the censorship of the political field and to compel party leaders and policy makers to acknowledge new forms of inequality and misery rendered invisible by established instruments of collective voice and claims-making.44

By the 1990s, however, Bourdieu felt the need to intervene directly in the political arena because he held that we were witnessing a ‘conservative revolution of a new type which claims the mantle of progress, reason, and science (in particular economics) to justify restoration and which thereby tries to reject progressive thinking and action on the side of archaism’.45 In his eyes, the recent fin de siècle was pregnant with the possibility of immense social regression: ‘The peoples of Europe today are facing a turning point in their history because the gains of several centuries of social struggles, of intellectual and political battles for the dignity of workers and citizens, are being directly threatened’ by the spread of a market ideology that – like all ruling ideologies – presents itself as the end of ideology and the inevitable end point of history.

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

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

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

Bourdieu’s major writings are referenced in the chapter, and they are the best place to start, especially the two collections *In Other Words* and *Practical Reasons*. The dialogical format of Bourdieu and Wacquant makes their systematic dissection of key concepts, methological principles and core inquiries particularly accessible. Brubaker and Thompson provide astute theoretical overviews of Bourdieu through his theories of class, language and politics. Jurt, Boschetti and Charle spotlight the use of the concept of field and the place of intellectuals in monographic, historical and comparative perspectives. Boltanski and Lenoir exemplify Bourdieu’s approach to symbolic power and group-making by tracing the fabrication of social collectives in the case of the middle classes and the family. Eyal, Szelenyi and Townsley extend it to the ruling elites of Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism and Ooms to caste hierarchy in feudal Japan. Sayad’s study of the suffering of Algerian immigrants in France and Wacquant’s ‘carnal ethnography’ of prizefighters in Chicago’s ghetto delve into the production of social agents and uncover the sensual and moral dimensions of habitus.

NOTES


Chapter 16 Pierre Bourdieu


2. P. Bourdieu, *The Ball of Bachelors: The Crisis of Peasant Society in Béarn*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002/2007. 'From the outset, I had designed this research on my own region of origin as a kind of epistemological experiment: to analyze as an anthropologist, in a familiar universe ... the matrimonial practices that I had studied in a far-away universe, Algerian society, was to give myself the opportunity to objectivize the act of objectivation and the objectivizing subject' (Bourdieu, 'From rules to strategies', *Cultural Anthropology*, 1–1 (1985/1986): 110–120 (reprinted in *In OtherWords*, 1994 rev. ed.) 1985/1986: 112). For a discussion of the pivotal role of this ‘paired ethnography’ of Kabylia and Béarn in the formation of Bourdieu’s intellectual project and theory as well as key texts from that period, see the special issue of *Ethnography* (2004) on ‘Pierre Bourdieu in the Field’, 4(4).

3. P. Bourdieu recalls that the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss ‘imposed upon a whole generation a new manner of conceiving of intellectual activity’ that held out the hope of ‘reconciling theoretical with practical intentions, the scientific vocation with the ethical or political vocation.’ (*The Logic of Practice*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1980/1990: 8).


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


13. Bourdieu (Masculine Domination, op. cit.) sees masculine domination as the paradigm of symbolic violence, 'this soft violence, indetectable and invisible to its very victims, which is wielded essentially through purely symbolic channels or, more precisely, through recognition and misrecognition, or even through sentiment', insofar as women perceive themselves through a web of homological categories that operate to naturalize their subordinate relations to men. The family, the church, the school, and the state (as 'public patriarchy') work in tandem to effect the 'historical labor of dehistoricization' that effaces the arbitrariness of the masculine vision of the world inculcated to men and women alike.

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


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

17. P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Passeron and J.-C. Chamboredon The Craft of Sociology: Epistemological Preliminaries, Berlin: Aldine de Gruyter, 1968/1979. This is particularly visible in the selection of texts in the philosophy of science that make up the second part of the book and illustrate its core propositions: of the 45 selections, five are by Bachelard and four by Canguilhem (as against six by Durkheim, three by Weber and two by Marx).


22. Habitus is an old philosophical concept, used intermittently by Aristotle (under the term hēxis), Thomas Aquinas, Hegel, Weber, Durkheim, Mauss and Husserl, among others. Bourdieu retrieved it in a 1967 reinterpretation of art historian Erwin Panofsky's analysis of the connection between scholastic thought and gothic architecture in the medieval era and refined it afterwards, both empirically and theor-
ically, in each of his major works. His most sophisticated explication of the concept is in *Pascalian Meditations* (op. cit., esp. 131–46 and 208–37).

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


26. The concept of field (*champ*) was coined by Bourdieu in the mid-1960s for purposes of empirical inquiry into the historical genesis and transformation of the worlds of art and literature. It was later extensively modified and elaborated, by Bourdieu and his associates, in the course of studies of the intellectual, philosophical, scientific, religious, academic, poetic, publishing, political, juridical, economic, sporting, bureaucratic and journalistic fields. The most accessible and compact source on the uses and effects of the concept is the collection of essays entitled *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) (esp. Part II, ‘Flaubert and the French literary field’).


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


35. This insistence finds a paradigmatic (and dramatic) illustration in Bourdieu’s inaugural lecture at the Collège de France. In this ‘Lecture on the lecture’, the
freshly consecrated professor dissects ‘the act of delegation whereby the new master is authorized to speak with authority’ so as to emphasize this fundamental property of sociology as he conceives it: ‘Every proposition that this science formulates can and must apply to the subject who produces it’ (Bourdieu, *Leçon sur la leçon*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit (reprinted as closing chapter in 1987/1991) 1982, p. 8). It is also actualized in Bourdieu’s last lecture course at the Collège de France, in which he trained his theory of practice on his own social and intellectual making and in the ‘outline of a self-socioanalysis’ that grew out of it (Bourdieu, *Sketch for a Self Socioanalysis*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004/2007).

37. Bourdieu *Pascalian Meditations*, op. cit.
40. The theory of ‘symbolic revolution’ adumbrated in the closing chapter of *Homo Academicus* is fully developed in *The Rules of Art* (op. cit.), which contains both an account of the historical invention of the institution of modern literature and a sociological theory of intellectual innovation that does away with the charismatic notion of ‘genius’ once and for all by elucidating it.
42. For a discussion of Bourdieu’s personal politics, his analyses of political institutions, and his working theory of democratic politics and their implication for contemporary civic struggles, see the essays in Wacquant (*Pierre Bourdieu and Democratic Politics*, op. cit.).
44. The book had an immediate impact unmatched by any social science book in recent memory: it sold over 100,000 copies in four months and stood atop the bestseller list for months; it was extensively discussed in political circles and popular magazines alike (conservative Prime Minister Balladur publicly instructed his Cabinet members to read it); it was later adapted for the stage and is widely used by school teachers, social workers and grass-roots activists.

Chapter 17 Michel Foucault

1. Foucault’s Chair at the College de France was given the special title of Chair in the History of Systems of Thought. Foucault’s major books are listed in the Bibliography. In addition, the following books are particularly useful introductions: J. Rajchman, *Michel Foucault and the Freedom of Philosophy*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985; B. Smart, *Michel Foucault*, Chichester: Ellis Horwood, 1985; and A. Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*, London: Routledge, 1990.
Key Sociological Thinkers

Second Edition

Edited by
Rob Stones

palgrave
macmillan
Contents

Notes on Contributors ix
Acknowledgements xvi
Introduction Rob Stones (University of Essex) 1
How to Use This Book 37
Seeing Things Differently: An Alternative Contents Page 43
List of Glossary Boxes 45

PART I 47
Contents 47
1 Karl Marx 49
Bob Jessop (University of Lancaster)
2 Max Weber 63
Lawrence A. Scaff (Wayne State University)
3 Emile Durkheim 76
Whitney Pope (Indiana University)
4 Georg Simmel 90
Patrick Watier (University of Strasbourg)
5 Herbert Blumer 106
Ken Plummer (University of Essex)
6 Theodor Adorno 120
Maggie O’Neill (University of Loughborough)
7 Talcott Parsons 136
Robert Holton (Trinity College Dublin)

PART II 149
Contents 149
8 Robert K. Merton 151
Alan Sica (Pennsylvania State University)
9 Norbert Elias 168
Jason Hughes (Brunel University, London)
10 Erving Goffman
Robin Williams (University of Durham) 184

11 David Lockwood
Nicos Mouzelis (London School of Economics) 197

12 Harold Garfinkel
John Heritage (University of California, Los Angeles) 209

13 Louis Althusser
Ted Benton (University of Essex) 224

14 Nancy J. Chodorow
Karin A. Martin (University of Michigan) 239

PART III 249

Contents 249

15 Jürgen Habermas
William Outhwaite (University of Newcastle upon Tyne) 251

16 Pierre Bourdieu
Loïc Wacquant (University of California, Berkeley, and Centre de sociologie européenne, Paris) 261

17 Michel Foucault
Lawrence Barth (Architectural Association, UK) 278

18 Stuart Hall
Michèle Barrett (City University, London) 293

19 Dorothy E. Smith
Karin Widerberg (University of Oslo) 311

20 Anthony Giddens
Ira J. Cohen (Rutgers University) 323

21 Michael Mann
Ralph Schroeder (University of Oxford) 338

22 Arlie Russell Hochschild
Simon Williams (University of Warwick) 355

23 Zygmunt Bauman
Tony Blackshaw (Sheffield Hallam University) 368

Notes 383

Bibliography 429

Index 460
KEY SOCIOLOGICAL THINKERS
Second Edition
Edited by Rob Stones
'Broad-minded in the range of thinkers represented and in the thoughtful ways each author explores the work of a major theorist. With creative integration the book achieves a degree of coherence rare in an edited collection. With jargon kept at bay, the language is direct and, at times, even charming. Students of all ranks, from undergraduate to full professor, will learn much and find reason to ponder even more.' – Harvey Molotch, Professor of Sociology and Metropolitan Studies, New York University

The second edition of this popular and established text provides a comprehensive guide to 23 of the most influential thinkers in sociology. Written by leading academics in the field, Key Sociological Thinkers 2e provides a clear and contextualized introduction to classical and contemporary theory.

Each chapter offers an insightful assessment of a different theorist, exploring their lives, works and legacies. Drawing upon examples from the everyday world, an innovative ‘Seeing Things Differently’ section, in every chapter, demonstrates how these theoretical ideas can be used to illuminate aspects of social life in new ways.

Included in this new edition:

- Four new chapters, looking at Theodor Adorno, Michael Mann, Dorothy Smith and Zygmunt Bauman
- Chapter updates on recent developments
- An important new introduction
- Three types of contents page to provide easy navigation of the text
- Useful glossary boxes throughout, with their own dedicated contents page, to highlight and explain complex theoretical ideas.

Key Sociological Thinkers 2e provides a stimulating overview of the best of sociological thought, from Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Georg Simmel to Nancy Chodorow, Michel Foucault and Anthony Giddens. It continues to be an essential text for all students of sociological theory.

Rob Stones is Professor of Sociology at the University of Essex. His previous publications include Sociological Reasoning (1996) and Structuration Theory (2005). He is the editor of two book series, Traditions in Social Theory and the forthcoming Themes in Social Theory (Palgrave Macmillan).