

# Practice and symbolic power in Bourdieu: The view from Berkeley

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## Abstract

In 2014–2015, Aksu Akçaoğlu was a visiting scholar in the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, where he had come to work with Loïc Wacquant on his research on “the conservative habitus” in contemporary Turkey (with the support of the TÜBİTAK Science Program). In this dialogue, he invites Wacquant to explicate the philosophy and pedagogy of his celebrated Berkeley seminar on Pierre Bourdieu. This provides an opportunity to revisit key conceptual nodes in Bourdieu’s work, to spotlight its anti-theoreticist cast as well as the influences of Bachelard and Cassirer; to clarify the relationships between social space, field, and symbolic power; and to warn against the seductions of “speaking Bourdieuese.”

## Keywords

Bourdieu, practice, social space, symbolic power, anti-theoreticism, epistemological vigilance, the state as supreme fetish, research pedagogy

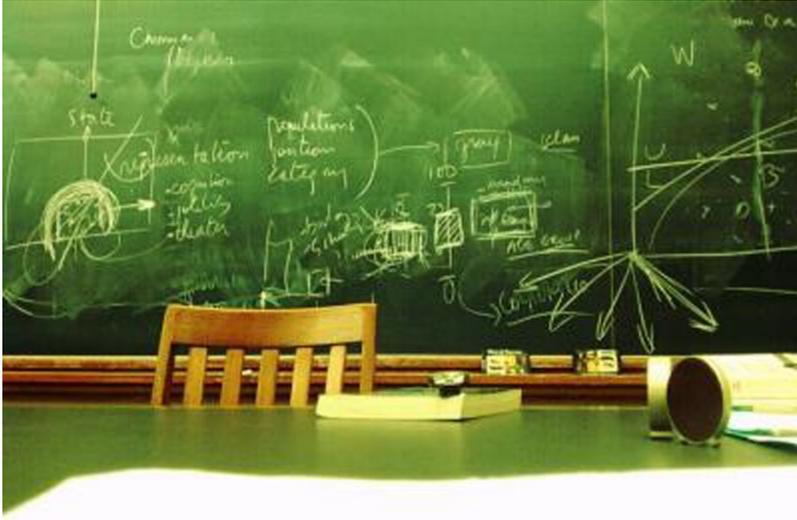
*The theme of this year’s “Bourdieu Boot Camp” at Berkeley was Practice and Symbolic Power in Bourdieu. Why did you choose this theme?*

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It is the generic title for SOC202B, a weekly seminar in advanced social theory, to which my students affectionately gave this military nickname because of the unusual intensity of the labor it requires: it is an accelerated immersion program in which you have to swallow, masticate, and digest large volumes of Bourdieu's writings organized chronologically and topically, covering the full span of his career, and essentially do the work of 15 years of methodical studying in a short 15 weeks. When you sign up, you commit yourself to reading, writing, eating, drinking, sleeping, dreaming, discussing, and thinking with Bourdieu round the clock 5 days a week for 4 months. To grasp the distinctive mental *modus operandi* of any great thinker, whether Bourdieu, Hannah Arendt, or Ibn Khaldun, you have to get deeply entangled with her intellectual grid and go from familiarity to obsession to fusion and back. It takes a certain level of deliberate devotion which this seminar is designed to sustain. The point is not to convert you (social theory is not theology) but to make you conversant in a particular way of thinking that you can appropriate and adapt to your own analytic needs down the road.

The title captures the two central conceptual nodes of Bourdieu's lifework. The first is the move *from structure to practice* construed as whatever people do, think, or feel in their ordinary world. This move reintroduced the knowing, active, and skilled agent (that is the primary task of the concept of habitus, which Bourdieu retrieved and began to hone in the 1960s) while retaining the relational mode of thinking that is the strength of structuralist approaches across the social sciences, from Marx, Durkheim, and Freud onwards. This makes Bourdieu a kind of anti-structuralist structuralist. The book that signals this dialectical rupture with structuralism is *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1972, in the French original), which marks the official "coming out" of Bourdieu from under Claude Lévi-Strauss' shadow. (On Bourdieu's relation to the pope of neo-Saussurian structuralism, I recommend the pointed monograph of Antoine Lantier, *La Science des institutions impures. Bourdieu critique de Lévi-Strauss* [2010]).

The second node is the one concept that, in my view, is epicentral and truly original to Bourdieu: *symbolic power*, the capacity for consequential categorization, the ability to make the world, to preserve or change it, by fashioning and diffusing symbolic frames, collective instruments of cognitive construction of reality. It is more capacious, multifaceted, ramifying, and powerful than habitus, capital, and field put together and squared (I am always puzzled, to put it mildly, when I come across “overviews” of Bourdieu that fail to even mention the notion). It anchors the triad of *cognition-recognition-misrecognition* that captures Bourdieu’s view of the social agent as a “symbolic animal,” to use the language of Ernst Cassirer, who is the major inspiration behind Bourdieu’s thinking on this front (here, the key book to ponder is Cassirer’s majestic *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* [1944]), but an embodied and embedded agent who exists first and last in the eyes of others, via a recursive “game of mirrors” in which social fictions becomes reality insofar as they rest on shared categories and common beliefs that ground consonant action. Symbolic capital also captures Bourdieu’s notion that power is never so efficient (and dangerous) as when it disguises itself and gets paradoxically activated by the subordinate, so that it proceeds via a cognitive relationship of assent opaque to itself obviating the expenditure of material suasion. Symbolic violence is that effortless force that molds the world via communication without us even noticing it; it tricks dominant and dominated alike, as in *Masculine domination* (Bourdieu, 2001 [1998]).

Symbolic power is a concept that Bourdieu elaborates over the full spectrum of his scientific life, from his youthful investigations into honor in Kabylia and kinship in Béarn to his works on art, education, and social suffering, to his later forays into politics and return to science itself. It is expressed most compactly in the sociological pragmatics of *Language and Symbolic Power* (Bourdieu, 1982a) and in *Pascalian Meditations* (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]). Its best illustration is found in his lecture course *On the State* (Bourdieu, 2014 [2012]) as “paramount symbolic power,” “supreme fetish,” and “warrant of all fetishes.” To understand that notion is an interminable but exhilarating journey; to master it is tantamount to spanning and mastering the totality of Bourdieu’s work.

*Based on taking it, I feel that the seminar was designed to create the social conditions of production of a distinct sociological habitus. I remember your instructions to participants on the first day setting out the triadic mandate to “read-write-discuss” constantly, not only during the 3-hour afternoon seminar itself but through the 5-page analytic memos everyone has to craft and share with all others in advance of each meeting. These three activities turned out to be intricately linked throughout the semester, and then again fused into the dossier participants prepare for the end of the semester. Can we speak, then, of the making of a sociological habitus and, if so, what is the role of the university, professors, students, and courses in this process?*

Your intuition is correct: in this seminar, we try, individually and collectively, to battle the scholastic bias inherent in the academic situation of the classroom to impart a *generative disposition toward theory as pragmatic means for the fabrication of sociological objects*. Bourdieu is a paradoxical thinker because he is viscerally and epistemologically an *anti-theoreticist social theorist* – viscerally from his class and ethnic upbringing in an isolated rural village of Southwestern France, worlds removed from the sheltered

experience of *skholé* in which scholars revel, epistemologically from the teachings of his mentor Georges Canguilhem, who stressed that scientific reason resides in the historical practices of scientists at work (the pivotal text on this is Canguilhem's arcane but bracing *La Formation du concept de réflexe au 17<sup>e</sup> et au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle* [1955]). This is something that is difficult to detect, understand, and absorb because it goes against the grain of what we learn in school, that social theorists are a special and higher breed and that the founding minds of the discipline are a gaggle of so-called "theorists." We are taught to approach the texts of the classical sociologists, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, Du Bois, whomever, as sacred scriptures to be revered and so we are wont to approach Bourdieu in this mode. This is a category mistake and a huge obstacle to understanding his work. The proper way to approach a text by Bourdieu's is as poacher of a "how-to handbook" to formulate smart scientific questions and to do the difficult handywork needed to resolve them empirically.

Bourdieu was insistent that he did not "do theory." He constantly warns us against the seductions of pure conceptual disquisition and the dangers of "theorizing," which so easily veers into scholasticism. (Around 1989, he turned down an invitation by Jeffrey Alexander, apostle of neo-functionalism, to hold a sort of "world summit" of social theory with Jürgen Habermas, simply because that agenda just did not make sense to him, to say nothing of the casting.) So the seminar strives to pay attention to how Bourdieu forges and uses concepts, *what he does with them and what he makes them do*, rather than how he defines them or whom he derives them from. Knowing the 13 – or is it 26? – different definitions of habitus one can quickly cull from texts spanning nearly a half-century tells you little about when, why, and how to deploy the notion to gear in the *genetic mode of thinking* that it encapsulates. (For an elaboration on this point, see my "Concise Genealogy and Anatomy of Habitus," Wacquant, 2016.)

This approach creates an unavoidable tension at the fulcrum of the seminar because to read Bourdieu fruitfully, as with every complex and multilayered author, you do need to know the texts – their intent and contents, composition, backgrounds, resonances, and mutual implications. In the case of Bourdieu, this is particularly challenging, first, because he is a very self-conscious and disciplined writer who, in every inquiry, tacitly calls on the results of myriad other parallel investigations (his sociology of religion is the permanent unseen springboard to his sociology of art, his sociology of science undergirds his sociology of politics, etc.). Second, Bourdieu's key texts always entail a subterranean dialogue with the philosophers who shaped him before he converted to social science: *Distinction* is a silent but brutal revision of Kant's third critique of judgment as well as an oblique engagement with Hume, whom he read fondly in his youth during a hitch-hiking tour of England (that Kant's philosophy, including his ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics, grew out of a frontal confrontation with Hume is demonstrated by Paul Guyer, *Knowledge, Reason, and Taste: Kant's Response to Hume*, 2008). *Pascalian Meditations* is a nod not just to Husserl (and his *Cartesian Meditations*) but, through him, to the non-dualistic wing of seventeenth-century rationalism – especially the monism of Spinoza and the pluralism of Leibniz – that Bourdieu sees himself extending.

So you must pay close attention to the texts without for that fetishizing the words of the author and practice a sort of *reverse reading*, backtracking continually from the substantive results and propositional arguments on the page to the research design and

operations that underlay them so as to grasp the mode of thinking that stitches them together. To help achieve that, we read early and late investigations on the same question (Bourdieu's entire *oeuvre* is informed by this "return and reformulate" strategy) and pair abstract writings with concrete sociological experiments. For instance, to explicate the notion of reflexivity, we read Bourdieu's regional elaboration of historical rationalism as working epistemology in the first one hundred pages of *The Craft of Sociology* (Bourdieu, 1991 [1968]) alongside with his practical testing of the sociological gaze in the first chapter of *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu, (1988 [1984]), "A Book for Burning"). We preface diving into Bourdieu's reconstruction of the historical invention of the aesthetic gaze in *The Rules of Art* (Bourdieu, 1996 [1992]) with his pilot study of "The Peasant and Photography" (Bourdieu and Bourdieu, 2004 [1965]) in his home village of Béarn, which served as a trial balloon for grounding the critique of the universalist fallacy of Kantian aesthetics.

It is paradoxical to use a scholastic format to battle scholasticism but, when everyone plays their part and energetically grapples with the material, the seminar becomes like a pedagogical locomotive that carries its own tracks: it resolves difficulties as it makes them spring forth. Beyond the specifics of Bourdieu research, I wish to teach a more general attitude toward sociological work that I learned from him, which is best summed up by Gaston Bachelard's notion of *epistemological vigilance* (or "intellectual superego to the third degree," as laid out in his book *Le Rationalisme appliqué* [1949]): know where your problems come from, pose your own questions, forge robust analytic constructs instead of borrowing the soft and spongy notions of common sense (including scholarly common sense), methodically question your methods, and adopt a proactive stance when it comes to data production. (Note that I do not say data "collection," which is a patent absurdity: data are *fabricated* by asking a rigorous question in an empirical design; a datum does not exist as such by itself, to be "harvested" in the manner of starfish stranded on a beach.) *Never accept a prefabricated object*, that is the first commandment that every sociologist should live by.

Now, as to the role of universities, unfortunately they have become major obstacles to the production and transmission of scientific dispositions as they get reorganized as "lean and mean" skills factories suited to short-term market demand under the press of constant budgetary austerity. Public universities in particular are a shell of what they used to be only two decades ago. We do whatever research and teaching we can in spite of the university, not thanks to it. In a seminar, in any case, the students do the brunt of the work, individually or collectively. To run a seminar is like conducting an amateur orchestra: I gesticulate to give the tempo, but it is up to the participants to produce the sociological music.

*There is the added challenge of managing the disparate levels of knowledge and expectations of participants, including scholars and doctoral students like me, coming from various foreign countries, who have different if not opposite visions of Bourdieu shaped by the varied national appropriations of his work.*

Indeed, the seminar attracts researchers from across the disciplines and the continents who come to it with their own *prefabricated images of Bourdieu*, more often than not

seriously truncated: Bourdieu the “reproduction theorist,” when his first three books were about the cataclysmic transformation of a colonial society at war; Bourdieu who “ignores agency,” when the very purpose of habitus is to repatriate the inventive agent at the heart of social analysis; Bourdieu who “didn’t theorize the linkages between fields” when one of his most distinctive concepts, field of power, is designed especially for that; or Bourdieu who is “blind to ethnicity,” when he wrote extensively on cultural gradations of (dis)honor and was himself an “ethnic” in French society, and so on. And the Turkish Bourdieu is not the Brazilian Bourdieu is not the Norwegian Bourdieu, or the French Bourdieu for that matter: each country has evolved its own selective version suited to the structure and history of its intellectual field (according to principles enunciated by Bourdieu in his discussion of “The Social Conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas,” (Bourdieu 1999 [1990])).

Bachelard teaches us that scientific knowledge proceeds, not by filling a void but by breaking with “spontaneous knowledge” that is already there, and it is no different when it comes to classical works of sociology as they travel across borders. The first few sessions of the seminar suffice to dispel the *fictions of Bourdieu* that paradoxically drew people to it in the first place. It is fun to do and it is easily done by adopting toward his work – treated as a social and scientific fact – the *genetic perspective* Bourdieu urges us to adopt toward any social reality.

In addition to cardboard pictures, one also has to deal with the *strong emotions, positive or negative, that Bourdieu’s work invariably elicits*, which fasten either on the objects he examines, the models he proposes of them, or on the more general intellectual posture he stipulates. Bourdieu has a knack for pulling his readers deep into his analyses, whether by analogy or homology, and to make them feel personally implicated in them. His sociology is a *socioanalysis* in the sense that it unveils the social unconscious, lodged in bodies and institutions, that governs us all and thence it fosters the “return of the repressed.” (This is most visible in *The Weight of the World*, [1993] 1999, and in Bourdieu’s dissection of the three social microcosms that shaped him: the village society of Béarn in which he grew up, in *The Ball of Bachelors*, 2006 [2002]; the academic system through which he rose, in *Homo Academicus*, 1988 [1984]; and the philosophical institution from which he broke, in *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, 1994 [1988], which is a manner of exorcism of the philosopher he could have become).

This return produces an effect of revelation that can be elating and even liberating: it was not uncommon, at the end of his public lectures, for people to come up to thank Bourdieu for having torn the veil of illusions they lived wrapped in and altered their existence. But it can also be taxing or suffocating if you are not prepared for it. Bourdieu makes people spring forth or squirm, shriek or shrivel; he rarely leaves them indifferent. His seemingly most abstract arguments always carry a Horacian *de te fabula narratur* rider that explains the polarized reactions they trigger, tending toward seduction or revulsion, with little in between. The task of the seminar is to transition from this confused “understanding of the heart” to a rational grasp of the argument, the concepts it involves and the epistemological principles that undergird it.

Bourdieu is especially threatening to scholars who have *rigid mental structures* and construe social inquiry as the reflex application of mechanical formulas prescribed by an all-encompassing theoretical creed – and on this front, the last Marxists vie hard with the

surviving Parsonians. (A distinguished Berkeley colleague who took my seminar – and wanted to take it a second time, but I would not allow it – has traveled round the globe delivering a lecture with the furiously Freudian title, “Who is Afraid of Pierre Bourdieu?”) To grasp and then implement his mode of reasoning, you have to renounce the sacralization of thinkers and become something of an *intellectual gymnast*. You must learn to bend and twist in unusual if not perilous theoretical positions: take Marcel Mauss to Max Weber, cross-breed Merleau-Ponty’s “body proper” with Jean-Pierre Changeux’s “neuronal man,” get Roman Jakobson and John Austin to row on the same linguistic boat, delve into serious mathematical statistics and yet heed the social insights nested in the literary innovations of a Virginia Woolf or a Thomas Bernhard. (For illustration, contrast Bourdieu’s quantitative dissection of the “Conservative Revolution in Publishing” 2008 [1999] with the self-reflexive reading of *Emily Dickinson* in which he reveals William Faulkner to be a manner of literary ethnomethodologist in *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu 1996 [1992].) Bourdieu is never shy to borrow notions and propositions from dispersed if not opposed theoretical traditions, but there is a reason to the madness: his principled theoretical eclecticism is bounded by his hard-wired commitment to what I call the “three Rs” of Bourdieu – a *rationalist* epistemology, a *relational* ontology, and a *reflexive* methodology that continually questions itself in the very movement whereby it is employed.

Once you have dealt with images and emotions, you still have to tackle the question of Bourdieu’s language. Here, the first order of business is to show that Bourdieu’s conceptual idiolect and spiraling style are deployed deliberately to prevent the interference of folk notions and common sense reasoning with analytic argumentation. The second is to forewarn against the *seductions of speaking Bourdieuse*: today journals across the social sciences and humanities are unleashing a tsunami of research invoking Bourdieu, but the vast majority of these publications merely overlay a thin veneer of Bourdieusounding rhetoric on research designs and results that have no connection to his sociology. (Here is a simple test to verify this: take a pen and strike out every mention of “habitus, capital and field”: if nothing is lost by deleting them, it means that nothing was gained by trotting them out, save for riding the intellectual fad of the moment.) *A contrario*, when Bourdieu’s concepts and analytic principles guide concrete research operations, you are immediately in a position to articulate new questions and paint a novel empirical landscape, as Tom Medvez (2012) does in his model inquiry into the rise of *Think Tanks in America*, which pierces through the screen of elite and policy studies to grasp the intrinsic ambiguity of this organizational animal and diagnose its turbid role in the US field of power.

*Against conventional views of Bourdieu anchored by the triad of “habitus, capital, and field,” you put forth the duet of “social space and symbolic power” as the root concepts organizing his work. You argue that the shift from the triad to the duet not only clears up common mistakes but also sheds light on the inner logic of Bourdieu’s project. Can you explain what is entailed in this shift?*

Over a period of 3 years, I prepared a new, expanded, corrected, and updated edition of *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) covering the last decade of Bourdieu’s production, which was his most prolific. (The trigger was the need

to retranslate the book into French in its entirety, which I did with the expert collaboration of Etienne Ollion: this new version would not exist if not for his contribution.) For that, I read bushels of dispersed, obscure, seemingly minor texts of Bourdieu, many of them not even listed in his official bibliography, which turned out to offer novel insights into his intentions and into the inner architecture of his work. I also wrote an extended essay setting out two complementary reading itineraries through the totality of his corpus, all 700-plus pieces. The first is a *genetic path* retracing the development of his framework in five stages; the second is an *analytic path* clarifying the forging and purpose of the seven key concepts (*habitus*, capital, field, social space, symbolic power, *doxa*, reflexivity) that anchor Bourdieu's distinctive way of thinking.

Together with combing through the transcripts of his seminars and lecture courses at the Collège de France and the thousands of pages of correspondence we exchanged to write the *Invitation* with the benefit of analytic hindsight, this totally transformed my understanding of Bourdieu. It was like piercing through a screen I did not even know was there to discover new beacons to navigate the ocean of his work. The fundamentally anti-theoreticist cast of Bourdieu's thought jumped at me like never before; the paramount influence of Cassirer became glaring (on the side of epistemology, he was the German structural counterpart to Bachelard for the Marburg school); the methodical use of his Béarn village as an experimental sill to test in miniature big research undertakings also emerged, and many other novel features such as the multiscalar inner makeup of the field of power and the tacit theory of symbolic revolutionaries running through his scattered essays on Flaubert, Heidegger, Baudelaire, Beethoven, and Manet.

But, most important, it became transparent to me that *social space is the mother-category*, the generic concept from which logically derives the *specific concept of field*, as a specialized social space arising when a domain of action and authority becomes sufficiently demarcated, autonomized, and monopolized. Realizing that social space (and not field) is the general construct that "faces" the concepts of *habitus* and capital to generate practice clears up recurrent difficulties and dissolves myriad false problems. First, it reminds us that fields are relatively *rare historical animals* that exist only in certain realms of activity and only in advanced social formations that have undergone sufficient differentiation – it is not for nothing that Bourdieu keeps invoking the Durkheimian designation of *differentiated societies*, instead of modern, capitalist, or postindustrial societies. (Craig Calhoun [1993] spotlighted the narrow historicity of fields in his astute contribution to *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, but he saw it as an unresolved tension in the theory of practice, rather than detect a misspecification of the relationship between field and social space.) For instance, there are no fields in colonial Kabylia because forms of capital are not disentangled and sorted out into distinctive institutional tracks. Accordingly, Bourdieu does not use the term in his revisit of his youthful fieldwork in *Le Sens pratique (The Logic of Practice)*, published in 1980 [1990], a full decade after he produced his first robust elaboration of field with the article on the "Structure and Genesis of the Religious Field," 1971 [1991], which provides a template for all the other fields).

The vast majority of social action unfolds in social spaces that are just that, social spaces, that is, multidimensional distributions of socially efficient properties (capitals) stipulating a set of patterned positions from which one can intelligibly predict strategies.

But they are not fields because they have no institutionalized boundaries, no barriers to entry and no specialists in the elaboration of a distinctive source of authority and sociodicy. This revision allows us to avoid the comical multiplication of fields and forms of capital *ad infinitum* – hardly a month goes by without some scholar proposing a new species! Thus there is no “sexual field” (*pace* Illouz, 2012; Green, 2013) and no “racial field” (sorry for Matt Desmond and Mustafa Emirbayer, 2015) for the simple reason that neither sex nor race as denegated ethnicity are monopolized by a nexus of distinct institutions and agents who elaborate them for the consumption by others, as priests do for the laity or politicians for voters. Indeed, their sociological importance resides precisely in the fact that they cut across microcosms and pattern social space at large through the formation of habitus: they are principles of social vision and division that have *not been corralled into fields*. More broadly, the promotion of social space as anchor category is coterminous with Bourdieu’s reformulation of question of group-making *after Distinction* (which he considered crude and obsolete on this front) that drops the presumption of the existence of classes to pave the way for a radically historicist ontology of social collectives (this argument is made in full in my article “Symbolic Power and Group-Making” [Wacquant 2013], which applies to all manners of collectives, ethnic, national, religious, sexual, etc.).

Part of the confusion around the relationship of field and social space was sown by Bourdieu himself in two ways. First, he developed the narrower notion of field around 1968–1977, before he hit upon and fully elaborated the broader category of social space that encompasses it from 1975 to 1985 and onwards. But that is not surprising given that Bourdieu honed all his concepts for purposes of particular empirical inquiries, as he went from research project to research project, and not as part of some grandiose Parsonian meta-vision of a preconceived set of analytic categories. Second, Bourdieu had to discover, learn, and adapt Jean-Paul Benzécri’s techniques of multiple correspondence analysis to operationalize the notion of social space and thence machine it conceptually (Lebaron and Leroux [2015] show this inadvertently in *La Méthodologie de Pierre Bourdieu en action*). Third, Bourdieu is often quite sloppy in his own use of the two terms, even after he has articulated social space: he sometimes talks of a social field, or of the family as a field, and of various settings that mix plain social space with the intersection of multiple fields as fields, which they are not. *Stricto sensu*, one can argue also that the field of power, so-called, is really not a field (it is not the locus of concentration and distribution of a distinctive species of capital, it does not have a specific *nomos*, and it does not secrete a set of distinctive cognitive constructs, etc.) but a *meta-field* as a multilayered kind of social space.

Now, about the conceptual triad of “habitus, capital and field,” it becomes easy to show that it offers at best an incoherent and incomplete condensation of Bourdieu’s thought (*non obstante* Bourdieu’s own occasional usage of it for pedagogical purposes): capital and field are redundant since a field is nothing other than a space of concentration of capital; habitus itself is capital embodied and, from another angle, can be understood as the somatization of cognitive and cathectic categories, that is, as the imprinting of symbolic power onto the socialized organism. If you carry out the semantic equivalent of smallest space analysis à la Guttman and Lingoes on Bourdieu’s framework, you find that the duet of *social space and symbolic power* suffices to regenerate all the other concepts he uses and thence to capture all manners of phenomena. Their articulation

constitutes the most parsimonious and irreducible conceptual core of his theory of practice. This is why it will be the title of the next “Bourdieu Boot Camp” at Berkeley.

*You are one of the editors of Bourdieu's (2014 [2012]) latest book On the State. In the special colloquium organized by the Berkeley Sociology Department to mark the release of the English version of the book in March of 2015, you made connections between this lecture course and touchstone works by Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. Can you tell us what makes this book so special?*

First, a correction: I was not one of the editors of the Collège de France course on the state. The chief editor was Bourdieu's last doctoral student, Franck Poupeau, who was invited to Berkeley to kick off the colloquium you mention precisely because he led the team of senior Bourdieu associates entrusted with that thorny task. I did spend 5 months round the clock combing through the thousand pages of the penultimate version line by line and I recommended deep revisions throughout (cuts, rewrites, terminological clarifications, added notes and references, etc.) that were for the most part incorporated into the final text. The Paris team tended to stay closer to the spoken word, in an attitude of editorial deference to the master. I have the benefit of having evolved a different relationship to Bourdieu and experience of *writing with* Bourdieu than his older erstwhile students did. That gave me a sort of *editorial impudence* they just could not have, for good sociological reasons, that provided the needed balance in the end.

Strangely enough, I have a closer connection to the inception of that lecture course. In the Spring of 1986, Bourdieu stopped over in Chicago where I was starting my doctoral studies, coming from San Diego where his friend Aaron Cicourel had invited him on his way to Princeton where he was to deliver the Gauss Lectures in Criticism. I had just finished revising a critical exposition of his work pairing his “Lecture on the Lecture” (Bourdieu, 1982b) inaugurating his chair at the Collège de France with a superb monograph by one of his doctoral students, Sylvain Maresca (1983), on how *Les Dirigeants paysans*, “farming union leaders,” had redrawn the postwar boundary of the peasantry and materially transformed the group through symbolic work carried out in conjunction with state policy managers. It was a sort of paradigm-and-exemplar exercise (in Thomas Kuhn's sense) that Bourdieu had encouraged me to write a couple of years earlier while I lived and worked in New Caledonia – this is why the paper ended up being published in an Australian journal! He read it closely and was miffed by the criticisms I had developed at the end, at the urging of my Chicago professors John Comaroff and James Coleman, especially my focus on his “glaring blind spot about the state.” My third critique ran thus:

[C]oncern should be expressed over the theoretical disregard for the role of the state that characterises Bourdieu's conception of the social space. The fact that it was not entered in the indexes of his three most important books (Bourdieu, 1972, 1979a, 1980a) indicates that the state is conspicuously absent from Bourdieu's picture. Recent efforts to remedy this flaw and set the state at the heart of the theory of symbolic violence have led to its (re)definition as “the agency which possesses the power of legitimate naming, i.e., the power enabling official imposition of the legitimate view of the social world” (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: 118).

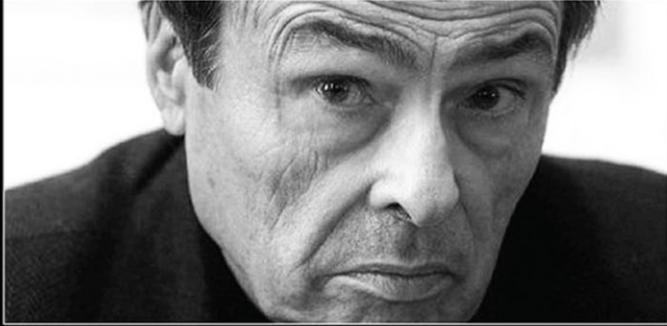
To define a concept, however, is not proof of its analytic potential, and it remains to be shown how much Bourdieu is able to get out of such a restricted definition, one that may eventually entrap him in exactly the kind of subjectivist position he rejects: the reduction of relations of domination to sheer relations of signification. The French social theorist will have to go well beyond issues of nomination and classification if, as I believe, his scheme is to contribute decisively to class analysis. For the state does considerably more than assign titles and impose taxonomies: it also manages a gigantic web of bridges between fields (legal, political, economic, social, cultural) whose boundaries, barriers to entry, and specific stakes it can easily alter, by force if need be, thereby greatly affecting the structuration of classes. The question arises, then, as to whether state power constitutes a species of capital *sui generis* and state institutions a field quintessentially different from other fields. (“Symbolic Violence and the Making of the French Agriculturalist: An Enquiry into Pierre Bourdieu’s Sociology,” Wacquant, 1987, pp. 79-80).

In Chicago, Bourdieu dismissed the criticism as facile, insisting that the state was too complex and hoary an entity to tackle frontally anyway. It was also a fashionable topic then, with the splashy publication a year earlier of the collective volume organized on behalf of the Social Science Research Council by Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (1985), *Bringing the State Back In*, which imported into the United States the theoretical fascination with the state that had consumed the European neo-Marxists of the 1970s such as Nicos Poulantzas, Claus Offe, and Perry Anderson – and the Althusserians were a total turnoff for Bourdieu! But a couple of days after he left the city, I got a surprise phone call from Princeton in which he flatly conceded, “Well, you are right, I will devote my next course at the Collège to the state to respond to your critique.” After three summers of intense reading, and finding an empirical peg on which to hang his investigation, namely, the political framing of single-home production and acquisition (it yielded a report for the Caisse des Dépôts et Consignation, the state agency that funds housing building in France, and then a double issue of *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, nos 81–82, March 1990, that later morphed into *The Social Structures of the Economy*, 2005 [2000]), Bourdieu turned to face the state head on and never turned back.

This move was fortified by wrapping up his book on the role of elite schools in the reproduction of the field of power, to which Bourdieu added an extended closing discussion of “State Power and Power over the State,” and whose title he changed at the last minute from *The School Nobility* to *The State Nobility* (1996 [1989]). This clarified that education is the main vehicle through which the inculcation of state categories of thought operates (whereas in his work on education of the 1960s Bourdieu had curiously *opposed* the school to the state), and it stipulated that the state is at once the product, the site, the target, and the referee of struggles to make reality. Pivoting toward the state was also necessitated by Bourdieu’s intensifying focus on symbolic power during that entire decade, which logically pushed him to confront the grand “symbolic alchemist” of the modern era. You can detect that, for instance, in the historical chapter on the linguistic unification of France at the behest of political authorities that opens *Ce que parler veut dire* (Bourdieu, 1982a), which demonstrates that “the production and reproduction of legitimate language” operates in tandem with the building of the central state, first by the absolutist royalty and later by the republican bourgeoisie whose power relies increasingly on the transmission of state-validated cultural capital, that is, educational credentials.

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PIERRE BOURDIEU AND THE INVENTION OF THE STATE

Special Sociology colloquium/Public sociology event

In *On the State* (Polity Press, 2015), his first major posthumous book (based on his lecture course at the Collège de France in 1989-1992), Bourdieu offers an analytic dissection of state theory, a reinterpretation of the historical transition from “the house of the king” to the “reason of state,” and a model of the state as organizing power anchored by the concept of “bureaucratic field” and the notion of the “monopolization of legitimate symbolic violence.” He correlates the forging of the modern Leviathan, based on the bureaucratic mode of reproduction, with the coining of the public, the simultaneous advance and private appropriation of the universal, and the rise of cultural capital. Contributors to this panel will engage the facets of this watershed book that connect with their own research to provide a collective assessment of its import and implications for the social science of the state, power, and citizenship.

Chair: **Loïc Wacquant** (Berkeley Sociology)  
**Mara Loveman** (Berkeley Sociology, author of *National Colors: Racial Classification and the State in Latin America*)  
**Frank Poupeau** (CNRS, author of *State Sociologists* and editor of *Bourdieu, On the State*)  
**Dylan Riley** (Berkeley Sociology, author of *The Civic Foundations of Fascism*)  
**Loïc Wacquant** (Berkeley Sociology, author of *Tracking the Penal State*)

Contact [od@berkeley.edu](mailto:od@berkeley.edu) to be added to notification list

So much to say that Bourdieu was bound to hit the Leviathan sooner rather than later. Yet it is funny to read my awkwardly phrased, juvenile, criticism of 1986 now and to realize that it was spot on thematically and played a small role in accelerating Bourdieu’s “coming out” on the state. (Later, during those long summers of intense reading down in his village of Béarn, Bourdieu would jokingly complain, “You be damned, I’m down in the mines chewing on theories of the state round the clock because of you, and it’s no fun”). Until the lecture course, the state turns out to have been a sort of absent presence at the center of his work, from the recapitulation of land spoliation in the making of the colonial society in *Sociologie de l’Algérie* (Bourdieu, 1958) to the sociology of schooling (Bourdieu, 1996 [1989]; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979 [1964], 1977 [1970]) to the

inquiries of the early 1990s into social suffering caused by the expanded rule of the market and climaxing in Bourdieu's resurgent engagement in the civic debate.

What makes *On The State* a truly unique text, the most extra-ordinary book of social science I have ever read? It combines the freshness and boldness of Marx's *Die Grundrisse* (it is a brash provisional building of first principles to be refined), the depth and vigor of Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (the state turns out to be a gigantic "classification machine" and "a chunk of the Church turned against itself": how much more Durkheimian can you get?), and the scope and ambition of Weber's sociology of religion (it ranges across eight centuries and three continents to build an ideal-type). And it adds to these a relentless, sagacious, *anxious interrogation of the very ambition and act of sociological interrogation* that is signature Bourdieu. In the course, the author of *Distinction* offers an analytic dissection of state theories (something he did for no other topic), a bold reinterpretation of the historical transition from "the house of the king" to the "reason of state," and a novel model of the state as organizing power anchored by the concept of bureaucratic field and the notion of the "monopolization of legitimate symbolic violence." And he correlates the forging of the modern Leviathan, based on the bureaucratic mode of reproduction, with the coining of the public, the simultaneous advance and private appropriation of the universal, and the rise of cultural capital. This is an enquiry of classical scope, depth, and reach.

The book, which should have been titled *The Invention of the State* (the expression recurs three dozen times in the lectures and the closing section of *The State Nobility*, which remixes a chunk of an early Collège lecture draft, is called "The Berobed and the Invention of the State") is evidently not the book that Bourdieu would have published had he lived to write it. For, contrary to what the editors of the volume assert in the post-face, Bourdieu did intend to write a tome on the state. What prevented him from doing so around 1995 is that he could not figure out how to locate it in the broader multi-volume study he was then preparing on the general theory of fields, provisionally entitled *Microcosms*. But we can be glad he did not because there is so much more to learn from the spoken draft of the book that was not. It is unfinished, raw, full of jagged edges, quiz-zical formulations, luminous leads, analytic ellipses and unresolved issues, and brimming with anguished candor about the epistemic exigencies and practical difficulties of the sociological craft. It is not a finished product, an *opus operatum* on the state, but the movement of its arrested fabrication, the live *modus operandi* of Bourdieu painstakingly constructing perhaps his most challenging object. And that, I submit, is the best way to capture his sociological engine in perpetual motion.

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