



Bourdieu 1993: A Case Study in Scientific Consecration

Sociology
47(1) 15–29
© The Author(s) 2013
DOI: 10.1177/0038038512472588
soc.sagepub.com


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Abstract

Drawing on archival materials and personal testimonies, I reconstruct the conditions under which Bourdieu came to receive the Gold Medal of the National Center for Scientific Research, France's highest science prize, in 1993 as a signal case study of the existential predicament and institutional trappings of scholarly consecration. Bourdieu's award speech and the ceremony at which he read it present a triple interest for the history and sociology of sociology. They illustrate how a shaping figure in the discipline personally experienced, reflexively viewed, and practically navigated the nexus of science, authority, and power. They mark 1993 as a pivot-year in Bourdieu's intellectual evolution, leading to a new agenda foregrounding the state as paramount symbolic power, the alchemy of group formation, and the unfinished promise of democratic politics; and they help explain why he ventured more forthrightly into civic debate in the 1990s. Bourdieu's ambivalent acceptance of the prize also illustrates his conception of the 'Realpolitik of reason' and put an emphatic end to the eclipse of Durkheim by restoring sociology to its rightful place at the scientific zenith in the country of its birth.

Keywords

Bourdieu, consecration, intellectual capital, science, politics, French academy, reflexivity, history of sociology

1993 marked a watershed of sorts for Pierre Bourdieu. A year earlier, he had published *The Rules of Art*, 'his Flaubert', an oblique response to Sartre's ([1971]1981) challenge in *The Family Idiot* taking the form of a historical sociology of the symbolic revolution bearing the invention of the aesthetic gaze and the crystallization of the literary cosmos, and offering what Bourdieu viewed as the first full-fledged deployment of his pivotal concept of field, on which he had labored across three decades (Bourdieu, [1992]1996).¹ Our book, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, providing the first comprehensive analytic guide to and thematic tableau of his works, had just appeared in seven languages

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(English original, French, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian, Bulgarian, and Catalan, with five more translations in progress), attesting to the booming international interest in and widening impact of his sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This impact was further evidenced by the simultaneous publication of an English-language collection of Bourdieu's (1993a) germinal pieces on *The Field of Cultural Production* and of the first multidisciplinary volume of essays on his thought to appear in the United States, *Pierre Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives* (Calhoun et al., 1993), based on a symposium held at the Center for Psychosocial Studies in Chicago a couple of years earlier, confirming that the walls of the American citadel at the nub of sociology's 'planetary orthodoxy' (Bourdieu, [2004]2008: 93) were beginning to crack.²

In the winter of 1993, the team project designed and directed by Bourdieu on the springs and forms of social suffering in contemporary society came to fruition with the release of *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al., [1993]1999). The thousand-page tome, composed of a string of perspectival views taken from tension points in the dualizing class structure of France, made an immediate splash far beyond the circle of scholarly readers. It sold 100,000 copies inside the calendar year and triggered interwoven debates across the academic, journalistic, and political spheres as well as spawned theatrical and visual arts adaptations. Bourdieu's intention with that book had been to push the boundaries of methodological conventions and sociological writing so as to reach 'a genetic and generic grasp' of the 'nearly infinite subtleties of the strategies that agents deploy in the everyday conduct of their existence' (Bourdieu, [1993]1996: 910, 903). But he also wanted to exemplify the Socratic impulse of his brand of *socioanalysis* (Bourdieu, 1991a), that is, the principled humility with which it approaches the ordinary actions, thoughts and feelings of ordinary people in its effort to forge instruments for a 'social maieutics' capable of giving them the means to understand the social principle of their personal predicament.³ Relatedly, Bourdieu wished to short-circuit the normal censorship of the media and party establishments, so as to thrust into the public glare a new set of issues spawned by the interplay of the 'poverty of condition' and the 'poverty of position' abetted by the accelerating differentiation of the social cosmos and retraction of the Keynesian welfare state. It became clear that *The Weight of the World* had reached that goal when Conservative Prime Minister Édouard Balladur advised the cabinet members of his government to read the book so as to feel the pulse of the country, and clearer still when Bourdieu was invited to present his diagnosis on the top-rated prime-time television program *La Marche du siècle*, in dialogue with the housing rights advocate *l'abbé Pierre*, then the single most popular public personality in the land.⁴ To amplify this brewing civic discussion, Bourdieu broke with his long-standing policy of strictly limiting his media interventions and gave interviews on that study to national dailies and weeklies such as *Le Monde*, *Libération* and *L'Express*, as well as unconventional outlets such as *Télérama* (the French equivalent of *TV-Guide*), *Actualités sociales hebdomadaires* (a newsletter for social workers and kindred professionals), and several French and foreign public radio stations.

1993 was also the year when Bourdieu synthesized the results and drew the implications of his three-year lecture course on the state at the Collège de France (published posthumously as Bourdieu, 2012). After decades spent circling cautiously around the Leviathan, the author of *The State Nobility* (Bourdieu, [1989]1998) had resolved to tackle it frontally from multiple angles at once: theoretical, historical, and empirical.

This new major analytic front was signposted by a series of interlinked articles mapping ‘The Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field’ (Bourdieu, [1993]1994) as the site of the monopolization of legitimate symbolic violence; spotlighting ‘The Fundamental Ambivalence of the State’ ([1993]1998) as a vehicle for promoting the universal but also for the usurpation of the universal by the holders of cultural capital; and tracing the consequences of the capitulation of political authority before market forces with the shift in pre-eminence from the ‘Left hand’ to the ‘Right hand’ of government across the advanced societies (1992). Together, this lecture course and its derivative publications would reorient Bourdieu’s intellectual agenda along the dorsal question of the struggles over the historical definition and implementation of democratic ideals, as well as goad him to multiply and deepen his forays into public debate during the ensuing decade (Wacquant, 2005a: esp. 9–13).

Over the summer of that same busy year, Bourdieu prepared the publication of the 100th issue of *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, the journal he had founded and edited since 1975 to serve as mouthpiece for a doggedly transdisciplinary sociology marrying scientific rigor, epistemic reflexivity, and sociopolitical pertinence – much as *L’Année sociologique* had done about a century earlier for the Durkheimians (Wacquant, 2005b). It is hard to exaggerate the centrality of *Actes* in the panoply of means of scientific production developed by Bourdieu over the years.⁵ In addition to fostering myriad empirical investigations based on the fusion of theory and method, it operated as a workshop to try, test, and move his analytic agenda forward by taking it on to new terrains, experimenting with graphic designs and statistical techniques (such as Multiple Correspondence Analysis),⁶ and pursuing transversal topics liable to facilitate comparison and induction. Reaching the quarter-century mark held special meaning for Bourdieu, not just owing to the personal investment in time and energy he had sunk into the journal, but because *Actes* best manifested the collective nature of his intellectual enterprise in breach of a French intellectual milieu infatuated with ‘the literary (and very Parisian) vision of “creation” as a singular act of the isolated researcher’ (Bourdieu, [2004]2008: 33).⁷ That anniversary issue, featuring articles by Carl Schorske on the sociological mutiny driving Gustav Mahler’s musical compositions, Robert Darnton on the motor role of books in the French Revolution, William Labov on pathways to reducing illiteracy, Eric Hobsbawm on the distinctive logics of ethnic conflict, and Amartya Sen on moral codes as vectors of economic success, along with a previously unpublished text by Erving Goffman on ‘communication out of character’, reaffirmed the internationalist vision of the journal as well as its editor’s commitment to showcasing the innovative work of a new generation of social researchers attentive to the Bachelardian imperative of the *construction of the object*. Bourdieu ([1994]1996) himself contributed to that banner issue one of his most potent essays, ‘The Family as Realized Category’, in which he lays out the rudiments of a general model of group-making through the historical exercise of symbolic power in social space and a cognitive-cum-affective labor of collective construction that dovetails neatly with his theory of the state as paramount fount of efficient classification (Wacquant, 2013).

Then came the news that Pierre Bourdieu had been awarded the Gold Medal of the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), France’s highest science prize. Created

in 1954, the medal is given yearly to 'a scientific personality who has made an outstanding contribution to the dynamism and reverberations of research'. This announcement confirmed the originality and bearing of Bourdieu's sociology and it set him definitively above his peers. The official press release from CNRS on 15 September 1993 read in part:

Pierre Bourdieu, a Professor at the Collège de France, has regenerated French sociology by constantly wedding experimental precision with theory founded on a broad culture in philosophy, anthropology and sociology. This methodology has allowed him to treat with a scientific rigor that is the hallmark of his analyses a set of fundamental issues in the social sciences. His most important and most universally recognized contributions deal with the role of education and cultural capital in the reproduction of social differences and with the workings of cultural consumptions as signs of distinction. Within the framework of the Centre de sociologie de l'éducation et de la culture, a CNRS laboratory, thanks to his highly innovative research teaching constantly guided by interdisciplinarity, Pierre Bourdieu has trained a large number of scholars who make for the renown of French research today in sociology, history, anthropology and sociolinguistics. Pierre Bourdieu is the author of a great many articles and of thirty-some books, most of them translated into multiple languages. Some, like *The Inheritors*, *Distinction*, and *The Weight of the World*, have been major events in intellectual life and have won acclaim from wide audiences. ... A tireless scientific orchestrator, Bourdieu has grown into an intellectual entrepreneur to found a school of thought. Present on all fronts, enjoying wide international renown, he now belongs to the ranks of the grand intellectuals of the European tradition.

This award posed something of a quandary for Bourdieu. For he was a very shy and private man with a deeply anti-narcissistic personality, stamped as it was by the communal values of the peasant society of Béarn in which he had grown up in the interwar years (Bourdieu, [2002]2008, [2004]2008: 84–94). Even as he had risen to its apex, he never felt at home in an intellectual world wont to exalt the self and to celebrate scholastic aristocracy; he deeply disliked being thrust into the limelight; and he positively abhorred academic pomp.⁸

What is more, his 'contradictory relationship to the academic institution, made of rebellion and submission', inclined Bourdieu ([2004]2008: 128) to question its legitimacy to grant distinctions: ever since his students days at the *École normale supérieure*, the breeding ground of France's leading intellectuals for a century, 'the self-certainty linked to the fact of feeling consecrated was eroded, in its very principle, by the most radical uncertainty about the consecrating authority, a kind of bad mother, vain and deceitful'. From the mid-1960s on, when he refused to bow to the sacrosanct requirement of the doctoral dissertation, he had stood firm in 'resolute rupture with the vanity of things academic' ([2004]2008: 71). Back in 1981, he had seriously envisaged turning down the Chair in Sociology to which he was eventually elected at the Collège de France, the country's top research institution, because he could not resolve to go through the official pageantry of the inaugural lecture. He assumed the position only after he had figured out how to turn the event onto itself and make it over into a performative paradigm for reflexive sociology by delivering a 'Lecture on the Lecture' in which he would dissect the social springs and underscore the symbolic arbitrariness of the very 'rite of consecration' he was enacting (Bourdieu, 1982).⁹

But the difficulty posed by the CNRS announcement ran deeper than a matter of personal psychology. Prizes, palms, titles, trophies, tributes, awards and accolades, be they scientific, put Bourdieu ill at ease because, as demonstrated by his sociology of fields of cultural production, they partake of the ‘economy of symbolic goods’, fueling the ‘collective self-deception’ through which institutions mystify agents and perpetuate themselves (Bourdieu, [1994]1998: chapter 6). They are tokens of the social alchemy whereby recognition breeds misrecognition, and relations of domination get transfigured into relations of admiration and affection; and they mark as well as mask knots of tension between spiritual and temporal powers – this is why Bourdieu was fond of quoting Gustave Flaubert’s quip that ‘honors bring dishonor’ (Bourdieu, 1993a: 154). As the supreme theorist of symbolic power, the signal notion at the epicenter of his lifework, Bourdieu was also keenly aware that the public forms and formalities through which institutions *sacralize* persons, objects or acts, that is, set them ‘apart and above the mundane’, to recall Durkheim’s ([1912]1995) luminous definition in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, present a real danger: they enwrap those thus ‘elevated’ into a web of collective expectations, statutory obligations, and organizational ligatures that can paralyze if not neutralize them, thus blunting their iconoclastic force.¹⁰

At the same time, another side of Bourdieu was, for once, inclined to accept that 1993 award for three reasons. First, of all academic distinctions, it was the rare one that he esteemed based on his empirical analyses of the French scholarly world. In his discussion of the statistical construction of the structure of university field in *Homo Academicus*, published a full decade earlier, Bourdieu ([1984]1988: 33) reports that membership in the



Figure 1. Invitation card to the award ceremony.

Institut de France and the Gold Medal of the CNRS would constitute two robust ‘institutionalized signs of scientific prestige’ attesting to *specifically intellectual capital*, as opposed to academic capital of the bureaucratic kind, if not for the fact that the former ‘consecrates ethico-political dispositions as much as scientific accomplishments’ and that the latter is ‘quite exceptional’, and therefore too infrequent to serve as a reliable indicator (only 1.2% of all Parisian academics in the 1968 survey had obtained it (Bourdieu, [1984]1988: 68)).

Second, the fact that the medal had been bestowed mainly to natural scientists, including a half-dozen Nobel laureates (and two Field medalists), in specialized domains of inquiry whose independence from worldly authority is beyond dispute, mattered greatly to Bourdieu, given his principled and practical commitment to the epistemological unity of the sciences (Bourdieu, 1991b, [2001]2004).¹¹ As of 1993, the CNRS gold medalists comprised 12 physicists (including four Nobel laureates), 11 life scientists (biology, immunology, physiology, and genetics, among them one Nobel winner), six chemists (one of whom got the Nobel Prize), three mathematicians, as well as six students of the social sciences and humanities: the geographer Raoul Blanchard (1960), the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1967), the archeologist André Leroi-Gourhan (1973), the historians Jean-Pierre Vernant (1984) and Jacques LeGoff (1991), and Bourdieu’s own mentor (as well as Foucault’s teacher), the philosopher Georges Canguilhem (1987). Third and most decisively, as this roster reveals, Bourdieu would be *the first sociologist to receive that distinction* so that, to overcome his intimate reticence, he could make the medal over from a personal accolade to a collective tribute.

This indeed set the central theme and thrust of Bourdieu’s speech at the award ceremony: to give its scientific props to the ‘pariah discipline’ of sociology that he had wilfully embraced in the mid-1960s after forsaking his higher-order tenure as a *normalien* philosopher turned anthropologist (Bourdieu, [1987]1994: 5–8, 20–1, [1997]2000: 33–43). The author of *The Craft of Sociology* thus moved the spotlight from his individual deeds to the collective achievements of the craft so as to blunt his personal anxiety and loosen the tension born of the ‘sort of antinomy between science and social respectability’ that exists within science itself ([1984]1988: 87). This stance also faithfully expressed his vision of *research as a quintessentially collective activity* whose true subject is not the individual scholar but the scientific field *in toto*, that is, the dynamic web of objective positions and subjective position-takings that constitute it as a space of agonistic exchanges aimed at the production of true propositions via mutual stimulation and criss-crossing controls:

A scientist is the scientific field made person, whose cognitive structures are homologous to the structures of the field and, for that reason, constantly adjusted to the expectations inscribed the field ... Every scientific act is, like any practice, the product of the meeting of two histories, history embodied in the form of dispositions and history objectified in the very structure of the field as well as in technical objects (such as instruments), publications, etc. (Bourdieu, [2001]2004: 41, 35)

The medal ceremony, taking place in an ornate amphitheater jam-packed with some two hundred officials and invited guests in formal attire, including the somewhat intimidated members of the Center for European Sociology, opened with a short movie

(shot especially for the occasion in Beta SP format by the renowned director Jacques Brissot) sketching a kaleidoscopic portrait of Bourdieu's intellectual persona (Brissot, 1993). The clips running through the screen catch him alternately giving a formal lecture on the state at the University of Amsterdam and scolding the 'journalists-philosophers' who skew standards of intellectual production,¹² such as Jean-Marie Cavada, the anchor shown interviewing him during his 'summit meeting' with *l'abbé Pierre*, and Serge July, the editor-in-chief of the left daily *Libération* who confesses to taking Bourdieu's seminar in his youth. It pictures him in dialogue with Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, and Susan Sontag at the founding meeting of the International Parliament of Writers and giving an interview on national radio on the civic import of *The Weight of the World*.¹³ It also features two of his doctoral students reflecting on his mentoring style – they joke that he refuses to 'let [them] consider him as [their] father' even as he takes on the proactive role of the *Doktorvater*. In five minutes, short for the audience but no doubt interminable for Bourdieu, we glimpse the author of *Distinction* crossing the borders between countries, domains of social and cultural inquiry, and the realms of knowledge and action.

Bourdieu was then called onto the stage to receive his prize from the hands of François Fillon, the youthful Minister of Research – he would become Nicolas Sarkozy's Prime Minister 15 years later – and deliver his address. As a live intersection between the academic field (represented by the head of CNRS), the political-bureaucratic field (impersonated by Fillon), and the journalistic field (via the presence of reporters from the country's main media),¹⁴ the ceremony provided Bourdieu with a high-impact platform on which to reassert the scientific character of the sociological enterprise and to call



Figure 2. Minister of Research François Fillon with medal recipient Pierre Bourdieu. © CNRS Photothèque/Nicole TIGET.

for the inflexible defense of the autonomy of the scholarly microcosm. It also gave him an opportunity to stress yet again the indispensability of the sociology of sociology as a lever to bolster the discipline's epistemic stature and shoulder its independence from temporal powers (Bourdieu, 1982, [1984]1988, 1991b, [1997]2000, [2001]2004). Proffering a speech in praise of sociology thus materialized Bourdieu's conception of the 'Realpolitik of reason', according to which science is not a Kantian transcendental but an *ongoing historical invention* that advances by fighting to secure the institutional conditions for the inculcation and realization of its ideals, starting with adequate funding, sufficient jobs for young scholars, and collective protection from media intrusions and political pressures.¹⁵

Owing to the high emotional cost that this public formality exacted from him, Bourdieu was intent on rocking the academic boat and on pressing for an immediate return on investment. And so, *horresco referens*, he did not hesitate to commit the social barbarism of openly calling for a fair share of positions for his students and collaborators, who had long been systematically barred from the National Center for Scientific Research as well as from the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* by gatekeepers intent on curtailing his influence and maintaining their parochial monopoly over the means of academic reproduction.¹⁶ And he openly rebuked 'governments of the Right and Left' for spending more on 'scientifically useless and financially ruinous polls' than on the budget of the Collège de France (Bourdieu, 2013: 12). This intrepid sortie thrilled the public of scholars and staff who applauded joyously, but it stunned the dignitaries of science and politics lining the front row. So much so that the normally placid Fillon felt impelled to break with protocol and to step back to the lectern to answer Bourdieu's indictment of the misuse of social science as a 'means of rational demagoguery' in a strained effort to restore proper decorum.

Facing the highest representatives of political and media power, Bourdieu took pains to reaffirm the stance of social science in studied distance from and vigilant contraposition to both. Taking his cue from Max Weber ([1918]2004), he rejected the forced and false alternative between the role of the societal prophet and that of the technocratic expert. Yet he did not for that devalorize or shrink the scope of the civic mission of sociology: on the contrary, he called for its development as a 'critical countervailing power' liable to illumine possibilities and paths for social transformation and as a 'public service' capable of 'play[ing] the Socratic role of midwife of individuals and groups' (Bourdieu, 2013: 12), that is, forging reasoned instruments for personal and collective self-appropriation – thus concretely realizing the vocation traditionally pursued by philosophy.¹⁷

Bourdieu's acceptance speech for the Gold Medal of the CNRS and the unfolding of the ceremony at which he read it, in a halting voice nervously scaling the cavernous silence enveloping him, present a triple interest for the history and sociology of sociology. First, they illustrate how Pierre Bourdieu personally experienced, reflexively viewed, and practically *navigated the tangled nexus of science, authority, and power*. They offer us a rare ground-level perspective on how a shaping figure of the discipline concretely plied the politics of knowledge and a signal case study of the existential predicament and institutional trappings of scientific consecration.¹⁸ Second, they mark 1993 as a *pivot-year in Bourdieu's intellectual evolution* when, having consolidated his



Figure 3. Bourdieu delivering his speech. © CNRS Photothèque/Nicole TIGET.

theoretical framework and fulfilled the research agenda capstoned by *Distinction* and *The Rules of Art*, he opened a new phase of investigations foregrounding the Janus-faced workings of the state, the conundrum of the alchemy of group formation, and the unfinished promise of democratic politics that would propel his theory of symbolic power into a whole new dimension (see, in particular, Bourdieu, [1997]2000: chapters 5 and 6). Being bestowed France's top scientific prize infused Bourdieu with the self-assurance needed to shed for good the garb of the *sociologue maudit* and fully assume the leadership and defense of the Sociological City.¹⁹ It also provided a scientific backstop sturdy enough to prompt him to venture more forthrightly into public debate and deploy his model of classification struggles to intervene directly into them as a matter of *applied reflexive sociology* (Bourdieu, [1998]1999, [2000]2003) – instead of sublimating his political impulses completely into his scientific work, as he had tended to do since elaborating that formula in his early Algerian work (Wacquant, 2004, 2005a: 11–13).

Yet, if 1993 marks a milestone in Bourdieu's personal trajectory and an inflexion in his scientific journey, one needs to go back a full century to gain the proper measure of the significance of that Gold Medal award for the history of social science. On 3 March 1893 at the Sorbonne, a young *normalien* by the name of Émile Durkheim ([1893]1997) defended a bold dissertation thesis entitled *De la division du travail social*, which heralded the self-affirmation of a new discipline and its incipient claim to supremacy over the literary and philosophical approaches that had hitherto ruled the study of society and history. That defense was immediately deemed 'an event' and the work presented 'the founding stone of a new edifice' called sociology (according to the exam committee's official report, cited by Fournier, 2007: 188). But only two decades later, the carnage of the First World War decimated the Durkheimians and levelled that edifice, leaving nearly

only Marcel Mauss to fight to salvage their legacy amidst the national rubble. By the interwar years, Durkheim was considered ‘a dead dog’ – to recall Marx’s re-telling of Lessing’s cruel expression about Spinoza – and philosophy swiftly reasserted its primacy, the ascent of ‘the three Hs’, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, paving the way for the untrammelled dominance of Sartrean phenomenology by the mid-20th century (Descombes, 1979). It would take another two decades for the structuralist wave to revive the Durkheimian project of a science of society built on ‘a philosophy without subject’ and to carry the young philosopher Bourdieu onto sociological shore (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1967). By going for the gold in 1993, Bourdieu put an emphatic end to the long eclipse of Durkheim and restored sociology to its rightful place at the scientific zenith in the country of its birth.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the late Pierre Bourdieu (with whom the project of publishing his CNRS Gold Medal speech was hatched back in 1997), Jérôme Bourdieu, Marie-Christine Rivière, Gabrielle Balazs, and Gilles L’Hôte at the Collège de France, as well as Delphine Thierry-Mieg, Christelle Pineau, and Sophie Deswarte at CNRS Images. I am also grateful for the testimonies of Patrick Champagne, Odile Henry, Remi Lenoir, Francine Muel-Dreyfus, Louis Pinto, and Gisèle Sapiro; the editorial advice of Megan Comfort and Tom Medvetz, and the library assistance of Sarah Brothers. Since chronology is of the essence here, I have listed Bourdieu’s publications in their original order of publication. All translations from the French are mine.

Notes

- 1 Until just before printing, the title of the book was *The Point of View of the Author*, which makes the counter to Sartre’s five-volume *magnum opus* clearer (by contraposing the literary microcosm to the family). *The Rules of Art* was Bourdieu’s response to Sartre and his brand of phenomenology (latterly mixed with psychoanalysis and Marxism), much as *The Logic of Practice* was both a homage to and overtaking of Lévi-Straussian structuralism. In Bourdieu’s eyes ([1980]1990: esp. 1–3, 25–9), Sartre and Lévi-Strauss were purified personifications of the two poles of the grand antinomy of subjectivism and objectivism that he strove to overcome.
- 2 The journal *French Cultural Studies* also ran a special issue on Bourdieu’s work which, not coincidentally, opened with a personal note by Bourdieu (1993b) on Sartre. A selection of Bourdieu’s major texts on *The Sociology of Politics* appeared in Russian (edited by Natalia Chmatko), on the heels of a collection of essays on science and politics in German and another one on fields in Greek. A book of dialogues with the New York-based artist Hans Haacke on the rocky relationship between the art world and economic power in the neoliberal age would follow the year after (Bourdieu and Haacke, [1994]1995). Two years earlier, the book springing from the conference Bourdieu had co-organized with James Coleman at the University of Chicago in April 1989 to confront rival views of the prospects for world sociology had come out under the title *Social Theory for a Changing Society* (Bourdieu and Coleman, 1991).
- 3 ‘If I wanted to give a gloried genealogy to sociology, I would say that, at bottom, the first sociologist was Socrates. Philosophers would be furious because they claim him as a founding father. But, in reality, he was obviously someone who came down to the street to ask questions, who went to ask an Athenian general what is courage, who went to ask Euthyphron, a pious man, what is piety, and so on. He was carrying out empirical inquiry, in a way ... He was someone who tirelessly fought the equivalent of my enemies of today, or at least those whom I fight with the weapons of science, that is, the Sophists: people who speak of an unreal

- world while pretending it is real, who put the real beyond reach by enshrouding it in words that impress' (Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Chartier, 2010: 44).
- 4 Concerned that the unavoidable clash between a scientific and an ethical approach to inequality might disorient viewers, Bourdieu agreed to participate with considerable reluctance, consenting to do so only at the express request of his elderly mother, who held *l'abbé Pierre* in veneration. The jarring discordance between the sociologist and the abbot, and Bourdieu's irrepressible disquiet at being on that television set, are palpable from the opening frame of the program when the anchor Jean-Marie Cavada introduces them with these solemn words: 'Here are two men among the most important of this century's end. They are different and yet they till the same field: the field of human suffering, the field of poverty' (Freine, 1993).
 - 5 Supported by the research teams hosted by the Center for European Sociology (under various configurations since 1968), this panoply included the book series 'Le sens commun' with the avant-garde press Minuit (from 1964 to 1991, followed by the 'Liber' series with Editions du Seuil after 1992), and the 'European review of books' *Liber*, published quarterly as a supplement to newspapers in a dozen languages and countries (from 1989 to 1998). It was enlarged in 1995 by the creation of the publishing house Raisons d'agir Éditions, which puts out slim and punchy tomes of sociology distilled to reframe a major sociopolitical issue for civic debate (Bourdieu's own book *On Television*, [1996]1998, served to launch the venture) as well as specialized social science monographs plying a neo-Bachelardian epistemological line (such as Bourdieu's *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, [2001]2004).
 - 6 Statistical innovation was pivotal to the advances of Bourdieu's theories of social space, class, and fields, as shown by Lebaron (2009), and these advances were typically introduced and refined in *Actes*.
 - 7 Encrevé and Lagrave (2003) gather a rich selection of accounts of 'working with Bourdieu' by the gamut of researchers he trained, collaborated with, and influenced from close and afar at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales. The chapters by Luc Boltanski, Robert Castel, Francine Muel-Dreyfus, Jean-Claude Passeron, Michel Pialoux, Monique de Saint-Martin, and Gisèle Sapiro, past and present members of the Center for European Sociology, are particularly instructive as to the stimulus and tensions animating the mobile sociological *cogitamus* formed around Bourdieu over the years.
 - 8 These traits come through in several passages of the documentary movie on Bourdieu's work by Pierre Carles (2001), *Sociology is a Martial Art*. This was confirmed in an interview for the national radio station France Inter given a few days before the medal award, in which Bourdieu coyly confessed: 'When I was told I had been granted the medal, I was very pleased, but I immediately thought about the ordeal that the ceremony would be ... It's true that if I could have the medal without the ceremony, I would have been much happier. But that's the way it is, it is part and parcel of the social obligations you beget.'
 - 9 Even then, the ceremony flirted with disaster: Bourdieu came close to picking up his papers and walking out on the 'assembled body of masters' in the middle of his lecture as he realized in delivering it that what was for him 'a psychological solution constituted an act of defiance toward the symbolic order, an affront to the dignity of the institution which demands silence over the arbitrariness of the rite being performed' (Bourdieu, [2004]2008: 109–10). I was in the public room where the lecture was being shown on closed-circuit television and I remember this moment vividly: Bourdieu fumbled his watch on the floor, blanched, and looked as if he was about to dash off the stage. Prior to the event, he had gone through months of insomnia and was so flustered on the afternoon of the lecture that he got 'lost' in the streets of Paris on his way to the Collège.
 - 10 Bourdieu ([1984]1988: xxii–xvi, 105–12) discusses the generic institutional positioning and specific strategic quandaries of the 'consecrated heretics' in the university field at length in *Homo Academicus*.

- 11 Two Nobel laureates in physics, Pierre-Gilles de Gennes (1991, CNRS Gold Medal in 1980) and Claude Cohen-Tannoudji (1997, CNRS Gold Medal in 1996), were fellow students of Bourdieu's at the École normale supérieure during 1951–1954 (De Gennes was in the same cohort and Cohen-Tannoudji entered during Bourdieu's third year there) as well as current colleagues at the Collège de France. Bourdieu ([2001]2004: 43–44) sketches the principles of their contrasted social and scientific trajectories in *Science of Science and Reflexivity*.
- 12 The institutional roots and pernicious effects of the centrality of philosophy and 'philosophical journalism' in the French intellectual field are analyzed by Bourdieu ([1984]1988: 256–70) and Pinto (2007). One of their transnational repercussions is the high-volume export and perennial social success of French literary-philosophical theory in English-speaking universities dissected by Bourdieu (1997) in his deliciously ironic 'Passport to Duke'.
- 13 Following a string of killings of Algerian writers, climaxing with the commando assassination of Tahar Djaout in July 1993, some 60 intellectuals mobilized at Bourdieu's behest to create an international organization dedicated to highlighting censorship and providing material support to persecuted writers around the world (starting with the formation of a network of 'refugee cities' for which Bourdieu later testified before the European Parliament). The International Parliament of Writers was thus formed in September 1993 (it dissolved in 2004), with Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida, Édouard Glissant, Salman Rushdie, and Christian Salmon as its executive board. It was successively presided over by Salman Rushdie, Wole Soyinka, and Russell Banks. It edited a journal entitled *Autodafe*, published in five languages, and was particularly active around the Algerian, Bosnian, and Palestinian questions. See Bourdieu (1994) for an abbreviated account of its purposes.
- 14 Among other journalistic accounts, *Le Monde* ran a page-long interview of Bourdieu (1993c) on the medal award, centered on his call to 'invent a collective intellectual on the model of the *Encyclopédistes*' for the present century, while the communist daily *L'Humanité* published a full-page excerpt from the address entitled 'An unloved science'. Bourdieu ([1996]2005) is an extended analysis of the tangled relationships between the political field, the journalistic field, and the field of the social sciences.
- 15 Sintomer ([2006]2011) offers a stimulating discussion of the dialectic of the 'corporatism of the universal' and 'the Realpolitik of reason' in Bourdieu's work and intellectual activism.
- 16 At the time of the medal ceremony, not a single young researcher trained at the Center for European Sociology had been admitted into the CNRS in a dozen years. After the award, the doors were gradually opened to the best of Bourdieu's students.
- 17 'Sociology liberates by liberating us from the illusion of liberty, or, more precisely, the misplaced belief in illusory freedoms. Freedom is not a given but a conquest, and a collective one at that. And I regret that, in the name of a petty narcissistic libido, encouraged by an immature denegation of realities, people can deprive themselves of an instrument that may allow them to constitute themselves truly – a little more, at least – as free subjects, at the cost of a work of reappropriation' (Bourdieu, [1987]1994: 15–16). This theme is epicentral to *The Weight of the World* (see, for instance, Bourdieu et al., [1993]1998: 627–9) and is most pithily expressed in Bourdieu's ([1998]2004) pensive eulogy of the Algerian ethnologist and poet Mouloud Mammeri.
- 18 This episode also reveals Bourdieu's bifurcated relationship to the social world, at once lucid and labored, that was made both possible and more pained by his sociological penetration of it.
- 19 For decades, Bourdieu had labored burdened by the apprehension that he would never be able to communicate his sociological vision and properly explicate the implication of his theories: 'I have been fortunate enough to live for a long time in a rather great indifference toward social success. I remember having often thought that, insofar as I strove to join competencies and intentions, theoretical and technical, that were rarely associated, it was probable and normal that I would long remain misunderstood and unknown' ([2004]2008: 70).

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Date submitted October 2012

Date accepted December 2012