

# Language and Symbolic Power

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Pierre Bourdieu

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Harvard University Press  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
1991

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## Editor's Introduction

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As competent speakers we are aware of the many ways in which linguistic exchanges can express relations of power. We are sensitive to the variations in accent, intonation and vocabulary which reflect different positions in the social hierarchy. We are aware that individuals speak with differing degrees of authority, that words are loaded with unequal weights, depending on who utters them and how they are said, such that some words uttered in certain circumstances have a force and a conviction that they would not have elsewhere. We are experts in the innumerable and subtle strategies by which words can be used as instruments of coercion and constraint, as tools of intimidation and abuse, as signs of politeness, condescension and contempt. In short, we are aware that language is an integral part of social life, with all its ruses and iniquities, and that a good part of our social life consists of the routine exchange of linguistic expressions in the day-to-day flow of social interaction.

It is much easier, however, to observe in a general way that language and social life are inextricably linked than it is to develop this observation in a rigorous and compelling way. The contemporary intellectual disciplines which are particularly concerned with language have been illuminating in this regard, but they have also suffered from a number of shortcomings. In some branches of linguistics, literary criticism and philosophy, for instance, there is a tendency to think of the social character of language in a rather abstract way, as if it amounted to little more than the fact that language is, as Saussure once put it, a collective 'treasure' shared by all members of a community. What is missing from such perspectives is an account of the concrete, complicated ways in which linguistic

practices and products are caught up in, and moulded by, the forms of power and inequality which are pervasive features of societies as they actually exist. Sociologists and sociolinguists have been more concerned with the interplay between linguistic practices and concrete forms of social life; but in their work there is a tendency – though this is by no means without exception – to become preoccupied with the empirical details of variations in accent or usage, in a way that is largely divorced from broader theoretical and explanatory concerns. When social theorists have turned their attention to language they have not neglected these broader concerns, but all too often they have run roughshod over the specific properties of language and language use in the interests of developing some general theory of social action or the social world.

One of the merits of the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is that it avoids to a large extent the shortcomings which characterize some of the sociological and social-theoretical writing on language, while at the same time offering an original sociological perspective on linguistic phenomena which has nothing to do with abstract conceptions of social life. In a series of articles originally published in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Bourdieu developed a trenchant critique of formal and structural linguistics, arguing that these disciplinary frameworks take for granted but fail to grasp the specific social and political conditions of language formation and use. He also began the task of elaborating an original, innovative approach to linguistic phenomena, an approach that aims to be both theoretically informed and sensitive to empirical detail. The theory that informs Bourdieu's approach is a general *theory of practice* which he has worked out in the course of a long and prolific career, spanning more than thirty years and twenty volumes of research and reflection.<sup>1</sup> Armed with the key concepts of this theory, Bourdieu sheds fresh light on a range of issues concerned with language and language use. He portrays everyday linguistic exchanges as situated encounters between agents endowed with socially structured resources and competencies, in such a way that every linguistic interaction, however personal and insignificant it may seem, bears the traces of the social structure that it both expresses and helps to reproduce.

The material brought together in this volume includes Bourdieu's most important writings on language, as well as a set of essays which explore some aspects of representation and symbolic power in the field of politics. My aim in this introduction is to provide an overview of this material and to outline the theoretical framework which

guides Bourdieu's approach. For his critical analysis of orthodox linguistics, and the alternative account of linguistic phenomena which he offers, are effectively an application to language of a range of concepts and ideas elaborated elsewhere. I shall begin by summarizing briefly his critique of formal and structural linguistics, as well as his appraisal of the theory of speech acts developed by Austin. I shall then discuss some of the main concepts and assumptions of Bourdieu's own theoretical framework, focusing on those aspects which are most relevant to the analysis of language use. In the third section I shall broaden the discussion to consider Bourdieu's views on the nature of politics and political discourse, which are the concern of the final set of essays in this volume. My aim is to provide a sympathetic exposition of some themes in Bourdieu's work, not a critical analysis of his views. There are, of course, various aspects of Bourdieu's work which could be questioned and criticized, and indeed which have been questioned and criticized in the literature, sometimes in ways that are thoughtful and probing, at other times in ways that display more than a hint of wilful incomprehension.<sup>2</sup> But these are issues which I shall not pursue here.

## I

As a thinker whose formative milieu was the Paris of the 1950s and early 1960s, Bourdieu is more aware than many of the intellectual impact of certain ways of thinking about language. Bourdieu followed closely the development of Lévi-Strauss's work and incorporated some features of Lévi-Strauss's method – in particular, his emphasis on the analysis of relations and oppositions – in his early ethnographic studies of kinship structures and matrimonial strategies among the Kabyle of North Africa.<sup>3</sup> But Bourdieu became increasingly dissatisfied with Lévi-Strauss's method, which gave rise to insoluble theoretical and methodological problems.<sup>4</sup> He was also somewhat sceptical of the fashionable trend called 'structuralism', which was rapidly gaining ground among Parisian intellectuals in the 1960s and which reflected, in Bourdieu's view, an overly zealous and methodologically uncontrolled application of the linguistic principles worked out by Saussure and others. The misadventures of structuralism alerted Bourdieu at an early stage both to the inherent limitations of Saussurian linguistics and to the dangers of a certain kind of intellectual imperialism, whereby a particular model of language

could assume a paradigmatic status in the social sciences as a whole.

Hence, when Bourdieu undertakes a critique of the linguistic theories of Saussure and others, he is seeking *also* to counteract the influence of linguistic models in other domains of social and cultural analysis. Bourdieu is adamantly opposed to all those forms of 'semiotic' or 'semiological' analysis which owe their inspiration to Saussure: these forms of analysis are purely 'internal', in the sense that they focus exclusively on the internal constitution of a text or corpus of texts, and hence ignore the social-historical conditions of the production and reception of texts. Moreover, such forms of analysis commonly take for granted the position of the analyst, without reflecting on this position, or on the relation between the analyst and the object of analysis, in a rigorous and reflexive way. As a result, semiotic or semiological analyses may express, to a significant but largely unexamined extent, the position of the analyst in the intellectual division of labour.

It is important to emphasize that, in distancing himself from the various kinds of internal analysis which are commonly employed in the study of literary texts and cultural artefacts, Bourdieu is not seeking simply to *supplement* these kinds of analysis with an account of the social-historical conditions of production and reception: his position is both more radical and more original than this. Unlike authors such as Lévi-Strauss and Barthes, who took over certain concepts originally developed in the sphere of linguistics and sought to apply them to phenomena like myths and fashion, Bourdieu proceeds in an altogether different way. He seeks to show that language itself is a social-historical phenomenon, that linguistic exchange is a mundane, practical activity like many others, and that linguistic theories which ignore the social-historical and practical character of language do so at their cost.

Bourdieu develops this argument by examining some of the presuppositions of Saussurian and Chomskyan linguistics. There are, of course, many important differences between the theoretical approaches of Saussure and Chomsky – for instance, Chomsky's approach is more dynamic and gives greater emphasis to the generative capacities of competent speakers. But there is, in Bourdieu's view, one principle which these theoretical approaches have in common: they are both based on a fundamental distinction which enables language to be constituted as an autonomous and homogeneous object, amenable to a properly linguistic analysis. In the case of Saussure, the distinction is that between *langue* and *parole*, that is, between 'language' as a self-sufficient system of signs

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and 'speech' as the situated realization of the system by particular speakers. Chomsky draws a somewhat similar distinction between 'competence', which is the knowledge of a language possessed by an ideal speaker-hearer in a completely homogeneous speech community, and 'performance', which is the actual use of language in concrete situations.<sup>5</sup>

Bourdieu's objection to this kind of distinction is that it leads the linguist to take for granted an object domain which is in fact the product of a complex set of social, historical and political conditions of formation. Under the guise of drawing a *methodological* distinction, the linguist surreptitiously makes a series of *substantive* assumptions. For the completely homogeneous language or speech community does not exist in reality: it is an idealization of a particular set of linguistic practices which have emerged historically and have certain social conditions of existence. This idealization or *fictio juris* is the source of what Bourdieu calls, somewhat provocatively, 'the illusion of linguistic communism'. By taking a particular set of linguistic practices as a normative model of correct usage, the linguist produces the illusion of a common language and ignores the social-historical conditions which have established a particular set of linguistic practices as dominant and legitimate. Through a complex historical process, sometimes involving extensive conflict (especially in colonial contexts), a particular language or set of linguistic practices has emerged as the dominant and legitimate language, and other languages or dialects have been eliminated or subordinated to it. This dominant and legitimate language, this *victorious* language, is what linguists commonly take for granted. Their idealized language or speech community is an object which has been *pre-constructed* by a set of social-historical conditions endowing it with the status of the sole legitimate or 'official' language of a particular community.

This process can be examined by looking carefully at the ways in which particular languages have emerged historically as dominant in particular geographical locales, often in conjunction with the formation of modern nation-states. Bourdieu focuses on the development of French, but one could just as easily look at the development of English in Britain or the United States, of Spanish in Spain or Mexico, and so on.<sup>6</sup> In the case of French, much of the historical groundwork was carried out by Ferdinand Brunot in his monumental study, *Histoire de la langue française des origines à nos jours*.<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu draws on Brunot's work to show how, until the French Revolution, the process of linguistic unification was bound up with

the construction of a monarchical state. In the central provinces of the *pays d'oil* (Champagne, Normandy, Anjou, Berry), the languages and dialects of the feudal period gradually gave way, from the fourteenth century on, to the dialect of the *Ile de France*, which was developed in cultivated Parisian circles, promoted to the status of official language and used in a written form. During the same period, regional and purely oral dialects were relegated to the status of *patois*, defined negatively and pejoratively by opposition to the official language. The situation was different in the *langue d'oc* regions of southern France. There the Parisian dialect did not take hold until the sixteenth century, and it did not eliminate the widespread use of local dialects, which existed in written as well as oral forms. Hence a situation of bilingualism developed, with members of the peasantry and lower classes speaking local dialects only, while the aristocracy, bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie had access to the official language as well.

As Bourdieu shows, the members of the upper classes had everything to gain from the policy of linguistic unification which accompanied the French Revolution. This policy, which was part of Condillac's theory of the purification of thought through the purification of language, would give the upper classes a *de facto* monopoly of political power. By promoting the official language to the status of the national language – that is, the official language of the emerging nation-state – the policy of linguistic unification would favour those who already possessed the official language as part of their linguistic competence, while those who knew only a local dialect would become part of a political and linguistic unit in which their traditional competence was subordinate and devalued. The subsequent normalization and inculcation of the official language, and its legitimation as the official language of the nation-state, was not just a matter of political policy: it was a gradual process that depended on a variety of other factors, such as the development of the educational system and the formation of a unified labour market. The production of grammar books, dictionaries and a corpus of texts exemplifying correct usage is only the most obvious manifestation of this gradual process of normalization. Perhaps more importantly, with the establishment of a system of educational qualifications possessing a standardized value independent of regional variations, and with the unification of a labour market in which administrative positions depended on educational qualifications, the school came to be seen as a principal means of access to the labour market, especially in areas where industrialization was weak. Thus, by the combined

effect of various institutions and social processes, people speaking local dialects were induced, as Bourdieu puts it, 'to collaborate in the destruction of their instruments of expression'.<sup>8</sup>

If linguistic theories have tended to neglect the social-historical conditions underlying the formation of the language which they take, in an idealized form, as their object domain, so too they have tended to analyse linguistic expressions in isolation from the specific social conditions in which they are used. In the work of Saussure and Chomsky, the isolation of linguistic analysis from the social conditions of use is closely linked to the distinctions drawn between *langue* and *parole*, competence and performance, and hence Bourdieu presses his critique further by asking whether these distinctions do justice to what is involved in the activity of speaking. In the first place, it seems clear that speaking cannot be thought of, in the manner suggested by Saussure, as the mere realization or 'execution' of a pre-existing linguistic system: speaking is a much more complex and creative activity than this rather mechanical model would suggest. In the case of Chomsky's theory, however, the issues are more complicated, precisely because Chomsky sought to take account of creativity by conceptualizing competence as a system of generative processes.

Bourdieu's objection to this aspect of Chomsky's theory is that the notion of competence, understood as the capacity of an ideal speaker to generate an unlimited sequence of grammatically well formed sentences, is simply too abstract. The kind of competence that *actual* speakers possess is not a capacity to generate an unlimited sequence of grammatically well formed sentences, but rather a capacity to produce expressions which are appropriate for particular situations, that is, a capacity to produce expressions *à propos*. Bourdieu's argument does not require him to deny that competent speakers possess the capacity to generate grammatical sentences; his main point is that this capacity is *insufficient* as a means of characterizing the kind of competence possessed by actual speakers. For actual speakers have a *practical competence*, a 'practical sense' (a notion to which we shall return), by virtue of which they are able to produce utterances that are appropriate in the circumstances; and this practical competence cannot be derived from or reduced to the competence of Chomsky's ideal speaker.<sup>9</sup> Thus actual speakers are able to embed sentences or expressions in practical strategies which have numerous functions and which are tacitly adjusted to the relations of power between speakers and hearers. Their practical competence involves not only the capacity to produce grammatical



utterances, but *also* the capacity to make oneself heard, believed, obeyed, and so on. Those who speak must ensure that they are entitled to speak in the circumstances, and those who listen must reckon that those who speak are worthy of attention. The recognition of the right to speak, and the associated forms of power and authority which are implicit in all communicative situations, are generally ignored by the linguist, who treats the linguistic exchange as an intellectual operation consisting of the encoding and decoding of grammatically well formed messages.

It is with this limitation of Chomskyan linguistics in mind that Bourdieu turns to a different body of writing on language, namely, to Austin's work on speech acts. In some respects, Bourdieu's approach to language is quite similar to that developed by Austin and other so-called 'ordinary language philosophers' in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, Bourdieu's appraisal of Austin's work is more sympathetic than his analysis of Saussure and Chomsky. In singling out a class of 'performative utterances', such as 'I do' uttered in the course of a marriage ceremony or 'I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*' uttered while smashing a bottle against the stem of a vessel, Austin stressed that such utterances are not ways of reporting or describing a state of affairs, but rather ways of acting or participating in a ritual; that they are not strictly true or false but rather 'felicitous' or 'infelicitous'; and that for such utterances to be felicitous they must, among other things, be uttered by an appropriate person in accordance with some conventional procedure.<sup>11</sup> This implies, according to Bourdieu, that the efficacy of performative utterances is inseparable from the existence of an *institution* which defines the conditions (such as the place, the time, the agent) that must be fulfilled in order for the utterance to be effective. Bourdieu is using the term 'institution' in a way that is both very general and active (a sense conveyed better by the French term *institution* than by its English equivalent). An institution is not necessarily a particular organization – this or that family or factory, for instance – but is any relatively durable set of social relations which *endows* individuals with power, status and resources of various kinds. It is the institution, in this sense, that endows the speaker with the authority to carry out the act which his or her utterance claims to perform. Not anyone can stand before a freshly completed ship, utter the words 'I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*' while flinging a bottle at its stem, and thereby succeed in *naming* the vessel: the person must be *authorized* to do so, must be vested with the requisite authority to carry out the act. Hence the efficacy of the performative

utterance presupposes a set of social relations, an institution, by virtue of which a particular individual, who is *authorized* to speak and *recognized* as such by others, is able to speak in a way that others will regard as acceptable in the circumstances. It follows that the myriad of symbolic devices – the robes, the wigs, the ritual expressions and respectful references – that accompany occasions of a more 'formal' or 'official' kind are not irrelevant distractions: they are the very mechanisms through which those who speak attest to the authority of the institution which endows them with the power to speak, an institution which is sustained, in part, by the reverence and solemnity which are *de rigueur* on such occasions.

While Bourdieu praises the speech-act theorists for calling attention to the social conditions of communication, he thinks that Austin, and especially some of the authors influenced by him, have not fully unfolded the consequences of this view. They have not fully appreciated the implications of the fact that the conditions of felicity are primarily *social* conditions: hence there is a tendency in the literature on speech acts to resort to analyses of a purely linguistic or logical kind. Part of the problem lies in the work of Austin himself. Austin refers, rather vaguely, to 'conventional procedures' which must be followed for the felicitous utterance of a performative; and later, when he shifts to the terminology of 'locutionary', 'illocutionary' and 'perlocutionary' acts, he suggests that illocutionary acts (the act performed *in* saying something) can be distinguished from perlocutionary acts (the act performed *by* saying something) by the fact that illocutionary acts employ 'conventional means'. But never does Austin examine in detail the nature of these conventions; never does he consider carefully what it might mean to treat these conventions as *social* phenomena, implicated in sets of social relations, imbued with power and authority, embroiled in conflict and struggle. Austin therefore left the way open for others to think about speech acts in purely linguistic terms, oblivious to the social character of the conditions of felicitous use. To think about speech acts in this way is to forget that the authority which utterances have is an authority bestowed upon language by factors external to it. When an authorized spokesperson speaks with authority, he or she expresses or manifests this authority, but does not create it: like the Homeric orator who takes hold of the *skeptron* in order to speak, the spokesperson avails himself or herself of a form of power or authority which is part of a social institution, and which does not stem from the words alone.

It is in this context that Bourdieu expresses reservations about the

way in which another major social thinker, Jürgen Habermas, tries to build upon the work of speech-act theorists. Habermas argues that, in exchanging speech acts, individuals are implicitly raising certain 'validity claims', such as truth and correctness; and that some of these validity claims can only be redeemed or made good in an 'ideal speech situation', that is, a communicative situation in which participants are motivated to accept or reject a problematic claim on the basis of reasons or grounds alone.<sup>12</sup> Although Bourdieu does not engage extensively with Habermas's work, it is clear that the way in which he wishes to pursue the insights of speech-act theorists is quite different from Habermas's account. Whereas Habermas seeks to show that the analysis of speech acts discloses a 'rationally motivating force' at work in communicative exchange, Bourdieu is concerned to demonstrate that whatever power or force speech acts possess is a power or force ascribed to them by the social institution of which the utterance of the speech act is part; and hence the notion of an ideal speech situation, in which the rational character of communicative exchange would be unhindered by social constraints, is a notion which is based, in Bourdieu's view, on a fictitious elision of the social conditions of language use. This line of argument, which echoes criticisms that others have made of Habermas's work, certainly has some plausibility. One may have doubts about Bourdieu's own account of speech acts – one may wonder, for instance, if he is not relying too heavily on those occasions in which the utterance of speech acts is clearly part of some recognized social ritual, like a marriage or a baptism, as distinct from those occasions in which individuals engage in relatively unstructured face-to-face interaction, like a banal and casual conversation between friends.<sup>13</sup> But it cannot be denied that, by focusing on the institutional aspects of language use and probing them with an astute sociological imagination, Bourdieu has highlighted some of the social conditions of language use in a way that is largely absent from the existing literature on the theory of speech acts.

## II

Bourdieu's writings on language offer more than an illuminating critical perspective on the work of Saussure, Chomsky, Austin and others: they also put forward a new approach to language and linguistic exchange. This approach is essentially a development of the theoretical framework that he has worked out in other contexts.

To understand this approach, it is therefore necessary to take account of Bourdieu's other theoretical work, that is, the key concepts and assumptions of his theory of practice.

Bourdieu's theory of practice is a systematic attempt to move beyond a series of oppositions and antinomies which have plagued the social sciences since their inception. For anyone involved in the social sciences today, these oppositions have a familiar ring: the individual versus society, action versus structure, freedom versus necessity, etc. Bourdieu's theoretical approach is intended to bypass or dissolve a plethora of such oppositions. When he develops his approach, however, he generally begins with a broad dichotomy, expressed at the level of epistemology or the theory of knowledge, between 'subjectivism' and 'objectivism'. By 'subjectivism' Bourdieu means an intellectual orientation to the social world which seeks to grasp the way the world appears to the individuals who are situated within it. Subjectivism presupposes the possibility of some kind of immediate apprehension of the lived experience of others, and it assumes that this apprehension is by itself a more-or-less adequate form of knowledge about the social world. What Bourdieu has in mind here are certain forms of 'phenomenological' and 'interpretative' sociology and anthropology, such as the phenomenological sociology developed by Alfred Schutz.<sup>14</sup> By 'objectivism' Bourdieu means an intellectual orientation to the social world which seeks to construct the objective relations which structure practices and representations. Objectivism presupposes a break with immediate experience; it places the primary experience of the social world in brackets and attempts to elucidate the structures and principles upon which primary experience depends but which it cannot directly grasp. The kinds of analyses developed by Lévi-Strauss and by some versions of structural linguistics are examples of objectivism in this sense.

Bourdieu's view is that both subjectivism and objectivism are inadequate intellectual orientations, but that the latter is less inadequate than the former. The chief merit of objectivism is that it breaks with the immediate experience of the social world and is able thereby to produce a knowledge of the social world which is not reducible to the practical knowledge possessed by lay actors. In Bourdieu's view, the break with immediate experience is an essential prerequisite for social-scientific inquiry, a break which is made all the more difficult by the fact that the social scientist is also a participant in social life and hence is inclined to draw upon everyday words and concepts in analysing the social world.<sup>15</sup> If objectivism rightly emphasizes the break with everyday experience, it suffers

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from shortcomings of its own. The main shortcoming of objectivism is that, by failing to reflect rigorously on its own conditions of possibility, it cannot grasp the link between the knowledge it produces and the practical knowledge possessed by lay actors; or, to put it another way, it cannot grasp the link between the objective relations and structures it elucidates, on the one hand, and the practical activities of the individuals who make up the social world, on the other. Thus, from the perspective of objectivism, the practical activities of individuals can appear as nothing other than the application of a rule, or the realization of a model or structure, which has been elucidated or constructed by the analyst. Practice is turned into a mere epiphenomenon of the analyst's own constructs. Bourdieu's view, persuasively argued, is that this perspective is irredeemably flawed as an account of practice. His alternative theory of practice is an attempt to move beyond objectivism without relapsing into subjectivism, that is, to take account of the need to break with immediate experience while at the same time doing justice to the practical character of social life.

The key concept that Bourdieu employs in developing his approach is that of *habitus*. The term is a very old one, of Aristotelian and scholastic origins, but Bourdieu uses it in a distinctive and quite specific way. The habitus is a set of *dispositions* which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are 'regular' without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any 'rule'. The dispositions which constitute the habitus are inculcated, structured, durable, generative and transposable – features that each deserve a brief explanation. Dispositions are acquired through a gradual process of *inculcation* in which early childhood experiences are particularly important. Through a myriad of mundane processes of training and learning, such as those involved in the inculcation of table manners ('sit up straight', 'don't eat with your mouth full', etc.), the individual acquires a set of dispositions which literally mould the body and become second nature. The dispositions produced thereby are also *structured* in the sense that they unavoidably reflect the social conditions within which they were acquired. An individual from a working-class background, for instance, will have acquired dispositions which are different in certain respects from those acquired by individuals who were brought up in a middle-class milieu. In other words, the similarities and differences that characterize the social conditions of existence of individuals will be reflected in the habitus, which may be relatively homogeneous across indi-

viduals from similar backgrounds. Structured dispositions are also *durable*: they are ingrained in the body in such a way that they endure through the life history of the individual, operating in a way that is pre-conscious and hence not readily amenable to conscious reflection and modification. Finally, the dispositions are *generative* and *transposable* in the sense that they are capable of generating a multiplicity of practices and perceptions in fields other than those in which they were originally acquired. As a durably installed set of dispositions, the habitus tends to generate practices and perceptions, works and appreciations, which concur with the conditions of existence of which the habitus is itself the product.

The habitus also provides individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives. It 'orients' their actions and inclinations without strictly determining them. It gives them a 'feel for the game', a sense of what is appropriate in the circumstances and what is not, a 'practical sense' (*le sens pratique*). The practical sense is not so much a state of mind as a state of the body, a state of being. It is because the body has become a repository of ingrained dispositions that certain actions, certain ways of behaving and responding, seem altogether natural. Bourdieu speaks here of a bodily or corporeal 'hexis', by which he means a certain durable organization of one's body and of its deployment in the world. 'Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking.'<sup>16</sup> The importance of bodily hexis can be seen in the differing ways that men and women carry themselves in the world, in their differing postures, their differing ways of walking and speaking, of eating and laughing, as well as in the differing ways that men and women deploy themselves in the more intimate aspects of life. The body is the site of incorporated history. The practical schemes through which the body is organized are the product of history and, at the same time, the source of practices and perceptions which reproduce that history. The continuing process of production and reproduction, of history incorporated and incorporation actualized, is a process that can take place without ever becoming the object of a specific institutional practice, explicitly articulated in language. The latter presupposes the development of a certain kind of pedagogic institution which is not present in all societies, and which in our societies is generally associated with the educational system.

The habitus, and the related notions of practical sense and bodily hexis, are the concepts with which Bourdieu seeks to grasp the

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generative principles or schemes which underlie practices and perceptions, works and appreciations. But when individuals act, they always do so in specific social contexts or settings. Hence particular practices or perceptions should be seen, not as the product of the habitus as such, but as the product of the *relation between* the habitus, on the one hand, and the specific social contexts or 'fields' within which individuals act, on the other. Bourdieu uses different terms to refer to the social contexts or fields of action: 'field' (*champ*) is his preferred technical term, but the terms 'market' and 'game' are also commonly used, in ways that are at least partly metaphorical. A field or market may be seen as a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or 'capital'.<sup>17</sup> One of the central ideas of Bourdieu's work, for which he is well known among sociologists of education, is the idea that there are different forms of capital: not only 'economic capital' in the strict sense (i.e. material wealth in the form of money, stocks and shares, property, etc.), but also 'cultural capital' (i.e. knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions, as exemplified by educational or technical qualifications), 'symbolic capital' (i.e. accumulated prestige or honour), and so on. One of the most important properties of fields is the way in which they allow one form of capital to be converted into another – in the way, for example, that certain educational qualifications can be cashed in for lucrative jobs.<sup>18</sup>

A field is always the site of struggles in which individuals seek to maintain or alter the distribution of the forms of capital specific to it. The individuals who participate in these struggles will have differing aims – some will seek to preserve the status quo, others to change it – and differing chances of winning or losing, depending on where they are located in the structured space of positions. But all individuals, whatever their aims and chances of success, will share in common certain fundamental presuppositions. All participants must believe in the game they are playing, and in the value of what is at stake in the struggles they are waging. The very existence and persistence of the game or field presupposes a total and unconditional 'investment', a practical and unquestioning belief, in the game and its stakes. Hence the conduct of struggle within a field, whether a conflict over the distribution of wealth or over the value of a work of art, always presupposes a fundamental accord or complicity on the part of those who participate in the struggle.

The terms used by Bourdieu to describe fields and their properties – 'market', 'capital', 'profit', etc. – are terms borrowed from the

language of economics, but they are adapted for the analysis of fields which are not 'economic' in the narrow sense. This is a point on which Bourdieu can be easily misunderstood. The reader may get the impression that, when Bourdieu uses these terms to analyse forms of interaction which are not strictly economic transactions, he is treating these forms of interaction *as if* they were economic transactions *and nothing more*; that is, one may get the impression that Bourdieu's approach involves a kind of economic reductionism. There may well be some genuine difficulties with Bourdieu's use of economic terminology, but it is important to see that his position is more complicated and more sophisticated than the charge of economic reductionism would suggest. His view is that the practices we describe today as 'economic' in the narrow sense (e.g. buying and selling commodities) are a sub-category of practices pertaining to a specific field or cluster of fields, the 'market economy', which has emerged historically and which displays certain distinctive properties. But there are other sub-categories of practices which pertain to other fields, such as the fields of literature, art, politics and religion; and these other fields are characterized by their own distinctive properties, by distinctive forms of capital, profit, etc. Hence Bourdieu does not wish to reduce all social fields to the economy in the narrow sense, nor to treat all types of practice as strictly economic transactions. On the contrary, he wishes to treat the economy in the narrow sense as one field (or cluster of fields) among a plurality of fields which are not reducible to one another. Within fields that are not economic in the narrow sense, practices may not be governed by a strictly economic logic (e.g. may not be oriented towards financial gain); and yet they may none the less concur with a logic that is economic in a broader sense, in so far as they are oriented towards the augmentation of *some* kind of 'capital' (e.g. cultural or symbolic capital) or the maximization of *some* kind of 'profit' (e.g. honour or prestige). So, for example, if we want to understand why a peasant family buys a second yoke of oxen after the harvest, on the grounds that they will be needed for treading out the grain of an allegedly plentiful crop, only to sell the oxen before the autumn ploughing when they would technically be most useful, we have to appreciate that the purchase of the oxen is a way of augmenting the family's symbolic capital in the late summer when marriages are negotiated.<sup>19</sup> The purchase of the oxen and their conspicuous display is a strategy of bluff that obeys an economic logic in a broad sense (the augmentation of symbolic capital and the maximization of symbolic profit), without being economic in the



narrow sense of financial or material gain.

Bourdieu therefore assumes a fundamental link between actions and interests, between the practices of agents and the interests which they knowingly or unknowingly pursue, while at the same time he rejects the idea that interests are always narrowly economic. 'Even when they give every appearance of disinterestedness because they escape the logic of "economic" interest (in the narrow sense) and are oriented towards non-material stakes that are not easily quantified, as in "pre-capitalist" societies or in the cultural sphere of capitalist societies, practices never cease to comply with an economic logic':<sup>20</sup> this is the core assumption of Bourdieu's theory of the economy of practice. It is a substantive assumption, in the sense that it makes a certain (and by no means uncontroversial) claim about the basic character of human action. But it is also, and perhaps more importantly, a heuristic principle, in the sense that it calls upon the researcher to elucidate the specific interests at stake in the practices and conflicts which take place in particular fields. For the *content* of interests cannot be determined abstractly. What interests are, that is, what they amount to in any particular instance of action or struggle, can be determined only through a careful empirical or historical inquiry into the distinctive properties of the fields concerned. Hence if one wishes to understand the interests at stake in literary or artistic production, one must reconstruct the literary or artistic field in relation to the fields of the economy (in the narrow sense), politics, etc.; and one may find that, the greater the autonomy of the literary or artistic field, the more agents within these fields will be oriented towards non-pecuniary and non-political ends, that is, the more they will have a specific 'interest in disinterestedness' (e.g. 'art for art's sake').<sup>21</sup> The fact that literary or artistic production appears as disinterested, as a haven for gratuitous activity that is ostentatiously opposed to the mundane world of commodities and power, does not mean that it is interest-free: on the contrary, it means only that it is able more easily to conceal its interests beneath the veil of aesthetic purity.

There is a further qualification that should be added to this schematic account of Bourdieu's theory of practice. While agents orient themselves towards specific interests or goals, their action is only rarely the outcome of a conscious deliberation or calculation in which the pros and cons of different strategies are carefully weighed up, their costs and benefits assessed, etc. To view action as the outcome of conscious calculation – a perspective implicit in some forms of game theory and rational action theory<sup>22</sup> – is to neglect the

fact that, by virtue of the habitus, individuals are *already predisposed* to act in certain ways, pursue certain goals, avow certain tastes, and so on. Since individuals are the products of particular histories which endure in the habitus, their actions can never be analysed adequately as the outcome of conscious calculation. Rather, practices should be seen as the product of an encounter between a habitus and a field which are, to varying degrees, 'compatible' or 'congruent' with one another, in such a way that, on occasions when there is a lack of congruence (e.g. a student from a working-class background who finds himself or herself in an elite educational establishment), an individual may not know how to act and may literally be lost for words.

In developing his approach to language and linguistic exchange, Bourdieu applies and elaborates the ideas that make up the theory of practice. Linguistic utterances or expressions are forms of practice and, as such, can be understood as the product of the relation between a linguistic habitus and a linguistic market. The linguistic habitus is a sub-set of the dispositions which comprise the habitus: it is that sub-set of dispositions acquired in the course of learning to speak in particular contexts (the family, the peer group, the school, etc.). These dispositions govern both the subsequent linguistic practices of an agent and the anticipation of the value that linguistic products will receive in other fields or markets – in the labour market, for example, or in the institutions of secondary or tertiary education. The linguistic habitus is also inscribed in the body and forms a dimension of the bodily hexis. A particular accent, for instance, is the product of a certain way of moving the tongue, the lips, etc.: it is an aspect of what Bourdieu calls, following Pierre Guiraud, an 'articulatory style'.<sup>23</sup> The fact that different groups and classes have different accents, intonations and ways of speaking is a manifestation, at the level of language, of the socially structured character of the habitus. Differences of this kind are well known and have been amply documented by sociologists, sociolinguists and social historians. A less obvious index of the differentiation of articulatory styles may be found in the ways that particular classes or the respective sexes are associated with particular conceptions of the *mouth*. This is easier to illustrate in French than in English. In French there is a distinction between a closed, pinched mouth (*la bouche*) and a large, open mouth (*la gueule*). Individuals from working-class backgrounds tend to draw a socially and sexually overdetermined opposition between these terms: *la bouche* is associated with the bourgeois and the feminine (e.g. 'tight-lipped'),

whereas *la gueule* is associated with the popular and the masculine (e.g. 'big mouth', 'loud mouth'). One can see that, from this viewpoint, the adoption of the articulatory style of the upper or middle classes may appear to some individuals from working-class backgrounds as a negation not only of their social identity, but also of their sexual identity. Working-class male speakers can adopt the dominant articulatory style only at the cost of a double negation, involving both the renunciation of their class habitus and the acquisition of dispositions which are perceived as effeminate. Bourdieu suggests that this may help to explain the fact, observed by Labov and others,<sup>24</sup> that working-class women display a greater tendency to adopt prestigious forms of speech than working-class men, while the latter tend to take the lead in developing new vernacular forms of expression.

4. Linguistic utterances or expressions are always produced in particular contexts or markets, and the properties of these markets endow linguistic products with a certain 'value'. On a given linguistic market, some products are valued more highly than others; and part of the practical competence of speakers is to know how, and to be able, to produce expressions which are highly valued on the markets concerned. This aspect of the practical competence of speakers is not uniformly distributed throughout a society in which the same language, such as English or French, is spoken. For different speakers possess different quantities of 'linguistic capital' – that is, the capacity to produce expressions *à propos*, for a particular market. Moreover, the distribution of linguistic capital is related in specific ways to the distribution of other forms of capital (economic capital, cultural capital, etc.) which define the location of an individual within the social space. Hence differences in terms of accent, grammar and vocabulary – the very differences overlooked by formal linguistics – are indices of the social positions of speakers and reflections of the quantities of linguistic capital (and other capital) which they possess. The more linguistic capital that speakers possess, the more they are able to exploit the system of differences to their advantage and thereby secure a *profit of distinction*. For the forms of expression which receive the greatest value and secure the greatest profit are those which are most unequally distributed, both in the sense that the conditions for the acquisition of the capacity to produce them are restricted and in the sense that the expressions themselves are relatively rare on the markets where they appear.

Bourdieu offers a vivid example of this dynamic. The example is from the town of Pau in Béarn, a province in southern France from

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which Bourdieu himself comes and where a local dialect, Béarnais, is spoken. The occasion is the official celebration, in September 1974, of the centenary of the birth of a Béarnais poet, Simin Palay. A French newspaper published in the province reported an event that 'greatly moved' the audience who 'applauded at length': the event was that the mayor of Pau addressed the audience in 'good quality Béarnais'.<sup>25</sup> Why should a group of people whose native language is Béarnais feel greatly moved by the fact that the mayor of their town addresses them in Béarnais on the occasion of honouring a Béarnais poet? Such a response is possible, argues Bourdieu, only in so far as they tacitly recognize the unwritten law which imposes French as the only acceptable language on official occasions. The mayor of Pau employs a *strategy of condescension* by which, in the very act of negating symbolically the objective relation of power between the two languages which co-exist in this market, he draws symbolic profit from this relation. He is able to draw profit from the hierarchy between the languages because everyone recognizes the unwritten law and knows that, as mayor of a large town, he has all of the qualifications which guarantee his competence in the dominant language. By virtue of his position he is able to negate symbolically the hierarchy without disrupting it, to transgress the unwritten law and thereby exploit the hierarchy to his advantage in the very process of reaffirming it. What is praised as 'good quality Béarnais' when issued from the mouth of the mayor would have been accorded a quite different (and no doubt much lower) value had it been uttered by a peasant who spoke mere fragments of French.

As this example illustrates, in reproducing linguistic expressions speakers take into account – in varying ways and to differing extents – the market conditions within which their products will be received and valued by others. The speaker's assessment of the market conditions, and the anticipation of the likely reception of his or her linguistic products, operate as internalized constraints on the very process of production. Individuals implicitly and routinely modify their expressions in anticipation of their likely reception – in the way, for instance, that adults alter their vocabulary and tone of voice when speaking to children. Hence all linguistic expressions are, to some extent, 'euphemized': they are modified by a certain kind of *censorship* which stems from the structure of the market, but which is transformed into *self-censorship* through the process of anticipation. Viewed from this perspective, phenomena of politeness and tactfulness, of choosing the right word for the right occasion, are not exceptional phenomena but are simply the most obvious manifesta-

tion of a situation common to all linguistic production. Tact is nothing other than the capacity of a speaker to assess market conditions accurately and to produce linguistic expressions which are appropriate to them, that is, expressions which are suitably euphemized.

Mechanisms of censorship operate not only in the production of everyday oral discourse, but also in the production of the scholarly discourses found in written texts. Here as elsewhere, when Bourdieu speaks of 'censorship' he is not referring to the explicit activity of political or religious organizations seeking to suppress or restrict the diffusion of symbolic forms. Rather, he is referring to a general feature of markets or fields which requires that, if one wishes to produce discourse successfully within a particular field, one must observe the forms and formalities of that field. This is just as true of the scholarly fields of literature, philosophy and science as it is of the mundane markets of everyday social interaction. Bourdieu takes the philosophical discourse of Heidegger as an example. Heidegger's work is particularly interesting precisely because the language is so arcane, so preoccupied with distinctions, allusions and rhetorical effects – in a word, so euphemized. What Bourdieu tries to show is that the style and form of Heidegger's prose is a product of the mechanisms of censorship and strategies of euphemization associated with his position in a specific philosophical field, itself related in determinate ways to the literary, political and broader social fields of Weimar Germany. Part of the distinctiveness of Heidegger's work is that it borrows many words from ordinary language – *Sorge* (care), *Fürsorge* (solicitude), *Sozialfürsorge* (social assistance), etc. – and introduces them into a philosophical field from which they had previously been excluded. But at the same time, these words are fundamentally transformed by a process of euphemization, through which they are adapted to the forms and conventions of philosophical discourse. In this way, Heidegger's work acquires the appearance of autonomy, the appearance of a self-sufficient body of texts which call for internal exegesis, while simultaneously alluding to and concealing its dependence on ordinary language. It is this distinctive combination of loftiness and simplicity, or ordinary words ennobled by the forms of philosophical respectability, which defines, in Bourdieu's view, the specificity of Heidegger's language. The difference between Heidegger and the more forthright exponents of the 'conservative revolution', such as Ernst Jünger and Möller van den Bruck, can thus be seen as a difference primarily of *form*, linked to their different positions within the fields characteristic of the Weimar

period. By carefully reconstructing these fields and analysing the mechanisms and strategies associated with Heidegger's location within them, it may be possible to shed some fresh light on Heidegger's work while steering clear of the rather polemical opposition between those critics who charge him with an apologetics for Nazism and those who seek to redeem him at any cost.<sup>26</sup>

Irrespective of whether one is considering the oral discourse of everyday life or the scholarly discourse of written texts, it is important to see that systematic discrepancies may arise between linguistic markets and the forms of censorship associated with them, on the one hand, and the capacities of individuals from differing social backgrounds to produce linguistic expressions appropriate to those markets, on the other. As a result of such discrepancies, individuals from differing social backgrounds are able to relate to linguistic markets, as well as to themselves as producers for these markets, in differing ways. Bourdieu illustrates this point by considering some of the typical speech practices of individuals from different class backgrounds when they find themselves in formal or official situations (an interview, a classroom discussion, a public ceremony, etc.).<sup>27</sup> Individuals from upper-class backgrounds are endowed with a linguistic habitus which enables them to respond with relative ease to the demands of most formal or official occasions. There is a concordance or congruence between their linguistic habitus and the demands of formal markets. It is this congruence which underlies the confidence and fluency with which they speak: their confidence merely attests to the fact that the conditions in which they are speaking concur fairly closely with the conditions which endowed them with the capacity to speak, and hence they are able (and know they are able) to reap symbolic benefits by speaking in a way that comes naturally to them. Hence, on most public occasions, they speak with distinction and thereby distinguish themselves from all those who are less well endowed with linguistic capital. By contrast, individuals from petits-bourgeois backgrounds must generally make an effort to adapt their linguistic expressions to the demands of formal markets. The result is that their speech is often accompanied by tension and anxiety, and by a tendency to rectify or correct expressions so that they concur with dominant norms. This hyper-correction of petit-bourgeois speech is the sign of a class divided against itself, whose members are seeking, at the cost of constant anxiety, to produce linguistic expressions which bear the mark of a habitus other than their own. For members of the lower classes, whose conditions of existence are least conducive to the

acquisition of a habitus which concurs with formal markets, there are many occasions in which their linguistic products are assigned, by themselves as well as others, a limited value. Hence the tendency of working-class children to eliminate themselves from the educational system, or to resign themselves to vocational courses of training. Hence also the unease, the hesitation leading to silence, which, as we noted earlier, may overcome individuals from lower-class backgrounds on occasions defined as official.

There are other circumstances, of course, in which individuals from lower-class backgrounds are able to speak fluently and confidently, and one of the merits of Bourdieu's approach is that he is able to analyse these so-called 'popular' forms of speech in a way that avoids the kind of intellectual romanticism characteristic of some studies of working-class or peasant culture. Bourdieu prefers to avoid blanket terms like 'popular culture' and 'popular speech', which have themselves become part of a struggle carried out among researchers and commentators in the intellectual field. He prefers, instead, to examine concretely the ways in which those who are most deprived in terms of economic and cultural capital are able to express themselves in the diverse settings of everyday life. These settings – gatherings of friends or peers, conversations among workers in an office or on the shop floor, etc. – can be viewed as markets with their own properties and forms of censorship, so that individuals who wish to speak effectively in these settings must concur to some extent with the demands of the market. Hence forms of speech like slang and 'cant' should not be seen simply as a rejection of dominant modes of speech: they are, at the same time, highly euphemized forms of speech which are adeptly tailored to the markets for which they are produced. In Bourdieu's terms, slang is the product of the pursuit of distinction in a dominated market. It is one of the ways in which those individuals – especially men – who are poorly endowed with economic and cultural capital are able to distinguish themselves from what they regard as weak and effeminate. Their pursuit of distinction therefore goes hand-in-hand with a deep-seated conformity with regard to established hierarchies, such as the hierarchy between the sexes. It also leads them to take for granted, and indeed positively to assert, the very characteristics (e.g. physical strength, lack of education) by virtue of which they occupy a subordinate position in the social space.<sup>28</sup>

In taking for granted certain aspects of established hierarchies even when overtly rejecting dominant modes of speech, individuals from lower-class backgrounds betray the fact that they share, to

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some extent, a system of evaluation which works against them. This is an example of a general phenomenon with which Bourdieu is concerned throughout his writings, and which he describes as 'symbolic power' (or, in some cases, as 'symbolic violence'). Bourdieu uses the term 'symbolic power' to refer not so much to a specific type of power, but rather to an aspect of most forms of power as they are routinely deployed in social life. For in the routine flow of day-to-day life, power is seldom exercised as overt physical force: instead, it is transmuted into a symbolic form, and thereby endowed with a kind of *legitimacy* that it would not otherwise have. Bourdieu expresses this point by saying that symbolic power is an 'invisible' power which is 'misrecognized' as such and thereby 'recognized' as legitimate. The terms 'recognition' (*reconnaissance*) and 'misrecognition' (*méconnaissance*) play an important role here: they underscore the fact that the exercise of power through symbolic exchange always rests on a foundation of shared belief. That is, the efficacy of symbolic power presupposes certain forms of cognition or belief, in such a way that even those who benefit least from the exercise of power participate, to some extent, in their own subjection. They recognize or tacitly acknowledge the legitimacy of power, or of the hierarchical relations of power in which they are embedded; and hence they fail to see that the hierarchy is, after all, an arbitrary social construction which serves the interests of some groups more than others. To understand the nature of symbolic power, it is therefore crucial to see that it presupposes a kind of *active complicity* on the part of those subjected to it. Dominated individuals are not passive bodies to which symbolic power is applied, as it were, like a scalpel to a corpse. Rather, symbolic power requires, as a condition of its success, that those subjected to it believe in the legitimacy of power and the legitimacy of those who wield it.

Like many of Bourdieu's ideas, the notions of symbolic power and symbolic violence are rather flexible notions which were worked out in specific research contexts, and hence they are best explained by reference to his more concrete anthropological and sociological studies. Bourdieu originally developed the notion of symbolic violence in the context of analysing the nature of the gift exchange in Kabyle society.<sup>29</sup> Instead of analysing the exchange of gifts in terms of a formal structure of reciprocity, in the manner of Lévi-Strauss, Bourdieu views it as a mechanism through which power is exercised and simultaneously disguised. In a society like Kabylia, where there are relatively few institutions in which relations of domination can be given a stable and objective form, individuals must resort to more



personalized means of exercising power over others. One such means is debt: an individual can bring another under his or her sway by enforcing the obligations deriving from usury. But there are other, 'softer' and more subtle means of exercising power, like the giving of gifts. By giving a gift – especially a generous one that cannot be met by a counter-gift of comparable quality – the giver creates a lasting obligation and binds the recipient in a relation of personal indebtedness. Giving is also a way of possessing: it is a way of binding another while shrouding the bond in a gesture of generosity. This is what Bourdieu describes as 'symbolic violence', in contrast to the overt violence of the usurer or the ruthless master; it is 'gentle, invisible violence, unrecognized as such, chosen as much as undergone, that of trust, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, debts, piety, in a word, of all the virtues honoured by the ethic of honour'.<sup>30</sup> In a society like Kabylia, where domination has to be sustained primarily through interpersonal relations rather than institutions, symbolic violence is a necessary and effective means of exercising power. For it enables relations of domination to be established and maintained through strategies which are softened and disguised, and which conceal domination beneath the veil of an enchanted relation.

✧ In those societies (including all modern industrial societies like Britain or the United States) which have witnessed the development of objectified institutions, the importance of symbolic mechanisms for sustaining domination through interpersonal relations has declined. The development of institutions enables different kinds of capital to be accumulated and differentially appropriated, while dispensing with the need for individuals to pursue strategies aimed directly at the domination of others: violence is, so to speak, built into the institution itself. Hence, if one wishes to understand the ways in which symbolic power is exercised and reproduced in our societies, one must look more carefully at how, in different markets and fields, institutionalized mechanisms have emerged which tend to fix the value accorded to different products, to allocate these products differentially and to inculcate a belief in their value. The educational system provides a good example of this process: the development of this system involves a certain kind of objectification in which formally defined credentials or qualifications become a mechanism for creating and sustaining inequalities, in such a way that the recourse to overt force is unnecessary.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, by concealing the link between the qualifications obtained by individuals and the cultural capital inherited by virtue of their social

background, this mechanism provides a practical justification of the established order. It enables those who benefit most from the system to convince themselves of their own intrinsic worthiness, while preventing those who benefit least from grasping the basis of their own deprivation.

### III

The development of Western European societies since the Middle Ages can be characterized very broadly, from Bourdieu's perspective, in terms of the differentiation of distinct spheres or fields of practice, each involving specific forms and combinations of capital and value as well as specific institutions and institutional mechanisms. Through this process of differentiation, a market economy based on capitalist principles was separated out and constituted as a relatively distinct sphere of production and exchange; a centralized state administration and legal system were established and progressively dissociated from religious authority; fields of intellectual and artistic production emerged and acquired a certain autonomy, with their own institutions (universities, museums, publishing houses, etc.) their own professionals (intellectuals, artists, writers, etc.) and their own principles of production, evaluation and exchange. While these and other spheres or fields of practice have emerged historically and acquired a certain autonomy, they are not completely disconnected from one another. They are interlocked in complex ways, and part of the task of a sociological study of these fields, as proposed by Bourdieu, is to bring out the ways in which they are structured and linked while rigorously avoiding the tendency to reduce one field to another, or to treat everything as if it were a mere epiphenomenon of the economy.

This broad perspective on the development of modern societies is a view strongly influenced by the work of Max Weber, to whom Bourdieu owes a significant intellectual debt. Like Weber, Bourdieu is particularly interested in the ways in which groups emerge in different fields and struggle for power and influence. Much of Bourdieu's work on the sociology of fields has been concerned with artistic and intellectual production, but he has also written extensively on other fields, such as religion and politics.<sup>32</sup> In the essays which make up part III of this volume, Bourdieu examines various aspects of the social organization of political fields. The analysis of the field of politics – understood here in the narrow sense of 'politics', i.e. the

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sphere of political parties, electoral politics and institutionalized political power – is closely related to the theme of language and symbolic power. For the political field is, among other things, the site *par excellence* in which agents seek to form and transform their visions of the world and thereby the world itself: it is the site *par excellence* in which words are actions and the symbolic character of power is at stake. Through the production of slogans, programmes and commentaries of various kinds, agents in the political field are continuously engaged in a labour of representation by which they seek to construct and impose a particular vision of the social world, while at the same time seeking to mobilize the support of those upon whom their power ultimately depends.

To understand the ways in which the political field works in modern societies, it is essential to see, Bourdieu argues, that the development of this field has involved a process of professionalization in which the political means of production (i.e. the means to produce political products like programmes, policies, etc.) have become increasingly concentrated in the hands of professional politicians. The most obvious manifestation of this process is the formation of political parties with their own bureaucratic structures, full-time officials and so on. But the professionalization of political activity, together with the increasing autonomy of the political field, has a paradoxical consequence: individuals cannot constitute themselves as a group with a voice, capable of making itself heard in the political field, unless they *dispossess themselves* in favour of a spokesperson in whom they vest the right to speak on their behalf. And the more that individuals are deprived of the specific competencies and graces that are necessary for participation in a professionalized political field, the more likely they are to hand politics over to the professionals. Hence the risks associated with political dispossession are all the greater in the case of left-wing parties: in seeking to represent those who are most deprived in terms of economic and cultural capital, these parties run the greatest risk of cutting themselves off completely from the people in whose name they claim to speak. The collapse of the communist parties in Eastern Europe, in the wake of the revolutions of 1989, would seem, at least to some extent, to bear out this hypothesis.

Bourdieu analyses the phenomenon of political dispossession as a two-step process of 'delegation'. The first step is that a group creates itself by establishing an institutional framework – a permanent office, a bureaucracy, paid officials, etc. The second step is that the organization then 'mandates' an individual or individuals to speak on

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behalf of the group. This delegate (Bourdieu uses the French term *mandataire*, i.e. the holder of a mandate) is thus at two removes, as it were, from the individuals whom he or she represents (from the *mandant*, i.e. the 'mandator' or the one who gives a mandate). This distance enables delegates to convince themselves and others that they are politically self-sufficient, the source of their own power and appeal: this is what Bourdieu describes as 'political fetishism', alluding to Marx's notion of the fetishism of commodities, according to which products of human labour appear to be endowed with a life and a value of their own. Once delegates have established their own appearance of self-sufficiency, they can engage in the verbal battles which characterize the political field with a certain degree of autonomy, concealing from themselves and others the social bases upon which their power, and the power of their words, depends.

As political parties and bureaucracies expand, the field of production of political discourses – what Bourdieu sometimes describes as 'ideologies' – becomes more and more autonomous, like a game with its own rules and conditions of entry. The bureaucracies take over responsibility for training the professionals who will enter the game, endowing them with the specialist skills and competencies which they will require in order to succeed. Above all, these professionals must acquire a practical sense or 'feel' for the game, that is, a habitus attuned to the specific conditions of the political field. The discourses produced by political professionals are therefore determined by two broad sets of constraints. One set of constraints derives from the logic of the political field itself, in which professionals are competing with one another, taking stances *vis-à-vis* one another, etc. In this respect, their utterances acquire a *relational* status: that is, they make sense only in relation to other utterances issued from other positions in the same field. It is for this reason that the political field appears to many people as a kind of esoteric culture with which they have little sympathy or empathy: they feel distanced from it, not so much because they fail to understand the words, but because they fail to understand why a distinction between words could matter so much, since they are not themselves involved in the constant attempt to define a distinctive position in the field. (It would be illuminating to examine, from this point of view, the public weariness that accompanied the repeated and ill-fated attempts of the once-proclaimed 'new force' in British politics, formed through the merger of the SDP and the Liberal Party, to find a suitable name for itself.)

The second set of constraints which operates in the production of

political discourse derives, not from the field itself, but from the relation between this field and a broader range of social positions, groups and processes. While the political field has a considerable degree of autonomy, it is not completely independent of other fields and forces. Indeed, one of the distinctive characteristics of the political field is that, in order for professionals to succeed within it, they must appeal to groups or forces which lie *outside* the field. This is quite different from, for instance, the fields of science and art, where an appeal to non-professionals is not only unnecessary, but would in all likelihood be counter-productive. In the political field, politicians must constantly appeal to non-professionals in order to secure the support – the 'credit' or 'political capital' – which will enable them to wage a successful battle against other professionals. Hence a significant part of the discursive output of politicians consists of slogans, promises and pledges of support for causes of various kinds, the purpose of such expressions being primarily to build up credit by providing non-professionals with forms of representation and self-representation, in exchange for which they give material and symbolic support (in the form of subscriptions, votes, etc.) to those who claim to represent them in the political field. It is because politicians are dependent on the credit accorded to them by non-professionals that they are especially vulnerable to suspicion and scandal, that is, to anything which threatens the bond of belief and trust which, precisely because their power is symbolic, they must constantly nourish and sustain.

Bourdieu's essays on the field of politics and political discourse should be seen as a contribution to a research project which, in order to be followed through properly, would require more detailed empirical or historical inquiry.<sup>33</sup> None the less, it is clear that Bourdieu has outlined a distinctive approach to political phenomena, an approach which has definite methodological implications. One such implication is that it would be superficial (at best) to try to analyse political discourses or ideologies by focusing on the utterances as such, without reference to the constitution of the political field and the relation between this field and the broader space of social positions and processes. This kind of 'internal analysis' is commonplace in the academic literature, as exemplified by the numerous and varied attempts to apply some form of semiotics or 'discourse analysis' to political speeches. The difficulty with all such attempts is similar to the difficulty that vitiates all 'formalist' approaches to language (or, indeed, all purely 'literary' approaches to literature): they take for granted but fail to take

account of the social-historical conditions within which the object of analysis is produced, constructed and received. Bourdieu's approach implies – and in this respect it seems to me that he is entirely justified – that an adequate analysis of political discourse must be based on a systematic reconstruction of the field within which such discourse is produced and received (with its distinctive organizations, schemes of production and perception, etc.) and its relation to the broader social space.

Another implication of Bourdieu's approach is that political phenomena cannot be analysed as if they were no more than a manifestation of socioeconomic processes, or of relations and oppositions between classes. This traditional type of Marxist analysis would involve a methodological short-circuiting which is quite antithetical to Bourdieu's approach. The problem with most forms of Marxist analysis, in Bourdieu's view, is that they tend to treat the social world as a one-dimensional space, in which phenomena or developments are explained, either directly or indirectly, in terms of the unfolding of the economic mode of production and the class oppositions stemming from it. While Bourdieu does not underestimate the importance of economic relations, his approach is rather different. He views the social world as a multi-dimensional space, differentiated into relatively autonomous fields; and within each of these fields, individuals occupy positions determined by the quantities of different types of capital they possess. Hence we cannot simply assume that those who occupy dominant positions in the political field will be identical with, or in some way directly linked to, those who occupy dominant positions in the field of economic production. There are likely to be important connections here; it is likely that the fields will correspond in certain ways, so that, for instance, the relations between positions in one field will reflect the relations between positions in another – that is, the fields will display certain 'homologies', as Bourdieu puts it. But if we want to understand these connections properly, there is no alternative to a careful, rigorous reconstruction of the fields and of the links between the positions and agents within them.

There is a further difficulty, in Bourdieu's view, with most forms of Marxist analysis: they tend to confuse theoretical classes with real social groups, and hence they misconstrue a whole series of questions concerning the ways in which agents mobilize themselves through representation. The notion of class plays a fundamental explanatory role in Bourdieu's work, and some readers may feel (with some justification, I think) that Bourdieu is trying to get too

much theoretical mileage from this concept. Readers may also feel that he gives insufficient attention to other bases of social division, inequality and conflict in modern societies, such as those connected with gender, ethnicity or the relations between nation-states.<sup>34</sup> These reservations may have some grounds; but it is important to appreciate that Bourdieu's use of the notion of class is quite distinctive, and that it differs in crucial respects from the way this notion is used in the traditional Marxist literature. Bourdieu does not define classes in terms of the ownership or non-ownership of means of production (his use of traditional Marxist terms like 'bourgeois' and 'petit-bourgeois' may be somewhat misleading in this regard, and is best seen as a kind of conceptual shorthand). For Bourdieu, classes are sets of agents who occupy similar positions in the social space, and hence possess similar kinds and similar quantities of capital, similar life chances, similar dispositions, etc.<sup>35</sup> These 'classes on paper' are *theoretical constructs* which the analyst produces in order to explain or make sense of observable social phenomena. Theoretical classes are not identical with real social groups, though they may help to explain why, in certain circumstances, a set of agents constitutes itself as a group. That is, it may be that agents are more likely to constitute themselves as a group if they occupy similar positions in the social space – as happens, for instance, when workers organize themselves into trade unions, or consumers form a pressure group. But a set of agents can organize themselves into a group, with their own organization, spokesperson and so on, only by producing or appropriating a certain *vision* of the social world and of themselves as an identifiable group within this world. It is this process of representation, and the complex symbolic struggles associated with it, that traditional Marxist analysis ignores or fails fully to understand. By tending to elide the distinction between theoretical classes and real social groups, Marxism has contributed to the production of a series of representations which have had real social and historical effects, but Marxist analysis lacks the means of grasping the symbolic mechanisms by which these effects are produced.

While Bourdieu is sharply critical of much traditional Marxist analysis, there can be no doubt that his work is deeply influenced by Marx's approach. The very fact that Bourdieu gives a certain theoretical priority to social classes, and to the role of economic capital in the social space, is ample testimony to his debt. But the way in which Bourdieu uses ideas drawn from Marx is the same as the way he uses notions drawn from Weber or Lévi-Strauss (or, in

other respects, Durkheim): he adapts them and re-works them for the purposes of concrete social analysis. Hence it would be quite misleading to view Bourdieu as a contemporary exponent of Marxism, even if a 'disguised' or heavily qualified Marxism, as some commentators are inclined to do.<sup>36</sup> This kind of characterization is based on a rather superficial understanding of the distinctive trajectory and concerns of Bourdieu's work. Moreover, Bourdieu is not a thinker who moves with the fashion, espousing 'structuralism' one day, 'post-structuralism' (or 'post-modernism') the next. He fiercely resists labels of this kind, and he has no sympathy for what he sees as a sort of intellectual faddism.

Bourdieu's work is an exceptionally sophisticated attempt to develop a coherent theoretical framework for the analysis of the social world, a framework of comparable interest and scope to the very different approaches elaborated by such contemporary thinkers as Habermas and Foucault. Throughout his writings Bourdieu displays a firm commitment to the value of empirical investigation, and he makes no apologies for his use (at times extensive) of statistical and quantitative methods. But his work also has a sharp critical edge. As a social scientist first and foremost, Bourdieu rarely engages in normative political theory, nor does he seek to formulate political programmes or policies for particular social groups. But his relentless disclosure of power and privilege in its most varied and subtlest forms, and the respect accorded by his theoretical framework to the agents who make up the social world which he so acutely dissects, give his work an implicit critical potential. For the first step in creating new social relations, alternative ways of organizing social and political life, is to understand the socially instituted limits of the ways of speaking, thinking and acting which are characteristic of our societies today. That Bourdieu has made a major contribution to our understanding of these limits is a judgement that would be difficult to dispute.

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