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## RETHINKING CLASSICAL THEORY

### The Sociological Vision of Pierre Bourdieu

ROGERS BRUBAKER

One of the most fertile and influential voices in recent French social theory has been that of Pierre Bourdieu. A sociologist of unusually broad intellectual formation, Bourdieu has produced, during the last two decades, a wide-ranging body of work remarkable for its theoretical sophistication and for its ethnographic acuity, and constituting one of the most significant of recent attempts to adapt the theoretical legacy of classical social theory to the empirical study, from a broadly critical perspective, of contemporary society.

Largely through the assiduous efforts of Richard Nice, much of this work is now available in English.<sup>1</sup> Yet knowledge of Bourdieu's work among Anglophone readers remains fragmentary. Anthropologists are familiar with his early ethnographic studies of Kabylia and with the metatheoretical discussions of *Outline of a Theory of Practice*; sociologists of education debate his work on the role of the educational system in perpetuating class-based differences in power and prestige; and sociologists of culture have recently begun to draw on his theory of the production and consumption of symbolic goods. But few students in these fields, and even fewer outside them, are aware of the full range and power of Bourdieu's work. As Nicholas Garnham and Raymond Williams have suggested, such "fragmentary and partial appropriation of what is a rich and unified body of theory and related empirical work . . . can lead to a danger of seriously misreading the theory."<sup>2</sup>

The recent publication in English of *Distinction* should appreciably lessen this danger: for this sprawling masterwork brings together in a single volume many of the themes that have exercised Bourdieu since the early 1960s. *Distinction*, however, is a difficult and (as Bourdieu warns in his preface to the English-language edition) a "very French" work: it is not for the unini-

tiated. It thus may be helpful to offer here an analytical overview and critical appraisal of Bourdieu's work, focusing on its central and unifying concern with social class and the reproduction over time of class-based power and privilege.

### Sources

Understanding French social theory, as Charles Lemert has argued in these pages (and as Bourdieu's own theory of symbolic production, reflexively applied to his own work, would imply), requires a prior understanding of the particular intellectual "fields" within which it is produced, as well as an understanding of the peculiarly text-centered literary culture that is the backdrop for all French intellectual work.<sup>3</sup> Any close reader of Bourdieu can testify to the truth of this claim. The problems Bourdieu addresses and the solutions he proposes are defined in the course of elaborate though not always explicit arguments with other texts and traditions. While a thorough examination of the multiple intellectual sources and contexts of his work is beyond the scope of this article, something must nonetheless be said, by way of introduction, about two crucial intellectual contexts.

The first is the opposition in the post-war French intellectual field between Sartre and Levi-Strauss. (Bourdieu, born in 1930, came of intellectual age just as the impact of Levi-Strauss's work was beginning to make itself felt: *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* was published in 1949.) This "exemplary confrontation" was doubly significant for the development of Bourdieu's work. In the first place, it furnished divergent models of intellectual vocation, with Levi-Strauss (whose seminar at the Collège de France Bourdieu attended) suggesting "to a whole generation a new way of conceiving intellectual activity" and opposing a kind of "metascientific enthusiasm for science" to Sartre's posture as a "total" intellectual, decisively turned towards politics.<sup>4</sup> Second, and in this context more important, it set against one another, in a relation of fruitful tension, two radically different approaches to the study of social life: Sartre's voluntarism and Levi-Strauss's structuralism. Sartre's emphasis on the creativity, freedom, and undetermined power of choice of the individual subject and Levi-Strauss's emphasis on the causal power of structures operating independently of the consciousness of agents came to be seen by Bourdieu as antithetical poles of a basic opposition between subjectivism and objectivism, an opposition discernible in different guises throughout the history of social thought and constituting, in his view, the chief obstacle to the construction of an adequate theory of society. All of Bourdieu's work, seen in this light, represents an effort to "transcend the

antagonism which sets these two modes of knowledge against each other and at the same time to preserve the insights gained by each position.”<sup>5</sup>

I shall have more to say later about Bourdieu’s attempt to avoid the twin dangers of subjectivism and objectivism. Here, however, I wish to consider a second (and more important) intellectual source of Bourdieu’s work: classical social theory, especially the writings of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber.<sup>6</sup> The central concern with class and reproduction and the critical, oppositional tone of Bourdieu’s writings have misled some into reading him as a Marxist.<sup>7</sup> Marxists themselves, on the other hand, have tended to regard him as a Durkheimian, excessively concerned with the integrative functions of culture. Paul DiMaggio, in a judicious review article, proposed a compromise formula: Bourdieu’s work, he suggested, represents a marriage of Durkheim and Marx.<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu is indeed indebted to Marx and Durkheim for his theoretical program, which may be described as an attempt to unite the (sketchy) Marxian program for a sociology of reproduction with the Durkheimian program for a genetic sociology of symbolic forms.<sup>9</sup> But if Bourdieu’s programmatic aims are derived from Marx and Durkheim, the substance of his theory owes most to Max Weber.

Bourdieu appropriates from Weber the conceptual resources for a theory of the social functions of symbolic goods and symbolic practices. From Weber’s conception of the particular styles of life and attributions of honor or dishonor that define status groups, he develops (most fully in *Distinction*) a systematic theory of the relation of life-styles and their attendant marks of distinction to material conditions of existence – a theory, in Weberian terms, of the relation of stratification by status to stratification by class.<sup>10</sup> From the Weberian notions of charisma and legitimacy, he develops a systematic theory of symbolic power and its relations to economic and political power.<sup>11</sup> And from Weber’s notions of ideal goods and ideal interests (as well as other themes and concepts developed by Weber in his sociology of religion), he constructs a general theory of the “economy of symbolic goods” and its relation to the material economy – a theory of the production and consumption of symbolic goods, the pursuit of symbolic profit, the accumulation of symbolic capital, and the modes of conversion of symbolic capital or power into other forms of power.<sup>12</sup>

From Durkheim, as suggested above, Bourdieu appropriates an explicit program: the program for a genetic sociology of symbolic forms, the aspiration to explain the “social genesis of schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action.”<sup>13</sup> For Bourdieu, as for Durkheim, this program is based on the hypothesis of a correspondence between social structures and symbol-

ic structures. Enunciated by Durkheim in the conclusion to *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, the program is echoed by Bourdieu in the conclusion to *Distinction* (itself an investigation of the “elementary forms” of cultural life, such as the search for distinction that gives the book its name): “the cognitive structures which social agents implement in their practical knowledge of the world are internalized, ‘embodied’ social structures.”<sup>14</sup> And Bourdieu follows Durkheim in emphasizing the social as well as cognitive functions of “collective representations” and “primitive classifications”<sup>15</sup> – though he conceives these as functions of domination, while Durkheim conceives them as functions of “logical and social integration.”<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu, in short, revives the Durkheimian effort to construct a sociological theory of knowledge and social perception, but is critical of the “illusion of consensus” that informs Durkheim’s thought.<sup>17</sup>

Bourdieu’s appropriation of themes from Marx, in particular from the “middle Marx” of the Theses on Feuerbach and the *German Ideology*, seems evident and straightforward. The primacy of class as the unit of analysis; the emphasis on the practical activity involved in the production and reproduction of social life; the notion that social being determines consciousness – these Marxian themes are salient in Bourdieu’s work. And Marx’s first thesis on Feuerbach is the kernel of Bourdieu’s effort to develop an adequate theory of practice (it stands as the epigraph to his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*). But the real significance of Bourdieu’s relation to Marx lies less in his appropriation of specific themes and perspectives than in his attempt to round out the Marxian system by integrating, with the help of conceptual tools derived chiefly from Weber, the study of the symbolic and the material dimensions of social life. Instead of segregating the study of the symbolic realm (religion, language, education, art, ideology – in short, culture, broadly understood) from the study of the material economy, and thus in effect relegating the study of culture to an “idealist semiology,” Bourdieu’s substantive theory, like the vast theory Marx envisioned but never constructed, is premised on the systematic unity of practical social life. Contra Daniel Bell, for example, who posits a “disjunction of realms” at the heart of social life and an attendant disjunction at the heart of social science,<sup>18</sup> Bourdieu conceives society as a system of relatively autonomous but structurally homologous fields (*champs*). The theoretical understanding of fields of symbolic production and consumption requires not a radically different mode of reasoning from that required for the theoretical understanding of the (material) economy, but an extension and generalization of this mode of thinking. It requires, in short, the “generalized” or “radical” materialism exemplified in Weber’s work: “far from countering Marx’s theory, as is commonly thought, with a spiritualist theory of history, [Weber] carried the

materialist mode of thinking into domains which Marxist materialism in effect abandons to spiritualism.”<sup>19</sup> “Generalized materialism” is perhaps somewhat misleading: Bourdieu means to emphasize not so much the materialism (though in his view the ultimate conditioning factors of all practices are material) as the generalization of a way of thinking that might better be called the “sociology of interest” – a mode of thought which conceives all practices, even the most ostensibly disinterested, as “economic [i.e. interested] practices directed [though often unconsciously] toward the maximizing of material and symbolic profit.”<sup>20</sup>

What is distinctive about this economic but not economic theory, and what distinguishes it from attempts by Gary Becker and others to extend the “economic approach to human behavior” to domains outside the traditional province of economics, is its specifically sociological dimension: its attention to class-based variations in the meanings and uses of nominally identical goods and activities,<sup>21</sup> to the social constitution of the various modes of interest, investment, and profit,<sup>22</sup> and especially to the class-based, systematically unequal distribution of the instruments needed to appropriate and accumulate both material and symbolic goods. (One can appropriate cultural goods, for example, only if one has internalized the necessary schemes of appreciation and understanding – schemes the development of which presupposes the “distance from economic necessity” that is the fundamental privilege of membership in a “privileged” class.<sup>23</sup>) This original class-based inequality engenders others: it leads in particular to class-based inequalities in the chances of realizing material or symbolic profit in the various fields of activity – in school, on the job market, on the “marriage market,” in one’s everyday consumption practices – and in the chances of accumulating power in the form of material or symbolic capital.

At the risk of crude oversimplification, it may be suggested in summary that Bourdieu attempts to systematize Weber’s thought in a quasi-Marxian mode and to “subjectivize” Marxian thought by incorporating the Durkheimian concern with symbolic forms and the Weberian concern with symbolic power and symbolic goods in its systematic view of the social world as a structure of class-based power and privilege.

### **The Objective and the Subjective**

Every sociological practice, theoretical or empirical, rests on an implicit or explicit metatheory – a general conceptual framework for the understanding of human social life. Metatheory matters: it is consequential for substantive work, determining (in part) the kinds of problems that are posed, the kinds of

explanations that are offered, and the kinds of techniques of empirical study that are employed. This holds a fortiori of Bourdieu, whose systematic and explicit metatheory informs all of his substantive theoretical and empirical work, not least his conception of class and his theory of class reproduction.

Bourdieu's metatheory, as suggested above, is constructed with reference to a set of problems that he subsumes under the rubric "objectivism vs. subjectivism." His argument for the need to "transcend" this opposition – an argument that finds repeated expression throughout his work – runs roughly as follows. Objectivism explains social life in terms of mind-independent and agent-independent elements such as material conditions of existence; subjectivism, by contrast, appeals to mind-dependent and agent-dependent elements such as the conceptions and beliefs of individuals. Neither of these one-sided modes of thought can comprehend the "intrinsically double" nature of social reality. Social life is materially grounded and conditioned, but material conditions affect behavior in large part through the mediation of individual beliefs, dispositions, and experiences. Social life exists only in and through the symbolically mediated experience and action of individuals, but these individuals have been formed under definite material conditions of existence, and their every activity – including their symbolizing activity – depends on social facts existing prior to and independently of that activity. Subjectivism ignores the external constraints placed on agents by thing-like social facts and the social formation of every "subject"; but objectivism ignores the "objectivity of the subjective"<sup>24</sup> and the "reality of the representation,"<sup>25</sup> because it does not recognize that the experience individuals have in and of social reality and the conceptions they form about it are partly constitutive of that reality. Only a theory based on a conceptualization of the relation between material and symbolic properties, and between external, constraining social facts and experiencing, apprehending, acting individuals, can be adequate for the human sciences.

Few social theorists would challenge this argument, which might well have been endorsed by theorists as distant from one another as Parsons and Marx (Parsons indeed explicitly constructs his theory with reference to the problem of the relation between objective conditions and subjective norms and values). If the argument is uncontroversial, this is because the problem of the relation between objective and subjective elements in social life, posed on this level of generality, is not a real problem at all. Objective and subjective are not "dimensions," "aspects," "elements," or "factors" in social life. They are merely paired concepts, complementary terms of an extremely general and abstract conceptual opposition. Only when specific meanings are assigned to "objective" and "subjective" does the problem of the relation between the two

cease to be a pseudo-problem. Consider the following successive specifications.

There is, in the first place, the problem of the relation between the material or physical constituents of the social world and the mental, symbolic, or meaningful aspects of social life. Even this is not a single problem, but a number of related problems, of which I will mention only two. First, with respect to the exercise of power, how should one conceive the relation between physical force and such things as claims to or acknowledgments of legitimacy? Second, with respect to the ways in which material objects are used in social life, how should one conceive the relation between the physical attributes of a material object and the categories in terms of which it is apprehended, such as “useful,” “valuable,” “dangerous,” “impure,” or “distinguished”? With respect to these problems, “subjectivism” denotes idealism, “objectivism” a reductionist materialism.

Second, there is the problem of the relation between economic and non-economic, in particular cultural, aspects of social life. This problem, like the first, is really a number of related problems. How should one conceive the relation between economic interests and other interests, in particular “ideal interests” in Weber’s sense? Between economic privilege or power and other forms of privilege or power, in particular power deriving from the social estimation of honor or dishonor? Between economic institutions and institutions such as the kinship system, the educational system, the legal system, the cultural system? With respect to these problems, “objectivism” denotes economism, which holds that ideal interests are mere epiphenomena of economic interests; that economic power is the source of social status; and that social phenomena in general are determined, at least “in the last instance,” to use that wonderfully elastic and ambiguous phrase that shields economic theories from falsification, by the strict logics of material production and exchange. Against economism are ranged theories emphasizing the autonomy (often fudged as “relative autonomy”) of ideal interests vis-à-vis economic interests, the (relative) autonomy of non-economic sources and modes of exercise of power and privilege, or the ultimate cultural conditioning of all social phenomena, including economic phenomena.

Third, there is the problem of the relation between the objective validity of theoretical knowledge about social life, constructed by outside observers without reference to agents’ conceptions, and the subjective certainty of agents’ perceptions and representations of social life. “Subjectivism” here denotes the strategy of phenomenological social theory, which attempts to grasp the “knowledge that guides conduct in everyday life,” as Berger and



Luckman put it,<sup>26</sup> on the grounds that the everyday conceptions of agents – conceptions developed “in and for practice,” in Durkheim’s words – are what “really” determine what they do. Objectivism, on the other hand, is exemplified by Marxist or structuralist social theory insofar as it denies the real efficacy or scientific significance of agents’ understandings of their own activity, of phenomenology’s “everyday knowledge.” Objectivism in this sense asserts the ontological or explanatory primacy of “models,”<sup>27</sup> “generative mechanisms,”<sup>28</sup> or “deep structures”<sup>29</sup> – entities discernible by deep-seeing theorists but invisible to the agents whose conduct they are held to regulate.

Fourth, there is the problem of the relation between what is “in” individuals and what is external to them. (This is not the same as the problem of the relation between symbolic and material things. For some partly material things of social significance – strength, dexterity, and all kinds of capacities to perform specific physical actions – are incorporated in individuals, while some partly symbolic things – all those that constitute objective culture in the Simmelian sense – exist in an objectified state that is independent of and external to individuals.) Here “subjective” designates what is in individuals, whether temporarily, as a fleeting desire or passing thought, or enduringly, as a settled disposition, an “ingrained” habit, a “deep-seated” prejudice, or an acquired taste; “objective” designates what is independent of and external to individuals. “Subjectivism” indicates a methodological or ontological individualism, while “objectivism” refers to a range of positions opposed to individualism in either form, including both structuralism and functionalism and, paradigmatically, Durkheim’s social theory, with its injunction to “treat social facts as things” external to individuals and constraining them from without.

Fifth, there is the problem of the relation between mechanical and teleological modes of social causality. Here “objectivism” designates a mechanistic, subjectless conception of causality, one resting on a theory of persons as more or less mechanical respondents to environmental stimuli, as in behaviorism, or as bearers of objective relations, caught in the play of structural determinants beyond their knowledge and control, as in Althusserian Marxism; “subjectivism” denotes a teleological conception of social causality, based on a voluntaristic or rationalistic theory of persons as subjects acting for reasons rather than from causes.

Sixth, there is the problem of the relative epistemological status of agents’ conceptions and scientists’ conceptions. With respect to this problem, the conceptions of agents are termed “subjective,” while those of external ob-

servers are termed “objective.” “Subjectivism” in this context indicates the epistemological thesis (advanced, for example, by Winch) that scientific conceptions must be built up from agents’ conceptions; while “objectivism” denotes the contrary thesis (advocated, for example, by Durkheim and in general strongly upheld in French social thought) that agents’ conceptions, while pragmatically serviceable, are (for the special purposes of social science) epistemologically unreliable, and for this reason must be disregarded by scientists.

Seventh, there is the problem of the relation between those aspects of social life that can and those that cannot be grasped scientifically through the use of controlled and formalized techniques. From another point of view, this is the question of the relation between “crystallizations” of social reality, understood as distributions at a given moment of observable properties among a given population, and the continuous flux of social reality, understood as the unbroken unity of social life as actually experienced in unfolding over time. In this context, “objective” denotes the formalized techniques used to apprehend social reality in a more or less crystallized form, as well as to what it is that can be apprehended using such techniques; while “subjective” refers to the informal techniques, paradigmatically those of a novelist like Proust or Joyce, used to apprehend life-in-flux, and to what it is that can be apprehended using those techniques. “Objectivism” here means positivism or empiricism, and in particular the exclusive reliance on operationalizable techniques, while “subjectivism” denotes a rejection or devaluation of formal and self-consciously scientific techniques in favor of informal techniques capable of apprehending social reality as experienced.

Eighth, and last, there is the problem of the relation between the theoretical and the practical points of view, between the cognitive interests of the observer of social life and the practical interests of the participant. Here “objective” means theoretical, and “subjective” means practical; “objectivism” suggests an arrogant scientism, “subjectivism” an epistemological skepticism or relativism. The problem is a double one: on the one hand, to recognize the inherent limitations of theoretical knowledge of an essentially practical subject matter, and, on the other hand, having acknowledged these limitations, to construct appropriate conceptual foundations for an objective science of the subjective, that is, for systematic theoretical knowledge of practical social life.

### Symbolic Power and Cultural Capital

These problems (all of which are addressed at some point by Bourdieu) fall roughly into three clusters. The first three are concerned with the relation between mind-independent and mind-dependent aspects of social life, the next two with the relation between agent-independent and agent-dependent aspects of social life, and the last three (which are of epistemological rather than metatheoretical significance) with the relation among the conceptions, techniques, and points of view of the detached observer and those of the involved participant. I will ignore this last group of problems, except to say that Bourdieu endorses Durkheim's epistemological objectivism, arguing that social science must break decisively with agents' self-understandings;<sup>30</sup> that he attempts in his substantive work to integrate the statistical analysis of distributions of "matter" with the ethnographic or novelistic appreciation of subtle inflections of "manner";<sup>31</sup> and that he develops an account of the inherent limitations of all theoretical knowledge of practical social life in an effort to free theoretical knowledge from additional and unnecessary limitations imposed by lack of awareness of these inherent limitations.<sup>32</sup> The first two problem-clusters I will discuss in some detail in this and the next section. For Bourdieu's responses to these problems, in the context of critical debate with Marxism and structuralism, are of crucial importance in understanding his effort to construct a social theory capable of understanding contemporary modes of class structure and class reproduction.

The first problem-cluster draws its significance from debates internal to the tradition of French Marxist thought. Because Marx never systematically developed his ideas about historical materialism or about class and class structure, theorists building on these underdeveloped aspects of his thought have had a rich and unencumbered interpretive space in which to work. The result has been a luxuriant growth of rival interpretations. It is in the context of this polemically charged interpretive space that Bourdieu's response to the first problem-cluster must be understood: it is directed against crudely reductionist interpretations of historical materialism, against economic interpretations of social class, and against structuralist denials of the scientific significance of agents' subjective self-understandings. These objectivist variants of Marxism, according to Bourdieu, cannot account for the "specific contributions that representations of legitimacy make to the exercise and perpetuation of power."<sup>33</sup> Nor can they account for the importance of the accumulation of non-economic goods and resources for the exercise and perpetuation of power, even economic power. Finally, the objectivist devaluation of the significance of agents' self-understandings overlooks the crucial role that false beliefs – what Bourdieu calls *méconnaissance* or misrecog-

nition – play in maintaining the power and privilege of dominant classes. In order to account for these symbolic, cultural, and cognitive aspects of the exercise and reproduction of class-based power and privilege, Bourdieu develops a theory of symbolic violence,<sup>34</sup> a theory of symbolic goods and symbolic capital,<sup>35</sup> and a theory of the real efficacy of agents' representations – in particular their misrepresentations – of social reality.<sup>36</sup> These theories (I'm using the term “theory” rather loosely) come together in a general metatheoretical account of what Bourdieu calls the “economy of practices.” This account rests on three core claims: that symbolic interests and economic interests are distinct and irreducible modes of self-interest; that symbolic capital and economic capital are distinct though (under certain conditions and at certain rates) mutually convertible forms of power, obeying distinct logics of accumulation and exercise; and that the logic of (symbolic or economic) self-interest underlying certain practices (including, in contemporary society, most practices in the cultural domain) is misperceived as a logic of disinterest, and that this misperception is what legitimates these practices and thereby contributes to the reproduction of the social order in which they are embedded.

This general metatheoretical account of the “economy of practices” informs all of Bourdieu's more specific theoretical analyses and empirical investigations. Consider, for example, his analysis of the functioning of what he calls, following Karl Polanyi, the archaic economy – an “economy in itself” but not “for itself.” Seen from the point of view of the detached observer, exchange in the archaic economy is regulated by self-interested strategies and tacit calculations. But this “objective truth” (assuming for the sake of argument that it is an objective truth) is not acknowledged by the participants, who hold to the “sincere fiction of a disinterested exchange”:

the “idolatriy of nature,” which makes it impossible to think of nature as a raw material or . . . to see human activity as labor, i.e., as man's struggle against nature, tends, together with the systematic emphasis on the symbolic aspect of the activities and relations of production, to prevent the economy from being grasped *as* an economy, i.e., as a system governed by the laws of interested calculation, competition, or exploitation.<sup>37</sup>

Self-interest, in this economy, is not reducible to material interest. Calculations of self-interest, broadly understood as any implicit or explicit reckoning of “costs” and “profits” of any kind, extends to “*all* the goods, material and symbolic, . . . that present themselves as *rare* and worthy of being sought after . . . which may be ‘fair words’ or smiles, handshakes or shrugs, compliments or attention, challenges or insults, honor or honors, powers or pleasures. . . .”<sup>38</sup> Just as self-interested calculation extends, tacitly or explicitly, to symbolic as well as material goods, so power exists in the form of symbolic as

well as economic capital. Even economic power has a crucial symbolic dimension. To understand, for example, the economic power exercised by a powerful family, one must consider

not only their land and instruments of production but also their kin and their clientele. . . , the network of alliances . . . to be kept up and regularly maintained, representing a heritage of commitments and debts of honor, a capital of rights and duties built up in the course of successive generations and providing an additional source of strength which can be called upon when extra-ordinary situations break in upon the daily routine . . . , requiring the unpaid assistance of a more extended group. . . . The strategy of accumulating a capital of honour and prestige . . . allows the great families to make use of the maximum workforce during the labour period.<sup>39</sup>

Power in the form of symbolic capital is perceived not as power, but as a source of legitimate demands on the services of others, whether material, such as help at harvest time, or symbolic, such as the expression of deference; and it is precisely this perception or misrecognition that makes it effective as a form of power. Symbolic power and economic power are mutually (though neither instantaneously nor automatically) interconvertible in definite ways; it is this interconvertibility that justifies their sociological treatment as different forms of the same thing. But this basic thing, power tout court, cannot fruitfully be identified with economic power, for under some conditions – almost universally in pre-market economies – purely economic power is powerless, and must be converted into symbolic power in order that it may be misperceived, legitimated, and thereby exercised.

Nor is the impotence of purely economic power confined to the pre-capitalist world. The golden era of “self-regulating” markets has been receding for over a hundred years, and it is increasingly necessary for economic power to clothe, conceal, and legitimize itself (through, for example, investments by corporations in the “Bank of Public Good-Will”) in order to make itself fully effective.<sup>40</sup> What holds for corporations holds also for classes and their members. Classes increasingly take the form of status groups, founded on distinctive styles of life and not (or so it appears) on dominant positions in a structure of power and privilege; class conflict, based on awareness of systematic differences in power and privilege, tends in consequence to yield to strategies of competition and emulation, based on perceptions of the social worth of different life-styles.<sup>41</sup> And individuals in dominant classes, with fewer opportunities than in the age of the family firm and untaxed estates to directly transmit economic power, must rely increasingly on the transmission of power and privilege in other forms – especially in the form of “cultural capital.”

Bourdieu developed the concept of cultural capital to explain differences in educational performance and cultural practices that remained unexplained by economic inequalities. Cultural or symbolic goods differ from material goods in that one can “consume” them only by apprehending their meaning. This is true for the cultural goods one encounters in museums and concert halls but also for those one encounters in school; it holds for works of art, but equally for mathematical equations, literary texts, or philosophical arguments. (It also holds equally for works of popular culture, and for all consumption goods that have symbolic meaning or value over and above their use-value.) Individuals can appropriate these goods, can apprehend their meaning, only if they already possess the necessary schemes of appreciation and understanding. The concept of cultural capital denotes the ensemble of cultivated dispositions that constitute such schemes of appreciation and understanding. These dispositions are cultivated in a double sense: in the evaluative sense, they are “refined”; and in the descriptive sense, they are the product of a process of (conscious or unconscious) cultivation.

The process of cultivation through which cultural capital is accumulated begins in the family and takes the form of an investment of time (whether the time of hired specialists or the parents’ own time). This investment returns dividends in school and university and, partly through the mediation of educational experience, in social contacts, on the “marriage market,” and on the job market. The payoff, to be sure, is not automatic. Because cultural capital exists in an incorporated state, as a system of internalized dispositions, the payoff is contingent on the existence of gate-keeping mechanisms that regulate access to desirable positions by somehow taking account of cultivated dispositions – by attending, for example, to the intangibles of style or manner. One such gate-keeping mechanism, according to Bourdieu, is the examination (and, more generally, the whole set of evaluative practices) in the French educational system. Empirical studies reveal that the criteria used by teachers in evaluating students’ work are not neutral with respect to students’ social origin, for they put a great deal of emphasis on language and style, which, more than any other aspects of educational performance, are heavily dependent on cultural capital and hence on a cultivated family background.<sup>42</sup> Similar informal and often unconscious mechanisms of selection and evaluation regulate hiring and courtship practices, helping in the latter case to explain the high degree of class endogamy.<sup>43</sup>

Cultural capital exists not only in the form of incorporated dispositions but also in the objectified, socially certified form of academic degrees. As desirable positions in the job market increasingly require formal educational qualifications, it becomes essential for parents to invest in a good education

for their children, meaning one that will have sufficient “scarcity value” to be profitable on the job market. This process of investment Bourdieu describes as the conversion of economic into cultural capital. In the United States as in France, the postwar boom in higher education, with its unintended inflationary and devaluationary consequences, can be explained as a response to the increasingly important role played by cultural capital in its objectified form – by educational credentials – in regulating access to desirable jobs.<sup>44</sup>

### **The Habitus**

Consider now the second cluster of problems: those concerning the relation between agent-dependent and agent-independent aspects of social life. These problems were brought into focus by the debates sparked by the spectacular rise (and subsequent routinization) of structuralism in the French intellectual field. Though Bourdieu’s early ethnographic studies were those of a “happy structuralist,”<sup>45</sup> he joined these metatheoretical debates as a critic of structuralism, in particular of its “realism of the structure” and the correlative exclusion of “subjects” – active individuals and their dispositions, aspirations, expectations – from social explanation. And if the notions of symbolic power and cultural capital mark Bourdieu’s distance from certain modes of Marxist thought, the notion of *habitus* marks his distance from structuralist thought.

The habitus is defined abstractly as the system of internalized dispositions that mediates between social structures and practical activity, being shaped by the former and regulating the latter. The use of this dispositional concept to complement structural concepts, like the use of conceptions of symbolic power and cultural capital to complement conceptions of economic power, is intended to correct the one-sided objectivism characteristic of post-war French social theory. Just as certain variants of Marxist thought tend to reify abstractions such as “modes of production,” so structuralist thought tends to reify conceptions of underlying generative structures and to treat them as “agents responsible for historical action or as a power capable of constraining action.” Such purely structural explanations, according to Bourdieu, are at best abbreviated explanations, for structures “do not exist and do not really realize themselves except in and through the *system of dispositions* of the agents.”<sup>46</sup> Adequate explanations must therefore take account of the habitus – the system of dispositions that mediates between inert structures and the practices through which social life is sustained and structures are reproduced or transformed.

Two examples may show how Bourdieu deploys this metatheoretical concept in his substantive theoretical and empirical work. The first illustrates how dispositions lead individuals to act in a way that reproduces the social structure (more precisely, the regularities constitutive of it) without radically transforming it. Following Gaston Bachelard, Bourdieu calls this mechanism the “causality of the probable.” That such a mechanism exists is suggested by the fact that even when other things, in particular academic performance, are equal, the propensity for a student from a given class to abandon his studies increases as the probability of access to higher levels of the educational system, calculated for the average member of his class, decreases. It is not suggested that agents have a precise knowledge of these probabilities or a disposition to reproduce them. The argument is that a person, by virtue of belonging to a particular class, has an “objective future.” Apprehended by social scientists as a set of conditional probabilities, it is apprehended by members of the class themselves in a cruder but more practically potent form as a shared modal understanding of eventualities as possible or impossible, normal or exceptional, probable or improbable, and hence as a shared evaluation of certain expectations and aspirations as “reasonable” and of others as “unreasonable.” The fairly consistent frequencies with which things do or do not occur within the immediate horizons of experience of members of the same class ensure a rough correspondence between statistical regularities and internalized expectations and aspirations; the latter in turn directly regulate conduct and ensure that the former will be roughly reproduced. The whole analysis, of course, presupposes the absence of rapid changes in social structure.<sup>47</sup>

The specific social efficacy of dispositions – and the inadequacy of any explanation that bypasses them – is especially evident in cases of rapid social change. For in such cases dispositions, adapted to the social conditions under which they were formed, may be “out of phase” with the social conditions under which they must function. To analyze these instances of dispositional lag, Bourdieu develops the concept of the “hysteresis effect,” taking the name from the physical phenomenon of magnetic effects lagging behind their causes.<sup>48</sup> Consider again the example of dispositions toward education. In consequence of the “*explosion scolaire*” – the rapid increase, in all social classes, in secondary and higher education – the labor-market value of diplomas has fallen, creating a “structural mismatch” between educational and occupational aspirations, generated in and oriented to an earlier state of affairs, and real opportunities. The resultant “collective disillusionment,” according to Bourdieu, explains the “disaffection towards work” and the “anti-institutional cast of mind” characteristic of a generation “inclined to extend to all institutions the mixture of revolt and resentment it feels toward



the educational system,” and these in turn explain “all the refusals and negations of the adolescent counter-culture.”<sup>49</sup> It should be clear from this analysis that Bourdieu is not committed, as some critics have suggested, to a model of “quasi-perfect” social reproduction. Under certain circumstances the “dialectic of mutually self-reproducing objective chances and subjective aspirations,” and with it the taken-for-granted legitimacy of the social order, may break down: “an abrupt slump in objective chances relative to subjective aspirations is likely to produce a break in the tacit acceptance which the dominated classes . . . previously granted to the dominant goals.”<sup>50</sup>

As is suggested by this last example, the habitus is conceived in three distinct sets of relations: to the conditions under which it was formed, to the immediate situation of action, and to the practices it produces. The habitus is thus a concept made to do an extraordinary amount of theoretical work. The theoretical weight falling on it is especially evident in Bourdieu’s various efforts at comprehensive definitions of the habitus, as for example a “system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems.”<sup>51</sup> Doubts inevitably arise about the usefulness of any concept so vague and versatile. It is tempting to dismiss the concept of habitus as a *deus ex machina*,<sup>52</sup> as another in the series of dialectical do-it-all-sprung on generations of unsuspecting sociology students by the ever-resourceful French. But the linked concepts of structure, habitus, and practice are not intended to constitute a theory, and it would be unfair to evaluate them by criteria we use to evaluate theories. They are metatheoretical notions, designed to focus attention on the kind of conceptual framework that is required of any adequate sociological theory, namely one that incorporates dispositional as well as structural concepts. In the remainder of the article, I focus on Bourdieu’s attempt to grasp simultaneously dispositional and structural, symbolic and material, cultural and economic, in short, subjective and objective dimensions of class structure and class culture in contemporary France.

## **Class**

Bourdieu’s studies of class structure, class cultures, and class reproduction in contemporary France draw heavily on his metatheory, especially on the notions of symbolic power, cultural capital, and the habitus. The distinctiveness of these studies – distinctiveness that owes much to their metatheoretical grounding – can perhaps best be elucidated by situating Bourdieu’s concep-

tion of class with reference to the Marxian and Weberian conceptions. Because of his central concern with class and reproduction, Bourdieu is often perceived (especially in the Anglo-American intellectual world, where his sharp criticisms of Marxism are not well known) as working within a broadly Marxian tradition. Yet his extremely general and transhistorical conception of class, defined by its place in a metatheoretical account of the full range of social life in any society, is very different from Marx's conception of class, defined in reference to its place in a theoretical account of the specific internal dynamic and immanent logic of the capitalist mode of production.<sup>53</sup> The conceptual space within which Bourdieu defines class is not that of relations of production, but that of social relations in general. Class divisions are defined not by differing relations to the means of production, but by differing conditions of existence, differing systems of dispositions produced by differential conditioning, and differing endowments of power or capital.

This extremely general conception of class is no closer to Weber's than it is to Marx's conception of class. For Weber, as for Marx, class is a mode of social grouping defined by a specific set of social relations – in Weber's case, market relations. "Class situation," he writes, "is ultimately market situation."<sup>54</sup> Yet Bourdieu's general approach to the study of the class structure as a structure of power and privilege is distinctly Weberian. For Weber's distinction between classes and status groups is at root a distinction between two modes of existence and exercise of power – between power that is exercised and accumulated in accordance with the strictly impersonal laws of the market and power that is exercised and accumulated in accordance with conventionally or juridically guaranteed status distinctions that permit particular groups to monopolize particular material or ideal goods or opportunities. Bourdieu systematically develops this notion of different modes of existence and exercise of power, seeing in the analogy between power and energy remarked by Bertrand Russell – both exist in many forms, mutually interconvertible under certain conditions, with no one form constituting the source of the others – the "principle of a unification of social science."<sup>55</sup> Besides this basic Weberian notion of mutually irreducible but potentially interconvertible forms of power, Bourdieu develops a number of subsidiary Weberian themes. The notion of a hierarchy of prestige or honor that is irreducible to any economic base; the notion that positively privileged status groups tend to develop a distinctive style of life; the notion that this stylization of life often requires an inhibition of strict or blatant economic calculation; and the notion that positively privileged status groups tend to legitimize their privilege through the cultivation of a sense of "natural" dignity and excellence – these and other ideas articulated by Weber in the seminal essay on "Class, Status and Party" are appropriated and developed by Bourdieu.

In one crucial respect, however, Bourdieu departs from Weber's analysis. For Weber, power (of particular amounts and kinds) is constitutive of group being: possession of a definite configuration of market power or status privilege, in so far as this determines "specific life chances," i.e., specific probabilities of appropriating ideal or material goods, is what defines classes and status groups. For Bourdieu, power, though an important characteristic of a class, is not in itself constitutive of class. Rather, the distribution of power is produced and sustained through the practices of classes constituted by shared conditions of existence and the shared dispositions engendered by shared conditionings. Thus class is formally defined as the set of

biological individuals who, being the product of the same objective conditions, are endowed with the same habitus: social class (in itself) is inseparably a class of identical or similar conditions of existence and conditionings and a class of biological individuals endowed with the same habitus, understood as a system of dispositions shared by all individuals who are products of the same conditionings.<sup>56</sup>

This definition envisions the perfect coincidence of divisions established by differences in external conditions of existence and divisions established by differences in internalized dispositions; indeed on this view it is precisely the coincidence of these divisions, and not either one of them alone, that constitutes class divisions.

Class thus defined is treated by Bourdieu as a *universal explanatory principle*. This sharply distinguishes Bourdieu's conception of class from those of Marx and Weber, both of which had definite and limited explanatory aims – for Marx, to comprehend the dynamic consequences of the differential situation of groups with respect to the means of production in the modern capitalist economy; for Weber, to isolate and analyze one dimension of the distribution of power in any market society. For Bourdieu, by contrast, class and habitus, the twin linchpins of his metatheory, together explain anything and everything. Dispositions (the habitus) directly govern conduct, and because classes are defined as individuals sharing the same dispositions as well as the same external conditions of existence, class becomes the principle of intelligibility of all conduct, and sociology can take as its aim to "determine how class condition is able to structure the whole experience of social subjects."<sup>57</sup>

Bourdieu's conception of class usefully focuses attention on the pervasive class conditioning of practices in all domains of social life and on the mechanisms – especially class-specific dispositions – through which this pervasive effect is exerted. But the definition of class in terms of the coincidence of shared external conditions of existence and shared dispositions is

problematic. For neither the system of internalized dispositions nor the totality of external conditions and conditionings is directly accessible to the sociologist, who can only impute shared dispositions or shared conditions of existence to groups of individuals on the basis on certain techniques. The sociologist can take data accessible to him as indicators of conditions of existence or of dispositions; or he can attempt in an ethnographic or novelistic fashion to grasp directly the particular “physiognomy” of an environment<sup>58</sup> or the “whole view of the world and of existence” that is expressed in a particular complex of tastes<sup>59</sup> and claim thus to have grasped the “essence” of external conditions or of internalized dispositions. Insofar as he relies on statistical analyses, he is likely to find that groups constructed because they share properties taken as indicators of conditions of existence do not in fact share properties taken as indicators of dispositions, i.e., that the relationship between properties representing conditions of existence and properties representing dispositions is discouragingly weak. Insofar as he relies on ethnographic or novelistic techniques, he may indeed construe class, in accordance with the formal definition, as the coincidence of shared conditions of existence and shared dispositions, but he will not be able to demonstrate that any such classes actually exist. To be sure, the problem is a familiar one: it is the old realism-nominalism problem that haunts all efforts to transform theoretical categories into categories suitable for empirical research and especially for statistical analysis. But the tension between Bourdieu’s “strong” theoretical definition of class, which gives class its wide explanatory power in his system, and the “weak” nominal definition of class that must be used for purposes of statistical analysis, raises this problem in an especially acute form.

### ***Distinction* Classes as Status Groups**

*Distinction* is a rich and complex work, organized around an open-ended program – to study the symbolic dimensions of class structure and class struggles in contemporary France<sup>60</sup> – rather than around a single problem. The analysis begins with Weber’s conception of the “stylization of life” characteristic of status groups, but departs from Weber in arguing that status groups are “not ... a different kind of group from classes, but are rather dominant classes denied as such, or, so to speak, sublimated and thereby legitimated.”<sup>61</sup> *Distinction* may be read as an attempt to substantiate this thesis and thus to unite Weberian and Marxian perspectives by studying classes *in the form of status groups*, focusing not on their external conditions of existence (which are, in the last instance, the fundamental source of their power and privilege) but on their shared dispositions and their “objectively harmonized”<sup>62</sup> practices, which are perceived by others as positive or nega-

tive signs of natural or social worth, and which thereby contribute to the legitimation of the social order.

If it is not easy to pin down Bourdieu's analysis of class in *Distinction*, this is because he is concerned with sources and manifestations of class differences on four distinct levels of analysis. On the most concrete level, he is concerned with class-based differences in the ensembles of consumption habits, leisure-time activities, and tastes in works of art, food, dress, and home furnishings, etc., that make up a style of life. The analyses on this level, especially those in the ethnographic mode, make for the most engaging reading in *Distinction*. Thus (to take an example from "the archetype of all taste," the taste for food), we learn that working-class men don't like fish, it being excessively delicate, insufficiently filling, and eaten "with restraint, in small mouthfuls, chewed gently, with the front of the mouth, on the tips of the teeth (because of the bones)," in a way that "totally contradicts the masculine way of eating ... with whole-hearted male gulps and mouthfuls." To this masculine way of eating there correspond ways of talking, laughing, blowing the nose, indeed an entire "practical philosophy of the male body as a sort of power, big and strong, with enormous, imperative, brutal needs."<sup>63</sup> Or we learn that gymnastics, "a sort of training for training's sake," is practiced disproportionately by the middle classes, especially by *cadres moyens*, medical employees, and teachers, i.e., by those "especially anxious about appearance and therefore about their body-for-others"; while mountaineering appeals to fractions of the dominant class richer in cultural than in economic capital, paradigmatically professors, because it "offers for minimum economic costs the maximum distinction, distance, height, spiritual elevation, through the sense of simultaneously mastering one's own body and a nature inaccessible to the many."<sup>64</sup> These and innumerable other differences in style of life are richly characterized: statistical evidence and ethnographic description are effectively and imaginatively supplemented by photographs, interviews, and substantial extracts from advertisements, brochures, popular magazines, etc.

But *Distinction* is more than a vast "ethnography of France."<sup>65</sup> It aspires to explain the coherence of choices in different domains of activity – coherence that justifies talk of a style of life – and to explain the class-based differences in life style. Both intra-class coherence and inter-class differences in life style are explained in terms of class habitus, i.e., class-specific systems of internalized dispositions. This is the second level of analysis. The petty-bourgeois habitus, for example, which is held to explain affinities among the cultural, linguistic, ethical, political, and even reproductive practices and preferences of the middle classes, is characterized by a "concern for conformity which induces an anxious quest for authorities and models of conduct," by an

“insatiable thirst for rules of conduct which subjects the whole of life to a rigorous discipline,” by “asceticism, rigour, legalism, the propensity to accumulation in all its forms.”<sup>66</sup> This stands in contrast with the “bourgeois ethos of ease, a confident relation to the world and the self . . . which supports and authorizes all the inner or manifest forms of *certitudo sui*, casualness, grace, facility, elegance, freedom, in a word, naturalness.”<sup>67</sup> Or, to take another example, the tastes of working-class people in theatre, painting, photography, cinema are explained as the product of an anti-aesthetic disposition, founded on an expectation of “continuity between art and life,” a hostility towards formal experimentation, an insistence on the primacy of expressive or representational content over form.<sup>68</sup> This “pragmatic, functionalist ‘aesthetic,’ refusing the gratuity and futility of formal exercises and of every form of art for art’s sake,” is just one manifestation of a generalized dispositional antipathy to formality and formalism, a generalized commitment to the substantial, the “real,” the sincere, the straightforward that explains not only preferences in works of art but “all the choices of daily existence” including modes of eating, socializing, dressing, and home furnishing.<sup>69</sup>

Differences in class habitus are themselves explained by differences in conditions of existence, above all by what are rather vaguely and abstractly characterized as different degrees of “distance from necessity”<sup>70</sup>: this is the third level of analysis. Thus the aesthetic disposition of the bourgeoisie, or, more generally, its “distant, detached or casual disposition towards the world or other people,” has as its social structural prerequisite the “suspension and removal of economic necessity and [the] objective and subjective distance from practical urgencies.”<sup>71</sup> Similarly, working-class pragmatism and functionalism are grounded in conditions of existence that afford no resources for keeping necessity at a distance and thus allow no escape from “ordinary interests and urgencies.”<sup>72</sup>

These “variations in objective and subjective distance” from the “material constraints and temporal urgencies” of the world<sup>73</sup> are themselves explained by differences in volume and composition of “capital,” broadly understood as “the set of actually usable resources and powers,” the most important of which are economic capital and cultural capital.<sup>74</sup> This is the fundamental (and also the most abstract) level of analysis, and it is on this level that Bourdieu constructs his basic model of the contemporary French class structure. The two-dimensional concept of volume and structure of capital (unlike the one-dimensional concept of distance from necessity) permits the analysis and explanation of intra-class as well as inter-class variations in life style and dispositions. Thus the opposition between the “bourgeois’ or

right-bank taste” of professionals and executives and the “‘intellectual’ or left-bank taste” of artists and professors – an opposition “between two world-views . . . symbolized . . . by Renoir and Goya, . . . rose-coloured spectacles and dark thoughts, boulevard theatre and avant-garde theatre, the social optimism of people without problems and the anti-bourgeois pessimism of people with problems”<sup>75</sup> is explained by the fact that professors, rich in cultural capital, are (relatively) poor in economic capital, while executives and professionals, rich in economic capital, are (relatively) poor in cultural capital.

It is crucial that the coincidence of divisions on these four levels of analysis be demonstrated, for the argument of *Distinction* rests on the premise that status groups, characterized by different life styles, are *nothing but* classes whose objective power base is misperceived. It is not sufficient to demonstrate the existence of different styles of life. It must be demonstrated in addition that differences in life style conceal differences in power, and that life styles are linked to definite external conditions of existence via definite systems of dispositions.

The statistical analyses Bourdieu carries out in an effort to support his theoretical argument rely heavily on data about the resources, practices, and preferences of members of different occupations. Occupation is treated as an indicator of two sorts of things. On the one hand it is an indicator of a whole set of properties of individuals that are directly determined or shaped by occupational environment or by position in the system of production. These include not only relation to the means of production, and hence class in the Marxian sense, and degree of market power, and hence class position in the Weberian sense, but also other forms of power that may be accumulated at work (such as a “capital” of economically or politically powerful social acquaintances made at work or a “capital” of skill that may be built up – or depleted). On the other hand occupation is treated as an indicator of an entire complex of “secondary properties” that characterize each occupational group, properties determined not directly by position in the system of production or by the intrinsic characteristics of different occupations, but indirectly by the mechanisms that control access to occupational positions by selecting or rejecting new members according to implicit or explicit criteria. These are properties such as level of education, sex ratio, age distribution, geographical distribution, distribution according to social origin, etc.<sup>76</sup>

The multivalence of occupation as an indicator is central to Bourdieu’s treatment of class in *Distinction*. For occupation, as a conveniently operationalizable category of social research, is correlated with consumption

habits and with indicators of dispositions, but often only quite weakly. To explain the correlations, but also to explain why they are not stronger, is a central task of *Distinction*. Premised on the dual thesis that class is defined by shared dispositions as well as shared conditions of existence and that status groups are nothing but concealed classes, the argument must explain why statistical analysis reveals only relatively weak correlations between indicators of class such as occupation and indicators of dispositions and life styles.

This is done in the following manner. Classes are by definition homogeneous. Occupational groups are relatively homogeneous: the selective mechanisms regulating access to occupational positions tend to ensure a certain degree of homogeneity. But occupations, especially when defined by the “relatively abstract categories imposed by the necessities of statistical accumulation,”<sup>77</sup> are not sufficiently homogeneous to constitute classes, for there are real, class-constitutive divisions within each abstractly defined occupational group – within the category of *cadres*, for example – along the lines of such “secondary properties” as age, sex, level of instruction, or social, ethnic, or geographical origin. To the extent that *cadres* of different age, sex, and social origin are the products of different conditions of existence and are endowed with different dispositions, then – in consequence of Bourdieu’s formal definition of class – they must be considered members of different classes. The point bears reiteration, for it underlines the distinctiveness of Bourdieu’s theory of class. Age, sex, and ethnicity are not principles of division that *cross-cut* class divisions: they *constitute* class divisions (more precisely, they are indicators of class-constitutive differences in conditions of existence and dispositions). Class is not one mode of social grouping among others: it is the generic name for all social groups distinguished by their conditions of existence and their corresponding dispositions.

There is no single property that is both suitable for statistical analysis and an adequate indicator of class as defined by Bourdieu (though occupation, especially when more precisely specified than is the case in most survey data, comes closest). This is a necessary implication of his rejection of a single-factor definition of class (like those of Weber or Marx, for example) in favor of a definition in terms of two total systems of factors, external conditions of existence on the one hand and internalized dispositions on the other. Not statistical analysis, but only a “work of construction” that takes explicit account of the “network of secondary characteristics”<sup>78</sup> on the side of conditions of existence and of the “practical coherence”<sup>79</sup> of consumption habits and life styles on the side of internalized dispositions can succeed in understanding classes as “(relatively) homogeneous sets of individuals characterized by sets of properties that are statistically and ‘socio-logically’ interrelated.”<sup>80</sup>



This work of construction takes its inspiration from an unlikely pair: Weber and Proust. On the one hand it can only be called ideal-typical, in that it is “formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete. . . concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged . . . into a unified analytical construct [that], in its conceptual purity . . . cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality.”<sup>81</sup> Professors characterized by an “aristocratic asceticism”<sup>82</sup> or rising members of middle classes characterized by “tension and pretension”<sup>83</sup> doubtless exist; but these striking ensembles of dispositions can be taken as characteristic of classes, indeed as part of the definition of classes or class fractions, only in an ideal-typical sense: such dispositional characterizations must be understood not as a “description of reality” but as aiming “to give unambiguous means of expression to such a description.”<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, Bourdieu’s analyses proceed with a Proustian sensitivity to the subtle differences in manner that constitute an inexhaustible source of perceived and therefore real social distinctions and divisions, especially within the labyrinthine upper reaches of French society:

Knowing that “manner” is a symbolic manifestation whose meaning and value depend as much on the perceivers as on the producer, one can see how it is that the manner of using symbolic goods, especially those regarded as attributes of excellence, constitutes one of the key markers of “class” and also the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction, that is, as Proust puts it, “the infinitely varied art of marking distances.”<sup>85</sup>

The product of this Webero-Proustian method is an extraordinarily rich ethnographic account of the innumerable manners of distinguishing oneself (positively or negatively) in contemporary French society. But when does a distinction between two manners of distinguishing oneself constitute a class division? Are there as many classes as there are manners of distinguishing oneself, i.e., styles of life? This question remains entirely abstract and unanswerable unless one recalls that class, on Bourdieu’s definition, cannot be self-subsistent but is always relative to a particular sociological problem. For the criteria of similarity that determine whether a group of individuals share sufficiently similar external conditions of existence and sufficiently similar internalized dispositions to constitute a class are necessarily problem-relative. And because *Distinction* is oriented not to a single problem, but to a tangled ensemble of problems constitutive of a whole sociological program, one should not expect to find a single set of divisions that, in Bourdieu’s view, constitute *the* class structure of contemporary France.

Among this network of problems, however, it is possible to distinguish one fundamental problem – the concern to give an overall account of the French social structure as a structure of power and privilege, taking account of

symbolic as well as material power, cultural as well as economic privilege. For this purpose two sets of group-based differences are relevant: differences in total amount of power or capital – a concept that is intelligible only on the (problematic) assumption that the different forms of power are mutually interconvertible at definite rates – and differences in kinds of power or capital possessed by groups with roughly similar total amounts of power. Bourdieu adopts the traditional threefold division into working class, middle class, and dominant class or bourgeoisie as adequate for the conceptualization of differences in overall level of power. His distinctive contribution to the study of class structure, though, is in his analyses of intra-class divisions. In these analyses, both middle and upper classes (though not the working class) are conceived as internally structured around the opposition between fractions relatively poor in economic capital but relatively rich in cultural capital (particularly school teachers and the “new cultural intermediaries”<sup>86</sup> in the middle classes and professors in the upper classes) and fractions relatively rich in economic capital but relatively poor in cultural capital (shopkeepers and artisans in the middle classes, industrial and commercial proprietors in the upper classes). In between, in each class, are fractions characterized by intermediate amounts of both kinds of capital (middle management in the middle classes, and top management and the liberal professions in the upper classes). These structural oppositions help to explain intra-class differences in attitudes and practices – differences, for example, between the repressive anti-modernism of the declining group of craftsmen and small shopkeepers, who tend to reject in the name of traditional values the contemporary “laxity in matters of . . . credit, childrearing or sex,” and the psychologically oriented hedonism of the “new petite bourgeoisie.”<sup>87</sup> It is above all the subtle analyses of such intra-class oppositions that make *Distinction* a brilliant and engaging ethnographic portrait of the contemporary French class structure.

## Conclusion

If Bourdieu’s ethnographic portrait of the contemporary French class structure is compelling, his theoretical understanding of class is less satisfactory. By virtue of its strategic location at the intersection of shared external conditions of existence and shared internalized dispositions, shared configurations of power and shared styles of life, class is the universal explanatory principle in Bourdieu’s metatheory of social life. Defined by the complete system of “pertinent properties,” by the “whole set of factors operating in all areas of practice – volume and structure of capital, defined synchronically and diachronically . . . , sex, age, marital status, place of residence,”<sup>88</sup> class ceases to designate (as it does in Marx or Weber) a particular mode of social grouping: it becomes a metaphor for the total set of social determinants.

Class structure is synonymous with social structure; class struggles are assimilated to sexual, generational, regional, ethnic, and occupational struggles; and class theory merges with sociological theory in general.

The extreme generality of Bourdieu's conception of class, and its strategic location at the center of a systematically unified metatheory, mark Bourdieu's distance from Weber, whose skepticism toward general theory and general concepts may be worth recalling in conclusion:

For the knowledge of historical phenomena in their concreteness, the most general laws, because they are the most devoid of content are also the least valuable. The more comprehensive the validity, – or scope – of a term, the more it leads us away from the richness of reality since in order to include the common elements of the largest possible number of phenomena, it must necessarily be as abstract as possible and hence *devoid* of content.<sup>89</sup>

Bourdieu's social theory is marked by a strong tension between the impulse toward generality – manifest especially in his conceptions of habitus and class – and the concrete novelistic richness of his accounts of particular practices, institutions, and rituals, from the ritual exchanges of honor (and aggression) in Kabylia to the ritual exchanges of honor (and aggression) in academia. This tension explains the distinctive virtues and defects of Bourdieu's treatment of class in *Distinction*. For his brilliant ethnographic dissections of the practices and pretensions of the various classes and class fractions resist the metatheoretical systematization to which they are nonetheless subjected: the result is an engaging if ultimately contradictory attempt to sustain simultaneously the perfect systematicity of the social world and the infinitely rich concrete diversity of human practices.

## NOTES

1. Nice has translated four important books by Bourdieu (as well as a number of articles) in recent years: *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (co-authored by Jean-Claude Passeron, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977); *The Inheritors* (co-authored by Jean-Claude Passeron, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); and *Distinction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). Two other books by Bourdieu – *Questions de Sociologie* and *Le Sens Pratique* – are also being translated by Nice and will be published by Wesleyan University Press. For a complete listing of English translations of Bourdieu's work through 1979, see *Media, Culture and Society* (1980) 2, 295–96; a bibliography of his French publications appears in *Revue française de science politique* (1980) 30, 1223–27. Most of his recent work has appeared in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, which Bourdieu has edited since its founding in 1975. Among recent English translations, see especially "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods," *Media, Culture and Society* (1980) 2, 261–93.
2. Nicholas Garnham and Raymond Williams, "Pierre Bourdieu and the Sociology of Culture: an Introduction," *Media, Culture and Society* (1980) 2, 209. (For other discussions in English of Bourdieu's work, see Paul DiMaggio, "Review Essay: On Pierre Bourdieu," *American Journal of Sociology* (1979) 84 (6), 1460–74; Pekka Sulkunen, "Society Made Visible – on the Cultural Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu," *Acta Sociologica* (1982) 25 (2), 103–115; Richard Jenkins, "Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism," *Sociology* (1982) 16, 270–281; and John Thompson, "Symbolic Violence: Language and Power in the Writings of Pierre Bourdieu," in *Studies in the Theory of*

- Ideology* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1984), 42–72). Though not especially surprising, given the current academic division of labor, it is ironic that the reception of Bourdieu's work has largely been determined by the same "false frontiers" and "artificial divisions" that his work has repeatedly challenged (see *Questions de Sociologie*, (Paris: Minit, 1980), 30, 35 and especially 52, where Bourdieu suggests that his own work depends on uniting the traditionally ethnological concern with systems of classification and the traditionally sociological concern with social classes.)
3. Charles Lemert, "Literary Politics and the *Champ* of French Sociology," *Theory and Society* (1981) 10, 645–69. Bourdieu's theory of knowledge, presented in Bourdieu, J.-C. Chamboredon, and J.-C. Passeron, *Le Métier de Sociologue*, 3rd edn., (Paris: Mouton, 1980), requires of sociology and the other social sciences reflexive attention to their own condition of production. "The sociology of sociology is not... one 'speciality' among others but one of the first conditions of a scientific sociology" (*Questions de Sociologie*, 22). For an introduction to Bourdieu's conception of the fields within which symbolic production takes place, see "Intellectual Field and Creative Project," in *Knowledge and Control: New Directions for the Sociology of Education*, ed. Michael F. D. Young, (West Drayton, England: Collier Macmillan, 1971).
  4. *Le Sens Pratique* (Paris: Editions de Minit, 1980), 8. The opposition between the Levi-Straussian and Sartrean models of intellectual vocation, Bourdieu writes, encouraged in those considering careers in social science "the ambition to reconcile theoretical and practical intentions, the scientific vocation and the ethical or political vocation, ... through a more humble and responsible manner of accomplishing their work as researchers" (ibid.). Bourdieu was indeed guided in his early studies of Algerian society during the Algerian war by an ambition to unite theoretical and practical aims (see the long preface to *Le Sens Pratique*), and he continues to regard his sociological work as one of demystification and deconsecration, as a work committed to revealing "hidden bases of domination" and thus to undermining the "misrecognition of the mechanisms on which it is founded" (*Questions de Sociologie*, 7, 13, 28). But while the themes of his early book *Les Héritiers* (an account of the pervasive and deeply inegalitarian effects of social origin in the experience of French university students) were taken up by student radicals in 1968, French Marxists and others on the left have criticized his work for what they have taken to be its pessimistic or even quietistic political implications. Even sympathetic commentators such as Nicholas Garnham and Raymond Williams, who believe Bourdieu's work constitutes a "progressive political intervention," are critical of the "functionalist/determinist residue in [his] concept of reproduction which leads him to place less emphasis on the possibilities of real change and innovation than either his theory or his empirical research makes necessary" (pp. 222–23). Bourdieu himself – to the consternation of certain (very) "critical theorists" – has devoted much more attention to the relation between sociological theory and sociological practice (especially in *Le Métier de Sociologue*) than to the relation between sociological theory and political practice.
  5. *Le Sens Pratique*, 43. Because of the dominance of structuralist, objectivist modes of thought in postwar French social theory, Bourdieu devotes most of his metatheoretical attention to a critique of objectivism. For his criticism of Sartre's voluntaristic theory of action and subjectivist conception of society, see *Le Sens Pratique* 71–78 and *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 73–76.
  6. For the specific importance of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber as cardinal points of reference for Bourdieu in the construction of his own theory, see *Reproduction*, 4–5; "Genèse et structure du champ religieux," *Revue française de sociologie* (1971) 12, 295–334, esp. 295–300; and *Questions de Sociologie*, 24–25. Here as elsewhere Bourdieu presents the task of theory-construction as one of "integrating in a coherent system the contributions of the different partial and mutually exclusive theories, without yielding to scholastic compilation or to eclectic amalgamation" ("Genèse et structure," 295). Apparent contradictions, between Marx and Weber for example, can be transcended by "going back to the common root" (*Questions de Sociologie*, 25). For Bourdieu's most sweeping exercise in theoretical synthesis, see the short article on "Symbolic Power," in ed. Denis Gleeson, *Identity and Structure: Issues in the Sociology of Education*, (Nafferton, Driffield, England: Nafferton Books, 1977), where the insights to be "integrated (and transcended)" are those of Kant and Cassirer, Sapir and Whorf, Hegel, Saussure and Levi Strauss as well as Marx, Durkheim, and Weber.
  7. Bourdieu has in fact reserved some of his sharpest criticisms for Marxism. See for example, the conclusion to "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," in this issue, in which Marxism is characterized as the "most powerful obstacle to the progress of the adequate theory of the social world." For a subtle reading of Bourdieu's work that places it in a (broadly conceived) Marxian tradition, see Garnham and Williams.
  8. DiMaggio, 1461.
  9. "If one takes seriously at the same time the Durkheimian hypothesis of the social genesis of schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action and the fact of class divisions, one is necessarily led to the hypothesis that there exists a correspondence between social structures (properly speaking, power structures) and mental structures, a correspondence

- that establishes itself via the intermediary of the structure of symbolic systems such as language, art and religion" ("Genèse et structure du champ religieux," 300).
10. See the Preface to the English edition of *Distinction*, xi–xii: "The model of the relationships between the universe of economic and social conditions and the universe of life-styles which is put forward here [is] based on an endeavor to rethink Max Weber's opposition between class and *Stand*."
  11. See especially *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, and "Symbolic Power."
  12. The theory of the economy of symbolic goods is developed in the following articles: "Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception," *International Social Science Journal* (1968) 20 (4), 589–612; "Le marché des biens symboliques," *L'Année Sociologique* (1971) 22, 49–126; "Genèse et structure du champ religieux"; "Une interprétation de la théorie de la vie religieuse selon Max Weber," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* (1971) 12 (1), 3–21; and "The Production of Belief." For the conception of symbolic capital and its relation to economic capital, see *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, esp. 171–183.
  13. "Genèse et structure du champ religieux," 300.
  14. *Distinction*, 468. For Bourdieu, as for Durkheim, this hypothesis provides a sociological answer to questions raised by Kant. Durkheim claimed that his sociological theory of knowledge would conserve "the essential principles of the [Kantian] apriorists" while grounding itself in the "positive spirit" of the empiricists (*Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, (New York: Free Press, 1965, 32); similarly, Bourdieu admits to the "perhaps immoderate ambition of giving a scientific answer to the old questions of Kant's critique of judgment, by seeking in the structure of the social classes the basis of the systems of classification which structure perception of the social world and designate the objects of aesthetic enjoyment" (*Distinction*, xiii–xiv).
  15. It is a recurrent theme of *Distinction* that even the most sophisticated cultural and social appraisals and evaluations are structured by a small number of (logically) primitive principles of classification – e.g., oppositions between high and low, spiritual and material, fine and coarse, light and heavy, unique and common, brilliant and dull – that are grounded in the "fundamental structures of society" above all in the "opposition between the 'elite' of the dominant and the 'mass' of the dominated, but also in the opposition between "two principles of domination . . . , material and intellectual" (*Distinction*, 468–69).
  16. "Genèse et structure du champ religieux," 297–300.
  17. *Reproduction*, 4; "Genèse et structure," 297; *Distinction*, 480.
  18. Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 8–15.
  19. *Le Sens Pratique*, 34.
  20. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 183. See also *Questions de Sociologie*, 25: "Against the typical regression of Marxism towards economism, which knows only the economy in the narrow sense of the capitalist economy and which explains everything by the economy thus defined, Max Weber extends economic analysis (in the generalized sense) to regions ordinarily abandoned by economics, such as religion. Thus, he characterizes the Church . . . as monopolizing the control of the goods of salvation. He suggests a radical materialism that would investigate economic determinants (in the broadest sense) in regions such as art or religion where an ideology of 'disinterestedness' reigns." For Bourdieu's own analyses of the "economic" logic of interest, investment, accumulation, and profit in fields of activity as diverse as high fashion, science, and conversation, see (in addition to *Distinction* and the works cited in note 11) "Le couturier et sa griffe," *Actes de la recherche* (1975) 1, 7–36; "The Specificity of the Scientific Field and the Social Conditions of the Progress of Reason," *Social Science Information* (1975) 14, 19–47; "The Economics of Linguistic Exchanges," *Social Science Information* (1977) 16, 645–68.
  21. *Distinction*, 20–22, 178, 209–213.
  22. *Questions de Sociologie*, 33–35. For Bourdieu's criticism of the human capital theory of Gary Becker, see "Avenir de classe et causalité du probable," *Revue française de sociologie* (1974) 15, 36.
  23. *Distinction*, 2–3, 5, 53–56.
  24. *Le Sens Pratique*, 233–44.
  25. *Distinction*, 482–84.
  26. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1967), 33.
  27. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Social Structure," in *Structural Anthropology*, (New York: Basic Books, 1963).
  28. Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Brighton, England: Harvester Press, 1979), chs. 1 and 2.
  29. Jean Piaget, *Structuralism* (Routledge, 1971), 98; Maurice Godelier, "Anthropology and Economics," in *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 45.
  30. See especially the analyses in *Le Métier de Sociologue*.
  31. *Distinction*, esp. 18–22 and 65f.

32. *Le Sens Pratique*, 43–70, esp. 46–47 and 56–58.
33. *Reproduction*, 5; cf. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 22.
34. See Part One of *Reproduction* and “Symbolic Power.”
35. See n. 12 above.
36. For a clear, short statement of the importance of *méconnaissance*, with reference to the practice of gift-giving, see *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 4–5.
37. *Ibid.*, 171–72.
38. *Ibid.*, 178.
39. *Ibid.*, 178–79.
40. *Le Sens Pratique*, 231 n. 28.
41. The increasing social attention paid to styles of life is itself economically conditioned: the functioning of the advanced capitalist economy “depends as much on the production of needs and consumers as on the production of goods.... This economy demands a social world which judges people by their capacity for consumption, their ‘standard of living,’ their life-style, as much as by their capacity for production” (*Distinction*, 310).
42. Pierre Bourdieu and M. de Saint Martin, “Les Catégories de l’entendement professoral,” *Actes de la recherche* (1975) 3, 68–93; see also *Reproduction*, 141–76. (The emphasis placed on style seems to be much heavier in the French than in the English or American educational systems.) One implication of this analysis is that the achievement of the liberal utopia, in which all forms of inheritance of economic resources would be abolished and free education would be provided at every level for all who were “qualified,” would not suffice to transform formal equality of opportunity into real equality of opportunity. “The educational system can... ensure the perpetuation of privilege by the mere operation of its own internal logic” (*Inheritors*, 27). For students from culturally privileged backgrounds would begin their formal educational careers with rich endowments of cultural capital, and these initial advantages would be compounded and recombined over the years. Even economic power would continue to be a source of (indirectly) inheritable privilege. For the economically powerful – those with the “power to keep economic necessity at a distance” (*Distinction*, 55, trans. altered) – would be better placed than others to cultivate, by making use of their own greater leisure or of the services of hired cultivators, the appropriate dispositions and capacities in their pre-school children.
43. *Distinction* 152, 241–43.
44. On the concept of cultural capital, see Bourdieu, “Les trois états du capital culturel,” *Actes de la recherche* (1979) 30, 3–6. On strategies of reconversion (of one form of capital into another) and the inflationary and devaluatory consequences of the boom in higher education, see *Distinction* 125–66. On the usefulness of analogical concepts such as degree inflation, cultural capital, and symbolic markets, see Jean-Claude Passeron, “L’inflation des diplômes: remarques sur l’usage de quelques concepts analogiques en sociologie,” *Revue française de sociologie* (1982) 23, 551–84.
45. *Le Sens Pratique*, 22. The long autobiographical preface to this work gives a full account of Bourdieu’s early enthusiasm for and subsequent disenchantment with structuralist modes of analysis.
46. “Structuralism and the Theory of Sociological Knowledge,” *Social Research* (1969) 35(4), 705. For the most sustained discussion of the concept of habitus, see *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, esp. chs. 2 and 4.
47. “Avenir de classe et causalité du probable,” esp. 9, n. 15. See also *Reproduction*, 155f.
48. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 78, 83. Bourdieu’s most extensive analysis of dispositional lag is contained in his study of colonial Algeria in the course of its adjustment to an imported and imposed money economy. Largely as a result of the massive rural clearances carried out during the war, agents endowed with economic and temporal dispositions oriented to a traditional agrarian economy were uprooted and suddenly forced to confront an urban money economy. The traditional dispositions had to be transformed, through a process of “creative reinvention,” in order that individuals could adapt to the demands and opportunities of the new economy. But dispositions “do not change in the same rhythm as economic structures,” and the period of transition and readaptation generated much confusion, “as if these societies were not contemporary with themselves,” as well as great hardship for those groups whose dispositions were most closely oriented to the traditional economic order and who were thus least well equipped to adjust to the demands of the emerging money economy. See *Algeria 1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); quotations from 4 and 5.
49. *Distinction*, 143–44.
50. “Avenir de classe,” 5; *Distinction*, 168.
51. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 82–83.
52. As Paul DiMaggio has suggested in his “Review Article,” 1464.
53. Marx, too, had a general, transhistorical conception of class – what Giddens (*The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*. (London: Hutchinson, 1973), 27) calls his “abstract or ‘pure’ model of class domination” – but it was never systematically elaborated. Much confusion in discussions of class has resulted from the failure to distinguish between this

undeveloped general conception of class and class conflict and his systematically articulated analyses of the structure, genesis, and dynamic consequences of class divisions in capitalist society. (See also Tom Bottomore, *Classes in Modern Society*. (George Allen & Unwin, 1965), 23).

54. Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 928.
55. *Le Sens Pratique*, 209.
56. *Ibid.*, 100.
57. *Algeria 1960*, 2.
58. *Le Sens Pratique*, 100.
59. *Distinction*, 269.
60. Though *Distinction* is about contemporary France, Bourdieu claims (in the Preface to the English edition) that its basic analyses of the “relationships between the universe of economic and social conditions and the universe of life-styles” are “valid . . . for every stratified society” (xi-xii). What is not made clear in *Distinction* – or elsewhere in Bourdieu’s work – is the level of generality at which such sweeping validity is claimed. Is it only the metatheoretical, purely formal propositions – e.g., the propositions about the relationships between conditions of existence, habitus, and practice – that are universally valid? Or do the substantive arguments – e.g., about the “changes in the mode of domination” (*Ibid.*, 154, 311) or about the increasing importance of cultural capital vis-a-vis economic capital – also have a cross-cultural validity? The uniqueness of the Parisian haute bourgeoisie (*Ibid.*, xi) and the French educational system would seem to restrict the scope of at least some of Bourdieu’s generalizations about the relationships between class and culture. As Bourdieu himself notes, it is “only by using the comparative method . . . that one can . . . avoid unjustifiably universalizing the particular case” (*Ibid.*). It is to be hoped that the analyses in *Distinction* will themselves soon be treated in comparative perspective.
61. *Le Sens Pratique*, 241.
62. *Distinction*, 173.
63. *Ibid.*, 79, 190–92.
64. *Ibid.*, 213, 219.
65. *Ibid.*, xi.
66. *Ibid.*, 331.
67. *Ibid.*, 339.
68. *Ibid.*, 32–34. For a pointed contrast between the pure aesthetic of (certain fractions of) the bourgeoisie and the anti-aesthetic ethos of the working class, see *ibid.*, 4–5.
69. *Ibid.*, 199, 376.
70. *Ibid.*, 53–56.
71. *Ibid.*, 376, 54.
72. *Ibid.*, 56.
73. *Ibid.*, 376.
74. *Ibid.*, 114. Sometimes Bourdieu distinguishes three main forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social, the last a “capital of social connections, honorability and responsibility” (122) that may yield advantages on the job market, on the marriage market, in a political career, etc. See also “Le capital social,” *Actes de la recherche* (1980) 31, 2–3.
75. *Distinction*, 292; compare 283, 286.
76. *Ibid.*, 101–106.
77. *Ibid.*, 244.
78. *Ibid.*, 106.
79. *Le Sens Pratique*, 145.
80. *Distinction*, 259.
81. Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (Free Press, 1949), 90.
82. *Distinction*, 176, 214, 219, 286.
83. *Ibid.*, 331–38.
84. Weber, *Methodology*, 90.
85. *Distinction*, 66.
86. *Ibid.*, 325. Bourdieu’s analyses of the ethos and life-style of the “new petite bourgeoisie” (354–71) are among the most suggestive in the book.
87. *Ibid.*, 350, 346. The intra-class opposition between fractions with differing “asset structures,” according to Bourdieu, is not merely a structural and static one: in the middle and especially the upper class, it engenders ongoing struggles to define the “dominant principle of domination” – struggles to determine the relative importance of economic, cultural, or social capital in attaining or maintaining privileged social positions and to secure the “best conversion rate for the type of capital with which each group is best provided” (*ibid.*, 254, 310). It is hard to know what to make of these abstract formulations. Despite much abstract talk of class struggles in *Distinction*, the concrete struggles Bourdieu discusses in any detail are not the struggles of classes or class fractions, but (1) struggles of individuals and families to preserve or enhance their powers and privileges over time or to transmit

them across generations; and (2) the struggles of occupational groups or fractions of such groups for material or symbolic rewards. Though the former are class-conditioned struggles (it is a great merit of Bourdieu's work to have demonstrated this in rich ethnographic detail), they can hardly be considered class struggles; indeed they are the very opposite of struggles informed by consciousness of collective interest. And though the latter could be considered class struggles given Bourdieu's elastic and highly general conception of class, it is not clear what theoretical gain would result from assimilating the struggles of occupation-based status groups (as they would be called in a broadly Weberian tradition) to the struggles that directly affect the destinies of the more inclusive groups traditionally conceived as classes.

88. Ibid., 106, 112.

89. Weber, *Methodology*, 80.

### **Acknowledgments**

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