

“The Real is Relational”: An Epistemological Analysis of Pierre Bourdieu’s Generative Structuralism*

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An internal reconstruction and an immanent critique of Bourdieu’s generative structuralism is presented. Rather than starting with the concept of “habitus,” as is usually done, the article tries to systematically reconstruct Bourdieu’s theory by an analysis of the relational logic that permeates his whole work. Tracing the debt Bourdieu’s approach owes to Bachelard’s rationalism and Cassirer’s relationalism, the article examines Bourdieu’s epistemological writings of the 1960s and 70s. It tries to make the case that Bourdieu’s sociological metascience represents a rationalist version of Bhaskar’s critical realism, and enjoins Bourdieu to give heed to the realist turn in the philosophy of the natural and the social sciences. The article shows how Bourdieu’s epistemological assumptions are reflected in his primary theoretical constructs of “habitus” and “field.” To concretize their discussion, it analyzes Bourdieu’s reinterpretation of Weber in his theory of the field of religion and of the young Mannheim in his theory of the scientific field.

By means of concepts and symbols we try to make a temporal
order of words stand for a relational order of things.

—S. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*

“Entities of the world—relate!” (Emirbayer 1997:312). This could be the motto of a relational sociology. Bourdieu has opted for another one, which contains an ironic reference to Hegel rather than to Marx. In *Méditations pascaliennes*, a sociological meditation on the philosophies of our time from Searle to Habermas and Rawls, Bourdieu has described himself as a *pascalien* (Bourdieu 1997a:9). But I think that insofar as his “generative structuralism” (Harker, Mahar, and Wilkes 1990:3) can best be understood as an attempt to systematically transpose the relational conception of the natural sciences to the social sciences—an attempt which takes the form of an original synthesis of sociology (Weber, Marx, Durkheim, and Mauss [Brubaker 1985:747–49], but also Elias, Mannheim, and Goffman), phenomenology (Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty), linguistic philosophy (Wittgenstein and Austin) and, last but not least, neo-Kantian epistemology (Bachelard and Cassirer, but also Panofsky and Lévi-Strauss)—one could as well, and maybe even better, describe him as a “*bachelardien*.”¹ Although the influence of Gaston Bachelard on Bourdieu has often escaped the attention of Anglo-American scholars who are not

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¹Bourdieu is not a syncretic but a synthetic and heretical thinker. He draws on Durkheim, Marx, Weber, and others but insofar as he critically corrects them, one could as well describe him as an anti-Durkheimian Durkheimian, an anti-Weberian Weberian, or an anti-Marxist Marxist. One could even say that he thinks with Althusser against Althusser and against Habermas with Habermas, but not—and this is probably the only exception—that he thinks with Bachelard against Bachelard.

well acquainted with the French tradition of the history and the philosophy of science, and who may have encountered the names of Bachelard, Koyré, Canguilhem, Meyerson, or Cavaillès only indirectly via their interest in Althusser, Foucault, or Kuhn, whose famous book on the *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn [1962] 1970) is directly influenced by Bachelard, I want to go back to the formative years of the French sociologist (the late sixties and the early seventies when all his seminal ideas were in gestation) to show that his social theory can best be understood when it is seen as an attempt to systematically transpose Bachelard's "applied rationalism" from the realm of the natural sciences to the realm of the social sciences.²

However, the focus on Bachelard should not obscure what Bourdieu owes to Ernst Cassirer's protostructuralist analyses of the relational principle in the modern sciences, from mathematics to physics and linguistics.³ Indeed, the unfalsifiable metascientific "hard core" (Lakatos) of Bourdieu's progressive research program is formed by a sophisticated synthesis of Bachelard's rationalism with Cassirer's relationism. Together, they form the metatheory of sociological knowledge that underlies and generates the sociological theory of the fields of the production, circulation, and consumption of cultural goods. This structuralist metatheory of knowledge is naturalist, but it is not positivist. Like contemporary critical realists (Harré, Bhaskar, etc.), Bourdieu argues for a nonpositivistic interpretation of the epistemology of the natural sciences and reformulates it systematically in such a way that the possibility of a naturalistic social science becomes possible.⁴ Notwithstand-

²Until recently, most commentators have missed the important input of the French tradition of the history and philosophy of science in general and of Bachelard in particular. Wacquant has noted it (1996b:152) and in the meantime Swartz (1997:31–36) has corrected the oversight. In *Culture and Power*, he introduces his analysis of the influence of Bachelard on Bourdieu by noting that "many of Bourdieu's central theoretical concerns remain somewhat elusive to much British and American sociology unless they are understood in light of this philosophical tradition" (ibid.:31). Before Swartz and Wacquant, Raynaud had noted it, but unfortunately he ended up with the reductive characterization of Bourdieu's sociology as the "distinguished form of vulgar materialism" (Raynaud 1980:93). Alexander (1995) for his part has taken over this partial characterization, but without noticing the Bachelardian strand in Bourdieu's thought. Otherwise, I am sure, he could not have chastized Bourdieu for ignoring the postpositivist philosophy of science. Leaving aside the highly polemical form and some misgivings, which are due to his superficial knowledge of the philosophical and political intricacies of the French field of cultural production (for an extremely violent critique of Alexander, see Wacquant 1996c), Alexander's metacritique of Bourdieu can be justified. That said, I want to add that although his "symptomatic" reading is a possible one, it is certainly not the one I would favor—although I have presented a metacritique of Adorno's critical theory that is inspired by a Habermasian reading of Alexander's *Theoretical Logic in Sociology* (Alexander 1982–1983) and, thus, is somewhat similar to his critique of Bourdieu (Vandenbergh 1998:55–103). But Bourdieu is not Adorno. If Adorno can be read as a hyperdeterministic Bourdieu (without theological overtones), reading Bourdieu as if one were reading the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is rather reductionistic. In fact, I read Bourdieu in a voluntaristic way as the sociological counterpart of, and prelude to, Habermas's normative theory of communicative action. In the meantime, the level of the attacks on Bourdieu has reached a historical low point with the publication of a vitriolic pamphlet by one of Bourdieu's former adepts. In *Le savant et le politique*, viciously subtitled *Essai sur le terrorisme sociologique de Pierre Bourdieu*, Verdès-Leroux, a historian of the communist party and the extreme right, no longer teases out the Althusserian overtones in Bourdieu's work but draws a direct parallel between Bourdieu and Lenin—not the thinker, but the tactician, the man. Jumping on the bandwagon of Bourdieu's recent popularity (or unpopularity) as the reincarnation of the Sartrian "total intellectual" and spokesperson of the radical left ("the left of the left"), the enormous commercial success of Bourdieu's latest book *La domination masculine* (Bourdieu 1998b)—an absolute bestseller that reached fifth position on the hit parade of books over the summer—has incited his old enemies (Mongin, L. Ferry, Finkelkraut, Debray, Grignon, etc.) to join the polemical fray and to indulge in a coordinated series of dispersed *ad hominem* attacks.

³More than any other sociologist, Bourdieu, who published Cassirer in the collection which he directed at the Editions de Minuit, is influenced by Cassirer—in two ways. First, the influence of Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms on the theory of symbolic violence is openly acknowledged and discussed by Bourdieu in his major statement on this central theme of his work (Bourdieu 1977b:405–11). I will not discuss this part of the Cassirerian heritage here, but will concentrate my exegesis on Cassirer's relational conception of knowledge and show how Bourdieu develops it into a full-blown theory of the properties of the field. It would also be interesting to explore Bourdieu's indebtedness to Panofsky, who was Cassirer's colleague at the Warburg Institute in Hamburg; unfortunately this analysis will have to be postponed till another time.

⁴By "critical realism," a denomination that arose by elision of the terms "transcendental realism" and "critical naturalism," I mean to refer to the British-based antipositivistic movement in philosophy and the human sciences led by Roy Bhaskar and inspired by his seminal books *A Realist Theory of Science* ([1975] 1978) and *The*

ing his nominal attacks on realist (empiricist) and substantialist (nonrelational) philosophies of science, which do not accomplish the epistemological rupture with the spontaneous conceptions of reality,⁵ I would like to show that his sociological metascience represents a rationalist version of critical realism.

Although I am generally sympathetic to Bourdieu's approach, I would like to formulate a positive critique of rationalism and try to argue for the necessity of a philosophical conversion from rationalism to realism. Once the philosophical ground is cleared, I will move on to a systematic reconstruction of the relational conception that forms the core of genetic structuralism to investigate in more detail how, in the wake of Bachelard, Bourdieu says *adieu* to empiricist accounts of science and conquers, constructs, and establishes the facts by means of a conceptual detour via a theory of fields. In that context I will also expound the famous concept of the habitus, which by realizing structures relates fields to actions and mediates between both as a Bachelardian attempt to transcend philosophical antinomies, and try to push it in a voluntaristic direction more in line with the moral and political intent that animates his critical theory. Moving from a metatheoretical analysis of the theory of sociological knowledge, I will next analyze Bourdieu's general theory of fields as a concrete application of the relational mode of thought and present a highly formalized account of the general principles and properties of fields and subfields. In order to illustrate how this theory of fields represents a sociological application of the conjunction of Bachelard's rationalist and Cassirer's relationalist metatheories of the natural sciences, I will reconstruct Bourdieu's first studies of the religious and the scientific fields and probe their Weberian and Mannheimian resonances. Finally, I will conclude with a general evaluation of the research program of the Centre of European Sociology and a final question about ethics.

1. THE POSSIBILITY OF NATURALISM

To what extent can society be studied in the same way as nature? Without exaggerating one could call this question concerning the possibility of naturalism in the social sciences the primal problem of the philosophy of the social sciences (Bhaskar 1989a). For, since the double foundation of sociology by Auguste Comte and Wilhelm Dilthey, the history of that subject has been polarized around a dispute between two traditions, affording rival answers to this conundrum. A naturalist tradition, whose immediate philosophical antecedents lay in the work of Hume, Comte, Mill, Mach, and the Vienna Circle, has claimed that the sciences are (actually or ideally) unified in their concordance with positivist principles, based in the last instance on the Humean notion of law as the regular succession of two observable events. In opposition to positivism, an antinaturalist tradition, which finds its philosophical ancestry in Vico, Kant, Hegel, Dilthey, Husserl, and Wittgenstein, has posited a cleavage in method between the natural and the social sciences, grounded in a differentiation of their subject matters. For this hermeneutic tradition, the subject matter of

Possibility of Naturalism (1989a). Unlike Putnam's and Van Fraassen's realism, which is a form of "truth realism," critical realism is a version of "entity realism." If the former focuses on the putative truth of theories, the latter is above all concerned with the reality of entities, structures, generative mechanisms, and causal powers. For a general introduction to Bhaskar's philosophy, see Bhaskar (1989b); for a good selection of essential readings of the realist movement, see Archer *et al.* (1998); for a sample of realist studies in social theory, see Benton (1977), Keat and Urry (1982), Outhwaite (1987), Layder (1990), and Archer (1995).

⁵In his earlier works, Bourdieu always used the term "realism" as a *Kampfwort* to attack the naive realism of the empiricists. Lately, however, the adjective realist has taken on more positive connotations that hint at a possible acquaintance with the realist movement in the Anglo-Saxon philosophy of the natural and the social sciences. See, for instance, *La noblesse d'Etat*, where Bourdieu describes his epistemology as "inseparably constructivist and realist" (1989:186) or *La misère du monde*, undoubtedly the book which seems the furthest removed from his earlier insistence on the necessary break with spontaneous conceptions and prenotions of the social, where he speaks of a "realist construction" (1993a:915–16).

the social sciences consists essentially of meaningful objects, and their aim is the elucidation of the meaning of these objects. Now, the great error that unites these disputants is, as Bourdieu says, their “false representation of the epistemology of the natural sciences” (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron 1973:18; here and below, all translations from cited works are mine), and the concomitant acceptance of an essentially positivist account of natural science, or at least of an empiricist ontology. Indeed, recent developments in the philosophy of science, and in particular those that are exemplified in the work of Rom Harré (1970) and that Roy Bhaskar has systematized under the title of “transcendental realism” ([1975] 1978), have convincingly shown that science as it is actually practiced by practicing scientists and reflexively reconstructed by epistemology does not conform to the positivist canon.⁶

The sciences do not so much aim to arrive by inductive generalization of the regular succession of observable phenomena at universal laws as they attempt to get “behind” or “beyond” the phenomena revealed to us by sensory experience, to give us knowledge of unobservable “noumenal structures” (Bachelard) or “generative mechanisms” (Harré) that somehow necessitate these phenomena. In this anti-Humean perspective, laws no longer refer to regular conjunctions of events but are analyzed in dispositional terms as the causal powers, or more precisely tendencies, of the underlying generative mechanisms. The combined tendencies of these “deep” structures and transfactual mechanisms may generate events that may be observed, but the events may take place whether or not there is anyone around to observe them, and the tendencies of the noumenal structures remain the same even when they counteract each other in such a way as to produce no observable change in reality. In place of the ontology of experience and atomistic events constantly conjoined, transcendental realism thus establishes an ontology of unobservable causal powers and mechanisms. And in place of an analysis of laws as constant conjunctions of events, it analyzes laws in terms of the tendencies of the underlying mechanisms that generate the events that may or may not be perceived. “Tendencies may be possessed unexercised, exercised unrealized, and realized unperceived (or undetected) by men” (Bhaskar [1975] 1978:184).⁷

In order to “exhume” the sciences and to overcome their empiricist fixation on perception and sense data, Bhaskar ([1975] 1978:56–62) proposes to replace the “flat ontology” of the empiricists with a more stratified vision of reality that distinguishes the overlapping domains of the real, the actual, and the empirical. If the domain of the real is composed of

⁶Critical realism is the final nail in the coffin of positivism—which does not exclude, of course, that the deceased may reappear for a second time, “like in a farce,” as Marx would say. The strength of positivist accounts of the natural sciences can be gauged by the fact that even such a clear-sighted critique of positivist scientism as Habermas has taken the erroneous self-interpretations of positivists like Comte, Mach, and even Popper at face value (see Habermas 1971).

⁷The fact that the noumenal structures and the generative mechanisms are only observable via their consequences raises the problem of their representation: How do we know that those transfactual structures exist? Who has accorded primacy of the unobservable over the observable? Who speaks for those structures? Who speaks in their name? Thanks to such critical questions about the representation of transfactual mechanisms and the role of spokespersons in science (Latour 1984), we gain access to a reflexive sociology of intellectuals (Pels 1999). At this point, a junction, and (who knows?) maybe even a fruitful cooperation can be established between realist and rationalist forms of constructivism and their nominalist counterparts, as represented by the radical constructivism of “Ants” (Actor-Network Theorists) like Callon (1986), Latour (1987), and Law (1994). Such a cooperation would, however, require that the radical constructivists abandon their ontological nihilism and make only methodological use of the “anti-essentialist nexus (relativism, constructivism, reflexivity)” (Grint and Woolgar 1997:5) to show us how “reality”—that is, the descriptions, rediscussions, and constructions of reality, but not reality itself, of course, which exists independently of those descriptions in the same way as the dog barks whether we have a concept of it or not—is “performatively” constructed as a matter of course by their spokespersons. Such a move from ontological to methodological nominalism implies a consequent switch from a “deconstructivist” to a genuinely “constructivist” posture, from construction to something more akin to phenomenological constitution (Lynch 1993)—but that may be asking too much of the “metareflexivists” who are convinced, like Derrida, that there is no “*hors texte*.”

transfactual generative mechanisms and structures that usually escape direct observation, the domains of the actual and the empirical, respectively, comprise patterns of events that are generated by these mechanisms and structures and the experiences in which they are apprehended. Given that the domain of the real cannot be reduced to and confounded with the domain of the empirical, Bishop Berkeley and the empirical realists are thus simply wrong: to be is *not* to be perceived. That reality exists independently of the observations and the descriptions we may have of it does not mean, however, that we can know reality independently of those observations and (re)descriptions. Reality can only be known thanks to the intervention of categories, theories, and conceptual frameworks, but—*pace* Kuhn, Foucault, and Rorty—they do not determine the structure of the world. Observations are always overdetermined by theory and theories are always underdetermined by observations, but if we want to avoid the “epistemic fallacy” (Bhaskar [1975] 1978:36–38), which consists in the reduction of ontological questions to epistemological ones, we have to categorically distinguish between the “transitive” and the “intransitive objects of science” (ibid:17): between our categories, theories, and conceptual frameworks on the one hand and the real entities, mechanisms, structures, and relations that make up the natural and the social world on the other. Without this distinction between the epistemic or transitive and the ontic or intransitive level of knowledge, we risk projecting our sociohistorically determined knowledge of the objects on the objects of knowledge themselves, substituting the one for the other, and taking the projected object for the thing itself, with the result that the world literally becomes (the reification of) my will and representation.⁸

Once the essentially positivist account of the natural sciences, which is shared by both the positivist defenders of naturalism and its hermeneutic critics, has been thus overhauled, the question concerning the possibility of naturalism in the social sciences can be raised in a refreshingly new way. Now that positivism is refused and refuted, the contributions of the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions can be taken on board and the possibility of a third position, or (with due apologies to Giddens) a “third way,” explored, namely that of a qualified, phenomenologically informed, and hermeneutically sensitive nonpositivist naturalism.⁹ Like other French sociologists and philosophers of his generation who studied at the “Ecole Normale Sup” on the Rue d’Ulm (e.g., Desanti, Macherey, Badiou, etc.), Bourdieu is a product of the philosophical tradition of “historical epistemology” that engenders what he refers to as “an almost obsessional preoccupation with epistemological problems” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1967:197–98). Consequently, it comes as no surprise that Bourdieu has developed a theory of sociological knowledge that systematically explores the possibility of social naturalism. I now proceed to an analysis of his structuralist epistemology, showing its indebtedness to Bachelard’s rationalism and criti-

⁸That the scientists themselves sometimes think that by describing the world they constitute it, that they may be sceptical and even share the conventionalist agnosticism of the sociologists who observe their laboratory life (Latour and Woolgar 1979; Knorr-Cetina 1981) and try to efface the distinction between the representation and the object (Woolgar 1991:21–22) does not detract, and should not distract, from the importance of the distinction between the transitive and the intransitive dimensions of knowledge. SSK, the sociology of scientific knowledge, is only concerned with the study of the transitive, not with the intransitive dimensions of knowledge. It is thus epistemologically relativist and ontologically realist. Once this is granted, we can even accept the most provocative conclusions of Latour and Woolgar: “By observing artefact construction, we showed that ‘reality’ [quotes added] is the consequence of the settlement of a dispute rather than its cause. If ‘reality’ [quotes added] is the consequence rather than the cause of this construction, this means that a scientist’s activity is directed not toward reality [quotes removed], but toward these operations on statements” (1979:236–37). For a critique of Latour’s ‘realism’ by one of the deans of SSK, see Bloor (forthcoming) and Latour’s reply (forthcoming) as well.

⁹Bhaskar’s exploration of the ontological limits, such as concept-dependence, activity-dependence, and greater time-space specificity of social structures, which the social realm imposes on naturalist research and which preclude the wholesale and unqualified transposition of the methods of the natural sciences to the social sciences, has given rise to a transformational model of social action that is, to a certain extent at least, remarkably similar to Giddens’s structuration theory (see Bhaskar 1989a; and for a critical comparison of Giddens and Bhaskar, see Archer 1988:72–100 and 1995:87–134).

cally comparing it to Bhaskar's critical realism. Needless to say, Bourdieu cannot be considered a mere "executor" of Bachelard or Cassirer. Neither of them has made any direct contributions to sociology. The author of *Distinction* has, and that is, without doubt, his distinctive contribution to our disciplinary field.

2. THE THEORY OF SOCIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

Realism versus Rationalism

In *Le Métier de Sociologue* [*The Craft of Sociology*], a handbook in epistemology he now describes as "almost scholastic," but which contains the basic epistemological and methodological principles on which his whole structural sociology rests, Bourdieu sets forth the "theory of sociological knowledge," comprising the "system of principles that define the conditions of possibility of all the acts and all the discourses that are properly sociological, and only those" (Bourdieu et al. 1973:15–16, 48; see also Bourdieu 1968:681–82). He specifies that the epistemological and logical principles of the theory of sociological knowledge are metascientific insofar as they are simply sociological particularizations of the principles upon which all science is founded. Once interiorized, the principles of the theory of sociological knowledge form the "sociological habitus" (Bourdieu et al. 1973:16; see also Brubaker 1993), understood as the operational disposition of the practicing sociologist to apply abstract principles in concrete empirical research.

Bachelard, the postal clerk turned philosopher who was one of Bourdieu's teachers at the prestigious *École Normale Supérieure*, is quoted almost as often as Durkheim in his early epistemological reflections on the logic of the discovery of the social sciences. A closer look at the theory of sociological knowledge reveals that the French sociologist has borrowed its main principles from Bachelard's rationalist reconstruction of the theoretical practices in the natural sciences. Bachelard offers above all a reconstruction of the "everyday" philosophy of the scientists, that is the philosophy implicit in their spontaneous practice, which he critically opposes to the "nocturnal" philosophy of the philosophers, forged in the schools of empirical positivism, to which scientists tend to return when they reflect on their practice (Bachelard [1940] 1988:13; [1953] 1990:19). Probing the epistemological implications of the scientific revolutions in chemistry, biology, and above all physics (relativity theory and quantum physics), he concluded that those breakthroughs undermined both the a priorism of the idealistic accounts of scientific reason and the naive empiricism of the positivist accounts of the sciences. Bachelard's epistemology is synthetic, or, as he says himself, "dialectic" and "discursive." It is dialectic, not because it proceeds in a Hegelian fashion toward a closed and all-encompassing totality, but because the movement of thought is seen as a never ending "pincer movement" (*mouvement d'enveloppement*; Bachelard [1940] 1988:137) in which the limitations of a particular conceptual framework are discovered, overcome, and integrated into a broader framework that includes the previously excluded aspect.

In the same dialectical vein, Bachelard attempts to show that the practical logic of the working scientist naturally transcends the philosophical oppositions of idealist rationalism and empiricist realism.¹⁰ Practicing scientists are not bothered by philosophical disputes and antinomies. Spontaneously and eclectically they combine the constructive imagination of the idealists (rationalism) with the instructed experience of the empiricists (realism),

¹⁰Is it necessary to mention that Bourdieu, like his mentor, cannot recognize an antinomy without trying to transcend it? In this respect, errors and limits of thought seem to be very useful. They are there to be corrected, to be overcome, and thus they are the medium of truth, the way to come closer to the truth, which is always conceived in properly fallibilist fashion as "truth for the time being."

which philosophers tend to separate and to declare incompatible. Thus, the synthetic philosophy they act on, and which combines abstract theory (rationalism) and concrete research (empiricism), is the one which Bachelard calls “applied rationalism” (Bachelard [1940] 1986) or “rational materialism” (Bachelard [1953] 1990). They do not simply gather facts, but they construct elaborate abstract theoretical models of noumenal structures that necessitate the phenomenal facts, and they set up experiments that technically “realize” and make concretely manifest the phenomenon that the theory has hypothetically posed as a possible effect of the noumenal structures. Instructed by the abstract theory, the scientist thus technically creates or “realizes” the phenomenon. In order to stress the break with the naive realism of the empiricists, however, it is essential to stress that Bachelard leaves no doubt about the “direction of the epistemological vector”: it is the one that goes “from the rational to the real” and “not from the real to the general” (Bachelard [1934] 1991:8), as has been professed by all philosophers from Aristotle to Bacon. Primacy is clearly conceded to theoretical reflection and to the construction of the theoretical object, and not to the “immaculate perception” (Nietzsche) of the empiricists. Being the “realization” of the theory (ibid.:98), the real is thus in effect rationalized. Paradoxically, it is to render the contact with reality more precise and more penetrating that science is forced to carry out, as Gilles-Gaston Granger beautifully says, “a detour via the realm of abstraction” (Granger, quoted in Hamel 1997:16). Insofar as the facts are not immediately given, but are properly speaking the mediated result of the technical realization of the theory, Bachelard’s realism can be characterized as a “realism of the second position, a realism that reacts against usual reality, a realism made of realized and experienced reason” (Bachelard [1934] 1991:9).

If this realism of the second position is compared with Bhaskar’s transcendental realism (for a comparison, see Bhaskar 1989b:41–48), we can clearly see that both react against and reject the standard positivist account of the natural sciences. Over and against empiricism both stress the theory-ladenness of facts and the importance of transfactual noumenal structures and generative mechanisms that necessitate and explain the phenomena. However, from the vantage point of Bhaskar’s transcendental realism, which tries to sustain a clear concept of the independent reality of being (of the intransitive or ontological dimension) in the face of the relativity of knowledge (in the transitive or epistemological dimension), Bachelard’s realism appears to be essentially a form of sophisticated neo-Kantian transcendental idealism that somehow reverses the real nature of the dependency of science and being.¹¹ Whereas for critical realism ontology is simply irreducible to epistemology, Bachelard equivocates and suggests at times not only that the world can only be known to be what it is thanks to science, which is unproblematic, but also, which is more controversial, that the world is what it is thanks to science. For, in Bachelard’s opinion, it is the fact that science occurs that gives the world a structure such that it can be known by men, whereas in Bhaskar’s opinion it is the fact the world has such a structure

¹¹The field of world-sociology is not a unified field yet. It remains fractured along national lines. This probably explains why Anglo-Saxon commentators, who are unfamiliar with the rationalist tradition of French *épistémologie* (Bachelard, Koyré, Canguilhem, Duhem, Cavailles) or with the German neo-Kantian tradition of *Wissenschaftslehre* (Lask, Cassirer, Panofsky), project their own brand of the philosophy of science (Bhaskar) on Bourdieu’s position, describing him as a “critical realist” (e.g. Harker et al. 1990:201; Jenkins 1992:95–96; Fowler 1997:6, 17, 82). This erroneous attribution is, however, easily understandable, as it results from the confusion between the epistemological and the metatheoretical levels of analysis. In epistemological terms, Bourdieu is a neo-Kantian, and thus an idealist; in metatheoretical terms, he is a Marxist-Weberian, and thus a materialist; the conflation of both levels of analysis leads to the label “realist,” which is the materialist brand of epistemology. Needless to say, my critique aims only at the epistemological idealism, not at the metatheoretical one. Unlike Bourdieu’s most vociferous critics, I am not claiming that Bourdieu’s structuralism represents a sophisticated version of vulgar (or reductionistic) materialism but that (at worst) he reduces ontology to epistemology and (at best) he avoids making ontological commitments by resorting to a conventionalist wink to Vaihinger’s neo-Kantian “philosophy of the as if.”

that makes science possible. From Bhaskar's perspective, the French historian of scientific ideas thus commits the "epistemic fallacy," because assuming that statements about being can be reduced to statements about knowledge, he wrongly concludes from the fact that the world can only be known from science that its nature is determined by science. The idea that being can be analyzed in terms of knowledge of being, that it is sufficient for philosophy to "treat only the network and not what the network describes" (Wittgenstein 1961:6.35), results in the dissolution of a world independent of but investigated by science, as can be gathered, for instance, from Kuhn's problematic statement that "when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them" (Kuhn [1962] 1970:111).

Notwithstanding Bourdieu's heavy investment in empirical research and the fact that social objects do not exist independently of, and may be causally affected by, social science, I think that he commits the same epistemic fallacy. Like his structuralist predecessors (Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, and Foucault), however, he tends to equivocate between a realist and conventionalist interpretation of science.¹² Although Bourdieu suggests at times that scientific representations of reality have their *fundamentum in re*, the main drift of his epistemological arguments points to the adoption of a more rationalist position in which scientific representations are not so much founded in reality as "reality" is founded in them (as indicated by the fact that words like "real," "reality," and "realization" are always put between quotation marks). At this point I would like to note that my critique of Bourdieu's rationalism is not intended as a final indictment of his metascience, but as an invitation to resume the dialectical "pincer movement" of thought in the direction of critical realism. In other words, I would like Bourdieu to abandon his scepticism about the existence of a theory-independent world and accept the idea that the world, which can indeed only be known under different (re)descriptions, actually exists independently of those (re)descriptions, or even better, that those alternative (re)descriptions of the world actually offer alternative accounts of the *same* world. This invitation is more than a philosophical skirmish. Given that the realist assumption that the (re)descriptions of reality refer to the same world is a necessary precondition for the rational comparison of theories and thus for a rational theory choice, the idea of scientific development over time depends on the overhaul of scientific rationalism. In a somewhat paradoxical formulation, we could say that the rationality of science presupposes the abandonment of scientific "surrationalism" (Bachelard [1940] 1988:28).

In *Structuralism and the Theory of Sociological Knowledge*, Bourdieu develops a structuralist theory of the social in which empirical reality is conceived as an analogical reflection of the relations between elements which the theoretical model posits as a hypothetical but invisible structure. "Theory as a system of signs organized to represent, through their own relations, the relations among the objects is a translation or, better, a symbol linked to what it symbolizes by a law of analogy" (Bourdieu 1968:689). Thus, insofar as the real relations between the elements are somehow reduced to an analogical reflection of the theoretical relations that obtain between the elements of the theoretical structure, the ontology of the world is indeed induced by a structural epistemology of the world. However, aware as he is of the risk of ontologizing epistemological propositions, he veers away at the last moment and has recourse to the neo-Kantian strategy of the immunization of analytical fictionalism: "All the propositions of the sociological discourse should be pre-

¹²For a discussion of this issue in relation to Althusser, see Benton (1984:179–99). This reference to Althusser shows that it is not enough to draw on the late Marx to become a realist. What really matters is whether one interprets Marx in rationalist or in realist terms. That Althusser himself was clearly drifting in the direction of rationalism is revealed by his apparently insignificant remark, which echoes a famous line of Derrida, that "we never get out of the concept" (Althusser et al. 1970:II:67; see also pp. 20 sq.).

ceded by a sign which could be read as “everything happens as if . . .” (Bourdieu 1972:173; 1980:49).¹³ As a result of this conventionalist stratagem sociological propositions are no longer supposed to capture the world as it is, but are sceptically downgraded to the status of (re)descriptions of “reality” that can never be more than heuristic devices to analogically represent or “save” the phenomena.

Thanks to this epistemological vigilance, Bourdieu avoids the risk of the reification of the theory, but only at the price of ontological cowardice, if I dare say. The reifying move from the model of reality to the reality of the model is indeed averted, but as a result of this conventionalist twist the referential relation between the model and reality becomes ontologically obscure. When the referential move from the model of reality to the reality of the model, and from the signifier to the signified, is a priori rejected and denounced as a reifying move from the hypothesis of the model to its hypostasis, it is no longer possible to rationally test the ontological pretensions of the model. In the name of an “ontophobic” fear for the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” (Whitehead 1930:65), one is thus no longer allowed to investigate whether the model actually refers to and captures reality, or whether it merely leads to its reification. In this sense, a realist interpretation puts more at stake than does a conventionalist one, because if the scientist possesses the concept of an ontological realm, distinct from his current claims to knowledge, his or her research can actually show that his or her hypothesis about the real thing was, in fact, only a real hypostasis of the thing. Epistemological pragmatism, on the other hand, avoids the risk of reification, but only at the price of epistemic relativism, because if the link between the epistemological and the ontological level is elastic, that is if we use analogical models of reality without making ontological claims about reality, we logically arrive at the situation where “anything goes.” With Bhaskar, I think that a theory has to be ontologically bold rather than epistemologically cautious (Outhwaite 1987:19–44).¹⁴ Rather than making conventionalist claims about conceptual necessities about the characteristics we must necessarily attribute to things, we should use real definitions of the things and try to capture their real structure. It is a (Quinian) fact that reality can be known under different descriptions, but in the absence of a correspondence theory between the model and reality, we cannot ascertain what reality is, and we end up in the absurd situation where there are as many worlds as descriptions under which reality can be known. With critical realism, we can thus conclude that it is only if we possess the concept of an ontological realm, distinct from our current claims to knowledge, that we can think out the possibility of a rational criticism of our claims.

¹³Here Bourdieu seems to follow Lévi-Strauss, when he states that “the fundamental principle is that the notion of social structure does not refer to empirical reality, but to the models which are constructed according to it” (Lévi-Strauss 1958:331). The break with Lévi-Strauss’s objectivism comes at a later stage, when Bourdieu is going to criticize the “scholastic fallacy” that consists in the intellectualistic transposition of the theoretical models in the head of the actors, enthroning metadiscourses and metapractices as the principle of discourses and practices, suggesting that actors act according to the model, which is a bit like assuming that we constantly walk around like tourists in a foreign city with a map in our hands. As we will see later, in discussing the notion of habitus, the invisible structure of differences takes on real existence and is “occasionally” revealed in ordinary existence, veiled in the lived form of keeping distances, of affinities and incompatibilities, sympathies and rejections, etc.

¹⁴By saying that science has to be ontologically bold (or even “presumptuous”) rather than epistemologically cautious (or “modest”), I am explicitly contesting Kant’s famous programmatic call for the dissolution of ontology—“The proud name of an ontology that presumptuously claims to supply, in systematic doctrinal form, synthetic a priori knowledge of things in general . . . has to make place modestly for a mere analytic of understanding” (Kant 1983:B 884). However, insofar as critical realism claims that knowledge is ultimately grounded *a posteriori*, it does not simply reverse Kant’s program. Realism establishes, by means of a transcendental argument, that science necessarily presupposes an ontology of complex generative mechanisms, but it wisely leaves it to science to empirically investigate what those mechanisms are and how they function.

Removing Epistemological Obstacles

Moving back from the lofty heights of philosophical criticism, we can proceed to an analysis of Bourdieu's transposition of Bachelardian epistemology to the realm of the social. Like Bachelard, Bourdieu calls for "epistemological vigilance." Science proceeds only by means of errors, by correcting errors. The first error is the empiricist error of the naive realist who takes facts as given and not as a result, as something to be conquered and systematically constructed. With Bachelard, Bourdieu states in his "epistemological preliminaries" to sociology that the scientific fact is "conquered, constructed [and] established" (*conquis, construit, constaté*; Bourdieu et al. 1973:24, 81). Consequently, the epistemological hierarchy of the scientific act subordinates the establishment of the fact to its construction, and its construction to the break with spontaneous conceptions of the social.

The "first epistemological obstacle" (Bachelard [1938] 1993:23–54) to be overcome if sociology is to be a rigorous science is the spontaneous adherence of the sociologist to the immediate "doxic experience" of the common-sense and common-sensical explanations of the social by traditional sociological theories.¹⁵ Insofar as scientific objectivity is only possible if one has first broken with the immediate object, the first imperative of sociology is to accomplish an "epistemological rupture" (Bachelard [1949] 1986:104) between the common-sense conception (*doxa*) and the scientific conception of the social (*episteme*).¹⁶ From this perspective, Schütz's "postulate of adequacy," which stipulates that scientific concepts (of the second order) should always remain tied to and translatable into common-sense concepts (of the first order) (Schütz [1932] 1974:289, 324 et seq.; 1962:44), has to be rejected categorically.¹⁷ In Bourdieu's opinion, a science can only be scientific if it applies throughout the determinist principle of "sufficient reason." Transposed to the domain of sociology, the principle of determinism takes the form of the Durkheimian "principle of

¹⁵Here Bourdieu polemically draws on Husserl's phenomenology of the lifeworld. According to Husserl, the common-sense world, our ordinary, everyday lifeworld, is a domain of "passive doxa," i.e., a domain in which the real is taken for granted and not reflexively questioned as to the intentional acts of consciousness that constitute it. In the doxic experience of the world, the world is always there, passively and immediately given to consciousness as the unquestioned foundation of all the constitutive acts of consciousness and of the actions themselves. "In passive doxa, being is not just pre-given as the substrate of all possible accomplishments of knowledge which actively contribute to it, but also as a substrate for all evaluations, practical determinations of ends and actions" (Husserl [1938] 1985:53). The epistemological rupture with the doxic experience of the lifeworld in order to construct the object as a scientific object of analysis is only a first moment of the research process, however. Eventually, the doxic experiences of the world will be reintegrated into the analysis as a scientifically objectivated experience that is theoretically understood as an experience that is "functionally" determined by the relationally reconstructed structures. Then it will appear that those structured doxic experiences actively contribute to the stable reproduction of those structuring structures that ultimately depend upon the recurrent practices and experiences of the agents.

¹⁶The "hard" version of the break with "portable sociology" (Javeau) is exposed in the epistemological handbook (Bourdieu et al. 1973), the "soft" version is presented in *La misère du monde*. In this beautiful book, which consists mainly of transcribed interviews with the excluded of this world (the racist shopkeeper, the hustler from the ghetto, the disillusioned syndicalist, the depressed teacher, the Algerian woman, etc.) that are preceded by little sociological *mises en perspective* by Bourdieu and his collaborators, the main concept ("misère de position," ordinary misery as linked to social position) is not even defined sociologically, but the spontaneous prenotions of ordinary everyday life are inserted in a larger scheme of sociological constructions of the object, which Bourdieu has elaborated elsewhere but which remains largely implicit in this book. The main message is in fact a political one: if the politicians don't intervene to improve the social conditions of the little people, the excluded and the marginal, they will be considered as "guilty for non assistance to persons in danger" (Bourdieu 1993a:944).

¹⁷This radical disjuncture with the common-sense conceptions of the social world does, of course, not exclude that the scientific concepts of the sociologist are afterwards disseminated to, and picked up by ordinary people (or "lay sociologists" as the ethnomethodologists call them—Garfinkel and his colleagues do not hesitate to playfully 'respecify' chimpanzees as "animal colleagues" (Lynch, Livingston and Garfinkel 1983:213). If anything, Bourdieu's social theory, which is after all intended as a critical theory, presupposes this kind of "institutional reflexivity" (Giddens 1990:15–16), where knowledge "spirals in and out" of the contexts it describes, thus performatively reconstituting both itself and its context. For a superb analysis of this "double hermeneutic," which draws on Bourdieu's praxeology, see Taylor (1985:91–115).

nonconsciousness" (Bourdieu et al. 1973:31): Social life has to be explained not by the conceptions of its participants, but by structural causes that escape consciousness and explain and necessitate the observed phenomena. Every time one refers to psychological or interactional explanations of social facts, one can be sure of inverting the causes and the effects. Bourdieu leaves no doubt about that: "It is the structure of relations which constitutes the space of the field, which commands the form which the visible relations of interaction and the content itself which agents have of it take on" (Bourdieu 1982a:42).¹⁸

Social facts can thus only be explained by social facts (Durkheim [1895] 1986:109), and those have to be systematically constructed against common sense and objectivated into a system of relations in such a way that the objective structural relations between the phenomenal elements necessitate and explain the behavior of the elements of the constructed relation between the elements.¹⁹ Statistical analysis of the numerical relations between elements are useful insofar as they allow the sociologist to break the illusory network of relations that are spontaneously spun in ordinary life, but they are only a first step and have to be inserted themselves in a relational network of a higher order that gives a rational account of the observed statistical relations.²⁰ The resistance that the science of sociology rouses when it strips immediate experience of its gnoseological privilege is inspired by a humanist philosophy of social action that takes the subject as the ultimate ontological reference without seeing that the objective but invisible system of the relations of the relations between the individuals has "more reality" than the subjects it binds. Or, to say the same in the scholastic language of which Bourdieu is so fond: not the visible individuals but the invisible space of relations between individuals is the *ens realissimum* (Bourdieu 1994:53). However, this real but invisible system of relations does not simply hang in the thin air of Platonic Ideas. It does not exist in itself, but similar to Popper's "inmates" of "world 3" (the "world of theoretical systems"), it only manifests itself empirically in the real world ("world 1," the world of observable events, whose objective regularities are systematically captured by statistical data) thanks to the intervention of the habitus (see below), which belongs itself to "world 2" ("the world of states of consciousness, or of mental states, or perhaps of behavioral dispositions"), but which mediates between world 3 and world 1 and thus "realizes" the theoretical system of constructed relations (see Popper 1979:106–90).

The Primacy of Relations

According to Bachelard and Bourdieu, who follows his mentor on this point, research is only scientific because and insofar as it effects an epistemological rupture between *doxa* and *episteme*. The move from the doxic realm of mere "opinion" to the scientific realm of "knowledge" presupposes a theoretical "detour via the infinitely open realm of abstractions in order to render contact with experience more penetrating, powerful and precise" (Granger quoted by Hamel 1997:31). Insofar as this theoretical detour aims to break (and to break with) "everyday essentialism," which naturally reifies what are really relations

¹⁸The inevitable consequence of this theoretical move is, of course, that Bourdieu cannot take into account or account for the autonomy of the interaction order (cf. Luhmann 1975:9–20 and Goffman 1983). Another consequence, but a less serious one, is that "collective subjectivities," such as social movements and groups, tend to seep through his conceptual net (Domingues 1995).

¹⁹Unlike most of the Anglo-Saxon *lectores* of Durkheim (with the notable exception of Johnson, Dandeker, and Ashworth 1984), Bourdieu has always conceived of Durkheim as a rationalist and a structuralist and not as a positivist.

²⁰For a clarifying analytical discussion of relations of a higher order (relations of relations of relations), which is somewhat similar to Bourdieu, see Archer (1995, part II).

into substances, the rationalist (or realist) construction of the theoretical objects as “bundles” of relations is inherently linked to a relational mode of intellectual production. The conquest of the scientific fact against the spontaneous and preconstructed perception of the “real object” is inseparable from its systematic construction as a “theoretical object” by means of its objectivation as a coherent system of constructed relations. If common sense spontaneously adheres to a substantialist philosophy, science reflexively and methodically deconstructs phenomenal substances in order to reconstruct the phenomenon as a tangled tissue of relations, that is as a rational or second order configuration of relational attributes.²¹

Although Bachelard has clearly perceived the primacy of relations over substances that characterizes the modern natural sciences, and maybe even the logic of modern world-views in general (Dux 1982)—as can be gathered from his motto: “In the beginning is the relation” (Bachelard 1929:65)²²—Bourdieu turns to Ernst Cassirer who, in his seminal book *Substance and Function*, has masterfully analyzed the displacement of the Aristotelian logic of substances by a functional logic of generating relations which can be found in modern mathematics and physics, and also in geometry and chemistry.²³ Cassirer’s neo-Kantian analysis of the concept of function is directed toward the elaboration of a transcendental logic in which the object is no longer presupposed by logic but is, so to speak, generated by it. Scientific concepts do not stand unrelated to each other, but are organized into coherent conceptual “fields” or “figurations” or, to use Cassirer’s preferred language, into a “lawful series of progressions” (*Reichenfolge*) that discloses and constitutes an analytical region of reality in a systematic way. In this relational conception the particular is no longer subsumed under the general, as is the case in the Aristotelian syllogism, but a functional or dialectical interrelation is established between both in such a way that the particular, which is overdetermined by theory, appears as the concrete synthesis of a bunch of general relations. “The concept no longer disdainfully discards the particulars which specify the contents that it subsumes but, to the contrary, it attempts to disclose the necessity of the manifestation and the connection of the particulars themselves. What it thus proposes is a universal rule which allows us to compose and to combine the particular element in person” (Cassirer [1910] 1994:25).²⁴

For instance, to take an example from the field of geometry, starting from a general mathematical formula, we can generate the particular geometrical figures of the circle, the

²¹Although I won’t say much here about “symbolic violence,” this is the point where Bourdieu inserts Marx’s classic analysis of the ideological effects of the fetishistic illusion, which consists of the reifying inversion of things and relations in such a way that “the social relation between men assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things” (Marx [1868] 1970:72). For a more systematic analysis of reification, see Vandenberghe (1997, chaps. 1 and 5).

²²Or, perhaps, it’s the other way round: “In the relation is the beginning.” Donati’s neofunctionalist exploration of a relational theory, which takes it lead from Alexander and Luhmann, also starts with the (catholic) slogan “In the beginning is the relation” (Donati 1991:80). Yet, his theory of relations is systemist, functionalist, and ultimately interactionist, but not structuralist.

²³For an analysis of Cassirer’s thought, which shows the continuity between *Substance and Form* and the philosophy of symbolic forms, see Vandenberghe (1996).

²⁴This Leibnizian idea of the relational (over)determination of the concrete particular by a multiplicity of variables, which can be expressed by means of a mathematical function, is neatly formulated by Bachelard in the following terms: “Taken as a complex of relations a particular phenomenon is a genuine function of several variables. The mathematical expression analyzes it most thoroughly” (Bachelard 1929:209). Marx expressed the same idea in the 1857 “Introduction” to the *Grundrisse*, where he states: “The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation and conception” (Marx [1857] 1973:101). However, against Marx and with Sayer (1995:18–42), who analyzes the relation between private property, the market, and the division of labor, one should stress that if the concrete is indeed a concentration or a function of several necessary relationships, the form of the concentration is contingent, and therefore only determinable through empirical research.

ellipse, and so forth, just by changing the parameter that constitutes the figure in such a way that it describes and passes through a continuous series of values. Or, to take a more sociological example, which is consistently developed in *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1979a), Bourdieu's masterpiece which is already a classic in sociology, starting from a particular volume and a particular structure of capital, we can vary the parameter and proceed continuously from the upper region of the constructed space of social positions, constituted by the dominant fraction of the dominant class (the industrial bourgeoisie) to the middle region, constituted by the dominated fraction of the dominant class (liberal professions and academics) and the dominant fraction of the dominated class (the shopkeepers and the handicraftsmen), to its lowest region, constituted by the dominated fraction of the dominated class (peasants and the unskilled manual workers). As a result of the application of the relational mode of thinking, "the scientific concepts no longer appear as imitations of thing-like existences, but as symbols representing orders and functional links within reality" (Cassirer [1906] 1971:3). Insofar as the reality of the objects has dissolved itself in a world of rational relations, we can indeed say with Bachelard and Hegel that "the real is rational" (Hegel [1821] 1971:24), and with Cassirer and Bourdieu that "the real is relational" (Bourdieu 1987b:3; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:72, 203; Bourdieu 1994:17).

Applied Relationalism

Although the object seems to precede the point of view, Bourdieu shares Saussure's constructivist assumption that, in fact, it is "the point of view [which] creates the object" (Saussure [1916] 1985:23). The delimitation of the field is thus an analytical one.²⁵ Thanks to the methodological construction of an autonomous and self-referentially closed system of internal relations between concepts, a coherent model of reality can be created that is supposed to be structurally homologous with reality. As we have seen above, however, Bourdieu does not wish to make an ontological argument about reality; stating that "social functions are fictions" (Bourdieu 1982a:49), he resorts in the last instance to the conventionalist gesture of the "as if." To construct the system of entangled relations two things are important: first, the system has to be complete, that is the whole population of relevant elements has to be taken into account; and second, the elements have to be linked to each other by means of internal relations, that is in such a way that they cannot be defined apart from each other, thus in such a way that they are mutually and conceptually implicated in each other. The musical scale and melodies offer good examples of paradigmatic and syntagmatic systems of internal relations or, to speak like Saussure, of internally related but arbitrary differences: the notes form a complete paradigmatic system, the value of each being rigorously determined by the position of all the others; and the melody, which syntagmatically reorders the notes, is nothing but the contingent realization of an internally related series of musical possibilities. So does Marx's account of the economic cycle (Marx [1857] 1973:81–111): the production, consumption, distribution, and exchange of economic goods are mutually implicated in a dialectical syllogism; as "members of totality" they only represent "distinctions within a unity" and, as such, they are "in their one-

²⁵This is an absolutely non-Durkheimian move. As Durkheim has made it clear in his inaugural speech (Durkheim [1888] 1970, especially 78–85), the project of establishing sociology as an autonomous discipline is analytically linked to and dependent on the autonomy of its object. It should also be noted in this context that this analytical definition of the field is in conflict with Bourdieu's genetic analysis of the field, according to which fields are not a historical invariant but only emerge in modern times as self-referential systems, "outdifferentiated from their environment" (Luhmann) or "uncoupled from the life-world" (Habermas). For an exploration of the tension between the historical specificity and the transhistorical validity of Bourdieu's analytic apparatus, see Calhoun (1995:132–61).

sided form determined by the other moments”; even more, they are identical processes, but analyzed from a different angle.²⁶ The same could be said not only of the positions that make up a field but of Bourdieu’s main categories as well: the notions of field, capital, and habitus cannot be defined separately; in fact, the field is identical to the distribution of capital and the habitus is identical to the field, but analyzed from a different perspective.

Although Bachelard and Bourdieu do not use the distinction between essences and appearances, they certainly would agree with Marx that science always aims at knowledge of the hidden (Bachelard [1949] 1986:38; Bourdieu 1996:16). In order to uncover the hidden, science has to construct “analogical models” of the social world, or maybe better, of the social space, which “recover the hidden principles of the realities they interpret” (Bourdieu et al. 1973:76). The construction of an ideal-typical model of the space of structural relations among the phenomenal relations allows one to treat the different social forms as so many different realizations of the same (symbolic) function. In this perspective, “the real” appears, as Bachelard says and Bourdieu likes to repeat after him, as “a particular case of the possible” (Bachelard [1934] 1991:62), which presupposes, of course, that the particular case is related to the more general properties of which it is a function. Thus, to take an example from the academic field, when one knows the exact position of an “epistemic individual” (Bourdieu 1984a:36), defined by the totality of the relevant properties like trajectory, volume, and structure of the different sorts of capital (economic, cultural, social, symbolic, etc.) which can be assigned to it and which are taken to be efficacious in explaining the variation of the positions in the field, it does not really matter whether one considers different “empirical individuals” like Lévi-Strauss, Braudel, or Foucault, because from the point of view of the analyst, who considers them as “realizations of the possible” or, as Marx would say, as “personifications” of structures, they only represent “similar cases of the possible” and as such, they are almost indiscriminable. Once the invariant properties (*illusio*, interests, struggle for monopoly of authority, volume and structure of capital, opposition between dominant and dominated fractions of the different classes, strategies of conservation and subversion, etc.) of a given field of practices are known, once the generative and unifying principles of a system of relations are codified and formalized in the theoretical model, this model can be transposed to, and compared with, other fields of practices so as to uncover functional and structural homologies.

This transposition of models of one field to another does not imply, however, that Bourdieu does not recognize the functional differentiation that characterizes modern societies (Bohn 1991:133–39; Alexander 1995:157–64). Although fields have emerged historically and acquired a certain autonomy, they are interlocked in complex ways, and the comparative application of the generative formula of their structure and function shows precisely how “formal” or structural invariance and “material” or empirical variation can be thought together in such a way that the tendency toward reduction of one field to another, *casu quo* the economic one, can be avoided.²⁷ However, even if the reductionism of the infamous “last instance” is avoided in this way, the problem of reductionism reemerges

²⁶This “overdetermination” (Althusser) is what distinguishes dialectical theories of (lateral) totalities from more functional analyses of systems (see Habermas 1976). The dialectical inter-, or more precisely, intra-relations between the elements of an organic totality are hard to understand for more analytically inclined minds, like Pareto, for instance, who complained that Marx’s concepts are “like bats: one can see in them mice and birds at the same time” (quoted in Ollman 1971:3).

²⁷This combination of formal invariance and material variation is what makes successful cross-national comparisons of field research possible. Thus, to take the example of the educational field, even if outside of France there is no exact equivalent of, say, the Ecole Nationale d’Administration or the Collège de France (although Oxford’s All Souls College comes quite close to it), it is enough to apply the relational grid, to transpose it to a new context, and structural equivalents will undoubtedly be found.

in another way as a “kind of field reductionism” (Swartz 1997:293) in which the producers of cultural products tend to be seen as emanations of the logic of the intellectual field and their products as so many epiphenomena of the respective positions they occupy in the field. As a theoretical fieldworker, Bourdieu has multiplied comparative research on different fields of practice (haute couture, literature, art, sport, philosophy, politics, housing markets, and, last but not least, the media [Bourdieu 1996] and the economy [Bourdieu 1997b]); for quite a while now, he has announced the publication of a book, on which he’s apparently still working, on the general theory of fields.

Applied Rationalism

Now that we have analyzed how the scientific fact is conquered against common sense and systematically constructed as a relational effect of the theory, we can proceed to an analysis of the process of verification of the theory. Against the empiricist dogma of immaculate perception, Bourdieu stresses once more that facts are always and necessarily overdetermined by theory. Insofar as empirical research techniques and instruments are, as Bachelard once said, “really reified theorems” (Bachelard 1971:137), all the operations of sociological research, from the formulation of a questionnaire to its coding and its statistical analysis, have to be considered as “so many theories in action” (Bourdieu et al. 1973:59). An accurate knowledge of what one does to and with the facts, and of what the facts can and cannot do, is thus the first requirement of sociological research. For instance, the technique of multivariate analysis, which seems applicable to all types of quantifiable relations, presupposes the independence of the dependent and the independent variables, and the sociologists, who by routine apply this linear mode of thought without much thought, are not even aware that the variables are internally linked and that they only take on their numerical value and are what they are thanks to their position and their function within a structural figuration (Elias [1965] 1985:234). And given that they don’t think in terms of structural causality, they cling to the nominal identity of their variables, assuming that their effects are purely linear, and do not see that in each of the variables the network of entangled relations exercises its efficacy through all the others (Bourdieu 1979a:113–22, 512–14).²⁸ The result of the standard application of the technique of multivariate analysis is an ontological confusion between the method and the “thing in itself” (*Ding an sich*), leading to a situation where the method is simply reified into a “general linear reality” (Abott 1988).²⁹ In order to avoid this risk of reification, any statistical correlation between variables obtained by multivariate analysis has to be systematically reinterpreted as a function of the system of the relations of relations that give meaning to the observed statistical relation. With the descriptive statistical technique of correspondence analysis, an advanced variant of factor analysis that is, obviously, Bourdieu’s favourite technique, this is not necessary because it is, so to speak, nothing else but the operational materialization of the relational mode of thinking which characterizes his generative structuralism.

²⁸The linear mode of thought thus violates what a network analyst has aptly called “the anticategorical imperative” (Emirbayer 1994:1414). This imperative rejects explanations that conceive social behavior as the result of individuals’ common possession of categorical attributes and stipulates that those categorical attributes take on their meaning only when they are inserted in a structural system of internal relations.

²⁹Charting the hidden linear assumptions of multivariate analysis, Abott describes the reification-effect in the following terms: “Many sociologists treat the world as if social causality actually obeyed the rules of linear transformations. They do this by assuming, in the theories that open their empirical articles, that the social world consists of fixed entities with variable attributes; that these attributes have only one causal meaning at a time; that this causal meaning does not depend on other attributes, on the past sequence of attributes, or on the context of other entities” (Abbott 1988:181).

Insofar as every fact implies the whole theory and the whole theory is implicated in every fact, Popperians consider the structural mode of verification, which relies not on a correspondence but on a coherence theory of truth, as unscientific, or even worse, as “dogmatic” and “intrinsically terrorist” (Ferry and Renaut 1988:259–68).³⁰ However, against Popper’s falsification of *ad hoc* hypotheses, one should stress with Duhem that “one experiment can never falsify an isolated hypothesis but only a theoretical totality” (Duhem, quoted in Bourdieu et al. 1973:89–90).³¹ Moreover, against Popper and with Lakatos (1970), who should be read as a Hegelian and thus as an intellectual cousin of Bachelard, one should consider that Bourdieu’s generative structuralism does not represent a single isolated theory, which may or may not be refutable, but a thriving and well-integrated research program that incorporates or “envelops” a multiplicity of other theories from Garfinkel to Elias. Admittedly, the “hard core” of the research program is very hard. However, if we go along with Lakatos and accept that a discipline is scientific so long as “progressive” research programs triumph over “degenerating” ones, then *mutatis mutandis* there is no reason to consider the project of the “scientific collective” that Bourdieu is directing from Paris as pseudo- or unscientific. Stretching this point a bit and willingly forsaking the “scientistic” posture of the “happy structuralist,” I would even be inclined to relax the criteria of scientificity and consider his research program in more aesthetic terms. Embellished as it is by its Proustian tonality, Bourdieu’s structural-relational mode of analysis offers a coherent and systematic “picture” of the social world. In this respect, it resembles a painting which, thanks to constant retouching, becomes more unified, whereas each detail, detached from the whole, loses meaning and ends up representing nothing at all.³² For Bourdieu, the world is not only his presentation but, ultimately, it is also his construction and his verification, made up of realized conceptual constructs and verified ideas.

Habitus, or the Occasional Realization of the Real

According to Bourdieu’s mentor, thought progresses dialectically by means of a pincer movement that encircles limited positions and tries to incorporate them into a larger conceptual framework that successfully overcomes the former limitations. This dialectical move-

³⁰From a Popperian perspective, historical materialism, psychoanalysis, and so-called “individual psychology” appear as “pseudo-sciences.” They are unscientific because they cannot be falsified. Their strength is their weakness. There is no doubt that the critique which Sir Karl addresses to Marx, Freud, and Adler (but never to his own theory) applies to Bourdieu’s theory of fields: “These theories appeared to be able to explain practically everything that happened within the fields to which they referred. The study of any of them seemed to have the effect of an intellectual conversion or revelation, opening your eyes to a new truth hidden from those not yet initiated. Once your eyes were thus opened you saw confirming instances everywhere: the world was full of verifications of the theory. Whatever happened always confirmed it” (Popper 1989:34–35).

³¹Caillé considers Bourdieu’s work as the sociological pendant of Balzac’s *Comédie humaine* and concludes that it belongs to the realm of “conceptualized literature” (Caillé 1992:113), without, however, and this is important, attaching overly negative connotations to this aesthetic characterization. For my part, I find Bourdieu’s work more Proustian, filled as it is with the subtleties of his observation, the innovative drift of his associations, and the minutely detailed reflections on everyday life thanks to which life and blood is pumped into what otherwise would be a highly formalistic system. And although his “long heavily articulated sentences, which one practically has to reconstruct as Latin sentences” (Bourdieu 1987a:66) may remind one at times of Parsons’s “elephantine style,” I must say—or, should I say, confess?—that I quite like his German-styled sentences with an overflow of commas, semicolons, and hyphens, phrases embedded in one another, reflexive loops, literary plays on words, scholarly references to scholasticism, oblique polemical shots at unquoted adversaries, and an almost Adornian predilection for chiasmatic inversions, negations, and paradoxes.

³²The coherence of the theory, and thus of its “truth,” also finds expression in Bourdieu’s “methodological polytheism”: “Not only does he often triangulate or validate his results *ex post* with different methods—the fit between the various outcomes thus generated replacing the technical discussion of confidence intervals and the like—he also reads quantitative data ‘ethnographically,’ that is as exploratory or confirmatory means of locating underlying patterns while, conversely, he often interprets field observations ‘statistically,’ that is, with the aim of drawing inferences and to elaborate relations between variables” (Wacquant 1990:683).

ment of enlargement operates by a mediation through (but *pace* Adorno not “in”) the extremes. “One could speak of a psychological law of the bipolarity of errors. As soon as a difficulty turns out to be important, one can be sure that by averting it, one will hit an opposed obstacle” (Bachelard [1938] 1993:20). Thus, to take the postwar history of our field as an example, when the one-dimensionality of Parsonsian structural functionalism (and related objectivist positions such as structuralism, marxism, etc.) became increasingly manifest in the late sixties, a microreaction ensued which, by the end of seventies, had shifted the metatheoretical balance to the other extreme of one-dimensional subjectivism, represented (for pedagogical reasons) by Schütz, Blumer, Garfinkel, and others. It is only when the limitations of both objectivism and subjectivism were underscored that the possibility of a synthetic micro-macro link eventually emerged in the eighties (Alexander et al. 1987). Although our philosopher-turned-anthropologist had already developed the main outline of his attempt to transcend the “bipolarity” of the subjectivist and the objectivist errors in the early seventies (Bourdieu 1972), his theory of practice is very much part of a larger “structurist” movement in social theory which takes its inspiration from Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*, and of which Sartre, Berger and Luckmann, Habermas, Giddens, Bhaskar, or the late Castoriadis are probably the best known representatives (Vandenberghe, 1998:322–339).

Moving from epistemological considerations to more metatheoretical ones, we can now present Bourdieu’s attempt to overcome the opposition between subjectivism and objectivism by introducing a supplementary relation: a vertical one that mediates between the system of objective positions and subjective dispositions. This is, of course, the point where the old and venerable Aristotelian concept of *hexis*, which Boetius and Thomas Aquinas translated as *habitus* and which the French ethnophilosopher has transformed into one of his central concepts, comes in.³³ As is well known by now, Bourdieu uses the concept of *habitus*, always understood as class *habitus* and defined as “systems of durable and transposable dispositions, structured structures which are predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu 1972:155; 1980:88–89), as a of kind of “theoretical operator” which, by giving a formal coherence to actions that are materially extremely different, mediates between the invisible system of structured relations (by which actions are shaped) and the visible actions of the actors (which structure relations). As a logical construct, “irreducible to its manifestations” (Bourdieu 1974:31), the *habitus* itself cannot be observed; but like the practical instantiations of Giddens’s virtual structures (Giddens 1979:53–76; 1984:16–28), it can be observed in its actualizations, when a “permissive

³³For the intellectual history of the concept (Aristotle, Boetius, Averroes, Thomas Aquinas, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Mauss, and Panofsky), see Bourdieu (1985:14); Funke (1974), Rist (1984), and Héran (1987). Notwithstanding the long standing of the concept, the influence of the phenomenological movement is really decisive in my opinion but, unfortunately, due to lack of space, I cannot explore the phenomenological link here. Although Husserl uses the concept quite regularly, Bourdieu is more influenced by Heidegger, his “first love,” who uses the concept less frequently. Notwithstanding the significant influence of *Ideen II* (Husserl 1952) on Bourdieu (and Merleau-Ponty), it is clear that he has not much sympathy for the radical Cartesianism of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and is only too happy to follow Heidegger’s turn away from the transcendental phenomenology of the “master” to an existential analytics of *Dasein*. Seen against this background, Bourdieu’s critique of the philosophy of consciousness, which manifests itself in his insistence on the infra-reflexive and routinized nature of our practices, starts to make sense. Like Heidegger and against Husserl, Bourdieu is simply convinced that “knowledge is a founded [or derived] mode of being-in-the-world of *Dasein*” (Heidegger [1927] 1993: part 1:62). However, when it comes to the concept of *habitus*, it is clear that Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of “habit” comes closest to Bourdieu’s. Having read Bourdieu before Merleau-Ponty, I really had the impression of reading Bourdieu when I was reading the phenomenological descriptions of the acts of “writing on the typewriter” and “playing the organ” (Merleau-Ponty 1945:166–72). For a fine exploration of the praxeological workings of the *habitus* through the analysis of the pugilistic *hexis*, see Wacquant (1995) and for a self-presentation of the work and the variegated interests of Bourdieu’s designated transatlantic interpreter, see Wacquant (1996d).

condition” (the state of the field, of the market, etc.) furnishes the appropriate occasion for the virtual disposition to manifest itself in its actuality in relation with a particular situation (Bourdieu 1979a:112; 1984b:135; 1997a:178).³⁴ Thus, as a mediator of *energeia* and *actus* (Aristotle), the habitus (or its more corporeal variant: *hexis*) also mediates between the structures and the actions, solving thus the antinomy of objectivism and subjectivism: “One should not forget that, ultimately, objective relations do not exist and do not really realize themselves except in and through the system of dispositions of the agents, produced by the internalization of objective conditions. Between the system of objective regularities and the system of directly observable conducts a mediation always intervenes which is nothing else but the habitus, geometrical locus of determinisms and of an individual determination” (Bourdieu 1965:22; 1968:705).

Between the habitus and the field there is an “ontological complicity” (Bourdieu 1982a:47; 1994:154): when the habitus enters into relation with the social world of which it is the product, the habitus feels at home—“like a fish in the water.” The habitus is internally linked to the field, even to the point that they refer to the same thing, but considered from a different angle: either as *ergon* (*opus operatum*) or as *energeia* (*modus operandi*).³⁵ The habitus is the internalization or incorporation of the social structures, whereas the field is the exteriorization or objectivation of the habitus. However, one should not conceive the relation between the two as a purely circular one, whereby the habitus, “product of the structures and producer of the practices and reproducer of the structures” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970:244), simply reproduces the structures.³⁶ Indeed, as chairman Mao used to say, one should “twist the stick in the other direction,” read Bourdieu with the spectacles of Giddens, see his work as a foreplay to Habermas, and insist on the transformative capacities of the habitus.³⁷ Notwithstanding Bourdieu’s

³⁴In this sense, one can describe the virtual powers of the habitus as “passive powers” or “liabilities,” and liabilities as the dispositions of the agent to act in virtue of its essential nature, whereby the stimulus which activates the disposition of the agent is part of the extrinsic circumstances (Harré 1970:272). Just as the disposition to steal manifests itself only when an appropriate situation presents itself, the habitus only becomes actualized and manifest in certain concrete circumstances that trigger its powers.

³⁵The distinction between *ergon* and *energeia* comes from von Humboldt; it corresponds to the distinction between *opus operatum* and *modus operandi*, which comes from Panofsky. Cassirer, who worked with Panofsky at the Warburg Institute in Hamburg, is the mediator between the two.

³⁶Moreover, it is only in exceptional circumstances, if ever, that the habitus functions as the *malin génie* of perfect reproduction. The model is ideal-typical, which means according to Weber that it never occurs in reality, and thus is purely heuristic. One should remember that the limit situation of perfect reproduction is only a “particular case of the possible” and avoid to “universalize unconsciously the model of the quasi-circular relation of quasi-perfect reproduction which is only valid in the case where the conditions of the production of the habitus and the conditions of its functioning are identical or homothetical” (Bourdieu 1974:5). Notwithstanding the fact that Bourdieu also analyzes situations where the “ontological complicity” (Heidegger) between the habitus and the field is disrupted (the so-called *hysteresis*-effect; see Bourdieu 1977a; 1984:207–50), it should, however, be noted that so far the situation of perfect complicity has been systematically privileged. In this respect, Bourdieu involuntarily reminds one of Parsons. And indeed, it is enough to fiddle a bit with a couple of key sentences of *The Social System* to obtain possible extracts from *Reproduction*: “It will be assumed that the maintenance of the complementarity of role-expectations [of habitus and field], once established, is not problematical, in other words that the “tendency” to maintain the interaction process is the first law of social process. This is clearly an assumption” (Parsons 1951:205); “Theory, relative to such systems, is directed to the analysis of the conditions under which such a given constant system pattern will be maintained and conversely, the conditions under which it will be altered in determinate ways. This, we may surmise, is the fundamental basis of the assumption of our “law of inertia” of social processes” (ibid.:482); and last but not least, “If theory is good theory, whichever type of problem it tackles most directly, there’s no reason whatever to believe that it will not be equally applicable to the problems of change” (ibid.:435). And indeed, being not only “grand” but also “great” and “good” theory, there’s no reason whatever not to read Bourdieu’s system of theory against the grain as a systematic theory of the conditions of possibility of social change.

³⁷I always had the impression that Bourdieu’s metatheoretical topology of the space of possibilities was perfect. Like Bachelard’s in his “epistemological profile” (Bachelard [1940] 1988:41–51), Bourdieu has systematically mapped the epistemological and metatheoretical oppositions that structure the sociological discipline: “The opposition between Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, as it is ritually invoked in courses and dissertations, hides

self-censorship,³⁸ I think, however, that he would encourage such a transformative reading.³⁹ Even more, I think that he should, if he wants to bring his theory in line with his political intentions, which are now no longer repressed but openly declared (Bourdieu 1998a; see also *infra*).

For sure, the habitus is the product of the social structures, but if one stops there, one falls into the trap of pure determinist reading and forgets that, as the generative principle of actions, evaluations, and perceptions, the habitus also structures the social world.⁴⁰ The habitus reproduces the social world but, given that a process of “selection” (Bourdieu 1997b:63)—or “self-interaction” (Blumer 1969:15, 50) or (why not?) “rational communication” (Habermas 1981:69, 212)—always intervenes between the stimulus and the response, “one cannot mechanically infer the knowledge of the products from the knowledge of the conditions of production” (Bourdieu 1984b:135). The habitus transforms that by which it is determined, and even if the principle of transformation is to be found in the rift between structure and habitus, there is no reason not to suppose that the depth of this rift and its meaning depends on the habitus (Bourdieu 1997a:177–78). After all, the agents are determined, but only to the extent that they determine themselves. If “there’s always space for a cognitive struggle concerning the meaning of the things of the world” (Bourdieu 1998b:19), nothing excludes thus the potential of the agent to transform the world in a nonpredictable way. Moreover, the open recognition of the creativity of the habitus and of its possibility to reflect on its own determinations has the nonnegligible advantage of

that the unity of sociology is maybe located in the space of possible positions. The antagonism, when it is understood as such, proposes the possibility of its own overcoming” (Bourdieu 1987a:49; see also 1971b:295). And even if, at the end of the day, in his attempt to transcend the ritual oppositions between objectivism and subjectivism, determinism and voluntarism, materialism and idealism, externalism and internalism, etc., he always ends up at the same pole of the polarity, “transcending, for instance, the objectivist-subjectivist dualism while remaining firmly rooted in objectivism” or “vociferously rejecting determinism while persistently producing deterministic models of social process” (Jenkins 1992:175), in principle, nothing should stop us from trying to bend the stick in the other direction. By arguing this way, I am trying to rejoin the celebrated “return of the subject” and the pragmatic, descriptive, and interpretative inflection that characterizes French post-Bourdieuian social theory and manifests itself in the greater emphasis that the “habermasso-ricœurduan” praxis axis and the “ethno-boltanski” action fraction place on the reflexive nature of action (see Gauchet 1988 and Dosse 1995). If, for personal reasons, Boltanski and other ex-Bourdieuians had to break with Bourdieu’s critical social theory as such to develop a “theory of social critique” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991), I am seeking to arrive at the same position by means of an “immanent critique.” Arguing with Bourdieu against Bourdieu, I am trying to open up the system from within and to loosen the grip of its tightly constructed *problématique*. This does not mean that I am not interested in the limits of the system, but only that I restrain myself from straying outside of the confines of the system. Just like Bourdieu himself, I am fascinated by what falls outside the system: the true gift, true communication, true friendship, true love, in brief the Maussian “miracle” of “symbolic exchange” that escapes domination, calculation, manipulation, etc. Thus, to take his most recent book on male domination, which offers a “feminist” reinterpretation of his early anthropological research on traditional classification systems in Kabylia (Bourdieu 1972) and uses it as an ideal-type to uncover the omnipresence of symbolic male domination in the West, what really interests me is the (Unscientific?) “Post-scriptum on Love and Domination” (Bourdieu 1998b:116–19) where Bourdieu talks openly, probably for the first time, about the limits of his system, *casu quo* the miraculous cease-fire, the end of war and fights, the end of strategic exchange or, more positively, nonviolence, mutual recognition, full reciprocity, disinterest, trust, wonder, happiness or “peace,” to speak like Adorno.

³⁸Just one example: At the end of *La noblesse d’Etat*, Bourdieu sketches a model of the historical progression of the universal. In an interview with Wacquant (1993b:35–36), he confesses that, when he was reading the proofs of the book, he decided to cut it out but that the production manager at Editions de Minuit inadvertently left it in the volume.

³⁹Comparing his earlier work, even a more praxeological one like *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique*, where Bourdieu explicitly states that practices “always tend to reproduce the objective structures of which they are in the last analysis the product” (Bourdieu 1972:175) with his latest work (especially Bourdieu 1997), we can notice that a progressive weakening of the hyperdeterminism has taken place. Although the Chomskyan accents of the “generative capacity” of the habitus have been present from the very beginning (Bourdieu and Passeron 1967:151–64), the stress on the active, improvisatory, inventive, and even creative nature of the habitus is relatively new (Bourdieu 1984b:134–35; 1987a:23; and 1997:170–93).

⁴⁰It is enough to compare Ravaisson’s metaphysical booklet on the habitus, which Heidegger liked so much, where habit is characterized as the transformation of Freedom into Nature and of the Will into Instincts (Ravaisson [1838] 1997:82–103), to see that Bourdieu has given an activist twist to the concept of “second nature.”

bringing the metatheoretical presuppositions of his theory of action, which is after all conceived as a theory which emphasizes “the primacy of practical reason” (Bourdieu 1987a:23), in line with the critical intention that animates his theory.⁴¹ I think that his moral indignation, which is sublimated in “theoretical hyperviolence” (Caro 1980:1175), would fare better if the hyperdeterminism were weakened so that voluntarism finally would get its due. As Sartre used to say, “what really matters is not what one has made of man but what he does with what one has done to him” (quoted in Terrail 1992:229).

THE THEORY OF FIELDS

The Field of Cultural Production

In the same way as the notion of the habitus was conceived with the intent to break away from the structuralist paradigm without falling back into the old philosophy of the subject or of consciousness, thus to “get out of the philosophy of consciousness without doing away with the agent in its truth as a practical operator of constructions of reality” (Bourdieu 1992a:253), the notion of the field (*champ*) was conceived from the very beginning as a way to “reject the alternative between an internal interpretation and an external explanation” (ibid.:254) before which all the cultural sciences (religious sciences, art history or literary history, sociology of religion, law or science) were placed. In cultural matters the opposition between formalist analysis, which offers an immanent (or “tautegorical”) interpretation of meaning (e.g., semiotics, archeology, grammatology, postmodernism, etc.), and reductionist analysis, which presents an external (or “allegorical”) reading that directly relates meaning to social forms (e.g., marxism),⁴² can be overcome by showing that the external influences and constraints (economic and political ones, for instance) are always mediated and “refracted” by the structure of the particular cultural field (literature, art, science, etc.), which intervenes between the social positions of the producer and his postures (*prises de positions*) in which they are expressed and whose principle lies in the structure and the functioning of the field of positions.⁴³

The theory of the field is the concrete realization of relational thought in a particular sphere of action (on fields, see Bourdieu 1983a:311–56; 1984b:113–20 and Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:71–91). The guiding principle of all field theories has been formulated by Kurt Lewin, one of Cassirer’s pupils: “Instead of abstracting one or another isolated element from a situation, the meaning of which cannot be understood without reference to the

⁴¹In a superb critique of Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology, Kögler (1997a) shows that although Bourdieu presupposes in principle the possibility of a reflexive reshaping or restructuring of the habitus, he is in fact unable to bridge the gap between intellectual and lay discourse and to link the reflexivity of the sociologist to the reflexivity of the agents. Drawing on Gadamer, Kögler’s (1997b) tries to solve the problem by hermeneutically explicating the habitus in such a way that the theoretical reconstruction of the habitus by the sociologist is reconnected to the critical self-understanding of the habitus of the agents.

⁴²The reductionist nature of historical materialist analyses of culture is well caught in Sartre’s punching and widely quoted passage on Valéry: “Valéry is a petit bourgeois intellectual, no doubt about it. But not every petit bourgeois intellectual is Valéry. The heuristic inadequacy of contemporary Marxism is contained in these two sentences” (Sartre 1963:56). To understand why Valéry, or Flaubert for that matter, writes as he writes and perhaps even what he writes, one has to re-open the short-circuit and insert the field as an autonomous mediator between the basis and the superstructure.

⁴³By saying that external influences are “refracted” by the structure of fields, Bourdieu seems to follow and accept one of Luhmann’s central claims, namely that fields are self-referentially closed systems that can only communicate, or more precisely, “resonate” with each other if the coded messages coming from other systems in their environment are somehow retranslated into the binary code of the receiving system (for the clearest outline of the self-regulation of systems through a selective opening up of closed systems to their environment, see Luhmann 1986).

total situation, the theory of the field starts with a characterization of the whole situation” (Lewin 1963:104). Unlike Lewin, however, Bourdieu gives an agonistic twist to his theory of fields. Although it is perfectly conceivable that the internally related elements would peacefully “con-spire” to form an organic whole, Bourdieu has always thought of the field as a field of struggle or, as Elias says, as a “field of tension” (Elias [1970] 1984:127). From the beginning, his relational conception of the field was mingled with a highly conflictual vision of the world as a battlefield for power, prestige, and all sorts of capital in which competitive distinction, domination, and misrecognition prevail over cooperation, disinterest, and recognition (Swartz 1997:63). In any case, whether the field is conceived in a conflictual way or not, given that the relations between the individual elements are the resultant of all factors that constitute the “figuration,” when analyzing the field one always has to “start with the relations and think from there towards the related” (Elias [1970] 1984:127).

Analyzing the whole of the relations that structure the field does not mean, however, that one has to investigate all the events that take place in the field. “It means rather to reveal the fundamental structures which give a specific imprint to the orientation and the morphology of the singular events within the field” (Elias 1976:393). Bourdieu, who has borrowed the notion from Lewin, who explicitly refers to Cassirer, and from Elias, who was a distant cousin of Cassirer,⁴⁴ has systematically linked the notion of “field” to the one of “capital,” with the result that he can define the field—he also uses the notions of “market” and “game”—as a structured space of social positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of capital (economic capital—i.e., material wealth, in the form of money, stocks, and shares, etc.; cultural capital—i.e., knowledge, skills, and other cultural acquisitions; symbolic capital—i.e., accumulated prestige and honour; and social capital—i.e., relations and networks of influence). Fields are to be viewed as systems of dominant and subordinated positions in which each epistemic position, which is contingently and empirically realized in the form of a concrete institution, organization, group, or individual, derives its distinctive properties from its internal relationship to all other epistemic positions. Given that the concrete positions, which represent so many realizations of the possible, are internally related, a change in one of them will necessarily have repercussions for all the others (e.g., when two giant firms merge the structure of the whole economic subfield is affected in the same way as Einstein’s theory of relativity changed the whole subfield of physics). One of the most important properties of fields is the way in which they allow one form of capital (e.g., economic capital) to be transformed into another form of capital (for example, cultural capital, which can exist in three different states: embodied in their owner—e.g., language skills and personal familiarity with works of art; objectified—e.g., in books, paintings, etc.; and certified, as with diplomas and formal credentials [Bourdieu 1979b]).

Insofar as the relational conception is inseparable for Bourdieu from a conflictual *Weltanschauung*, the field is always a field of forces and of struggles in which individuals seek to maintain or to alter the relations of forces and the distribution of the forms of capital specific to it. Although the competing parties are opposed to each other (dissensus), they all share in common some fundamental presuppositions (“consensus in the dissensus”

⁴⁴Personal discussion with Stephen Menell, Toronto, August 1997. For a well-informed analysis of the relation between Cassirer and Elias, see Maso (1995). At this point, it should be noted that Bourdieu does not define the field as a structure of relations between people, as Elias does, but as a structure of relations between positions or, as Bhaskar would say, as a “position-practice system” (Bhaskar 1989a:41). This difference, which can be formulated as a difference between institutional and figurational conceptions of structure (Mouzelis 1995:69–80), explains why, notwithstanding all similarities, Elias’s figurational sociology still has an empiricist ring to it which Bourdieu has completely rationalized away.

[Bourdieu 1966:902]), which are constitutive of the functioning of the field itself.⁴⁵ They believe in the game they are playing and in the value of what is at stake in the struggles they are waging (*illusio*). At any given moment in time the structure of the field, i.e., the space of social positions, can be determined by the structure of the distribution of the different species of capital between the groups or classes. Bourdieu characterizes classes of social positions along three dimensions (Bourdieu 1979a:128–44), two of which are spatial and one of which is temporal: (1) volume of capital possessed, (2) structure of capital, i.e., composition of global capital according to the specific weight of the different species of capital relative to the global capital, and (3) objective social trajectory, past, present, and potential, as indicated by movements along the spatial axes.

The analysis of culture in terms of the field proceeds in three stages (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:80). First, although the cultural (artistic, literary, juridical, philosophical, etc.) field is relatively autonomous, one should nevertheless place it within the field of power on which it is relatively dependent, because the struggle that goes on in the field of power determines whether the principle of the hierarchization of the field of class relations is of an economic or of a cultural nature.⁴⁶ In our societies, economic capital is the dominant principle of domination and cultural capital is the dominated one. Thus, the intellectual field, for instance, occupies a dominated position in the field of power, which is itself situated at the dominant pole of the field of class relations. At any moment in time, the field is the locus of struggle between two principles of hierarchization: a heteronomous criterion (success, as measured by book sales) that works to the benefit of those who dominate the field economically and politically (the people in “suits” who distribute the resources, sit on committees, and decide on the marketability of books), and an autonomous criterion (quality, as measured by the recognition by peers) that favors the “true scholars.” Second, one should uncover the objective structure of the relations between the positions occupied in the field by the agents or the institutions which are in competition

⁴⁵This idea of the ‘consensus in the dissensus’, according to which the dissensus not only presupposes but also reinforces the consensus or, to say the same somewhat differently, according to which conflict actually contributes to the emergence of a shared understanding and thus to the integration of the opponents in a community, is typically French. One finds it not only in Bourdieu, but also in Touraine’s analytics of social movements as triangular reaction-formations of Identity, Opposition and Totality (Touraine, 1978, 103–133) and in Lefort’s concept of politics (*‘le politique’*) as the generative and foundational form of social division and integration (Lefort, 1986, 1–27).

⁴⁶Some analytical clarification might be useful at this point to unpack the concepts, which are nested like Russian dolls: (1) A space is anything that is topologically constructed as a relational structure of differences, generated by a principle, or, as Cassirer would say, by a “lawful progression” or “mathematical function” that discloses and constitutes a region of reality. (2) All societies are social spaces, i.e., structures of relational differences, generated by the principle of the distribution of the different species of capital in currency in a given society. (3) Social spaces are fields, that is fields of forces and fields of struggle in which social classes try to transform the structure of the field. (4) The structure of forces of the field of power determines at any given moment the principle of the hierarchization of the positions in the field: either economic capital or cultural capital is the dominant principle. Classes struggle for the determination of the dominant principle of the hierarchical dispersion of positions in the field. The dominant classes are only dominant if they successfully impose their sort of capital as the dominant principle of hierarchization. (5) The field of power should not be confounded with the political field, which is a subfield like any other. The field of power is a sort of “metafield” that regulates the struggles for power throughout all fields. Its determinate configuration at any moment in time has implications for the struggles for the imposition of the principle of hierarchization that go on in the subfields of cultural production, because the configuration of the field of power overdetermines the configuration of the subfields. The state of the structure of the field of power determines the structure of oppositions of the subfield and thus also the possible alliances that can be formed in the subfield, and also between the members of the subfield and those of their environment. Moreover, the structural homology that exists between the field of power and the subfields of cultural production means that cultural productions can and do offer an ideological legitimization of the status quo insofar as the conservation of the symbolic order contributes to the conservation of the political order. On the other hand, one should also note that the subversion of the symbolic order can have effects on the political order, but only if the symbolical subversion is accompanied by a social subversion of the field of political power.

with each other in the field. Here the point is to reveal the hierarchy of the products and the producers, which is based on the opposition between the “field of restricted production,” in which the producers produce for other producers, and the “field of mass-audience production,” which is symbolically excluded and discredited (Bourdieu 1971:54–55). Finally, the analysis of the field should also include the detailed analysis of the trajectories and the dispositions of the producers who are in competition with each other within the field. To understand the practices of the producers and their products entails understanding that they are the result of the history of the positions they occupy and the history of their dispositions. Once the agent is introduced into the field, one can then dynamize the picture and analyze the interplay of objective positions and subjective dispositions and thus explain the postures (*prises de positions*) of the producers of a given field.

The generalized model of the field of cultural production presented above is the result of a long series of studies of particular fields that Bourdieu started in the sixties with an analysis of the intellectual field, from Flaubert and the “nouveau roman” to jazz and cinema (Bourdieu 1966),⁴⁷ the conceptual framework of which is largely derived from and inspired by a brilliant and original reinterpretation of Weber’s chapter on religion in *Economy and Society* (Weber [1921] 1972:245–381) in terms of his general theory of sociological knowledge (Bourdieu 1971a, b).⁴⁸ Insofar as this interpretation gives a Marxian twist to Weber’s notion of ideal goods and ideal interests, it also lays the groundwork for a general theory of the economy of symbolic goods which, by extending the logic of economic calculation to all goods, material as well as symbolic, without distinction, aims to demonstrate that there is a political economy of cultural goods. As a result of this thoroughly materialist reading of Weber, which outmarxes Marx and was anticipated by Mannheim (see *infra*), an economic interpretation of non- and even antieconomic sectors, such as the religious one for instance, becomes possible, which consistently shows that a well-intended and conspicuous disinterest in material rewards always pays in one way or another, even if this interest (in the sense of dividends) is not consciously intended by the agent. When “strategic action” without strategizing or “traditional action” with a rational purpose is uncovered everywhere, the suspicion arises of economic reductionism and hyperutilitarianism à la Gary Becker, which detects unconscious egoism in conscious altruism, leading thus to the oxymoron of “unconscious calculation,” inevitably, and to a certain extent justifiably (see Joppke 1986; Honneth 1990; Caillé 1992; and Alexander 1995).

The central axis of variation of the fields is their degree of autonomy. Highly autonomous fields, like the scientific field, follow the binary code of true and false; highly heteronomous fields, like the political field, the Schmittian code of friend and foe (Bourdieu

⁴⁷Verdès-Leroux, who has “read and re-read 10,000 pages” of Bourdieu’s “dry, artificial, immensely repetitive and unscientific” prose without finding anything worth preserving, has compiled an impressive but incomplete list of fields (and their corresponding species of capital) that indirectly indicates the plurality of his interests, the power of his theoretical tools, and the fertility of his prolific production: “Scientific field, literary field, field of power, religious field, juridical field, field of constructors, field of the production of houses, field of territorial powers, political field, economic field, field of journalism, field of ideological production, field of cultural production, field of painting, field of the institutions of higher education, field of the political sciences, field of political marketing, field of universities, field of the *grandes écoles*, field of *haute couture*, field of comic strips, field of pop art, field of publishing houses, field of contemporary physics, field of galleries, etc. (and don’t forget the subfields)” (Verdès-Leroux 1998:199).

⁴⁸Although both articles overlap, the second article (1971b) is much more complex than the first (1971a) insofar as Bourdieu systematically intermingles Marx, Weber, and Durkheim (and a few others) in the picture and introduces his highly sophisticated and synthetic theory of symbolic power (Bourdieu 1977b) in his analysis of the religious field in order to unveil the ideological contribution of religion to the maintenance of the social order. Although the theory of symbolic violence occupies a central place in Bourdieu’s project (see Wacquant 1987, 1996a, and especially 1993a:1, where he states that “Bourdieu’s entire oeuvre may be read as a quest to explicate the specificity and potency of symbolic power”), I will leave it out of my analysis and concentrate on the relational aspects of the theory of fields.

1986:10). First, we will consider the religious field, which is open to external determinations and whose “truth” is nothing else but the legitimate imposition of a cultural arbitrary that expresses mainly the interests of the dominant. The penultimate section will analyze the scientific field, which is more autonomous and in which the producers produce for other producers and not for a mass audience, as is the case in the religious field.

The Religious Field

Insofar as Weber’s theory of religion systematically relates the religious discourses of the sorcerer, the prophet, and the priest to the larger social interests of its carrier strata (Weber [1922] 1966:237–268; [1921] 1972:259–79), he has, in principle at least, developed a theory of the relative autonomy of the religious field, which allows him to transcend the opposition between a (structuralist) theory that interprets the changing content of religious messages in terms of the immanent laws of the mind and a (Marxist) theory that conceives them as a direct reflection of the material infrastructure of society, committing thus the error of the short-circuit. The problem with Weber is twofold: First, he remained caught in the substantialist mode of thought. Rather than systematically relating the protagonists of religious action (prophet, sorcerer, and priest) to each other, he developed an ideal-type of each of them that searched for their general characteristics in the protagonists themselves, arriving thus at a “mosaic theory” of reality (Parsons [1937] 1949:621). Second, Weber also remained entangled in the “occasionalist illusion” (Bourdieu 1972:184). Rather than constructing the structure of objective relations between the positions which the religious agents occupy in the religious field, he reduced the “objective structure,” which determines interpersonal relations, to the “conjunctural structure” of their interactions in particular groups and situations.

Those two problems can, however, easily be overcome according to Bourdieu. To bring home the harvest of Weber’s rich analysis of the interactions between the religious specialists on the one hand and the lay population on the other, it is sufficient to construct the complete system of objective relations among the prophets, the priests, the sorcerers, and their secular followers, and to reinsert Weber’s analysis in this structural scheme. Once this is done, the dynamic of the religious field, and the transformation of the religious contents themselves, can then be explained in terms of an analysis of “the transactions between the specialists and the laypeople which are established on the basis of different interests and relations of competition which oppose the different specialists within the religious field” (Bourdieu 1971b:313). Indeed, in order to decipher the sociological meaning and functions of religious actions, it is necessary to consider the religious interests of those who produce, diffuse, and receive religious messages. Whereas the religious specialists have an interest in the accumulation of “religious capital” and compete therefore for the monopoly of the administration of the goods of salvation and the legitimate exercise of religious power over the laypeople, understood as the power to durably impress a religious habitus on them, the lay population has an interest in their messages insofar as, according to their respective position in the field of classes, they need either justification for their social privileges (dominant class) or compensation for their relative deprivation (dominated class). The offer of “theodicies” (Leibniz) by the specialists finds thus its complement in the demand of “sociodicies” (Bourdieu) of the masses. Depending on the demand of the ones, the offers of the others fluctuate. If the popular classes, and especially the peasants, pressed by economic urgency, look above all for immediate gratification, which they find in the profane and profaning magical manipulation of demons by the sorcerers, the other classes, less pressed by economic urgency, which explains why they can distance them-

selves from their immediate situation, have a need for the systematization of religious representations and the moralization of religious practices (Weber 1966:252–256; 1972:259). They address themselves either to the Church and their priests or to the prophets and their sects.

At any time, the structure of the religious field is determined by the balance of power, which is the result of former struggles for the monopoly on the administration of religious goods, between the priests, the prophets, and the sorcerers, which is itself a function of the extent to which they can mobilize the masses and satisfy their demands. The Church, which claims a monopoly on the legitimate interpretation of the world, is always confronted with the possibility of competition from the prophet, who offers an alternative systematic interpretation of the world, and from the sorcerer, who responds to punctual pragmatic demands. The prophet, a heretic producer of a systematic vision of the world, is opposed to the Church, this instance of reproduction of “routinized charisma” (Weber [1921] 1972:142–48), and its orthodoxy. Engaged in strategies to subvert the reigning orthodoxy, the prophet tries to convince the masses of his or her rival interpretation of the world. Whether this succeeds or not does not so much depend on his or her personal charisma, as Weber thought, but on the demand of the masses, especially the proletaroid intellectuals, and the social tensions which reign within the Church and the larger world. Insofar as prophets and heretics tend to appear at times of social crises and to preach to those who are already converted, their appearance has to be explained in relation to the particular figuration formed by the priests, the laypeople, and the prophet.

To counter the subversion strategies of the prophet and competition with the sorcerer, the Church responds with two typical conservation strategies. On the one hand, it imposes a growing ritualization of the religious practices and the annexation of magical beliefs; on the other hand, it adapts its original message and reinterprets it to appeal to the largest audience, introducing thereby a fundamental ambiguity wherein, thanks to the “selective reception” (Bourdieu 1971b:315) that is relative to the position occupied in the social structure, all categories of the population can find themselves. Given that the religious authority and the secular power that the religious instances can mobilize in their struggle for religious legitimacy is never independent from the weight of the lay population which they mobilize, the struggles that are waged in the religious field are not only overdetermined by the structure of power relations between the classes in the field of power but also inevitably have implications for this field. This structural homology between the two fields explains why the struggle in the religious produces “euphemized forms” (Bourdieu 1977b:410) of the economic and political struggle between the classes and how the strategies for the conservation of the symbolic order contribute directly to the conservation of the political order, whereas the strategies of subversion of the symbolic order can only affect the political order when they are accompanied by the political subversion of this order. Thus, as the person of extraordinary situations, the prophet can only be a revolutionary if the political situation itself is in a revolutionary state.

The Scientific Field

One could plausibly argue that the hub of the new “radical” sociologies of science consists in an ongoing “correction and expansion” (Lynch 1993:42) of Mannheim’s *Wissenssoziologie*, so as to include the exact sciences, which Mannheim explicitly exempted from the purview of his sociology (Mannheim 1936:43, 179, 272; 1952:170). And indeed, in the same way as the so-called “Strong Program” (Bloor 1991:3–23) in the sociology of scientific knowledge only makes sense against the background of Mannheim’s sociology of

knowledge, Bourdieu's ongoing interest in the sociology of the scientific field (Bourdieu 1976, 1990, 1997c) should be seen as an attempt to generalize Mannheim's thesis of the social determination of ideas. In a prize-winning essay of 1928, entitled "Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon" (Mannheim 1952:191–229), which largely anticipates Bourdieu's sociology of science, the young Mannheim defends the thesis of the "existential relativity of knowledge."⁴⁹ This thesis does not stipulate that all knowledge can simply be reduced to the social circumstances of its production (the error of epiphenomenalism), but it does stipulate that both the production and the reception of sociohistorical scientific knowledge is socially and historically determined. In the same way as the production of knowledge is a function of the particular social positions various groups occupy in the social structure, its reception (selection) is a function of a certain formation of the mind (categorical structure included), which is itself linked to a particular social position.⁵⁰ More particularly, Mannheim wants to show that the "general sociological phenomenon of competition" (ibid.:195–96), of which economic competition is only a particular case, can and does explain the dynamics of the social production of cultural knowledge. Insofar as the movement of thought depends in the last analysis upon the tensions that dominate the social sphere, theoretical conflict is always related to, and overdetermined by, social conflict. "From the point of view of the social sciences, every historical, ideological, sociological piece of knowledge (even should it prove to be Absolute Truth itself), is clearly rooted in and carried by the desire for power and recognition of particular social groups who want to make their interpretation of the world the universal one" (ibid.:196–97). The struggle for the public interpretation of reality, or at least for the prestige that goes with it, is thus the stake for which people fight, and the different interpretations of the world generally correspond to the particular positions they occupy in their struggle for power. Paraphrasing Clausewitz, we could thus say that science is politics pursued by other means (Latour 1984:257).

It is against this Mannheimian background of the general social relation of competition that we can best appreciate Bourdieu's enormous talent to concretize abstract ideas. Like Mannheim, Bourdieu starts his analysis of the field of scientific practices with the proposition that it is the arena of a competitive struggle, the particular stake (*enjeu*) of which is the monopoly on scientific authority. The relative indifference of scientists toward money and power should not hide the fact that all their practices are oriented toward the acquisition and accumulation of scientific capital (authority, prestige, recognition, celebrity, etc.), which is only a particular instance of social capital, which can then, of course, at a later stage be converted into other forms of capital (e.g., economic capital). The scientific field is highly autonomous ("restricted field of cultural production"). It is only because it follows its own immanent laws (the laws of the academic marketplace are irreducible to the laws of the market) and generates its own values and imperatives (universalism, communism, disinterestedness and organized scepticism [Merton 1968:604–15]) that the interests of scientists appear as disinterested. Once it is understood, however, that the interests in knowledge (*Erkenntnisinteressen*) of the scientists are strictly internal to the field, where

⁴⁹ Although Bourdieu's ideas largely echo those of the young Mannheim which echo those of Carl Schmitt (Pels 1988:229–231), I have never seen a reference to the 1928 essay. It is not even clear whether Bourdieu has actually read it. In passing, I would like to note that he has read Bakhtin, but that so far his influence on the analysis of the linguistic market (Bourdieu 1982b) has not sufficiently been acknowledged by his readers.

⁵⁰ In terms that remind us of Bourdieu's analysis of the relation between the field and the habitus, Mannheim writes that "certain qualitative features of an object encountered in the living process of history are accessible only to minds of a certain structure. There are certain qualitatively distinguished features of historically existing objects that are open to perception only by a consciousness as formed and devised by particular historical circumstances" (Mannheim 1952:194). For a further exploration of affinities, see Kögler 1997a.

they play a quasi-economic and quasi-political role, we can also understand that scientists have an “interest in disinterestedness” (Bourdieu 1976:94; see also 1994:149–67) and that they can reap the profit of seeing themselves, and being seen by others, as not being interested in vulgar profit making (see also Mulkay 1976). Their strategies of apparent disinvestment are strategies of the second order, which dissimulate the strategies of investment of the first order by which the scientists aim, consciously or not, “to make a name for themselves,” to make their own name (and for some even their first name) known in the field of their competing colleagues.

The struggle that scientists wage within the field is always a struggle for the power to define the definition of science which is best suited to their specific interests and which, if accepted as the legitimate definition, would allow them to occupy with legitimacy the dominant position in the field. And given that there is no external and impartial arbiter, the scientific-cum-political legitimacy claims are always a function of the relative power of the competing groups. From this conflictual perspective on the field of scientific production, which systematically relates the struggle over the “relations of definitions” (Beck 1988:211–26) to the “relations of production” that structure the positions in the field, even “epistemological conflicts” (e.g., realism versus empiricism versus rationalism, etc.) can be analyzed as “political conflicts” (Bourdieu 1976:90). Depending on the state of competition in the academic marketplace, which can vary, as Mannheim has shown, from the monopoly position of one particular group to atomistic competition among a multiplicity of competing groups (Mannheim 1952:207–10), the opposition between the “priestly” strategies of conservation and the “prophetic” strategies of subversion of the structure of the field take on different meanings and functions.

The monopoly situation is characterized by a permanent conflict between the established, who, in an attempt to defend the reigning orthodoxy and to maintain their monopoly on the means of intellectual production (control over educational training, instances of consecration, and scientific journals), carefully select their successors and try to keep heretical newcomers from entering the game, and “heretics” like Einstein or Marx, who enter into revolt not only against the scientific establishment but also against the social establishment as such. As accumulated scientific resources increase, the incorporated scientific capital needed in order to appropriate them and thereby gain access to scientific problems and tools increases as well, and the cost of entering the field becomes greater and greater. As a result, the degree of homogeneity between the competitors increases and the opposition between the succession strategies of the dominant fraction and the subversion strategies of the dominated fraction tends to lose its meaning. Even the outsiders are now somehow established, and the disputes that take place between the competitors take place against the background of undisputed *doxa* (“consensus in the dissensus”), which is taken for granted by all the parties of the struggle and which is thus never put into question by them.

As competition becomes institutionalized and as the accumulation of capital needed to accomplish scientific revolutions tends increasingly to occur in accordance with regulated procedures, the great periodic revolutions are replaced by a multiplicity of small permanent revolutions that are increasingly devoid of political effects. In brief, the scientific field becomes more autonomous, and as it becomes more autonomous and self-regulating, scientific reason progresses and, eventually, the “force of reason” (Kant), becomes the only form of force that is recognized and legitimately utilized in the field. At this point, Bourdieu joins Apel and Habermas, but with this notable difference: reason is no longer considered as a transhistorical universal but as the historical result of the progressive institutionalization of rational discussions in the field of science (Bourdieu 1997a:111–

51),⁵¹ and possibly and hopefully also—but this depends on the institutionalization of the conditions of rational discussion in other highly autonomous fields of cultural production—in the larger world as well (Bourdieu 1989:548–59; 1992:459–73; 1993b, 1994:164–67, 239–44).⁵²

According to Bourdieu, the social sciences have not yet reached this autonomy. Unlike the scientific fields, capable of producing and satisfying a strictly scientific interest and thus of maintaining a dialectical process of mutual and rational critique out of which reason ensues, “the fields of production of learned discourses” (Bourdieu 1976:100) are highly dependent on external instances, and the apparent esoterism of the “doxosophers” should not hide the exoteric dependence that they maintain with social demands. “Falsely autonomous” and operating with a “false rupture” with common sense and the real interests of the dominant classes, the social sciences are “false sciences,” doomed to produce and to maintain “false consciousness” (ibid.:100–3). Parading with the technological appearances of scientificity (e.g., log-linear modelling, path analysis, etc.) and the rhetoric of cumulativeness (e.g., neo-Marxism, neofunctionalism, etc.), the social sciences do not aim to realize themselves as real sciences, but only to realize the official image of science. And even the radical sociologists, those of the Frankfurt School included, who contest the “orthodox consensus” and ally themselves with the dominated classes, remain negatively but necessarily trapped within the presuppositions of the false science of their colleagues from the mainstream. “The manifest conflicts between the tendencies and doctrines mask, from the participants themselves, the underlying complicity which they presuppose and which strikes the observer from outside the system” (Bourdieu 1966:902). Rather than reflexively uncovering the presuppositions of their opponents, they take them over, and the oppositions they set up (consensus versus conflict, quantitative versus qualitative analysis, objectivism versus subjectivism, etc.) function as so many “mirror-traps” (Bourdieu 1991:383). Only the signs are thus reversed, and at the end of the day, the mutual opposition shows that the same game has been played over (and over) again.

Bourdieu claims that a “reflexive sociology” (Bourdieu et al. 1973:95–106; 1982a; 1984a:9–51; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:45–70), a sociology of sociology that objectivates the complete system of positions that engenders the rival strategies, allows him to transcend the “mimetic rivalry” (Girard 1982) that opposes the objective allies. Rhetorically, this move relies on the Mannheimian distinction between the “particular special” and the “total general” conception of ideology (Mannheim 1936:55–88, 264–86), which Bourdieu now reformulates in terms of a radical distinction between the “polemical” and the “reflexive” use of the sociology of knowledge (Bourdieu 1983b:51): in the first case, the sociology of knowledge is used to disqualify the strategies of one’s opponents (“x is a

⁵¹In a thoughtful article, Pels (1995) has shown that universalism does not arise from the internalization of a normative “culture of critical discourse” (Gouldner’s CCD), but from a set of social constraints that forces the rivals in the field to a cross-checking of their mutual products that unintentionally turns the pursuit of self-interest into a motor of the progress of reason (“private vices, public virtues”).

⁵²Just like Foucault, Bourdieu shares Habermas’s concern with communication, even if he analyzes it from a different angle. For Habermas, the ideal speech situation is characterized by the absence of power, whereas for Bourdieu and Foucault it is the absence of communication without symbolic violence that characterizes power. This shared emphasis on communication (with and without constraints) is what allows a Habermasian reading of Bourdieu (and, possibly, of Foucault as well) and a Bourdieusian (or Foucauldian) reading of Habermas. Rather than simply opposing the one to the other, one should see that their politics of knowledge are perfectly complementary. For Bourdieu, power always comes first (power as *arche*). The task of politics consists in the creation of an egalitarian social universe that would render a discussion without symbolic constraints possible (discussion as *telos*). For Habermas, on the other hand, the ideal speech situation is always already given, or at least counterfactually anticipated as given (communication as *arche*). The task of a radical reformist politics consists in its institutionalization in a democratic system. Although Bourdieu rightly claims that the ideal speech situation does not exist, he would certainly not want to conclude from this that the ideal of the speech situation does not exist either!

petty bourgeois”—the sociologist is always the best critique of his or her opponents); in the second case, it is used to objectify the whole field, one’s own position included (autoreflexive sociology by means of “participant objectivation” [Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:48]), i.e., self-observation through objectification of the objectivating subject and of its relation to the object). According to Bourdieu, the systematic objectivation of the field as the totality of the possible standpoints (*positions*) and their corresponding viewpoints (*prises de positions*), which he opposes to the partial and interested objectivations of the agents involved in the field, “allows one to establish the truth of the different positions and the limits of validity of the different standpoints” (Bourdieu 1997c:38–39).

This Bachelardian move by which the author of *Homo Academicus* attempts to create a third position for himself is, however, problematic, first, because he himself has clearly stated that there is and can be no independent position on the field within the field itself and, second, because the reflexive application of his own sociology to his own sociology unmasks his epistemological position as an ideological position and, thus, as a move within the field itself. And indeed, everything happens as if Bourdieu is only introducing a revamped version of Althusser’s ideological distinction between science and ideology in the field of sociology to transcend the opposition between mainstream and radical sociology. And even more problematic, if his move is not a polemic but a reflexive one, not a “cynical” but a “clinical” one (Bourdieu 1996:68), then the question still remains how he can have access to the position of the “impartial spectator,” observing his own observations and those of the others, seeing what they don’t see and maybe even what he doesn’t see.⁵³ And indeed, this seems to be the point where Bourdieusian sociology turns into something divine—into “Bourdieuian sociology.”

Although Bourdieu is tempted at times to totalize and close his own totalizing scheme, he should know better, and he does indeed know better, as can be gathered from his highly reflexive inaugural lecture on the lecture at the Collège de France, where he warns explicitly against the Platonic and Hegelian temptations of the “free floating intelligentsia” by noting that “one should not expect of a thought on the limits that it will give access to a thought without limits” (Bourdieu 1982a:23). Although Bourdieu still tends to maintain some residual separation between science and politics, the political nature of his scientific endeavors has now become clear not only to the readers of *Liber*, the international political supplement to the *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, but also to the larger readership of *Libération*, *Le Monde*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Télérama*, *Les Inrockuptibles*, or the *Magazine Littéraire*, which recently published a “special” on Bourdieu (October 1998, no. 369). In the true spirit of the Enlightenment, advancing science in the name of emancipation and emancipation in the name of science, the most famous sociologist of France has chosen to intervene as a political agitator in the public sphere to give a voice to the excluded (the unemployed and the new poor, the gays and the lesbians, the Algerian intellectuals and the illegal immigrants in France, etc.) and to undermine the neoliberal hegemony. Indeed, since the December 1995 strike (see Duval 1998), he has multiplied his interventions “for a left on the left” (Bourdieu 1998c)—and not for a “left of the left,” as his enemies like to misread him, critically analyzed and attacked the media intellectuals and other “fast thinkers” for their complicity with the dominant classes (Bourdieu 1996), proposed a series of powerful arguments aimed to counter the onslaught of the welfare state and the global politics of “flexploitation” with a proposal for a European social state

⁵³Observations of observations may allow one to relativize one’s observations of the first order, but insofar as they remain observations, the “blind spot” of their own observations always perdures. Or, as Luhmann says, “even the observation of the second order cannot see what it cannot see. At best it can see that it cannot see what it cannot see” (Luhmann 1989:333).

(Bourdieu 1998a), and, last but not least, launched a very successful series of affordable, well-documented, and readable booklets, whose format reminds one of Habermas's *Kleine politische Schriften* and which are "animated by the militant will to diffuse the knowledge which is indispensable for political reflection and action in a democracy" ("Preamble" to Halimi 1997).⁵⁴ As the main spokesperson of the "collective autonomous intellectual," Bourdieu and his metapolitical strategy of the Gramscian type, which aims to undermine the cultural hegemony of neoliberalism (both on the right and on the left—"the Jospin-Blair-Schröder troika"), has been so successful that Bourdieu himself had to publicly deny the wild speculations that he would create a new political party and present himself as a candidate in the 1999 elections of the European parliament ("The candidate Bourdieu does not exist," *Libération*, 8/27/1998).

4. CONCLUSION: FROM CRITIQUE TO RECONSTRUCTION

At the end of the day, Bourdieu's generative structuralism may be seen as an ongoing sociophilosophical reflection and empiricotheoretical variation on the relational theme of thought, which allows him "to let the categories dance," as Marx said in another context, "to their own political melody." Indeed, moving progressively downward along the continuum of scientific abstractions, from the philosophical, epistemological, and metatheoretical reflections on a relational social theory to their theoretical, methodological, and empirical implementations in a sociology of fields, we have seen how Bourdieu's argument can be internally reconstructed as a systematic transposition of Bachelard's and Cassirer's reformulation of Hegel's outrageous statement that the "real is rational" and the "rational real" from the natural to the social sciences. That the relational mode of thought is central to Bourdieu's project is proved by the fact that the two central metasociological concerns that have driven his research program for forty years, namely the substitution of a relational for a substantialist conception of social reality and the transcendence of the fundamental antinomy of subjectivist and objectivist approaches to the study of social life, can respectively be interpreted as a horizontal and vertical application of this relational mode of intellectual production. If the first metasociological concern has found its sociological way in a conflict theory of the general properties of social fields and an impressive series of empirical investigations of the different fields of cultural production, distribution, and consumption, the second one has led to the sociological recovery of the phenomenological descriptions of the habitus in a sophisticated theory of practices and their role in the reproduction of structures. Together the theory of fields and the theory of the habitus (with their theoretical paraphernalia: *illusio*, capital, etc.), which are internally related in such a way that the one appears either as a practical medium (*modus operandi*) or as the consequence (*opus operatum*) of the other, form the "hard core" of Bourdieu's progressive research program.

If my internal reconstruction of "genetic structuralism" has consistently shown what Bourdieu owes to other theories (of Bachelard, Cassirer, etc.), how it overlaps with other theories (of Elias, Mannheim, etc.), or even how it could benefit from other theories (of Critical Realism, Giddens, Habermas, etc.), this was not done to detract from his originality, let alone to depreciate his sheer talent, but with an eye to explore the possibility of (meta)theoretical alliances and knowledge-political coalitions between different intellec-

⁵⁴In his latest book on globalization or, as he prefers to call it, "the postnational constellation," Habermas approvingly quotes Bourdieu's new internationalist proposal for the creation of a European welfare state (Habermas 1998:124). Together with Beck (1997) and Bauman (1998)—but against Giddens's "Third Way" (Giddens 1998), which sells out to New Labour—we can witness the emergence of a post-Marxist defence against the involution of the welfare state and the Brazilianization of Europe.

tual strands. The internal reconstruction of Bourdieu's system of theories that I have proposed has all along been inspired by the dialectical motif of "immanent critique" (Benhabib 1986:19–43). Refusing the use of elements and criteria of judgment that are external to the theory, an immanent critique closely follows the curvatures of the theory and attempts to judge it according to its own criteria, arguing thus from within the theory against it, not to undermine it, but in order to uncover and ultimately to recover its tensions and limits, so as to make the theory stronger and more coherent.

In this dialectical vein, I have advanced two main critiques of Bourdieu. First, an epistemological one. In order to avoid the "epistemic fallacy," which reduces ontological questions to epistemological ones, he should avoid all equivocations between rationalist and realist interpretations of his work, abandon the conventionalist stratagem of the "as if," and put his theory on the solid ontological foundations that critical realism is only too happy to provide. The social world is not an analogical reflection of the relations that the theory depicts (rationalism), but it is the other way around (realism). If Bourdieu wants his critical theory of the social to be critically assessed, so that it can in turn critically assess the social, if he wants his theory to come to grips with and to have an effect on the social world, then he ultimately has to presuppose that the social world is more than an epistemic effect of his theory. Second, I have also advanced a metatheoretical critique. If Bourdieu wants to bring his sociological theory in line with his political intentions, he should open up his system, avoid deterministic descriptions of stable reproduction, and give voluntarism its due. This presupposes that the creativity of the habitus is openly recognized and that culture is not only seen as symbolically sublimated violence, not only as an instrument of domination, but also as an instrument of liberation. After all, a critical theory is not only a theory that uncovers the arbitrary nature of social necessity (domination), but also one that is able to reveal the possibility of the improbable (emancipation). It certainly describes reproductive practices, but only to stimulate praxis; and if it analyzes the mechanisms by which actors are reduced to agents (not to say to mere carriers of structures), it is only to contribute to the construction of "something like a subject" (Bourdieu 1980:41). Of late, in his more militant moods and political appeals for a *Realpolitik* of Reason (Bourdieu 1992, 1994, 1997a), Bourdieu has recognized the spontaneity of action and the efficacy of ideas. More recently, he has even set aside his theoretical critiques of the state and its so-called "ISA's" to defend the universal value of education (Areser 1997) and the welfare state (Bourdieu 1998:34–50, 66–75) against their monetarist despisers; but those political concessions have yet to find their theoretical expression in his scientific corpus.

And, finally, a question: Why not go further, all the way from a critical theory of domination to a political theory of emancipation, and from there to a normative theory of ethics? If a critical sociology presupposes not only an analysis of the forces of social domination, but also an analysis of the social forces of emancipation and the possibility of a transformative politics of emancipation, then it also presupposes an ethics, or at least some formulation of normative criteria of moral judgement and some indication of the "good life." Bourdieu has already given us his critique of pure reason and his critique of judgement, what we now would like to see is his critique of practical reason.⁵⁵

⁵⁵In the meantime Bourdieu has honored me with some 'frank and perhaps somewhat brutal remarks' on this article. He confirms that the 'hard core' of his theory is formed by a synthesis of Bachelard's rationalism and Cassirer's relationalism, rejects my insinuations that he might be a crypto-rationalist and declares that like Bhaskar, whose work he has recently discovered, he has been a realist all along, and finally complains that I have made abstraction of the empirical content of his work, which explains why I have not only committed what one could call a scholastic fallacy of the second power (my term) but also why my interpretation of his political interventions in the public sphere does not rise far above the level of journalism (letter to the author d.d. 11/26/1998).

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