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I. Identity and Representation

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Elements for a Critical Reflection on the Idea of Region

The confusion surrounding debates concerning the notion of region and, more generally, of ‘ethnic group’ or ‘ethnicity’ (scientific euphemisms that have been substituted for the notion of ‘race’, which is none the less still present in actual practice) stems in part from the fact that the desire to submit to logical criticism the categories of common sense – emblems or stigmata – and to substitute for the practical principles of everyday judgement the logically controlled and empirically based criteria of science, leads one to forget that practical classifications are always subordinated to practical functions and oriented towards the production of *social effects*. One also tends to forget that the practical representations that are the most exposed to scientific criticism (for example, the statements made by regionalist militants about the unity of the Occitan language) may *contribute to producing* what they apparently describe or designate, in other words, the *objective reality* to which the objectivist critique refers them in order to show their delusions or incoherence.

But on a deeper level, the quest for the ‘objective’ criteria of ‘regional’ or ‘ethnic’ identity should not make one forget that, in social practice, these criteria (for example, language, dialect and accent) are the object of *mental representations*, that is, of acts of perception and appreciation, of cognition and recognition, in which agents invest their interests and their presuppositions, and of *objectified representations*, in things (emblems, flags, badges, etc.) or acts, self-interested strategies of symbolic manipulation which aim at determining the (mental) representation that other people may form of these properties and their bearers. In other words, the characteristics and criteria noted by objectivist sociologists and anthropologists, once they are perceived and evaluated as they are in practice, function as signs, emblems or stigmata, and also as powers. Since this is the case, and since there is no social subject who can in practical terms be unaware of the fact, it follows that (objectively) symbolic properties, even the most negative, can be used strategically according to the material but also the symbolic interests of their bearer.

One can understand the particular form of struggle over classifications that is constituted by the struggle over the definition of ‘regional’ or ‘ethnic’ identity only if one transcends the opposition that science, in order to break away from the preconceptions of spontaneous sociology, must first establish between representation and reality, and only if one includes in reality the representation of reality, or, more precisely, the struggle over representations, in the sense of mental images, but also of social demonstrations whose aim it is to manipulate mental images (and even in the

sense of delegations responsible for organizing the demonstrations that are necessary to modify mental representations).

Struggles over ethnic or regional identity – in other words, over the properties (stigmata or emblems) linked with the *origin* through the *place* of origin and its associated durable marks, such as accent – are a particular case of the different struggles over classifications, struggles over the monopoly of the power to make people see and believe, to get them to know and recognize, to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world and, thereby, to *make and unmake groups*. What is at stake here is the power of imposing a vision of the social world through principles of division which, when they are imposed on a whole group, establish meaning and a consensus about meaning, and in particular about the identity and unity of the group, which creates the reality of the unity and the identity of the group. The etymology of the word region (*regio*), as described by Emile Benveniste, leads to the source of the division: a magical and thus essentially social act of *diacrisis* which introduces by *decree* a decisive discontinuity in natural continuity (between the regions of space but also between ages, sexes, etc.). *Regere fines*, the act which consists in ‘tracing out the limits by straight lines’, in delimiting ‘the interior and the exterior, the realm of the sacred and the realm of the profane, the national territory and foreign territory’, is a *religious* act performed by the person invested with the highest authority, the *rex*, whose responsibility it is to *regere sacra*, to fix the rules which bring into existence what they decree, to speak with authority, to predict in the sense of calling into being, by an enforceable saying, what one says, of making the future that one utters come into being. The *regio* and its frontiers (*fines*) are merely the dead trace of the act of authority which consists in circumscribing the country, the territory (which is also called *fines*), in imposing the legitimate, known and recognized definition (another sense of *finis*) of frontiers and territory – in short, the source of legitimate division of the social world. This rightful act, consisting in asserting with authority a truth which has the force of law, is an act of cognition which, being based, like all symbolic power, on recognition, brings into existence what it asserts (*auctoritas*, as Benveniste again reminds us, is the capacity to produce which is granted to the *auctor*). Even when he merely states with authority what is already the case, even when he contents himself with asserting what is, the *auctor* produces a change in what is: by virtue of the fact that he states things with authority, that is, in front of and in the name of everyone, publicly and officially, he saves them from their arbitrary nature, he sanctions them, sanctifies them, consecrates them, making them worthy of existing, in conformity with the nature of things, and thus ‘natural’.

Nobody would want to claim today that there exist criteria capable of founding ‘natural’ classifications on ‘natural’ regions, separated by ‘natural’ frontiers. The frontier is never anything other than the product of a division which can be said to be more or less based on ‘reality’, depending on whether the elements it assembles show more or less numerous and more or less striking resemblances among themselves (given that it will always be possible to argue over the limits of variations between

non-identical elements that taxonomy treats as similar). Everyone agrees that ‘regions’ divided up according to the different conceivable criteria (language, habitat, cultural forms, etc.) never coincide perfectly. But that is not all: ‘reality’, in this case, is social through and through and the most ‘natural’ classifications are based on characteristics which are not in the slightest respect natural and which are to a great extent the product of an arbitrary imposition, in other words, of a previous state of the relations of power in the field of struggle over legitimate delimitation. The frontier, that product of a legal act of delimitation, produces cultural difference as much as it is produced by it: one need only consider the role of the educational system in the development of language to see that political will can undo what history had done. Thus the science which claims to put forward the criteria that are the most well founded in reality would be well advised to remember that it is merely recording a *state* of the struggle over classifications, in other words, a state of the relation of material or symbolic forces between those who have a stake in one or other mode of classification, and who, just as science does, often invoke scientific authority to ground in reality and in reason the *arbitrary* division they seek to impose.

Regionalist discourse is a *performative discourse* which aims to impose as legitimate a new definition of the frontiers and to get people to know and recognize the *region* that is thus delimited in opposition to the dominant definition, which is misrecognized as such and thus recognized and legitimate, and which does not acknowledge that new region. The act of categorization, when it manages to achieve recognition or when it is exercised by a recognized authority, exercises by itself a certain power: ‘ethnic’ or ‘regional’ categories, like categories of kinship, institute a reality by using the power of *revelation* and *construction* exercised by *objectification in discourse*. The fact of calling ‘Occitan’ the language spoken by those who are called ‘Occitans’ because they speak that language (a language that nobody speaks, properly speaking, because it is merely the sum of a very great number of different dialects), and of calling the region (in the sense of physical space) in which this language is spoken ‘Occitanie’, thus claiming to make it exist as a ‘region’ or as a ‘nation’ (with the historically constituted implications that these notions have at the moment under consideration), is no ineffectual fiction. 6 The act of social magic which consists in trying to bring into existence the thing named may succeed if the person who performs it is capable of gaining recognition through his speech for the power which that speech is appropriating for itself by a provisional or definitive usurpation, that of imposing a new vision and a new division of the social world: *regere fines, regere sacra*, to consecrate a new limit. The effectiveness of the performative discourse which claims to bring about what it asserts in the very act of asserting it is directly proportional to the authority of the person doing the asserting: the formula ‘I authorize you to go’ is *eo ipso* an authorization only if the person uttering it is authorized to authorize – has the authority to authorize. But the cognition effect brought about by the fact of objectification in discourse does not depend only on the recognition granted to the person who utters that discourse: it also depends on the degree to which the discourse which announces to the group its

identity is grounded in the objectivity of the group to which it is addressed, that is, in the recognition and the belief granted to it by the members of this group, as well as in the economic or cultural properties they share in common, since it is only in accordance with a given principle of pertinence that the relation between these properties can appear. The power over the group that is to be brought into existence as a group is, inseparably, a power of creating the group by imposing on it common principles of vision and division, and thus a unique vision of its identity and an identical vision of its unity.

The fact that struggles over identity – that being-perceived which exists fundamentally through recognition by other people – concern the imposition of perceptions and categories of perception helps to explain the decisive place which, like the strategy of the *manifesto* in artistic movements, the *dialectic of manifestation or demonstration* holds in all regionalist or nationalist movements. The almost magical power of words comes from the fact that the objectification and *de facto* officialization brought about by the public act of naming, in front of everyone, has the effect of freeing the particularity (which lies at the source of all sense of identity) from the unthought, and even unthinkable, (This is what happens when an unnameable ‘patois’ is asserted as a language capable of being spoken publicly.) And officialization finds its fulfilment in *demonstration*, the typically magical (which does not mean ineffectual) act through which the practical group – virtual, ignored, denied, or repressed – makes itself visible and manifest, for other groups and *for itself*, and attests to its existence as a group that is known and recognized, laying a claim to institutionalization. The social world is also will and representation, and to exist socially means also to be perceived, and perceived as distinct.

In fact, it is not a question of a choice between, on the one hand, objectivist arbitration, which measures *representations* (in all senses of the term) by ‘reality’, forgetting that they can give rise in reality, by the specific effectiveness of evocation, to the very thing they represent, and, on the other hand, the subjectivist commitment which, privileging representation, ratifies in the domain of science that falsehood in sociological writing by which militants pass from the representation of reality to the reality of the representation. One can avoid the alternative by taking it as an object or, more precisely, by taking into account, in the science of the object, the objective foundations of the alternative of objectivism and subjectivism which divides science, preventing it from apprehending the specific logic of the social world, that ‘reality’ which is the site of a permanent struggle to *define* ‘reality’. To grasp at one and the same time *what is instituted* (without forgetting that it is only a question of the outcome, at a given point in time, of the struggle to bring something into existence or to force out of existence something that already exists) and *representations*, performative statements which seek to bring about what they state, to restore at one and the same time the objective structures and the subjective relation to those structures, starting with the claim to transform them: this is to give oneself the means of explaining ‘reality’ more completely, and thus of understanding and foreseeing

more exactly the potentialities it contains or – more precisely, the chances it objectively offers to different subjective demands.

When scientific discourse is dragged into the very struggles over classification that it is attempting to objectify (and, unless the disclosure of scientific discourse is forbidden, it is difficult to see how this usage could be prevented), it begins once again to function in the reality of struggles over classification. It is thus bound to appear as either *critical* or *complicitous*, depending on the critical or complicitous relation that the reader himself has with the reality being described. Thus the mere fact of *showing* can function as a way of pointing the finger, of accusing (*kategorieren*) or, on the other hand, as a way of showing and throwing into relief. This is as true of classification into social classes as it is of classification into ‘regions’ or ‘ethnic groups’. Hence the necessity of making completely explicit the relation between the struggles over the source of legitimate division which occur in the scientific field and those which take place in the social field (and which, because of their specific logic, grant a preponderant role to intellectuals). Any position claiming ‘objectivity’ about the actual or potential, real or foreseeable existence, of a region, an ethnic group or a social class, and thereby about the *claim to institution* which is asserted in ‘partisan’ *representations*, constitutes a certificate of *realism* or a verdict of *utopianism* which helps to determine the objective chances that this social entity has of coming into existence. The symbolic effect to which scientific discourse gives rise by consecrating a state of the divisions and of the vision of the divisions is all the more inevitable because, in symbolic struggles over cognition and recognition, so-called ‘objective’ criteria, the very ones which are well known to scientists, are used as weapons: they designate the characteristics on which a symbolic action of mobilization, can be based in order to produce real unity or the belief in unity (both in the group itself and in others) which ultimately, and in particular via the actions of the imposition and inculcation of legitimate identity (such as those actions performed by the school or the army), tends to generate real unity. In short, the most ‘neutral’ verdicts of science contribute to modifying the object of science. Once the regional or national question is objectively raised in social reality, even if only by an active minority (which may exploit its very weakness by playing on the properly symbolic strategy of *provocation* and *testimony* in order to draw out ripostes, whether symbolic or not, which imply a certain recognition), any utterance about the region functions as an *argument* which helps to favour or penalize the chances of the region’s acquiring recognition and thereby existence.

Nothing is less innocent than the question, which divides the scientific world, of knowing whether one has to include in the system of pertinent criteria not only the so-called ‘objective’ categories (such as ancestry, territory, language, religion, economic activity, etc.), but also the so-called ‘subjective’ properties (such as the feeling of belonging), i.e. the *representations* through which social agents imagine the divisions of reality and which contribute to the reality of the divisions. When, as their education and their specific interests incline them, researchers try to set themselves

up as judges of all judgements and as critics of all criteria, they prevent themselves from grasping the specific logic of a struggle in which the social force of representations is not necessarily proportional to their truth-value (measured by the degree to which they express the state of the relation of material forces at the moment under consideration). Indeed, as pre-dictions, these ‘scientific’ mythologies can produce their own verification, if they manage to impose themselves on collective belief and to create, by their mobilizing capacity, the conditions of their own realization. But they do no better when, giving up the distance of the observer, they adopt the representation of the agents and participants, in a discourse which, by failing to provide itself with the means of describing the game in which this representation is produced and the belief which underlies it, is nothing more than one contribution among many to the production of the belief whose foundations and social effects should be described.

It can be seen that, as long as they do not submit their practice to sociological criticism, sociologists are determined, in their orientation towards the objectivist or subjectivist pole of the universe of possible relations to the object, by social factors such as their position in the social hierarchy of their discipline (in other words, their level of certified competence which, in a socially hierarchized geographical space, often coincides with their central or local position, a particularly important factor when the matter at hand is that of regionalism) and also their position in the technical hierarchy: ‘epistemological’ strategies which are at such opposite ends of the spectrum as the dogmatism of the guardians of theoretical orthodoxy and the spontaneism of the apostles of participation in the movement may have in common a way of avoiding the demands of scientific work without giving up their claims to *auctoritas* when they either will not or cannot satisfy these demands, or when they satisfy only the most superficial of them. But they may also swing, following their directly experienced relation to the object, between objectivism and subjectivism, blame and praise, mystified and mystificatory complicity and reductionist demystification, because they accept the objective problematic, in other words, the very structure of the field of struggle in which the region and regionalism are at stake, instead of objectifying it; because they enter into the debate on the criteria enabling one to state the meaning of the regionalist movement or to predict its future without asking themselves about the logic of a struggle which bears precisely on the determination of the meaning of the movement (is it regional or national, progressive or regressive, right-wing or left-wing, etc.) and on the criteria capable of determining this meaning.

Here as elsewhere, in sum, one must escape the alternative of the ‘demystifying’ recording of objective criteria and the mystified and mystificatory ratification of wills and representations in order to keep together what go together in reality: on the one hand, the objective classifications, whether incorporated or objectified, sometimes in institutional form (like legal boundaries), and, on the other hand, the practical relation to those classifications, whether acted out or represented, and in particular the

individual and collective strategies (such as regionalist demands) by which agents seek to put these classifications at the service of their material or symbolic interests, or to conserve and transform them; or, in other words, the objective relations of material and symbolic power, and the practical schemes (implicit, confused and more or less contradictory) through which agents classify other agents and evaluate their position in these objective relations as well as the symbolic strategies of presentation and self-representation with which they oppose the classifications and representations (of themselves) that others impose on them.

In short, it is by exorcizing the dream of the 'royal science' invested with the regal right of *regere fines* and *regere sacra*, with the nomothetic or law-giving power of decreeing union and separation, that science can take as its object the very game whose stake is the power of governing the sacred frontiers, that is, the quasi-divine power over the vision of the world, and in which one has no choice, if one seeks to exercise it (rather than submit to it), other than to mystify or de mystify.

II. Social Space and the Genesis of 'Classes'

The construction of a theory of the social space presupposes a series of breaks with Marxist theory. It presupposes a break with the tendency to emphasize substances – here, real groups whose number, limits, members, etc. one claims to be able to define – at the expense of *relations* and with the intellectualist illusion which leads one to consider the theoretical class, constructed by the social scientist, as a real class, an effectively mobilized group; a break with economics, which leads one to reduce the social field, a multidimensional space, to the economic field alone, to the relations of economic production, which are thus established as the co-ordinates of social position; and a break, finally, with objectivism, which goes hand in hand with intellectualism, and which leads one to overlook the symbolic struggles that take place in different fields, and where what is at stake is the very representation of the social world, and in particular the hierarchy within each of the fields and between the different fields.

THE SOCIAL SPACE

To begin with, sociology presents itself as a *social topology*. Accordingly, the social world can be represented in the form of a (multi-dimensional) space constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation or distribution constituted by the set of properties active in the social universe under consideration, that is, able to confer force or power on their possessor in that universe. Agents and groups of agents are thus defined by their *relative positions* in space. Each of them is confined to a position or a precise class of neighbouring positions (i.e. to a given region of this space), and one cannot in fact occupy – even if one can do so in thought – two opposite regions

of the space. In so far as the properties chosen to construct this space are active properties, the space can also be described as a field of forces: in other words, as a set of objective power relations imposed on all those who enter this field, relations which are even to direct *interactions* between agents.

The active properties that are chosen as principles of construction of the social space are the different kinds of power or capital that are current in the different fields. Capital, which can exist in objectified form – in the form of material properties – or, in the case of cultural capital, in an incorporated form, one which can be legally guaranteed, represents power over a field (at a given moment) and, more precisely, over the accumulated product of past labour (and in particular over the set of instruments of production) and thereby over the mechanisms which tend to ensure the production of a particular category of goods and thus over a set of revenues and profits. The kinds of capital, like trumps in a game of cards, are powers which define the chances of profit in a given field (in fact, to every field or sub-field there corresponds a particular kind of capital, which is current, as a power or stake, in that field). For example, the volume of cultural capital (the same would be true, *mutatis mutandis* – of economic capital) determines the aggregate chances of profit in all games in which cultural capital is effective, thereby helping to determine position in the social space (in so far as this position is determined by success in the cultural field).

The position of a given agent in the social space can thus be defined by the position he occupies in the different fields, that is, in the distribution of the powers that are active in each of them. These are, principally, economic capital (in its different kinds), cultural capital and social capital, as well as symbolic capital, commonly called prestige, reputation, fame, etc., which is the form assumed by those different kinds of capital when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate. One can thus construct a simplified model of the social field as a whole, a model which allows one to plot each agent's position in all possible spaces of the game (it being understood that, while each field has its own logic and its own hierarchy, the hierarchy which is established between the kinds of capital and the statistical relation between different assets mean that the economic field tends to impose its structure on other fields).

The social field can be described as a multi-dimensional space of positions such that each actual position can be defined in terms of a multi-dimensional system of co-ordinates whose values correspond to the values of the different pertinent variables. Agents are thus distributed, in the first dimension, according to the overall volume of the capital they possess and, in the second dimension, according to the composition of their capital – in other words, according to the relative weight of the different kinds of capital in the total set of their assets.

The form assumed, at each moment, in each social field, by the set of the distributions of the different kinds of capital (whether incorporated or materialized), as instruments for the appropriation of the objectified product of accumulated social labour, defines the state of the relations of power, institutionalized in durable social statuses that are socially recognized or legally guaranteed, between agents who are objectively defined by their position within these relations; this form determines the actual or potential powers in different fields and the chances of access to the specific profits they procure.

Knowledge of the position occupied in this space contains information on the intrinsic properties (i.e. condition) and the relational properties (i.e. position) of agents. This is particularly clear in the case of those who occupy intermediate or middle positions – those which, apart from the middle or median values of their properties, owe a certain number of their most typical characteristics to the fact that they are situated *between* the two poles of the field, in the *neutral* point of the space, and are balanced between the two extreme positions.

CLASSES ON PAPER

On the basis of knowledge of the space of positions, one can carve out *classes* in the logical sense of the word, i.e. sets of agents who occupy similar positions and who, being placed in similar conditions – and submitted to similar types of conditioning, have every chance of having similar dispositions and interests, and thus of producing similar practices and adopting similar stances. This ‘class on paper’ has the *theoretical* existence which belongs to all theories: as the product of an explanatory classification, one which is altogether similar to that of zoologists or botanists, it allows one to *explain* and predict the practices and properties of the things classified – including their propensity to constitute groups. It is not really a class, an actual class, in the sense of being a group, a group mobilized for struggle; at most one could say that it is a *probable class*, in so far as it is a set of agents which will place fewer objective obstacles in the way of efforts of mobilization than any other set of agents.

Thus, contrary to the *nominalist relativism* which cancels out social differences by reducing them to pure theoretical artefacts, we have to affirm the existence of an objective space determining compatibilities and incompatibilities, proximities and distances. Contrary to the *realism of the intelligible* (or the reification of concepts), we have to affirm that the classes which can be carved out of the social space (for instance, for the purposes of statistical analysis, which is the sole means of demonstrating the structure of the social space) do not exist as real groups, although they explain the probability of individuals constituting themselves as practical groups, families (homogamy), clubs, associations and even trade-union or political ‘movements’. What exists is a *space of relations* which is just as real as a geographical space, in which movements have to be paid for by labour, by effort and especially by time (to move upwards is to raise oneself, to climb and to bear the traces or the stigmata of that effort). Distances can also be measures in time (the time of ascent or of the reconversion of capital, for example). And the probability of mobilization into organized movements, endowed with an apparatus and a spokesperson, etc. (the very thing which leads us to talk of a ‘class’), will be inversely proportional to distance in this space. While the probability of bringing together, really or nominally, a set of agents – by virtue of the delegate – is greater when they are closer together in the social space and belong to a more restricted and thus more homogeneous constructed class, nevertheless the alliance of the closest agents is never *necessary* or inevitable (because the effects of immediate competition may get in the way), and the alliance of the agents that are most separated from one another is never *impossible*. Although there is more chance of mobilizing in the same real group the set of

workers than the set of bosses and workers, it is possible, in the context, for example, of an international crisis, to provoke a grouping on the basis of links of national identity. (This is in part because, due to its specific history, each of the national social spaces has its own structure – for instance, as regards hierarchical divergences in the economic field.)

Like ‘being’ according to Aristotle, the social world can be uttered and constructed in different ways: it can be practically perceived, uttered, constructed, in accordance with different principles of vision and division (for instance, ethnic divisions), it being understood that groupings founded in the struggle of the space constructed on the basis of the distribution of capital have a greater chance of being stable and durable and that other forms of grouping will always be threatened by splits and oppositions linked to distances in the social space. To speak of a social space means that one cannot group together just anyone with anyone else while ignoring the fundamental differences, particularly economic and cultural differences, between them. But this never completely excludes a possible organization of agents in accordance with other principles of division – ethnic, national, etc. – though it should be remembered that these are generally linked to the fundamental principles, since ethnic groups are themselves at least roughly hierarchized in the social space, for instance, in the USA (by the criterion of how long it has been since one’s family first immigrated – blacks excepted).

This marks a first break with the Marxist tradition: this tradition either identifies, without further ado, the constructed class with the real class (i.e., as Marx himself reproached Hegel with doing, it confuses the things of logic with the logic of things); or else, when the tradition does draw the distinction, opposing the ‘class-in-itself’, defined on the basis of a set of objective conditions, to the ‘class-for-itself’, based on subjective factors, it describes the movement from the one to the other, a movement which is always celebrated as a real ontological advance, in accordance with a logic which is either totally determinist or on the contrary fully voluntarist. In the former case, the transition appears as a logical, mechanical or organic necessity (the transformation of the proletariat from a class-in-itself to a class-for-itself being presented as an inevitable effect of time, of the ‘maturing of the objective conditions’); in the latter case, it is presented as the effect of an ‘awakening of consciousness’, conceived as a ‘taking cognizance’ of the theory which occurs under the enlightened leadership of the party. In both cases nothing is said about the mysterious alchemy by which a ‘group in struggle’, as a personalized collective, a historical agent setting its own aims, arises from the objective economic conditions.

By a sort of sleight of hand, the most essential questions are spirited away: first, the very question (the political, the specific action of agents who, in the name of a theoretical definition of ‘class’, assign to the members of that class the aims which officially conform most closely to their ‘objective’ (i.e. theoretical) interests, and of the labour through which they succeed in producing, if not the mobilized class, a belief in the existence of the class, which is the basis of the authority of its

spokespersons; and second, the question of the relations between the supposedly objective classifications produced by the social scientist, similar in that respect to the zoologist and the classifications which agents themselves continually produce in their ordinary existence, and through which they seek to modify their position in the objective classifications or to modify the very principles in accordance with which these classifications are produced.

THE PERCEPTION OF THE SOCIAL WORLD AND POLITICAL STRUGGLE

The most resolutely objectivist theory must take account of agents' representation of the social world and, more precisely, of the contribution they make to the construction of the vision of this world, and, thereby to the very construction of this world, via the *labour of representation* (in all senses of the term) that they continually perform in order to impose their own vision of the world or the vision of their own position in this world, that is, their social identity. The perception of the social world is the product of a double social structuring: on the objective side, this perception is socially structured because the properties attached to agents or institutions do not make themselves available to perception independently, but in combinations whose probability varies widely (and just as feathered animals have a greater chance of having wings than furry animals, so the possessors of a substantial cultural capital are more likely to be museum visitors than those who lack such capital); on the 'subjective' side, it is structured because the schemes of perception and evaluation susceptible of being brought into operation at a given moment, including all those which are laid down in language, are the product of previous symbolic struggles and express, in a more or less transformed form, the state of symbolic relations of power. The fact remains, none the less, that the objects of the social world can be perceived and expressed in different ways because, like the objects of the natural world, they always include a certain indeterminacy and vagueness – because, for example, the most constant combinations of properties are never founded on anything other than statistical connections between interchangeable features; and also because, as historical objects, they are subject to variations in time and their meaning, in so far as it depends on the future, is itself in suspense, in a pending and deferred state, and is thus relatively indeterminate. This element of risk, of uncertainty, is what provides a basis for the plurality of world views, a plurality which is itself linked to the plurality of points of view, and to all the symbolic struggles for the production and imposition of the legitimate vision of the world and, more precisely, to all the cognitive strategies of *fulfilment* which produce the meaning of the objects of the social world by going beyond the directly visible attributes by reference to the future or the past. This reference may be implicit and tacit, through what Husserl calls protension and retention, practical forms of propection or retrospection excluding the positioning of past and future as such; or it may be explicit, as in political struggles in which the

past, with the retrospective reconstruction of a past adjusted to the needs of the present ('La Fayette, here we are!'), and especially the future, with the creative foresight associated with it, are continually invoked, in order to determine, delimit, and define the ever-open meaning of the present.

To point out that perception of the social world implies an act of construction is not in the least to accept an intellectualist theory of knowledge: the essential part of one's experience of the social world and of the labour of construction it implies takes place in practice, without reaching the level of explicit representation and verbal expression. Closer to a class unconscious than to a 'class consciousness' in the Marxist sense, the sense of the position one occupies in the social space (what Goffman calls 'the sense of one's place') is the practical mastery of the social structure as a whole which reveals itself through the sense of the position occupied in that structure. The categories of perception of the social world are essentially the product of the incorporation of the objective structures of the social space. Consequently, they incline agents to accept the social world as it is, to take it for granted, rather than to rebel against it, to put forward opposed and even antagonistic possibilities. The sense of one's place, as the sense of what one can or cannot 'allow oneself – implies a tacit acceptance of one's position, a sense of limits ('that's not meant for us') or – what amounts to the same thing – a sense of distances, to be marked and maintained, respected, and expected of others. And this is doubtless all the more true when the conditions of existence are more rigorous and the reality principle is more rigorously imposed. (Hence the profound realism which most often characterizes the world view of the dominated which, functioning as a sort of socially constituted instinct of conservation, can appear conservative only with reference to an external and thus normative representation of the 'objective interest' of those whom it helps to live or to survive.)

If the objective relations of power tend to reproduce themselves in visions of the social world which contribute to the permanence of those relations, this is therefore because the structuring principles of the world view are rooted in the objective structures of the social world and because the relations of power are also present in people's minds in the form of the categories of perception of those relations. But the degree of indeterminacy and vagueness characteristic of the objects of the social world is, together with the practical, pre-reflexive and implicit character of the patterns of perception and evaluation which are applied to them, the Archimedean point which is objectively made available to truly political action. Knowledge of the social world and, more precisely, the categories which make it possible, are the stakes *par excellence* of the political struggle, a struggle which is inseparably theoretical and practical, over the power of preserving or transforming the social world by preserving or transforming the categories of perception of that world.

The capacity for bringing into existence in an explicit state, of publishing, of making public (i.e. objectified, visible, sayable, and even official) that which, not yet having attained objective and collective existence, remained in a state of individual or

serial existence – people’s disquiet, anxiety, expectation, worry – represents a formidable social power, that of bringing into existence groups by establishing the *common sense*, the explicit consensus, of the whole group. In fact, this labour of categorization, of making things explicit and classifying them, is continually being performed, at every moment of ordinary existence, in the struggles in which agents clash over the meaning of the social world and their position cursing and of malicious gossip, eulogy, congratulations, praise, compliments, or insults, rebukes, criticism, accusations, slanders, etc.

It is easy to understand why one of the elementary forms of political power should have consisted, in many archaic societies, in the almost magical power of *naming* and bringing into existence by virtue of naming. Thus in traditional Kabylia, the function of making things explicit and the labour of symbolic production that poets performed, particularly in crisis situations, when the meaning of the world is no longer clear, conferred on them major political functions, those of the war – lord or ambassador. But with the growing differentiation of the social world and the constitution of relatively autonomous fields, the labour of the production and imposition of meaning is performed in and through struggles in the field of cultural production (and especially in the political sub-field); it becomes the particular concern, the specific interest, of the professional producers of objectified representations of the social world, or, more precisely, of the methods of objectification.

If the legitimate mode of perception is such an important stake in different struggles, this is because on the one hand the movement from the implicit to the explicit is in no way automatic, the same experience of the social being recognizable in very different expressions, and on the other hand, the most marked objective differences may be hidden behind more immediately visible differences (such as, for example, those which separate ethnic groups). It is true that perceptual configurations, social *Gestalten*, exist objectively, and that the proximity of conditions and thus of dispositions tends to be re-translated into durable links and groupings, immediately perceptible social units such as socially distinct regions or districts (with spatial segregation), or sets of agents possessing altogether similar visible properties, such as Weber’s *Stände*. But the fact remains that socially known and recognized differences exist only for a subject capable not only of perceiving the differences, but of recognizing them as significant and interesting, i.e., exists only for a subject endowed with the aptitude and” the inclination to *establish* the differences which are held to be significant in the social world under consideration.

In this way, the social world, particularly through properties and their distribution, attains, in the objective world itself, the status of a *symbolic system* which, like a system of phonemes, is organized in accordance with the logic of difference, of differential deviation, which is thus constituted a significant *distinction*: The social space, and the differences that ‘spontaneously’ emerge within it, tend to function symbolically *a space of life-styles* or as a set of *Stände*, of groups characterized by different life-styles.

Distinction does not necessarily imply, as is often supposed, following Veblen and his theory of conspicuous consumption, a quest for distinction. All consumption and, more generally, all practice, is *conspicuous*, visible, whether or not it was performed *in order to be seen*: it is distinctive, whether or not it was inspired by the desire to get oneself noticed, to make oneself conspicuous, to distinguish oneself or to act with distinction. Hence, every practice is bound to function as a *distinctive sign* and, when the difference is recognized, legitimate and approved, as a *sign of distinction* (in all senses of the term). The fact remains that social agents, being capable of perceiving as significant distinctions the ‘spontaneous’ differences that their categories of perception lead them to consider as pertinent, are also capable of intentionally underscoring these spontaneous differences in life-style by what Weber calls ‘the stylization of life’ (*Stilisierung des Lebens*). The pursuit of distinction – which may be expressed in ways of speaking or in a refusal to countenance marrying beneath one’s station – produces separations which are meant to be perceived or, more precisely, known and recognized as legitimate differences – most frequently as differences of nature (in French we speak of ‘natural distinction’).

Distinction – in the ordinary sense of the word – is the difference written into the very structure of the social space when it is perceived in accordance with the categories adapted to that structure; and the Weberian *Stand*, which people so often like to contrast with the Marxist class, is the class adequately constructed when it is perceived through the categories of perception derived from the structure of that space. Symbolic capital – another name for distinction – is nothing other than capital, of whatever kind, when it is perceived by an agent endowed with categories of perception arising from the incorporation of the structure of its distribution, i.e. when it is known and recognized as self-evident. Distinctions, as symbolic transformations of *de facto* differences, and, more generally, the ranks, orders, grades and all the other symbolic hierarchies, are the product of the application of schemes of construction which – as in the case, for instance, of the pairs of adjectives used to express most social judgements – are the product of the incorporation of the very structures to which they are applied; and recognition of the most absolute legitimacy is nothing other than an apprehension of the everyday social world as taken for granted, an apprehension which results from the almost perfect coincidence of objective structures and incorporated structures.

It follows, among other consequences, that symbolic capital is attracted to symbolic capital and that the – real – autonomy of the field of symbolic production does not prevent this field from remaining dominated, in its functioning, by the constraints which dominate the social field as a whole. It also follows that objective relations of power tend to reproduce themselves in symbolic relations of power, in visions of the social world which contribute to ensuring the permanence of those relations of power. In the struggle for the imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world, in which science itself is inevitably involved, agents wield a power which is proportional to their symbolic capital, that is, to the recognition they receive from a group. The authority which underlies the performative effectiveness of discourse

about the social world, the symbolic force of visions and pre-visions aimed at imposing the principles of vision and division of this world, is a *percipi*, a being known and recognized (*nobilis*), which allows a *percipere* to be imposed. It is the most *visible* agents, from the point of view of the prevailing categories of perception, who are the best placed to change the vision by changing the categories of perception. But they are also, with a few exceptions, the least inclined to do so.

THE SYMBOLIC ORDER AND THE POWER OF NAMING

In the symbolic struggle for the production of common sense or, more precisely, for the monopoly of legitimate *naming* as the official – i.e. explicit and public – imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world, agents bring into play the symbolic capital that they have acquired in previous struggles, in particular all the power that they possess over the instituted taxonomies, those inscribed in people's minds or in the objective world, such as qualifications. Thus all the symbolic strategies through which agents aim to impose their vision of the divisions of the social world and of their position in that world can be located between two extremes: the insult, that *idios logos* through which an ordinary individual attempts to impose his point of view by taking the risk that a reciprocal insult may ensue, and the *official naming*, a symbolic act of imposition which has on its of common sense, because it is performed by a delegated agent of the state, that is, the holder of the *monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence*. On the one hand, there is the world of particular perspectives, of individual agents who, on the basis of their particular point of view, their particular position, produce namings – of themselves and others – that are particular and self-interested (nicknames, insults, or even accusations, indictments, slanders, etc.), and all the more powerless to gain recognition, and thus to exert a truly symbolic effect, the less their authors are *authorized*, either personally (*auctoritas*) or institutionally (by delegation), and the more directly they are concerned to gain recognition for the point of view that they are seeking to impose. On the other hand, there is the authorized point of view of an agent who is personally authorized, such as a great critic or prestigious preface-writer or established author (Zola's, *I' accuse*'), and above all the legitimate point of view of the authorized spokesperson, the delegate of the state, the official naming, or the *title* or qualification which, like an educational qualification, is valid on all markets and which, as an official definition of one's official identity, saves its bearers from the symbolic struggle of all against all, by establishing the authorized perspective, the one recognized by all and thus universal, from which social agents are viewed. The state, which produces official classifications, is to some extent the supreme tribunal to which Kafka was referring when he made Block say, speaking of the advocate and his claim to be among the 'great advocates': 'any man can call himself "great", of course, if he pleases, but in this matter the Court tradition must decide. The truth is that scientific analysis does not have to choose between perspectivism and what has to be called absolutism: indeed,

the truth of the social world is the stake in a struggle between agents who are very unequally equipped to attain absolute, that is, self-verifying, vision and pre-vision.

One could analyse from this point of view the functioning of an institution such as the French national statistics office, INSEE, a state institute which, by producing the official taxonomies that are invested with a quasi-legal authority, and, particularly in the relations between employers and employees, that of a qualification capable of conferring rights independent of actually performed productive activity, tends to fix hierarchies and thereby to sanction and consecrate a relation of power between agents with respect to the names of professions and occupations, an essential component of social identity. The management of names is one of the instruments of the management of material scarcity, and the names of groups, especially of professional groups, record a particular state of struggles and negotiations over the official designations and the material and symbolic advantages associated with them. The professional name granted to agents, the title they are given, is one of the positive or negative retributions (for the same reason as one's salary), in so far as it is a *distinctive mark* (emblem of stigma) which takes its *value* from its position in a hierarchically organized system of titles, and which thereby contributes to the determination of the relative positions between agents and groups. As a consequence of this, agents resort to practical or symbolic strategies aimed at maximizing the symbolic profit of naming: for example, they may give up the economic gratifications assured by a certain job so as to occupy a less well paid position, but one which is endowed with a more prestigious name; or they may orient themselves towards positions whose designations are less precise, and thus escape the effects of symbolic devaluation. In the same way, in the expression of their personal identity, they may give themselves a name which includes them in a class which is sufficiently broad to, include agents occupying positions superior to their own, such as the 'instituteur' or primary-school teacher who calls himself an 'enseignant' or teacher, without specifying the level at which he teaches. More generally, agents always have a choice between several names and they may play on the uncertainties and the effects of vagueness linked to the plurality of perspectives so as to try to escape the verdict of the official taxonomy.

But the logic of official naming is most clearly demonstrated in the case of the *title* – whether titles of nobility, educational qualifications or professional titles. This is a symbolic capital that is socially and even legally guaranteed. The nobleman is not only someone who is known, famous, and even renowned for his good qualities, prestigious, in a word, *nobilis*: he is also someone who is recognized by an *official* authority, one that is 'universal', i.e. known and recognized by all. The professional or academic title is a sort of legal rule of social perception, a being/perceived that is guaranteed as a right. It is symbolic capital in an institutionalized, legal (and no longer merely legitimate) form. More and more inseparable from the educational qualification, by virtue of the fact that the educational system tends more and more to represent the ultimate and unique guarantor of all professional titles, it has a value in itself and, although we are dealing with a common noun, it functions like a great name (the name of some great family or a proper name), one which procures all sorts of symbolic profit (and goods that one cannot directly acquire with money). It is the

symbolic scarcity of the title in the space of the names of professions that tends to govern the rewards of the profession (and not the relation between the supply of and demand for a certain form of labour). It follows that the rewards associated with the title tend to become autonomous with regard to the rewards associated with the work. In this way, the same work can receive different remunerations depending on the titles and qualifications of the person doing it (e.g. a permanent, official post-holder as opposed to a part-timer or someone acting in that capacity, etc.). The qualification is in itself an *institution* (like language) that is more durable than the intrinsic characteristics of the work, and so the rewards associated with the qualification can be maintained despite changes in the work and its relative value: it is not the relative value of the work which determines the value of the name, but the institutionalized value of the title which acts as an instrument serving to defend and maintain the value of the work.

This means that one cannot establish a science of classifications without establishing a science of the struggle over classifications and without taking into account the position occupied, in this struggle for the power of knowledge, for power through knowledge, for the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence, by each of the agents or groups of agents involved in it, whether they be ordinary individuals, exposed to the vicissitudes of everyday symbolic struggle, or authorized (and full-time) professionals, which includes all those who speak or write about social classes, and who can be distinguished by the extent to which their classifications involve the authority of the state, as holder of the monopoly of *official naming*, of the right classification, of the right order.

While the structure of the social field is defined at each moment by the structure of the distribution of capital and the profits characteristic of the different particular fields, the fact remains that in each of these arenas, the very definition of the stakes and the trump cards can be called into question. Every field is the site of a more or less openly declared struggle for the definition of the legitimate principles of division of the field. The question of legitimacy arises from the very possibility of this questioning, from this break with the doxa which takes the ordinary order for granted. That being said, the symbolic force of the parties involved in this struggle is never completely independent of their positions in the game, even if the specifically symbolic power of naming constitutes a force which is relatively independent of the other forms of social power. The constraints of the necessity inscribed in the very structure of the different fields still weigh on the symbolic struggles which aim to preserve or transform that structure. The social world is, to a great extent, something which agents make at every moment; but they have no chance of unmaking and remaking it except on the basis of a realistic knowledge of what it is and of what they can do to it by virtue of the position they occupy in it.

In short, scientific work aims to establish an adequate knowledge both of the space of objective relations between the different positions which constitute the field and of the necessary relations that are set up, through the mediation of the habitus of

those who occupy them, between these positions and the corresponding stances, i.e. between the points occupied in that space and the points of view on that very space, which play a part in the reality and development of that space. In other words, the objective delimitation of constructed classes, of *regions* of the constructed space of positions, enables one to understand the source and effectiveness of the classificatory strategies by means of which agents seek to preserve or modify this space, in the forefront of which we must place the constitution of groups organized with a view to defending the interests of their members.

Analysis of the struggle over classifications brings to light the political ambition which haunts the gnoseological ambition to produce the correct classification: an ambition which properly defines the *rex*; the one who has the task, according to Benveniste, of *regere fines* and *regere sacra*, of tracing in speech the frontiers between groups, and also between the sacred and the profane, good and evil, the vulgar and the distinguished. If social science is not to be merely a way of pursuing politics by other means, social scientists must take as their object the intention of assigning others to classes and of thereby telling them what they are and what they have to be (herein lies all the ambiguity of forecasting); they must analyse, in order to repudiate it, the ambition of the creative world vision, that sort of *intuitus originarius* which would make things exist in conformity with its vision (herein lies all the ambiguity of the Marxist conception of class, which is inseparably both a being and an ought-to-be). They must objectify the ambition of objectifying, of classifying from outside, objectively, agents who are struggling to classify others and themselves. **If** they do happen to classify – by carving up, for the purposes of statistical analysis, the continuous space of social positions – it is precisely so as to be able to objectify *all* forms of objectification, from the individual insult to the official naming, without forgetting the claim, characteristic of science in its positivist and bureaucratic definition, to arbitrate in these struggles in the name of ‘axiological neutrality’. The symbolic power of agents, understood as a power of making people see – *theorein* – and believe, of producing and imposing the legitimate or legal classification, depends, as the case of *rex* reminds us, on the position they occupy in the space (and in the classifications that are potentially inscribed in it). But objectify objectification means, above all, objectifying the field of production of the objectified representations of the social world, and in particular of the legislative taxonomies, in short, the field of cultural or ideological production, a game in which the social scientist is himself involved, as are all those who debate the nature of social classes.

THE POLITICAL FIELD AND THE EFFECT OF HOMOLOGIES

We must examine this field of symbolic struggles, in which the professionals of representation – in every sense of the term – confront one another in their debate over another field of symbolic struggles, if we are to understand, without succumbing to the mythology of the ‘awakening of consciousness’, the shift from the practical

sense of the position occupied, *which is itself capable of being made explicit in different ways*, to properly political demonstrations. Those who occupy dominated positions in the social space are also situated in dominated positions in the field of symbolic production, and it is not clear whence they could obtain the instruments of symbolic production that are necessary in order for them to express their own point of view on the social space, were it not that the specific logic of the field of cultural production, and the specific interests that are generated within it, have the effect of inclining a fraction of the professionals engaged in this field to supply to the dominated, on the basis of a homology of position, the instruments that will enable them to break away from the representations generated in the immediate complicity of social structures and mental structures and which tend to ensure the continued reproduction of the distribution of symbolic capital. The phenomenon designated by the Marxist tradition as that of ‘consciousness from outside’, that is, the contribution made by certain intellectuals to the production and diffusion, especially among the dominated, of a vision of the social world that breaks with the dominant vision, cannot be understood sociologically without taking account of the homology between the dominated position of the producers of cultural goods within the field of power (or in the division of the labour of domination) and the position within the social space of the agents who are most completely dispossessed of the economic and cultural means of production. But the construction of the model of the social space which supports this analysis presupposes a definite break with the one-dimensional and one-directional representation of the social world underlying the dualist vision in which the universe of the oppositions constituting the social structure is reduced to the opposition between those who own the means of production and those who sell their labour-power.

The failings of the Marxist theory of class, above all its inability to explain the set of objectively observed differences, result from the fact that, by reducing the social world to the economic field alone, it / is condemned to define social position with reference solely to the position within the relations of economic production. It thus ignores the positions occupied in the different fields and sub-fields, particularly in the relations of cultural production, as well as all those oppositions which structure the social field and which are not reducible to the opposition between the owners and non-owners of the means of economic production. Marxism imagines the social world as one-dimensional, as simply organized around the opposition between two blocs (one of the main questions thus becomes that of the *boundary* between these two blocs, with all the ensuing questions – which are endlessly debated – about the ‘labour aristocracy’, the ‘embourgeoisement’ of the working-class, etc.). In reality, the social space is a multi-dimensional space, an open set of relatively autonomous fields, fields which are more or less strongly and directly subordinate, in their functioning and their transformations, to the field of economic production. Within each of the sub-spaces, those who occupy dominant positions and those who occupy dominated

positions are constantly involved in struggles of different kinds (without necessarily constituting themselves thereby as antagonistic groups).

But the most important fact, from the point of view of the problem of breaking out of the circle of symbolic reproduction, is that, on the basis of homologies between positions within different fields (and because, too, there is an invariant or even universal element in the relation between the dominant and the dominated), *alliances* can be set up which are more or less durable and which are always based on a more or less conscious misunderstanding. The homology of position between intellectuals and industrial workers – the former occupying within the field of power, that is, *vis-à-vis* the captains of industry and commerce, positions which are homologous to those occupied by industrial workers in the social space as a whole – is the source of an ambiguous alliance, in which cultural producers, the dominated among the dominant, supply to the dominated, by a sort of embezzlement of accumulated cultural capital, the means of constituting objectively their vision of the world and the representation of their interests in an explicit theory and in institutionalized instruments of representation – trade-union organizations, political parties, social technologies of mobilization and demonstration, etc.

But one must be careful not to treat homology of position, a resemblance within difference, as an identity of condition (as happened, for instance, in the ideology of the ‘three Ps’, *patron, père, professeur* – ‘boss’, ‘father’, ‘teacher’ – developed by the ultra-left movement in France in the late 1960s). Doubtless, the same structure – understood as an invariant core of the forms of different distributions – recurs in different fields, and this explains why analogical thinking is so fertile in sociology. But the fact remains that the principle of differentiation is different each time, as are the stakes and the nature of the interest, and thus the *economy* of practices. It is after all important to establish a proper hierarchization of the principles of hierarchization, i.e. of the kinds of capital. Knowledge of the hierarchy of the principles of division enables us to define the limits within which the subordinate principles operate, and thus to define the limits of those similarities linked to homology. The relations of the other fields to the field of economic production are both relations of structural homology and relations of causal dependence, the form of causal determinations being defined by structural relations and the force of domination being greater when the relations in which it is exercised are closer to the relations of economic production.

We would have to analyse the specific interests which representatives owe to their position in the political field and in the sub-field of the party or the trade union, and show all the ‘theoretical’ effects that they produce. Numerous academic studies of ‘social classes’ – I have in mind, for instance, the problem of the ‘labour aristocracy’ or of the ‘managerial class’ (*cadres*) – merely elaborate the practical questions which are forced on those who hold political power. Political leaders are continually faced with the (often contradictory) practical imperatives which arise from the logic of the struggle within the political field, such as the need to prove their representativeness or the need to mobilize the greatest possible number of votes while at the same time asserting the irreducibility of their project to those of other leaders. Thus they are

condemned to raise the problem of the social world in the typically substantialist logic of the boundaries between groups and the size of the mobilizable group; and they can try to solve the problem which forces itself on every group anxious to know and demonstrate its own strength – and thus its existence – and let other people know it too, by resorting to elastic concepts such as ‘working class’, ‘the people’ or ‘the workers’. Moreover, as a result of the specific interests associated with the position they occupy in the competition to impose their particular visions of the social world, theoreticians and professional spokespersons, in other words, all ‘party officials’, are inclined to produce differentiated and distinctive products which, because of the homology between the field of professionals and the field of consumers of opinion, are as if they were automatically adjusted to suit the different forms of demand. Demand is defined, in this case more than ever, as a demand for difference, for opposition, which these professionals themselves help to produce by enabling it to find expression. It is the structure of the political field, that is, the objective relation to the occupants of other positions, and the relation to the competing stances they offer which, just as much as any direct relation to those they represent, determines the stances they take, i.e. the supply of political products. By virtue of the fact that the interests directly involved in the struggle for the monopoly of the legitimate expression of the truth of the social world tend to be the specific equivalent of the interests of those who occupy homologous positions in the social field, political discourses are affected by a sort of structural duplicity: while they are in appearance directly aimed at the voters, they are in reality aimed at competitors within the field.

The political stances taken at any given moment (electoral results, for example) are thus the product of an encounter between a political supply of objectified political opinions (programmes, party platforms, declarations, etc.) linked to the entire previous history of the field of production, and a political demand, itself linked to the history of the relations between supply and demand. The correlation that can be observed at any given moment between stances on this or that political issue and positions in the social space can be understood completely only if one observes that the classifications which voters implement in order to make their choice (left/right, for instance) are the product of all previous struggles, and that the same is true of the classifications which the analyst implements in order to classify, not only opinions, but the agents who express them. The entire history of the social field is present, in each moment, both in a materialized form – in institutions such as the administrative organization of political parties or trade unions – and in an incorporated form – in the dispositions of agents who run these institutions or fight against them (with the effects of hysteresis linked to questions of loyalty). All forms of recognized collective identity – the ‘working class’ or the CGT trade union, ‘independent craftsmen’, ‘managers’, ‘university graduates’, etc. – are the product of a long and slow collective development. Without being completely artificial (if it were, the attempted establishment of these forms would not have succeeded), each of these representative bodies, which give existence to represented bodies endowed with a known and

recognized social identity, exists through an entire set of institutions which are just so many historical inventions, a ‘logo’, *sigillum authenticum* as canon lawyers said, a seal or stamp, an office and a secretariat endowed with a monopoly over the corporate signature and the *plena potentia agendi et loquendi*, etc. As a product of the struggles which occurred within and outside the political field, especially concerning power over the state, this representation owes its specific characteristics to the particular history of a particular political field and state (which explains, *inter alia*, the differences between the representations of social divisions, and thus of groups represented, from one country to another). So as to avoid being misled by the effects of the labour of *naturalization* which every group tends to produce in order to legitimize itself and fully justify its existence, one must thus in each case reconstruct the *historical labour* which has produced social divisions and the social vision of these divisions. Social position, adequately defined, is what gives the best prediction of practices and representations; but, to avoid conferring on what was once called one’s *statu*, that is, on social identity (these days more and more completely identified with one’s professional identity) the place that ‘being’ had in ancient metaphysics, namely, the function of an essence from which would spring all aspects of historical existence – as is expressed by the formula *operatio sequitur esse* – it must be clearly remembered that this *status*, like the *habitus* generated within it, are products of history, subject to being transformed, with more or less difficulty, by history.

CLASS AS WILL AND REPRESENTATION

But in order to establish how it is that the power of constituting and instituting held by the authorized spokesperson – party or union boss, for instance – is itself constituted and instituted, it is not enough to explain the specific interests of the theorists or spokespersons and the structural affinities which link them to those whom they represent. One must also analyse the logic of the process of institution, ordinarily perceived and described as a process of delegation, in which the representative receives from the group the power of creating the group. If we transpose their analyses, we can here follow the historians of law (Kantorowicz, Post, etc.) when they describe the mystery of ministry – a play on words dear to canon lawyers, who link *mysterium* with *ministerium*. The mystery of the process of transubstantiation, whereby the spokesperson becomes the group he expresses, can only be explained by a historical analysis of the genesis and functioning of *representation*, through which the representative creates the group which creates him. The spokesperson endowed with full power to speak and act in the name of the group, and first and foremost to act on the group through the magic of the slogan, is the substitute of the group which exists only through this proxy; as the personification of a fictitious person, of a social fiction, he raises those whom he represents out of their existence as separate individuals, enabling them to act and

speaking through him as a single person. In return, he receives the right to take himself for the group, to speak and act as if he were the group incarnate in a single person: 'Status est magistratus', 'l'État, c'est moi', 'the union thinks that. . .', etc.

The mystery of ministry is one of those cases of social magic in which a thing or a person becomes something other than what it/he is, a person (minister, bishop, delegate, member of parliament, general secretary, etc.) able to identify and be identified with a set of people (the People, the Workers) or with a social entity (the Nation, the State, the Church, the Party). The mystery of ministry is at its peak when the group can exist only by delegating power to a spokesperson who will bring it into existence by speaking for it, that is, on its behalf and in its place. The circle is then complete: the group is created by the person who speaks in its name, thus appearing as the source of the power that he exerts over those who are its real source. This circular relation is at the root of the charismatic illusion which means that, ultimately, the spokesperson may appear, to others as well as to himself, as *causa sui*. Political alienation from the fact that isolated agents – and this is all the more true the more they are symbolically impoverished – cannot constitute themselves as a group, as a force capable of making itself heard in the political field, unless they dispossess themselves and hand over their power to a political apparatus: they must always risk political dispossession in order to escape from political dispossession. Fetishism, according to Marx, is what happens when 'the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own'; political fetishism lies precisely in the fact that the value of the hypostatized individual, that product of the human brain, appears as charisma, a mysterious objective property of the person, an elusive charm, an unnameable mystery. The minister – minister of religion or minister of state – is in a metonymic relation with the group; as part of the group, he functions as a sign replacing the group as a whole. It is the minister who, as an entirely real substitute for an entirely symbolic being, encourages one to make a 'category mistake', as Ryle would put it, rather similar to the one made by a child who, after having watched a procession of the soldiers composing the regiment, asks where the regiment is. By his mere visible existence, the minister constitutes the pure serial diversity of separate individuals into a moral person, transforms the *collectio personarum plurium* into a *corporatio*, a constituted body, and he may even, through mobilization and demonstration, make it appear as a social agent.

Politics is the site *par excellence* of symbolic effectiveness, an activity which works through signs capable of producing social entities and, above all, groups. By virtue of the oldest of the metaphysical effects linked to the existence of a certain symbolism – that which enables one to consider as existing everything which can be *signified* (God or non-being) – political representation produces and reproduces, at every moment, a derivative form of the argument of the bald King of France so dear to logicians: any predicative statement with 'the working class' as its subject conceals an existential statement (*there is a working class*). More generally, all statements which have as their subject a collective – People, Class, University, School, State, etc. – presuppose that

the question of the existence of this group has been solved and conceal that sort of 'metaphysical fallacy' which has been criticized in the ontological argument. The spokesperson is the person who, speaking about a group, speaking on behalf of a group, surreptitiously posits the existence of the group in question, institutes the group, through that magical operation which is inherent in any act of naming. That is why we must proceed to a critique of political reason – a reason which is inclined to commit abuses of language which are abuses of power – if we want to raise the question with which all sociology ought to begin, that of the existence and mode of existence of collectives.

A class exists in so far as – and only in so far as – representatives with the *plena potentia agendi* may be and feel authorized to speak in its *name* – in accordance with the equation, 'the Party is the working class', or 'the working class is the Party', an equation which reproduces that of canon lawyers, 'the Church is the Pope (or the Bishops), the Pope (or the Bishops) is (or are) the Church'. In this way, a class can be given existence as a real force in the political field. The mode of existence of what is these days called, in a great number of societies (with variations, of course), the 'working class', is completely paradoxical; what we have is a sort of *existence in thought*, an existence in the minds of many of those who are designated by the different taxonomies as workers, but also in the minds of those who occupy the positions furthest removed from the workers in the social space. This almost universally recognized existence is itself based on the existence of a *working class in representation*, that is, on political and trade-union apparatuses and on party officials who have a vital interest in believing that this class exists and in spreading this belief among those who consider themselves part of it as well as those who are excluded from it; who are capable too of *giving voice* to the 'working class', and with a single voice to evoke" it, as one evokes or summons up spirits, of invoking it, as one invokes gods or patron saints; who are capable, indeed, of manifesting it symbolically through *demonstration*, a sort of theatrical deployment of the class-in-representation, with the one side the body of party officials and the entire symbolic system that constitutes its existence – slogans, emblems, symbols – and on the other side the most convinced fraction of the believers who, by their presence, enable their representatives to give a representation of their representativeness. This working class as 'will and representation' (as Schopenhauer's famous title puts it) has nothing in common with the class as action, a real and really mobilized group, imagined by the Marxist tradition; but it is no less real, with that magical reality which (with Durkheim and Mauss) defines institutions as social fictions. This is a true mystical body, created at the cost of an immense historical labour of theoretical and practical invention, starting with that of Marx himself, and endlessly recreated at the cost of innumerable and constantly renewed efforts and acts of commitment which are necessary in order to produce and reproduce belief and the institution designed to ensure the reproduction of belief. The 'working class' exists in and through the body of representatives who give it an audible voice and a visible presence, and in and

through the belief in its existence which this body of plenipotentiaries succeeds in imposing, by its mere existence and its representations, on the basis of affinities which objectively unite the members of the same 'class on paper' as a probable group. The historical success of Marxist theory, the first social theory to claim scientific status that has so completely realized its potential in the social world, thus contributes to ensuring that the theory of the social world which is the least capable of integrating the *theory effect* – that it, more than any other, has created – is doubtless, today, the most powerful obstacle to the progress of the adequate theory of the social world to which it has, in times gone by, more than any other contributed.

In: Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Polity Press, 1992. 220-251