

1 Bourdieu's concepts

Political sociology in international relations

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Until recently, the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu exerted a limited influence in the field of International Relations.¹ Apart from his late work on the “international circulation of ideas,” Bourdieu himself focused mostly on the domestic arena. Yet, as we argue in this chapter, his rich and provocative social theory suggests concrete responses to the epistemological, methodological, and conceptual inquiries that have preoccupied minds across the social sciences, including in IR.

In this chapter, we want to outline six specific contributions that Bourdieu's social theory brings to the study of world politics. Our analysis is not meant to be exhaustive, and does not pretend to verse the reader in the totality of Bourdieu's sociology in a few pages – the complexity of his approach renders such a simplification unthinkable. Our aim, rather, is to revisit and enrich the grand theoretical debates in IR through a Bourdieusian perspective. In widening the sphere of Bourdieu's thought and positing it against that of the principal debates in IR, we walk in the footsteps of a number of “critical” IR authors. The work of Richard Ashley (1984) and Michael Williams (2007, see also this volume), to cite two examples, uses Bourdieu's notion of *symbolic power* as a tool to interrogate the fundamental elements of neorealist theory. In a similar vein, Didier Bigo and the “Paris School” combine Bourdieu's *field* with Foucauldian discourse to demonstrate the practice of danger and threat production by (in)security professionals (Bigo 1996, 2005, see also this volume; Huysmans 2002). A handful of other authors, several of whom are contributors to this volume, also attempt to demonstrate the rapport between Bourdieu's sociology and world politics.

Our objective in this chapter is to push these reflections further by concentrating on two principal points of engagement. First, as rich as these contributions are, existing efforts to wed Bourdieu and IR tend to employ only one aspect of his social theory without interrogating the way in which the whole could possibly complement a number of diverse perspectives in IR. In contrast, we take as broad a view as possible when considering the intellectual challenges of the discipline through the lens developed by Bourdieu. Our objective is not to propose ready-made solutions or provide definitive answers but rather to cast a new light on the complex theoretical debates that circulate throughout world politics. Second, the authors who refer to Bourdieu in IR often belong to so-called critical schools. While there is no denying that Bourdieu saw himself as a critical, even at times a

polemical scholar who put forward a reflexive approach to uncover modes of domination, the conceptual and methodological tools that he used were actually quite conventional for a sociologist. Bourdieu's obsession with empirical work, and resolute opposition to armchair theorizing, justifies in our view putting him in conversation with "mainstream" approaches, with which he shared a number of common research questions, namely the sources of cohesion, conflict, power, and domination. For him, there is no contradiction between juggling with data, on the one hand, and criticizing society, on the other.

From a social scientific point of view, Bourdieu is a classical scholar, not a radical one. As a case in point, it is far from evident which of the founders of the sociological discipline – Durkheim, Marx, or Weber – has exerted the most influence on Bourdieu's thought; indeed, his synthetic approach can be said to be equally inspired by the work of each author. For him, "to enable science to progress, one has to establish communication between opposing theories, which have often been constituted against each other" (Bourdieu 1993: 12). At the risk of simplifying, the legacy is as follows. From Marx, Bourdieu inherits a vision of a world made through domination, relations of force and conflicts over basic human needs. From Durkheim, Bourdieu retains above all a sociology of symbolic forms as well as an adherence to methodological holism. Finally, the debt to Weber is pervasive in Bourdieu's work, most notably in his economies of social phenomena (for example, the religious field) as well as the cognitive dimension of structuring principles such as power, hierarchical organization, and legitimacy (see Brubaker 1985).

This desire not to espouse any theoretical current, along with the refusal of fashionable academic alliances, put Bourdieu in the crossfire of a number of critics. Bourdieu is a strange animal in IR because his work is premised on an a priori rejection of all the "debates" that dominate the discipline. But that is probably also what explains his appeal. Not thinking in terms of IR categories, Bourdieu (1990c: 123) described his approach as a kind of "structuralist constructivism." Indeed, there exists within his work a marked interest in sense-making systems (culture, symbols, ideology, education, taste) which calls to mind the importance accorded to intersubjectivity by constructivism. At the same time, for Bourdieu (as well as for Marx), social conditions determine, at least in part, both individual and collective forms of thinking.

If we must try situating Bourdieu in the context of IR theories, we can probably begin with those theories that are farthest from his own. To be sure, Bourdieu is far from (neo)liberal theories (Moravcsik 1997; Keohane 1984). Not only did he vehemently refuse the political philosophy underlying methodological individualism (Bourdieu 1998b), he just as forcefully rejected the consequentialism inherent in rational choice theory. This second objection would also move Bourdieu away from neorealists such as Waltz (1979) who viewed microeconomic models as an anthropological foundation. Be that as it may, because of their focus on relations of power as well as in dialectics, the writings of several classical realists (notably those such as E.H Carr (1958) which betray a distinct penchant for Marxism) contain a number of elements that intersect with Bourdieu's thought. More recently, by virtue of his double interest in social structures and their intersubjective

composition, Alexander Wendt's constructivism could be close to Bourdieu; however Wendt does not share the same preoccupation with relations of power and structures of domination, a lacuna meant to be compensated by "realist constructivism" (Jackson *et al.* 2004) and neo-Gramscian analyses. While accepting that anarchy in international politics is a social construction, realist constructivists maintain the impossibility of transcending power in world politics. Similarly, for Bourdieu relations of power only make sense as part of the struggle to make sense of the world. This analytical premise would do well to be developed within the walls of IR: "Because the truth of the social world is the object of struggles in the social world and in the sociological world which is committed to producing the truth of the social world," Bourdieu (2004: 115) writes, "the struggle for the truth of the social world is necessarily endless."

Bourdieu's social theory and the foundations of IR

The first section deals with the three metatheoretical contributions that Bourdieu's sociology offers to International Relations, which correspond to three of the fundamental debates around which the core of IR has been centred for the past two decades. First, his reflexive epistemology hints at a *via media* between the poles of neopositivism and antifoundationalism. Second, the relational ontology that he develops offers a conceptual solution to the structure-agent problem. Third, developing a theory based on practice allows us to move past the reified antinomy between *homo sociologicus* and *homo economicus*. In short, the world according to Bourdieu is one where our familiar metaphysical dualisms dissolve.

A reflexive epistemology

Towards the end of the 1980s the rise of postpositivist approaches such as post-modernism and constructivism initiated the third "Great Debate" concerning the epistemological bases of IR (Lapid 1989). By opposing the dominant theories of neorealism and neoliberalism, a growing number of authors denounced the prevailing positivist contention that world politics could be studied employing methods similar to those in the natural sciences, and that they purported to discover universal truths as a result. Thus the essence of the postpositivist critique was predicated on interrogating academic knowledge in the absence of any transcendental foundation upon which this knowledge could rest. This critique was also an effective means of unearthing the sociopolitical dynamics underlying scientific activity, as well as the performative nature of language; words were given their proper force, capable of both describing and defining the world we inhabit. Put differently, the social world necessitated an interpretive outlook that searched for meaning rather than trying to affirm natural laws.

More than twenty years after its birth however, it is quite clear that the Third Debate has failed to engender a new methodological consensus at the core of the discipline. Looking at certain specialized (and rather narrow) scientific journals that have emerged during this period, we might even say that the two camps have

become even more set in their respective ways, stuck in their respective corners. It is precisely within this dialogue of the deaf that the reflexive epistemology offered by Bourdieu resonates, and may open up a crucial line of communication. For if it is true that Bourdieu protested the positivist notion that the task of academic discourse is to give words to that which exists "in fact," it is equally the case that many of his critiques were directed at the narrowly defined postmodernist movement, which at times categorically rejects the aspirations of science. Epistemological reflexivity might well be the "third way" that allows us to think beyond the metaphysical quandaries that have structured the discourse of IR for the past two decades (Neufeld 1993) without necessarily resolving these dilemmas.

Bourdieu's epistemology is largely inspired by the work of Gaston Bachelard, a French philosopher and advocate of the polemical action of scientific reason (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron 1991). The basic principle consists of turning reason against itself, or to subject every scientific analysis to its own scientific analysis. Epistemological reflexivity therefore involves "[providing] cognitive tools that can be turned back on the subject of the cognition" (Bourdieu 2004: 4). The trick is to "objectivate objectification": the construction of the object of study by the analyst is the moment of an epistemological break against commonly held knowledge that must in turn be taken as its own object of study. Reflexivity thus does not constitute a field of inquiry reserved for a few marginal philosophical strands; it is at the very foundation of the sociological enterprise as it provides a basis which is epistemological rather than ontological. Taking into account also the inextricable link between the field of knowledge and that of power delineated by Michel Foucault (1997) with his notion of *power/knowledge*, Bourdieu insists on substituting the radical doubt of this stance with a sort of hyper-positivism, applied to the researcher him- or herself in an endless loop of "self-objectivation." The cornerstone of Bourdieu's critical sociology is thus to transform reflexivity into a reflex (Bourdieu 2004: 89).

This "science of science" is meant to allow us to identify the conditions under which academic discourse is produced while maintaining "epistemological vigilance." This vigilance manifests itself on three levels which correspond respectively to what Bourdieu calls the three forms of scholastic fallacy (Bourdieu 2000a). First, epistemological vigilance must be exercised against the presuppositions associated with the occupation of a position held within a given social space as well as the particular trajectory that led to it. Second, the researcher must throw back into question the *doxa* of the university field, which is to say the set of rules that are taken for granted and which constitute "the order of things" within academia (for example, the postulated validity of certain methodologies). Third, and the most dangerous fallacy, the "intellectualist" bias encourages the researcher to observe social life as a spectacle rather than as a series of concrete situations that require being navigated as such. The "epistemocentrism" inherent in every form of theorizing projects in practice a scholastic viewpoint that belongs to a different social logic.²

Bourdieu's reflexive epistemology is foremost aimed at historicizing scientific reason. Rather than viewing science as a collection of transcendent truths as with

the positivist position, it forces the researcher to recognize that rational scientific criteria are themselves a product of an intellectual history, rather than a primordial essence. Against the postmodern vision that, at its extreme, leads to a reduction of the social world to texts, reflexive epistemology reminds the researcher of the importance of understanding practices *as* practices: after all, practices are only logical to the extent that to be logical remains practical. Rejecting at the same time absolutist positivism and relativist postmodernism, Bourdieu straddles between modernist and postpositivist epistemologies (Bourdieu 2004: 106). On one hand, the “polemical action of scientific reason” brings the scientist closer to true knowledge, or an “approximated” or “rectified” knowledge (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron 1991: 8). Although perhaps a bit utopian, Bourdieu believed profoundly in the ability of reason to reason itself, and to explain the progressive and even cumulative nature of science. On the other hand, assuming an analytical posture based on the idea that “the most neutral science exerts effects which are anything but neutral,” Bourdieu (1991: 134) historicizes (and thus relativizes) the very notion of truth.³ In so doing, he proposes a social science founded not on reason *as such* but rather on reasoning (Guzzini 2000: 152). By encouraging social sciences to intake themselves the object of research, reflexive epistemology becomes a virtual Archimedes point upon which science rests.⁴

In order to turn the weapons of sociology against itself, Bourdieu applies to his own work the same conceptual and analytical devices that he forged over a number of decades. However, he decries the “narcissism” of autobiographical approaches to reflexivity. Rather, he insists that socioanalysis must focus on the social conditions of the production of knowledge, and therefore on the objective position of the researcher in the academic field, but also, and perhaps more importantly, on the position of the academic field *vis-à-vis* others (Eagleton-Pierce 2011). As Trine Villumsen Berling shows in her chapter, the academic environment is constituted as a social field endowed with a structure wherein the struggle over the positions that actors occupy, and the dispositions that allow them to evolve as actors, are played out. It is through this depiction that we turn to the second contribution of Bourdieu’s work to IR: a relational ontology.

A relational ontology

Constructivism has found an audience in IR by highlighting a problem that has plagued the social sciences for several decades: the structure vs. agency dilemma. As Wendt aptly noted (1987: 337–8), this fundamental debate originates in “two truisms about social life”:

- 1) human beings and their organizations are purposeful actors whose actions help reproduce or transform the society in which they live; and 2) society is made up of social relationships, which structure the interactions between their purposeful actors. Taken together these truisms suggest that human agents and social structures are, in one way or another, theoretically interdependent or mutually implicating entities.

The manner in which constructivists have attempted to address this thorny problem has been largely inspired by the introduction of Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration into IR analyses, making the mutual constitution of agent and structure an ontological postulate widely recognized among scholars today.

It is worthwhile to note that a number of years before the publication of Giddens's seminal work, *The Constitution of Society* (1984), Bourdieu had already begun to craft his own approach to the problem of structure and agency. In fact, one of the first theoretical plots that he began to weave (1977) was based on his conviction that "of all of the oppositions that artificially divide social science, the most fundamental, and the most ruinous, is the one that is set up between subjectivism and objectivism" (Bourdieu 1990a: 25). Subjectivism, embodied by the phenomenological tradition of both Sartre and Schutz (and lent by Bourdieu to some "cognitive" constructivists), is trapped by the idea of common sense, which makes it impossible to historicize sense making systems and thus place them within a social structure of domination. Objectivism, on the other hand, tends towards the reification of scientific models by depicting these structures and other abstract concepts as the "real" engine of social practice (a return to "scholastic fallacy"). Indeed both Saussure and Lévi-Strauss, to cite two notable examples, depict language and kinship as *logos* instead of as *praxis*. In IR, the few studies that take a psychological interest in perceptions suffer from an excess of subjectivity (for example, Jervis 1976), while the vast majority that are published, whether from the point of view of rational choice or neorealism, commit the scholastic error typical of the objectivist stance, that is, "to slip from the model of reality to the reality of the model" (Bourdieu 1977: 29) (for example, Waltz 1979).

The ontological synthesis in Bourdieu's work employs a particularly rich theoretical device, with the notions of *habitus* and *field* constituting the pillars upon which this theoretical platform rests. Habitus is a "system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (Bourdieu 1977: 82–3). Through the habitus, the individual incorporates her history, both personal and collective, into a set of guiding principles and dispositions which dictate effective practices. Intersubjective by its very nature, the habitus is the point of dynamic intersection between structure and action, society and individual. This is the point where Bourdieu is at his most conceptually innovative, developing one of the fundamental analytical tools of a *relational* ontology. Because it is conceived of as a "socialized subjectivity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 126), the habitus conveys this mutually constitutive dialectic that unites agents and structures.

However, contrary to the automatism of rational choice theory or the "over-socialized" individual in Parsonian sociology, Bourdieu's habitus does not produce predetermined compartments. Dispositions *incline* the actor towards one or another practice, which will only be effected in a dialectic with the *position* that the individual occupies in the *field*. As Frédéric Mérand and Amélie Forget show in their chapter, agents develop strategies to maintain their position that are neither intentional nor fully determined because they simply come from having a sense of the game, which in turn is generated by one's habitus. Most of the time, these

strategies are competently aligned with the structure of the field even if the agent may not realize it.

Simply put, the field is a social space structured along three principal dimensions: power relations, objects of struggle, and the rules taken for granted within the field (Bourdieu 1993: 72–7). First, each field is composed of unequal positions which become woven together to create a hierarchy of domination. It is the control of a variety of historically constructed and determined forms of capital (such as economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) that determine this power structure. Again, the relational aspect of Bourdieu’s sociology manifests itself: the concept of the field opens the door to a positional or “topographical” analysis, as Niilo Kauppi puts it (2003; see also this volume). Second, fields are defined by the stakes of the game in play, which are specific to each field: every field is relatively autonomous from the others precisely because it is the site of a specific struggle. To be sure, actors who refine their game within the field and engage in its battle will at least agree on one point: be it prestige, material gain, or the need to make a name for oneself. For example, actors who are part of the political field are for the most part in agreement on the monopoly of legitimate instruments for the manipulation of the social world. This attachment to the principles of the field forms the basis for the third aspect of fields: the knowledge that is taken for granted, or *doxa*. *Doxa* encompasses the set of ideas, norms, and other types of knowledge that are generally accepted as axiomatic within a given social situation. In so doing, *doxa* reinforces orthodoxy and thus benefits those who are dominant – we will return to this point in the second part of our chapter.

In Bourdieu’s relational ontology, practices or social actions are the result of an encounter between habitus and field, or between dispositions and positions. The logic of practice is thus situated at the midpoint of structure and agency, resolving the tension brought to light by Wendt in IR. Bourdieu’s critics will say that it is impossible to resolve this ontological dilemma with the help of a few simple concepts. This argument, anchored in a realist philosophy of science, is hardly convincing: the idea of prioritizing ontology over epistemology, though defended by constructivists a decade ago (Wendt, Dessler, Adler), has now given way to a vision much more in line with that of Berger and Luckmann, who saw epistemology and ontology as two sides of the same coin (Pouliot 2007). Put otherwise, the social construction of logic, including scientific knowledge, obeys the same logic as the construction of social reality (Guzzini 2000). By espousing this position from the outset, Bourdieu’s sociology (1991) takes the “linguistic turn” seriously and underlines the ontological continuity between words and the things that they are meant to signify.⁵

A theory of practice

How can we explain the actions of social agents? For some, the simple answer is that *homo economicus* is a self-contained individual decision maker, whose actions adhere to instrumental rationality; for others, *homo sociologicus* is a member of a community that defines itself by shared practices. March and Olsen (1998)

famously applied this distinction when they developed the idea of a “logic of consequences” opposed to a “logic of appropriateness.” According to this distinction, *homo economicus* acts with the expectation of consequences for these actions, knowing as well that others will act according to the same expected consequences. *Homo sociologicus*, on the other hand, acts in accordance to the rules, identities, and norms that are defined by the group of which he is a part. Though swerving towards a depiction of ideal types, these two logics have nonetheless been at the source of a number of very important theoretical debates (see Risse 2000; Pouliot 2008; Hopf 2010). In IR, this opposition corresponds largely to that between rationalist and constructivist paradigms.

In keeping with his sense of synthesis, Bourdieu never adhered to one model of social action over the other. For him, both *homo economicus* and *homo sociologicus* are inadequate, or at least incomplete pictures. Indeed, while Bourdieu has been particularly critical of the reductionist or overly economic actor that rational choice theory depicts, he has also been vocal in denouncing the ungainly inconsistencies of a Parsonian sociological tradition so heavily dependent on norms and values. Instead, Bourdieu (1990a: 50) is interested in the “economy of practices” wherein the “origin [of practices] lies neither in the decisions of reason understood as rational calculation nor in the determinations of mechanisms external to and superior to the agents.” Again, to reduce the logic of practice to either instrumental rationality or structural determinism is to fall into the scholastic error; indeed, to reify the abstract concepts of the researcher is to fail to grasp the genuine logic of practice. After all, as Bourdieu insisted again and again, social action can be reasonable without being reasoned.

In Bourdieu's thought, the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness obey the same logic of practice: put differently, neither instrumental rationality nor adherence to social norms is innate to the agent's character. Instead, actors act based on the dispositions that have been crafted over time (*habitus*) which, at the point of intersect with their socially defined positions (in the field), are actualized in the form of practices. Instrumental rationality would thus be but one particular instance of a “general theory of the economics of practice” (Bourdieu 1977: 177). For some, Bourdieu offers a constructivist analysis that also succeeds in subsuming rational choice theory within it (Leander 2001). For each field, the *habitus* produces a “self-evident” or “natural” logic of social action. But that self-evidence can shift when one moves from one field to another. For example, in his study of the European Parliament, Kauppi (2003) highlights the impact of the European political field on the political practices of parliamentarians in the form of social and cultural integration, as “spending time in Brussels changes the political *habitus* of politicians.” Literally *incorporated* by agents, the schemas of perception and of action are hardly rigid and unchanging; they can adapt to changing structures and moreover, through a process that Bourdieu calls *hysteresis*, may sometimes be out of sync with those structures (see Pouliot 2010). Indeed, the MEP has internalized the trajectory of a career in national politics, and may not see that his or her *habitus* was progressively changed with his or her entrance into a different field.

In sum, Bourdieu's theory of practice differs considerably from most IR theories because it rejects the very notion of distinct modes of action. For Bourdieu, social action is always field-specific. Recently, sociology has undergone a "practice turn" that looks to restore a non-representational dimension to social action (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, and von Savigny 2001; in IR see Adler and Pouliot 2011). Practical knowledge, or what Bourdieu (2000a) calls "bodily knowledge," whose nature is both pre-reflexive and pre-intentional, is incorporated by agents in the form of the dispositions which constitute their habitus. Without any reflection, these dispositions guide practices which are in constant dialectical engagement with the effects of the field. Therefore contrary to appropriateness, rational calculations or arguing, the logic of practice is not thought but simply *implemented* by agents. Bourdieu's theory of practice is thus a way to engage with a theoretical enterprise thus far sorely neglected in IR, namely the systems of sense-making which are inarticulate, and which nonetheless structure world politics (Pouliot 2008).

Bourdieu and IR theory: practical questions

Having outlined the metatheoretical contours of a Bourdieusian sociology, we now look at some of the implications for studying world politics empirically.

Multiple fields in a global space

While the genesis of fields is at the core of his theoretical framework, Bourdieu does not really propose a theory of the conditions under which fields are formed (Lemieux 2011). Usually, a field is identified when a group of agents struggle in a structured way over a specific kind of scarce resource. The origins of this struggle are then traced backwards, with an emphasis on processes of naturalization, of "common sense"-making. Fields can be small or large, more or less important, more or less autonomous. Because the field is indeed a social space, once we have identified the main object of struggle, we need to do its topography: what is the population, where are agents positioned, and what are the boundaries of the field? A field is defined by the relationships that objectively link different positions around a given set of stakes – for example, political economy, science, or literature – be it at the national level (always of paramount interest to Bourdieu) or at the global level (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).⁶

To think in terms of fields, as Bourdieu so often noted (2000a), is to think in terms of relations. If we apply his work to IR, this relational approach allows us to recognize a level of analysis that is quite distinct from the discipline's dominant currents: it is not focused on substances, such as the state and state actors, or essentialized concepts such as politics or globalization, but instead on the "totality of relations" involving the positions that are uncovered, structured, and conceptualized in the field. Within these ontological relations (which we outlined above), there are no privileged actors as such, but rather relations of dependence, contestation or distinction – what Bourdieu calls "practical" solidarities and rivalries – that depend on the positions occupied by agents in the field. These

agents, or groups of actors, are defined precisely by their relative positions within the field.

As elements that constitute fields, the pecking order that positions assume is the object of struggles between agents that populate the field, who feel its effects while simultaneously trying to shape the field to their advantage. These agents are led by their *illusio*, or the emotional and corporeal investment in the social game. Bourdieu preferred the notion of *illusio* to that of interest, which he found connoted by rational choice theory: applying his terms to IR, one could say for example that the notion of “national interest” captures the *illusio* involved in diplomatic practice, but it is not an essential aspect of diplomacy. To be sure, there is a definite struggle over the distribution of resources. Social practices are deployed in the field which, on the aggregate level, form the rules of the game. These rules make sense to the agents, who incorporate the structure of the field and transform them into dispositions (or categories of representation and appreciation, bodily attitudes, and so forth).

We want to make clear that the relational ontology is not just wishful thinking, but has concrete methodological implications (see also Pouliot, this volume). If Bourdieu stresses the importance of structures, it is because they allow us to describe positions within the field, along with the practices associated with these positions. This is a vastly different conception of structures than that which has become the postulate of neorealism’s systemic approach, for example, where the emphasis is on a balance of power (military, economic), and where structures are conceived of as “substances” rather than positions within a relational space. It is also distinct from constructivism’s reduction of structure to culture. For Bourdieu, positions can only be analyzed in relation to each other. The researcher is not the one who determines which resources are most important and generate positions; these resources are sources of power precisely because they are recognized as such *within* the social field. Structures are not balance sheets or systems of meaning, but topographic spaces.

Although distinct from neorealism by virtue of the emphasis placed on the social construction of fields, Bourdieusian sociology is not a cognitive, identity-based, or idealistic variant of constructivism either (Bourdieu 2000a). The concept of the field allows us to escape the frequent anthropomorphization of culture, ideas, and norms which tend to permeate certain strands of constructivism (Mérand 2006). As Leander notes (2001), agents’ ideas (position-taking, in Bourdieu’s terms) are faithful reflections of their positions within the field. Agents are disposed to defend certain ideas or norms, but only insofar as they “fit” with the positions that they hold. In this sense, acts in the field, for Bourdieu, are always “interested” (Bourdieu 1998a). More importantly, the field is a vector of power. It is not just a social space where actors share a set of rules or norms. A field is bisected by conflict, between those who remain orthodox and those who commit heresy, those who are elite and those who position themselves against the elite, and so forth. As Charlotte Epstein shows in her chapter, Bourdieu’s notion of rules (or *nomos*) is traversed with power. As we will explore in the next section, Bourdieu’s theory is predicated on the ubiquity of social *domination*.

Yves Chouala (2002) has argued that Bourdieu's notion of the field is the most promising one to analyze world politics. The number of fields that can exist within a given space is indeed potentially unlimited. Empirically, Bourdieu worked on the university field (1990), the field of consumption (1979), the scholarly field (2005), the bureaucratic field (1989, 1998), and so on; that there could be so many theoretically possible fields raises the question of their boundaries. Bourdieu and Wacquant's answer to this question is that "the limits of the field are situated at the point where the effects of the field cease" (1992: 100). This is perhaps one of the most difficult points of the method that Bourdieu developed. It requires that one discover the *modus operandi* of the field before defining the actors involved in the game and their interest in playing. However, the *modus operandi* necessitates some interpretive work, a task which rests upon a certain number of philosophical postulates. For Bourdieu, who in this regard is indebted to the French anthropological tradition (Durkheim, Mauss, and Lévi-Strauss), a field is generally structured according to a system of binary oppositions: dominant/dominated, orthodox/heterodox, sacred/profane, to name a few examples. But as Lemieux (2011) has argued, this is easier said than done, and it is possible that Bourdieu's notion of field, which he developed in the 1970s, is a particularly modern notion with no universal relevance.

The potentially unlimited number of fields also raises the crucial question of the *relations between* fields. A number of scenarios are possible. As long as the rules are clear, the borders clearly demarcated, and the struggles around the stakes that structure the field are sufficiently understood by actors, we can say that the field is autonomous. A good illustration of this condition in IR is likely that of "epistemic communities": these transnational networks of individual experts who maintain a common body of knowledge are reminiscent of scientific fields which, without being exempt from power struggles, are nonetheless relatively self-sufficient universes of exception (Bourdieu 2000a: 109). Being interested in the international circulation of ideas, Bourdieu (2000a: 98) considered the scientific field to be one of the only sites of a power that could correctly be called "transnational." Because of its somewhat generic quality, the concept of field acts as an analytical anchor to such concepts as epistemic communities even if, as far as we know, few researchers have used the concept in this way (see Dezalay 2007).

Conversely, we find fields that overlap, interpenetrate, mutually determine each other, and within which different logics intersect. It is the case, for example, when logics of economic gain intrude upon the scientific field, where this type of *illusio* is not a priori dominant. Indeed, relations between fields are often complex. In the French context, Bourdieu showed that cultural capital accrued in the scholarly field could be "translated" into economic capital within industrial or consumption fields, and vice versa (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970; Bourdieu 1989). There exists an "exchange rate" between different types of capital, which permits the holder to profit from a social investment in a number of connected fields. This exchange rate depends largely on the hierarchy of fields within the social space. Bourdieu suggests that an incessant struggle is waged between holders of specific types of capital in order to reinforce their positions in the field as well as the strength of

their field vis-à-vis others, in order to increase the value of their investment (where “investment” is a reflection of *illusio*). He calls the site of these struggles the *field of power*, frequently the state (a point to which we will return in the next section). Mérand uses these terms (2008), for example, to analyze the emergence of a European defense policy as a struggle between actors in the bureaucratic and military fields, both at the national and at the regional (European) level.

The main contribution of the notion of field, in our view, is that it allows us to move beyond the level-of-analysis problem (Singer 1961). For Bourdieu, the level of analysis is always the field, whether local, national, international, or functional. The geographical or functional scope of a field cannot be prejudged but is rather contingent on the nature of the struggle. For the most part, Bourdieu and his followers limited their studies to the national level. Very few, with Bourdieu himself never having done so, expressed interest in fields whose effects cross the borders of states.⁷ From an epistemological point of view, as Yves Buchet de Neuilly (2005), Didier Bigo (2005), and others have pointed out, nothing inherently precludes the application of the field to a wide range of phenomena in world politics insofar as we can identify a space of objective, hierarchical, regulated, and structured relations around a set of stakes that stays more or less faithful to a set of borders. In the same way that the ensemble of social fields and their relations constitute a social space for Bourdieu, we might also say that the ensemble of international fields and their relations constitute a global space. A number of authors in IR have studied what Bourdieu would have recognized as fields, even if they didn't use the same terms, notably the financial field (Strange 1996). Similarly, Bourdieu's notion of field, based on social domination, would add a critical edge to the analysis of regimes (Krasner 1983).

Indeed, Bourdieu's sociology also allows us to analyze the totality of social facts (to borrow from Marcel Mauss's expression) that combine both national and international logics. This makes it possible to move past the two-level game theoretical models centered on the head of state, for example (Putnam 1988). The idea of fields also draws a stronger theoretical connection between the “second image,” that of the internal structures of world politics, and the “second image reversed” (Gourevitch 1978). The interconnectedness of different fields, both national and international, brings forth the genesis of new fields: borrowing from Mauss again we can call the global space a “*milieu de milieux*.” It is perhaps no accident that field analysis has been particularly popular in European studies, where it makes it possible to trace the formation and multiplication of social fields across national borders that remain, however, deeply interconnected with – and subject to – established local and national fields (Favell and Guiraudon 2011; Kauppi, this volume).

Despite certain limitations, field theory has real analytical potential within IR. We have already noted the work of Bigo (2005), who analyzes the interpenetration of national and international security fields. In so doing, he effectively illustrates the manner in which the struggles for positions between national security professionals are the driving force behind strategies of internationalization as well as the production of a transversal discourse around the “necessary globalization of

security” against “barbarism.” Additionally, Yves Dezalay and Bryan Garth (2002) show the utility of fields for analyzing “double games” in their fascinating study on the mechanisms of globalization in Latin America. Double games refer to national elites who deploy strategies of internationalization to strengthen their position in the domestic field of power. These two authors demonstrate that the economic and juridical concepts that are produced within the international field of ideas – a field dominated by American institutions – are absorbed and adapted to differently within dominated countries, according to the logic exclusive to their respective fields of power, and more particularly to the historical trajectory of their political elites.

The state and forms of capital

It is crucial to keep in mind that Bourdieu’s thought is at its core a theory of domination. Like the “national” fields, the space of global politics can be conceived of as a field of forces, a “set of objective power relations imposed on all those who enter this field, relations which are not reducible to the intentions of individual agents or even to direct interactions between agents” (Bourdieu 1991: 230).

The fundamental notion underlying this principle is that of *capital*. In Bourdieu’s sense, capital is a resource, specific to a field (such as cultural or political capital) which actors aim to accumulate and benefit from. Capital functions as an investment that pays in and of itself, much like the trump in a card game, but also as a currency. In essence, capital is a kind of “legal tender” that exists to the extent that it is recognized as such by the agents that populate the field. As we have seen, social agents possess an intimate understanding, even a corporeal knowledge, of the rules of the game and, consequently, of their position in the field. This does not mean that they recognize the distribution of resources as legitimate all of the time; to the contrary, they may contest this strongly if they find that it works against their favor. But much like the actors in Erving Goffman’s social theater, agents in the field are constantly trying to avoid losing face. In so doing, they implicitly recognize and incorporate the structure of the field.

In his analysis of power structures, Bourdieu accords a particular importance to the state, holder of a “meta-capital” due to its privileged position in the center of the field of power. Importantly, this privileged position is the result of the historical accumulation of a number of different types of capital (coercive, political, and economic, among others) as well as the state’s ability to organize multiple fields. “Because it concentrates an ensemble of material and symbolic resources,” Bourdieu (1998a: 33) writes, “the state is in a position to regulate the functioning of different fields, whether through financial intervention . . . or through juridical intervention.” This conception of the state, as a field of institutionalized power that articulates relations between other fields, is in marked contrast to the definition most commonly held in IR. Essentially, the state cannot be considered as only an *actor*; it is first and foremost a *space* of positions, the core of which sees different groups of actors struggling to impose their “principles of vision and division.” The state is thus the game’s main stake more than it is an institution. To speak in the

name of the state, to grab hold of its legitimacy on the world stage and to adopt the “mind of state,” is also to occupy a position at the heart of the field of national power in the name of a much more complex reality.

While it may not completely resolve the tension between state-as-actor and state-as-structure, Bourdieu's sociology allows us to open the proverbial “black box” of the state and emphasize its political dimension, which brings us closer to the conception of the autonomous state that we found in the neo-Weberian and neo-Marxist sociology of the 1980s (Evans *et al.* 1985). As such, Bourdieu offers a sophisticated way in which to deconstruct “national preferences” devoid of pluralist assumptions, according to which the action of “heads of state” is simply a reflection of the aggregation of interests (Moravcsik 1997). For Bourdieu, it is crucial to understand the logic of the national field of power and the possible influences that could come from outside. This logic is likely to be characterized by conflicts and symbols that a pluralist perspective, founded solely on economic interests, would fail to capture.

In the same way, we might say that the state constitutes a key point of reference in each field that composes the global landscape. Few within IR would dispute the existence of a hierarchy of states, whereby some have much greater stocks of economic capital, others military capital, and others cultural capital (akin to what we sometimes call “soft power”). As Rebecca Adler-Nissen shows in her chapter, these forms of capital have an exchange rate which allows, for example, a country such as the United States to transform its economic and military supremacy into cultural influence; at the same time it allows the diplomats of a smaller country such as Norway to use their reputation for “good offices” to enhance their political capital in the eyes of the international community. Of course, those many states that are deprived of resources have little choice but to comply with the rules of the game set up by the bigger players. This is hardly a stretch: if we remain faithful to his study of power struggles between social groups and apply it to international studies, Bourdieu puts little faith in the capacity of dominated actors to transform the game to their advantage where these conditions do not change. Barring a profound morphological shock to the “geopolitical” field, for example, it is hard for dominated agents to challenge their domination not only because they lack capital, but also because they tend to rationalize the status quo, that is, to be cognitively complicit in their own domination.

However, and this is one of the advantages of Bourdieu's sociology, the state is not the only – and perhaps not the main – “actor” involved in these struggles for position. More accurately, we might say that a number of non state actors occupy the “international field of power,” acting as a sort of global elite (a “world nobility,” to paraphrase Bourdieu) that dominates different global fields such as those of finance or business, and emerge in such fora as the Davos summit. This elite is reminiscent of Cox's (1986) “*nébuleuse*” or the “transnational class” analyzed by Kees van der Pijl (1998). It remains strong against any counter elites, such as the anti-globalization activists who, in recognizing the existence of this elite and thus in playing the game, reinforce the structure of the field. The doxa that the elite unconsciously imposes seems less restrictive than the Marxist hegemony, but it is

at the same time more difficult to undo, as the dominated are, in a manner of speaking, actively complicit in their domination because their involuntary adherence to a “common sense” is effectively perpetuated by their continued investment in the game. Emancipation, according to Bourdieu, can only come through a profound understanding of the forces that weigh upon the field, the unearthing of their genesis, which may under specific circumstances allow us to move past them.

Habitus and symbolic power

If the field is a site of power relations, it is also one of meaning where, essentially, symbolic systems are viewed as systems of domination. For example, it is the Westphalian culture and its corollary, the concept of territorial sovereignty, which has given state institutions their power in the global field (the “*esprit d’Etat*”). In his writings, Bourdieu (1991) shows a penchant for the performativity of language, and more particularly towards the possibility that it may create a hierarchy which is, generally speaking, favorable to dominant actors. This possibility is what Bourdieu calls “symbolic power.”

Symbolic power is part of struggles to define reality itself. Agents invest their time and energy in the field, facing off against others who battle to impose their own vision of the world. This vision is expressed in dispositions, in the positions that actors take, but also through what Bourdieu calls *doxa*, the “common sense” that indicates an unspoken submission to everyday life (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 73–4). Invisible, *doxa* is perhaps the principal reason for the inertia of social fields since it reinforces the status quo that benefits dominant actors. Bourdieu here is quite close to other thinkers within IR, especially Stephen Gill and Robert Cox’s neo-Gramscian analysis of hegemony. Some authors in this tradition reclaim Bourdieu’s work to enlarge the discussion of socialization in collective security (Goetze 2006; Williams 2007). As we mentioned, there exists as well a rich literature inspired by Bourdieu on the international circulation of ideas, which does not shy away from discussing imperialism and hegemony (Bourdieu 2002).

It should be noted that Bourdieu, unlike his mentor Raymond Aron who contributed a 800-page book to the subject, rarely uses in his writings the term “*pouvoir*,” except when he is writing about symbolic power, and, to our knowledge, almost never writes “*puissance*.” We suspect that he would not disagree with Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall’s (2005: 42) generic definition of power as the “production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their circumstances and fate.” As they observe (2005: 54), Bourdieu’s understanding of power is closer to their (and Stephen Lukes’s) specific definition of structural power as the production of social capacities and identities. However, Bourdieu would probably not see structural, compulsory, institutional, and productive power as analytically distinct, but as different sides of the same coin, which is social domination, whether observed in direct social interaction or in large social structures. In concrete social fields, dominated agents do not see a difference between a dominant agent’s structural and productive power. Large

structures of domination are embodied even in the most mundane social encounters. "Power over" and "power to" are more or less the same thing: in practice, one's power over others is recognized by others as being grounded in the social reality that one has contributed to creating. Symbolic power takes place through a process of misrecognition and naturalization that is inscribed in habitus. This, in contrast to, say, Foucault's own understanding of power, is a process that brings people down and causes suffering.

As a reader of both Durkheim and Marx, Bourdieu places tremendous value on the conviction that there is a homology between social and mental structures; in other words, that the agents' image of the world is a reflection of their structural position. However, because of the inherent bias within the doxa, the dominated are likely to conform to social representations that favour the dominant, or at least to incorporate them into the shape of their world. Even when opposing them, the dominated consent to take part in a game where they recognize the rules without being involved in the creation of those rules. They are thus consenting victims to "symbolic violence" which contravenes relationships of force in order to better reinforce them (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970).

For Bourdieu (1998a: 35), the state is the holder *par excellence* of symbolic power. "To endeavor to think the state," he writes, "is to take the risk of taking over (or being taken over by) a thought of the state, that is, of applying to the state categories of thought produced and guaranteed by the state and hence to misrecognize its most profound truth." Indeed the state, more than any other institution, possesses the power of appointment, of *nomination*: it codifies, delegates, and guarantees the implementation of schemas of classification, of "principles of vision and division," norms, status, or categories. It is the state that declares war, that appoints a *chargé d'affaires*, that defines the criteria of a policy. In so doing, the state naturalizes or universalizes arbitrary constructions. It is here that we go back to the aforementioned tension between state-as-actor and state-as-structure. Paraphrasing Weber, Bourdieu (1998a: 40) says that the state holds the monopoly of legitimate *symbolic* violence. As Adler-Nissen suggests in her chapter, the man who has devoted so much attention to the school system would have seen in the world of diplomacy a fertile ground for testing these hypotheses. Not surprisingly, Bourdieu and his followers have paid considerable attention to the field of law and lawyers. They have researched in great detail the formation of *esprit de corps* but also specific cleavages among international lawyers. Antonin Cohen and Antoine Vauchez (2007), for example, have argued that the institutionalization of the European Union was in large part produced by a small coterie of international lawyers creating a new political and symbolic order called "Europe" in the 1950s. Their analysis, which focuses on states-*men*, makes almost no reference to the state or its material dimension.

The concepts of power and symbolic violence are also quite useful as they allow us to reflect further on questions of hegemony, ideology, and paradigms, by moving the study past three theoretical pitfalls. The first, which is particular to neorealist and liberal approaches, consists of negating the impact of symbols and beliefs, inscribing the state in a "natural" reality, which is objective and insurmountable.

The second, common to constructivist approaches, consists of attributing a disembodied, evanescent, and self-determining dimension to social representations. The third pitfall, found in mostly Marxist critiques, is to think of ideational phenomena as products which are determined automatically by economic interests. For Bourdieu, symbolic power is a trump amidst all others, conditioned only in part by different forms of capital, in the much bigger and always agonistic game of social fields. For example, seen through the lens of “legitimate symbolic violence,” *soft power* is not soft at all because it constitutes, in the same manner as material power, a potential instrument of domination (Mattern 2005). Bourdieu attacked globalization as a form of universalization of particularisms, especially American particularisms, where transnational rhetoric in fact conceals a “cunning of imperialist reason” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1998). At the end of the day, Bourdieu’s sociology has the advantage of approaching world politics as a site of incessant power struggles where the stakes, equally symbolic and material, evolve over time.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed six contributions that Bourdieu’s sociology makes to the study of world politics. Metatheoretically, Bourdieu’s perspective is characterized by a reflexive epistemology, a relational ontology, and a theory of practice, three axes that place it at a crucial meeting point with the great debates within IR. From an empirical point of view, Bourdieu’s sociology allows us to study world politics as superimposed fields, to open the black box of the state as a field of power, and to better appreciate the symbolic nature of power. Through this brief overview, we certainly do not presume to have said everything on the subject; hopefully, however, we have managed to stimulate reflections on how the world of IR might come into contact with Bourdieu’s world.

While we have barely scratched the surface of a political sociology of international relations where the social construction of reality only makes sense when viewed in the light of the deep structures present in society, we want to reiterate that Bourdieu’s work is not a theoretical panacea. To cite just a few examples, Bourdieu probably exaggerated the capacity of reason to reason itself, often accorded an absolute ontological priority to material conditions of existence, had a tendency to exaggerate the weight of social domination on dominated agents, and never managed to offer a convincing answer to the thorny problem of the limits of fields. Ultimately, the fertility of Bourdieu’s sociology (1990c: 49) for IR studies can only be evaluated to the extent that it will be possible, as the sociologist himself was so fond of saying, to “think with a thinker against that thinker.”

Notes

- 1 Following established convention, we use the capital letters IR to designate the discipline of international relations. However to fit our purposes, we prefer the term *world politics* as it lets us broaden the scope of our analyses beyond traditional interstate relations.

- 2 For example, the essence of Bourdieu's critique regarding rational choice theory lies in the fact that it substitutes the calculating mind of the observer for the practical sense of the actor. In so doing, this theory lends greater logic to practices than they may have, as they deduce from the *opus operatum* (practices already performed) their *modus operandi* (practices meant to be performed). As Bourdieu (2000b: 233) explains: "the observer who forgets everything implied by its position as observer is inclined to forget, among other things, that whoever is involved in the game cannot await the completion of the move to make sense of it at the risk of incurring the practical penalty of this delay." On the representational bias, see also Pouliot (2008).
- 3 As well, a reflexive epistemology paves the way towards thinking about critical and emancipatory action – an idea that featured prominently in the last works that Bourdieu produced before his death.
- 4 For example, a constructivist who highlights the norms and action of political entrepreneurs such as NGO actors applies a grid which, unconsciously, valorizes the role of NGOs in international negotiations as well as their own posture as a "liberal" researcher in the university field. Several authors have argued this in IR, from Devetak to Campbell via Smith: each theoretical effort rests upon a social trajectory as well as pre-suppositions that it claims to demystify. For a recent treatment of this, see Smith (2004).
- 5 Moreover, this interest in language is naturally tied to the relational perspective. In the diplomatic domain, a speech act, such as the condemnation of a foreign policy, cannot be analyzed without referencing the actors to whom this act is addressed; power relations, whether hostile or trustworthy, based on interdependence or the domination that links "condemners" to "condemned" and also the trajectory and the posture (cultural, social ideological) of the actors involved. A "foreign" policy is thus hardly national, nor is it determined by the system: it must rest on the interaction between the national political field and the field of international relations, the fields themselves having been understood as sets of relations.
- 6 We thank David Swartz for helping us clarify that point.
- 7 A recent exception is n. 151–152 (2004) of *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* on globalization. See also the issue of *Actes* on "European Constructions: National Constructions and Transnational Strategies", n. 166–167 (2007).

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