

Micro-worlds: field theory (No4-5, 2014)

Abstracts

Franz Schultheis

Studying Bourdieu and moving beyond him: Bourdieu's theory of the religious field

When Pierre Bourdieu experienced a profound life conversion from a philosopher of the École Normale Supérieure to a field anthropologist and sociologist during his years in Algeria, he got familiar with Max Weber's sociology of religion, which was going to remain a key reference for him. Upon his return to France, thanks to the support of Raymond Aron, he taught sociology at the University of Lille, and instead of a course on Durkheim, which he would have preferred, Aron urged him to teach Weberian sociology. As Bourdieu tells us, this was a decisive moment for him, as he discovered in Weber's sociology of religion the elementary structures of the theory of fields, which were going to accompany the development of his own theory of the social world in the decades that followed. The religious field became paradigmatic in the analysis of other social fields such as the artistic or the academic field, giving Bourdieu theoretical perspectives and analytical tools which enabled him to understand and make others understand the social dynamics that characterize every field, i.e. the competition with regard to the monopoly of the legitimate definition of the stakes in the field, the existence of a specific capital around which such competitions are centred (religious capital, in the case of the religious field, called Heilsgut by Weber), and the production of a collective belief in the existence of the field, its specific *illusio*. Nevertheless, if Bourdieu owes Weber the theoretical inspiration at his starting point, he soon got free from it and moved beyond the limits of the Weberian paradigm, which according to him remained bound within an all too interactionistic vision of the religious field, whereas the perspective Bourdieu developed was going to stress the «objective» character of the social structures underlying every field of the social world.

Patrick Champagne

The concept of field in Bourdieu and its application in media analysis

After presenting and discussing Bourdieu's theory of fields, the author shows that the autonomy of the journalistic field is always endangered because it is the uncertain and unstable result of incompatible principles of legitimacy which struggle, or at least compete, with one another for dominance in the space of journalism. The latter is, in effect, characterized by a triple polarization (political, economic, ethical), the news press and journalists within them having to negotiate these diverse demands, as we see particularly in large audiovisual media. In effect, there is no properly «journalistic» principle of legitimacy, because the news press is constructed in variable proportions by the economy, is involved in the political game, and has to go by a number of professional rules in order to be credible (the codes of ethics, more often invoked in colloquia than put in practice in the field). If changes in the editorial line of the news press are frequent, this is in consequence of the functioning of the journalistic field, which is characterized by a constant and general sliding towards the economic pole.

Nikos Panayotopoulos

The concept of field and the relational way of thinking

This text aims to show that the concept of field and other concepts which constitute the core of the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (habitus, capital, social space, symbolic violence, etc.) consist in respective research programmes, which can inseminate systematic elaborations on social reality. The author will try to demonstrate the practical contribution of the relational way of thinking which the concept of field presupposes, to the production of further scientific propositions, beyond the specific empirical context of their original production, or rather to confirm, emphasizing on the concept of field, that the

theory of field as Bourdieu elaborated its functions as a controlled activation of epistemological principles of construction of sociological objects and «is nourished by contact with new empirical objects». In this perspective, the author uses the concept of field as a working tool which can contribute to the constitution of a real economics of the phenomena of international symbolic domination.

Anna Boschetti

Working on the literary field: stakes, gains, perspectives

By presenting some contributions of Bourdieu's works devoted to literature, the text tries to show that his work provides valuable tools for the confrontation between disciplines, as it is a systematic way of thinking which, when applied to very heterogeneous objects, allows systematic transfer of issues and concepts.

Pierre Bourdieu

The scientific field

The seemingly "pure" and "disinterested" universe of science is a social field like any other, with its power relationships and monopolies, its conflicts and strategies, its interests and profits. A kind of game whose particular stakes consist in the monopoly of scientific authority (prestige, recognition, fame, and so forth), the scientific field owes its main characteristics to the fact that the producers generally have no other possible clients than their direct competitors. For this reason, the latter are the least inclined to accord (scientific) value to the products offered without first subjecting them to examination. What is always at stake in scientific conflicts, in which each of the actors must engage in order to have the value of his products accepted, is the power of imposing the definition of science best conforming to his own individual interests; for the definition of what is at stake is itself part and parcel of the stakes in such a conflict. And the form taken by this struggle over scientific legitimacy depends on the structure of the distribution of the specific capital of scientific recognition among the participants. The history of science shows that, as the accumulated scientific resources grow, scientific competition tends to assume the form of a constant series of minor revolutions

rather than that of intermittent great revolutions, and that along with this change the difference between the conservative strategies of the dominant members of the field and the subversive strategies of those first entering it («the challengers») seems to diminish. Accordingly, the fundamental question which arises for a scientific sociology of science is that of defining the social conditions that must be fulfilled for a social game to be established in which true ideas possess great force because the participants have an interest in the truth, rather than (as in other games) in the preservation of their interests. Science has no other foundation than the collective belief in its foundations, a belief which is both the result and the presupposition of the very functioning of the scientific field. But, depending on the degree of autonomy of the scientific field under consideration with respect to external determinative factors, the proportion of social arbitrariness incorporated in the particular system of presuppositions generating belief can vary widely. In the case of the social sciences, progress towards the real autonomy which is the condition of a self-regulating and self-sufficient scientific field comes up against obstacles unknown elsewhere.

Pierre Bourdieu

Political Representation: elements for a theory of the political field

Within a representative organization, the more dispossessed the groups it represents are of capital, especially cultural capital, the greater the tendency towards the concentration of political capital. The autonomy of the political field, which increases with the development of permanent organizations of professionals, means that the positions adopted by the agents are primarily determined in relation to the universe of competing political positions. Consequently, the correspondence between the mandators and the mandated is based not so much on direct transaction as on the homology between the political scene and the field of the class struggle of which it is the representation. In the struggle which goes on in the political arena, the professionals have political weight in proportion to their power to mobilize, i.e. in proportion to the credit and belief which they receive, either directly from

their mandators or from the apparatuses which invest them to the extent that they invest in the apparatuses. A whole set of factors tends to cause the organizations representing the dominated classes to function as apparatuses (or «total institutions»). The militarization of the active membership is merely the systematic exploitation of the tendencies inherent in the relationship between the dominated classes and the parties and in the logic of the political field.

Pierre Bourdieu

The force of the law: elements of a theory of the legal field

A rigorous sociology of law differs from what is usually called «juridical science» in that it takes the latter for its object. Breaking out of the false dilemma of formalism, which asserts the absolute autonomy of the juridical form vis-à-vis the social world, and instrumentalism, which conceives law as a reflection or a tool in the hands of the dominant classes, it shows what these two antagonistic visions, internalist and externalist, both ignore, namely the existence of a social universe relatively independent of external demands, within which juridical authority, the form par excellence of the legitimate symbolic violence monopolized by the State, is exercised and produced. The practical vision of the law that is revealed in the verdict is the culmination of a symbolic struggle between professionals endowed with unequal technical and social competences. The constitution of a specifically juridical competence, often antithetical to the simple recommendations of common sense, leads to the disqualification of the sense of equity of non-specialists. This discrepancy between the vulgar vision of the layman, and the learned vision of the expert –judge, attorney, legal consultant, etc.– is the basis of a power relation which sets up two different systems of presuppositions, two socially unequal views of the world, and it results from the structure and the very functioning of the field where a system of demands is imposed, at the heart of which is the adoption of a comprehensive posture, particularly visible in matters of language. Law is no doubt the form par excellence of the symbolic power of naming and classifying which creates the things named, and particularly groups. It is

not excessive to say that it makes the social world, so long as it is not forgotten that it is also made by that world.

Maurice Godelier

What are the social relations that make a set of human groups and individuals a society?

The basic idea of this text is that it is only the political-religious relations which establish and legitimize the sovereignty of a certain number of social groups over their territory, and that only these relations have the capacity to make these groups into historical real societies. This thesis contradicts the idea of most anthropologists that kinship relations form the base of society.

Bernard Vernier

The transformation of forms of flirting in six Muslim villages in Greece

Youngsters in certain Muslim villages in Greece habitually meet outdoors every day for an hour to engage in flirting. The question is how to explain the diversity of the structural forms of these encounters in six villages which are within a distance of up to 30 km from each other, their evolution in a 13-year period, and the absence of internal cohesion in each encounter in relation to several relevant persisting features: the moment of the encounter (day or night), the outfit of the girls (more traditional or less so), the type of communication (through eye contact, gestures, or speech), etc. A study in historical and comparative ethnography thus appears to be able to function as a real mechanism of scientific experimentation which can lead to the discovery of general anthropological truths.

Agnes Fine, Veronique Moulinie & Jean-Claude Sangoï

From mother to daughter: the transmission of fertility

Recent surveys conducted in France have exposed the feeling of shame experienced by women who were pregnant at an age considered by themselves and by those around them to be too late in life. The unspoken norms related to the age deemed suitable for procreation have been brought to light, specifically a norm that literally prohibited women from being mothers again once they were old enough to be

grandmothers. The anthropologists and demographers who have written this article show the implication of these norms for the succession of generations, in particular the passing of the power of sexual reproduction from mother to daughter. This analysis draws on several sources and on a comparison with the practices and beliefs studied by ethnologists in African societies of the past and present. Thanks to sources in historical demography and its tools, evidence is presented about this prohibition and its frequency in two rural areas in southwestern France during the 19th century. The conclusion raises questions about the survival and current transformation of these implicit norms, and discusses both the new approaches opened by this research for historical demography and, more broadly, the theoretical implications for the social sciences.

Robert Castel

The war on poverty in the United States: the status of poverty of an affluent society

Accordingly, there exists an organic relationship between the denial, in the political realm, of a status to poverty and the proliferation of «psychologistic» techniques on the level at which poverty is actually handled. The present essay attempts to elucidate this relationship by examining the different approaches to public assistance which have succeeded each other in the United States in the last century. It is found that almost all the American institutions specialized in the management of poverty (including the recently established federal bureaucracies) operate with notions which are ultimately psychological in nature, for the very reason that their definition of the person receiving assistance is one which denies him a social status right from the start.

Robert Boyer

Seven scenarios for the future of the European Union

The recurring difficulties in overcoming the crisis in the euro area, opened in spring 2010, derive from the flaws in the economic governance established by the European treaties: International finance, European Council, Governments of member countries, European Central Bank and European Commission pursue objectives that prove

inconsistent, and they have not the relevant instruments for a coordinated response. This mismatch can be overcome if a key actor take the lead and impose its views and resynchronize the various tools of economic policy. Since July 2012, the ECB has played this role and drives various reforms to restore confidence in the future of the Euro (scenario 1). However, such a strategy is not consistent with the German vision of a federalism based on intangible rules, excluding solidarity and permanent transfers across countries (scenario 2). But this would exacerbate the divergence between Northern and Southern European trajectories and could lead to a fragmentation of the euro zone (scenario 3). Rejection by national public opinions of the European discipline is likely to lead to a beggar-thy neighbor policy, based on nationalism and protectionism (scenario 4). Given this major risk, the British government would be in a position to propose a return to a simple free trade zone and a flexible «*la carte*» Europe without any political integration (scenario 5). The answer of federalists would then be to promote an unprecedented deepening of democracy at the European level (scenario 6). The failure of all these strategies would give the primacy to the international finance that would trigger again the storm by imposing soaring risk premium (scenario 7). These scenarios do not exclude each other because they have a good chance to be explored sequentially and possibly hybridize. A radical uncertainty prevails that defies any pretense to forecasting.

Frederic Lebaron

Why austerity kills: the consequences of austerity policies in Europe since 2010

The social consequences of austerity policies in Europe are a democratic issue of primary importance. Only an independent scientific evaluation of public policies can help determine precisely the share of responsibility in the growth of social suffering. The work of David Stuckler and Sanjay Basu *The Body Economic* illustrates one of the first major achievements of the project to measure empirically, on the basis of modern methodologies, the effects of austerity policies in response to economic crises. From the study of several historical periods, they conclude their great harm to people's health.