

Pierre Bourdieu

Physical Space, Social Space and Habitus

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Institutt for sosiologi og samfunnsgeografi, Universitetet i Oslo

Postboks 1096 Blindern, 0317 Oslo

Introduction of the Lecturer

by Ragnvald Kalleberg,

Chairman, Department of Sociology

University of Oslo,

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Professor Bourdieu, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Department of Sociology at the University of Oslo and the Institute for Social Research, I have the honour of welcoming Pierre Bourdieu to present the Vilhelm Aubert Memorial Lecture this year.

The Vilhelm Aubert Memorial Lecture is jointly organized by the Department of Sociology, University of Oslo and the Institute for Social Research, Oslo, to celebrate good sociology and social research, and to honour the memory of Vilhelm Aubert (1922-1988), the leading Norwegian sociologist in the four decades after World War II.¹

Pierre Bourdieu has long been a dominant figure in French social science and has become increasingly influential internationally. The American

¹ For an English-speaking audience, two of his books are especially good introductions to his work: *The Hidden Society* (Bedminster Press, Totowa, NJ, 1965) and *Continuity and Development in Law and Society* (Norwegian University Press, Oslo & Oxford University Press; posthumously published in 1989). The last book also contains an autobiographical introduction. Aubert identified his program for sociology as "problem-oriented empiricism", see "Methods and theory in sociology" (*International journal of sociology*, vol. 3, no 3-4 1973-74, pp. 72- 109).

sociologist Neil Smelser a few years ago claimed, correctly I think, that the center of gravity of general social theory had shifted from the United States to Europe. He backed his claim by referring to outstanding contributors like Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhman, Anthony Giddens, Alain Touraine, - and to Pierre Bourdieu.

Pierre Bourdieu is now a professor of sociology at the *College De France*. For convenience, his major works can perhaps be separated into four interconnected groups. 1) The first consists of studies deriving from his fieldwork in Algeria. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, as one of them is called in the English translation, is well known. 2) A second grouping consists of his collaborative work on education. The book on *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* has been widely discussed. 3) A third derive from his early and continuing interest in the sociology of culture and cultural consumption. The best known of these books is *Distinction* from 1979, quite recently translated into Norwegian. 4) A fourth group reflects Bourdieu's own professional practice as a sociologist. The sociology of sociology is for him a fundamental dimension of sociological epistemology. *Homo Academicus* and *In Other Words* and *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* are well known in that large part of the academic world that prefer to read the English translations. The last of the books mentioned is also translated into Norwegian.

Vilhelm Aubert never thought it fruitful to draw too sharp boundaries between the social sciences, nor between social sciences, cultural sciences, law and literature. The main focus should be on the identification and analysis of important problems in society, not on the

separate disciplines and their more or less accidental boundaries. There is a similarity between Aubert and Bourdieu in this respect.

They are also similar in their emphasis on the emancipating role of sociology. Bourdieu ends an article by arguing for the importance of “collective autonomy of the scientific field” and for “the norms of rational communication within the scientific universe”. Only then can we hope, he says, to “produce sociological works capable of forcing symbolic violence into retreat, both within the field of social science and in the social world at large.”

After the lecture we open the floor for a session of questions and comments. We will close the session by giving the Aubert lecturer the usual gift, a drawing of Vilhelm Aubert by the artist Finn Graff, a drawing especially made for this lecture.

The title of Pierre Bourdieu’s lecture is : **Physical Space, Social Space and Habitus**. Pierre Bourdieu, the floor is yours!

PHYSICAL SPACE, SOCIAL SPACE AND HABITUS

by

Pierre Bourdieu

Happy to be here. In a country which has many *famous sociologists*, and among them Vilhelm Aubert, and in which I have many friends, that I want to thank, like Dag Österberg, and Annick Prieur, who translated *Distinction* into norwegian. Thanks to the publishing house.

Plato in the Letter VII, said that the texts, the books are in a sense inferior to oral language, because they are not able to defend themselves, to hinder misreadings, etc. And, although I am very happy and proud to see my book *Distinction*, published in Norwegian, I am a little afraid. Not only because, in order to make the publication possible, some parts of the book had to be cut: or because many documents, pictures, statistical data, clippings, were omitted, so that, one of the intentions, at the same time artistic and scientific, of the book, that is to create a new language, a new form of expression, is destroyed; but because this work is particularly exposed to various misreadings.

As I never accepted the distinction between theory and methodology, conceptual analysis and empirical description, the theoretical model does not appear there embellished with all the marks by which one usually recognizes "grand theory" [such as lack of any reference to some empirical reality]. The notions of social space, symbolic space, or social class are never studied in

and for themselves; they are tested through research in which the theoretical and the empirical are inseparable, and which mobilizes a plurality of methods of observation and measurement, quantitative and qualitative, statistical and ethnographic, macrosociological and microsociological (all these being meaningless oppositions), for the purpose of studying an object well defined in space and time, that is, French society in the seventies. [The report of this research does not appear in the language to which certain sociologists, especially Americans, have accustomed us and whose appearance of universality is due only to the imprecision of a vocabulary hardly distinguishable from everyday usage (I shall mention only one example, the notion of "profession")]. *Thanks to* a discursive montage which facilitates the juxtaposition of statistical table, photograph, excerpt from an interview, facsimile of a document, and the abstract language of analysis, such a report makes the most abstract coexist with the most concrete, a photograph of the president of the Republic playing tennis or the interview of a baker with the most formal analysis of the generative and unifying power of the habitus.

RELATIONIST READING. The real is relational

As a matter of fact, my entire scientific enterprise is based on the belief that the deepest logic of the social world can be grasped, providing only that one plunges into the particularity of an empirical reality, historically located and dated, but in order to build it up as a "special case of what is possible," as Bachelard puts it, that is, as an exemplary case in a world of finite possible configurations; through an analysis of the French social space in 1970, I try to grasp invariant properties which do not disclose themselves to casual inspection. Or in other words, I try to propose a model which aspires to universal validity.

In order to apprehend this model, one must *avoid a realistic or substantialist reading* of analyses which aim to be structural or, better, relational (I refer here, without being able to go into details, to the opposition suggested by Ernst Cassirer between "substantial concepts" and "functional or relational concepts"). To make myself clear, I shall say that the substantialist or realistic reading stops short at the practices (for instance, the practice of playing golf) or at the patterns of consumption (for instance, Chinese food) which the model tries to explain and that such a reading conceives of the correspondence between, on the one hand, social positions and classes, considered as substantial sets, and, on the other, tastes or practices, as a mechanical and direct relation. Thus, in the extreme case, naive readers could consider as a refutation of the model the fact that, to take probably too easy an example, Japanese or American intellectuals pretend to like French food, whereas French intellectuals like to go to Chinese or Japanese restaurants; or that the fancy shops of Tokyo or Fifth Avenue often have French names, whereas the fancy shops of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré display English names, such as "hairdresser."

The substantialist mode of thought, which characterizes common sense -and racism- and which is inclined to treat the activities and preferences specific to certain individuals or groups in a society at a certain moment as if they were substantial properties, inscribed once and for all in a kind of *essence*, leads to the same mistakes, whether one is comparing different societies or successive periods in the same society. One could thus consider the fact that, for example, tennis or even golf is not nowadays as exclusively associated with dominant positions as in the past, or that the noble sports, such as riding or fencing, are no longer specific to nobility as they originally were as a refutation of the proposed model (which Figure 1, presenting the correspondence between the space of constructed classes and the space of practices, captures in a visual and synoptic way).

An initially aristocratic practice can be given up by the aristocracy, and this is most often the case when this practice is adopted by a growing fraction of the bourgeoisie or petit-bourgeoisie, or even the lower classes (this is what happened in France to boxing, which was enthusiastically practiced by aristocrats at the end of the nineteenth century); conversely, an initially lower-class practice can sometimes be taken up by nobles. In short, one has to avoid turning into necessary and intrinsic properties of some group (nobility, samurai, as well as workers or employees) the properties which rest with this group at a given moment because of its position in a definite social space and in a definite state of the *supply* of possible goods and practices. Thus, at every moment of each society, one has to deal with a set of social positions which is bound by a relation of homology to a set of activities (the practice of playing golf or the piano) or of goods (a second home or a master painting) that are also characterized relationally.

This formula, which might seem abstract and obscure, states the first condition for an adequate reading of the analysis of the relation between *social positions* (a relational concept), *dispositions* (or habitus), and stances ("*positions taking*"), that is, the "choices" made by the social agents in the most diverse domains of practice, food or sport, music or politics, and so on. It is a reminder that comparison is possible only from *system to system*, and that the search for direct equivalence between features seized in isolation, whether, appearing at first sight different, they prove to be "functionally" or technically equivalent or nominally identical (the practice of golf in France and Japan, for instance), risks unduly identifying structurally different properties or wrongly distinguishing structurally identical properties. The very title *Distinction* serves as a reminder that what is commonly called distinction, that is, a certain quality of bearing and manners, mostly

considered innate (one speaks of *distinction naturelle*, "natural refinement"), is nothing in fact but *difference*, a gap, a distinctive feature, in short, a *relational* property existing only in and through its relation with other properties.

SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL SPACE

This idea of difference is at the basis of the very notion of *space*, that is, a set of distinct and coexisting positions which are exterior to one another and which are defined in relation to one another through relations of proximity, vicinity, or distance, as well as through order relations, such as above, below, and *between*; certain properties of members of the bourgeoisie or petit-bourgeoisie can, for example, be deduced from the fact that they occupy an intermediate position between two extreme positions, without it being possible objectively to identify them and without their subjectively identifying themselves, either with one or the other position.

I must stop at this point to make explicit the difference between social space and physical space. Human beings are at once biological beings and social agents who are constituted as such in and through their relation to a social space. As biologically individuated bodies, they are -like things- situated in a locus (they do not have the property of physical ubiquity which would allow them to be at several loci at the same time) where they occupy a place. The locus, *topos*, can be defined first in absolute terms as the site where an agent or a thing is situated, "takes place", exists, in short as a *location*. It can also be defined relationally, as a *position*, as a rank in an order. [The *place* occupied, in turn, may be defined as the range, the surface and the volume that an agent or a thing occupies, its dimensions or, better, its *encombrement* (cumbersomness, as we sometimes say of a vehicle or a piece of furniture).]

Physical space and social space have a lot of things in common. Just as physical space is defined by the mutual externality of parts, social space is defined by the mutual exclusion (or distinction) of positions which constitute it, that is, as a structure of juxtaposition of social positions. Social agents, but also things as they are appropriated by agents and thus constituted as properties, are situated in a location in social space which can be characterized by its position relative to other locations (as standing above, below or in between them) and by the distance which separates them.

Social space is an invisible set of relationships which tends to retranslate itself, in a more or less direct manner, into physical space in the form of a definite distributional arrangement of agents and properties (eg. opposition between downtown and suburbs).

[This means that all the distinctions proposed about physical space can be found in reified social space (or, what amounts to the same, in *appropriated social space*) defined, to speak like Leibniz, by the *correspondence between a certain order of co-existence of agents and a certain order of co-existence of properties*. Each agent may be characterized by the place where he or she is situated more or less permanently, that is, by her place of residence (those who are "without hearth or home," without "permanent residence", *domicile fixe*, have almost no social existence -see the political status of the homeless) and by the relative position that her localizations, temporary (as for instance with the regulated placings of protocol in official ceremonies) and permanent (her private and professional addresses), occupy in relation to the localizations of other agents. It is also characterized by the place it legally occupies in space through properties (houses and apartments or offices, land for cultivation or residential development, etc.) which are more or less congesting or, as we sometimes say, "consuming of space" (the ostentation of

appropriated space being one of the form par excellence of the ostentation of power).] It follows that the locus and the place occupied by an agent in appropriated social space are excellent indicators of his or her position in social space. [One may also note in passing that part of the *inertia* of the structures that make up social space results from the fact that they are inscribed in physical space and can be modified only at the cost of a painful *work transplantation*, by moving things and by uprooting or deportating persons.]

The structure- of social space thus manifests itself, in the most diverse contexts, in the form of spatial oppositions, inhabited (or appropriated) space functioning as a sort of spontaneous metaphor of social space. There is no space, in a hierarchical society, which is not hierarchized and which does not express social hierarchies and distances in a more or less distorted or euphemized fashion, especially through the *effect of naturalization* attendant on the durable inscription of social realities onto and in the physical world: differences produced by social logic can then seem to arise out of the nature of things (think of the notion of "natural frontier" or that of "natural area" dear to the early Chicago school).

SCIENTIFIC CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL SPACE

Social space is constructed in such a way that agents or groups are distributed in it according to their position in the statistical distribution based on the two differentiation principles which, in the most advanced societies, such as the United States, Japan, or France, are undoubtedly the most efficient: economic capital and cultural capital. It follows that all agents are located in this space in such a way that the closer they are to one another, the more they share in those two dimensions, and the more remote they are from one another, the

less they have in common. Spatial distances on paper are equivalent to social distances. More precisely, as expressed in the diagram in *Distinction* by which I tried to represent social space (Figure I), the agents are distributed in the first dimension according to the overall volume of the capital they possess under its different kinds, and in the second dimension according to the structure of their capital, that is, according to the relative weight of the different kinds of capital, economic and cultural, in the total volume of their capital. Thus, to make it clear, in the first dimension, which is undoubtedly the most important, the holders of a great volume of overall capital, such as proprietors, members of liberal professions, and professors are opposed, in the mass, to those who are most deprived of economic and cultural capital, such as unskilled workers; but from another point of view, that is, from the point of view of the relative weight of economic capital and cultural capital in their patrimony, they are also very sharply opposed among themselves, and this, no doubt, is as true in Japan as in France (this remains to be verified).

The second opposition, like the first, is the source of differences in dispositions and, therefore, in "positions", which can differ in their contents according to period and society or can appear under an identical form, such as the opposition between intellectuals and proprietors which, in postwar France and Japan alike, is translated, in politics, into an opposition between *left and right*, and so on. More broadly, the space of social positions is retranslated into a space of "position takings" by the mediation of the space of dispositions (or habitus); or, in other words, the system of differential deviations in agents' properties (or in the properties of constructed classes of agents), that is, in their practices and in the goods they possess, corresponds to the system of differential deviations which defines the different positions in the two major dimensions of social space. Habitus, which are the products of the social conditioning associated with

the corresponding condition, make a systematic set of goods and properties, united by an affinity of style, correspond to each class of positions.

One of the functions of the notion of habitus is to account for style unity, which unites both the practices and goods of a singular agent or a class of agents (this is what writers such as Balzac or Flaubert have so finely expressed through their descriptions of settings -e.g., the Pension Vauquer in *Le Père Goriot*- which are at the same time descriptions of the characters who live in them). Habitus are these generative and unifying principles which retranslate the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position into a unitary life-style, that is, a unitary set of persons, goods, practices. Like the positions of which they are the product, habitus are differentiated, but they are also differentiating. Being distinct and distinguished, they are also distinction operators, implementing different principles of differentiation or using differently, the common principles of differentiation.

GENESIS OF HABITUS

Habitus = structured structure -> structuring structure

Incorporation of objective structures which are incorporated into appropriated physical space (eg. the opposition between the poles of economic and cultural power, right bank/left bank, managers and intellectuals, the art world and that of business). Structures incorporated into appropriated physical space become incorporated structures -cognitive schemas, principle of vision and division (cf. *State Nobility* or Kabyle house)

Thus, for instance, beyond expressing basic economic and cultural differences via the spatial distribution of housing among central-city neighborhoods and peripheral and suburban neighborhoods, the Parisian space presents a secondary, but very pronounced, opposition between the "right bank" and the "left bank" corresponding to the fundamental division of the field of power between, *grosso modo*, the poles of economic and cultural power, managers and intellectuals, the world of art and that of business (Bourdieu 1989). We can discern in this simple example a social division objectified in physical space which, as I showed in *The State Nobility*, functions at the same time as a principle of vision and division, as a category of perception and appreciation -in short, as a mental structure (the Kabyle house was another one). And we have every reason to think that it is through the mediation of its realizations in the structures of appropriated physical space that the muted injunctions of the social order and the silent callings to order of objective hierarchy are reconverted in systems of preferences and in cognitive structures (Bourdieu 1984). More precisely, the progressive inscription into bodies of the structures of the social order is perhaps accomplished, for the most part, *via moves and movements of the body, via the bodily poses and postures* that these social structures reconverted into physical structures-organize and qualify socially as in rise or decline, entry (inclusion) or exit (exclusion), bringing together or distancing in relation to central and valued site (one remembers the metaphor of the "hearth", the dominant point of the Kabyle house, which Halbwachs [1972] naturally reverted to when he spoke of the "hearth of cultural values"). I have in mind, for example, the respectful demeanor called for by grandeur or height (of a monument, a stage or a stand) or yet by the frontality of sculptural or pictorial works or, more subtly, all the conducts of deference and reverence tacitly imposed by the mere social qualification of space (VIP seats, "le haut du

pavé", etc.) and all the practical hierarchizations of regions of space (high/low, noble/ignoble, front/backstage, store/storage, right side/left side, etc.).

Habitus are structured structures, generative principles of distinct and distinctive practices -what the worker eats, and especially the way he eats it, the sport he practices and the way he practices it, his political opinions and the way he expresses them are systematically different from the industrial proprietor's corresponding activities / habitus are also structuring structures, different classifying schemes classification principles, different principles of vision and division, different tastes. Habitus make different differences; they implement distinctions between what is good and what is bad, between what is right and what is wrong, between what is distinguished and what is vulgar, and so on, but they are not the same. Thus, for instance, the same behavior or even the same good can appear distinguished to one person, pretentious to someone else. and cheap or showy to yet another.

SYMBOLIC SPACE

But the essential point is that, when perceived through these social categories of perception, these principles of vision and division, the differences between practices, the goods which are possessed, the opinions which are expressed become symbolic differences and constitute a real language. Differences associated with the different positions, that is, goods, practices, and especially manners, function, in each society, in the same way as differences which are constitutive of symbolic systems, such as the set of phonemes of a language or the set of distinctive features and of differential deviations that are constitutive of a mythical system, that is, as distinctive signs.

THEORETICAL CLASSES

Constructing social space, this invisible reality that can neither be shown nor handled and which organizes agents' practices and representations, also entails the possibility of constructing theoretical classes that are maximally homogeneous from the point of view of the two major determinants of practices and of all their attendant properties. The principle of classification that can be constructed in this way is genuinely *explanatory*. This is a social taxonomy which does not stop short at describing the set of classified realities but which, like the good classifications of natural sciences, fixes on determinant properties that (as opposed to the apparent differences of bad classifications) allow for prediction of the other properties. The classes which one is thus able to construct bring together agents who are as similar to each other as possible and as different as possible from members of other classes, whether adjacent or remote.

But the very validity of the classification risks encouraging a perception of theoretical classes, which are fictitious regroupings existing only on paper, through an intellectual decision by the researcher, as *real* classes, real groups, that are constituted as such in reality. The danger is all the greater as it does appear from the research that the divisions drawn in *Distinction* do indeed correspond to real differences in the most different, and even the most unexpected, domains of practice. Thus, to take the example of a curious property, the distribution of the owners of dogs and cats is organized according to the model: commercial proprietors preferring dogs, intellectuals preferring cats. Likewise, class endogamy is intensified, as the units which are spatially divided are more confined.

The model thus defines distances that are *predictive* of encounters, affinities, sympathies, or even desires: concretely, this means that people located at the top of the space have little chance of marrying people located toward the bottom, first because they have little chance of meeting them physically (except in what are called "bad places", i.e., at the cost of a transgression of the social limits which reflect the spatial distances); then because, if they do meet them on some occasion, accidentally, they will not get on together, will not really understand each other, will not appeal to one another. On the other hand, proximity in social space predisposes to closer relations: people who are inscribed in a confined sector of the space will be both closer (in their properties and in their dispositions, *their tastes*) and more disposed to get closer, as well as being easier to bring together, to mobilize.

But this does not mean that they constitute a class in Marx's sense, that is, a group which is mobilized for common purposes, and especially against another class. The theoretical classes that I construct are, more than any other theoretical divisions (more, for example, than divisions according to sex, ethnicity, and so on), predisposed to become classes in the Marxist sense of the term. If I am a political leader and I propose creating one big party bringing together both proprietors and workers, I have little chance of success, since these groups are very remote in social space; in a certain conjuncture, under cover of a national crisis, on the basis of nationalism or chauvinism, it will be possible for them to draw closer, but this solidarity will still be rather fictitious and very provisional. This does not mean that, inversely, proximity in social space automatically engenders unity: it defines an objective potentiality of unity or, to speak like Leibniz, a "claim to exist" as a group, a probable class. Marxist theory makes a mistake, I similar to Kant's in the ontological argument or to the one for which I, Marx himself criticized Hegel: it makes a "death-defying leap" from existence in theory to

existence in practice, or, as Marx puts it, "from the things of logic to the logic of things."

It is Marx who, more than any other theoretician, has exerted the *theory effect*, namely, that properly political effect that consists in making tangible what exists but, insofar as it remains unknown and unrecognized, cannot *entirely* exist; but paradoxically, Marx has omitted to take this effect into account in his own theory.... One moves from class on paper to the real class only at the price of a political work of mobilization: the mobilized class is both the prize and the product of the *struggle of classifications*, which is a properly symbolic struggle, the stake of which is the sense of social world - how to construct it, in perception and in reality; the principles of vision and division that must be applied to it, that is, the very existence of the classes.

The very existence of classes, as everyone knows from his own experience, is hotly contested. And this fact, no doubt, constitutes the major obstacle to a scientific knowledge of the social world and to the resolution (for there is one...) of the problem of social classes. Denying the existence of classes, as the conservative tradition has persisted in doing for reasons not all of which are absurd (and some of which research sometimes ends up reconstructing in good faith), means in the final analysis denying the existence of differences and of principles of differentiation. This is just what those who pretend that nowadays the American, Japanese, and French societies are each nothing but an enormous "middle class" do, although in a more paradoxical way, since those who believe this nevertheless preserve the term "class" (and I have heard that, according to a survey, 80 percent of the Japanese say they belong to the "middle class"). This position is, of course, unsustainable. All my work shows that in a country said to be on the way to becoming homogenized, democratized, and so on, difference is everywhere. And in the United States

today, partly under the influence of works like mine, every day some new piece of research appears showing diversity where one *wanted to see* homogeneity, conflict where one wanted to see consensus, reproduction and conservation where one wanted to see mobility. Thus, difference exists, and persists. But does this mean that we must accept or affirm the existence of classes? No. Social classes do not exist (even if political work, armed with Marx's theory, has in some cases contributed to making them exist through mobilization and proxies). What exists is a social space, a space of differences, in which classes exist in some sense in a state of virtuality, not as something given but as something *to be done*.

Nevertheless, if the social world, with its divisions, is something that social agents have to do, to construct, individually and especially collectively, in cooperation and conflict, these constructions still do not take place in a social void, as certain ethnomethodologists seem to believe: the position occupied in social space, that is, in the structure of the distribution of different kinds of capital, which are also weapons, commands the representations of this space and the "positions" in the struggles to conserve or transform it.

To summarize this intricate relation between objective structures and subjective constructions, which is located beyond the usual alternatives of objectivism and subjectivism, of structuralism and constructivism, and even of materialism and idealism, I usually quote, with a little distortion, a famous formula of Pascal's: "The world comprehends me, but I comprehend it." The social world embraces me and, as Pascal also says, "submerges me like a point." But (a first upset) this point is a *point of view*, the principle of a perspectival vision, of an understanding or representation of the world. Moreover (a further upset), this point of view remains a view adopted from a point located in the social space, a *perspective* which is defined, in its form

and contents by this objective position. The social space is indeed the first and last reality, since it still commands the representations that the social agents can have of it.