

Sociology 929 Reading Interrogations Session 9
Bourdieu's Approach to Class Analysis
October 31, 2006

1. Rudolfo Elbert

This interrogation will focus on the class analysis of the French society that Pierre Bourdieu develops in *Distinction* (1998). As a general topic I would like to discuss the role of Marxist and Weberian perspectives on class in Bourdieu's framework. As we have seen in this course, Marxist definitions of social classes in capitalist societies link production and exchange in a exploitation centered demarcation of social classes. Weberian perspectives, on the other hand are a market-centered approach, that differentiates between different classes according to life-chances related to different work situations. Taking this into account, I would like to discuss if there is a place for the notion of exploitation in Bourdieu's definition of class? **[There is a lot of room for power struggles within Bourdieu's analysis, but I am not sure if this can really be thought of as exploitation. There is nothing I have seen in which the power and capacities of dominant categories depends upon their appropriation of anything from those with less capital. The metaphor is more that of a game with winners and losers, and the winners enter the game with advantages, but they do not seem to take anything from the losers exactly, as far as I can tell.]** Is there a relationship between his definition of *lifestyles* and Weber's notion of life chances? What does the answer to these two questions tell us about the relationship of Bourdieu's framework with the perspectives of Marx and Weber on social classes?

In second place I would like to discuss the relationship between the subjective and objective characteristics of classes in this approach. According to Bourdieu, his framework seeks to "overcome the opposition between the objectivist theories that identify social classes with discrete groups, this is, populations that can be quantified and which are differentiated from other populations by objective and real frontiers and those subjectivist theories that reduce social order to a collective classification that results from the aggregation of individuals classifications" (1998:493) Taking into account this position, I would like to discuss if in fact Bourdieu achieves his objective of developing a class analysis that takes into account both the objective and the subjective dimension of social classes. Are these two dimensions equally treated in his book? Or is there a primacy of the structural dimension? More specifically, the relationship between the objective and the subjective can be seen in the concepts of field, social space and habitus. The first two concepts guide the structural analysis of the French society, which is based on identifying people's class positions according their relation to "the volume of capital, the structure of capital and the evolution of these two properties in a time period" (1998:113). The basic differences are those that classify people in classes of conditions of existence, according to the volume of global capital they possess. However, according to Bourdieu, any analysis of social classes should also take into account the subjective character of society, which he includes with the notion of Habitus. According to Bourdieu, the habitus allows us to analyze the relationship between the objective and the

subjective, or in his words, between “those characteristics related to the social and economic condition and the distinctive characteristics related to different positions in the space of lifestyles” (Bourdieu, 1998: 170). This is the way in which Bourdieu conceptualizes the similarities of practices and perceptions of people belonging to the same class positions, which are observed in the different tables of *Distinction*. Even if the notion of habitus includes the analysis of subjective practices and perceptions, it remains unclear if this subjective dimension has any explanatory capacity or it will always be a dependent variable in the analysis. **[You have identified here a key nexus of concepts within Bourdieu’s framework -- field, social space and habitus. There is a way of interpreting “habitus” that makes it a concept that either dissolves the objective/subjective distinction or bridges it: habitus is a way of talking about internalized dispositions to act but only insofar as they correspond to the context of action. In a way they are context-dependent disposition rather than pure internal states. A habitus only functions in a habitat: those dispositions don’t work outside of the habitat. Thus they are not strictly internalized states, nor are they objective properties. At least this is one way of framing the idea.]**

2. Fabian Pfeffer

For this interrogation as well as for discussion in class I would like to propose a closer look at the link between ‘position in a social space’ and ‘habitus’. Bourdieu introduces the concept of habitus as the mediating link between objective class positions and social practices. As Brubaker warns us (1985: 760), although the concept of habitus thus has to accomplish an “extraordinary amount of theoretical work” it would be unfair - given its meta-theoretical function - to “evaluate it by criteria we use to evaluate theories”. Let me nevertheless see how well Bourdieu specifies this link (or how well I understood it).

Stipulating that habitus is “the product of internalization, the incorporation, of the objective structures of social space” (Bourdieu 1985: 728), Bourdieu aims at evading the shortcomings of both objectivism and subjectivism. His claims about the causal linkage between social positions and habitus nevertheless emphasize objective factors - how else could we understand the “immediate complicity between social structures and mental structures” (1985: 736) or even more obvious in Brubaker’s words (1985: 762) the “perfect coincidence of divisions established by differences in external conditions of existence and divisions established by differences in internalized dispositions”. Regarding the mechanism of the “embodiment of social structures”, Bourdieu mainly refers to processes of socialization. On the subjective side, Bourdieu (1987: 5) notes the existence of “individual struggles of daily life in which agents [strive] to impose a representation of themselves through strategies presentation of self” (see Goffman) as well as “proper political collective struggles” via external representation. **[One interpretation of all this is that Bourdieu is basically making a claim about a functional correspondence between internalized dispositions and external demands of roles. The idea of “incorporation of objective structures of social space” means “development of subjective orientations which enable one to function effectively within that social space.” This is – I think – basically the same idea as Althusser’s**

“interpellation” or Therborn’s idea of “subjection and qualification.” Therborn’s formulation seems especially close to Bourdieu’s (but predates it) since he talks about the formation of the social subject as a process by which a person is subjected to a set of dispositions which qualify the person to function effectively. Is there a difference with Bourdieu?]

I think that the line of reasoning presented yields unsatisfactory guidance in especially one respect: the study of the middle class. To explain why particular classes possess a particular habitus, see e.g. the “anti-aesthetic disposition” of the working class as “one manifestation of a generalized dispositional antipathy to formality and formalism” (cited in Brubaker 1985: 765), it is argued that these dispositions arise from the **specific experience of material necessity**. **[It is of course a bit mysterious why that particular set of experiences would induce this specific form of subjectivity that is functionally adapted to the requirements of these positions. What could be the mechanism?]** This makes much sense for the needy working class and the opulent bourgeoisie but as Bourdieu himself admits “it is in the intermediate positions of social space, especially in the United States, that the indeterminacy and objective uncertainty of relations between practices and positions is at a maximum, and also, consequently, the intensity of symbolic strategies” (in Weininger 2005:107, see also Bourdieu 1987: 12). To me the latter part of this statement reveals the rather pragmatic approach of Bourdieu towards the specification of the position-habitus link. Socialization, strategy, and struggle are at work - but differentially so: strategy is mainly available to the middle class - seemingly just because habitus-socialization takes a more precarious shape for them. My impression that the strategical part of habitus-construction is theoretically underdefined and fuzzy is further nurtured by Bourdieu’s failure to empirically distinguish class fractions within the middle class. **[It is an interesting idea to see habitus as an object of struggle. I am not completely sure that Bourdieu would see it this way. It seems more like some kind of complex psychological adaptation and direct socialization. It could be a by-product of struggles, but are the dispositions themselves or even the disposition-forming process ever a direct object of struggle? Maybe – can you identify places in Bourdieu where he suggests this?]** Could it be that Bourdieu is facing his very own middle class problem?

3. Assaf Meshulam

There are three powerful elaborations in Bourdieu: his notion of habitus and the rich description of how it permeates all aspects of life; the elaboration of symbolic power and cultural capital that, together with economic capital, present a “systematic theoretical knowledge of practical social life” (Brubaker: 753); and the distinction among class fractions.

Bourdieu’s notion of habitus helps to give a better, more picturesque understanding of how our everyday way of living (or “life-style”, which is more complex than Weber’s definition) is a reflection or expression of class and cultural forces (or capitals). It seems that habitus in being so encompassing of all aspects of existence (Bourdieu does not speak about individuals, rather the habitus is a product of social structure) and in

regulating all practical activity, shapes the individual to the point that there is no real ability to create any social change. I wonder if anything could motivate anyone to try to alter one's habitus except for a more secure future/present. **[The habitus describes a set of internalized dispositions to act in particular way – the things that give people a profound feel for the game. But it doesn't follow from this that actors do not make choices and engage in strategies. Indeed, this is precisely what they always do within a field – they play the game. They are not acting out a script as does an actor within a theater play; they are not merely performing. It is much more like soccer where they are constantly making choices, improvising, countering the strategies of others, but in a way animated by their embodied dispositions. Now, that is a kind of agency, I think. And it also suggests conditions in which a person might be “motivated” to change one's habitus – to acquire different dispositions – because, for example, of a devaluation of the kind of capital one has in the game. This may be very hard because of the embodied quality of habitus – thus the difficulty of the “Pygmalion” story (My Fair Lady).]**

The idea of cultural capital is very powerful in providing deeper insights into differences between class, and fractions of them, other than economic capital or relations of production. Yet, it is not easy to follow where the boundaries between classes lie—and even not always what mechanisms Bourdieu uses to distinguish between different strata. (I am not actually sure that Bourdieu even tries to make such distinctions. The fields he presents demonstrate exactly the opposite, that there are no clear divisions.) **[The boundaries are always created through boundary struggles; they are not given. The depend upon the sense of being a group that the actors within the game actually have.]** There might be too many “capitals”—cultural, economic, social (and, even given the correlation between them, why stop there and not add other forms of capital, such as citizenship). On the other hand, Bourdieu uses occupation as a constant variable and, if occupation correlates with all the other variables, maybe for the purpose of class distinction it could be enough, the only necessary variable: tell me your occupation, I'll tell you your class (or field)

One final remark: According to Bourdieu, taste is a very strong barrier between classes. “Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent. Aversion to different life-style is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between classes” (p. 56). Is there no morality or value judgment at all involved in the struggle between classes? Does this mean that morality is a product of taste, aesthetics? **[Next week this is just what we will talk about!]**

4. Adrienne Pagac

Pierre Bourdieu's approach to the question of 'class' seems to be quite unlike any other we have encountered thus far, in that its understanding of 'class' as a category/state/social collective appears only loosely based on the economic reality of the actors that comprise it. Instead, the battleground of social collectives ('classes') is the arena of taste (and the distinction and prestige that go along with that). **[This is certainly true in the book *Distinction*, but I don't think he quite reduces the problem of class**

to the construction of taste-based distinctions. These distinctions are in the service of something else – they are not distinctions just for the sake of the love of distinction; they are distinctions to buttress the power/efficacy of forms of capital as these are deployed within the various fields in which they are useful.] As I understand, one's **taste** (or perhaps it is more accurate to say one's **habitus**, i.e. dispositions) not only acts as a reflection/proxy of one's total volume and composition of capital (economic/cultural/social) and position within the 'social space', it also shapes one's ability to move within that social space (Bourdieu's three-dimensional model). **[Taste and Habitus are not the same thing, I think. Habitus is the full configurations of dispositions to act that are embodied in a person-within-a-position. I embody a professorial habitus which is a quite complex set of dispositions, manners, sensibilities, ways of talking, etc. One consequence of such dispositions is a set of tastes (or perhaps one aspect of those dispositions – I am not sure how best to frame this). But tastes are an aspect of preferences, and habitus is a broader concept of dispositions.]** However, taste is not something that can be equally distributed—it is the possession of one or a group of social collective(s)—nor is it something objectively defined. If I understand correctly, it depends upon a social collective's dispositions and their relation to legitimate culture; what is deemed legitimate/illegitimate is the subject of struggle between collectives. What does all this mean in relation to class? Good question.

It seems to me that Bourdieu tackles social mobility in a similar way to that of Weber. He is concerned with life chances, but rather than attributing them solely to one's position within the market, he seems to give a great deal of causal weight to social/cultural factors. **[That is precisely right. But there is also a sense in which he regards "culture" and "society" as a kind of "quasi-market", at least in the sense of be made up of fields within which various kinds of games are played that have a lot of exchange-like interaction and competition.]** If this is correct, then I can/do agree with Bourdieu's emphasis on cultural capital as it relates to the market (one's ability to get a job), but I have difficulty believing that if one appreciates (as determined by one's class habitus) Vivaldi's Four Seasons rather than Bach, such a difference will make or break one's chances for mobility. That said, if the purpose for drawing such an example is to illustrate their importance regarding the ability to successfully navigate social networks that may aid in mobility, I suppose I do not object. **[Bourdieu would agree with you that any given taste/distinction issue would not "make or break" one's ability to get a job, but taken as a whole it could be the case that the full configuration of tastes/manners/styles of discourse could serious impede or facilitate a career. It is often said that on this score he reads Paris as the World.]**

I think my discomfort concerning what I perceive to be the primacy given to cultural capital by Bourdieu stems from the disconnect between it and economic capital. It is not clear to me how much, if at all, Bourdieu sees cultural capital (in the legitimate sense) as being the result of the possession (at some time during the life course or one's family history) of economic capital. It seems to me only logical that if one has more economic capital, one should also have more cultural capital (and if not that, then at least have greater ease in obtaining it). But given Bourdieu's examples from his empirical data, he does not seem to suggest this at all—for example, industrialists have a great degree of economic capital, but have a low degree of cultural capital, whereas professors

would have the opposite composition of capital. **[Industrialists do not exactly have low cultural capital, just not as much as professors. More importantly in this context, I am not sure that the “more” and “less” designation really works here, rather than just “different.” To be more or less both actors must recognize the same content to the cultural capital and see one as having more than the other. I suppose that is true for the classical music genres – the people who like lite classics recognize that this is not as cultivated as High Classical music. But is this always the case – that actors share a consensus on what counts as “more”?] I understand that the industrialist would have less cultural capital (in perhaps educational terms) than the professor, but why does it hold that the industrialist (or his family) would not also attain a level of cultural capital comparable to that of the professor, if the industrialist has the economic means to obtain it?**

And, completely unrelated: how would Bourdieu define “the professions”? **[I think he defines this mainly by the amount of education needed and the certification process by which they monopolize entry and credentialing.]**

5. Charity Schmidt

I am appreciative of Bourdieu’s meta-level analysis of society as centered around the interplay of class and habitus. I believe that his exploration of the relational aspects of social formation offers a useful framework to contextualize individuals and groups with a more comprehensive vision of social motivation, action and ‘standing’ along the axes of capital, habitus and field. However, I question the explanatory potential of Bourdieu’s framework relative to those individuals who represent the fringes of the class structure or those ‘contradictory class locations.’ The importance of this (for me) lies in its potential to analyze inter-class/habitus solidarity and relations (which is an aspect of class analysis I have consistently returned to throughout this seminar). Where can we identify the grounds upon which inter-class/habitus solidarity for social change may be generated? **[This is a very good question. One interpretation of Bourdieu is that he would be very suspicious of such inter-class solidarity – he would suspect the motives of the privileged high cultural capital leftist claiming solidarity with the masses: isn’t this just a way of deploying cultural capital in a specific kind of field to gain power? That skepticism, historically, is often justified of course: many intellectual leaders of popular movements are seeking power, manipulating their base, etc.]** How can disconnections (or contradictions) between one’s condition of existence and their habitus be explained (furthermore, how can those disconnections be thwarted or reinforced)?

In terms of social mobility, how do we understand the significance of habitus in relation to one’s mobility in condition of existence? If an individual moves ‘upward’ in the capital axis, how do we explain a habitus that was formed within and may actually represent various conditions of experience? **[Bourdieu writes as if a habitus is something that is so deeply instilled that you cannot transcend it. This is the problem of the nouveau riche who never really know how to be upper class. But not all differences in habitus have that kind of very rigid quality, so some kinds of**

learning the “feel for the game” might be possible in the course of mobility.] The case of organic intellectuals makes for a good representation of this question.

While reading this material late Sunday night, Public Broadcasting was showing a program about class in the U.S. I thought it was a perfect compliment to the material as it represented class ‘distinctions’ very well and also the interplay of such distinctions among various classes. I would love to know if anyone else caught that program! There is too much material to describe here, but perhaps I will try to bring into the discussion examples if and where they seem appropriate.

6. You-Geon Lee

The Bourdieu’s model of class structure was developed “by means of an analysis of survey data which includes a wide variety of indicators of the economic and cultural capital possessed by individuals located in positions throughout the occupational system (Weininger, 2005: 87).” Bourdieu (1987: 4) argues that “agents are distributed in the overall social space, ... first... according to the global volume of capital they possess, ... second ... according to the composition of their capital, ... third ... according to their trajectory in social space.” As a structure of objective positions, this multidimensional configuration seems to well represent relative class positions that individuals occupy and “the various possible combinations of the most important ‘powers and resources’ in the social formation and their evolution over time (Weininger, 2005: 89).” This may permit the analysis and explanation of intra-class and its intergenerational relationship as well as inter-class variations in life style and dispositions: for example, “the opposition between the ‘bourgeois’ or right-bank taste’ of professionals and executive [who have relatively less cultural capitals and more economic capital] and the ‘intellectual’ or ‘left-bank taste’ of artists and professors [with more cultural capitals and less economic capitals] (Brubaker, 1985: 765-766)”. In this model, Bourdieu (1984, 1987) used the occupation as an appropriate measure of classifying individuals into their class location because he thought that occupation is “a good and economical indicator of position in social space and ... provides valuable information on occupational effects... with its cultural and organizational specificities, etc (1987: 4).” At this point, my simple question is that “in his scheme, can the category of occupations be really the most appropriate and efficient indicator of estimating the variations of both cultural capitals and economic capitals without the help of other indicators such as education, income, or other direct indicators of measuring those variations in the empirical or statistical research?” How about a situation where the correlation between occupation and cultural capitals is very low, not because of such secondary properties as age, sex, ethnic, etc, but because of such other factors as powerful mass culture which obscures cultural boundaries among people with different occupations? Can occupation be an appropriate indicator to measure the volume, composition, and trajectory of cultural capital in this particular situation where the variations of cultural capital are limited even though there are still cultural distinctions between classes? **[I think there are two connected questions you are posing here: The first is a measurement question: under what conditions can the formal categories of “occupations” serve as good indicators of cultural capital. The second question is**

more about the character of cultural capital itself: In a world of mass culture, does “cultural capital” actually cease to be an important form of “capital”? If culture is broadly homogenized so that it doesn’t vary all that much across different occupations wouldn’t this also mean it wouldn’t vary all that much across persons and thus cease to be the kind of resource that confers power on people?]

7. Rahul Mahajan Interrogation, Week 9

Agenda Item: Relational vs. gradational concepts of “capital” (and thus class) in Bourdieu

Comment/Question: Bourdieu’s extension of the notion of capital to other “fields” is amusing and heuristically useful – “good to think with.” But there is a great deal of slippage between two very different notions that gets hidden under the word “capital.”

In the economic sphere, capital embodies a social relation – Bourdieu even effectively quotes Marx in this regard. Those who have it enter into certain determinate bilateral relations with those who don’t, extracting surplus, and so on. Whether or not one uses terms like surplus or exploitation, the basic notion of capital as creating certain determinate relations between the holder of capital and the person without sufficient capital who seeks employment is accepted across a wide range of thinkers. **[Do you think Bourdieu’s understanding of this economic capital dimension really involves exploitation or just competition with differential power? I didn’t reread the material with this in mind – does he suggest that there is a real appropriation of surplus or labor from one class by another?]**

Even though workers may have some capital and there is clearly some continuous distribution of capital, there is a sharp discontinuity between the holder of capital and the employee. We don’t simply differentiate one from the other as occupying slightly different points along a continuum of possession of capital.

This is very different from some putative view of economic “capital” as merely being something that different people have different stocks of, with no discontinuity imposed on the continuous variations. **[I wonder if there might be a relational construal of cultural capital when it involves relations of deference and the like, where the amount and kind of cultural capital you have means that *in the field where this capital is effective* other people have a specific kind of relation to you – they defer to your judgment, they listen to what you have to say, they cede responsibilities to you, etc.]**

Bourdieu certainly accepts this view of economic capital in some places in the text.

But when it comes to cultural capital, there is no relational sense that comes across. It’s true that holders of cultural capital can gain benefits denied to those who don’t have cultural capital, but there is no direct determinate relation. Cultural capital is just a stock

in a bank account – you have 3 units, I have 5, somebody else has 10 – and does not generate determinate relations between people. In using the same word for both, Bourdieu conflates two entirely different things, in a potentially (and actually) rather obfuscatory manner. **[But you are not using the idea of cultural capital as a resource deployed in a field to gain advantages within the game of that field. In that kind of setting maybe there is more of a relational aspect.]**

In other places, where he uses his extremely mathematically illiterate descriptions (the “three-dimensional space,” etc.) of how to plot people as points in the social field (looking at volume of capital, composition of capital, and trajectory), economic capital is also now, as Weinenger points out in his piece, reduced to a continuum without any imposed discontinuity and without again a notion of determinate relations it imposes.

If interpreted correctly, his mathematization corresponds to plotting people as lines in a three-dimensional space. One dimension is time, another is volume of capital, the third is ratio of economic to cultural capital, say (equivalently, you could plot time, economic capital, and cultural capital as the three axes). This geometrical picture takes out everything we know or think we know about how capital creates social relations that structure society.

Is there a way to put this back in? Either we have to come up with a more directly relational notion of cultural capital or give up treating economic and cultural capital as similar mutually fungible quantities.

8. Joe Ferrare

This interrogation will focus on the following concepts related to Bourdieu’s class analysis:

1. Class Primacy
2. Means of production: cultural and economic capital
3. Social Space
4. Structure and Agency
5. False consciousness

Before I discuss these topics, I would like to say that I find it laudable that Bourdieu spends a significant amount of time discussing the act of classification, and its political and social scientific implications. By bringing up the act of classification, Bourdieu draws attention to a fundamental (and consequential) issue in social science: mainly that in social science, the act of research can in fact change the phenomenon that is being researched. I believe Giddens refers to this as the double-hermeneutic, whereby social actors are interpreting the social world at the same time as social scientists, and often times they are interpreting the sociologist’s interpretations. This presents an interesting situation for social science, something the natural sciences have not had to deal with to such an extent (i.e. Ian Hacking points out that in Physics, a quark retains its “quark-ness” despite being classified as a quark). Social actors interact with the

classifications they are a part of (but are most often placed into by another, more powerful class) through institutions and the sets of practices that revolve around such classifications. Therefore, as Bourdieu suggests in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1992), sociology must also take itself as a unit of analysis. I do not think that this reflexivity puts anyone in a position to completely understand how they may be distorting social reality, or all the potential consequences that may result in our classifications, but I still see it as a productive and necessary step.

Some may interpret what I have just stated to suggest that classification should be done away with. I do not take such position. To the contrary, I think to *not* classify has many more negative political and scientific consequences than classification itself. **[But is it even remotely possible to avoid classification as soon as you want to describe anything?]** I'm sure there are many, particularly the Conservative Right, who would love it if classifications such as those by race, class, and gender were completely done away with. Classifications such as these are precisely what make possible the illumination of structural relations that hurt and help people in arbitrarily disproportionate ways.

I think it is pretty safe to say, at least in his earlier work, that Bourdieu gives primacy to class. However, this really isn't that informative when one considers that his notion of class has a much wider scope than any of the work we have read so far in this course. To say that Marx gives primacy to class is not the same as saying Bourdieu gives primacy to class, since for Marx class structure is synonymous with the economic structure, and for Bourdieu class structure includes both economic and symbolic structures. What are the consequences of this wide view? Brubaker claims that Bourdieu's notion of class structure "is synonymous with social structure," but he does not explain what the consequences of such a notion might be. **[Does it really make sense to say for Bourdieu class structure = social structure? Is social structure exhausted by the idea of the distribution of forms of capital? Is that all that we mean by social structure?]** In other words, what is lost by extending the notion of class to include cultural as well as economic capital?

Whereas some may say that Bourdieu rejected Marxist thought, I would reframe this to say that, in some areas, he simply widened certain understandings (To digress, in the book *In Other Words* Bourdieu makes the point of saying that it is only by way of Marx's contributions that we are able to critique him and extend our understanding of the social world.). An example of this can be found in his conception of *means of production*. Like Marx, Bourdieu recognizes that some agents possess the means of economic production and others (many others) do not. However, Bourdieu sought to extend this notion of "means of production" to include other forms of capital, mainly cultural capital. Thus, one could say that Bourdieu was concerned with economic and **cultural means of production**. **[Does the idea of cultural means of production correspond to a full notion of the cultural labor process, cultural technologies, and cultural products as the result of the use of those means of production? Is cultural capital used in a production process to produce cultural products? I am not sure how far to push the economic/production analogy here. This is something that the structuralist Marxists did: ideology was understood as the result of an ideological production process in which lived experiences (the raw materials) were transformed using ideological means of production into a distinctive ideological product (beliefs and ideas embodied in subjectivity), and politics was understood as a political production**

process which produces and transformations social relations. Is Bourdieu making a similar move around culture?] For the most part I think this is a strength of Bourdieu's work, particularly because I am interested in the ways in which the education system reproduces relations of class, race, and gender. Relying solely on one's position within the relations of production does not tell the full story of how certain groups are able to succeed with *ease* in the education system, while for others the exact opposite is the case. Now, one could argue that cultural capital is simply an expression of those who hold the most economic capital (i.e. an "in the last instance" type argument), but I think Bourdieu's empirical work suggests otherwise. For example, some class factions possess relatively small amounts of economic capital but relatively large amounts of cultural capital. **[The idea of an "amount" of economic capital is clear. Is it so clear for cultural capital?]** If we trace the trajectory of their class position within social space, we will find that those who inherited large amounts of cultural capital are often able to convert that into increased gains of economic capital that goes beyond their social origin. In other words, it not only the case that economic capital can be converted into cultural capital; cultural capital can also be converted into economic capital. I see this as one of the strengths in Bourdieu's class analysis: the extension of the concept of capital beyond the economic.

I particularly appreciate the multi-dimensional nature of Bourdieu's framework. Incidentally, his framework is three dimensional, not two as Brubaker suggests (1985:765). Brubaker does not, for some reason, include the third axis of "trajectory" which is one of the distinctive strengths of Bourdieu's framework. **[Is this really a dimension? It is an element or aspect of the analysis, but is trajectory a dimension in the same sense as the types and volume of capital? This gets pretty elusive to me.]** The three components of social space—volume, composition, and trajectory—together provide a continuous scale that takes away some of the problems with delineating boundaries between groups (i.e. what to do with groups that are at the fringe of two separate groups). **[How do these three "dimensions" yield a continuous "scale"?)** One key issue that remains unresolved for me is what the exchange rate is between cultural and economic capital. **[This is a good question and one that Bourdieu is certainly very vague about. But note: at least you can pose this question – which suggests that these do indeed constitute dimensions or axes. In terms of the third "dimension" it is not even clear what one means to talk about the exchange rate between economic capital and trajectory. This seems like a different sort of aspect of the problem, not a dimension of social space.]** This concern arose as I was considering Bourdieu's depiction of the vertical axis of social space, total volume of capital, as the sum of economic and cultural capital.

One of the central components of Bourdieu's meta-theory is his understanding of the relationship between structure and agency. Bourdieu was dissatisfied with purely objectivist notions of structure that exclude an active agent, as well as subjectivist notions that treat social actors as unconstrained beyond their own desires and pursuits. I found Brubaker's description of the objectivist and subjectivist tension between Levi-Strauss's work and that of Sartre to be very helpful in understanding the intellectual context of Bourdieu's early intellectual days. Despite Bourdieu's attention to agency through his notion of *habitus*, however, I think it is important to recognize that the agent in Bourdieu's meta-theory remains highly bounded within a set of structural (power)

relations. As Weininger notes, Bourdieu rejected classical rational action theory (correctly in my opinion), and instead insisted that social action is only rational within specific sets of structural relations (i.e. the ones most familiar to the habitus).

One thing that occurred to me while Brubaker was comparing Bourdieu to Marx was their similar views on false consciousness of the dominated classes. Marx (or perhaps it is better so say “Some Marxists”) saw the proletariat as embodying the ruling class’s ideology, which kept hidden relations of exploitation. In a similar way, Bourdieu sees individuals as “misperceiving” the actual basis behind social practices, which as Weininger states, is “the economic and cultural capital that both underlies the different habitus and enables their realization” (2005:101). While Marx and Bourdieu were making separate claims, they were both arguing that individuals hold a set of misperceptions about social relations, and that these misperceptions are partly responsible for the reproduction of such relations (whereas Marx was speaking of ideology and false consciousness, Bourdieu uses the term ‘symbolic capital’ and ‘symbolic violence’). While at times I **have had trouble with the notion that some agents are able to “rise above the deception”** while others are not, it does not take away from the reality that social relations are often masked behind a perception of being “natural,” and that the task of sociology, in part, is to “denaturalize” such relations. **[I am not sure why you have trouble seeing some people as being able to unmask deception. This is basically a premise of being even able to talk about deception – someone has to utter those words. It is possible, of course, to make the claim we are all mystified including me, and no demystification is possible. I can identify the existence of fog, but I cannot blow it away. One strategy is to say that intellectuals can identify the existence of fog, but it is only through dialogue and struggle – not intellectual expertise – that the fog can be removed.]**

9. Jorge Sola

How do Bourdieu’s strategies and concepts help to solve the theoretical asymmetry between class structure and class as collective actors?

In the last session I had to comment on one of Elisabeth’s interrogations in which she stressed the necessity of a good account of how class structure has causal effects on class formation and class struggle. Then, I pointed out that there is a kind of theoretical asymmetry between these two fields. On one hand, concerning class structure, we take the “interests” as the criterion to define class location; on the other hand, however, concerning class formation or class struggle, we must recognize that an approach based merely in the “interests” is quite poor. The theoretical asymmetry entails that while in the former case we can use an *etic* approach based in an artificial construction, in the latter case we must use an *emic* approach closer to the motivations (be these interests, norms, values, etc.) of social actors (including especially **the collective identity** of these groups concerning to their existence as such groups). **[Bourdieu also suggests that the social distances “on paper” affect the probabilities of groups forming. Doesn’t this imply that there is a pretty deep link between identity and interests – that identities will**

tend to be forged around common interests defined by the kinds of capital people have? Mostly this seems to be what Bourdieu argues actually happens.]

Bourdieu also deals with this problem when he compares the “class on paper” and the “actual existence of groups”. It is then when he accuses Marx of confusing the things of logic with the logic of things. Among other things, Bourdieu seems to propose two bridges to overcome such asymmetry: First, he tries to rethink the relation between social classes and status groups. Since these groups share a common lifestyle, when a “class on paper” become a kind of status group, it will be important to explain issues as class formation and class struggle. Second, *habitus* concept is an original way to pass from the agents’ objective situation (“class structure” or “social space”) to their actual actions, by **denying a deterministic link based merely on either interest or norms.** **[But aren’t the dispositions instilled through habitus still pretty deterministic, even if they are not reducible to interests and norms? People don’t have much choice about their habitus, do they?]** Both related strategies are very interesting ways to connect the intellectual construction of “class on paper” with the more phenomenological study of “actual classes”.

Nevertheless, after reading Bourdieu’s works and his commentator’s papers, I have some doubts above how to understand his proposals: Are they actually a theoretical model or only some conceptual tools to use case by case? What kind of generalizations is he able to make, beyond his amazing ethnographic descriptions? What is the exact relation between class and other social attributes as race or gender? And indeed, can these sexual or racial groups be classes also (Bourdieu 1987, 15)?

What is the actual power of symbolic power?

Despite his criticisms to Marx, Bourdieu seems very close to some Marxists: he coincides with E. P. Thompson (although Bourdieu is much more sophisticated theoretically) by stressing the importance of the class’ identity to consider that class actually exists (Weininger, 114; Brubaker, 762, Bourdieu 1987, 15) and with Gramsci by exploring the struggles in the culture battlefield, what is very related to the ideas of “cultural hegemonic” and “common sense” of the latter... whom Bourdieu doesn’t quote.

Nevertheless, when he approaches the symbolic struggles (perhaps the most important issue in his work), it seems to me that he sometimes overvalues the power of symbolic power to explain certain social processes. I know that when he deals with these conflicts he regards the resources and the position in social space of each agent. But, again, I think he is ambiguous or, at least, not clear enough. Finally, one could think that the symbolic struggles try to keep or to break certain domination or exploitation social relationships, but this latter concept doesn’t play an important role in his framework. **[I like your question above – what is the actual power of symbolic power? It isn’t all that clear, but it seems to have to do with a particular mixing of legitimation and status as these figure in solidarities. I see this as having a positive implication for the power of ruling elites in various arenas/fields: the symbolic struggles affirm the rightness of**

their advantages to the elites themselves (forging their inward looking solidarities and sense of self-justification) while – when successful – eroding the solidarity of the subaltern groups by affirming their inferiority and incapacity. One view is that this works through the link between status and self-esteem, and we know from a wide range of psychological research that self-esteem is crucial for a sense of personal efficacy which is an important element of a disposition to rule.]

10. Adam Slez

Bourdieu argues that fundamental task of the sociologist is to examine the “existence and mode of existence of collectives” (Bourdieu 1985:741). According to Bourdieu, collectives are the product of symbolic struggle within a multidimensional social space; the probability that a collective will form is a function of proximity within the social space. **[This is a nice way of linking the issues: the proximities in a social space determine the probabilities of a collective forming, but it is symbolic struggles – not struggle in general, but symbolic struggles - which actually turn those proximities into actual collectives. I am not 100% sure that Bourdieu limits the idea of symbolic struggle to its role in forging real groups out of positions-within-spaces, but you may be right that this is the central theoretical role that symbolic struggles (and symbolic capital) play.]** In general, actors within this space can be differentiated along three dimensions—the “volume of capital,” the “composition of capital,” and “change in these two properties over time” (Bourdieu [1979] 1984:114). Though Bourdieu’s position on the importance of non-economic forms of differentiation appears to have changed over time (see Weininger 2005), at one point he did note that “groupings grounded in the structure of the space constructed in terms of capital distribution are more likely to be stable and durable, while other forms of groupings are threatened by the splits and oppositions linked to distances in the social space” (Bourdieu 1985:726). While economic factors shape the contours of this abstract social space, it is the relational properties of the space which determine the probability of group formation. **[What does “relational properties” really mean, especially in light of Rahul’s comment above about cultural capital?]** What is so interesting is that despite marked changes in the underlying economic processes, the overall structure of relations within the space tends to remain relatively stable. **[Is this something we actually know to be true? What would it take to show that the “overall structure of relations” had changed significantly? This implies that there are different patterns of “overall structure” that we could distinguish so that we would know they had changed. It isn’t so clear to me that the overall structure of relations hasn’t changed quite dramatically as economic processes changed from – say – Fordism to the “knowledge economy”].**

Describing this type of change, Bourdieu indicates that “the maintenance of...the relations of order which a social formation its structure, is provided by an unceasing change in its substantial (i.e., non-relational) properties” (Bourdieu [1979] 1984:163). Summarizing the results of this dynamic, Bourdieu suggests that “what the competitive struggle makes everlasting is not different conditions, but the difference between conditions” (Bourdieu [1979] 1984:164). If I understand this argument correctly, it

suggests that examining labor at the point of production potentially gives us very little purchase on the problem of class formation, in that distribution of available jobs which underlies a particular class structure can change without there being a concomitant change in class structure—as members of the dominated class begin to move into jobs previously occupied by members of the dominant class, the members of the former class do not automatically become members of the latter. In short, through “strategies of reconversion” it is possible for the dominant class to reproduce the structure of the social space, despite changes in the types of jobs which they actually occupy (see Bourdieu [1979] 1984).

11. Sarbani Chakraborty

I am unclear as to how we would understand the Bourdieuan concept of labour, which is an individual asset. Bourdieu states, “Capital, which may exist in objectified form [...], and which may be legally guaranteed, represents power over the field [...] and, more precisely, over accumulated product of past labor [...]” (p. 724). If I possess a particular form of capital by virtue of the accident of my birth, i.e. through inheritance, how do I use my labour to accumulate my labour? Would the labour on my part be then understood in terms of my repeated symbolic production of my inherited capital? **[I am not a Bourdieuan expert by any means. Power over a field means that you have advantages in the competition over whatever it is that the field defines as “rewards”. Your activities in the field, in which you deploy your capital, is what enables you to capture those rewards. The expression “accumulated product of past labor” certainly has a Marxist ring to it, and I assume that he is suggesting here is that the rewards a field have to offer are the result of all of the interacting practices that constitute the field – and thus they do embody “past labor” (=practices). But I am not completely sure of this.]**

How do we understand class – as neighbouring positions or as a set of agents? It seems that they have different connotations altogether. The former may imply geography, dispositions and distribution of power/capital. The latter is understood as individuals occupying a particular position. Related to the concept of agents is another question that it seems puzzling to me. When does an occupant of a position in a social space become an agent? Bourdieu talks a lot about the unconsciousness of every-day practice. But to become an agent it seems that one needs to have the knowledge of the discursive structures that constitute them in the first place based upon which they practice in their every day lives. But it is unclear how both the presence and absence of knowledge makes an agent out of a human being. **[Bourdieu does not seem so concerned with agency in the sense you are using here – the reflexive, self-conscious agent. His actors are knowledgeable and skilled at playing games -- they have a “feel for the game” – and dispositions to act in specific ways (habitus), but they are not really conscious calculators of actions.]**

I would like to discuss how struggles become possible within Bourdieuan framework. **[I am not sure what you mean by “becomes possible”: the whole framework is based**

on conflicts of interest within fields, animated by the use of forms of capital in pursuit of those interests, so conflict is their from the start.] Even though Bourdieu can be criticized for his model of complicity and passivity, it seems that his emphasis on knowledge and discourse do open up the possibility of struggles. **[I agree that B emphasizes knowledge in various ways, but why is it knowledge as such which opens the door to struggle, rather than the conflicting interests around which people use their knowledge.]** He mentions, “Knowledge of the social world and more precisely, the categories that make it possible, are the stakes, par excellence, of political struggle, the inextricably theoretical and practical struggle for power to conserve or transform the social world by conserving or transforming the categories through which it is perceived.” (p. 729). Here the ‘role of the intellectuals’ seems important. Intellectuals (academicians, poets, literary critics, leaders etc.) can take up projects to transform the categories themselves. **[Why, precisely, does the struggle over classification matter? Why does anyone care about this? Is it just because of knowledge and discourse, or is it because of the ways in which different classifications either enable to disable the use of different forms of capital in pursuit of ones interests?]** This seems to be more relevant in projects that question the categories of ‘disability’ or ‘undeserving poor’. But I feel that, even though Bourdieu is critical of utterances that pre-suppose existence of a category like ‘working class’ and “class on paper”, he would not disapprove of projects to bring back or “conserve” the category of ‘class’ or “working class” per se. What he might push for is to be critically aware of the usage of the term, as to how we position ‘class’ vis-à-vis the dominant discourse. **[He would only care about that in the context of academic understandings/analysis of class. He would not argue – I think – that actors in the world cannot struggle over the category for various reasons without being “critically aware of the usage of the term.”]** It seems that it is only through making the class-ness of societies visible ‘we’ can challenge the illusory ‘dissolution’ of the class say in the US society. The production of the knowledge about class, probably irrespective of or prior to class re-identification of people per se does seem important especially in advanced capitalist societies as we can argue that it is precisely because of the dismissal of class by the dominant discursive structure, the identification in terms of class has been lost. So we can say that it is a viable project to at least talk of class in terms of a “probable group” in order to attain forms of mobilization.

12. Elizabeth Wrigley-Field

What is the causal structure of Bourdieu’s argument?

At first I thought that he was using class (i.e. economic and cultural capital) to explain consumption patterns. Then I thought he was using consumption patterns as an *index* of class, since he rejects any *a priori* demarcations of classes, and it’s not necessarily clear how to measure economic and cultural capital directly.

I think it’s actually supposed to be both: people with similar distributions of economic and cultural capital are compelled toward certain tastes and then reinforce these by using the taste patterns as a symbolic boundary around their group. Thus, a multidimensional continuum of class locations crystallizes into cohesive groups. This

happens because the class locations generate a material interest (is the interest in people demarcating themselves, or in features of the specific consumption pattern? I read it as both), but they don't directly weigh the benefits; rather, their interest gives rise to a "habitus" that pushes in that direction. [I assume Tilly was very much influenced by all of this although I don't remember him saying so.] So on this model, class locations influence consumption, which gives rise to classes as social groups. And then we can use consumption to identify what the classes are. Is this correct? **[I interpret the notion of "capital" as identifying a capacity to pursue interests based on particular kinds of capacity-enhancing resources. "Consumption" would be one such interest, but not the only interest. And indeed, because of the competitive nature of the fields within which one deploys specific kinds of capital, one of the interests capital-wielders have is in accumulating more capital. This basically accounts for financial capital, cultural capital, and social capital. "Symbolic capital" seems different – and I don't quite understand it as well – but it seems to be concerned with the status-prestige value that possession of the other forms of capital confer. This has something to do with legitimacy, and I think especially legitimacy among co-holders of a given kind of capital. Thus, for example, having a certain kind of cultural capital generates a form of status recognition from other holders of that cultural capital which ratifies and enhancing the actual capacity you have from your cultural capital. Maybe it is a kind of multiplier. *Habitus* refers to the internalized dispositions one acquires to play the game properly – the game of accumulating capital, deploying it in competition within a field, etc. It is defined by the set of dispositions to act needed with respect to a kind of capital. It is not so much that interests *give rise* to a habitus as a habitus develops in ways the functionally correspond to the use and accumulation of capital].**

Relatedly, I am confused about the basic issue of what economic and cultural capital are. I took economic capital to be a Weberian concept of what economic powers and resources one can bring to bear on their goals. Is this right? **[Yes – but not "human capital" or skills, just financial resources].** Similarly, we can take cultural capital (or cultural + symbolic capital?) to be more analogous to Weber's status, but this doesn't resolve my confusion. If class is in fact meant to explain consumption, rather than merely be operationalized by it, then doesn't this become tautological? (It needn't if you have a more limited concept of "cultural capital," like education, but I thought the point was that it wasn't just limited to education, it also includes things like how high-status your tastes are.) Is "refined taste" part of the definition of cultural capital and therefore part of the explanation of consumption patterns, or is does one's cultural capital explain how they are able to win the symbolic struggle to have their taste be considered "refined taste"? **[Cultural capital refers to all of the cultural resources a person accumulates to be able to play certain games properly – the game of high finance, the game of homo academicus, the game of football. It is knowledge plus a range of other cultural forms that give one these capacities to act. So it is not just "status" although I think it is connected to status.]**

That raises a third point of confusion for me, about taste hierarchies. These hierarchies are supposed to be both universal (that's how they can represent a hierarchy, rather than just different choices made by different classes), and also contested (mostly by elite class fractions, since the working class can't compete effectively as taste-makers).

This leads to the question: How would we empirically validate Bourdieu's theory? If we take his theory as a given, we can use it to identify what we think the classes are, but (unless I'm confused) we don't have capital measures independent of their supposed effect on consumption. So we need another way to test whether Bourdieu's sense of economic + cultural capital, is a useful way to understand anything. What predictions are made by Bourdieu's theory outside of consumption patterns? **[For example: There is a set of predictions about boundary work and classification struggles within "fields" as actors struggle to increase the value of the forms of capital which they control. Since this is a "relational field" their struggles to do so meet resistance from others.]**

That, in turn, leads me to: how much is Bourdieu actually disagreeing with the other theorists we've looked at, and how much is he just interested in different questions (especially from Marx)? i.e. how much is he posing a different idea of what the same concept, class, is and does, vs. using the term for a different purpose. I don't think those can be completely demarcated – presumably your substantive theories about what a "class-like" concept can explain will influence the questions you are interested in answering, as well as the reverse – but I would like to pose it all the same.

I like a lot of Bourdieu's insights. For example, I think "capital conversion" is a good insight – anecdotally speaking, you do have independently wealthy (through parentage or marriage) people who consider themselves "artists" or otherwise take on high-status, low-paying pursuits. However, it's not just that they turn economic capital into cultural capital (by becoming really starving, but culturally well-regarded, artists); I think (again, anecdotally) that they must also maintain a high level of economic capital (although it is not coming from their own jobs) to remain high status. Regardless, I think this is a good point. I also think the idea of "habitus," expressing real interests but not through an explicit cost-benefit analysis or value derivation, is a very interesting and promising one.

However, what I understand of his explanatory project strikes me as too narrow. I don't quite understand what this is supposed to tell us about society, beyond the questions of who consumes what.

13. Hsing-Mei Pan

Bourdieu proposes the concept of a socially constituted structure of social space to present his notion of class. He distributes people in different occupational categories to different positions in the structure of social space based on the volume and composition of the economic and cultural capitals that they possess (his research field is in French). In his opinion, the social relations in the structure of social space and the social classification involved in the structure shape the mental structure and disposition of people. He further shows the different consumption practices among people in different positions to present the division of the class structure and the boundaries among different social classes.

It seems that Bourdieu thinks the concept of social classification of people originates in (or correspond to) the social relations involved in the structure of social space. I agree with his viewpoint. But, on the other hand, is this the only way that we can understand the concept of symbolic classification of people? Is it possible that there exist some

fundamentally cultural classification concepts in society that create the structure of social relations? For example, different societies, especially those that have traditional cultures, may have different cognition of labor power or work or knowledge (or credentials) that people use to classify other people. Through the process of classification, the division of social relations forms. That is, if we want to further understand how social relations form, it seems that we should find and catch the possible fundamentally cultural concepts that people use to classify other people. Based on this kind of exploration, we can further understand how dominant classes use fundamentally cultural classification concepts to solidify their dominant positions. **[You raise an interesting “chicken-and-egg” problem: do classification systems generate social relations, or are classification systems a response to social relations? You are suggesting that the classification logics might be “fundamentally cultural concepts” that are generative of relations rather than something which actors strategically use to shore up their power within relations. I guess my own intuition is that even if this were true in some specific cultural moments where social relations are being formed, once a system is in place there is a real dialectical relation between relations and (cultural) classifications in which struggles *over* classification are weapons to defend and subvert the power within those relations.]**

14. Ann Pikus

There are two issues I would like to discuss this week. First, I would like to discuss Bourdieu's treatment of crosscutting classifications and his view of the primacy of class. Brubaker indicates that age, sex, and ethnicity "...are indicators of class-constitutive differences in conditions of existence and dispositions" (p. 767). He indicates the divisions actually constitute class divisions. In contrast, Weininger seems to argue that the impact of such secondary factors (age, sex, ethnicity) may vary depending on one's location but that class will not vary as a function of the secondary factors. Does Weininger interpret Bourdieu correctly to give class primacy over secondary factors? Weininger also points out that Bourdieu revised his theory in later years to show that gender does exert independent effects apart from class and the two could moderate each other. Would age and ethnicity have similar effects? IF class no longer has primacy, would Bourdieu agree that groups organized around sex, age or ethnicity could be as effectively mobilized as groups organized around their economic and cultural conditions after all? **[I do think that there is a current within Bourdieu in which any form of social difference that is constituted as a basis of power would be considered a form of class – class is nothing other than social groups built around power-capacities, whatever the source of that power. And since the idea of “capital” in his usage is so open-ended, I am sure that gender capital, age capital, etc. could be concocted. Once you move from a specific economic/production based class concept to one that includes cultural capital and social capital, then I do not see the basis for a general exclusion of a wide range of social relations and social differences that could be interpreted as defining specific types of social capital and cultural capital. At least this would define positions within social spaces – classes on paper – that could**

potentially become recognized as groups. Now surely ethnic groups do form in this way. So why wouldn't they be "classes" for Bourdieu?]

Secondly, I would like to discuss Bourdieu's theory of the conflict over legitimate culture, particularly the trickle-down effect. This model presumes that the dominant class acts as "taste-maker" whose choice of objects or practices becomes distinguished and mimicked down through the lower classes except for the working class whose capital and disposition remain constraints (Weininger, p. 96-97). Yet, how does Bourdieu explain the trickle-up phenomenon, for example when hip hop culture becomes fashionable or when a gritty urban neighborhood becomes popular for those with higher economic and cultural capital? In these examples, the upper classes may still be legitimating the culture but what causes them to identify themselves with the groups so beneath them in economic and cultural capital (depending on whose cultural capital) initially? **[This is an interesting question. One idea of course is that the urban street culture does not confer any power on ghetto kids, so it is not really a form of "cultural capital" until it is valorized by elites – they infuse the capital into that cultural form because of their position of cultural power. Somehow this doesn't sound quite right, but it is the sort of argument Bourdieu might make to make this observation consistent with his framework.]**