Postindustrial Society: Daniel Bell

THEORIST'S DIGEST

Brief Biography

Daniel Bolotsky was born in poverty on May 10, 1919, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. His parents were Jewish immigrants who worked in the garment industry. His father died when Daniel was just 8 months old, and he, his older brother, and his mother moved in with relatives. At 11 years old, Daniel became the legal ward of his uncle, a dentist who changed the family name to Bell.

Daniel Bell grew up in sight of the city's "Hoovervilles." These shantytowns were named for President Herbert Hoover, who was widely blamed for the Great Depression and the lack of government help for the needy. They were constructed from pieces of cardboard, wood, tin, canvas, and other materials that were scrounged from area dumps and back alleys. Some "homes" in Hooverville weren't structures at all, but simply holes dug in the ground with tin or cardboard for a roof. In his early teens, Bell ran with a gang of boys to steal food from local markets, mostly potatoes and damaged tomatoes. The gang met late at night, gathered around small fires made from broken boxes, and shared and ate the pilfered food. In explaining why he became a sociologist, Bell ("First Love and Early Sorrows," n.d.) explained, "I wanted to know, simply, why this had to be. It was inevitable that I would become a sociologist." Bell clearly saw a relationship between his early experiences and his sociology: "'The intellectual . . . begins with *his* experience, *his* individual perceptions of the world, *his* privileges and deprivations, and judges the world by these sensibilities'" (as quoted in Kaufman, 2011, n.p.).

He began his sociological training in his early teens by going to the New York Public Library and "squatting" in the sociology section. There, he studied Herbert Spencer and Karl Marx, among others. He also attended a socialist Sunday school and would go twice a week in the evenings to a Marxist reading group at the Rand School of Science. At the age of 13, both convinced and impressed, he joined the Young People's Socialist League. Bell often told the story of informing his Bar Mitzvah Rabbi that he had found the truth in socialism and no longer believed in God. The Rabbi responded, "Kid, you don't believe in God. Tell me, do you think God cares?"

After graduating high school, Bell began attending the City College of New York in 1935. He majored in the classics because an adviser told him, "ancient history was the best preparation for sociology because one could there examine entire and coherent cultures" (Waters, 2003, p. 164). There was an alcove in the cafeteria that was known for heated political discussions. Bell referred to his time with that group as a kind of *heder.* Heders are "Jewish religious schools where arguing a variety of views and redefining positions was the basis of learning" (Kaufman, 2011, n.p.). Bell apparently valued this style of teaching and learning throughout his career. A close friend and prior student, Mark Lilla (2011), recalls that Bell "had a passion for conversation alien to a midwestern gentile. I spent a lot of time in his office . . . mostly listening and taking notes while he digressed from his digressions and gave me my education" (n.p.).

Bell graduated from City College in 1939 and attended just one year of graduate school at Columbia University, after which he worked in journalism for many years, as an editor for *The New Leader* and later

the labor editor for *Fortune* magazine. In 1965, Bell and Irving Kristol, whom he met at City College, formed the *The Public Interest*, a journal that has had significant impact on domestic policy in the United States (Kaufman, 2011).

Bell's teaching career began in 1945 at the University of Chicago, where he taught social science. He lectured at Columbia from 1952 to 1956, and in 1960, Columbia University awarded Bell a PhD for his book *The End of Ideology*. He became a full professor at Columbia in 1962 and moved to Harvard in 1969, where he became Henry Ford II Professor of Social Sciences in 1980. In addition, Bell has served on several public service boards and commissions, including the President's Commission on a National Agenda for the 1980s; the National Commission on Technology, Automation, and Economic Progress; and the Commission on the Year 2000. Bell was a prolific writer and is best known for his works *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society, The End of Ideology*, and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. These last two were both named by the *Times Literary Supplement* as being among the 100 most influential books since the end of World War II. Bell died in January of 2011 at the age of 91.

Central Sociological Questions

Bell's questions are essentially those of Marx: He wants to understand how capitalism simultaneously promises and denies human hope. More specifically, Bell (1999) wants to understand how the promise of hope can be fulfilled: "Like many advances in human history, post-industrial developments promise men and women greater control of their social destinies. But this is only possible under conditions of intellectual freedom and open political institutions" (p. lxxxiv).

Simply Stated

Daniel Bell argues that the way we have thought of society in the past isn't fruitful for truly understanding what's going on. Rather than a system, society has three distinct and independent domains: the techno-economic structure (TES), polity, and culture. Each of these domains operates according to axial principles and structures specific to the domain. Thus, changes in one don't necessitate changes in another.

The TES of early to middle modernity—industrialization—has shifted to postindustrialization. The leading sectors in a postindustrial economy are the tertiary, quaternary, and quinary; and the more important occupations are professional, technical, and scientific. A postindustrial economy is thus driven by knowledge and theory. Rather than industrial classes, then, situses become important for understanding social position.

Key Concepts

techno-economic structure, polity, culture, axial principles, axial structures, preindustrial society, industrial society, postindustrial society, bureaucratic management, legitimacy, identity, traditionalism, syncretism, economic sectors (primary–quinary), data, information, theoretical knowledge, situses, distributional goods, positional goods, time, knowledge

Concepts and Theory: Rethinking Society

The ontology of society—how society exists—was a paramount issue for early theorists because sociology had to establish itself as a viable modern discipline. Yet, as we've seen, the way in which we conceptualize society, what it is and how it works, has fundamental implications for theory, as well. In Chapter 2, we saw what it means to think of society as a system. The elementary parts of society are structures and institutions that are interrelated and mutually dependent. Changes in one part of society thus bring changes in other parts, which in turn affect the initial structure and create additional complexities as the system brings itself back to equilibrium. In the functionalist model, then, changes multiply through the connections that exist among different social structures. Collectively, these changes tend to increase the complexity of the system, balance society at a point of equilibrium, and make society more adaptive. Marx, on the other hand, saw society as an effect of economic relations—that is, the economy determines the structures of society. The economy is the substructure, the foundation upon which everything else is built. Social change is thus driven by the economy, the means of production determining the relations of production, and these changes are driven by dialectical economic forces.

Bell thinks of society differently. Despite the differences between the functionalist approach and Marx's, they are similar in that they posit fairly linear, unified, and somewhat predictable paths. According to people like Durkheim and Parsons, society is generally progressing, becoming more adaptive, and because society is a system, all parts of the system change together and are usually balanced at a point of equilibrium. Marx similarly argues that society changes as a whole and is on an inevitable historic path to communism, the economic form most in keeping with species-being. Bell, however, argues that change is not unified or predictive because different social arenas are not linked together as a system, nor is change driven by a single factor, such as the economy.

For Bell, society is best understood as a set of three disconnected realms: the techno-economic structure (TES), polity, and culture. The *techno-economic structure* refers to the organization of production and the unequal distribution of goods and services; TES thus includes Marx's means and relations of production. *Polity* is not a social system per se. It is, rather, a set of laws and procedures that are used to create social justice and power. The polity specifies the legitimate use of force and regulates conflict. *Culture* for Bell (1976) is specifically defined in terms of expressive symbolisms that "seek to explore and express the meanings of human existence in some imaginative form" (p. 12). The culture with which Bell is concerned, then, involves expressions that address the issues of existence that confront every person, such as death, the meaning of life, redemption, the meaning of love, and so on. Forms of cultural expressions, for Bell, include painting, poetry, and fiction, and most specifically religious liturgy and ritual.

Each of these realms has distinct rhythms of change and is governed by unique axial principles and structures. Bell's use of the idea of "axis" is significant. An axis is a straight line around which something rotates, like the axis of the earth. Bell uses

this idea to emphasize the unpredictable nature of these separate realms: Each realm has two axes, both of which may vary independently. *Axial principles* refer to the dominant values within a realm. *Axial structures* are the methods of organization specific to the realm.

It's important to emphasize that these axes don't necessarily "work" together. Bell doesn't explain the relationships between the two axes because there aren't any; changes in one axis do not automatically produce changes in another. At times they may, but at other times perhaps not. The same is true about the relationships among the realms. The TES generally initiates change, but those changes don't determine what happens in the other sectors: "as the initiator of change it poses problems for the political order . . . and the cultural realm in confronting the claims of instrumental reason as it spreads through the society" (Bell, 1999, p. xix). Further, the rhythm of change is generally different within each realm, and these differences are the sources of tension and change in society generally. There are only certain periods when change in all three areas will occur at the same time. Each of these periods produces an accidental yet powerful unity. The beginning of modernity was one such period when all three domains changed at the same time and in the same direction. This initial period was the "bourgeois society."

Bell identifies three periods of modernity, each generally defined through the techno-economic structure: preindustrial, industrial, and postindustrial. However, as with almost everything, we shouldn't think of postindustrial society in exclusionary or absolute terms. It isn't true that societies are either industrial or postindustrial. We should think of it as a continuum, with societies being more or less postindustrial. In fact, Bell (1999) characterizes postindustrial society as an ideal type, "a fiction, a logical construction of what could be, against which the future social reality could be compared" (pp. xix–xx). Bell's theory, then, is an analytical scheme that can be used to analyze an existing society or to describe how a society changed at some point in the past.

Characteristics of Modern Society

Each of the three domains has different principles and structures around which society revolves. In modernity, the techno-economic structure's principles are function and rationality. The TES is an economizing sphere, and thus the central value is efficiency in terms of means–ends rationality. As Weber (1904–1905/2002) puts it, action is legitimated and evaluated "on the basis of strictly *quantitative* calculations and is oriented to the sought-after economic success in a systematic and dispassionate manner" (p. 35).

The axial structure for the modern TES is bureaucratic management and hierarchy. Under a bureaucracy, tasks and interactions are rationalized in terms of means–ends efficiency, and they are routinized in the sense that they may be carried out without thought or planning or dependency on individual talents. Thus, each person and task is met in the same efficient and equal manner; personal issues and emotions do not have a place in a bureaucracy; and, because the person

is subordinated to the task, she or he becomes an object, like a cog in a wheel. Together, the TES axial principles and structures in modernity mean that the rhythm of change is linear and progressive, with "clear rules for innovation, displacement, and substitution" (Bell, 1976, p. 13).

The focus of polity's principles is *legitimacy*, the moral or ethical basis for exercising power, and its explicit condition in modernity is the consent of the governed. The implicit condition is egalitarianism, that all people should have an equal voice in achieving consensus. The axial structure is a system of representation or participation. However, due to the increasing impact of technology in modernity, the administrative apparatus may become technocratic, government by technicians. The rhythm of change, then, cycles between efficiencies of oligarchy and equalities of democracy.

The last domain, culture, is made up of expressive symbols that are responses to basic existential issues. Such issues are usually seen as part of religion, but Bell also includes other artistic and visual expressions like painting and literature. For Bell (1976), culture is "a continual process of sustaining an identity through the coherence gained by a consistent aesthetic point of view, a moral conception of self, and style of life. . . . Culture is thus the realm of sensibility, of emotion and moral temper, and of the intelligence, which seeks to order these feelings" (p. 36).

For culture, the principles of modernity are self-expression and realization. The issues of authenticity arising from these factors are assessed through subjective sentiments and not objective, institutionalized standards. The axial structures are those arrangements for the production and reproduction of cultural meanings and artifacts. The rhythm of change in the cultural realm is *recursive*, which means it can repeat itself indefinitely. Culture is recursive for Bell because it always deals with the same types of issues: questions of human existence. The "answers may vary, or they may be recast in new aesthetic forms," but culture always comes back to the "concerns and questions that are the existential agonies of human beings" (Bell, 1976, p. 13).

Thus, for culture, there isn't a clear rhythm or principle of change. It will always retain elements from the past, either through *traditionalism*, with a clear return to previous expressions, or by *syncretism*, arbitrarily borrowing from and mixing diverse cultures. Because of its focus on individual expression, modern culture changes mostly through syncretism: "Modern culture is defined by this extraordinary freedom to ransack the world storehouse and to engorge any and every style it comes upon" (Bell, 1976, p. 13).

One of the things that Bell wants us to see here is that by using his analytical scheme, we find that there isn't the economic determination that Marx used, nor is there the model of a balanced system that functionalists propose. There is, rather, tension among the three realms in modernity: the TES is bureaucratic and hierarchical, dealing with people formally as objects; polity is oriented toward equality and participation and structured by democratic participation or representation; and culture values the self-actualizing individual in search of the authentic or whole person. For Bell, these differences are a major source of structural tension and change.

Concepts and Theory: The Decline of Class

An economy can be divided up into sectors that are defined by distance from the natural environment and the proportion of a society's population involved. The primary sector, then, is most directly involved in an organized attempt to extract raw resources from a by-and-large uncontrolled natural environment. The part of the economy that is most important is extractive, such as agriculture, mining, fishing, and so on. Here, the tension is between human beings and nature. This sector dominates during the preindustrial phase of modernity.

The secondary sector of an economy manufactures finished goods. Here, nature is more clearly dominated by machines. Goods are produced by semiskilled workers laboring with engineered equipment. The tension, or "game" as Bell has it, is still played out against nature, but now it is a *fabricated* nature. The most important part of the economy is manufacturing and processing—those sectors that produce goods. This is the industrial phase of modern society, the phase with which Marx was most concerned.

In a *postindustrial society,* the leading sectors of the economy are tertiary (transportation), quaternary (trade, finance, insurance, and so on), and quinary (health, education, research, recreation, etc.). Where the important jobs in preindustrial society are such things as farmers and miners, and semiskilled workers and engineers are the vital positions in industrial society, the significant economic positions in a postindustrial society are professional (medical, legal, and so on), technical (software design, data management, and so forth), and scientific.

Thus, the "central feature of post-industrial society is the codification of theoretical knowledge and the new relation of science to technology" (Bell, 1999, p. xiv). In order to help us see what he's driving at, Bell makes distinctions among data, information, and theoretical knowledge. *Data* are sequences of statistics or events that are given in an orderly fashion. We find data all around us in reports of birth or marriage rates, tables in journal articles, the periodic table in chemistry, a schematic of the solar system, and so forth. *Information,* on the other hand, gives a context to such data and thus creates meaning. We get information from newspapers and newscasts, Wikipedia, history books, and so forth. *Theoretical knowledge* takes it further: It "allows one to take a finding and generalize from any one context to another context" (p. lxiii). Through theoretical knowledge, we can reorder or rearrange what we know and create new perspectives or apply knowledge to a new purpose.

In a postindustrial society, theoretical knowledge drives innovation. Historically, the type and level of natural resources were central for a society. This is obviously true in preindustrial societies, with its emphasis on extraction, but equally true with industrial societies, as manufacturing was based on the practical use of materials, such as steel for automobiles. But theoretical knowledge derived from such things as quantum mechanics opens doors to greater options. The issue in an industrial society is the thing itself, such as copper for electrical wiring, but in postindustrial society, the issue is seen as a generalized, theoretical one: conductivity. It is knowledge that

understands what copper *does* rather than what it *is*. For example, theoretical knowledge led us to the development of fiber optics.

Theoretical knowledge is at the core of postindustrial innovation, especially in transportation and communication technologies. Older industries developed largely through trial and error and by inventors that worked independently from the centers of science and theoretical knowledge. Think of the Wright brothers and the airplane, Marconi and the radio, Edison and electricity, and so on. In postindustrial society, on the other hand, innovation comes directly from new theoretical insights in science. For example, the computer and Internet are direct applications of solid-state physics, optics, and quantum theory. Theoretical, and thus scientific, knowledge forms the basis not only for new product innovation, but also for social control and political management of new social relationships. Careers in the health industry, financial investment, advertising and marketing, human resources, occupational therapy, social services, weather reporting, growth management, cultural diversity, exercise and sport physiology, education, and so on are increasingly based on theoretical knowledge and academic credentials. Postindustrial economies typically grow through *initiating* products rather than making them. As an economy moves into a postindustrial phase, the production, diffusion, and use of theoretical knowledge becomes increasingly central to its survival and success.

Class and Situs

Concurrent with the move to theoretical knowledge is a change in the significance of ownership. Marx's class-based system is built upon the distinction between owners and workers. Increasingly, the ownership of large corporations varies as shareholders, the legal owners, sell and buy stock based on speculation and portfolio management. In addition, after establishing a business, entrepreneurs and founders generally sell their interest, leaving control of the operation to professional managers and investment brokers. Thus, property relations of class in the Marxian sense play less of a role in making social distinctions.

Together, the emphasis on theoretical knowledge and the declining significance of ownership create an economy where class becomes less important than *situses*. The word *situs* comes from Latin and means place or site. Bell (1976) uses the term to point to the "actual loci of occupational activities and interests" (p. 376). His point is that class denotes a stable, structured position that is determined by one's place in an industrial economy. Postindustrial economies, on the other hand, create social positions that are much more complex and crosscut one another. For example, a research scientist working for a university is in a different position from a scientist working for Dow Chemical. The site (situs) of actual work for these two people is different, which in turn create different interests, economic standings, and social relationships. Differences aren't created simply through status (scientist) or structure (university vs. corporation); there are also significant differences in *knowledge*, which is the gold standard of a postindustrial society. Situses, then, are fundamentally attached to their knowledge base,

not to a company, thus providing a great deal of horizontal mobility in the job market (movement from one organization to another. This has political implications too, according to Bell, because "the likelihood of a pure 'estate' consciousness for political purposes tends to diminish" (p. 377). In other words, the Marxian notion of class and class consciousness is passé because class position is less important than situses.

In addition, the idea of scarcity moves from material goods to issues of time and knowledge. In industrial businesses, the key control problem is inventory management. This issue is part of what forms Marx's business cycles of overproduction: Inventory levels exceed demand. But with postindustrial society, the product isn't materially based; it is, rather, theoretical knowledge. Early market positions and high profits are based on discovering new technologies and applications. Front-running corporations thus compete heavily for new graduates with indications of research promise. Knowledge must not only be obtained, but it has to be controlled as well. Such things as non-compete agreements and intellectual property issues help guard the scarcity of this product.

The collapse of time has also impacted occupation. The meaning of time as a natural entity has slowly been emptied since before the dawn of modernity. The first step in this transformation was the invention of the mechanical clock, which was soon followed by institutionally established time zones. These advances allowed people to control time and to schedule events and actions over vast expanses of space, as with train travel. That form of time management held for quite some time. In the last few years, however, computer and Internet technologies have further emptied time. We can now conduct business and communicate with people halfway around the world in "real time." In this, real time has taken on symbolic rather than natural meaning; it means that we can communicate instantaneously with others who are perhaps living in another day (across the international dateline). "For the knowledge class, particularly managers, the decisions one encounters involve greater complexity of tasks and, often, the need to be available at all times" (Bell, 1999, p. lxxix).

Concepts and Theory: Polity and Culture

Postindustrial society is primarily a feature of the techno-economic structure. However, there are significant issues and changes in both polity and culture as well. Briefly, the primary issue confronting polity is the problem of scale. Societies function reasonably well when there is a match in size or scope among the three realms. The problem for a postindustrial society is that the TES has grown exponentially through the globalization of the economy, and the person is increasingly concerned with her or his individual rather than institutional life. The result is that polity is either too small or too big. Laws, policies, and procedures at the national level are too small to adequately control and coordinate an economy that knows no territorial or time boundaries. Moreover, nations are too big to address the micro-level issues that arise in daily life.

Culturally, we've seen that the strongest expressive systems are found in religion. While the five major religions still exist, they've been institutionally decentered, and there are social forces that are continually pushing for the privatization of religion. Bell argues that initially the modern idea of progress filled the psychic gap that the decentering of religion left. However, that belief has come under question in postindustrial society, through such things as threats of environmental catastrophes and political disenchantment. Further, culture in general has lost its ability to answer existential issues due to continually expanding commodification and advertising, increases in discretionary spending, mass media, and the emergence of new philosophies of doubt that have brought into question the perfectibility of human nature.

The result is that postindustrial culture does not present a coherent and consistent point of view or moral conception of self. It can no longer sustain aesthetic identities or provide a roadmap for emotion, moral temper, and intelligence. The question of how the self is to be realized is left to the individual who finds a culture based on hedonism, acquisition, and simulation. Moral authority is also individualized in postindustrial culture. Firm, institutionalized answers to the issues surrounding human life are replaced by individual anxiety, which is addressed through psychotherapy, counseling, pop psychology, and the self-help industry.

In some ways, postindustrial society sounds bleak. In early modernity, there was belief in the grand narrative of progress and a hope centered in emancipatory politics. Postindustrial society has little of that. However, the future in postindustrial society is far from unpromising. First, what we see in the three realms of society are possibilities of change. Rather than fairly clear and stable inroads for people to affect change, as there were in early modernity, postindustrial society by its nature of unpredictability offers multiple ways and methods for democratic participation. As Bell (1999) says, "post-industrial developments promise men and women greater control of their social destinies" (p. lxxxiv).

However, this promise is conditional, as are all social opportunities. The condition is based on the defining feature of postindustrial society: knowledge. Knowledge, as Bell intends it (and as we are using it in this book), is intrinsically subversive. Data and information tend to stay in clearly defined boxes. Theoretical knowledge, however, by definition transgresses its boundaries. Knowledge specifically entails the ability to move from one context to another, the ability to redefine, reorganize, and create new perspectives and insights. Thus, greater control in postindustrial society "is only possible under conditions of intellectual freedom and open political institutions, the freedom to pursue truth against those who wish to restrict it. This is the alpha and omega of the alphabet of knowledge" (Bell, 1999, p. lxxxiv).

Summary

- Society is made up of three unrelated domains: the techno-economic structure (TES), polity, and culture. Generally, these domains work independently of one

another; only on occasion does society work as an interrelated system. Each is governed by unique axial principles and structures. In contemporary society, the TES principles are function and rationality, and the structure is bureaucratic management; for polity, they are legitimacy (principle) and a structure of representative or participatory democracy (structure); and the principles for culture are self-expression and realization, and the structures are those that produce and reproduce meanings and artifacts.

- Society, specifically the TES, has shifted from industrial to postindustrial, where the tertiary, quaternary, and quinary sectors gain importance. Such a TES values knowledge and theory for innovation rather than production. Position within the TES has also shifted, from class to situses. Because of its emphasis on knowledge rather than labor, situses are status positions rather than those of class. Status refers to social positions that are hierarchically arranged according to different levels of honor or esteem. Generally speaking, status is created and maintained through credentials and levels of education, distinctive lifestyles, specific types of careers, or family traditions and history. With the emphasis on lifestyles, the nature of scarcity changes from distributional goods to positional goods. Distributional goods are those that can be manufactured for decreasing costs, making them increasingly available. Positional goods are those that by their nature are limited in number and thus carry social prestige and honor.

- Polity in postindustrial society is stymied because on the one hand, TES is too big to control, and on the other, individual concerns have become too personalized to govern. Culture is handicapped as well. Due to commodification, mass media, and general disenchantment, culture is generally incoherent and has lost its ability to answer existential questions.

Embodying Class: Pierre Bourdieu

There is a sense in which Bourdieu's theory may be seen as the mirror image of Marx. According to Marx, the economy and class are two of the most important structures in society, and the symbolic world of culture is, at best, an amorphous side effect. Whereas Bourdieu's theory begins with material class, he clearly moves the reproduction of class structures into the symbolic realm. Like Marx, Bourdieu defines the social world as the place where the competition for scarce resources takes place. The result of this competition is an unequal distribution of economic capital. But unlike Marx, Bourdieu sees much of this competition as taking place in a symbolic realm that produces an unequal distribution of four different kinds of capital: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. Bourdieu is additionally concerned with Marx's notion of misrecognition, the idea that people fail to see or recognize the relations of production within a commodity or means of production. Bourdieu expands Marx's idea by arguing that misrecognition is present within all social practices and forms of knowledge, as well as a necessary condition for symbolic violence and oppression.

Calhoun (2003) argues that Bourdieu's theory is the "single most important theoretical approach to the sociology of culture," and, perhaps more significantly, "he helped to bring the study of culture into a central place in sociology" (p. 303). While culture has been central to sociology since its inception, it has appeared generally as a topic of study, like you would study class, race, or gender. What Bourdieu helped accomplish was to move culture to the sociological approach in general. Rather than it being something studied on its own, this cultural sociology sees culture as intrinsic to everything people do: "To believe in the possibility of a cultural sociology is to subscribe to the idea that every action . . . is embedded to some extent in a horizon of affect and meaning" (Alexander & Smith, 2001, p. 136).

THEORIST'S DIGEST

Brief Biography

Pierre Bourdieu was born August 1, 1930, in Denquin, France. Bourdieu studied philosophy under Louis Althusser at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. After his studies, he taught for 3 years, 1955–1958, at Moulins. From 1958 to 1960, Bourdieu did empirical research in Algeria (*The Algerians,* 1962) that laid the groundwork for his sociology. In his career, he published over 25 books, one of which, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979/1984), was named one of the twentieth century's 10 most important works of sociology (International Sociological Association). He was the founder and director of the Centre for European Sociology, and he held the French senior chair in sociology at Collège de France (the same chair once held by sociologist and anthropologist Marcel Mauss). Craig Calhoun (2003) writes that Bourdieu was "the most influential and original French sociologist since Durkheim" (p. 274). Bourdieu died in Paris on January 23, 2002.

Central Sociological Questions

Bourdieu's passion was intellectual honesty and rigor. He of course was concerned with class, and particularly the way class is created and recreated in subtle, nonconscious ways. But above and beyond these empirical concerns was a driving intellect bent on refining critical thinking and never settling on an answer: "An invitation to think with Bourdieu is of necessity an invitation to think beyond Bourdieu, and against him whenever required" (Wacquant, 1992, p. xiv).

Simply Stated

Bourdieu tells us that class is structured in the body through cultural capital, which is made up of tastes, habits, social and linguistic skills, and so on. People thus display their class position in an unthinking, ongoing manner, simply in the way they walk, sit, talk, and so forth. Every social encounter becomes, then, a market. In interactions where class positions are comparable, people will feel comfortable because everybody's tastes are similar. The disadvantage of such encounters is that no one can gain higher levels of cultural capital. In encounters where the class positions are different, people with lower cultural capital will tend to feel uncomfortable and will be likely to not participate or to participate poorly. Thus, when in a position to increase cultural capital, and thus class position, most people withdraw and are unable to gain profit. Class is in this way structured in the body where it insidiously restricts and replicates a person's class position in all social interactions.

Key Ideas

economic capital, social capital, symbolic capital, cultural capital, taste, habitus, distance from necessity, education, field, linguistic market, symbolic violence

Concepts and Theory: Structuring Class

The basic fact of capitalism is capital. Capital is different from either wealth or income. Income is generally measured by annual salary and wealth and by the relationship between one's assets and debt. Both income and wealth are in a sense static; they are measurable facts about a person or group. Capital, on the other hand, is active: It's defined as accumulated goods devoted to the production of other goods. The entire purpose of capital is to produce more capital.

Four Kinds of Capital

Bourdieu actually talks about four forms of capital—economic, social, symbolic, and cultural—all of which are invested and used in the production of class. Bourdieu uses *economic capital* in its usual sense. Economic capital is generally determined by one's wealth and income. As with Marx, Bourdieu sees economic capital as fundamental. However, unlike Marx, Bourdieu argues that the importance of economic

capital is that it strongly influences an individual's level of the other capitals, which, in turn, have their own independent effects. In other words, economic capital starts the ball rolling, but once things are in motion, other issues may have stronger influences on the perpetuation of class inequalities.

Social capital refers to the kind of social network an individual is set within. It refers to the people you know and how they are situated in society. The idea of social capital can be captured in the saying, "It isn't what you know but who you know that counts." The distribution of social capital is clearly associated with class. For example, if you are a member of an elite class, you will attend elite schools such as Phillips Andover Academy, Yale, and Harvard. At those schools, you would be afforded the opportunity to make social connections with powerful people—for example, in elections over the past 30 years, there has been at least one Yale graduate running for the office of president of the United States. But economic capital doesn't exclusively determine social capital. We can build our social networks intentionally, or sometimes through happenstance. For example, if you attended Hot Springs High School in Arkansas during the early 1960s, you would have had a chance to become friends with Bill Clinton.

Symbolic capital is the capacity to use symbols to create or solidify physical and social realities. With this idea, Bourdieu begins to open our eyes to the symbolic nature of class divisions. Social groups don't exist simply because people decide to gather together. Max Weber recognized that there are technical conditions that must be met for a loose collection of people to form a social group: People must be able to communicate and meet with one another, there must be recognized leadership, and a group needs clearly articulated goals to organize. However, even meeting those conditions doesn't alone create a social group. Groups must be symbolically recognized as well.

With the idea of symbolic capital, Bourdieu pushes us past analyzing the use of symbols in interaction (Chapter 3). Symbolic interactionism argues that human beings are oriented toward meaning, and meaning is the emergent result of ongoing symbolic interactions. We're symbolic creatures, but meaning doesn't reside within the symbol itself; it must be pragmatically negotiated in face-to-face situations. We've learned a great deal about how people create meaning in different situations because of symbolic interactionism's insights. But Bourdieu's use of symbolic capital is quite different.

Bourdieu recognizes that all human relationships are created symbolically, and not all people have equal symbolic power. For example, I write a good number of letters of recommendation for students each year. Every form I fill out asks the same question: "Relationship to applicant?" And I always put "professor." Now, the *meaning* of the professor–student relationship emerges out of my interactions with my students, and my student–professor relationships are probably somewhat different from some of my colleagues as a result. However, neither my students nor I created the student–professor relationship. Bourdieu (1991) tells us that objective categories and structures, such as class, race, and gender, are generated through the use of symbolic capital: "Symbolic power is a power of constructing reality" (p. 166).

Bourdieu (1989) characterizes the use of symbolic capital as both the power of constitution and the power of revelation—it is the power of

> world-making . . . the power to make groups. . . . The power to impose and to inculcate a vision of divisions, that is, the power to make visible and explicit social divisions that are implicit, is political power par excellence: (p. 23)

This power of world-making is based on two elements. First, the group must be recognized and symbolically labeled by a person or group that is officially recognized as having the ability to symbolically impart identity, such as scientists, legislators, or sociologists in our society. Institutional accreditation, particularly in the form of an educational credential (school in this sense operates as a representative of the state), "frees its holder from the symbolic struggle of all against all by imposing the universally approved perspective" (p. 22).

The second element needed to world-make is some relation to a reality: "Symbolic efficacy depends on the degree to which the vision proposed is founded in reality" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 23). I think it's best to see this as a variable. The more that social or physical reality is already present, the greater will be the effectiveness of symbolic capital. This is the sense in which symbolic capital is the power to consecrate or reveal. Symbolic power is the power to reveal the substance of an already occupied social space. But note that granting a group symbolic life "brings into existence in an instituted, constituted form . . . what existed up until then only as . . . a collection of varied persons, a purely additive series of merely juxtaposed individuals" (p. 23). Thus, because legitimated existence is dependent upon symbolic capacity, an extremely important conflict in society is the struggle over symbols and classifications. The heated debate over race classification in the 2000 U.S. census is a good example.

There is a clear relationship between symbolic and cultural capital. The use of symbolic capital creates the symbolic field wherein cultural capital exists. In general, *cultural capital* refers to the informal social skills, habits, linguistic styles, and tastes that a person garners as a result of his or her economic resources. It is the different ways we talk, act, and make distinctions that are the result of our class. Bourdieu identifies three different kinds of cultural capital: objectified, institutionalized, and embodied. *Objectified cultural capital* refers to the material goods (such as books, computers, and paintings) that are associated with cultural capital. *Institutionalized cultural capital* alludes to the certifications (like degrees and diplomas) that give official acknowledgment to the possession of knowledge and abilities. *Embodied cultural capital* is the most important in Bourdieu's scheme. It is part of what makes up an individual's habitus (defined further below), and it refers to the cultural capital that lives in and is expressed through the body. This function of cultural capital manifests itself as taste.

Taste refers to an individual preference or fondness for something, such as "he has developed a taste for expensive wine." What Bourdieu is telling us is that our tastes aren't really individual; they are strongly influenced by our social class—our tastes are embodied cultural capital. Here, a particular taste is legitimated, exhibited, and

recognized by only those who have the proper cultural code, which is class specific. To hear a piece of music and classify it as baroque rather than elevator music implies an entire world of understandings and classification. Thus, when individuals express a preference for something or classify an object in a particular way, they are simultaneously classifying themselves. Taste may appear as an innocent and natural phenomenon, but it is an insidious revealer of position. As Bourdieu (1979/1984) says, "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (p. 6). The issue of taste is "one of the most vital stakes in the struggles fought in the field of the dominant class and the field of cultural production" (p. 11).

Habitus

Taste is part of habitus, and habitus is embodied cultural capital. Class isn't simply an economic classification (one that exists because of symbolic capital), nor is it merely a set of life circumstances of which people may become aware (class consciousness). Class is inscribed in our bodies. *Habitus* is the durable organization of one's body and its deployment in the world. It is found in our posture and our way of walking, speaking, eating, and laughing; it is found in every way we use our body. Habitus is both a system whereby people organize their own behavior and a system through which people perceive and appreciate the behavior of others.

Pay close attention: This system of organization and appreciation is *felt* in our bodies. We physically feel how we should act; we physically sense what the actions of others mean, and we approve of or censure them physically (we are comfortable or uncomfortable); we physically respond to different foods (we can become voracious or disgusted); we physically respond to certain sexual prompts and not others—the list can go on almost indefinitely. Our humanity, including our class position, is not found in just our cognitions and mental capacity; it is in our very bodies.

One way to see what Bourdieu is talking about is to use a sports analogy. I love to play sand volleyball, and I only get to play it about once every 5 years, which means I'm not very good at it. I have to constantly think about where the ball and other players are situated. I have to watch to see if the player next to me is going for the ball or if I can do so. All this watching and mental activity means that my timing is way off. I typically dive for the ball 1.5 seconds too late, and I end up with a mouthful of sand rather than the ball (but the other bunglers on my team are usually impressed with my effort). Professional volleyball players compete in a different world. They rarely have to think. They sense the ball and their teammates, and they make their moves faster than they could cognitively work through all the particulars. Volleyball is inscribed in their bodies.

Explicating what he calls the Dreyfus model, Bent Flyvbjerg (2001) gives us a detailed way of seeing what is going on here. The Dreyfus model indicates that there are five levels to learning: novice, advanced beginner, competent performer, proficient performer, and expert. Novices know the rules and the objective facts of a situation, advanced beginners still have concrete knowledge but see it contextually, and the competent performer employs hierarchical decision-making skills and

feels responsible for outcomes. With proficient performers and experts, we enter another level of knowledge. The first three levels are all based on cognitions, but in the final two levels, knowledge becomes embodied. Here, situations and problems are understood "intuitively" and require skills that go beyond analytical rationality. With experts, "their skills have become so much a part of themselves that they are not more aware of them than they are of their own bodies" (p. 19).

Habitus thus works below the level of conscious thought and outside the control of the will. It is the embodied, nonconscious enactment of cultural capital that gives habitus its specific power,

> Beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will . . . in the most automatic gestures or the apparently most insignificant techniques of the body . . . [it engages] the most fundamental principles of construction and evaluation of the social world, those which most directly express the division of labour . . . or the division of the work of domination. (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 466)

Bourdieu's point is that we are all, each one, experts in our class position. Our mannerisms, speech, tastes, and so on are written on our bodies beginning the day we are born.

There are two factors important in the production of habitus: education and distance from necessity. In *distance from necessity,* "necessity" speaks of sustenance, the things necessary for biological existence. Distance from the necessities of life enables the upper classes to experience a world that is free from urgency. In contrast, the poor must always worry about their daily existence. As humans move away from that essential existence, they are freed from the constant worry, and they are free to practice activities that constitute an end in themselves. For example, you probably have hobbies. Perhaps you like to paint, act, or play guitar as I do. There is a sense of intrinsic enjoyment that comes with those kinds of activities; they are ends in themselves. The poorer classes don't have that luxury. Daily life for them is a grind, a struggle just to make ends meet. This struggle for survival and the emotional toll it brings are paramount in their lives, leaving no time or resources for pursuing hobbies and "getting the most out of life."

We should think of distance from necessity as a continuum. You and I probably fall somewhere in the middle. We have to be somewhat concerned about our livelihood, but we also have time and energy to enjoy leisure activities. The elite are on the uppermost part of the continuum, and it shows in their every activity. For example, why do homeless people eat? They eat to survive. And if they are hungry enough, they might eat anything, as long as it isn't poisonous. Why do working classes or nearly poor people eat? For the same basic reason: The working classes are much better off than the homeless, but they still by and large live hand to mouth. However, because they are further removed from necessity, they can be more particular about what they eat, though the focus will still be on the basics of life, a "meat and potatoes" menu. Now, why do the elite eat? You could say they eat to survive, but they are never aware of that motivation. Food doesn't translate into

the basics of survival. Eating for the elite classes is an aesthetic experience. For them, plate presentation is more important than getting enough in their bellies to keep from starving.

Thus, the further removed we are from necessity, the more we can be concerned with abstract rather than essential issues. This ability to conceive of form rather than function—aesthetics—is dependent upon "a generalized capacity to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends, a durable inclination and aptitude for practice without a practical function" (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 54). This aesthetic works itself out in every area. In art, for example, the upper-class aesthetic of luxury, or what Bourdieu calls the "*pure gaze*," prefers art that is abstract, while the popular taste wants art to represent reality. In addition, distance from economic necessity implies that all natural and physical desires and responses are to be sublimated and dematerialized. The working class, because it is immersed in physical reality and economic necessity, interacts in more physical ways through touching, yelling, embracing, and so forth than do the distanced elite. A lifetime of exposure to worlds so constructed confers cultural pedigrees, manners of applying aesthetic competences that differ by class position.

This embodied tendency to see the world in abstract or concrete terms is reinforced and elaborated through *education*. One obvious difference between the education of the elite and the working classes is the kind of social position in which education places us. The education system channels individuals toward prestigious or devalued positions. In doing so, education manipulates subjective aspirations (self-image) and demands (self-esteem). Another essential difference in educational experience has to do with the amount of rudimentary scholastics required—the simple knowing and recognizing of facts versus more sophisticated knowledge. This factor varies by number of years of education, which in turn varies by class position. At the lower levels, the simple recitation of facts is required. At the higher levels of education, emphasis is placed on critical and creative thought. At the highest levels of education, even the idea of "fact" is understood critically and held in doubt.

Education also influences the kind of language we use to think and through which we see the world. We can conceive of language as varying from complex to simple. More complex language forms have more extensive and intricate syntactical elements. Language is made up of more than words; it also has structure. Think about the sentences that you read in a romance novel and then compare them to those in an advanced textbook. In the textbook, they are longer and more complex, and that complexity increases as you move into more scholarly books. These more complex syntactical elements allow us to construct sentences that correspond to multileveled thinking—this is true because both writing and thinking are functions of language. The more formal education we receive, the more complex are the words and syntactical elements of our language. Because we don't just think *with* language, we think *in* language, the complexity of our language affects the complexity of our thinking. Our thinking in turn influences the way in which we see the world.

Here's a simple example: Let's say you go to the zoo, first with my dog and then with three different people, one at a time. You'd have to blindfold and

muzzle my dog, but if you could get her to one of the cages and then remove the blinders, she would start barking hysterically. She would be responding to the content of the beasts in front of her. All she would know is that those things in front of her smell funny, look dangerous, and are undoubtedly capable of killing her, but she's going to go down fighting. Now picture yourself going with three different people, each from a different social class and thus education level. The first person has a high school education. As you stand in front of the same cage that you showed to my dog, he says, "Man, look at all those apes." The second person you go with has had some college education. She stands in front of the cage and says, "Gorillas are so amazing." The third person has a master's degree and says, "Wow, I've never seen *gorilla gorilla, gorilla graueri,* and *gorilla berengei* all in the same cage."

Part of our class habitus, then, is determined by education and its relationship to language. Individuals with a complex language system will tend to see objects in terms of multiple levels of meaning and to classify them abstractly. This type of linguistic system brings sensitivity to the structure of an object; it is the learned ability to respond to an object in terms of its matrix of relationships. Conversely, the less complex an individual's classification system, the more likely are the organizing syntactical elements to be of limited range. The simple classification system is characterized by a low order of abstractedness and creates more sensitivity to the content of an object, rather than its structure.

Bourdieu uses the idea of habitus to talk about the replication of class. Class, as I mentioned earlier, isn't simply a part of the social structure; it is part of our body. We are not only categorized as middle class (or working class or elite); we *act* middle class. Differing experiences in distance from necessity and education determine one's tastes, ways of seeing and experiencing the world, and "the most automatic gestures or apparently most insignificant techniques of the body—ways of walking or blowing one's nose, ways of eating or talking" (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 466). We don't choose to act or not act according to class; it's the result of lifelong socialization. Moreover, as we act in accordance with our class, we replicate our class. Thus, Bourdieu's notion of how class is replicated is much more fundamental and insidious than Marx's and more complex than Weber's.

However, we would fall short of the mark if we simply saw habitus as a structuring agent. Bourdieu intentionally uses the concept (the idea originated with Aristotle) in order to talk about the creative, active, and inventive powers of the agent, or actor. He uses the concept to get out of the structuralist paradigm without falling back into issues of consciousness and unconsciousness. In habitus, class is structured but it isn't completely objective—it doesn't merely exist outside of the individual because it's a significant part of his or her subjective experience. In habitus, class is *structured but not structuring*—because, as with high-caliber athletes and experts, habitus is intuitive. The idea of habitus, then, shows us how class is replicated subjectively and in daily life, and it introduces the potential for inspired behaviors above and beyond one's class position. Indeed, the potential for exceeding one's class is much more powerful with Bourdieu's habitus than with conscious decisions—most athletes, musicians, and other

experts will tell you that their highest achievements were inspired by visceral intuition rather than rational processes. It is through habitus that the practices of the dialectic are performed.

Fields

Bourdieu uses the analogy of the field to explain how empirical and symbolic worlds work (see Calhoun, 2003). Bourdieu was a rugby player, which is a European game somewhat like American football, but it is considered by most to be much more grueling than football. In rugby, the play is continuous with no substitutions or time-outs (even for injury). The game can take anywhere from 60 to 90 minutes, with two halves separated by a 5-minute halftime. An important part of the game is the *scrum*. In a scrum, eight players from each side form a kind of inverted triangle by wrapping their arms around each other. The ball is placed in the middle, and the two bound groups of players struggle head-to-head against each other until the ball is freed from the scrum. To see the struggle of the scrum gives a whole new perspective on Bourdieu's idea of social struggle.

Rugby matches take place on a field, involve strategic plays and intense struggles, and are played by individuals who have a clear physical sense of the game. Matches are of course structured by the rules of the game and the field. The field not only delineates the parameters of the play, but each field is different, and thus knowledge of each field of play is important for success. The rules are there and, like in all games, come into play when they are broken, but a good player embodies the rules and the methods of the game. The best plays are those that come when the player is in the "zone," or playing without thinking. Trained musicians can also experience this zone by jamming with other musicians. Often when in such a state, the musician can play things that he or she normally would not be able to, and might have a difficult time explaining after the fact. The same is true for athletes. There is more to a good game than the rules and the field; the game is embodied in the performer. Finally, there is the struggle, against not only the other team, but also the limitations of the field, rules, and one's own abilities.

What I just gave you is actually an explanation of Bourdieu's theory through analogy. Keep your eyes open for how it fits. Just like in rugby, fields are delineated spaces wherein "the game" is played. Obviously, in Bourdieu's theoretical use of field, the parameters are not laid out using fences or lines on the ground. The parameters of the theoretical field are delineated by networks or sets of connections among objective positions. The positions within a field may be filled by individuals, groups, or organizations. However, Bourdieu is adamant that we focus on the relationships among the actors and not the agents themselves. It's not the people, groups, or even interactions that are important; it's the relationships among and between the positions that set the parameters of a field. For example, while the different culture groups (like theater groups, reading clubs, and choirs) within a region may have a lot in common, but they probably do not form a field because there are no explicit objective relationships among them. On the other hand, most all the universities in the United States do form a field. They are objectively linked through

accreditation, professional associations, federal guidelines, and so forth. These relationships are sites of active practices; thus, the parameters of a field are always at stake within the field itself. In other words, because fields are defined mostly through relationships, and relationships are active, the positions and relationships that go into making up the field are constantly changing. Therefore, what constitutes a field is always an empirical question.

Fields are directly related to capitals. The people, groups, and organizations that fill the different objective positions are hierarchically distributed in the field, initially through the overall volume of all the capitals they possess, and secondly by the relative weight of the two particular kinds of capital, symbolic and cultural. More than that, each field is different because the various capitals can have dissimilar weights. For example, cultural capital is much more important in academic rather than economic fields; conversely, economic capital is more important in economic fields than in academic ones. All four capitals or powers are present in each, but they aren't all given the same weight. It is the different weightings of the capitals that define the field, and it is the field that gives validity and function to the capitals.

While the parameters of any field cannot be determined prior to empirical investigation, the important consideration for Bourdieu is the correspondence between the empirical field and its symbolic representation. The objective field corresponds to a symbolic field, which is given legitimation and reality by those with symbolic capital. Here, symbolic capital works to both construct and recognize—it creates and legitimates the relations between and among positions within the field. In this sense, the empirical and symbolic fields are constitutive both of class and of social affairs in general. It is the symbolic field that people use to view, understand, and reproduce the objective.

Symbolic Struggle

Social change for Bourdieu is rooted in symbolic struggles, which makes sense given Bourdieu's emphasis on symbolic capital and power. Part of that struggle occurs within the speech act or encounter. As we've seen, encounters are structured by markets of differing distinction, and habitus expresses itself naturally within those markets. We will feel at home or foreign in an encounter, we will speak up or silence ourselves, all without thought. However, we also have to keep in mind that habitus is embodied and expresses itself through intuitive feelings. Moreover, sometimes our intuitions can lead us to brilliant moves, whether on the sports field, the game board, the music stage, or the speech act. Just so, our habitus at times can lead us to speech acts that defy our cultural, symbolic, economic, or social standings.

This kind of symbolic struggle can bring some incremental change. Bourdieu gives us hints about how more dynamic change can occur, but keep in mind that his isn't a theory of social change or revolution. Bourdieu allows that there are two methods by which a symbolic struggle may be carried out, one objective and the other subjective. In both cases, symbolic disruption is the key. Objectively, individuals or groups may act in such a way as to display certain counter-realities. His example of this method is group demonstrations held to manifest the size, strength, and cohesiveness of the disenfranchised. This type of symbolic action disrupts the taken-for-grantedness that all systems of oppression must work within—it offers an objective case that things are not what they seem.

Subjectively, individuals or groups may try and transform the categories constructed by symbolic capital through which the social world is perceived. On the individual level, this may be accomplished through insults, rumors, questions, and the like. A good example of this approach is found in bell hooks' (1989) book *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black:* "It is that act of speech, of 'talking back,' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of moving from object to subject—the liberated voice" (p. 9). Groups may also operate in this way by employing more political strategies. The most typical of these strategies is the

redefinition of history—that is, "retrospectively reconstructing a past fitted to the needs of the present" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 21). But notice that with each of these kinds of struggle, a response from those with symbolic capital would be required. These disruptions could bring attention to the cause, but symbolic power would be necessary to give it life and substance within the symbolic field first and then the objective field.

Summary

- Bourdieu is specifically concerned with the reproduction of class. In contrast to Marx, Bourdieu sees class as replicated through symbolic violence rather than overt oppression. Bourdieu argues that there are four types of capital: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. The latter two are his greatest concern. Symbolic capital has the power to create positions within the symbolic and objective fields. The objective field refers to social positions that are determined though the distributions of the four capitals. But these positions don't become real or meaningful for us unless and until someone with symbolic capital names them. This naming gives the position, and the individuals and groups that occupy it, social viability. The symbolic field has independent effects in that it can be manipulated by those with symbolic capital; people use the symbolic field to view, understand, and reproduce the objective field.

- Cultural capital refers to the social skills, habits, linguistic abilities, and tastes that individuals have as a result of their position in the symbolic and objective fields. Cultural capital is particularly important because it becomes embodied. This embodiment of cultural capital becomes the individual's habitus: the way the body exists and is used in society. Distance from necessity and level of education are two of the most important ways in which habitus is structured, both of which are related to economic capital. Class position, then, is replicated through the embodied, nonconscious behaviors and speech acts of individuals.

- Habitus is expressed in linguistic markets. Linguistic markets are structured by different weightings of the various capitals. One's position within the market is determined by different rankings on the capitals and the embodied ability to perform within the market. Linguistic markets are played out in speech acts where individuals sense how their habitus relates to the market and thus anticipate differing profits of distinction. This nonconscious sense provides the basis for symbolic violence: Anticipating few rewards in acts where they are "outclassed," individuals simultaneously sanction themselves and legitimate the hierarchical relations of class and power.

- There is, however, the possibility of symbolic struggle. The struggle involves symbolic disruption. First, individuals or groups can act in such a way as to objectively picture alternative possibilities. This is what we normally think of as social movements or demonstrations. But because Bourdieu sees the importance of

symbolic power in the replication of class, he understands these demonstrations as pictures—they are objective images of symbolic issues that disrupt the taken-for-grantedness in which oppression must operate. Second, individuals and groups can challenge the subjective meanings intrinsic within the symbolic field. In daily speech acts, the individual can disrupt the normality of the symbolic field through insults, jokes, questions, rumors, and so on. Groups can also challenge "the way things are" by redefining history.