going on is mainly a state-guaranteed social distribution of cultural capital. Bourdieu returned to the subjects of the university and elitist education in Homo Academicus (1988 [1984]) and State Nobility (1995 [1989]). The first work attracted much attention as a professor’s carefully thought out attempt to write a professor’s sociology and to expose the qualitative differences between the five faculties as a manifestation of different combinations of mundane and symbolic power, of cultural and socioeconomic capital.

Bourdieu’s analysis of the relationship between the social structure of society and the lifestyle and taste of different classes’ is found in Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (1984 [1979]). This work contains not only the most thorough account of Bourdieu’s alternative to Marxist class analysis and to a functionalist theory of stratification as a basis for an analysis of socially conditioned lifestyles, but also a critique of modern aesthetics, which has either reduced lifestyle to signify its economic conditions or has proclaimed, ultimately, the radical autonomy of the judgement of taste. In opposition to the economic explanation, Bourdieu claims that one first must compare one lifestyle or taste to another, and not each of them individually to their group of social bears. Yet in opposition to humanistic aesthetics Bourdieu claims that the aesthetic difference of taste is the result of and brings about its effect through mundane differences. He returned to this subject in a large-scale theory on art and literature as social phenomena in The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field (1996 [1992]).

The huge volume La Misère du monde (The Misery of the World) (1993a) is an in-depth interview-based inquiry on outcasts from “two-thirds society.” This work is methodologically important as an example of the constructivist use of an interview technique based on a theory which is suspicious of immediate experiences and confessions. In regard to theory, the work is important as an analysis of the modern state’s retreat from public responsibility for the dynamics of social reality.

The Social World and Knowledge of this World

Spontaneous everyday consciousness and homemade theories

In everyday life, knowledge operates like a flashlight in the dark. When we act, our knowledge is a light in front of us and in this light we see the reality we are in. We do not act blindly. We know what we are doing and the realm in which we are acting. And in a kind of second-degree consciousness we also know where we are placed within the realm even though our consciousness is primarily focused on the world, that is, the realm in which we are placed.

The flashlight is our practical sense. At one and the same time it is readiness to act and orientation. It is united in a basic orientation which then divides into very different orientations which can come to the fore in different fields in the social space with which one is familiar. On top of this, many other forms of impetus and knowledge settle, ultimately including professional technologies and basic sciences. However, they are all subsequent rationalizations of the practical sense, even when they question it and break it down. Within this context Bourdieu has theoretically reconstructed his concept of habitus.

In this way we all act in a realm which has the designation: our society, for example, Denmark. That is the part of the globe which is found on a map in which all the inhabitants who live there have a Danish passport, speak Danish, have a residence and a right to a retirement pension, have a family and an affinity to a municipality to which they pay tax. Some are members of a trade union and spend a significant amount of time in protesting against the Maastricht Treaty, but have not resigned membership of the Danish National Church. Others have parents who own a small farm, but have striven to send their children to college. Still others have an academic degree and are employed by the state, but their children go to a business school and are counting on a career in the privat sector, which today affords a better chance of maintaining the income, status, and standard of living to which they are accustomed.

Society is experienced as a limited number of concrete individuals who are organized in various unions, each with their own system of rules, which ultimately fit into an order which limits all these individuals’ efforts to get as much as possible of the good things in life. Thus we understand from just a glance at a map of the world that there are many societies like this, divided into unions, continents and somewhat loosely united by an organization called the United Nations.

Science as a break with immediate experience

Social science constructs itself from and breaks with this perception of society which is experienced in practice. Bourdieu’s theory is a theoretical construction which traverses the experienced spontaneous perception of society which home-made sociology fabricates. Instead the theory works with concepts like social space, fields within this space, dimensions within social space and social fields. Various incorporated, objectified, and institutionalized capitals are distributed among positions. These positions are occupied by agents with corresponding dispositions and a tendency for corresponding attitudes and behavior.

So what is social science? If we to believe Bourdieu, it is a completely different kind of flashlight invented 200 years ago, in which a small corps of experts are very proficient and work on a full-time basis in special institutions. But ordinary people, who usually get by with their everyday flashlights, do use, much more than they realize, batteries which are partly charged with energy from the flashlights of social science. Even in everyday life reality appears in a form colored by the light of popular science.

Bourdieu is a sociologist and anthropologist, roughly speaking. He is an expert in two disciplines in social science and, among other subjects, in political economy and law. In actual fact he does not work in a way which respects these divisions, but rather in a way which constantly transverses these disciplines. He works in areas which belong to the subjects of economics or law, but also the science of religion, literary history, etc.

Bourdieu’s interdisciplinary social science is, according to himself, about creating a flashlight in whose light aspects of our everyday life become visible; aspects which we repress and fail to appreciate in order to manage everyday life on the established premises – premises which we have already recognized beforehand in practice, before we are aware of it. But social science is also about – and this is perhaps highly typical of Bourdieu’s work – creating a flashlight in whose light aspects of the scientist’s work become visible, and which the scientist represses in order to manage science on the established premises. The light which is produced by social science neither presumes to replace the everyday flashlight nor to be the only true light. It does presume to be a light which reduces the number of blind spots.
Yet it is through everyday activities that we must reinvent life after having had our batteries recharged during an illuminating recess.

Can practical sense be scientific?

Social science in general, sociology, and the works of Bourdieu are thus part of the rather particular world that was created by Western civilization in the past 200 years: a world which, among other things, is built up around a systematic combination of an everyday life with confidence in everyday common sense on one hand, and a coordinate suspicion of any form of common sense which is just an afterthought, not a different belief. The flashlight of afterthought does not replace the simple-minded flashlight; the practical sense which guides everyday life is not an applied scientific theory, but a sense in its own right which is the decisive impetus behind actions. Certainly this practical sense may have been subjected to X-rays in certain aspects and this may have left its mark. Yet this is a far cry from establishing a picture of history in which the world is transformed into a “rational clinic,” that is where no one does anything that cannot be justified by the results of scientific research.

The modern rationalistic utopia of the Age of Enlightenment, which actually lives on in spite of postmodern critiques of “the great legends,” at least as a reflection of professional technologies in nursing, social services, and various arts of engineering, does not have anything to do with the combination of practical sense and social science. Yet even a more humble combination of practical sense and science did not exist in other civilizations in time and space, for example, in the oral civilizations of the old Europe and the Africa of today. Perhaps it will not remain this way, even in modern Western civilization. Perhaps science will follow.

Science breaks with science

Now we have indicated a few of the most basic characteristics of Bourdieu’s work as a social theorist. This does not offer a systematic description of the world we live in, it does not substantiate an account of the true meaning of our world, history, and our lives. It does not indicate how individuals, who are united beneath a national flag, should be organized in a perfect world. Its goal is to find the spots which are still blind in the light of the flashlights of science and the everyday in such a way that a new basis comes to light—out of the countless ones we use to orient ourselves practically, so we have a greater knowledge, albeit hypothetical, in the recess of afterthought, of what it is we are doing. Yet only providing what is produced in a specialized workshop meets social conditions allowing it to be generally active.

Heilė’s theory about society is a conceptual construction, not only in the sense that reality is replaced by words and concepts which represent it, so we no longer are dealing with reality but with concepts. It is not only a matter of verbalizing things or orienting oneself in thought, it is about working with material made up of concepts and with tools which are concepts, in order to do a piece of work which results in concepts.

The material for this construction consists of all the words, tales, and explanations, all the skills, practices, and sets of rules, all the experiences and expressions, all the desires and efforts with which we already have ordered our world in everyday life, be it spontaneously and privately, but also officially and organizationally.

The method aims to organize a way in which all the words, tales, explanations, practices, sets of rules, etc. can come to experience one more time with a predisposition which refuses to listen to the spontaneous experience and its way of designating, classifying, interpreting, and managing. This predisposition is suspicious of everything which seems to be what meets the eye. But it is also suspicious of the theorist’s particular way of taking for granted that one can explicate silence, that one can reconstruct the system of rules behind ingrained practice, that one can place things in a wider and deeper perspective than everyday practice can take in or has the scope to acknowledge, that one can think of explanations that one had not yet thought of or dared to consider.

This suspicion is directed at conceiving of a choice of partner as a love affair, but also at the table in the scientific report which shows the system of rules which prescribes marriage between cousins as an explanation of how X was married to Y. None of these are taken for granted.

This way of producing knowledge is of course circular. That is to say that it works on the assumption that the very nature of social life gives good reason for this double suspicion, for this very need to work with a theory arises from the fact that, even for everyday experience, things do not appear as they should, if everything were to fall into place. The basic assumption is not that reality makes sense, but that one can figure it out, that everything has a reason/cause, although it may not be the reason/cause one thought it would be in the beginning.

To be more specific, the basic assumption is that the putty that unites the inhabitants of a country consists of social magic as well as organization. One can say that the opportunity for research stems from a critical interest in knowledge. Just as the natural sciences are based on a desire to master and make use of the physical world and thereby find how our world is put together, social science is based on a desire to know the reason why we can participate in establishing and maintaining an arrangement which is neither random nor necessary, but arbitrary, that is to say, not as it is expected to be according to the experienced assumptions which everyone takes for granted. Therefore, because even the practical sense lies to itself, a science of the practical sense is possible and necessary (see The Craft of Sociology: An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology, 1991 [1968]).

Social Space, the Autonomous Field, Dispositions and Positions, Symbolic Violence, and Habitus

It is rather misleading to consider Bourdieu a cultural sociologist because most of his empirical-theoretical studies are about culture perceived as systems of symbols. What interests Bourdieu is the way in which the representation of reality makes reality more real than nature. What interests him is the way the symbolic contributes to establishing and maintaining or changing the order of things, whether it has not yet been differentiated into a relatively independent area of social practice (for example, in so-called oral cultures) or whether it has been differentiated to a great degree from nonsymbolic domains, such as landscapes,