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Thinking Tools

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In 1984, I moved to Paris to begin my undergraduate education at the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris* (Sciences Po). Sciences Po offered a series of seminars ostensibly to help foreigners (including me at that time) pass the entrance exam. What I remember from these is a chain smoking 'M. Thomas' doing his utmost to convey the message that Sciences Po was an elite institution, that entering it was like entering a 'gulag' and that only the best would 'survive' (his expressions). I also recall finding M. Thomas and his universe rather bizarre. A few years later, this was no longer true. I looked at French education in a new way just as Iver Neumann (in this book) looked at women differently after working with fur-coats. But more significantly, I had become intensely aware of the (often inarticulate) hierarchies and power relations of *practices*.

A year and a half after my first encounter with M. Thomas and the practiced hierarchy of French higher education, I came across the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and more precisely his book *Distinction* (1984). (All references here refer to his work in translation but I recommend the originals in French, which tend to be considerably longer and more elaborate.) By that time, I was thoroughly puzzled by the idiosyncrasies of the hierarchies surrounding me as well as by the fact that those on the receiving end of these (students, including myself) kept accepting them. *Distinction* provided some clues, since it is an analysis of social hierarchy in France. But more significantly for a discussion of method, it contained a *vocabulary* for asking questions about power. These were embedded in a Social Theory of the grand kind: an updating of such classics as Marx, Durkheim, Weber, or Levi Strauss informed by philosophers such as Pascal, Kant, and Heidegger (such as Bourdieu 1996a, 2000a). No wonder I was impressed.

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This chapter conveys some basic ideas regarding the 'thinking tools' this vocabulary provided that will be useful for applying any theoretical framework to empirical research. Bourdieu has attracted attention from all branches of the social sciences and the humanities, including international relations, resulting also in a momentous secondary literature. Clearly this is not an obscure method that seduced me because of my experience at Sciences Po. The chapter you are about to read cannot possibly 'cover' it or introduce an uncontested version of it. My presentation is selective, geared primarily towards the social science side and towards providing some practical advice based on my own experience in using it. Those who find Bourdieu's particular tools potentially useful will also have a basis to find out more from his own work.

I will do this by discussing how the thinking tools relate to the key issues all researchers face when selecting and applying appropriate 'methods.' I begin with the kinds of questions that Bourdieu's thinking tools are useful for raising and answering, namely questions about symbolic power and violence. I then discuss the conceptualization of the thinking tools in general terms, and proceed to highlight three crucial decisions to be made when 'operationalizing' these to answer a specific research question. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how to distinguish good research from bad (validity), with an emphasis on the centrality of reflexivity.

Research questions: ask about symbolic power/violence in practices

The method a study uses cannot be dissociated from its research questions. Methods serve a purpose. One does not drill holes with a hammer or fix nails with a drill. Similarly, when working in the social sciences it is important to acknowledge that methods can do different things. The method one chooses is related to what questions one is answering. Inversely, as anyone embarking on a research project (and any supervisor) knows, formulating a good research question is key to a successful research project. Methods textbooks explain that 'good' research questions are anchored in existing literatures and theoretical approaches. There is a two-way relationship between research questions, theoretical approaches and the methods tied to them.

Consequently, the first thing to consider about a method is whether or not it is useful for formulating and answering the kind of research question one wants to ask. The 'thinking tools' introduced here interested me precisely because they gave me a vocabulary for considering the

questions I found important about my Science Po experience, namely questions about symbolic power and violence in social practices. I have continued to find these significant in my work in international political economy and international relations, ranging from the politics of foreign direct investments in Turkey to security in Africa and in the West (see, for example, Leander 2001, 2002).

Asking questions about symbolic power amounts to looking at how 'symbols' (broadly defined) are an integral part of power relations (Bourdieu 1992). This seemed of essence in the 'gulag' that M. Thomas was introducing, but it kept striking me as an essential aspect of all power relations, including in the very hard material things. To stick with Sciences Po, there was clearly a strict hierarchy; there were dominated and dominating people. This hierarchy had some material manifestations (material rewards for success, written rules, sanctions, institutionalized humiliations) but the common understanding of education and of one's own role in the system seemed so much more important. It seemed to shape the material manifestations of power relations as much as (if not more than) the other way around. Asking questions about the working of symbolic power hence seemed an obvious priority. The thinking tools were helpful in that they directed my questioning towards three central aspects of these power relations.

The first of these was the extent to which 'symbolic violence' was an integral part of symbolic power. The power relations at Sciences Po could not have worked if the 'losers' of these relations had not themselves gone along and followed rules, which so obviously placed them at a disadvantage. As in so many other situations, the victims were their own perpetrators. Women perpetuate gender inequality, military establishments accept benchmarking practices favoring private security companies, development planners contribute to a displacement of the focus of development thinking towards security issues. Symbolic power relations rest on 'symbolic violence' where victims perpetrate their own powerlessness. Power therefore works all the more effectively as there is a degree of what Bourdieu would call 'misrecognition' or *illusio*, an idea with parallels in Gramscian and Foucauldian thought. For similar reasons, power is all the more effective when it rests on understandings which appear disinterested or unrelated to hierarchy, for example, based in science, culture, or art (Bourdieu 1993, 1996b). In my own work, technocratic competence, efficiency, humanitarian work, and local empowerment have been central for obfuscating power relations and symbolic violence. To 'discover' this, asking questions about symbolic violence has been crucial.

The second aspect of symbolic power relations that the thinking tools help focus attention on is the centrality of practices (what people do) rather than overarching discourses and representations (captured by what they say and write). At Sciences Po, rules were upheld more by what was *not* said and written anywhere than by what was. Power rested on the innumerable practices people engaged in without thinking much about it, just because it was the right thing to do, and they all somehow knew it. When you arrive as a foreigner, you notice simply because you do not know and (consequently) keep doing the wrong things. You would really like people to articulate the unwritten rules for you but if you ask, it turns out they cannot. For them, the rules are so obvious and natural that they do not seem to be rules but part of the natural world. Texts and discourses (and Sciences Po's written regulations) will of course reflect some of this, and you can capture this part by reading and acquiring a 'cultural competence' of the kind Neumann mentions (in this book). But the step from discourses to practice is a long one (see Dunn's discussion of the 'long conversation' in this book).

This brings attention to a third aspect of symbolic power high-lighted by the thinking tools, namely its link to the material world (things like money, jobs, institutional positions, weapons, passports, or diplomas). Meaning and its practical implications change depending on the context. *What* you say matters less than *where* you speak from. The mystery of the minister is that her words can produce the material realities they purport to represent. But they do so *only* because of her position in social hierarchies. Similarly, the power of contemporary private security companies reflects not only the favorable bias towards them in risk and new public management discourses but also their links to policy makers, their evolving institutional role and their capacity to promote these economically. In addition, to some extent, what you say depends on where you speak from. As a student in Sciences Po, I did not count on having the same effect on our reality as our professors or as the minister of education. In fact, it did not even occur to me to try to have much influence at all. What I say (or not) is linked to my social position. This focus on material power and social hierarchies as an integral part of meaning production contrasts starkly with the 'internalist' focus of those discourse analysts who concentrate mainly or only on language. It has consequently been a key bone of contention between Bourdieusians and (some) post-structuralists (see contributions in Shusterman 1999).

To recapitulate, methodologies are linked to conceptualizations of the social world and so are the questions they are useful for answering. The approach introduced here is particularly helpful for asking questions

about symbolic power and violence in social practices. This may not sound terribly original. Discourse analysis, process tracing, and gender studies methods – just to mention some methods discussed in this book – claim to raise and answer similar research questions. However, as just underlined, I find Bourdieu's approach particularly helpful because of the specific focus it gives to these questions. It keeps questions about power in the center of the analysis. It directs attention to the centrality of the dominated in power relations. It is helpful for capturing the extent to which practices reflect and reproduce a mixture of economic, cultural, and symbolic power. With this specific focus comes a set of methodological tools. Consequently, the next steps are to get a hold of these in the general toolbox (conceptualization) and then decide how you would like to use the tools for your own purposes (operationalization).

Conceptualization: grab your thinking tools

A general conceptualization of the social world is an integral part of any methodology. It defines what to think about and what to look at (hence thinking tool). Methods rest on these assumptions about how the social world works. With vision come basic tools. Some authors in the social sciences become 'classics' because they challenge existing assumptions and make readers see the world differently. Luhmann, Braudel, and Foucault have made people think about how the social world works in novel ways. One cannot use Foucauldian discourse analysis or a Braudelean historical materialist analysis to answer questions about Luhmanian autopoietic systems. When Neumann (in this book) advises you to begin by carving out a 'discourse,' he has already equipped you with the basic thinking tool for analyzing the social world: not the carver but the discourse. Bourdieu-inspired methods rely on three such basic thinking tools: Fields, *Habitus*, and Practices (some would add *doxa* and capital). Indeed, earlier versions of this paper talked about the FIHP (Field, *Habitus*, Practices) method.

The first of these thinking tools is the field, the centrality of which leads some scholars to label the method 'field analysis.' In order to make sense of the social world, it is useful to think of it as divided into relatively autonomous sub-systems following their own logic. These subsystems are called fields but the general idea is rather widespread and reminiscent of Luhmann's relatively autonomous social systems. Sciences Po might be thought of as a field, relatively autonomous from the field of social sciences internationally, from the French economy, and so on. A field is defined by the fact that those who are in it share

an understanding (often unarticulated) of the rules of the game or the 'stakes at stake' in that given area of social activity. In that sense, the field is essential for understanding power relations. It defines what counts as advantages, or (social, economic, or cultural) 'capital' in that field. People's (or institutions') relative *position* in the social hierarchy in turn is defined by how much capital they accumulate. In diplomacy, humanitarian aid, banking, or Islamism, different forms of capital confer advantages. While central bankers may hold dominant positions in the field of banking, they may be subordinate in the humanitarian field.

Fields are only *relatively* autonomous. They exist in the context of other fields. This means that capital can be imported from one field to another. For example, Halliburton could import the economic and political capital it had accumulated in the field of US construction when it began competing for security contracts in Iraq. Of course, there is no guarantee that capital in one field has the same value in another field. Halliburton's political contacts to the Pentagon and the State Department were certainly more directly valuable than were its contacts to local administrators in Houston, Texas, when it moved into security contracting. There is an 'exchange rate' for capital. One might think of the struggle over its value in terms of the general struggle for power in society, and it is in this sense that Bourdieu uses 'the field of power.'

That fields are only relatively autonomous also means that the logic of a field is continuously shaped by the logic of other fields. Some fields are particularly important because they influence a great number of subfields; one might think of these as 'meta-fields.' Education, with its role in defining legitimate knowledge, is one example. The State, with its claim to a 'monopoly on legitimate symbolic violence,' is another. The shift in a meta-field sends ripples across a number of other fields. For example, the revalorization of neo-classical economics, including econometric modeling and degrees from the United States or Britain, triggered changes in most other fields, such as public administration, where these assets become valued and new public management thinking central. In turn, this shifts the positions and capital of actors in a range of subfields. In security, for example, private firms found themselves considerably advantaged. The meta-field of education has been crucial in reshaping the subfields of public administration and of security. These linkages between fields, and in particular the existence of meta-fields, are useful for understanding the broader (re-) production of power and domination in society.

Fields are not only static entities where actors occupy immutable positions according to their 'objectively' measurable capital endowments.

Fields are also dynamic terrains of struggle. People may seek to improve their own position by increasing their capital, they may strive to alter the field increasing the value of the capital they have or they may try to shift the boundaries of the field to alter both the value and the amount of capital they have. It is surprising that this struggle is not more intense and explicit. To explain this and to give substance to struggles that do take place, the second central thinking tool of the approach, the *habitus,* becomes pivotal.

The idea of the *habitus* is that while people have resources (capital) granting them a position from which to act, they also have taken-for-granted understandings, or 'dispositions,' that guide how they act. These are largely habitual and unreflected in nature, hence the term *habitus*. But they are essential for power relations. The *habitus* shapes strategies for accumulating capital and for reshaping fields or the failure to have such a strategy. But more than this, dispositions – such as eating habits, cultural interests, manners of speech, dress codes, and lifestyles – give shape to the body and body language. These become incorporated and embodied capital. Ataturk's dress codes (prohibition of the Fez and the veil, detailed dress codes directed at state officials) and the contemporary struggle over them are good illustrations of efforts to shift the value of incorporated capital and more profoundly of the dispositions going with them. Ataturk wanted a modern and Westernized Turkey. Present day Turkish Islamists wish a Muslim and independent one.

The *habitus*, like capital, is produced in specific fields. It reflects the values and discourses of a field, which in turn are shaped and reproduced by the people in that field. It provides the link between general structures and discourses – to which the Bourdieuian *doxa* is a rough equivalence – and the variety of practices they result in. Hence, the *doxa* is useful for the analysis of broad overarching understandings (such as Bourdieu's analyses of the state) or for the analysis of relatively undifferentiated societies (such as Bourdieu's analysis of Kabyl society in *The Logic of Practice* [1990]). However, to understand why a person or groups of people reflect general discourses in varied ways and why people follow the kind of 'strategies' they do, the *habitus* is a better tool.

The *habitus* is indeed an agent or group level thinking tool. As such it is subject to variation and change. A person is part of multiple fields in the course of their life. A person entering a new field (me entering Sciences Po, International Alert activists entering diplomatic circles) is bound to miss many unwritten rules and consequently appear clumsy and ill-adjusted. Over time, these rules become incorporated into the *habitus* of the person, whose behavior becomes less awkward. Alternatively, the

logic of the field might evolve so that the behavior is no longer at odds with its logic. Often both processes occur. Activists of major non-governmental organizations, such as International Alert, have learned the rules of international diplomacy and to some extent these rules are reflected in their *habitus.* At the same time, they have been major drivers of change in international politics. For example, their mere presence, which is at odds with traditional diplomatic state-based politics, has resulted in far-reaching changes in what actors can claim to be part of the field (extended to a range of non-state actors), what resources are valued (adding democratic resources, media power, and human rights credentials to military and economic might), and what understanding about international politics is taken for granted (such as in resolutions passed by the UN).

This takes us to the third thinking tool, practice. The basic idea with practices is that what people do rather than what they say is of essence. In part, this is so because a large share of their behavior is not consciously reflected but habitual and shaped by the position they act from. Practices capture the 'structuring' effects that shape action. (For a Foucauldian perspective on this issue, see Dunn and Gusterson in this book.) It is a way of capturing the reasons and situated rationality of action by replacing it in context. It is a guard against the very common tendency to impute a rationality to people (usually the rationality of the researcher) and then be forced to explain behavior that does not follow this rationality as stupid, irrational, or deviant, a tendency Bourdieu referred to as the 'genetic fallacy.'

More centrally, practices capture what people do in context, and this *relational* aspect of practices is of essence. We may be able to understand the action of International Alert in calling attention to small arms trade in the UN context by looking at its capital and the *habitus* of key members. However, we can only grasp the *habitus* and the capital if we think in relational terms. Moreover, if we want to understand the consequences of their actions for power relations in international politics, we need to place this action in relational context. We need to look at the practices of International Alert, how these are shaped, and, in turn, how they affect the practices of other actors in the field. Since practices are thought of as relational, they capture the overall pattern of interactions in a field and are differentiated from individual strategies of action.

This leads to a last essential point about practices: they are 'generative.' Practices create meanings, entities, and power relations. When International Alert enters international politics, practices are shifted.

It is not simply that power relations change because (given) people gain and lose in terms of some (predetermined) resources. Rather the resources and the people that count in international politics themselves are reshaped. A generative process is in motion. Similarly, contemporary political practices resting on opinion polls and media-mediated political action 'generate' politics as the aggregation of atomized individual interests on topics over which individuals have little to say and often few thoughts (see contributions in Wacquant 2005).

In practices, one can observe the relations of (symbolic) power and violence. It is hence not surprising that many consider 'practices' pivotal to the approach. They would argue that any Bourdieu-inspired study should depart from practices and build up an understanding of field and *habitus* from these. More generally, they would side with those who consider Bourdieu's work as key to the 'practice turn' in the social sciences. However, as pointed out above, the *habitus* and field have similar status for other scholars. My own position is that the three thinking tools are related to each other and work together. Perhaps this is because I first read *Distinction*, where the analysis is framed as [(*habitus*) (capital) + field = practice]. But more likely it is because I have worked with all three thinking tools and find them all important.

To sum up, the toolbox of this approach contains three basic concepts for thinking about the social world: field, *habitus*, and practices. Using these thinking tools together is the basis for explaining and understanding symbolic power and violence. Many scholars consider one tool to occupy a more central and logically primary position. My own understanding is that they work together, that one can begin by using any tool. Moreover, most studies make more use of one tool than the others. Certainly Bourdieu's own work did; note the difference between *Distinction*, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1995) and *The Weight of the World* (1999). The decision of which tool to use and how much to take the two other tools out of the toolbox are decisions about how to employ the general thinking tools in one's own context. As this indicates, the third step, after asking questions and conceptualizing, is to operationalize.

Operationalization: decide on boundaries, level and scope

The thinking tools have been used to look at symbolic power and violence in practices ranging from those related to artistic production, the state, international law, elites in Brazil, the family, the suburbs of Paris, the media, European politics, and public administration (and elsewhere). As this diversity signals, there can be no firm guidelines for

what exactly to look at, what evidence to gather or in what kind of quantities (nor can I possibly list here all the fascinating secondary literature applying Bourdieu). Annual income, bonuses, thinking in terms of financial economics, interest in extreme sports and participation in professional meetings may be essential for understanding the field, *habitus*, and practices of investment banking but have little relevance for understanding those in the field of artistic production.

It is impossible to 'operationalize' field, *habitus*, and practices before the research. Fleshing them out in order to analyze symbolic power and violence is what the research is about; 'operationalization' is a key aspect of research. This said, if it is to work well, there are three central decisions to be made about the study: (i) where to draw the boundaries of the field; (ii) at which level to work with the *habitus*; and (iii) how to limit the scope of the study (possibly through a selective use of the thinking tools).

Drawing boundaries around the study to delimit the field and the practices at the center of the research is necessary: we obviously need to know what symbolic power/violence we are interested in. Yet, the stakes are high. The delimitation of the field both includes and excludes. The drawing of lines therefore shapes the analysis and its results profoundly. Consider two studies analyzing changes in international security after the Cold War. In one, the boundaries of the field are narrowly drawn around diplomatic practices (Pouliot 2003). In the other, the boundary is drawn to include the gamut of security professionals, including police, military, and commercial networks (Bigo 2005). The subsequent analyses differ in content, coverage, and style. And they reach opposite conclusions about the nature of change in international security. Pouliot argues that security greatly increased after the Cold War, as the bloc confrontation has been replaced by a security community. Bigo concludes that insecurity has greatly increased, as a consequence of the evolving practices of security professionals.

It is therefore important to be conscientious about the decision to draw boundaries. Mistakenly drawing lines may distract attention from essential practices and power relations, and hence obscure precisely the things the analysis purports to clarify. It is particularly important to watch out for two common pitfalls. The first is to draw the boundaries of the field so that the symbolic power/violence relations one aims at analyzing fall outside it. Although there is an international diplomatic practice and field, it may be a serious mistake to assume that symbolic power/violence in the definition of international security can

be analyzed in terms of it. The pivotal role of security professionals and their routine practices, for example, is entirely left out.

The second pitfall is to assume that links between a field and other fields deprive the field studied of its own logic. All fields exist in context. This does not make it impossible or meaningless to study them. The crux is to draw the line between the field and practices that are central and those shaping them from elsewhere. The practices of private security companies can be studied in terms of a field in its own right, even if this field is obviously tied to a number of other fields, notably fields of national security which shape the field of private security professionals and which these in turn influence. However, for the sake of a study it is of essence to set the boundaries of which relations of symbolic power/violence one wants to focus on.

This leads to a second crucial decision that has to be made: what level to work on, or more specifically, how to operationalize the *habitus*. At one extreme, one might work from the individual. Hence to capture symbolic power and violence in the Caucasus, Derlugian (2005) has constructed his research around the biography of Musa Shanib to clarify and explain the (sharply diverging) political trajectories of Checheno-Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Abkahzia. At the other extreme, one might imagine working at the level of the entire practice and field studied, as Ashley (1989) did in IR, where he argued that the shared (Realist) assumption, or *doxa*, that community in international anarchy is impossible resulted in a diplomatic practice blocking the possibility of 'global governance.' Both extremes have serious drawbacks.

Using the *habitus* at an overly general level makes the social world seem uncomfortably 'automatic and closed,' as Lahire (1999) rightly points out. It overemphasizes the structuring effects that weigh on actions. The variation in the *habitus* of different groups and people due to their social positions and past experiences is simply eliminated by fiat, as is the role of emotions in social relations, such as love, family, friendship, or enmity. If the *habitus* is merged with the *doxa*, it can no longer provide the link between general discourses, structures, and agency. Its role as a separate thinking tool disappears. Working with the *habitus* on the individual level is no more persuasive. Here the *habitus* becomes a collation of individual experiences and pasts, in which it is difficult to distinguish what is of more general utility for understanding the symbolic power and violence of social practices. The *habitus* runs the risk of being watered down to an individual history with limited analytical clout.

Consequently, I find the best strategy to be one of trying to work with the *habitus* at a level between these two extremes. More concretely, the *habitus* works best when differentiated according to key groups in a study, as in Bourdieu's analyses of the educational field in France (for example, *Homo Academicus* [2000b] or *The State Nobility* [1998]). This is also how it enters my analysis of the field of private security, where groups of individuals share a common general understanding of the stakes at stake but differ fundamentally in how this is articulated in their readings of the social world. This 'middle of the road strategy' can usefully be complemented by analysis at the individual level to retain the sense of depth in the study. Like the *Economist* uses boxes to detail an example, one can use examples to flesh out a point. I have often relied on extensive quotes from interviews with security contractors, job announcements, and advertisements by firms to make arguments about the *habitus* of contractor groups more tangible.

The third and final decision to be made is when to stop or how to limit the scope of the study. This is a central question for analysts using any method, and certainly in studies drawing on Bourdieu, it is an essential one. The empirically grounded theoretical set up easily produces overly ambitious studies. Evidence – including statistical data, biographical information, photographs, art, literature, classical texts, diplomatic archives, public speeches, newspaper clippings, and inter-views (depending on the question) – tends to pile up but could always be completed with even more. This requires subjecting 'evidence' to a thorough analysis. Finally, writing and structuring the analysis is inspiring, but word limits, stylistic requirements, and the like quickly become a nuisance. This is one reason for Bourdieu's foundation of the journal *Actes de la recherches en sciences sociales*, where there were NO word limits and one could publish non-conventional material including pictures, art, and news clippings. It is probably also the reason *Distinction* is 660 pages and *The Weight of the World* is 1460 pages.

Most of us do not have the privilege of publishing books or writing dissertations of that length. Nor do many journals accept articles on the conditions of *Actes de la Recherche*. But even if we did, it is really hard work as Bourdieu often sneered at those who shun empirical studies. Hence my strong and articulate preference for good 'thick descriptions' (Geertz 1973) based on the analysis of a range of evidence is tempered by my self-preserving instincts and pragmatic approach to the needs of those completing their dissertations. I am persuaded that deciding on scope, as early as possible, is of essence.

I have tried both of the two most common ways of limiting the scope of my studies, and they both work fine. The first is to reduce the empirical focus of the analysis: focus on small groups of agents and practices. Restricting the scope of an empirical analysis does not have to be done at the expense of its theoretical ambitions. For example, in *The Social Structures of the Economy* (2005), Bourdieu uses an empirical analysis of the housing market in France to make a general theoretical point about the significance of social structures for the operation of an economy. The second way to limit scope is to work selectively with the 'thinking tools': instead of trying to provide an analysis based on field, *habitus*, and practices, rely on one of these, leaving the others in the background. This strategy is also used by Bourdieu in short lectures and essays, such as those in *Practical Reason* (2002), to concentrate on an argument. But perhaps the most important is to put strict deadlines and time limits. (Or as Gusterson notes, in this book, the grant money runs out.) That is a very unscientific but effective way of limiting scope, making sure that a project does not swell and become more ambitious than there is room for it to be.

The thinking tools introduced in this chapter are malleable. They can be used to raise questions and analyze power in almost any context. Yet, when using them in any specific context they have to be fixed. The field, *habitus*, and practices (*doxa* and capital) need to be given concrete and tangible meaning. This operationalization within a particular focus is a central part of the research process – no general blueprint can guide it.

Validity: work reflexively

As with all other methods, a Bourdieu-inspired approach needs to answer the basic question of how it distinguishes good research from bad. Since researchers using the thinking tools are left relatively free to apply these contextually, they will necessarily make different choices. How can one judge which account is better if two accounts, such as the studies of (in)security discussed above, reach different conclusions on the same question? But more centrally for most people, how can one assert the quality and validity of one's own work? The answer seen from the perspective of the thinking tools is simple: 'work reflexively.' Reflexivity hence becomes an integral part of the 'method,' which is consequently sometimes referred to as 'reflexive' sociology (Bourdieu 1985). I outline here three distinct understandings of what working 'reflexively' means for research practice and end with a note of how it is reflected in research

writing. (See Ackerly, in this book, for a complementary elaboration on these issues.)

At the most simple, working reflexively may mean reflecting on the quality and validity of the study in a methods textbook's sense. Evidence for a thinking tools study is similar to evidence used in any empirical work. It relies, variously, on statistical information, life span data, interviews, texts, photographic evidence, or pictures. Consequently, the usual standards apply. Issues such as the accuracy, adequacy, representativeness, and relevance of the information are essential for evaluating whether the 'evidence' of a study supports its conclusions. For example, if people are assigned positions in a field on the basis of information that can be shown to be false or irrelevant, that assignment is mistaken. If a scholar argues that an actor's position in the field of international security is greatly enhanced by the cultural capital linked to the mastery of Copenhagen School concepts and the educational capital that comes with a diploma from the Political Science Department of the University of Copenhagen, he or she is simply wrong. Similarly, a generalization about the *habitus* of private contractors based on the movie *Blood Diamonds* can be taken to task for generalizing on too thin a basis. Finally, the approach is set up to produce accounts about real-world symbolic violence and power and social practices. If these can be shown to follow very different patterns from those suggested in an account, it is wrong. These conventional checks on the validity of a study deserve being taken seriously (see the other chapters in this book for answers to these issues reflecting the authors' diverse thinking tools).

However, reflexivity at this level is insufficient. As all studies that take the role of meaning in social contexts seriously, studies made with the thinking tools approach have to answer some tricky questions regarding the status of the observer in relation to the observed. Specifically for this approach, it would be inconsistent to claim that the field of the social scientists was a field – the only one – where people did not have a *habitus*, did not struggle over positions, and were not engaged in practices producing symbolic power/violence. Since the approach makes no such claim, it needs a way of dealing with the tainting that the dynamics of the scientific field must give to its 'scientific' accounts of the social world (Bourdieu 2004).

This is where the second understanding of reflexivity comes in: working reflexively also means using 'epistemological prudence.' The basic idea is that researchers should 'objectify the objectifying subject,' that is, use the thinking tools to analyze themselves. This caution about the way knowledge is produced has direct implications for research. It is

the only road to limit the bias entailed in looking at the world from one's own perspective, such as me looking at the world of private contractors as a female French/Swedish Copenhagen Business School employee. It is also important in interacting with the people researched. The impact of my physical appearance, reactions, gestures, social status, and use of language tends to have an immediate impact on what interviewees say and leave out from their accounts. I cannot abolish this, just as I cannot, through reflexivity, eliminate my own bias in order to look at the world from nowhere. I can, however, do my best to limit its impact and also be aware of it when I analyze the results. This is 'epistemological prudence' in research practice.

Third, the researcher exists in a broader context, in a social world where privileged knowledge, such as that produced in universities, is of essence. Scientific practices 'loop,' to use Hacking's (1999) term, back into society and reshape its 'reality.' Categories and representations create their own social reality. Educational institutions are meta-fields that shape knowledge in other fields not only by producing categories but also by sanctioning careers. When scientific practices have looping effects, we need to be reflexive about what kind of 'reality' these research loops constitute. Epistemological prudence is a beginning. It can be used as a guard against the collective hypocrisy and self-delusion of assuming or pretending (rather than showing) that research agendas sanctioned by a scientific field are those most socially important. This is an obvious concern in the current context of the commercialization and internationalization of universities.

However, limiting the role of reflexivity to one of prudence is arguably both naive and irresponsible. Instead of 'prudence,' one needs reflexivity in a third sense: as a 'realpolitik of reason.' Purportedly neutral and objective scientific knowledge all too often presents unrealistic and unreasonable accounts of a world devoid of symbolic power and violence. However, precisely because knowledge is so central to the social world, these accounts play an essential role in perpetuating power by obscuring it. This delegitimizes work that effectively deals with issues of symbolic power. In this context, reflexivity (at least in Bourdieu's view) should be used to promote a realpolitik bolstering serious scientific work (with emancipatory potential) while denaturalizing, historizing, and unmasking (to use some clichéd expressions) the fantasy world of much of what counts as 'science.'

The first two kinds of reflexivity are relatively straightforward and palpable. They sit well with classical understandings of reflexivity, even if the notion of epistemological prudence gives it a twist. The realpolitik

take on reflexivity is more complicated. It runs against the idea of value neutral science with which most contemporary university education is imbued. It smacks of politicization. It has become (mistakenly I would argue) associated with Bourdieu's left-wing politics and hence understandably irritates people who do not share these. Ultimately, the question is one of alternatives. The alternative seems to ignore the looping effects of the sciences, unreflexively accepting their role. Any responsible thinking person (not only left-wingers) would presumably find this unsatisfactory.

By now, you are hopefully wondering how these three versions of reflexivity can possibly be stuffed into a research project. The short answer is that they cannot. If I write an article about intervention in Darfur, I cannot also include a full reflexive analysis of my own position in the academic field and the link of my study to the political context I am analyzing. There will most probably not even be much explicit reflexivity about the evidence used. There simply is not enough space; the reflexive grounding of the argument will most probably have to remain unarticulated. But then, that is the fate of most methodological and theoretical considerations that underpin a study of any kind. This does not diminish their importance any more than it does the utility of working reflexively, but it makes following the reflexivity of others more difficult. It also limits the time one sets aside to think reflexively. One may wish for a magical self-reflecting quill à la Neumann (in this book) to do the job, especially since most of us cannot spare the time to write the equivalent of Bourdieu's *Homo Academicus* to come to grips with their position in their own academic field or of his *Distinction* to come to grips with their position in society. However, I still contend that, even if the result remains unarticulated, working reflexively is sound advice.

Conclusion: thinking tools, dispositions, and irreverence

When I first read *Distinction*, I did not for a second imagine that I would one day be trying to distil some essential points about its 'method' into maximum 25 manuscript pages. The idea would have seemed absurd to me. For one, I did not picture myself as an academic. But more centrally, I did not think of it as a 'methods' book. I found the book interesting and helpful for strictly personal reasons but drew no link between it and my studies. As many students, I thought it essential to have neat and clear-cut concepts and methodological tools that simplify the world. The dense vocabulary, the shifting definitions, and the constant back

and forth between theory and empirical observation in Bourdieu's book definitely did not fit this understanding of a useful method.

It was not until quite a few years later (well into my PhD) that my frustration with the Procrustean beds of neat and clear concepts and methods that effectively stymied interesting research pushed me to draw on Bourdieu. By that time, I had come to appreciate the relatively open and malleable thinking tools. These did not work as the strict universal categories that I had once thought indispensable. They were integral to something more useful, namely a disposition for thinking about power and symbolic violence in context.

This chapter has communicated my bid for the substance of that 'sociological disposition' and more specifically my understanding of its methodological translation. I have insisted that I think it disposes analysts to raise questions about symbolic power/violence and, more generally, social hierarchies. I have suggested that thinking of the social world in terms of fields, *habitus,* and practices is integral to it. I have drawn on the work done by myself and others to point to some key decisions to be taken in the course of operationalizing these general thinking tools. And I have argued that it logically suggests the importance of working reflexively.

This distilling exercise is absolutely irreverent. I have imposed a strictly personal order, priority, and logic on a complex and multifaceted conceptual framework, which can of course be understood and used differently. Moreover, to satisfy editors and readers, I have eliminated much of the conceptual apparatus and ('all that French') vocabulary that expresses it in the process of simplifying. But then, Bourdieu was a great advocate of the irreverent use of theories – of 'writing with a theorist against that theorist' – so I may just be following the tradition I claim to write about. The bottom line is that if this makes what I have called the thinking tools more accessible, it will have been worth it.

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