

Bourdieu and the Politics of Symbolic Violence^{*}

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In this lecture I examine the analytical work performed by the concept of ‘symbolic violence’ in Bourdieu’s theorisation of society as a mechanism for the production and distribution of, and the struggle over, being, or, to put it differently, the production and distribution of, and the struggle over, the viability of life. I show how Bourdieu’s key concepts constitute analytical angles on dimensions of this struggle for viability. *Habitus* highlights a conception of viability associated with practical efficiency: the more efficient one is, the more viable one’s life becomes. *Illusio* points to the viability that comes from having a life pursuit that makes life meaningful: it is the struggle to have a *raison d’être* that makes life valuable in our own eyes. Capital focuses on the viability derived from recognition: the sense of worthwhileness that comes when others validate the importance and significance of our life pursuits, our tastes, and our possessions. People’s struggles to augment their being is shaped by the kind of *habitus*, *illusio* and capital they inherit and for their capacity to invest their inheritances such as to yield an as satisfactory life as possible. The value of this inheritance, however, is crucially dependent on the social reality that valorizes it. One cannot inherit a valuable capacity to speak English in a world that is not an English-speaking reality. This is why the struggle to augment one’s being is always a struggle to keep reality on one’s side to maximize one’s complicity with reality. Symbolic power for Bourdieu is the power to create this complicity. Symbolic violence is a measure of the degree to which the dominant can naturalize this sense

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(This piece is based on the transcript of the above lecture. I have maintained the ‘live lecture’ style of the piece as I delivered it. But the text has been re-organised and sometimes clarified and augmented to make it flow better from a reader’s perspective. Repetitions have also been removed)

of complicity with reality such as to not only impose their reality but make others experience it as the only possible reality there is. The lecture examines what kinds of modes of domination and resistance such a degree of power entails.

I am very honored to give the Li, Yih-yuan Memorial Lecture, and particularly so having heard about the specificity of his work and the intellectual heritage he has left. I hope this lecture lives up to his intellectual lineage. I also want to let you know that I have augmented this zoom lecture with some real-life audience. Like many, I have become sick of giving lectures all over the world that end up with me facing my lounge room wall. I have asked some colleagues and friends to join me in my lounge room and be my live audience. So, I'd like to thank them for coming as well. When everything is over and we switch off our computers, I'm going to be having a beer with them, and talking face to face and discussing everything that is happening in the world. So take that, COVID!

This lecture is part of a book I am writing, but it's not a finished book. It's probably more finished than it has been for a long time. But this is still an optimistic way of putting it. It's one of those books I have been 'trying to finish' for the last twenty years. And I have been teaching Bourdieu's sociology and anthropology for more than 20 years. Every year I tell my students: "you are lucky because you are getting the final draft of my Bourdieu manuscript"... I am telling you something like this now and will probably tell my students the same thing next year. One day that 'final draft' will happen.

I actually want to start with the same little story I start the book with - that bit is definitely written! The story is about when I was a post-doc at Bourdieu's Center in Paris for the first time in the early nineties. I was in this big room that I shared with other postdocs, and Bourdieu comes in, walks straight to me, taps me on my shoulder and says, "Let's go and have lunch!" I thought he was going to ask other people, but then I realized, wow, he was just asking me. It was going to be a tête à tête lunch. What an amazing thing in my life!

So I went with him and he took me to what turned out to be his favorite bistro, next to the College de France. It was all great, except it was an exceptionally noisy place. Now, you may or may not have noticed that I have cochlear implants. I have suffered from gradual hearing loss since my mid-twenties. At the time when the event I am describing happened, I was wearing hearing aids. But I was already becoming too deaf for my hearing aids to be useful. This is to say that I heard with great difficulty, particularly in noisy places. And, sure enough, I was having problems hearing Bourdieu in his noisy bistro as he started talking. He was telling me about the book he was working on at the time, *La Misère du Monde*, and he was explaining the technical problems the researchers were having with tape-recorders and how it affected the interviewing process. As he talked all I did was sit and concentrate, to try and hear him despite the noise. After a good 10 minutes or so, he notices that he was monologuing and that I was just sitting there. He leans back a little bit and says "but,

maybe I'm boring you!" I was, of course, quite embarrassed, and I explained to him the situation. He was very good at trying to speak slowly and clearly. But I couldn't help thinking: "This was the weirdest thing happening here. I am living my ultimate intellectual fantasy. I'm sitting in a bistro, in Paris, with Pierre Bourdieu, my favorite living thinker, and he's asking me: 'Am I boring you?'". I start the book with this story and then go on to say that the book itself is the answer to this question.

The above is to say that my take on Bourdieu as I present it in the book and as I am presenting it in this lecture, is a very personal one. I'm not claiming that my interpretation captures the *real* Bourdieu more so than others. I am claiming that I am dealing with those parts of Bourdieu that have made my mind sparkle over the years. Given my own biases, it has often been those parts where the sociological, and the anthropological fuse with the philosophical. I don't have a particular investment in 'Bourdieu' as such. But I certainly have an investment in my mind sparkling. I also have an investment in what gives me new insights and makes me see new things in my empirical material. Finally, I also have an investment in sharing this experience with other researchers hoping they can benefit from it analytically in the same way I have benefited from it.

It is in developing this personal take on Bourdieu's work that I have come to highlight a dimension that I have referred to, since my very first lectures and presentations on his work, as "a critical political economy of being." The idea came from a remark Bourdieu made in reply to someone suggesting that his theorizing of interest and capital meant that he shared with marginal economists a conception of human beings as driven by the accumulation of capital. Bourdieu says something like: "No, I don't have such a conception of people, if anything, I have a conception of people as aiming to perpetuate or augment their social being."

Now this conception is already pretty much a fusion between the philosophical and the empirical, because, on one hand, the idea of an augmentation of being comes from Spinoza. It is associated with the concept of joy. It is important to note that augmentation is not the same as accumulation, because for Spinoza, as for Bourdieu, some accumulation can lead to a diminishing of being, in the same way if you eat too much you end up with indigestion. So too much is not always good in this notion of "augmentation." There's also the politics of how you accumulate: some people accumulate too fast, and in accumulating too fast, their fastness diminishes their being. One must think about the speed but also the rhythm of accumulation when talking about the augmentation of being. Today, for instance, we are faced with a situation where forms of accumulation that we always experienced as augmenting our being, such as the accumulation of fossil-fuel driven development, have begun to diminish it because of the intensity with which the initial accumulation happened.

An economy of being, then, is not the same as any conception of economy that usually comes to our mind when we use the word. We cannot just substitute being to monetary and other forms of wealth and assume that the usual processes of production and distribution that we associate with an economy remain the same. Thinking being economically changes the way we think economic categories. The subjects positioned within this political economy do not just become rich or poor. For example, as he explains in *Misère du monde*, misery for Bourdieu involves more than just poverty.

There is one more set of preliminary points I want to go through with you before confronting the topic that interests us today, that of symbolic violence. I want to briefly show you how each of Bourdieu's key concepts, such as habitus, *illusio* and capital works to clarify a particular dimension of this political economy of being. This will allow me to better explain the analytical work that the concept of 'symbolic violence' does.

It might also make things clearer if I say quickly that when we talk of 'being' in relation to Bourdieu we might as well be talking, and I certainly talk, about viability. A political economy of being, is the same as a political economy of viability. From this perspective societies are seen as assemblages concerned with the production and distribution of viability. People are positioned as subjects/agents within this assemblage and accordingly, they inherit and have different conceptions of viability, they struggle for a life worth living, and they also struggle to uphold, protect and sometimes impose on others their conceptions of viability.

In what way do Bourdieu's key concepts help understand this political economy? Let us start with *Habitus*. To put it as succinctly as possible, *Habitus* is viability as practical efficiency. Bourdieu is interested in the relation between viability and how well the human body deploys itself in the world. Here, the degree of life's viability is linked to the degree of the body's capacity to deploy itself efficiently. Think of the simple act of a hand moving to pick up a glass of water to drink from it. The movement of the hand involves a deployment of the body. It involves a whole series of classifications about the nature of the glass, how far from one's hand it is, how heavy it is, etc... all these classifications happen while the human arm unfolds itself and along with the hand and the fingers that also unfold to perform the act gripping the glass and bringing it back to the body. That's what is meant by the body 'deploying' itself. In this sense, all practices are processes of bodily deployment. *Habitus* offers a theory of how the body-mind assemblage acquires its degree of efficiency. There is in *habitus* a vitalist conception that runs systematically through Bourdieu's work and that is not acknowledged often enough. Here he is continuously in dialogue with Spinoza, Nietzsche and Bergson and a whole tradition that sees the viability of life as

capacity to act, as energy, power, efficiency, and force.

Let us now consider the concept of *illusio*. This takes us to a very different conception of viability which has to do with the existence of a “raison d’être” for living. One can speak of this as an existential viability whereby a viable life is a life that considers itself worthy of being lived. Bourdieu sees *illusio* as the process of investing oneself in a path that makes life meaningful. When you invest yourself in a path, you are gambling with yourself, you are putting your social life on the line so to speak. You are saying “I’m going to throw myself in this path, and if this path works for me, it’s going to give my life a meaning. Finally, the world has meaning for me because I’ve got this [path].” So this is then what we call “existential viability,” as opposed to “practical viability,” which is the *Habitus* viability. It is in a sense like what Husserl called “project” in relation to philosophy as a path. However, *illusio* does not necessarily denote any grand path in life. It can be a minor route that is enough to make life bearable as opposed to unbearable. This is why it is part of an economy as far as Bourdieu is concerned. What kind of path is available to me to throw myself in, how much meaningfulness does it yield vary from one social location and from one trajectory to another? Society is the ultimate distributor of ‘*raison d’être*’ but like with everything else it does not distribute this precious good equally.

The third dimension of viability in Bourdieu’s work is related to Capital. It is probably the most straightforwardly explained by Bourdieu himself: it involves viability as recognition. Here, life is as viable as it is valorized by others. You notice how *Illusio* is not as dependent on others. It is me gambling with and valorizing my own life pursuits: “I think my life is going well as a carpenter, I’m doing some really good work here, and actually, hey, maybe carpentry is for me, and I am for carpentry.” I’m not as dependent on what others think, like: “Wow, good on you, you are a fantastic carpenter.” In the struggle to accumulate capital however, the viability of life is totally dependent on the game of recognition. This is so despite capital being at another level a subcategory of *Illusio*. It is so in the sense that if I invest myself in being a carpenter, I start accumulating carpentry skills, carpentry tools and carpentry connections. I get a sense of viability linked to self-satisfaction from the sense that I am on a good path in life, but I also get a sense of viability when people recognize and show an appreciation of the skills, tools and connections that I have accumulated. Symbolic capital is the measure of this recognition-related viability. Here again, we see how Bourdieu inherits a largely Hegelian set of questions related to ‘recognition’ and transforms them into a political economy that involves the distribution and inheritance of recognition, its pursuit and accumulation and the struggle to make it yield as much as possible.

Habitus, *Illusio*, Capital, can be seen as anthropologically oriented concepts,

in the sense that they are much more about the properties that humans, by virtue of being social agents, have and deploy as they struggle to augment their being. However, as it has been made clear above, what kind of habitus and *illusio* people have and how much capital they inherit, and what kind of capacity for accumulation they inherit, all depend on the kind of social space and the kind of social trajectory they are located in, and where they are located within this space and this trajectory. This takes us to the more sociologically oriented concepts of 'field' and 'states of domination'. While the anthropological concepts are oriented by the question of 'what is it about social agents that makes them desiring, willing and able to want to augment their being?', the sociological concepts are oriented by the question 'what is it about society that makes it an assemblage for the production and distribution of being?'

Let us look into the concept of field. A field is above all a way to theorize social space. This is the space where people are located and where they are latched onto specific *illusios* and pursuing particular forms of capital. But this is not an inert backdrop to where things happen. This space is an already existing relational assemblage which has its own properties and its own causal powers. Like a magnetic field, it is a causal force in the way it pulls and repels certain agents towards or away from certain locations in order to position them on a particular trajectory. Trajectories are as important as location for Bourdieu. One is not only born in a particular class position but also a position on a socio-temporal vector: inheriting a certain amount of capital in a group experiencing upward social mobility is not the same as inheriting the same amount of capital in a group experiencing downward social mobility. A field distributes different 'amounts' of being in the form of different capitals but also different propelling powers which translate into different capacities to augment one's being. The field highlights the fact that ultimately viability is social in its nature, not individual. Being and viability are always social being and social viability. They are structured [and] socially determined and irreducible to individuals.

But Bourdieu's conception of the social is not of an economy of being, but of a *political* economy of being. That is, the field embodies an economy of being that is both structured by relations of power and domination, and at the same time is also the object of struggle and contestation. People do not just passively inherit what the field distributes. They inherit a position but they struggle to position themselves as best as they can from that position. They inherit a certain amount of capital but they try to augment it. Furthermore, the field is not just a space where people compete over the distribution of capital, it is a space where people struggle to valorize their capital. The latter is a struggle to make others valorize one's material

and cultural possessions, one's taste and one's choices. It is also a struggle to make them valorize one's life pursuits, to turn one's *illusio* into something everyone aspires for and wishes to share, what Bourdieu refers to as a *collusio*. All the above implies a struggle to dictate the means of classification and appreciation of reality and the opportunities it offers, which for Bourdieu ultimately entails a symbolic struggle to 'institute' reality. We will soon come to see what 'symbolic' actually means here. At this point it is important to note that, in French, the verb '*instituer*' has a meaning that is perhaps not as salient in the English verb 'to institute': it means to establish and create a state of affairs in a durable manner. As such, any 'instituted' reality, any society with a semblance of stability and durability is so by virtue of the processes of symbolic domination that have made it into what it is. It is on account of this that the analysis of the processes of power and domination that run through social space become one of the primary tasks of a critical social science.

Bourdieu offers several key analytical concepts and differentiations that are concerned with elucidating the way power works in giving shape to the social world. First, as is clear from his work, it is important to keep in mind that he approaches domination from three simultaneous perspectives. These are:

1) Domination as a relatively stable structure, that is, as an on-going social relation of subjection between dominant and dominated social groups with relatively stable and durable differential of power. This is the most 'objectivist' of Bourdieu's conceptions of domination in that these relations are perceived to exist for the social analyst even if those inhabiting the social are not aware of them.

2) Domination as what the dominants do, as a practice, such as when we speak of 'strategies of domination.' But also, importantly, what Bourdieu refers to as 'the field of power' which treats 'power' as the product of the accumulation of various forms of capital each competing to dominate the field of power itself. This is somewhat similar to what Marx called 'fractions of capital', in that it breaks the dominant into variety of interests, all in a position of power, but all competing to dominate the field of power itself. And finally,

3) Domination as a pervasive type and culture of power within the field. The latter entails a more totalizing analytic description of the existing state of domination instituted by the dominant class. It involves a further differentiation between:

a) Modes of domination, which offers a description of the manner in which domination is instituted. Here Bourdieu mainly differentiates between aristocratic and democratic domination. And,

b) Degrees of domination, which offers an analytics of the extent to which a dominant group has saturated the social with its own values and imposed its reality on others. This is where the concept of symbolic violence does its analytical work.

Bourdieu shares the first two approaches to domination (as practice and as structure), at least at a general level, with many other social scientists. It is the third conception, that is truly distinctive in his work and that needs further detailing. Particularly since it is also where the concept of symbolic violence that concerns us is located.

Let us begin with the differentiation between ‘aristocratic’ and ‘democratic’ domination. In a way, the categories are self-explanatory. ‘Aristocratic domination’ involves the dominant group positing, as aristocracies do, that its mode of being, the kind of cultural capital it has, its tastes and modes of appreciation are superior to the rest of the population. What’s more they posit that their possession of ‘what it takes’ to be part of the dominant group and to have access to the kind of being this entails is a natural inheritable part of their persons (for example, ‘in the blood’). The dominated group also is posited to have a mode of being that is specific to it and that it inherits. It just so happen that this mode of being is constructed as inferior to the mode of being of the dominant. Bourdieu sees traditional masculine domination as a classical aristocratic form of domination. It institutes a division between what males are, what they can do and what they can aspire for, and what females are, what they can do and can aspire for. Most important it naturalizes what it takes to be a male and what it takes to be a female and the kind of social being open to each. In the way the differences between the dominant’s social being and the social being of the dominated are naturalized, as well as the superiority of the one over the other, the aristocratic mode of domination institutes a form of Apartheid. Indeed, Apartheid South Africa in the past and today’s Zionist Israel can be seen as instituting or as having instituted a form of aristocratic ethno-racial domination. What each group is and what they have accesses to is predetermined by birth. Aristocratic domination is dependent on the dominated knowing their place by seeing it as their natural place. It essentializes the difference between the dominant and the dominated by institutionalizing it within both the social body and the human body. Thus, it is not only a matter of belief that stops the dominated from wanting to aspire for the dominant’s mode of being but rather a question of the social avenues for self-realization being objectively structured in such a way that the body of the dominated is not able to realistically aspire to do certain things. For example: I’m pretty short—in case you can’t see this through the zoom screen out there in Taipei, let me tell you: I’m pretty short—and so as a short body, first at school in Lebanon, and then, in later life, in Australia, I realistically never aspired to play basketball professionally for the Lakers or the Chicago Bulls. Because of where I am located and because of my evaluation of what my body can achieve in relation to the possibilities offered by my social milieu, being a professional basketball player in a famous American team

has not been one of my imaginary aspirations. Or, to put it in Bourdieusian language, professional basketball was never laid out as an *illusio* before me: I played basketball at school and could see that I won't even make it into my school team let alone join a famous international basketball team. This is not where my body can go. That does not mean one cannot fantasize, but this is a different question. What is important is that the question of dominated aspirations is not simply a matter of belief, something that you subjectively stop yourself from aspiring for. It is more that your body and society are constituted in such a way, in themselves and vis a vis each other that makes it impossible for you to aspire for certain things. We go back to what we highlighted earlier: for Bourdieu domination is the domination of social reality and a decline in the sense of complicity with social reality. The very notion of 'confidently aspiring to be x' involves a sense of complicity. Aristocratic domination deprives the dominated of that sense when it comes to aspiring for something that the dominant do. It makes the dominated stick to what they experience ontologically as realistically their lot, unless they think it viable to struggle to reshape reality. As I was growing up, I never felt that a struggle to reshape basketball as a game that accommodates short people was likely to succeed, so I simply accepted that it wasn't for me.

Let us now move to the democratic mode of domination which works rather differently, at least up to a point. The democratic mode of domination, when one thinks of it, is a far more perverse form of domination. But let's start with its basic form. Rather than instituting a neat aristocratic division between a dominant and a dominated mode of being, in the democratic mode of domination the dominant take the reality with which they are most complicit and proclaim it to be the only mode of being that everyone, the dominant and the dominated, ought to aspire for. Here, instead of dominating by saying "This is what we dominant do, and this what you dominated do," the dominant say: "*Everyone* should be X." Except that X is something that the dominant are already adept at. Here is a brief clichéd example to highlight the difference. Let's for example take the ways an upper-class English accent and a working-class accent are spoken. In an aristocratic mode of domination, the upper class will tend to normalize the belief that their accent is superior to the working class accent, but they may also aim to instill the belief that each accent reflects a different type of intelligence specific to each class. What's more this level of intelligence is seen as an inheritance (in the blood). There is no point the working class trying to speak any differently. The difference in accent becomes articulated to the difference in intelligence that in turn is articulated to class difference. In the democratic mode of domination the ruling class will act differently. It will take its accent, and instead of positing it as their own accent, they posit it as the only 'proper' accent that should be spoken by everyone. Thus, rather than closing access to its accent as the aristocrats

do, it opens it up, and says to the working class “come on, you can do it, go ahead and try to speak proper English”. The problem is that the ruling class has already learnt to speak with that accent from the day they are born. It is what they inherit and deploy in their households, their mother tongue. It is integral to their way of life. Not only does their accent come to them ‘naturally’, it has a relation of complicity to all aspects of their existence. That is, the accent is not a series of detached sound bites. It comes with the whole social reality to which it is articulated. The working classes try to speak it but in so doing they can only try, as they are always trying to bridge, not merely a linguistic gap, but an ontological gap that exists between them and the reality to which the accent is articulated. As such they become in a position of those who are forever trying.

On the basis of the above, we can say that the aristocratic mode of domination institutes a structural relation of power between those who have X and those who have Y, with X being posited as superior to Y, while the democratic mode of domination institutes a structural relation between those who have X and those are forever trying to have X without ever fully succeeding, with X being posited as the only mode of being worth pursuing. The aristocratic mode of domination works by instilling in the dominated a sense of inferiority and resignation that their lives can never be as viable as that of the dominant classes. The democratic mode of domination works by instilling in the dominated a sense of *failure*, a belief that it is because they lack something (energy, knowledge, intelligence, etc.) that they are not managing to access the kind of being the dominant classes have.

Note that modes of domination in real life are not either aristocratic or democratic. They are often a fusion or a continual oscillation between both. Colonial racism has instituted white dominance by continually fluctuating between a belief that whites are essentially superior to indigenous people – nothing much can be done to help the latter who aren’t even human, and a belief that the natives can be saved if they are willing to ditch their modes of being and adopt the ‘evidently’ superior white colonial mode of being. Furthermore, the dominant groups instituting a democratic mode of domination often resort to aristocratic strategies to keep the dominated in place. Take for instance the republican politics of assimilation in France. Here we have a classical process of instituting a democratic mode of domination. White French people insist that the republic is color and ethnicity-blind and that anyone regardless of their particularities can become French if they accept and assimilate to the French secular republican spirit. Yet, and despite the game being rigged against those who wish to assimilate, when people take their assimilation too seriously and appear close to achieving it, the dominant worry and they start to produce or to facilitate nativist (ie, aristocratic) arguments that put the dominated in their place

and inform them that one can only become a ‘really true’ French person (*de souche*) if one is white. This dynamic is highlighted in the case of France because of the strong (mis)belief in the color-blindness of the republican ideal. But the dynamic is present in all colonial and settler colonial states. As I have shown in my book *White Nation*, it also pervades the politics of belonging in multicultural Australia. The politics of assimilation in fact offer a paradigmatic example of the process of symbolic violence. So, I will use it as a point of entry into the concept: why ‘symbolic’ and why ‘violence’?

To begin with, it is important to note that you don’t understand much about symbolic if you take Bourdieu’s conception of the symbolic to mean something opposed to material. Symbolic for Bourdieu is not conceived any differently from the way it is used by the structuralist tradition around Levi-Strauss, Lacan and Althusser. In that tradition, the symbolic is not something mental or ideational as opposed to ‘material’ reality. The symbolic order is the order of meaningful reality. It is not symbol versus reality but ‘symbolized reality’ versus raw reality; reality-for-us versus reality-in-itself – the latter being there but inaccessible to us other than in a symbolized form, what Lacan calls the Real. That Bourdieu highlights the practical at the expense of the structural dimensions of social life affects how this symbolic order is approached but not its general ontological nature. As we have already noted, the reason why the struggle over the valorization of capital is at the heart of symbolic politics is that it entails a struggle over the means of classification, perception and appreciation of what constitutes a meaningful and treasured life pursuit. What needs to be highlighted here is that this struggle is nothing more or less than the struggle to ensure that social reality is ‘on your side,’ so to speak: that it speaks the language that you speak, that it valorizes what you valorize, that it highlights what you deem worthy of highlighting. That is why Bourdieu sees in symbolic power what he calls the power to make and unmake reality. In this sense, symbolic domination secures a general dimension of viability. One might even call it a meta-viability in that it is the precondition of all the forms of viability related to habitus, *illusio* and capital. When you look at the concept of efficiency pertaining to habitus, for instance, a body cannot be efficient or inefficient. A body is efficient or inefficient *in* a particular material environment, a particular reality. So the struggle for efficiency is always a reality struggle at the same time as it is a struggle to make the body more capable and most suited for that reality. This is why all struggles are reality struggles, struggles for a viability derived from the degree to which social agents have a relation of *complicity* with social reality (ie, the degree to which they are well suited for each other and partake in each other’s struggle).

Symbolic power highlights another anthropological dimension that is present in Bourdieu’s work: it is the idea that we humans are ecological beings. Ecological

beings in the sense that through our existence, we create the very environment in which we exist and that ends up affecting how we exist. Other philosophers and social scientists have used different words to refer to this ecology: social environment, lifeworld, experiential or discursive reality, etc. All these concepts point to the circular idea (circular in a good way!) that as we come to exist in the world, we largely inherit a world that has been made into 'our world' by those who bequeathed it to us, and likewise, we continue to strive to shape the world into a world that suits us best, where we can best strive. This is an individual and a collective power. Ideally, and idealistically, everyone, by the mere fact of being practically enmeshed in the world, has the power to shape their own reality as they see fit. But, of course, this is never the case. We are born in a world that is already built by those who preceded us. And as we already noted, we are born in a specific location within this world and on a specific trajectory. For Bourdieu a social location and a social trajectory are a specific relation to the world. Thus, we inherit the world in ways that are specific to our location and trajectory. In the process, depending on our relation to those who have built the world in which we come to exist, we inherit degrees of complicity with the world. Likewise, we are not left alone with our inheritance to build or reproduce the world as we see fit. The dominant groups have the power to shape the reality in which they exist more than others. It is a characteristic of their dominance. As such they end up subjecting the dominated to the realities that are best suited to the dominants themselves. The dominated struggle to fit into a world that is not made by or for them, and where the degree of complicity they have with such a world is minimal. It is through this ontological imposition that the dominant transform their symbolic power into symbolic domination.

So symbolic power is the power to create one's own ecological surrounding, one's own social reality; Symbolic domination is when the dominant force their own social reality on others. In so doing, they make others strive to augment their being in a reality that is always already rigged against them and in the dominant's favor. This symbolic/ontological domination ensures that the dominant's practices yield an augmented sense of being while the dominated end up with a diminished sense of being. That is, it ensures that the dominants practices are efficient and well-fitted to their environment, able to yield both existential meaningfulness and recognition from others. Dominated practices are the opposite. They are inefficient. They are meaningless in that engaging in them does not give one a sense that life is worth living. And they yield little recognition. They are sick practices —and I'm using sick in a playful manner here—because sick in French, is *malade* (in English we have the connected word 'malady'). And *malade*, as those who have studied the history of the usage of the term *habitus* tell us, is actually a contraction of *mal-habitus*. A

person who is socially '*malade*' is someone who is socially 'sick' in the sense of not being able to deploy themselves so well in the world. This is where the 'violence' of symbolic domination begins. But the 'violence' of symbolic violence is much worse because not only does it generate sick bodies that cannot deploy themselves in the world. It generates bodies that despite their 'sickness' continue to believe in their capacity to achieve what they cannot achieve as it is all they have available to them to believe in. Imagine me in the example I gave above about the relation between my short body and the world of professional basketball and its tall bodies. But what if instead of realistically coming to terms that the world of professional basketball is not for me, my school and later experience led me to believe that in fact this is what I should aim for in life. My life would have consisted of a frustrating, physically and psychologically debilitating history of continual belief in something I cannot achieve: an on-going repetitive series of failed attempts at trying to give my life a meaning and a sense of purpose. This is why, as we noted above, the history of assimilation is a good exemplification of the kind of violence that is symbolic violence. It is a symbolic violence that truly batters the body as it makes it continually desire that which will defeat it. I am sure that had Lauren Berlant had a better knowledge of Bourdieu's work, they would have seen in his conception of symbolic violence a very particular but very intense conception of 'cruel optimism.'

Colonialism constitutes perhaps the clearest and most paradigmatic example of this ontologically conceived symbolic domination that ensures and reproduces the sickness of the dominated. When the Europeans invaded the Americas, they did not merely 'dominate' the indigenous people who inhabited them. They transformed the whole social ecology of the continent. They forced their world and their aspirations onto the continent and instituted them. They did not only rob the indigenous people of their freedom, exploit them, and exploit their resources. They also robbed them of their whole social reality and repositioned them in an implanted European social reality within which they were ill-equipped to augment their being. Indeed the concept of symbolic violence begins to take shape in Bourdieu's work in his analysis of the way the Algerian peasants experienced the implantation of French colonialism on their lands. The peasants were not oppressed within French capitalist society in the way the French working class were said to be oppressed by capital within a French society that they shared with the dominant capitalist exploiting class. The peasants as colonized people were outside of this society and dominated by its totality. Both the French capitalists and the French workers who shared this totality were party to this ontological domination.

At the most basic level, then, symbolic violence is a particularly deep, intense and pervasive imposition of the reality of the dominant on the dominated. What

makes such an imposition so complete is that it stops being seen as an imposition. Instead of it being experienced as the reality of the dominant it becomes experienced as 'reality' tout court. Bourdieu refers to this as a naturalization of domination; that is, something that dominates no longer carries the trace of its domination and becomes perceived as 'natural'. Along with this comes the work of 'fatalization'. That is, making the future something unchanging that one cannot do much to alter, a fatality. This is why Bourdieu sees that the main object of a social science that tries to undo symbolic violence as being a work of de-naturalization and de-fatalization.

Let me give you a quick example of 'naturalization'. I'll ask someone in my live audience: "What date is it today?"... "There's no trick. Just tell me"

(Audience member: "the 7th")

It's the 7th of December. Now notice this reply. It is unqualified. There is no 'I think it is...' or 'to me it is...' It is an absolute statement of incontrovertible, indisputable and boring fact: 7th of December seems like a *natural* date to most of us. But had they been a historian of the way the western world has come to categorise and classify time, the person who answered this question might have said: "Actually there is a long history of struggle between the Gregorian calendar and the non-Gregorian calendar, and the fact that it is December the 7th today is the fact that we have naturalized the dominance of the Gregorian calendar." The Gregorian calendar has lost the history of its dominance. This is the idea of symbolic violence: symbolic violence is when we naturalize the reality within which we are living. Naturalize its categories and the aspirations that emerge from it. 'Naturalize' here derives its meaning from a somewhat old-fashioned understanding of the opposition nature/culture whereby the cultural is human made and the natural is not. To naturalize something is to see it in the same way one sees a natural phenomenon. It is what it is, not because humans made it this way, but because that is how it is. Once we do this we start to think of social reality as unalterable or at least as far more resistant to social change than if we perceive it as a human construction.

Bourdieu differentiates states of symbolic violence from states of orthodoxy. States of orthodoxy are states where the dominants' domination is secure but is visible for what it is. The dominated look at them and say 'they are ruling over us', 'they are forcing their interests on us'. In a state of orthodoxy, the dominated perceive the dominance of the ruling group but are either ideologically, or with brute force, made to accept it, even though they are aware that the ruling group's interest is not in their interest. In a state of orthodoxy, the ruling group has to labor to maintain its rule and dominance. In a state of symbolic violence their dominance self-reproduces. This is why symbolic violence is what the dominants yearn for. It is their fantasy of maximal domination. In a state of symbolic violence the dominated experience the aspirations

and the interests of the ruling group as their own even if they rarely ever get to a situation where they feel they have obtained what they have aspired for. Here the dominated live in a reality that has successfully immunized itself from the historical process that has led to its domination.

Ideally, and perhaps, idealistically, a struggle for domination between two groups can be seen as starting as a fight between equals where the gaze of each competitor on the other is horizontal. It's like tennis or boxing or football, it is like any game involving two sides facing each other. To say that the gaze of the players/fighters is horizontal is to say that each side has equal power and struggling from the same level with a kind of 'you or us will prevail in this game.' There is no *a priori* dominant or winner. But in social reality, hardly any 'game of life' is played in this way, for the rules of the game and its reality are always on somebody's side more so than the other. The dominated find themselves fighting both the dominant and the fact that the rules are such that the game is always *a priori* rigged in the dominants' interest. That is, the way the game is instituted and played is already in a state of complicity with the dominant's mode of playing.

As part of conceiving politics as the politics of making and un-making reality, Bourdieu argues that every domination involves both a struggle to dominate, and an attempt to institutionalize one's domination. And this is where an important transformation occurs: the more the dominant institutionalize their dominance, enshrine it by law and by habit, etc. the more their struggle moves from winning against someone to ensuring that the game and its rules are their game and their rule and here, their gaze turns into a top down gaze rather than just a horizontal gaze. From an imaginary of war, where the horizontal 'I'm fighting you'-gaze prevails, we move to a to an imaginary of policing where the top-down 'I am protecting my reality'-gaze is dominant. Symbolic violence is when the process whereby the dominants, rather than being seen as fighting for their interests become seen, and indeed become in practice, the protectors of 'the order of things', is at its maximal point. This is where the group that the dominants are struggling to subdue becomes a policing problem rather than a competitor/adversary.

A shift between warring and policing is very crucial in the fluctuation between states of orthodoxy and states of symbolic violence. We can briefly take the difference in the international politics of Donald Trump and that of Joe Biden after him as an example. At a time in the post-World War 2 era, the belief in the United States as a protector of an international order marked by democracy and the rule of law etc. rather than someone going after their own interest alone was as pervasive as ever. It can be said that during that time the dominance of US interest approximated a state of symbolic violence. But this international legitimacy has been in decline ever since.

US dominance in world politics has been more and more recognized for what it is: the US fighting to its own interests under the guise of protecting a world 'order of things.'

What is interesting about Trump's international politics is that it has accepted this state of affairs and dropped any pretense of being responsible for policing the world order. It abandoned its commitment to international bodies that provide a semblance of world governmentality and unequivocally presented itself as fighting for US interests before anything else. Trump's gaze on international politics can be said to be more horizontal than up-down. It looks at international competitors eye to eye and says I am going to win against you. In this Trump can be seen as far more realist about the state of US domination and legitimacy than Jo Biden and his Democratic Party who still have a fantasy of symbolic violence as they struggle to portray US international politics in terms of an international order that they see themselves as caring for and policing.

In a way, one can say symbolic violence is an increasingly impossible fantasy of power, in the sense that, sure, there's still an aspiration for symbolic violence everywhere, but there are very few space today where power and domination are so extremely naturalized that they constitute a case of symbolic violence such that we are dominated by them without seeing them as domination. In fact, we can say that we live in the era of decline of symbolic violence. An era where many of the key beliefs, values and aspirations that have been constitutive of capitalist modernity such as development, progress, the superiority of the West, are no longer naturalized. The same goes for white racial supremacy and masculine domination. Today, we increasingly question these categories of domination and see them for what they are. Even categories that we considered natural such as nation-states are coming undone. When I was a kid the idea that France can disintegrate as a national unity, or that Scotland might secede from the United Kingdom, was unthinkable, at least to us living outside those spaces. Today the fragility and possible disintegration of nation states is taken for granted. Notice, this not to say that masculine domination does not exist anymore, [nor] that developmental modes of thinking in the world don't exist anymore, or that nation states are not dominant as a normative mode of collective being. Of course they are dominant. But they are recognized as dominant and they are increasingly challenged. From being part of a state of symbolic violence they have become orthodoxies.

One can move from the above constataion to say that symbolic violence is no longer useful to account for the way the main forms of domination works today. This however would fail to appreciate the depth at which symbolic violence operates and marks everyday life. For Bourdieu, symbolic violence is not only about the content

of beliefs and the nature of reality. It reaches the very categories we have at our disposal for thinking reality and for thinking our current situation. This is a common Bourdieusian question: how does one think domination when the categories we must think with are themselves the product of this domination? Thus, in his analysis of the state, Bourdieu's primary question was something like: "how can I analyze the state, when the language and concepts I have at my disposal have been inculcated in me by the state". The same applies for symbolic violence and to fully understand the question's ramification, we need to clarify one last concept that Bourdieu considers crucial in his political economy of being. This is the concept of social reflexivity.

It is often the case that people explaining the concept of social reflexivity take it to be something that sociologists do. Bourdieu himself often contributes to this understanding of social reflexivity. Nonetheless, in a series of lectures, some of which I have attended, Bourdieu dealt with what he called the social conditions of lucidity. I am not sure if these lectures have been published. It is very hard in these COVID times to access what is being published in France. But many of Bourdieu's lectures are being published now. In any case, the reason I am referring to these is that in those lectures, the capacity for lucidity is very much linked to the capacity for social reflexivity, the capacity to reflect on the social conditions that mark what you are and what you do. In other places Bourdieu has reflected on the degree of lucidity of the people he interviews and tried to explain why some interviewees are able to make clear the conditions of their own making than others. In all of the above, then, social lucidity involves social reflexivity, the ability to think through one's social location, one's inheritances, the perspective, the various social determination that help make the reality one is enmeshed in what it is, etc. This capacity for social reflexivity is not a matter of intelligence but of social location and an inheritance or acquisition of an ability to distance oneself and 'reflect' on one's existence. It is not only what sociologists do, everyone engages in some form or another of social reflexivity. But the capacity for social reflexivity is not equally distributed in and by society, and social scientists work on making social reflexivity more professional, rigorous, and systematic: something that can be inherited as part of the sociological craft, but also something that can be conveyed to others.

The questions of 'why do lucidity and social reflexivity matter?' and 'why do social scientists need to convey lucidity to others that are not, because of their social location, as able to engage in social reflexivity?' takes us to the relation between social reflexivity, viability and the political economy of being. For Bourdieu, social reflexivity, allows us to augment our being by helping us acquire something priceless. It provides us with what he calls 'a margin of freedom.' Bourdieu is often seen and indeed sees himself as always offering a deterministic critique of Sartre's

conception of the free subject who takes responsibility for her actions in so far as her actions begin with her and her only. For Bourdieu this idea of a subject that is the starting point of practice and who is responsible for whatever action emanates from themselves is a fiction. It flies in the face of the way so much of us is socially determined. Indeed, for Bourdieu everything about us is socially determined. Freedom from determination is not an anthropological given in the way Sartre imagines it. Rather it is something that one needs to wrest from the jaws of determination. And one does so through social reflexivity. It is social reflexivity and the capacity to be lucid about our determination that opens up this precious social good called 'a margin of freedom'. As such, the capacity for reflexivity and lucidity and as such the capacity of the dominated to augment their being can be diminished by the lingering effect of forms of symbolic violence. This is at the heart of Bourdieu's argument concerning the function of social science and its implication in the very political economy of being that it is analyzing. Perhaps rather than an incontrovertible truth, Bourdieu leaves us here with an interesting space of reflection.

There is another interesting space of reflection around the politics of unravelling symbolic violence that Bourdieu also opens up and that I want to end with. It concerns the relation between undoing symbolic violence and social responsibility. For all the violence that it perpetrates, symbolic violence in being an enduring form of social domination is also the very pre-condition of social durability. As we noted earlier, for Bourdieu societies exist in so far as they are subjected to enduring stable forms of domination. The work of undoing symbolic violence does not automatically bring a new society into being. Rather it destabilizes and pluralizes existence. This is quite an achievement if indeed it can be achieved but it comes at a social cost. Living in an unstructured, de-routinized society is something that is unsustainable.

At one point when working with newly arrived immigrants in a suburb of Sydney I became interested in the discourse of 'tiredness' that was often articulated by the immigrants themselves. For a trained ear, the number of times people referred to the fact that they were 'tired' was hard to overlook and disregard analytically. It soon became clear to me that this was primarily a social tiredness that came from living in an environment where every minor step needed some hard thinking.

If you wake up in the morning and you want to take the bus, and start by saying "Okay, where should I go, right or left. Wait a second, I think I should go right. And then, maybe this is the bus, okay, here's the bus, how do I stop the bus, remind me again, okay maybe this way...oh my god, this bus didn't stop, I did the wrong thing, I'm going to do it again. Ah I'm on the bus, how am I gonna pay for the bus. Where am I gonna stop?" I'm giving you an example of riding the bus—it's exhausting if you haven't done it in a routine manner.

It made me think that when Bourdieu advocates against symbolic violence what he calls the work of denaturalization and de-fatalization this primarily translates practically into a kind of undoing of social routines and as such is bound to be a very tiring project. I mean, it's exhausting. Just think about: I don't know if you share my view about this, but I just think about when we started having to say "he or she" as opposed to just "he" and when we start having to say "man or woman" instead of "man." Needless to say, I'm not arguing against this for a split second. I think the universalization of male categories is as good an example of symbolic violence as any. And the feminist struggle to de-naturalise this process is equally an exemplary case of an undoing of the symbolic violence associated with male categories of thought. So it is a great thing for our consciousness. But it was and still is demanding. It actually requires time, reflection, thinking. It has ruined many poetic sentences, etc. So the fact of the matter is that denaturalizing something that used to be "natural"—that man is a category, etc.—it takes it out of you. It's exhausting. That is why it is immediately followed by the routinization of new things like s/he, etc. to facilitate an alternative mode of expression.

The above is to say that the undoing of symbolic violence on its own without the labor of re-instituting reality differently is not viable, and I contend that there is more work needed concerning this process of re-instituting reality. The same can be said about 'de-colonization.'

For instance, giving Sydney and Melbourne indigenous names such as Cadi and Naarm is very much an act that helps undo the symbolic violence of naming that is an inherent part of the process of colonization. In the tradition of symbolic violence the English names work to hide the colonial process of land theft that is behind the emergence of these cities. But giving the city two names, one English one Indigenous dis-allows a shared between those who relate to each of those names. What I am trying to highlight is that there is always a shared sociality that is threatened to be destroyed in the process of challenging symbolic violence. For example, what if one calls for the undoing of the English introduction of left-hand driving? how does one decolonize something like that? I mean this might be a bit of a silly example, but at the same time, I hope it helps me in trying to highlight for you that there are some choices of decolonization and choices of fighting symbolic violence that involve a social responsibility to maintain forms of shared sociality. So we have to think very hard when we engage in the politics of fighting symbolic violence, that it's not enough to just challenge domination or undo symbolic violence. We have to be able to institute another shared sociality, because if we only challenge without instituting a shared sociality, we are destined to live in very tiring societies for a very very long time [laughs], and that's not very good for augmenting our being. Without an attention

for this alter-politics of common sociality, 'freedom' from symbolic violence begins to suspiciously move in the narcissistic direction of the 'freedom' advocated by anti-vaxers and that is filling our streets today.

布迪厄與象徵暴力的政治

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布迪厄（Bourdieu）以「象徵暴力」概念進行的分析工作，布迪厄將社會理論化為一套對於存在的生產與分配以及為此爭鬥的機制，或者說是一套對於生命生存力的生產與分配以及爭鬥的機制。我揭示布迪厄的一些關鍵概念如何在這場生存力爭鬥的幾個面向構成了分析的角度。「慣習」（*habitus*）所強調的概念是一種與實踐效率有關的生存力：當一個人越有效率，他的生活也會變得更具生存力；指向生存力的「幻覺」（*illusio*）則源於擁有人生追求使得生命富有意義：也就是擁有「存在的理由」（*raison d'être*）的爭鬥讓生命在我們自己的眼中具有價值；「資本」（*capital*）關注衍生自承認的生存力：一種對於「什麼真正具有價值」的感知，源於他人認可我們的人生追求、品味與財產之重要性與意義。人們增強自身存在的爭鬥受到他們所繼承的慣習、幻覺與資本之性質形塑，他們投資自己的繼承以盡可能過上令人滿意的生活。然而至關重要的是，這個繼承的價值取決於為其定價的社會現實。例如在一個非英語通行現實的世界中，人們無法繼承具有價值的英語能力。這也是為什麼人們增強自身存在的爭鬥永遠是一場使現實維持在自己這邊以最大化自己與現實共謀的爭鬥。象徵暴力對於布迪厄而言是創造這種共謀的力量。宰制者得以自然化這種與現實共謀的感知，如此一來不僅將宰制者的現實強加於人，也使得他人以這種現實為唯一可能存在的現實去經歷它，象徵暴力衡量的即是此舉的程度。這場講座檢視這樣一定程度上的力量蘊含何種模式的宰制與抵抗。

（羅盤針翻譯，司黛蕊校定）