

# Applying Bourdieu's framework of power analysis to IR: opportunities and limits

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## Abstract

This paper shows how Bourdieu's framework of power analysis can be fruitfully used to keep a wider conceptualisation of power ('Lukes-plus-Foucault'), and yet overcome a series of fallacies and problems that the analysis of power has encountered beforehand. More specifically, I try to show that such a framework can accommodate both the sociological turn (in its handling of the agency-structure divide) and the linguistic turn in the social sciences, centrally including the performative analysis of 'power'. Yet, at the same time, the transfer of this approach to the study of an international power elite is marred with a series of difficulties, not the least of which the question whether such an elite can ever be circumscribed in the first place. Finally, also Bourdieu's approach is not yet a guarantee to allow the two lineages of power analysis to meet in a more convincing way; the political theory lineage which stresses questions of governance, order and the 'political', and the social theory tradition which is interested in the role of power for understanding particular outcomes and modes of 'domination'.

## **Applying Bourdieu's framework of power analysis to IR: opportunities and limits**

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The study of power has two main inspirations. Informed by political theory, power has often been connected to the 'nature' of politics. It relates to questions about order, indeed the state or governance in general. 'Power' is used in many languages as a synonym with the locus of government. In world politics, devoid of such a centralised order, 'powers' used to be the general word for the main actors. It often also evokes questions about human nature and the extent to which the organisation of social life is both an effect of, and a reaction to human drives and needs which can express themselves in a quest for power. Apprehended in terms of authority and legitimation, power has a fundamental role in a polity more general, or, more specifically, in its underlying organisation of collective violence.

But power has been a major inspiration in social theory, too, where the organisation, and indeed domestication of violence becomes itself object not of philosophical deliberation and constitutional design, but empirical analysis. Forms of authority and statehood are the focus, the civilising or modernising (rationalising) process of government the dynamics of a social theory of power. With the move to an increasing individualisation of social theory, finally, power has reached the level of agency by studying how resources and forms of capital, latent capacities (or 'potentials') in the prevailing over outcomes. Often akin to concepts of 'cause', social theories of action look at power in terms of influence mainly. Here, power is no longer focus and object of study, indeed central justification for entire disciplines, but becomes a variable in an explanatory theory of social choices.

That a single concept should stretch all the way from the nature of politics to the study of individual political outcomes, might look strange to a present observer, trained in cutting concepts to their operational minimum. But in particular within the political realist tradition, the move from political to social theory is ubiquitous, as the so far implicitly mentioned Max Weber exemplifies. In IR, Morgenthau's writings display no trouble in moving from a general human drive for domination to the organisation of states and then via the influence over conflicts/outcomes to the understanding of the nature of international politics as 'power politics' in which violence is ubiquitous and great powers govern.

This is a package of tall proportions which has intimidated not a few scholars

interested in power (the present author included). For the two obvious solutions are of no easy avail. One could simply refuse the package deal and untie the bits and pieces most suitable for one's own interest. Albeit the obvious strategy for the common mortal, the disadvantage is that 'power' carries its overtones from social to political theory and vice versa. Ignoring it might make research possible, but the results are affected nonetheless. So, the 'better' strategy would consist in addressing the relation between the philosophical components often smuggled into social theories and explanations, or, the other way round, between the findings of empirical studies and their implications for understanding the nature of violence, order and governance. But few of us are trained for this stretch, heirs of a specialisation which the study of politics has experienced over the last century. One has troubles to acquire sufficient expertise in one field, not to speak of so many and fundamental ones.

This paper is situated within this context and marred with similar problems. Studying power in International Relations is almost inevitably mobilising both traditions, perhaps even more than in political science.<sup>1</sup> Be it the imprint of realism or the focus on war, we slide easily back and forth. While doing so, many of the transfers can, however, no longer be taken for granted. For, as I have tried to show elsewhere, the IR tradition of political realism, turned explanatory theory, is no longer the best starting point for thinking about power.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, trying to make its concept of power shoulder the weight of realist explanatory theories inevitably ends up overburdening it.<sup>3</sup>

The issue has been further complicated by the fact that most explanatory approaches were concerned with power at the level of action theory and more or less assumed that prevailing over outcomes can be aggregated to the structural level, i.e. into an understanding and analysis of authority or governance. There have been many reasons to question this simple aggregation; and some more recent approaches started from the other end, top-down, as it were, trying to understand the nature of international society (as conceived within the confines of IR) as a first step for understanding governance and hence also systematic effects on outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

Using Bourdieu for coming to grips with the dual tradition of the study of power is not fortuitous. His theory puts power and domination at center stage and hence, by many

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the historically evolved disciplinary boundaries, not any sense of real division between politics in an inside and outside. For the pernicious effects of that divide, see the still incisive Walker 1993a.

<sup>2</sup> Guzzini 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Guzzini 1998, 2004b

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis along these lines which refers to power approaches in the agent-theory tradition (e.g. Baldwin, Keohane and Nye) and the more structural tradition (e.g. Strange, Gill and Law), see Guzzini 2000b.

standards, makes it a political theory, too. Besides many other inspirations, his approach tries to keep a post-Weberian lineage in his socio logical embedding of rationality, and in his theory of different capitals, as well as forms of economic and symbolic domination that should, in principle, accommodate most phenomena of power. Yet, the challenge is to know how best to use it for the purposes of the study of International Relations.

The following paper on the opportunities and limits of Bourdieu's power analysis for IR will originate from within the more narrow study of power, more precisely from one difficulty and one challenge that the conceptual analysis of power has encountered in social and political theory (here narrowly conceived). The particular difficulty refers to an 'overload-fallacy'.<sup>5</sup> It is the effect of trying to have all the good things together, adding up a series of power conceptions without, however, checking whether they can be combined within a single social theory, or, if not, how different social theories could possibly be combined for the analysis of power. In 1993, I proposed a four-tier power analysis around a twofold agent power concept (non-intentional and indirect institutional power) and a two intersubjective governance or impersonal power concept (social construction of options and ritualised mobilisation of bias which affect the identities of agents) tied together in a dynamic model. This added Foucault to Lukes, but only in a way to fit a generic agency-structure model, and hence left it within an underdetermined social theory and without including the philosophical components of Foucault.<sup>6</sup>

Besides this difficulty, there is also a particular challenge within conceptual analysis, which can lead to Bourdieu; it is the need to take the linguistic turn seriously and to think of power in terms of performativity and reflexivity. Power belongs to a series of concepts which play a special role in our political discourse. Naming or addressing something in terms of power *does* something to it. It establishes the borders of the political realm (*res publica*), where what falls inside becomes an issue of public action and justification. By doing so, it appeals to discourses of responsibility for acts taken or shunned.<sup>7</sup> For concepts such as power, conceptual analysis must include a 'performative' component.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, the mere debates about what power means, semantic skirmishes as it were, have implications which go well beyond technical details, whether we wish it or not. One cannot simply pretend to take some concepts out of their socio-linguistic and political context to which they often significantly relate, and hope that nothing happens. This performative aspect is part of the reflexive interrelationship between thought/ideas, speech, and political reality, cornerstone of the linguistic turn and

<sup>5</sup> Guzzini 1993: 46-8ff.

<sup>6</sup> Guzzini 1993.

<sup>7</sup> For an early and still relevant statement of this link, see Connolly 1974.

<sup>8</sup> Guzzini 2005.

a more constructivist understanding<sup>9</sup>, which has still to find a sufficient examination in our understanding of ‘power’.

Bourdieu comes in, hence, since his social theory focuses on power to such an extent that it makes it perhaps possible to overcome the difficulties that result from taking the sociological turn towards Foucault and, at the same time, to coherently embed the linguistic turn into an analysis of power. This will be the topic of the first two sections of this paper. And yet, as a last section starts to investigate, it still remains to be seen, how exactly its concepts can be applied to an international society not as dense as a domestic one. Moreover, it is not sure whether using Bourdieu has not so far tended to limit the more philosophical component of the study of power to the more structural level of a social theory. Hence, the power critique might have just done the easy part. For even this understanding, or so this paper will argue with recourse to Bourdieu, falls so far short of addressing some important philosophical implications of ‘power’, in particular with regard to the understanding of violence [this is a so far more of an hypothesis not yet a claim].

## 1. Facing the ‘overload-fallacies’ of power (taking the sociological turn seriously)

### **Eclectic combinations and their limits**

Can one combine Steven Lukes’s three dimension and Michel Foucault’s understanding of power? Admittedly, this question is somewhat misplaced if the main aim is to provide a typology of power concepts. There, Foucault could be thought of as a fourth facet, productive power. The choice for whatever facet of power for the analysis of particular events would be question-driven.<sup>10</sup>

The advantage of such an approach is its modesty, giving power an important yet not necessarily central role in a *theory* of international politics. Power arguments had been so much misused as shortcuts, indeed as synonyms for an explanation of all things important in international affairs, that some caution is called for. How many mistaken and misleading attempts to reduce international affairs to power politics, its theorising to one where power shows prominent in all explanation?

And yet, ‘adding different power concepts up and stir’ has a series of drawbacks, too. Lukes could still work from a relatively straightforward theory of action.<sup>11</sup> Focussing on

<sup>9</sup> Guzzini 2000a.

<sup>10</sup> This is the approach in Barnett and Duvall 2005b, a.

<sup>11</sup> Lukes 1974.

power and conflict, and hence the way interests are furthered or impeded, the three dimensions add a series of layers to such a theory. The first dimension zooms in on the theatre of actual conflicts. The second and third dimension add an institutional and then a cognitive and/or social context. There, conflicts are won for not being fought out, either because pre-set agendas rules preempts them, or while some actors have come to believe that their interests are not harmed in the first place.

Conceived this way, Lukes's approach does not challenge much traditional theory of action, although it points towards two complications. The first is the question of intentionality. Adding intentionality to the concept of power has a long pedigree, both in political theory or in International Relations.<sup>12</sup> One of the reasons for adding intentionality has little to do with social theorising as such, but rather with the earlier mentioned place that power has in our political discourse. If it invokes responsibility, then unintended or unforeseen effects attenuate its assessment. Yet, different power concepts apply to different contexts. Whereas the moral or legal context asks for an important role of intentionality, in a practical context, where 'we want to work out what people might do to us, it is non-epistemic [non-intentional and unforeseen] power we are concerned with.'<sup>13</sup> Such a shift implies three conceptual consequences: it is important to locate the context of the study and analysis of power; power is seen backwards from its effects<sup>14</sup>, rather than from the power-holder; and, related to this, it is therefore to be seen as a capacity and disposition, not a cause. Such a shift is perfectly possible within individual theories, just that it strips them of their causal (and also behavioural) parts. Quite logically, Lukes defends the inclusion of non-intentionality in his revised edition also against attempts to redefine this type of power as luck.<sup>15</sup>

The second complication is more fundamental. Lukes derived his third dimension *also* from a Gramscian understanding of interests, which led him to the common difficulty of any concept of 'real' interests. Scholars might acknowledge that the arguably most insidious form of power occurs when people are systematically suggested to internalise interests which seem to counter their further emancipation and autonomy (and the passive tense is of the matter here). But the sociologist will find it difficult to

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Wrong 1988 [1979] and Knorr 1973, respectively.

<sup>13</sup> Morriss 2002 [1987]: 54; and also for the general argument to distinguish power concepts according to contexts.

<sup>14</sup> This avoids the blank spot of the 'tacit power of the strong'. For this defence of non-intentional power concepts, see Guzzini 1993: 456-461.

<sup>15</sup> Lukes 2004. One of the consequences of the inclusion of non-intended effects, and hence the loosening to the link of power to the power holder's view, has been criticised in what rational choice approaches call the 'power-as-benefit' fallacy, where free-riders, at the mercy of the system, would yet appear as powerful instead of simply lucky. See e.g. Polsby 1980: 208, Barry 1988 [1987]: 315, and Dowding 1991: 137. For an earlier critique of the power-as-luck solution, see Guzzini 1993: 472ff.

assess exactly this individual real interest. As a result, political theory, such as liberal conceptions of autonomy, must make the job, a solution with philosophical, but not necessarily action-theoretical appeal.

There are, in principle, two ways out of the conundrum for the sociologist. One would refer back to some versions of psychology, sociobiology and analyses of human nature. For the individualist action theorist, this would have the advantage of locating a solution at the individualist level. Innate or acquired needs and desires which exist with some universality (where liberal principles might not), will then do the explanatory job, at least at a basic level. But this comes at no relief for Lukes, a scholar who worked on Durkheim and was an early and ardent critique of methodological individualism. The other possibility would consist in finding a more structural approach. Starting from macro-sociology would neglect the idea that there need to be 'real' interests in the first place, and merely concentrate on how interests are formed by dissecting the processes and practices which embed the agent's identity and choices.

Scholars who wish to combine Lukes with Foucault have taken this second more structural road, partially to the chagrin of Lukes himself. Lukes was wary about attempts to locate power at a structural level.<sup>16</sup> Untying power from agency risked reducing power to an amorphous concept, ubiquitous and hence with limited use. Having conceived of power from the view of the receiver, such a more structural approach seemed to conflate power with structural constraint. With his focus on political, rather than social theory, where our political discourse relates power to autonomy, such an amorphous concept seems at best of little help, even if patterns of general domination would have to enter the analysis at some point; at worst, it seems to undermine the very subject/agent of the Enlightenment upon which Lukes's analysis is built.

Hence, the question becomes whether it is possible to separate the sociological component in Foucault's power approach from its philosophical undertones, to use the inspiration of a diffused version of power which goes through and constitutes agents while combining it with some version of a theory of action. That is where Bourdieu's field theory shows some appeal.

### **Thinking power in a field theory**

Bourdieu's field theory has a series of components which make it attractive for the present purpose of re-thinking power. First of all, it is meant to be a relational approach. In general, this refers to the idea that central variables at the different layers of his theory are to be thought as emanating from relations, rather than fixed substances producing

<sup>16</sup> Lukes 1977.

such relations.<sup>17</sup> For apprehending this idea, the different layers need first to be spelled out.

At the most encompassing level, his theory addresses the historical evolution of increasingly more differentiated societies. At this level is what he calls 'structure' in general. This differentiated structure has given rise to a series of more autonomous areas of society, which he calls 'fields'. Such fields, in turn, are defined by the peculiar field-specific mix of capitals which are relevant for defining its internal hierarchy. Characteristic for the economic field, for instance, is not just economic capital (although it is the dominant capital of that field), but also social and cultural capital, referring to the social connections and educational titles accumulated. But the level of the agent is not reduced to the distribution of capitals in a field. Indeed, crucial for Bourdieu are the social practices of such agents which result from the interplay of the fields' logic and the mental structures of agents. Such mental structures are analysed as intersubjective or social phenomena, which he calls *habitus*; they are historically sedimented dispositions within a field to see, understand and act. It is the co-constitutive relationship between the social structure of the field – its 'self-understanding' and hierarchy as defined by the particular capital-mix – and the mental structure of the habitus which allows Bourdieu to link macro and micro level in the analysis. The social structure of the field is reproduced in those cases where it meets a corresponding mental structure within the agents in the field. In the extreme case of *homologie* between social and mental structures, the underlying arbitrariness of any principle domination is completely overseen, indeed not even conscious: a situation in which the *doxa* applies and creates an unquestioned 'common sense'. Together with the structure of the field, they define its *sens pratique*, the logic or direction of its practices.

Being a disposition, no reproduction of the habitus is ever secured but can be affected by external and field-internal events. Internally, there is a constant struggle about which type of capital should be the most important one. As Bourdieu shows extensively with regard to the economic field, for instance, small family business owners have a very different conception of the independent role of cultural capital (the need to possess not only a hereditary title to be at a firm's command, but the meritocratic title for it) than managers in great public enterprises.<sup>18</sup> Bourdieu argues that such capital derived from the 'field of (elite) schools' is not necessarily producing more meritocratic results, since so far it has mainly worked to allow a pre-existing elite to reproduce itself. It has the 'advantage', though, of claiming independent and highly selected titles of merit and knowledge; an advantage since it conveys a much higher legitimacy for the existing

<sup>17</sup> For the importance of thinking relations before agents/structures, see Jackson and Nexon 1999.

<sup>18</sup> This is a red thread in Bourdieu 1989.



hierarchy than in less differentiated societies. But at the same time, Bourdieu shows the struggles which can go on within a field, in particular if some formerly privileged capital is devalued and its bearers need to convert into other now more prominent forms of capital it or risk being downgraded.

This short introduction should have made visible the relational character of the theory which applies within the layers of the different fields and across layers. The general structure is but the effect of the interplay of fields and their ongoing path-dependent (but not determined) reproduction processes. These processes in turn are the resultant of the internal logic of fields in which the different forms of capital 'position' agents, and yet, their relation and struggle for the underlying definition of the most dominant forms of capital influences the logic of fields. Although Bourdieu's starting point is not the agent, but always the structure<sup>19</sup>, the structure itself is defined as a set of practices, rather than substance, and a set of relations of positions which are in potential flux, a set of socially defined (but not determined) roles and subjects, as it were.

As it is clearly visible, this theory is profoundly a theory of domination. Yet, it is one which is definitely not individualist, since it rejects the Dahlian idea that the aggregation of different resources and policy areas in which outcomes have been 'won', is a sufficient shorthand for 'who governs'.<sup>20</sup> And indeed, the theory accommodates a series of concerns raised by more recent power analysis both in political theory and International Relations.

*First*, as already mentioned, it opposes the narrow focus of the pluralist approach to power, just as Lukes did, and by its focus on habitus and practices, it includes non-intentional power and impersonal empowering.

*Second*, its relational character is akin to, but sociologically thicker, than Baldwin's call for it. Similarly to Baldwin, Bourdieu does not reduce power to resources (in his language: capital), since such properties become only 'power' with the acceptance by the other agents in the relation. Also, his field theory, and hence its differentiated capital mixes which define a hierarchy, involves that agents do not necessarily privilege always one kind of capital over another; that is field-dependent. This undercuts attempts to think power in a single issue area and opens up a similar research programme about fungibility of forms of capital from one field to another and conversion from one form of capital to another within a field - which all become, in themselves highly political issues. But Bourdieu proposes a thicker approach, since he posits a co-constitution of the habitus with the structure of the field. In other words, he would expect 'acceptance' to be much more often forthcoming, if the rules of the game and the position in the play have been

<sup>19</sup> Wacquant 1992: 19-20.

<sup>20</sup> For an explicit critique of Dahl, see Bourdieu 1989: 373 f.

sufficiently interiorised by the agents in their habitus.

*Third*, it seems to find a solution without producing an eclectic and eventually incoherent social theory.

*Fourth*, by doing so, it can be used to circumvent the overload fallacy. Just as Morriss, the theory argues that it makes sense to include unintended or unforeseen effects if they systematically empower or disempower agents. Often included within the *habitus*, they are part of the practices which lead towards (or away of) the reproduction of elites. By mobilising the bias deposited in a *habitus*, practices can effect ‘symbolic violence’ on agents. Yet, as just mentioned, Bourdieu’s theory uses a series of concepts for the moments of such a power analysis which are in themselves diverse, sometimes even not called ‘power’, but tied together by the general question of domination (not always hierarchically understood). So, the trick is not to make power a structural concept. Neither is it to keep a strong link between the analysis of power and individual autonomy. The trick is to look at what is significant in the analysis of domination and then include it in a general approach. If there are structural components intrinsically pertinent to the understanding of the chain of variables that explain practices and outcomes; indeed, if some variables at the agent level can only be understood through their relations and not reduced to actor properties, then they need to be included, whether or not they are explicitly called ‘power’. This pushes Morriss’ strategy a step further. Morriss argued that different contexts and purposes of power ask for different components of a wider and differentiated concept of power. Here, the ‘solution’ is to allow for phenomena to be tied to a power analysis without necessarily being called as such.

*Lastly*, the relational character meets Foucault’s concerns about power and the subject. It is arguable whether Bourdieu is not more materialist than Foucault, even though his theory of capitals only uses materialist language for including symbolic power, too. Suffice it is to say that the issue of subjectivity and identity can be accommodated within Bourdieu through the concept of the *habitus*, which functions like a depository of the collective memory in the field, going through and constituting agents in their social behaviour. Since agents are part and positioned in different fields, their multiple *habitus* allow for a wider understanding of this identity or subjectivity.<sup>21</sup> Being a mainly social theory, though, it still does miss the philosophical component of the modern subject in Foucault’s writings.

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion on the quite Foucaultian theme of how classificatory schemes interact with the identity and indeed the body, see Bourdieu 1980: 117-134.

## 2. Power and performativity (taking the linguistic turn seriously)

One of the impersonal power components mentioned earlier, the ‘ritualised mobilisation of bias’, was directly derived from Bourdieu. It there refers to the power which lies in the social construction of knowledge that suggests a certain ‘order of things’ and is hence a crucial element in a any mode of domination which is characterised less by direct coercion and more via indirect (and hence more cost effective) ways.<sup>22</sup> This has an obvious resonance with classical sociology and the (tacit) reproduction of norms (‘tradition’), as well as with Foucault’s *Surveiller et Punir*, where he elaborates the increasing ‘cost-efficiency’ of modes of social control which culminate in the reality and theoretical metaphor of the Panopticum where discipline is ultimately achieved by the acts of the powerless themselves.<sup>23</sup>

More precisely, a ‘ritualised mobilisation of bias’ is connected to the idea of power in two ways. For once, it refers to the idea of how the calling up of classificatory schemes, which itself is embedded and naturalised in the logic (*sens*) of the field, can empower certain capitals and hence positions within the field. Hence, it ‘empowers’ or disempowers’ such positions. Bourdieu plays quite a bit with the word ‘title’, both in its legal and its educational sense. Indeed, for him a title is exactly what is important to the idea of capital in the first place. In Bourdieu’s understanding, capital is related to power because, like a title, it is social by definition. It only exists through the recognition by others, indeed formal issuing by ‘neutral’ administrations. A title ‘entitles’ and hence ‘empowers’. Moreover, and here moving more an idea of power at the level of agency itself, it calls up a series of epistemic predispositions in agents which are connected to their role-taking and action. Whereas the first effect can be quite open and ‘objective’ by cementing or changing the ‘power’ position in the field, the second works through the agent and reveals power mainly in the way agents are tacitly made accomplices of the established order.

Second, both ideas are strongly connected not just to the idea of power-as-domination, but also to the central focus of legitimacy. In particular the educational title functions within an efficient mode of domination because its apparent meritocratic character conceals the underlying elitist reproduction. By doing so, it proffers legitimacy to the chosen crowd which results in the social construction of options (and the two impersonal power concepts meet). But it also conceals the daily effect of the mode of domination, if the mental structures exhibit a large homology or overlap. Compared to classical power analysis, this conceptualisation goes well beyond the ‘rule of anticipated

<sup>22</sup> For this discussion, see Bourdieu 1980: chapter 8.

<sup>23</sup> Foucault 1975.

reactions' where agents pre-empt punishment by acquiescing to change their behaviour even without an open threat by the power holder.<sup>24</sup> In what I have dubbed elsewhere Bourdieu's rule of 'non-reactive anticipation'<sup>25</sup>, self-censorship is the often unconscious practice by which agents conform to the expectations of their position in the field, 'the concession to a social universe which one makes by accepting to become acceptable'.<sup>26</sup>

For making this version of impersonal power function, Bourdieu takes language very seriously. For only through the working of language and its capacity to fix concepts and schemes can he build a link from the social construction of knowledge to the construction of social reality. And he does this within an explicitly reflexive theory of power where categories and schemes to apprehend the social world interact with that world.<sup>27</sup>

Hence, with the role of language in knowledge and power, there is a quite logical link from the 'symbolic violence' inherent in what I have called the ritualised mobilisation of bias to a more performative analysis of power, akin to but not the same as in the pragmatic linguistic tradition. Bourdieu calls the 'act of social magic' – which he calls himself a performative act – the attempt to make things become reality by giving them a name ('nominating' them) and succeeding in the imposition of this new vision and division of social reality.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to classical speech act theory, however, Bourdieu insists heavily on the social conditions which make such an attempt potentially successful. Not everyone is either in the position or more generally in the authority to command an open or tacit acceptance of his or her 'power of nomination'. Not everyone is empowered or entitled to call things into being. Yet, this is not just an analysis of the official authority given to some actors rather than others, which by making all depend on the already existing authority, would be the mirror mistake to seeing the power of performatives only within speeches themselves. Bourdieu's general approach does include also the tacit legitimacy conferred by the logic of the field to certain dispositions to see and understand social reality which can be 'articulated' and its role and subject

<sup>24</sup> Carl Friedrich's 'rule of anticipated reaction' is the only exception a Dahlian approach allows to non-intentional power, since it is the imputed intention of A (hence intention nevertheless) which affects the behaviour of B.

<sup>25</sup> Guzzini 1994: 273ff.

<sup>26</sup> Bourdieu 1982: 76, my translation.

<sup>27</sup> For this point, see Guzzini 2000a.

<sup>28</sup> There are many passages in his work to this. For a rather explicit one, see Bourdieu 2001: 286 ff. It obviously runs parallel to Foucault's studies of how statistical and other categories interact with the world they are simply said to describe, something which the post-Foucauldian Ian Hacking's calls a 'looping effect'. See e.g. Hacking 1999.

positions ‘interpellated’, but also challenged.<sup>29</sup>

Now, in a curious reflexive link, the enunciation of ‘power’ itself can become part of a ‘social magic’ with large consequences for social power. Naming something ‘power’ has performative power. This stems from its place in our political discourse where it connotes the boundaries of the political and the attribution of responsibility.

‘Power’ implies an idea of counterfactuals; i.e., it could also have been otherwise. The act of attributing power redefines the borders of what can be done. In the usual way we conceive of the term, this links power inextricably to ‘politics’ in the sense of the ‘art of the possible’. Lukes rightly noticed that Bacharach’s and Baratz’s conceptualisation of power – which included agenda-setting, non-decision making and the mobilisation of bias<sup>30</sup> – sought to redefine what counts as a political issue. To be ‘political’ means to be potentially changeable; i.e., not something natural, God-given, but something which has the potential to be influenced by agency. In a similar vein, Daniel Frei notes that the concept of power is fundamentally identical to the concept of the ‘political’; i.e., to include something as a factor of power in one’s calculus, means to ‘politicise’ it.<sup>31</sup> In other words, attributing a function of power to an issue imports it into the public realm where action (or non-action) is asked to justify itself. In return, ‘depoliticisation’ happens when by common acceptance no power was involved. In the conceptual analysis of power, this depoliticisation has been taking place through the concept of ‘luck’. As mentioned earlier, the starting point for the discussion is the so-called ‘benefit fallacy’ in power analysis. which went so far as acknowledge something like ‘systematic luck’, but not calling it power. No power and hence no further politics involved or needed.

The very definition of power is a highly political issue since it influences the respective value of different power resources (or capitals). It is made easier by the fact that we still lack a clear measure of power and hence the assessment of power has a conventional character. Despite claims to the contrary, power is not especially fungible;

<sup>29</sup> Bourdieu does not mince his words when criticising Austin (and then Habermas) for neglecting the social conditions for the possibility of a speech act. See e.g. Bourdieu 1982: 103-120. A more generous reading could have been possible since the speech act tradition after Austin includes also a socially thicker understanding of speech and communication. Searle’s work shows this bridge between the two. But then, in an ironic reversal, also Bourdieu was criticised for overdoing the distinction between an almost objectivist social positioning which empowers performatives, and which tends, at least in his critique of speech act theory, to neglect the extent to which performatives are themselves contributing to the social positioning. For this critique, see Butler 1999. Again, the critique is correct in showing a tension, but in general Bourdieu seems indeed committed to think the power of performatives (the ‘social magic’) as generated by the habitus and sens pratique in a field, which include dispositions, mental schemes and practices where a distinction in its social and linguistic parts can at best be analytical.

<sup>30</sup> Bacharach and Baratz 1970.

<sup>31</sup> Frei 1969: 647.

i.e., resources effective in one area might not necessarily be so elsewhere. In more technical terms, power does not do for politics what money does for economics since it does not provide a standard measure with which a particular resource can be exchanged with another one.<sup>32</sup>

Yet, due to the special role great power status plays in international affairs, diplomats need to ‘make up’ indicators for overall power. Given the need to trade gains and losses so as (not) to upset the ranking of power (also achieved through politics of compensation), diplomats have to come to agree on what counts before they can start counting. Yet, there is still no neutral solution in sight. Indeed, the very definition of power is so contentious precisely because of its political consequences. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union resisted those definitions of power whose stress on non-military factors would imply a decline in its status. Similarly, in the recent controversy about soft and hard (coercive) power, deciding what power really means has obvious political implications. Focussing more on the military side and hence stressing an unprecedented preponderance of the US military made it possible to ask the US to push its advantages further (since it is ‘possible’), and at times even stress the duty of the US to intervene given its capacities (which relates back to the performative argument above). Or, stressing US soft power and its potential decline, analysts could advocate a much more prudent and varied foreign policy strategy sensitive to claims of legitimacy and cultural attraction (whether or not the legitimacy crisis is simply an effect of poor public diplomacy or of a more fundamental origin). Or, finally, insisting on the unipolarity of the present international system, such a power statement mobilises a justification for leadership and responsibility which, in turn, can justify the ‘inescapable’, and hence excusable, nature of unilateralism (and a consensus on multipolarity does the opposite).

Let me elaborate a bit on this last hypothesis to illustrate the performative power when a certain definition of power becomes dominant.<sup>33</sup> The US is repeatedly portrayed as the only ‘orderer’ there is, the last refuge before failed states turn into chaos or ethnic violence into genocides. This image legitimates the very exemptionalism that the present administration has made its official policy. Having an interpretation of power that raises the US to the pinnacle as the only country able to do anything, means that even should it fail, it did the right thing, responding to its special duty. There is no way to disconfirm this logic. If order has not yet been found, given the unprecedented (read: military) power position of the US, the only way forward is to do more of the same and let the US try to fix it again, being the only authority there is. The logic is a kind of Microsoft

<sup>32</sup> The best place to read about power fungibility is still Baldwin 1989. For a recent assessment of the fungibility debate, see Guzzini 2004b: 537-544.

<sup>33</sup> For an extended discussion, see Guzzini 2006 forthc..

theory of security: the problem is not that there is too much Windows, the problem is that there is still not enough.

At some point in time, repeated US unilateralism would have contributed to reduce the international society to military order, and security to military strategy, and so eventually produce the very social fact of unipolarity from which all is supposed to derive. The chain of the self-fulfilling prophecy is this: (1) a presumed but wrong causal link between power (unipolarity) and behaviour (primacy-plus-unilateralism) based on a wrong reduction of power to resources and moreover to material ones, allows (2) a justification for a special responsibility which exempts the sole superpower from the usual rules, hence (3) a re-militarised unilateralism which requires a retreat from the multilateral de-militarising regime network and (4) by these very actions, increasingly enforces a definition of power in purely military terms, which (5) becomes the accepted and intersubjectively shared meaning and understanding of power in international society, that (6) finally leads to a world of Mars in which legitimacy is reduced to efficient coercion. This chain is the effect of a neo-conservative understanding of the world which actively changes the world, not just responds to it. And the socially constructed and/or performative character of the concept of power is crucial in every link of this chain.<sup>34</sup>

### 3. Problems in applying Bourdieu's analysis for understanding power in IR

#### 1. The field of IR - which field?

When Richard Ashley tried to understand the specificity of international governance, he referred to Bourdieu both as an inspiration for an anthropological take on the international community, identified in the microcosm of realists, and later for studying the nature of international governance, understood, in Bourdieu's words, as an orchestra functioning without a conductor.<sup>35</sup> This approach played on a beautiful paradox Bourdieu would appreciate (and one would be able to appreciate through his theory, too). Ashley argued that, despite realist claims to the contrary, there is an international

<sup>34</sup> This link did not go unnoticed. Buzan writes that '[t]he salient point is ... which interpretation of unipolarity gets accepted within the US – and indeed the other great powers – as the prevailing social fact. It is the accepted social fact that shapes securitization.' And continuous securitization ('hypersecuritization', as Buzan calls it), if successful, would indeed change the nature of international society. For the quote, see Buzan 2004b: 171.

<sup>35</sup> For the first anthropological move, see Ashley 1986 [1984], 1987; for the latter, see Ashley 1989.

community under anarchy - and that it exists in the very realists who deny its existence. Indeed, this community is all the more powerful in the international system as its theory conceals its very existence; a theory which has, in many aspects, the status of common sense in particular among practitioners. By making the field and its practitioners think world politics in binary divisions of realism-idealism (its *doxa*), it establishes a hierarchy of signification, legitimating an orthodoxy of the world as it really is against a heterodoxy of utopia and wishful thinking. With Ashley, realism is no longer a theory to study IR, it becomes itself a unit of analysis; realists are no longer subjects but objects of observation, not registrars of a world inevitably tragic, but inadvertent accomplices of its tragedy.

Yet, when applying Bourdieu to the 'international', one of the major difficulties derives from this very sociological grounding needed for establishing the contours of 'international society/community' and where Ashley's choice of a ultimate highest elite might no longer persuade. Almost inevitably the studies cut down the 'field' of International Relations or international 'society' to much smaller communities or (redefined) regimes to get sufficient sociological leverage. If concentrating on actual communities, the analysis goes often for geographic limitation. Focussing on the other hand on particular types of regimes, the limitation of the 'society' under scrutiny is done by the boundaries of that regime.<sup>36</sup>

None of these limitations is without problems, however. If one does go down the first route, this has the major advantage that it allows to tie the different issue areas, the different fields together in a more general analysis of domination. This is in principle similar to Bourdieu's own approach where his studies of the fields of (elite) education, the arts, the bureaucracy and the economy come together for the understanding of the field of power (to this concept, see below). But few studies go as far as that and usually stay limited to one of those elites, usually the military or the economic, and having to cope with the challenge of how to combine them. The higher the societal density of the region, the better for the study. I.e. in the context of the EU, that might be to some extent possible, but in less organised or not organised regions, it might not. Even, if it were, we then lack a general understanding of international domination, since we cannot simply aggregate geographically derived elites here and there, not to mention the question whether there is such a thing like a system of domination at the international level in which all parts are connected (and not just a series of regional systems).

<sup>36</sup> Such studies bring regime theory to their logical conclusion as many partly sympathetic critiques of the regime literature had asked for earlier. The call is explicit in Kratochwil and Ruggie 1986 and Kratochwil 1988. It also includes the category of sociologically-inspired 'knowledge-based' regime theories, as developed in Hasenclever, Mayer and Rittberger 1997.



By going down the regime route, the opposite problems appear. Here, the advantage is that one cuts through a part of international governance in terms of a specific policy area or function and looks at all possible capitals and elites which could play a role therein. Again, this can produce valuable and highly significant studies. But for the more general question of the mode of domination in international society, it still cannot work by aggregation. After all, regime theory derived from the idea typical of the interdependence literature which argued against a unified hierarchy of issue areas (no longer the military necessarily top) with a limited fungibility of power resources.<sup>37</sup> And it has repeatedly looked for, but never succeeded in, providing a general theory of linkages<sup>38</sup> – unsuccessful, for the simple reason that if we had such a theory, it would rely on some higher order fungibility which would make the fragmentation of world politics into issue areas unnecessary in the first place.

This relates to a larger issue. In Bourdieu's approach, the analysis starts from a relatively simple and unified mode of domination for understanding earlier societies. In a relatively customary way, the development towards modern societies unfolds by the increasing autonomisation of different public spheres, systems for Luhmann, fields for Bourdieu. They come into existence once they have achieved a certain autonomy of their reproductive logic. Now, again as with Luhmann, some of the fields might be structurally coupled (e.g. for Luhmann it is Law and politics; for Bourdieu it is education/knowledge, economics and power). Hence, to stay within this tradition, the observer would need first to establish whether, on the international or transnational level, such autonomous fields have come into being.

A discipline which has been accustomed to think of itself as living under 'anarchy' seems singularly ill-prepared to do so. And yet, the focus on an actual community, an elite and its reproduction has obvious links to several versions of constructivism and European peace research<sup>39</sup>, as well as to the study of international society, community or world society in the English School.<sup>40</sup> By looking at the formation and reproduction of transnational elites, it also connects to concerns of post-Gramscians and historical sociologists.<sup>41</sup> And here the fragmentation of the transnational aristocratic elite – and not international 'anarchy' under which also this elite existed beforehand – becomes problematic for the analysis. It is with a certain irony that Ashley's focus on the realists

<sup>37</sup> Keohane and Nye 1977.

<sup>38</sup> Keohane and Nye 1987.

<sup>39</sup> So does, for instance, Alexander Wendt openly acknowledge his debt to Ashley in Wendt 1987, 1992, 1999. The critique of self-fulfilling prophecies is typical for at least European peace research. For a discussion connecting the two traditions, see Guzzini 2004a.

<sup>40</sup> E.g. Cronin 1999 and, partly via Wendt, to Buzan 2004a.

<sup>41</sup> E.g. van der Pijl 1984, Krippendorff 1985, Gill 1990, van Apeldoorn 2002, van Apeldoorn 2004.

as the international community might have been similarly tainted by a look into the past like the worldview of many realists themselves, trying to recreate the conditions for the possibility of (Concert) diplomacy in an era of ‘universalist nationalism’, as Morgenthau once put it. By the time, Ashley is finally able to name a community, that very community had already changed its nature.

One of the reasons is that the recruitment of (at least Western) elites and the circles in which they move include a large component of new, often private sectors, too. Moreover, at least in some countries and in particular in the major international organisations, the elite is coming out of a relatively limited number of major schools and universities, sometimes moving back and forth to its faculty. In other words, exactly because the international society is becoming more ‘dense’<sup>42</sup> at a more trans-societal and not only European aristocratic level, precisely because the interrelationship between education, economy and bureaucracy in world politics starts increasingly to resemble Bourdieu’s *Noblesse d’État*, its study becomes far more complex for not being circumscribed by a state, a long history and relatively path-dependent boundaries of fields.

And yet, a unifying concept is part and parcel of Bourdieu’s approach. The noblesse d’État inhabits the ‘field of power’. To be thought horizontally not in a hierarchical position, this field amalgamates and overlaps with the fields of the economy the bureaucracy, and (elite) education. It is a particularly vague concept in Bourdieu’s theory. And yet it plays a significant role insofar as it is the encompassing concept to assess the mode of domination. Hence, if one wishes to understand the mode of domination on the international level, using Bourdieu’s theory would push to think of such a field of international power.

But given this higher fragmentation, is there a *noblesse du monde* or should one simply give up? It is perfectly possible that the more unified vision of a field of power with its dominant elite does not well translate on a transnational/transsocietal level. And yet, that is actually an empirical question which waits its answering. One way of operationalising a first research agenda would need to look for a new community that somewhat replaces the old one. And if there is a summit of the world elite, it is not the G7 or 8, but the yearly meeting in Davos (and the social forum meeting then for the counter-elite), in which a selected jet-set of the economy, finance, media, politics, and academia/think tanks meets.<sup>43</sup> From there, the analysis could retrace the origin of the invited (or mobilised) transnational and international actors. It would then locate the

<sup>42</sup> The idea of ‘social density’ derives from Durkheim. For its use, see e.g. Ruggie 1986 [1983] in his critique of the Waltzian understanding of the international level, or also Badie 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Guzzini 2001. For a critical assessment, see Graz 2003.

types of capitals (and their mix) which has made them ‘join the club’ (i.e. be invited to it) and so possibly re-create the type of setting, the field, in which that capital is accumulated and its value performatively defined and redefined.

This type of analysis would need to be checked against the more socio-genetic component of Bourdieu’s approach, namely whether they do indeed correspond to autonomous fields and how they developed into them. It is not fortuitous that some scholars in International Political Economy have been particularly sensitive to this issue. For one the main tenets of classical IPE (less the rational choice version which has become dominant in the US now) was that more structures of authority have evolved. Let me rephrase the findings of a scholar interested in structural power, the late Susan Strange, in a Bourdieusian language. She did argue that there have been 4 main sub-systems evolving, controlling the provision of security (the military), credit (finance), wealth (production), and knowledge. This latter is the most heterogeneous one, since it includes the elite educational field, technology, and media. Media in particular is a very bizarre field, structurally coupled with the economic field. She referred to the existence of an international business civilisation in which values, life-styles and worldviews are increasingly harmonised and in which the conversion of some capital into another is controlled. That development of 4 systems is obviously related both to the historical development of (welfare) capitalism and of political principles, such as equal opportunities for all.<sup>44</sup>

A Bourdieu-inspired power analysis would move into the direction of the study of governance, public and private. Compared to domestic governance and elites, it would have the specificity of the international system in which security and violence (and the capital attached to it, a capital missing in Bourdieu) still plays an important, sometimes central role. And here Davos shows to be probably an insufficient shorthand to account for ‘the field of power’ in world politics. Although it updates part of the Concert diplomacy component, although it bundles the different elites on one spot, diplomats decide about war and peace; Davos usually does not (even if the exact relationship is still to be established).

In other words, the missing monopoly of legitimate violence on the international level adds a crucial and difficult component, asking for a different field and for one capital to

<sup>44</sup> These themes appear in almost all of Strange’s later writings. See e.g. Strange 1988b, a, 1989, 1990, 1996. Having difficulties to pinpoint the locus of power, her solution tries to square a circle: although authority is diffusing, as she shows in analyses of firms and managers, the moment her analysis moves to the systemic level, the US is still leading an Empire. But that US Empire is then to be thought not in terms of a state controlling others, but of a transnational power structure, which, however, escapes US control more often than not. Again, it shows how difficult it is difficult to grasp the international ‘field of power’ when moving from the micro to the macro level.

be thought in all fields that make up the 'field of power'. This does not invalidate, however, the general approach. For the monopoly escapes even the community of states, ever since private actors are now legitimately taking part in the system.<sup>45</sup> That makes of world society one which is both more dense and displaying more community than a society before the Leviathan, and also less since the monopoly of legitimate violence (including symbolic violence) does not exist. Davos might not its core, but its forum.

## **2. Power and politics, power and violence revisited [section basically absent]**

The reference to collective violence leads back to the second tradition which inspires power analysis, political theory and its concern with 'politics'. In the previous section, Foucault-the philosopher was taken out of the equation to use Foucault-the social power theorist. But, as I mentioned in the introduction, this goes only so far. Even if the performative analysis of power and the structural level of the social theory (domination) has addressed concerns of political theory, they do not exhaust them.

When poststructuralists infuriated against the inside/outside divide, the attack was often not meant to think politics according to a 'domestic analogy', so long refused by the common wisdom in IR. The idea was not to think international politics according to a progressive line informed by a liberal democratic teleology. Rather, it was to look and possibly redefine domestic politics in terms of the international. Critical of progressive meta-narratives, poststructuralists often re-read classical political realists (Weber and Morgenthau) and re-apprehended the theme of violence.<sup>46</sup>

Coming from Bourdieu's framework of analysis, the link to violence is not all that straightforward. Exactly because Bourdieu's approach, just like Foucault and Lukes, stresses the violent component in *non-coercive* relations, the theory keeps direct coercion and the monopoly of collective violence largely out of the picture. In the division of academic labour, it works in a complementary way; but that eludes its exact relationship.

Moreover, there is tendency in approaches which stress non-physical coercive components of power or violence, to rely on a dichotomy perhaps most identified with Hannah Arendt. In her reading, power and violence exclude each other. With a strong concept of legitimacy attached to it, she argued that an authority which continuously needs to rely on violence, is one whose power is eroding or has eroded.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, she proposed to think about power in a way which stresses the achievements of (public) action done in common, not untypical for the Republican ('civic virtue') democratic

<sup>45</sup> See Leander 2001, 2005a, b.

<sup>46</sup> E.g. Walker 1988-89, 1993b.

<sup>47</sup> Arendt 1969.

tradition.<sup>48</sup>

And yet, even if the question of collective violence does not loom as large in international politics as to permit a power structure to be thought merely in terms of military capital, that form of capital needs to be conceptualised in ways compatible with Bourdieu's approach. In that context, Bourdieu himself does not seem to be of a major help, since state violence (army or police) is hardly analysed by him.

By analogy the starting point to think about a possible field which accounts for forces of destruction (i.e. a capital), could be policing. And indeed, there have been attempts, however, to understand the working not just of a national, but now increasingly transnational police field in Bourdieusian terms (again using the dense European region as a way to look for transnational elite structures).<sup>49</sup> Again, the analysis can usefully apply Bourdieu for the study of that network, but the question still remains how to think the organisation of collective violence within the international power structure, once the elites are so much enmeshed. After all, representatives of the military and other security forces are present in many elite settings; private actors and companies take over security functions; and so on.

And hence it harks back to the very question how to conceptualise 'international politics' and the international 'field of power'. The classical divide of macro-approaches in IPE – states versus markets – had usually reserved this sector mainly to the states side, reinforcing a divide between politics and economics which those approaches were, in principle, supposed to overcome. Within a Bourdieu perspective, that would not work: the different capitals interact in all fields.

The one reason Bourdieu might have little to say about it, is that it is far from clear whether police or military correspond to such a differentiated social subsystem in the first place; or, if it does, what much is left for the field of diplomacy. Usually the two are seen to be connected if not overlapping for the understanding of international politics. Indeed, perhaps this is the part reserved to the 'field of power' which otherwise overlaps with the other fields. Yet, it does not change much to a first statement that Bourdieu's framework of power analysis needs to be revised so as to suit the international system, where collective violence plays a more important role.

<sup>48</sup> Habermas 1986 [1977].

<sup>49</sup> Bigo 1996.

## Conclusion

The present paper is a first step in an attempt to use the inspiration from Bourdieu's framework of power analysis to systematically deal with the sociological and linguistic turn in the social sciences. The framework offers the opportunity to provide a more coherent social theoretical setting for many power phenomena and concepts that have surfaced over the last 3 decades, and to embed a performative analysis of power in International Relations. The paper has tried to show why Bourdieu's theory displays at least to potential to overcome a series of fallacies and problems, power concepts in IR have experienced earlier. Yet, at the same time, the transfer of this approach to an international power elite, is marred with a series of difficulties, not the least of which the question whether such an elite can ever be circumscribed in the first place. Finally, also Bourdieu's approach is not yet a guarantee to allow the two lineages of power analysis to meet in a more convincing way; the political theory lineage which stresses questions of governance, order and the 'political', and the social theory tradition which is interested in the role of power for understanding particular outcomes and modes of 'domination'. But Bourdieu is just a starting point, not a religion.

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