Social Positions and Political Practice in Denmark: Homology/Autonomy?

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ABSTRACT
How can we understand politics in late modernity? Is it so that politics is becoming more and more autonomous, and hence that the political choice of the individual is constituted by reflexive and reasonable arguments? Or could it be that the differentiations of class and power still have something to say? The paper resents the result of a study on political participation in Denmark. Bringing to work Pierre Bourdieu political sociology, including the concepts of class, social space, field, habitus and political taste, it is argued that Bourdieu presents a possibility of moving beyond the traditional dualism of social science. Specifically, it is argued that although the political consumption field is constituted with a relative autonomy, political practice is also homologous to the class positions within social space. Thus, it is shown, for example how there are differences in the degree to which the different classes feels entitled to act politically, and the degree to which they see themselves as natural and legitimate political agents.

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The wisdom of sociology – as well as political discourse – seems to suggest that political behaviour of late modernity is no longer a matter of class conflict. Apparently today, the individual is no longer bound by class conscience but rather set free to reflexive reasoning. Political Choice is embedded within the identity-constructing projects of the individual or at the most founded in new, complex structures of inequality (Giddens 1991; Giddens 1994; Beck 1992; Pakulski & Waters 1996a; Pakulski & Waters 1996b). In short, there no longer seems to be any (strong) connection between social classes or social structure and political behaviour. Equivalently political scientists increasingly focus on institutional or explicitly political rather than social determinants when trying to explain political behaviour and it seems as if the political field is considered to be more or less autonomously constituted.

Inspired by the political sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, this paper discusses the link between social space and the political field, i.e. the homology or autonomy of social positions and political practice. Is it so that politics today can be seen as an autonomous sphere, and consequently, that political inequalities and relations of dominance founded in social relations have “withered away”? Or do we instead need to re-conceptualise the concepts of class and politics along with the conception of causality in order to understand in detail the relationship between social position and political practice?

Presenting empirical results of a research project on political participation in Denmark, I argue the latter. Bringing to work Bourdieu’s concepts of class, social space and field, I focus on the relative autonomy of the political field as well as the homologies to social space. Further, I suggest the fruitfulness of Bourdieu’s concept in going beyond the traditional either/or’s of homology/autonomy, structure/agency, determinism/voluntarism and class society/functional differentiation. The paper focuses on political practice understood as political participation and the basic conceptions of and relationship to politics.

Social structure and political behaviour
The relationship between social structure and political behaviour has traditionally been at the core of political sociology. The Marxist conception of social relations, classes and class consciousness focused on the more or less direct link between social structure and political conflicts of society, envisaging (class) politics as the transformation of the social order (e.g. Sørensen 1976: 66-80, 268-292, 597-629; Andersen 1991). And even though Marxism have been reformulated and reconstructed (Wright 1985; Wright, Becker, Brenner et al. 1989; Wright 1997), the questions of social structure, political conflicts and social change remain central (Wright 1997: 374). Within non-marxist political sociology, the question of political attitudes and their foundations in social relations have also been of great importance. Social cleavages (e.g. urban, religious, class, or education) are seen to produce political conflicts and over time freeze into party systems and systems of voter alignment (Lipset & Rokkan 1967; Knutsen & Scarbrough 1995). Further, studies of political participation have typically focused on social resources (e.g. income, education and social networks) as limiting and facilitating political participation, political interest and political efficacy (Verba, Nie, Barbic et al. 1973; Verba & Nie 1972; Verba, Nie & Kim 1978; Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995; Parry, Moyser & Day 1992).
However, today, the conception of politics being founded in social relations is challenged in different ways. First, within the studies of voter alignment and party choice, studies of the relationship between the values and cognitive conceptions of voters are increasingly dominating the scientific agenda (in Denmark at least), along with the concept of issue voting and party image (Andersen & Borre 2003). Consequently, the main question today is how general values, political attitudes and party choice are connected, and as a consequence the voter is seen as a rational (or reasonable) agent. Similarly, within studies of political participation, the relationship between political efficacy, political engagement and interest, democratic values and political participation seems to become more and more important, setting aside issues of social resources and inequality.

Second, in a more general perspective, political sociologists question the conception of social relations or social structures determining the actions of the individual. The critique is both sociological and epistemological. Sociologically it is stated that today social structure is becoming more and more complex, and especially the Marxist notion of society as base and superstructure is challenged, being too simple to capture the (functional) differentiations of late modernity (Luhmann 1997). And epistemologically, the conception of determinism is questioned and replaced with an idea of agents reflectively choosing and negotiating their actions and identities (Giddens 1991; Laclau & Mouffe 1985; Laclau 1994).

Although all of these critiques may be partly reasonable and fruitful, the problem is that they seem to present and argument reifying the problems of the theories they criticize. Because of the either/or's of structure/agency and class structure/functional differentiation, and because of the way in which the argument is constructed in an ontological way, it seems as if a story of absolute transformation (social and theoretical) is presented. Before, society was simple and social (class) structure therefore determined the consciousness and actions of individuals. However, today, society is complex, differentiated and individuals choose freely and act in a non-determined way. Clearly, neither of these perspectives holds the truth. Instead of confirming the dualisms, sociology needs to move beyond the either/or's and into the pragmatic and epistemological grounds of different and complementary perspectives. As we shall see below, this is exactly the point of the political sociology of Pierre Bourdieu.

**Social Space and the Classes “On Paper”**

Bourdieu does not discuss the concept of ‘society’. Instead he talks about the social space as a relational configuration of objective positions constituted by the most important forms of capital (Bourdieu 1984: 99-168). Capital is – broadly speaking – a concept of power:

Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its "incorporated", embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e. exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor. [...] Capital, which, in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being, is a
force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible (Bourdieu 1986: 241-242).

In the western democracies of late modernity, the most important forms of capital are money and knowledge, i.e. economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1998: 6). To be precise, the most important and most autonomously differentiated fields are the economic field, the cultural field and the scientific field. What is not often pointed out, though, when discussing the sociological work of Bourdieu is, that this is an empirical claim. As such, it reveals an implicit but specific sociological understanding of the development of modern society.

Bourdieu opposes Marxist theory, underlining how it is not only the economic field that – qua the division of labour and sedimentation of structures – takes on an objective character vis-à-vis the individual. This can be said about a lot of different fields, especially the cultural fields of art and science. Here written language, the printing press and the standardisation and certification of competence and credentials – just to mention a few characteristics – secures the storing and circulation of capital in a manner similar to the economic field. Consequently, cultural capital becomes an alternative form of structurally based power, competing for a dominating position in social space.

However, Bourdieu also opposes theories of functional differentiation, arguing that not all fields have the same powerful position as the economic and cultural field. More important than the number fields, though, is the argument that functional differentiation is counterbalanced by the foundation of individual action in the body and the individual habitus created in the life of the individual and the (shifting) social surroundings of the position(s) in social space. Hence, the different fields and the different games defining and accumulating different forms of capital are not autonomously isolated from the social history of the individual. Thus, it is important to note that the theory of Bourdieu is a theory of practice, and not a theory of communication (Bourdieu 1987a). Individuals carry with them a history, consequently resulting in the production of homologous – and not autonomous – fields. And the fields most powerful in the creation of individual and class habitus, and most effectively influencing the functioning and structure of other fields are – today – the fields of economy and culture.

Returning to the concept of social space, this can be seen as the relational configuration of the different fields of society, or the positions of the individuals and classes. The main point of the concept of social space is that it is a strong analytical tool focusing on the relational configuration of objective positions, i.e. on the structures and the opus operatum of the social.

To construct social space, this invisible reality that cannot be shown but which organizes agent's practices and representations, is at the same time to create the possibility of constructing theoretical classes that are as homogeneous as possible from the point of view of the two major determinants of practices and of all their attendant properties. The principle of classification thus put into play is genuinely
Figure 1: The Social Space of Denmark

Note: This is the result of a correspondence analysis (see e.g. Greenacre 1993; Blasius 2001) of several indicators of cultural and economic capital, hence presenting a descriptive map of the relational configuration of objective positions in the society of Denmark 1998.

*) Income is family income in D.kr. 1000 D.kr. = appr. 132 €

**) In Denmark, one can own a house together with other people in an association (andelsbolig).

Modalities = good relationship to the dimensions of the map
Modalities = weak relationship to the dimensions in the map
explanatory. It is not content with describing the set of classified realities, but rather, like the good taxonomies of natural sciences, it fixes on determinant properties which, unlike the apparent differences of bad classifications, allow for the prediction of the other properties and which distinguish and bring together agents who are as similar to each other as possible and as different as possible from members of other classes, whether adjacent or remote (Bourdieu 1998: 10). (Se også Bourdieu 1984: 114)

The three main dimensions of the social space are i) the volume of capital, ii) the composition of capital and iii) the historical development of these two dimensions. Here, I shall focus on the two first dimensions only. Again, the claim that social space is differentiated in this way is empirical and based on a number of sociological analysis of modern France. However, the claim has been empirically confirmed in analysis of other countries (e.g. Norway, Rosenlund 2000), and as can be seen in figure 1 above, it is also confirmed by the Danish case.

The quote above also points the connection between the concept of social space and the concept of class. Constructing the social space also means constructing – “on paper” (Bourdieu 1987b), i.e. in theory – the social classes and class fractions. The concept of class in its simple definition means exactly positions close to each other in social space. The main point in the concept of class is, then, that similar objective social conditions create a class habitus, producing similar positionings, i.e. similar practices in different fields – including the political (Bourdieu 1984: 167-225).

**Homology/autonomy? The Political Consumption-Field of Denmark**

The concept of the field also presents an analytical tool focusing on the relational constitution of the social. A field is a relational configuration of positions and positionings united in the struggle for accumulation and definition of a specific form of capital. Hence, the field is a social universe, where external determinants can have an effect only through transformations in the structure of the field itself. In other words, the field’s structure refracts, much like a prism, external determinants in terms of its own logic, and it is only through such refraction that external factors can have an effect on the field. The degree of autonomy is measured precisely by its ability to refract external demands into its own logic (Johnson 1993: 14).

Thus, there are many different fields, e.g. the religious field, the cultural field, the field of sports, the economic field and the fields of education. Integrating the different positions (and agents) of the field is the game of power in relation to the specific forms of capital in the field, the (silent) presuppositions of the field and rules of the game (doxa) and the illusio, i.e. the being caught up by this game.

Produced by the experience of the game, and therefore of the objective structures within which it is played out, the ‘feel for the game’ is what gives the game a subjective sense – a meaning and a raison d’être, but also a direction, an orientation,
an impending outcome, for those who take part and therefore acknowledge what is at stake (this is *illusio* in the sense of investment in the game and the outcome, interest in the game, commitment to the presuppositions — *doxa* — of the game) (Bourdieu 1990: 66).

As mentioned above, the social space can be seen as either the total relational configuration of individuals and classes, or the total relational configuration of fields. This indicates a very important characteristic of Bourdieuan sociology. Although Bourdieu is a realist in the sense that he does not question the reality of the physical nor the social world (Vandenbergh 1999), his sociological project is explicitly epistemological. Consequently, the concepts of social space and field are analytical tools focusing on different aspects of the social structure. The point is that these two concepts should not be seen as “real” (i.e. ontological) entities with specific relations that can be empirically “revealed”. Rather they point to the different relational configurations relevant in the production of habitus and practice: ([habitus] (capital) + field = practice (Bourdieu 1984: 101).

Within this analytical framework, the relation between the social and the political is to be conceptualised as the homology between the social space and the political field. This means taking into consideration the effects on practice of class differentiation as well as the functional differentiated and more or less autonomous constitution of the political.

However, one further point has to be taken into consideration. Speaking of the different fields as functionally differentiated and autonomous configurations of positions and positionings more precisely is speaking of the different production fields (see e.g. Broady 1991: 270). But these production fields contain a very limited configuration of positions and agents. Parallel to the production fields one can also speak of different consumption fields, i.e. the configurations of positions not explicitly involved in the struggle for accumulation and definition of capital, but positioning themselves with regard hereto.

This concept of the consumption field is not the most thoroughly developed in the sociological writings of Bourdieu. However, it is a very helpful tool in the analytical distinction between different fields as well as the theoretical development of expectations regarding the strength and character of the homologies between fields and the social space. Hence, one can imagine fields that are almost entirely production fields, i.e. that does not have any clear constitution of an audience beyond the members of the fields itself, e.g. the scientific fields or the legal field. And alternatively, one can imagine fields that are defined by the orientation towards an audience or the consumers of the field products. This could for example be said about the economic field, the cultural field and the political field.

Analyses of the political field, then, cannot solely concentrate on the agents and positions involved in the struggle for accumulation and definition of political capital, the production of political programmes and solutions, or the battle of control over the state (that posses the monopoly of legitimate physical violence as well as the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence (Wacquant 1989)). Of course, the relational constitution and development of the political production field is an important question, but so is the question of the understandings and relations to this production
field as constituted among the citizens and the "political audience" of a society, i.e. in the political consumption field.

Whereas it must be expected that the political production field has a high degree of autonomy, i.e. that the relational configurations of the game and the history of the field means more in the production of political practice than does the class habitus of the agents, this is not the case for the consumption field. As the game of politics and the political illusio is not very strong here, the class habitus and the position in the social space must be expected to co-determine the political habitus and practice of the citizens. However, citizens are orientated towards the political production field, and hence the dynamics of the production field (e.g. the definitions of political capital or the political illusio) remains an active force in the production of practice. To sum up: Political practice is a result of the social history of individuals as well as the social history of the political field.

Empirically, this can be seen in an analysis of the Danish political consumption field. In figure 2 and 3 the configuration of political consumption capital (i.e. the ability to follow and understand politics and act politically, that is political efficacy) and political practices are displayed. Here it can be seen, that this field (i.e. the two independent but strongly homologous configurations) clearly has to dimensions. The first dimension differentiates between one the one hand a group that is feeling competent and “empowered” (i.e. a high level of political efficacy) vis-à-vis the political production field, and showing a high amount of political engagement and activity; and on the other hand a group that is distanced, dis-empowered and passive.

Consequently, one can say that the most important dimension of the political consumption field is the total amount of political consumption capital (i.e. the ability to understand and act in relation to the political system) and the total amount of participation. Further, as can be seen from the positions of the class fractions, there is a homology between the political consumption field and the social space. Hence, the first dimension of total amount of political consumption capital parallels the first dimension of the social space, i.e. the total amount of capital.

Although the second dimension is weaker in the sense of explained variance, it evidently differentiates between two specific types of political capital and practice. In the upper part of the right side of the map (i.e. among the dominating positions of the political field), the feeling of confidence with regard to being heard and the ease with which one feels able to contact a politician dominate. This stands in opposition to (in the lower part of the right side of the map) a high degree of knowledge about politics and ease in following political topics. Equivalently, political practice characterised by action (typically in traditional political activities) stands in opposition to a political practice dominated by political interest and participation in political discussions. In the left side of the map – i.e. in the dominated, disempowered and passive positions of the political consumption field – a generally alienated group opposes a group critical of their possibilities of being heard and recognized by the political system. This second dimension is also homologous to the second dimension of the social space that is to the dimension of capital composition. Thus, the economic class fractions are positioned in the upper part of the map, whereas the cultural class fractions are positioned in the lower part of the map.
Figure 2: The political consumption field of Denmark, Political consumption capital

Note: This is the result of a correspondence analysis of several indicators of political efficacy and political estrangement, hence presenting a descriptive map of the relational configuration of political consumption capital in Denmark 1998.
Note: This is the result of a correspondence analysis of several indicators of political participation and political interest, hence presenting a descriptive map of the relational configuration of political practices in Denmark 1998.
However, one should also notice the reconfiguration or refraction of the social space within the political consumption field. First, the positions of the class fractions are not as dispersed as the positions of political consumption capital or political practice. This indicates that although the political consumption field is homologous to the social space it also shows a relative autonomy. Further, especially in the configuration of political practices, a group of very active positions (ion th upper right hand corner of the map) seems not to be described very well in terms of the social class positions. And finally, the middle class is placed in a “high” position on the first dimension of in the political consumption field close to the cultural upper class, whereas the economic middle class is placed close to passive and dominated position of the lower classes. This indicates a reconfiguring effect of the political field and points to the fact that cultural capital has a higher “value” in the field than economic capital.

In relation to more traditional studies of political participation, this analyses shows how the question of the social and the political should not be posed as either/or. It is not so that the political field of late modern societies is constituted as totally autonomous from the social differentiations of power and classes, nor is it so that politics only mirrors the class structure. Consequently the analysis of late modernity must take into consideration the functional differentiation as well as the prevailing class differences.

One should also keep in mind, though, that this kind of analysis is strictly an epistemological tool. The correspondence analyses show the patterns of political practice and class positions, but it does not show “reality”. The statistical analysis is effective in breaking with the common sense of sociology, and as such it is a necessary part of sociological analysis. But it is equally necessary to make a second break with the objectivity of the structural analysis presented above. “Social reality” is practice, and “systematicity is found in the opus operatum because it is in the modus operandi” (Bourdieu 1984: 172-173). So, to complement the analysis of political practice and political taste of late modernity, the analyses must now turn to the production of practice by the political habitus.

**The Natural Taste of Political Habitus**

The concept of habitus condensates the theory of action implicit in the writings of Bourdieu (Weininger 2002 presents and excellent discussion of Bourdieu's conception of action and causality). Habitus is produced by the (structured) social surroundings of the individual, and it produces and organises the practices and representations of the individual:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor (Bourdieu 1990: 53).
The habitus consists of different schemes, e.g. cognitive schemes, aesthetic and normative schemes and it orientates the perceiving and presentations of the social world as well as the social actions of the individual. Hence, the practices of the different fields are homologues to the structures of the social space because of the different forms of class habitus produced by different social positions. But the habitus is not a static mechanism, and it also orientates itself in field and the space of possible positionings presented here. In other words, the production of practices is never carried out in a vacuum, but is always a choice between and a positioning with regard to already existing symbolic practices in a field (Bourdieu 1984: 208-225).

Although Bourdieu is not a sociologist of the “Lebenswelt” his writings are (also) founded in the tradition of phenomenology. Thus, there are some similarities between the concept of the “Lebenswelt” and the concept of the habitus, even though the concept of the habitus explicitly takes the consequences of social differences into consideration:

The practical world that is constituted in the relationship with the habitus, acting as a system of cognitive and motivating structures, is a world of already realized ends – procedures to follow, paths to take – and of objects endowed with a 'permanent teleological character', in Husserl’s phrase, tools or institutions. This is because the regularities inherent in an arbitrary condition ('arbitrary' in Saussure's and Mauss's sense) tend to appear as necessary, even natural, since they are the basis of the schemes of perception and appreciation through which they are apprehended (Bourdieu 1990: 53-54).

As pointed out by Weininger (Weininger 2002: 73) there is something “intrinsically verstehend” about the explanatory project of the concept of the habitus. Habitus is not the additive accumulation of social experiences but rather the creation of an integrative principle (much like a handwriting) that structures the production of practices and representations. Hence, one has to analyse the semantic unity of the practices across different field to identify the habitus as an integrative principle.

In a qualitative study of political participation in Denmark, I asked eighteen very different people (selected according to the empirical characteristics of the social space as presented above) about their conceptions of politics and their political practices. The interviews (lasting between one and two hours) show how differences in political habitus and political taste are tightly connected to the objective class position in the social space, and how these differences legitimates themselves by being perceived as natural.¹

The upper class is united in their ability to distance themselves from and reflectively observe politics as a “game of power” with specific aims and rules. Among other things, this means that people in the upper class typically has a very abstract conception of politics, and further, that they

¹ The results of this study are presented (in Danish) in my Ph.D. Dissertation. Hvad betyder klasse. En rekonstruktion af klassebegrebet med henblik på en analyse af sammenhængen mellem klasser og politisk deltagelse i Danmark. [The Meaning and Importance of Class: Reconstructing the Class Concept and Analysing the Importance of Class for Political Participation in Denmark], (forthcoming), Aarhus: Politica.
emphasize procedural aspects of the political process when judging politics and political agents. This means, for example, that they accept political opponents as legitimate members of the political field. A university teacher (in the Faculty of Arts) presents this distanced positions vis-à-vis politics very clearly. Asked which politicians he thinks are “doing a good job” or with whom he can identify himself, he answers:

Well, it’s difficult. I don’t have anybody that I really love. And I could perhaps mention just as many that I disagree with as ones that I agree with. I really don’t know who’s doing a good job …

I then asked him, if he could mention any politicians that he trusted:

Well, you don’t really trust politicians, do you? And again, the ones you trust as human beings aren’t the ones you would vote for, because of their different political opinions. There are politicians that create trust, because they are honest. What kind of politicians are those? Well, I don’t even know, because then you are not sure if they are really honest. Typically honest politicians as Uffe Elleman Jensen [The Liberal Party] or Marianne Jelved [The Radical Party, a small social liberal party], perhaps they are not as honest after all. Sometimes, you kind of sense the performance … […] So, I don’t really know. Bill Clinton, he was great! You knew for a fact that you couldn’t trust him. (University Teacher, Faculty of Arts)

However, upper class people are also typically characterized by the presence of a genuinely political logic in their political arguments as well as the reasons they put forward for the political choice of a party. Further, they show a high degree of knowledge about politics (at the local, national and international level), even though some of them describe themselves as not particularly active in politics. This has to do with the fundamental relationship to politics, which is extremely powerful precisely because it is implicit. The upper class simply sees themselves as natural and legitimate political agents, and they follow politics and position themselves with ease in the political consumption field.

This fundamental relationship – this taste for politics – is presented as driven by political interest and engagement, i.e. as driven by choice, and accordingly, political passivity is presented as a choice that can easily be reversed. When presented as a choice, the political taste is seen as neutral with regard to the social position of the upper class, and hence as a possibility for every citizen:

The really interesting thing is to look at … well if you look at some of the politicians from the right-wing parties, who have been in office for some time now, and then look at those people doing political careers. Are they stars, in the broad sense of the word? … The answer is no! Of course they are perhaps in many ways above average, but when I look at some of the people I know from my studies at the University, and look at those people that really have the ability to get the message through to an audience.
Are they politicians today? No, they are not. [...] So I really think that most people with just a little bit of ‘drive’ and some level of IQ, who puts themselves to it, they could be elected to Parliament within two years. [...] It is not something that many people do not have. Many people could do it. It is definitely not some elite-thing. (Male, Self-employed economic consultant previously employed as private sector junior executive).

So, in the phrasing of Bourdieu, one can say that the social foundations of the political taste of the upper class are misrecognized\(^2\).

Besides these common characteristics, the upper class is also clearly divided in class fractions. In addition to the conception of politics as a game of power, the cultural upper class puts forward a concept of politics as the broader struggle to make a better world. Also, they present some very high demands to the political processes and agents, focusing on politics as a rational and reasonable exchange of arguments informed by the facts of the matter. This is very obvious in the judgement of political agents:

Well, I think Helge Sander [Minister of Science and Technology, The Liberal Party] is an idiot. I also think Brian Mikkelsen [Minister of Culture, The Conservatives] is an idiot. I think these kinds of politicians that simply don't know what they're doing [...]. It's plain incompetence, nothing else. And it shows how idiots apparently can get very far in politics, because they know the Prime Minister or something (Male, University teacher, Faculty of Arts).

A person I don’t like is Mogens Camre [Member of the EU-Parliament, Danish Peoples Party]. Terrible. And that … Ulla Dahlerup [Danish Peoples Party]. [...] They’re just stupid! It’s simply …. stupidity. It’s simply people not trying their best, and only speaking out of their inner feelings. There’s no reflexivity behind it, no intellect. Well, you can’t run a country based on feelings, can you? Who are we afraid of and things like that … You have to have some ideals about how to make society better (Female, TV and Film producer).

Hence, in the cultural fraction of the upper class, politics is seen as a deliberative process. Opposed to this view is the conception of politics in the economic fraction of the upper class. Here, politics is presented as the technical solution to problems, and the political process is ideally seen as characterized by effectiveness and the production of results. Implicit, the private sector is put forward as the appropriate model for politics, and consequently, there is little tolerance with regard to political processes resulting in endless discussions and no decisions. Also, political leadership is seen as the key to ‘good politics’:

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2 ‘Misrecognition’ (méconnaissance) combines subjective non-recognition (blindness) with objective recognition (legitimation); for example, a teacher who observes his pupils ‘gifts’, or lack of them, and who imagines he is indifferent to social class, objectively helps to legitimate the causes and effects of cultural inequality (Bourdieu 1984: 566, note 46, translators note).
Anders Fogh Rasmussen [The Danish Prime Minister, The Liberal Party] he is a fantastic leader. I really like the way he is orientated towards making results (Male, Self-employed economic consultant previously employed as private sector junior executive).

But I must admit that the people in the private sector who are really good, charismatic leaders, they could do a much better job in Parliament than the ones sitting there now. But they really don’t bother (Male, Retired, previously owner and employer in small production company).

In addition the opposition between the economic and the cultural fractions of the upper class reflects the differences in type of resource or political consumption capital, i.e. personal contacts vs. knowledge, also shown in the statistical charts above.

In the middle classes, there is also a clear distinction between the cultural fraction and the economic fraction. However, the cultural fraction is very difficult to discern from the cultural fraction of the upper class, whereas the economic fraction looks much more like the fractions of the dominated class. Thus, the cultural middle class also presents a conception of politics as based on knowledge and reasonable arguments:

As a teacher, I also work with politics. Teaching about society and discussing, reaching agreements. Teaching the children that it’s not always the majority that is right, and stuff like that […] Voting is not always the best way, you know, saying well we have ten for and nine against, then it’s for. Then perhaps you can get a discussion and get some different views and arguments and see if you can get somebody to change their mind and realise that there are better arguments, and even though not as many people would vote for this suggestion, the arguments are still better. (Female primary school teacher).

Further, the cultural middle class present a political practice dominated by ‘alternative’ activities focused, for example, on the concrete improvement of the conditions for homosexuals or the betterment of the lives of children from lower class families. Also, we find here a very clear conception of the legitimacy of the state and the effort to widen the scope for political decisions (e.g. state intervention in family life). This is strongly opposed by the view in the economic upper class, where politics is considered to be legitimate only with regard to a specific and limited number of areas. Most importantly, though, the cultural middle class also consider themselves legitimate political agents, and they implicitly orientate themselves and position themselves with ease in the political consumption field.

Thus, the political taste of the cultural middle class is very different from the taste of politics presented by the economic middle class and the middle class with a balances capital composition. Here, politics is sees as something more or less difficult to understand, and in any way, more or less superfluous:
Well it’s complicated. It’s not something you just do (Female Nurse).

Thinking about it, politics seems a bit negative to me. When something is political, people can’t agree on anything (Female, Private sector employee, consultant).

What’s typical for politics? Election campaigns. They just sit there and talk and talk, and they don’t say anything. And one has to make sure, that he says more than the other. I also think of, when I hear a politician speak in the news about some political subject, they can talk for four minutes without saying anything (Female, bookkeeper in a private sector company).

Also, the concept of politics is much more concrete and not at all focused on the procedural level. Asked about when politics is functioning in a satisfying manner, the typical answers put forward are examples of concrete legislation, institutions of the welfare state or even the building of a bridge. Consequently, the acceptance of political opponents as legitimate agents is almost absent here.

Very clearly, the economic fraction of the middle class sees themselves as outsiders vis-à-vis the political field, and they do not put forward the same naturalness and ‘feeling at home’ with regard to politics as was seen in the upper classes as well as the cultural middle class. They don’t follow politics in very many details, and typically, they cannot point to many political questions as important. Simply, they lack the political illusio (i.e. the feel for the game and the commitment to play the game of politics) typical of the upper classes:

Well, actually I don’t have any political issues that I really care much about, that I would just do anything for. As I said, everything is going so well. So, it’s difficult to point anything out (Female, bookkeeper in a private sector company).

When some documentary is on, the interview of some politicians or … I mean, I like to know what’s going on in Denmark and stuff, but I don’t want to watch a programme going really deep into some political issue. I’m just not interested, it cannot catch my attention. Even though I would like to say that I could, because I feel that I should be interested (Female Nurse).

The position as outsiders, or as a passive and rather inattentive audience of politics, also implies that genuinely political arguments are almost absent. In stead, the presence of moral arguments about the general values, humanitarian ideals, and arguments considering the style of politicians dominate the judgement of political agents:

Right now … it changes a lot actually, it can be from both one party and another. Right now … a politician like Lene Espersen [Minister of Justice, The Conservatives]. I think she’s really good at presenting her views. […] But also, what’s her name … Pernille Rosenkrantz-Theil [Member of Parliament for the Unitary List, radical left wing party] … and that’s something completely different. And then, you see, often it matters
so much, when you vote, *who* it is. What kind of person it is. Because, you compare them to yourself. A person like Mette Frederiksen [Member of Parliament, Social Democrats] she’s really something new. And she’s also been good at presenting her views. (*Female, Private sector employee, consultant*).

This quote presents a logic different from the political logic in the upper classes. Actually, in the interviews with upper class people, often this type of argument was seen as ‘polluting’ the pure logic of politics:

> I think many politicians mistakenly present themselves as human beings besides being politicians. Because I think this is totally irrelevant. It is totally uninteresting, because they *are* politician and they *are* professionals, and they should present themselves as such. And deep down I feel they should take care to present themselves as anything else, because it blurs everything. Who is this? Is it a politician with a political opinion that I can relate to, or is it a human being, that I should relate to as good or bad, having a nice or an ugly house, I mean … In this way it really blurs the picture (*Female, economist, employed in a government department*).

As a result of their political taste – or lack of political taste – the economic middle classes rarely engage in any political activities. Some even do not discuss politics:

> I don’t have any strong opinions. I can’t just say “this is how it is”. People should be allowed to have their own opinions (*Male, electrician, employed at a factory*).

Even though the economic fraction of the middle class is primarily politically passive, the potential for political action is – at some level – intact, and the political resources are not as low as they might seem. This can be seen from the fact that the people in the middle classes do engage in social activities (e.g. being a football trainer or making social arrangements in the neighbourhood). And also, this is the self-image put forward:

> I think, if something was really wrong or unjust, then I think I would begin to get involved. Then you read about it, and then you also find it interesting. But when it’s just all those small things, you just don’t bother (*Female, Private sector employee, consultant*).

However, although this self-image contains some truth it also strengthens the conception of political practice as a choice, and hence, it strengthens the misrecognition of the social foundation of political taste.

In the lower class, the lack of political taste combined with a very weak political illusion is even more evident. However, these differences are not connected to the fractions (i.e. the cultural or economic pole of the social space) but rather to other types of resources (e.g. trajectory in social space). Hence, the most apparent opposition in the lower class (in the qualitative interviews of this
study) is between, on the one hand, a group totally excluded from the political consumption field and, on the other hand, a group who presents a specific, yet practical, conceptions of politics and a high amount of political action.

This last group is characterized by the membership of a workers union and their political practice and understanding of politics is very tightly connected to the concrete organization – on the work place – of the units of the Union. Hence, the political institutions (e.g. the steering committee and general meeting) and the practical involvement in union politics create a political illusio that – over time – gets converted to political consumption capital.

Well I joined the painter’s team, and I found the work interesting and did it for many years. I got so good at it that I became the leader of this team. And I started making agreements with the management. And in that way I got some power, and became a link between the comrades and the company. And that was also my way into the union. I always found union politics interesting, and I went to the general meeting, because there you heard more than you normally did. But then they thought that I was competent, because someone suggested me for the steering committee. Well, of course it was interesting to be involved and to get heard, but to be elected to a steering committee. I mean, standing outside this kind of work, you think of it as ‘up there’. So it’s a big step, to express the demands of other people and to get some kind of responsibility (Worker, previously employed at a shipyard, now working in an IT-company).

However, the political taste of this group is not comparable to the political taste of the upper classes. The conception of politics is very concrete, and there is no reflective distance to procedures of political processes. Even though this group clearly sees themselves as legitimate political agents and hence – as insiders to the political field – present a challenge to the power of the upper classes, this position is a position ‘in practice’. Further it seems as if it does not last beyond the connection to the working place and the involvement in the political activities of the union.

The group totally excluded from the political consumption field is first and foremost characterized by the absence of a language with which they can understand and relate to politics. The political is discussed in a very general matter, and the moral logic – as we saw above – also dominates the arguments here. Where some political language does exist, it typically presents itself with too much effort or with mistakes, revealing the not feeling at home in politics:

Well, I think it’s very important to define our international role right now. I think we are in a bit of a quicksand-situation. We’re biting much more than we can chew. I mean, now we’re in the Security Council of NATO, and I don’t know what else, right? And that’s all very fine, if we can handle it. But we are just a small country, and with changing governments and whatever. And who knows what’s gon’na happen next
time ... Well, I don’t know, I’m afraid to become a plaything for the great powers, right? It’s difficult for such a small country, you know?

Most typical, though, are the absence of an effective political language and the conception of politics as something completely strange and irrelevant:

The first thing I want to ask you is what you think about when you hear the word ‘politics’?
Nothing at all ...
Nothing?
No ... I don’t even pay attention to politics.
It doesn’t mean anything to you?
Not at all.
Can you tell me, why that is?
Well, I think ... I would rather spend my time on something other than politics.
Okay. ... Perhaps then you can give me an example of what you see as typical for politics?
... they just sit there and talk and something ... discussing something
So you think of some people deciding something, or ...
Yes because I was at that Christiansborg [the name of the Danish Parliament] ... some time, I remember, last year, just to hear inside the Christiansborg
So you’ve actually been to Christiansborg?
Yes, just to see them talk
Tell me about that. Were you alone over there?
No, it was with my school. Well, I thought it was boring to hear them talk, so I would rather go around Copenhagen having a good time (Male, Worker at a factory, parents from Turkey).

Later in the same interview, this young man presents a picture of politics as something completely incomprehensible to him. Very concretely, he tells me about how he can’t drive his scooter any more. Legislation now demands registration of scooters, and thus he cannot drive so fast (and illegal) as he is used to. But he does not show any kind of resistance to this concrete legislation. I asked, what he would do about it, and he answered:

Well, I’ve thought about not driving a scooter any more, because I can’t drive a legal one (Male, Worker at a factory, parents from Turkey).

This situation of powerlessness vis-à-vis the political system is typical for this group of lower class people. However, the people themselves do not perceive it as powerlessness. The question of political action does not come to their minds, and hence, the lack of political resources and an effective political language remains hidden. Consequently, we find here they parallel the
conception of political choice put forward by the upper class, hence contributing to the
misrecognition of class and the self-exclusion from the political field.

Doxa and symbolic violence
In the preceding sections, I have showed how the effects of class remain an important factor in the
production of political practice. Although the political consumption field is constituted with a relative
autonomy, it is also clearly homologous to the social field. Furthermore, with regard to political
habitus and political taste, there are obvious differences between the classes. Most evident, is the
differences between the ease and naturalness of the upper classes, and the position as outsiders
as well as the conception of politics as strange and incomprehensible among the lower classes.
Hence, the feeling of being a legitimate political agent is very unequally distributed among the
social classes.

Further, it has been shown how the social foundation of political practice is misrecognized in
practice. Bourdieu underlines, how this particular relationship between the social structure, practice
and the representations of practice produced by the very same structures producing practice can
be seen as symbolic violence

Symbolic violence is the coercion which is set up only through the consent that the
dominated cannot fail to give to the dominator (and therefore to the domination) when
their understanding of the situation and relation can only use instruments of
knowledge that they have in common with the dominator, which, being merely the
incorporated form of the structure of the relations of domination, make this relation
appear as natural; or, in other words, when the schemes they implement in order to
perceive and evaluate themselves or to perceive and evaluate the dominators
(high/low, male/female, white/black, etc.) are the product of the incorporation of the
(thus naturalized) classifications of which their social being is the product (Bourdieu
2000: 170).

The concept of symbolic violence also point to the importance of going beyond the either/or’s of
political sociology. As mentioned by Bourdieu himself, one cannot understand the functioning of
power and relations of dominance, unless one “moves beyond the false choice between
mechanical constraints through forces and consent to reasons, between mechanical coercion and
voluntary free, deliberate submission” (Bourdieu, 2000: 170).

Concluding remarks
As has been shown, the political sociology of Bourdieu presents a reconstruction of the basic
conceptions of social structure and political behaviour. Most importantly though, is the way in which
the epistemological framing of the questions enables one to move beyond the traditional dualisms
and either/or’s of sociology and political science. Late modernity is not entirely a functionally
differentiated society, and political behaviour is not constituted autonomously without any relation
to social structure. The concepts presented above, then, make it possible to maintain a focus on
the homologies between social positions and political practices without returning to a simple concept of class or a mechanical determinism.

Above I have focused on political behaviour understood as political participation and the basic conceptions of and relationship to politics. However, the concepts of social space and political field (consumption field as well as production field) can also be applied to the study of political attitudes and party choice.

Preliminary studies of the quantitative as well as qualitative data show that the economic fraction of the upper class is primarily orientated towards conservative and economically right wing parties, whereas the cultural fraction of the upper class and middle class are orientated towards liberal and anti-authoritarian values and (left-wing) parties focusing on new issues (environment, globalization, liberal attitudes towards law and order, refugees etc.). The economic and balanced fractions of the middle class (in Denmark at least) seem to be divided among the large catch-all parties, both right-wing and left-wing (social democrats), whereas especially the economic fraction of the dominated class is orientated towards the new protest parties (in Denmark The Danish Peoples Party). These parties present an economic policy focusing on the securing of the welfare state combined with a rather strict policy towards refugees/ethnic minorities and a “tough-on-crime”-view.

These findings point to a political conflict between the economic fraction of the dominated class on the one side and the cultural upper and middle class on the other. Within political science this has been described as new politics and has been seen as connected to authoritarian vs. liberal values. If it has been linked to questions of social relations, this has primarily been differences in education and the consequences of globalisation.

Applying the concepts of Bourdieu, this conflict can also be seen as a class conflict resulting from the reconfigurations of the social space. However, further studies also considering the independent effects of the political production field (i.e. the supply of political attitudes), as well as the differences in political taste, i.e. the differences in the formation of political attitudes and the way in which different people (or classes) have political attitudes, are necessary.
References


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