

Let's collapse un-necessary differences: through dialogue

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Abstract

This paper draws on the social and political theory of Pierre Bourdieu to suggest that collapsing unnecessary differences between subfields within the IR, through dialogue, could be an effective first step in reclaiming greater explanatory power for the discipline and exerting a corrective influence on its pro status-quo bias. The paper reviews current observations about the 'state of play' in the discipline, both from an intellectual, substantive perspective, and from a sociological perspective. Second, it offers some observations about relevant dynamics from Bourdieu's general analysis of fields that seem significant for the IR academic field and for its interactions with national and international social and political fields. Finally, it draws out some practical implications of this analysis, for a transformative opening in IR and beyond.

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The supreme need of our time is for men to learn to live together in peace and harmony.

More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas

[W]e must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.

The old imperialism – exploitation for foreign profit – has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair-dealing.

Only by helping the least fortunate of its members to help themselves can the human family achieve the decent, satisfying life that is the right of all people.

Democracy alone can supply the vitalizing force to stir the peoples of the world into triumphant action, not only against their human oppressors, but also against their ancient enemies – hunger, misery, and despair.¹

Harry Truman's inaugural address meets several criteria of salience and interest for the political scientist and the international relations scholar. It is at once a speech that bears testimony and a speech that has had palpable effects on the reality it describes. Made at a crucial juncture in the aftermath of World War II, just as the ideological and security polarity of the Cold War was becoming entrenched, the speech captured, with a lack of self-consciousness typical for its time, a second powerful assumption that has organised both perceptions and actions in world politics since then. It takes differences in levels of economic development, between developed and developing nations, as a challenge that needs to be addressed, through technological transfer and investment, with respect for democracy and self-determination. Evidently, this is a description that unifies as well as separates: the peoples of the earth are meant to share a common desire, to achieve the standards of economic well-being that the developed nations have already reached.

¹ Harry Truman Inaugural Address, 20 January 1949, available at <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres53.html>, viewed on 6 September 2010.

Like all effective political framing, the speech draws on some well-known facts – the differences in levels of development – to transform them into salient, obvious, uniquely relevant political facts. Equally, it invokes common human aspirations that are seemingly beyond reproach, for human solidarity, for enlightened self-interest, for help-giving that dignifies those who need it as much as those in a position to give it and so on. It also claims these aspirations, in the same move, as the distinctive and unquestionable attributes of the speaker. Potentially progressive, such depictions have, however, served to entrench divisions. The relatively clear hierarchy that can be constructed by using the unifying criterion proposed by Truman has been reproduced through countless repetitions in discourse, institutionalisation at the United Nations, other international organizations, as well as within countries, and the scale and depth of developmental efforts. It has constituted an important part of what one might call the underlying, constitutive consensus of the post-war international society.

Sixty years on, it might be appropriate to wonder whether such sense of clear-cut hierarchies and the use of simple, unifying criteria for ordering the world might not impede rather than help the very objectives and values that are professed as the starting point. How might we take seriously questions of development and democracy as well as the broader terms of what various societies and cultures consider to be the good life? How may we make a difference to this relentless process of reproduction of domination, poverty and misery for billions of people today by integrating into the analysis, by bringing to bear on each and every particular, situated question, the sum of all known facts about the social-political world?

The paper aims to contribute towards such an opening in IR, which, it goes without saying, could only be realised through dialogue among IR scholars and practitioners. The argument is organised in three sections. First, I review current observations about the ‘state of play’ in the discipline, both from an intellectual, substantive perspective, and from a sociology-of-the-discipline perspective. Second, I offer some observations about relevant dynamics from Bourdieu’s general analysis of fields that seem significant for the IR academic field and in its relationship with national and international social and political fields. Finally, I draw out some practical implications of this analysis, given the underlying intent discussed above about the possibility of a transformative opening in IR and beyond.

1. The state of play in IR: theoretical and sociological reflections

Writing in 1998, Ole Weaver offered a compelling description of some of the salient sociological dynamics in the IR field. The history of IR is usually told as a story of successive theoretical debates and these debates are, in fact, ‘expressions of coherence.’² While the question of hierarchy between subfields remains unsettled, it is clear that debates take place within a central place, that of theory, and theoretical debates are then used to orient debates within sub-fields. This is reflected in the fact that ‘the journals are mainly defined, structured, and to a certain extent controlled by theorists. You only become a star by doing theory. The highest citation index scores all belong to theorists. Thus, the battle among theories/theorists defines the structure of the field, but it stimulates competition among the subfields to make it into the leading journals’³

There is also a hierarchy of journals – with the major ones published in the US, and mostly comprising output by US scholars – a side effect of the large size and intense competition within the US field and the predominance of quality publication as a criterion

² Weaver 1998, 716

³ Ibid, 718

for career advancement there. ⁴ It is perhaps not surprising that since '[w]ithin most subfields of IR, task uncertainty is relatively low: one knows which methods, approaches, and even questions count as appropriate,' while '[a]cross subfields there is a very high task uncertainty',⁵ there is a strong tendency, as a matter of professional survival and career advancement, to adopt specialisation as the strategy of choice.

The result is a two-tiered discipline. To get into the lower tier, scholars have to manage the functional dependence within a subfield and become accepted as competent in it. Most subfields are relatively tolerant, welcome new members, and are not terribly competitive. They are hierarchical, but the hierarchy is not settled internally, so there is not much to fight over. Scholars gain top positions by making it into the upper tier, that is, by publishing in the leading, all-round journals, which means convincing those at the centre about the relevance and quality (they still have to prove competence to their fellow specialists because some of them will most likely be reviewers). ⁶

Contributions to this self-reflective strain of literature in IR sometimes also offer specific observations and even analyses on how the IR field might be influenced by developments in other fields, such as international politics as a whole. For instance, Mastanduno argues that 'scholarship responds to the particular features of the international environment, and that the resulting patterns become institutionalised in academic life.'⁷ More specifically, Mastanduno shows that the separation between security studies and international political economy reflected their separation in the actual practice of statecraft in the United States, after World War II. ⁸ Polarity in the security arena coexisted with a dynamic in the economic sphere where security allies were also competitors for the US. Different players dominated the dynamics in each and the study of these two domains remained separate.⁹

At a minimum, it may be said that events in international relations have had an impact on the development and decline of particular research programmes in IR in the last sixty years. For instance, the rise of scholarship on international regimes has coincided with the decline of interest in the study of formal organisations, such as voting within the UN, or the process of European integration, in the 1950s and 1960s. Regimes provided a looser, less formalised understanding of the contexts that constrain and enable state behaviour, at a time when the US was increasingly asserting its freedom of action, through war, in Vietnam, and through changing the rules of the economic game, by discontinuing the link between the dollar and gold, and then floating the dollar.¹⁰ The emergence of a stronger interest in critical and constructivist scholarship was undoubtedly helped by the end of the Cold War, globalisation and the changing nature of security threats in which non-state actors and smaller states have come to play a greater role.¹¹

⁴ Ibid, 718

⁵ Ibid, 717

⁶ Ibid, 718

⁷ Mastanduno 1998, 829

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid, 839

¹⁰ Martin and Simmons 1998, 736-8

¹¹ Ruggie 1998; Katzenstein *et al.*, 1998, develop a comprehensive historical and analytical review of developments in the discipline, as illustrated by publications in the *IO*, in which this mediated, imperfect, sometimes delayed, sometimes resisted, feed-back loop between IR and international relations plays an important part. Similar points are supported in more specialist areas and arguments by the other contributions to this special anniversary, 52 (4) issue of *IO*, including those by Martin and Simmons, Milner, Garrett, Mastanduno, Ruggie, Finnemore and Sikkink, Kahler, March and Olsen, and Jervis.

On the whole, prospects for further theoretical development in the field looked promising at the end of the 1990s. Common knowledge was clearly a point of complementarity between rationalism and constructivism.¹² Tackling that complicated relationship between domestic and international politics seemed to benefit from at least a clear criterion for the integration of findings: 'As long as models use the same basic assumptions about the nature of actors and their environment, the potential for learning across the level-of-analysis divide could be enormous.'¹³

Thus, overall, this was a picture of a stratified but nonetheless coherent and relatively benign disciplinary field, with a workable balance between the central ground of theory and specialist sub-fields, a working out of complementarities and possibilities for dialogue.¹⁴ More than a decade later, the tenor of these kinds of self-reflective observations has changed considerably.¹⁵ Most articles published in the 2000s in the leading journals have used quantitative methodologies, deploying sophisticated technique to study ever narrow questions, while the major challenges of these turbulent times, of changing distribution of power, financial and economic crisis, disastrous wars of choice, as well as climate change and increasing pressures on natural resources, remain inadequately addressed.¹⁶ Moreover, the trends of specialisation, methodologism, non-empiricism and self-referential focus on literature, as reflected in journal publications and organized sections in professional conferences, are linked to the abiding aspiration to model political science on the physical sciences. The result is demoralisation and disillusion, a retreat to purely instrumental survival strategies.¹⁷

2. Some Bourdieusian reflections

In the following, I would like to point out several aspects of field dynamics in IR that come to light through using the sociological lenses provided by the work of Pierre Bourdieu and could contribute to an understanding of the stakes and forces at play in current scholarship in IR and political science.

Evidently, the public life of the discipline takes place through publications and debates that respect the usual norms and concerns of science. This is the result of struggle and active balancing of a variety of constraints that pertain to the disciplinary field as such

¹² Katzenstein *et al.*, 1998, 678-82

¹³ Martin and Simmons 1998, 739

¹⁴ The book edited by Sil and Doherty (2000) was also cautiously optimistic about the possibilities of dialogue between disciplines and theoretical traditions as a source of renewal and development within political science and IR. See also Patomäki and Wight (2000) on possibilities of post-positivist synthesis.

¹⁵ See especially Cohen (2007 and 2008) and Higgott and Watson (2008) and Ravenhill (2008). Subsequent debates were hosted in special a issue of the *Review of International Political Economy* 2009, 16 (1) with contributions by Weaver, Maliniak and Tierney, Keohane, Lake, Farrell and Finnemore, McNamara, Phillips, Germain, Wade, Katzenstein and Cohen. The *New Political Economy* 2009, issue 14:3 was also dedicated to this discussion, including contributions by Cox, Blyth, Weaver, Underhill, Murphy, Hveem, Helleiner, Palan and Cohen.

¹⁶ See especially the data presented in Maliniak and Tierney (2009). Cohen (2010) asks whether IPE journals have become boring; see also contributions by Aggarwal, Denemark and Eden in the special symposium hosted by ISQ in its current issue (54). Lake (2009) is the one dissenting voice present in this forum, arguing for a self-limiting view of science which accepts the trade-offs between disciplined acceptance of certain assumptions and methodologies, possibilities for accumulation of knowledge and the limitations in the range of questions that can be addressed.

¹⁷ See for instance Mead (2010) for an analysis of these trends in political science in the US. Admittedly, Sil and Katzenstein (2010, 411) do articulate a way forward, in the form of analytical eclecticism, 'an intellectual stance that supports efforts to complement, engage and selectively utilize theoretical constructs embedded in contending research traditions to build complex arguments that bear on substantive problems of interest to both scholars and practitioners.'

and also to its relationship with surrounding fields, such as the social, economic and political fields. Clearly, external constraints can affect the conditions for competition within the field and may contribute to the relative hegemony of some types of scholarship over others. As a matter that is taken for granted, and thus one that perhaps does not receive sufficient analytical attention, this is often recognised by scholars, even those who work within mainstream IR and IPE. For instance, Finnemore and Sikkink note as an aside that ‘in fact, the success of rational choice theory within the social sciences is, itself, a logical outgrowth of world culture, in institutionalist terms.’¹⁸ This seemingly unthinking transmission of values and priorities from the surrounding fields could be understood at several levels, to do with the particular hierarchy, or simply nesting, of fields and also with field-habitus relations.¹⁹

The case of the dominance of realism in IR could be taken as an illustrative example here. In terms of habitus-field interactions, it would not be surprising for a field dedicated to the study of political power to attract practitioners who are inclined not only to create knowledge about how power works, but also to incorporate this knowledge in their particular balancing of values, as reflected in the content of scholarship and the style of engagement in the scientific enterprise and relations with others. It may be that, for realists, love of power, a habitus trait, may become an over-determining factor in their choice of research topics and research strategies as well as in their style of participation in the social life of the discipline.²⁰ In other words, their practice would suggest that for them power plays subordinate purely scientific values, which include openness to dialogue. For instance, in a recent article, Walker explains how particular arguments about the nature of scientific competition, selectively imported from the work of Kuhn and Lakatos, are treated by realists as sources of authoritative truth about the nature of scientific endeavour and are mobilised to ignore or silence opposition. Critical engagement is then a show of strength in which stonewalling opponents is justified through two typical power moves: (1) behaving as though realism has earned the status of a paradigm; (2) on this basis, drawing selectively on Kuhn and Lakatos’s work to set the bar for any contesting view according to the maximalist expectation that the realist paradigmatic status-quo could only be replaced by an alternative explanation that would have to be able to subsume realism before it could establish itself as the new paradigm.²¹

¹⁸ Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 911, note 107. A reservation is worth noting here: what they mean by ‘world culture’ really refers to US-centred culture.

¹⁹ Here is a rather lengthy definition of the field of power and the work of domination, that might serve to set the Bourdieusian background for the following discussion on academic fields and their relations: “The field of power is a *field of forces* defined by the structure of the existing balance of forces between forms of power or between different species of capital. It is also simultaneously a *field of struggles of power among the holders of different forms of power*. It is a space of play and competition in which the social agents and the institutions which all possess the determinate quantity of specific capital (economic and cultural capital in particular) sufficient to occupy the dominant positions within their respective fields [the economic field, the field of higher civil service of the state, the university field, and the intellectual field] confront one another in strategies aimed at preserving or transforming this balance of forces. ... This struggle for the imposition of the dominant principle of domination leads, at every moment, to a balance in the sharing of power, that is, to what I call a *division of the work of domination*. It is also a struggle over the legitimate principle of legitimation and for the legitimate mode of reproduction of the foundations of domination. This can take the form of real, physical struggles, (as in “palace revolutions” or wars of religion for instance) or of symbolic confrontations (as in the discussions over the relative ranking of *oratores*, priests, and *bellatores*, knights in Medieval Europe).” unpublished lecture, “The field of power,” University of Wisconsin at Madison, April 1989, quoted in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 76 fn 16.

²⁰ Small ethnographic example: typical realist panel at the ISA conference chaired by one of the leading realist scholars. Strong papers within the usually limited assumptions and standards of evidence. Apathetic audience attracts abuse from the chair – for being apathetic. Evidently, inability to engage a wider audience, or even its own supporters – is not going to be regarded as significant under this tautological assumption of one’s own power.

²¹ Walker 2010, especially 441-3

But the dominance of realism within IR, established through such agents and their unquestioned affinities with power and its exercise, runs more deeply and might be linked to broader facts. As students of symbolic power warn, such dominance cannot endure without the acquiescence of the dominated²² and the basis for this acquiescence must be a structural element that configures the IR field and its relation to other fields. It is an element that is shared by all those who are part of the field, part of the instinctive acceptance of the rules of the game that comes simply from participating in it. It is possible that the privileging of power, force and conflict in the realist account indirectly reflects a belief in the superiority of these assets that are characteristic of the US and it is thus, in this sense, somewhat appealing and unconsciously natural to participants in the US academic field as a whole. It is a belief that average Americans would share; without sufficient self-belief in the scientific autonomy of their field and sufficient actual, institutionalised autonomy, IR scholars in the US might not dare to contradict such unspoken, and for this reason all the more powerful, expectations.

This tension between power and scientific criteria is sometimes expressed, albeit somewhat unwittingly, by way of apparent inconsistency. Thus, Katzenstein *et al.* note that, at least at the end of the 1970s,

Realism maintained its dominant position despite alternative arguments that appeared more accurately to describe actors, and despite the fact that its empirical validation had always been problematic. Realism continued to be *primus inter pares* because liberalism did not offer an alternative research program that specified causality and operationalized variables clearly enough to be falsifiable. The renewal of the Cold War after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979 seemed to reinforce realism's intellectual triumph.²³

This concession to realism will later lead to a programme of renewal in institutionalist research that meets realism on its favourite methodological ground – rational choice. Apart from intra-field competition, this seems to have been the result of relative subordination to economics: “[t]he appeal to economics has served to legitimise the narrowing of American IPE in the direction of rational choice theory.”²⁴

The significant point of difference between the realist and liberal rationalist positions seems to be that only the latter abide by the condition articulated by Katzenstein *et al.* that ‘for a consistent rationalist, it would be anomalous to think of persuasion in terms of changing others’ deepest preferences.’²⁵ And in turn the difference between realists and constructivists in relation to changing deep preferences, and thus identity, is that while realists favour application of force as a means, for constructivists it is rather more important to meet that power with appropriate reflection and with right.

²² According to Bourdieu, 1991, 50-1, ‘[a]ll symbolic domination presupposes, on the part of those who submit to it, a form of complicity which is neither passive submission to external constraint nor a free adherence to values. The recognition of the legitimacy of the official language has nothing in common with an explicitly professed, deliberate and revocable belief, or with an intentional act of accepting a ‘norm’. It is inscribed in a practical state, in dispositions which are impalpably inculcated, through a long and slow process of acquisition, by the sanctions of the linguistic market, and which are therefore adjusted, without any cynical calculation or consciously experienced constraint, to the chances of material and symbolic profit which the laws of price formation characteristic of a given market objectively offer to the holders of a given linguistic capital.’ Here language stands for any symbolic order.

²³ Katzenstein, *et al.* 1998, 661-2. I note that in more recent contributions, for instance Sil and Katzenstein (2010) this trap created by acceptance of a certain reading of Kuhn and Lakatos is avoided.

²⁴ Palan 2009, 390

²⁵ Katzenstein *et al.*, 1998, 682.

It is possible to conceive a formula for change in which the liberal and constructivist rule of self-restraint in the use of force does not thereby lead to subordination to the more aggressive, unapologetic use of power. The fundamental difference here seems to be between willingness to treat the institutional resources, the rules and procedures of the academic field as a means to an end extrinsic to the scientific effort – i.e. mere power accumulation – and the ability to ensure that these resources, rules and procedures are genuine arbiters, are used in the spirit in which they are meant. Under the latter regime, lack of empirical validation would indeed be taken as fundamental weaknesses, not only for, say, constructivist research but for realism as well.

Here is an example of critique offered to this choice for rational choice, from a constructivist perspective:

Any theoretical approach that begins with generalised formula about the nature of agency, the state, or indeed, a system – such as rational choice theory or classical realism – is inherently non-empirical. This is for the obvious reason that it is founded on theoretical assumptions rather than on observation. The British School, on the other hand, begins not with a general assumption but with an observation. So when Cerny identifies finance as the new infrastructure of power in the world, his thesis was not generated in some rigorous specific research programme rooted in a general theoretical orientation. His thesis is rooted in an observation, naturally open to challenges and theory is then used to analyse, explain or present this observation in a more generalised discussion.²⁶

The further, sociological, question one might like to add to this effort to understand the interaction between general theoretical orientations and research programmes is how and why rational choice theory became accepted in IPE and why are its merits so self-evident, quite apart from the usual reasons that are usually given in its defence (clarity of reasoning, possibility to specify consequences and expected outcomes etc.). There seems to be a deeper cultural affinity between some of the underlying assumptions about the nature of the social bond specific to rational choice theory and the difficult tensions between individual liberties, violence and forms and styles of public (state) authority in the US. Take for instance the core situational model of the prisoner's dilemma. How is the social bond structured here? And why are these structuring conditions considered so self-evident as to constitute the valid starting point for masses and masses of academic research efforts? A crime has been committed, it is assumed, and the two culprits have been caught but now have to be made to confess and they can play their hand collaboratively or against each other. In any case the bottom line is that the authority figures, the police, already know the truth. Moreover, they are in a position to set the conditions that are likely to extract from the culprits the evidence that will seal the truth of what they already know. There is no mediating juridical principle here; the police might be presumed to keep their promises exactly, but only as long as there is no questioning that indeed a crime has been committed. The only form of opposition, non-confession is of course the least desirable outcome under the circumstances, a perfect trap.

What we are presented with is a logical structure, a set of logical options, whose consequences can be rigorously calculated and rationally assessed. Seen as a cultural artefact, its salient characteristic is the high level of abstraction, and thus, it might be suspected, sublimation of underlying affects. It may be that the effect it enjoys of appearing natural is

²⁶ Palan 2009, 391. The reference in the quote is to Cerny (1994); the manner and meaning of deployment, which are the most important issues here, are clear in any case.

the result of the fact that it retains in its structure traces of what might have been for anyone living in America a direct observation or experience of the arbitrariness of life and violence. In this drama characteristic of a particular cultural, social and political setting, chaos brings forth a heavy handed form of authority (why would otherwise the police be allowed to presume they know the truth?) and the cult of ragged, individualist self-defence (the right to carry guns appears sacrosanct). Quite clearly, there are underlying structural similarities, homologies between what might be a paradigmatic social situation, a form of social bond, and the logical structure underlying the prisoner's dilemma.²⁷

Coming back to Palan's distinction, then, the difference we observe is between degrees of sublimation of cultural, emotionally charged, and seemingly self-evident observations about reality. In social contexts where social bonds have been historically constituted in such a way as to allow for greater trust, there might be, as a rule, less need for mobilising highly abstracted mental structures in such a rigid (and presumptively negative) way. There might be greater comfort with fewer degrees of sublimation. Thus, while supporters of rational choice may need to make recourse to the mental comfort to be had from logic, basing research on less stringent and stringently formulated assumptions would require greater tolerance for ambiguity, tension or anxiety of the general, floating kind, the usual 'background noise' of experience.

However, an analysis of how and why certain methodological choices come to overshadow and limit interest for substantive questions and problems would have to take account of the role played by methodology in the on-going relationship between the scientific field and others fields. Quite simply, pointing to complicated models and graphs is an obvious and appropriately obfuscating way of justifying 'scientific', and thereby privileged status. It works so very well for other fields, notably economics; it corresponds to particular intellectual styles that prefer the language of numbers and abstraction of mathematics, and such skills are, in terms of training and subsequent surveillance relatively straightforward to codify and enforce.²⁸

The dominant position of economics within the social sciences in general, in the US, no doubt has historical roots that would be worth uncovering. In contrast, in other social and historical settings, this dominant role has belonged and still belongs to philosophy.²⁹ According to one of its current outstanding practitioners, John Searle, "Philosophy' is in large part the name for all those questions which we do not know how to answer in the systematic way that is characteristic of science." It is, in part 'an attempt to reach the point where we can have systematic knowledge.' In his understanding, philosophers venture to articulate, in clear enough language, points that might not have been thought before, and thus cannot rely on the backing of expert opinion. Every reader has to judge for him/herself as to the truth value of the statements put forward, such that: 'If I am right, what I say

²⁷ In Pop (2010) I try to show how underlying cultural choices and assumptions may be seen to permeate other areas of endeavour and may constitute the reason why particular kinds of relationships between social fields appear natural in different societies.

²⁸ The rendering of the material determinations of symbolic practices such as science, but also art, invisible, is, as Bourdieu observes, part and parcel of the process of constitution of these fields. It allows scientists to take their point of vision for granted; it is a point of vision dependent on abstract forms of knowledge, different in kind from practical knowledge that social actors use habitually, or that scientists themselves use in the social life of their discipline or other professional roles. On this and other forms of scholastic fallacy, see Bourdieu 2000, 49-92. Having said that, my remarks on strategies of justification of distinctiveness and privilege that occupy scholars, ought to be backed up with a proper analysis of the structural constraints that define access to resources within the IR field and have led to the choice of practical strategies of survival that rely on these methodologies.

²⁹ It might be worth recalling that Ph.D., Doctor of Philosophy comes from the Latin *philosophiae doctor*, meaning "teacher in the love of wisdom".

should seem obviously true, once I have said it and once you have thought about it.³⁰ As a scientist, s/he might well decide whether it is then possible or desirable to take further steps towards acquiring systematic knowledge by deploying the instruments of science.

Ideally, this kind of enhanced reflexivity about our collusions and complicities with the broader social and political fields, even though they are collusion and complicities that cannot be easily, or simply revoked, could create an opening, the possibility of contemplating different choices. One consequence would be to allow us to take a further step away from the field level of analysis, and zoom the lens of attention at the level of countries and inter-national relations proper. Evidently, resources for the sustained study of international affairs are in fact concentrated, for the most part, in the developed countries. Strengthening the autonomy of the scientific (and philosophical) ethos within the field of power is vital for being able to study global issues in such a way that there is no automatic identification with the point of view or the national interest of the country of origin. The academic field is one of the few social fields, in any developed nation, that may in fact develop such autonomy which is crucial not only, or not even first of all, for the sake of cosmopolitan values, but for reasons of self-preservation.

3. Practical implications for dialogue and transformation

Seemingly insurmountable as they appear, these difficulties and constraints are actually dependent for their reproduction on practices and thus, could, in principle, be changed. The fact that excellent works of scholarship are still produced is no doubt testimony to so much that is hopeful and productive in academic life. Moreover, some express the hope that since much social science writing is subject to fads and fashions, this too will change. Clearly, in any field of endeavour, the constraints of the moment have served, for the truly creative, as obstacles against which to test and cultivate their strength, rather than pretext for self-pitying hand-wringing.

In any case, as an early career scholar yet to secure a permanent academic job, I am not in a position to judge what exactly, and how, might budge, be open to renegotiation and rearrangement in the current distribution of power within the field. Even though some of the external effects are apparent, have been noted by others and can be reflected upon, using Bourdieusian or any other sociology of knowledge lenses, it remains the case that only the senior people placed at the crucial nodes of these subfields, whether disciplinary as such or institutional, in various universities, government agencies, journal editorial boards, etc., could think through and implement in their day-to-day activities or in moments of intense struggle and confrontation a particular set of values.

What I can offer, perhaps, are some observations derived from the experience provided by the accidents of my education, immigration and academic career in the UK.³¹

³⁰ Searle, 2002, 20. Bourdieu, though a lapsed philosopher, has embedded in his sociology fundamental philosophical questions to do with the judgement of taste or the possibility of knowledge for instance. See for instance Pop (2011) on this point.

³¹ Briefly, the relevant facts here are as follows. My undergraduate education started in the Faculty of Philosophy and History (including courses in economics and psychology) and ended with a degree in Sociology, at the University of Bucharest (1988-3), having earned a certificate in comparative European Social Studies from the University of Amsterdam (1991-2), in English, with courses in politics, anthropology and sociology. Thus, two major discontinuities punctuated this period: the end of the communist regime, a seismic change (for us), and the cultural shock of studying in English and living abroad. My postgraduate education in the UK, at Manchester and Warwick, continued this pattern somewhat, while writing my Ph.D. dissertation in Politics and International Relations (international political economy) I obtained a certificate in counselling and completed the first of the two-year diploma course in counselling. Since defending my Ph.D., I have held two short-term lectureships (University of Wales, Aberystwyth and Birkbeck College, University of London) and a research fellowship

Specialisms are meant to create secure territories for their practitioners; their boundaries are safeguarded by presumptions of exclusive knowledge that would be difficult to acquire. Outsiders better be warned before trying to offer a critical view, since lack of appropriate knowledge of the internal language and codes will immediately expose their ignorance and they will end up covering themselves up in shame.

I wonder whether this (often implicit) threat is more often bark than bite. The intimidation would not work on someone who has the basic elements of theory or method, to be able to work out whether claims made for a particular contribution or another are actually realistic or convincing. Time constraints aside for the moment, through trial and error, I have found that my ability to relate past specialist claims increases by checking out, however, briefly, the works around which such (self-interested) mystique develops. There seems to be a positive trade-off between the time it takes and the effects in terms of 'levelling the playing field', in the sense of being able to sustain coherent, argued (perhaps not specialist per se but collegial) conversation. Mobilisation of the usual scholarly criteria of evidence, coherence, clarity of presentation, relevance is usually sufficient for forming a coherent judgement, even when confronted with completely new material.

I will give a brief example, and I am sure any reader could come up with a few of their own. After attending some post-structuralist panels at the BISA conference a few years back, I was struck by the tones of hushed admiration that accompany and imply deep insight and mysterious, powerful grasp of profound questions about human problems, surrounding the name of Giorgio Agamben. In fact, several contributors used his name with the tone of implying that of course it is self-evident what he is about, and that it is profound, without, however, saying very much at all about the content of his arguments. Eventually I took myself to a good bookshop that had all (or most) of his books. They are very slim, and made up of short chapters, each of the chapters presenting succinctly and clearly a rather discrete engagement with fragments of texts from often well-established theorists, such as Foucault or Kantorowicz. They were all works indicating acute analytical sharpness, moreover, drawing on sources in several different languages. However, at this stage, his works consist of mostly discrete flashes of qualifying or new insight for very specific points of interpretation or argument. They do not reflect the effort to reflect in a sustained manner on a body of literature or to propose a new systematic interpretation of the history of philosophy; it is possible, of course, that these fragmentary insights might well turn out to be building blocks for such a contribution in the future. In any case, having defined more concretely the basis for the authority of his arguments, I felt could make a judgement on how I might be able to incorporate them in my own work.

I find that reading several general knowledge publications, such as *London Review of Books*, *New York Review of Books*, *Harvard Business Review* or *New Left Review* is good training and also reinforcement of this appreciation for good general skills in writing and research, irrespective of specialisms. Like other publications of some cache, in my experience, these inspire some degree of awe and reticence, as though some kind of special invitation ought to be made before joining such a select circle. It is the impression I was given and it is the reason why it took me a long time before I actually started reading them, to discover, of course, what I should have always known, that things are not what they appear from a distance.³²

(London Metropolitan University), in which are had responsibility for teaching courses in both comparative politics - Central and Eastern Europe - and international political economy.

³² I was given a one year free subscription for LRB by one of my colleagues (I then learned that nominating someone to receive this every year is the usual perk for LRB subscribers, as you may know); another colleague, who was a member of the editorial board of the *New Left Review*, helped me to see that far from being old-fashioned or a publication whose time has passed, it contained mostly serious, informative contributions.

In general, then, all practices that encourage dialogue across specialisms would be welcome. Rather than regarding the presumptions of specialism as walls to hide behind or occasionally use as parapets from which to direct sniping fire at others, it would lower anxiety levels for everyone if we decided to value the generic skills specific to the profession. There might be less distinction based on exclusive difference and more sharing as a result, but potentially, the ability to assimilate more quickly existing knowledge and to cooperate with others would increase not only our ability to be effective. My sense is that it would come as a great relief to many not to have to spend so much time and energy to uphold parochial orthodoxies. It would also allow for opportunities to remove the separation between research work and the pursuit of general intellectual interests. For most people, it is love of knowledge, a sense of vocation that draws them to these fields and sustains them through long, arduous processes of learning and self-development.

From this perspective, it would be possible to envisage a definition of the principle of differentiation for the IR (and other social science) field(s) that does not rely so much on method and concomitantly the privileging of particular habitus traits – or scholarly qualities and skills, such as a love of quantitative methods and mathematical modelling. Consideration could be given to the implication of such theories as multiple intelligences,³³ for instance, to promote a plurality of styles of scholarship. And each participant in the field could be expected to develop awareness of their specific strengths as well as some ability to draw on the results of others. Skills required for the integration of knowledge might come to be considered as important as combative, sharp abilities to make distinctions and create differences.

In recognition of these kinds of investments, the creation of habitus traits that are in fact capitals, whose development requires sustained effort over long periods of time, IR and other social sciences might claim a different kind of monopoly, as keepers of knowledge. It may not be such a bad response, when faced with the erosion of authority confronting universities, the assault of the internet and the confusion it brings between information and knowledge.

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³³ See for instance Gardener (2006).

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Wide Reading Hones Judgement

No Beauty Contest

Fair and



³⁴ I make use here of Baldessari's series of paintings that consist of words on paper and, at the end, a commentary on one of his iconic paintings, *Wrong*. The source is a photograph of John Baldessari. *Wrong*, 1966–68. Photoemulsion and acrylic on canvas, 59 x 45 inches (149.9 x 114.3 cm). Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of the Contemporary Art Council. © 2009 John Baldessari. Photo © 2009 Museum Associates/LACMA.



Net WRONG