

# Power: Relational, Discursive, and Performative Dimensions

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## Abstract

This article draws on the conceptual link between power and causality to develop an account of the relational, discursive, and performative dimensions of power. Each proposed dimension of power is grounded in a different understanding of social causes: relational-realist, discursive-hermeneutic, and performative-pragmatic. For the purposes of empirical analysis, this dimensional schema crosscuts the classic sources of power typology developed by Michael Mann and others, thus rendering the conceptual apparatus for pursuing sociological research on power more complex and explanatorily effective. The schema is illustrated by an example from comparative-historical sociology: explaining the storming of the Bastille and its effects. A series of research questions for investigating the relative autonomy of performative power is proposed. Finally, the current schema is situated vis-à-vis classic sociological theories of power, including the arguments of Steven Lukes, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu, among others.

## Keywords

power, performance, discourse, social structure, Steven Lukes, causality, dimensions

## INTRODUCTION

Imagine a series of actions and interactions leading up to a sociological outcome of interest. Let this outcome be political in a broad sense—let it be a binding decision on how a set of human beings will order their lives together and make other decisions in the future. So, for example, a sociologist might be interested in the town hall meetings and day-to-day informal talk leading up to a vote on a new proposed law or an election for mayor in a small town; or in how different interviewing practices and rules for faculty voting in different academic departments affect racial and ethnic diversity in hiring; or in the lead-up, in three different unions, to the decision about whether to strike; or in how a board meeting about a merger, conditioned by a set of threats and counterthreats that precede that meeting, results in a specific kind of corporate restructuring.

I hazard that explaining such outcomes is important to sociology and that, even beyond the contentious issue of the relationship of these outcomes to democracy or the good society,

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sociologists find a great deal to argue about when they try to explain them. How should we explain what happened in a specific case, or over a large range of cases, or comparatively, in a small or medium number of cases? Who triumphed? Who lost? What issue was not even on the table? Whose grievances were ignored or unarticulated? And who did not even know they were being manipulated and thus dominated?

These are questions about power. Especially in sociology, these questions reach far beyond binding decisions. Nonetheless, it is useful to begin with such situations when writing about power, because the relevance of the concept to the ability to provide a good explanation of the outcome is clear. Now imagine the following three typified, one-sided sociological accounts of how an outcome or outcomes were brought about.

One account emphasizes social capital, mechanisms of patronage and exchange, and the “positionality” of key actors. Perhaps everyone in town already owes a certain candidate for mayor a favor; perhaps long-standing business relationships, founded on both profit and trust, give one corporate leader an insurmountable advantage in a given series of negotiations. Or perhaps, in a contest that was otherwise evenly matched, a semi-outsider—an old union member who had worked for another, bigger union and returned with enhanced prestige—could throw his weight around and thus push the outcome in one direction or the other. Network analysis might help here, if edges can be correctly coded, as would an understanding of the different ways unequal exchange works. Overall, one could point to a certain structure of social relations—more or less dynamic over the time studied—as accounting for the outcome. And in this structure, there are advantaged and disadvantaged positions, which people occupy. These positions are, not coincidentally, related to the winners, the losers, and the radically excluded who characterize the outcome. This is the relational concept of power.

The second account is interested in talk, symbolization, narrative, and coding and, more generally, in the intersection of perception and advantage. Perhaps in the town hall meetings, one group becomes very good at “framing” the issue. Indeed, they are so good at it that by the end of the process, the outcome has been *naturalized* as inevitable, as the only thing to do, or, alternatively, as the moral thing to do. Or, in the lead-up to the strike vote in the union, the repeated conversations and interactions of several members spread an account of striking that successfully associates it with essential values of masculinity—courage, responsibility, and pride. Or perhaps, the in the long trip to the top, corporate raiders come to construe themselves and their relation to the world in certain terms, terms that make their actions feel like the most natural thing in the world, good for capitalism, growth, and the bottom line, which is, “obviously,” what life is all about. Maybe this sort of sociological account would even go so far as to say that the very kind of people that end up doing X or Y at the end of the process—voting this way or that, deciding to strike, and so on—have been *produced* by the repeated talk and writing that they engage in. Qua decision-making subjects, they have been constructed and construed by the significations in which they are immersed. This construal itself makes for advantage, discipline and even domination. This is the discursive concept of power.

Finally, one account emphasizes the situated creativity and temporal ordering of the actions that produce the outcome. The people who act may indeed occupy a position in a relational structure and may be interpolated by certain discourses. But in this account, it is the acts themselves that produce new realities and thus account for why the whole process went one way or another. Timing, surprising yet compelling public action, and transformative moments or events are what explains the outcome. The order in which issues are introduced in a meeting affects how they are comprehended<sup>1</sup>; a key speech at a particularly tense moment in the very last union meeting leads to a strike; the crafty manipulation of the interactional conditions of the board meeting (withholding a trip to lunch, exhaustion of the opposition, amassing a large, intimidating group of lawyers) has discernible effects on

corporate negotiations. In this sociological account, it is worth noting, some of these actions are consequential precisely because they are *not* naturalized, hidden, or insidious: they are the bold and sudden giving of orders when doing so would seem to be out of place; they are wild ideas and insane lies that resonate with an audience because they capture the absurdity of a situation; they are acts that transform the emotions of previously steady subjects; they are speeches that, even though someone is not well positioned to give them, end up carrying the day. And so the vote is swayed, authority is shored up, a company is broken up and sold off. This is the performative concept of power.

### *From Concepts to Dimensions*

These are abstract, highly typified accounts-of-sociological-accounts of power. As such—informally given, using brief reference to made-up examples—they lack rigorous theoretical justification; in what follows, I attempt to elaborate and ground these concepts of power by conceptualizing them as *dimensions* of power as it works in the world, subject to empirical variation. I specify and situate these dimensions of power in relation to prevalent theoretical languages for analyzing power and domination and link them to different ontologies of social causality, thus giving them some epistemological justification. I argue that the dimensions of power—relational, discursive, and performative—should form part of the general theoretical framework with which we do research on power in sociology. In particular, these three dimensions of power should be understood as orthogonal to, or cross-cutting, the well-known theorization of power in terms of its sources, associated with Michael Mann and others (see discussion below and Table 1). Finally, I suggest that the performative dimension of power is, of the three presented here, the least well understood in sociology, and I suggest some avenues of research that might remedy this situation.

## POWER: CONCEPTUAL ISSUES AND THEORETICAL DEBATES

Power is a central, subfield- and discipline-organizing concept in sociology, and as a result, the way in which theorists parse, typologize, conceptually delimit, or otherwise comprehend power has consequences for empirical research and the truth claims that result from it. Yet when it comes to theorizing power, matters are far from clear. It is an essential, but also essentially contested, concept (Lukes 2005:14; see Gallie 1956). The normative reasons for studying power are myriad, but so are the conceptual disputations surrounding it, even if normative considerations are bracketed. As Gianfranco Poggi (2006) explained in a review of the subject, the concept of power “stands out as one whose definition is particularly contentious and unstable” (p. 464). Various solutions to this problem have been proposed, including developing clear limits on what can be considered power (Lukes 2005:108–24) or arguing that power should be used multiply, as a “family resemblance” concept (Haugaard 2010).

All of this multiplicity is the contemporary inheritance of a century’s worth of debate beginning with Max Weber’s (1978) definition of power explicitly as the “chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action” (p. 926). By the mid-twentieth century, Robert Dahl (1957) had extracted from Weber’s definition the idea that “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do” (pp. 202–203) and used the concept to study decision-making power in New Haven, Connecticut (Dahl [1961] 2005). In sociology, Talcott Parsons had proposed a radical redefinition of the term. Arguing that his critics—especially C. Wright Mills (1959:35–49) and Ralf Dahrendorf (1958:126–27)—had defined power as a zero-sum game between those who possessed power and those who did not, Parsons instead suggested an analogy between power and money. For Parsons,

power could be augmented by social reorganization and, like money, served as a generalized medium through which societies function. So, while some could have more power or money than others, ultimately power, like money, was a product of the social system as a whole (Parsons 1963).

In a direct attack on Parsons, Anthony Giddens (1968) argued that “largely though a trick of definition,” Parsons had removed from consideration “two obvious facts,” namely, “that authoritative decisions very often do serve sectional interests and that the most radical conflicts in society stem from struggles for power” (p. 265). For Parsons, Giddens wrote, “power now becomes simply an extension of consensus, the means which a society uses to attain its goals” (p. 268). Steven Lukes (2005:31–36) had a similar critique of Parsons as Giddens, Mills, and Dahrendorf did. But Lukes’s “radical view” of power, while distancing itself from Parsons, was primarily developed in opposition to the “pluralist” views of power common in American political science at the time (e.g., Bachrach and Baratz 1962, 1970; Dahl [1961] 2005). Lukes argued that Dahl had comprehended only one of power’s three dimensions and that his critics had comprehended only two of them. Dahl had focused on which leaders were able to influence decision-making processes, had ignored the ways in which certain issues and decisions never came up in the first place (the second dimension), and had ignored how the preferences of whole populations were manipulated (the third dimension). One intellectual source of this problem, Lukes argued, was the methodologically individualist use of Weber’s definition of power that had been mobilized by Dahl. In contrast, Lukes’s theory of power developed a Gramscian-Marxist account of how the consent of the dominated is obtained. With some modification, this is the position maintained by Lukes (2005:124–51) in his extensively updated edition of *Power: A Radical View*.

The post-Parsonian theories of power, then, developed in what could broadly be called Marxist-cultural and structural-Weberian directions. The former developed a focus on ideology, hegemony, consumption, and other sources of quiescence in capitalist societies (e.g., Laclau and Mouffe 1985), while the latter, especially in historical sociology, developed a focus on the state as an arena of power (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985). It was in this context that Michael Mann’s understanding of power became central to comparative-historical sociology. Mann theorized power as existing in organizational networks that respond to basic human needs and thus separated ideological, economic, military and political power (Hall and Schroeder 2006; Mann 1992, 1993).

This emphasis on the different organizational and/or institutional bases for power—what I call the sources approach—was by no means limited to Mann’s historical sociology, however. John Scott (1996) developed Weber’s “Class, Status, Party” into an account of three different kinds of power, class, status, and “command,” and analyzed how in modern capitalist societies economic power bases were also inflected by command structures and hierarchies (especially pp. 158–225). Meanwhile, Gianfranco Poggi (2001) developed his work on the state into a general account of power sources that looked quite similar to Scott’s: political power is control of the resource of rulership, ideological/normative power is control of status (especially in relationship to divine or holy entities), and economic power is the control of material resources. Poggi (2006) argued, in particular, that Mann made a theoretical misstep in separating political and military power. Hence, among sociologists who take a broadly Weberian view, the theorization of power moved from Lukes to Mann, from an account of power’s dimensions to an account of—and debate about the interactions between—power’s sources.

Other theoretical accounts of power can be understood as a variation on this sources approach. If we understand power as originating in different institutional spheres, organizational complexes, or fields of social action, then we could suggest that these fields are more varied than just polity, economy, and culture. One might understand Bourdieu’s framework for field analysis in this way, insofar as his work developed the metaphor of capital as a way

to analyze how different sorts of power can be converted into one another and how power struggles relate to the social construction of value in specific arenas of action, such as the colonial state (Steinmetz 2008) or literature (Bourdieu 1995). In this format of analysis, the number of potential fields of struggle is not limited but becomes itself a historical question (Calhoun 1993). Or one might point to the resurgence of a macro-institutionalist, evolutionary approach to institutional differentiation as, again, a sources approach to power, in which power is grounded in institutions, in particular the six core institutions that appear to be common to all societies: kinship, religion, polity, economy, law, and education, with perhaps science and art added as autonomous spheres in the modern era (Abrutyn 2009; Turner 1997, 2003). Finally, one might note the overlap between these approaches and those developed by systems theorists concerned with differentiation (Luhmann 1995).

The ongoing sociological arguments about power's sources and their relationships is, in parts of the discipline, complicated by the influence of Michel Foucault. In some of his writings and interviews, Foucault argued that researchers should not examine power as something that a person could "have" (Foucault 1980:142, 159, 198–200). He thus arrived at a notion of power as diffuse and anonymous, as productive of those entities that other theorists had often identified as the sources or resources for the development of power (bodies, populations, laws, etc.), and even as productive of the agents who exercise power (see Digesser 1992:979–82 for a discussion of the production, by power, of "subjects"). In his written empirical work, Foucault directed his attack on the Hobbesian philosophy of power as too limiting for the analyst. He proposed, instead, productive power as a counterpoint to repressive power (see especially Foucault 1990:92–102) and thus reopened a series of debates about the complex relationship between "power to" and "power over," while simultaneously injecting into these debates his broader perspective on the importance of discursive formations in constituting social relations (Allen 2010; Honneth 1993; Honneth, Allen, and Cooke 2010; Saar 2010).

### *Making Sense of Sociological Theories Of Power: Three Axes of Debate*

Such a brief, indeed telegraphic, account can barely scratch the surface of the many debates about power (for a recent book-length examination, see Hearn 2012). Nonetheless, one can discern from the wide-ranging literature on the subject three axes of argumentation.

First axis: the long-standing distinction between power to (capacity) and power over (domination), iconically embodied by the difference between "Parsons" and "Dahrendorf"—or between "Arendt" and "Hobbes" (Gohler 2009; Pitkin 1972; Wrong 1968). Along this axis, the primary question is how "empowerment" is related to domination and how a better understanding of these issues might inflect both research on, and perhaps the practice of, social movements that seek liberation and justice (Allen 2000). One key point of debate here is, for example, whether certain kinds of capacity (or "empowerment") are paradoxically dependent on domination. For example, a child receives recognition and love from her parents, which allows her to become a functioning, capable adult—someone with capacity to act on the world. But these very forms of recognition and love encode gendered schemas of self that are patriarchal and render her vulnerable to domination (Allen 2010).

Second axis: a series of arguments about different sources of social power and how they interact—deriving originally from Weber but developing into extended discussions on political, economic, and cultural power. These arguments clearly lend themselves to a series of historical questions about how and when different sources of power are more or less important and how they interact. Classically, for example, one might be interested in how economic power both disembedded itself from other formats of power and came to dominate other social arenas (Polanyi 2001). This second axis of argument is widely understood to cut

across the first axis orthogonally, which is to say that all of the sources of power can be relevant for “power to” as well as “power over.”

Third axis: the “dimensions” of power. Here Lukes’s work is foundational. Taken in its original intellectual context, Lukes’s *Power: A Radical View* was written as a challenge to the understanding of political decision making and government-centered power common to American political science; that is, this work can be read as suggesting there were three *dimensions* to a single *source* of power (political). But Lukes’s third dimension of power, while strictly defined as the manipulation of subjectively perceived interests, drew theoretically and empirically for its elaboration on how other sources of power affected political power—economic, cultural, and so on. Furthermore, it was tied to a notion of actors and real interests that, as Lukes (2005:99–107) showed in his expansion of *Power: A Radical View*, formed the central *normative* difference between Lukes’s perspective and that of the Foucauldians he debated (Bordo 2003; Flyvberg 1998).

In the massive flurry of debate about reason and power that has accompanied the interpretations of Foucault’s work, the emphasis, in Lukes’s original text, on the link between methodology and the theorization of power has been lost; in particular, the fundamental connection between the concept of “power” and the concept of “cause” has been obscured. Amid discussions of modern and postmodern conceptualizations of power, the basic insight of Lukes—that research on power was informed not only by one’s normative stance but also by one’s concept(s) of social causality—has faded.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, at the origins of social theories of power, we find that Thomas Hobbes (1839–1845) argued explicitly in his work that “power and cause are the same thing” (p. 127).

This suggests that we could theorize power with reference to the causal workings of the social world, as expressed in our theoretical “root metaphors” for understanding how that world works (Pepper 1961). Furthermore, insofar as social causality is multiple, this multiplicity could be mobilized as the basis for understanding power’s different dimensions and thus as the basis for research on social power. This is the path I pursue in this article.

## SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS, CAUSALITY, AND POWER

Consider what is, for social theory at least, an important moment in the intellectual history of arguments about power: Marx and Engels’s argument in *The Communist Manifesto* that the massive increase in social capacity represented by the capitalist reorganization of production was dependent upon the social domination of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. This is an argument that combines the sources of power axis of argument with a theorization of an intersection between capacity (power to) and domination (power over). Marx’s historical narrative accounts for the triumph of economic power over other sources of power. It splices this economic power into the intertwined strands of productive capacity (whereby for the first time, in capitalist modernity, humankind begins by social organization to master nature and free itself from the continual threat of starvation) and productive domination (wherein this accomplishment is premised on the debasement, humiliation, impoverishment, and dehumanization of the proletariat).

However, there is, as many commentators have made clear, a link between this argument and the epistemological framework that Marx used to build explanations of the social world (see, especially, Benton 1977:38–169). In Marx, the social relationship between dominator and dominated is conditioned by the particular way in which a given society relates to nature via labor and, more specifically, by the social-organizational aspects of the production and distribution of the resources created by that labor. This understanding is further inflected by the specifically Marxist concepts of totality (Arato and Breines 1979; Jay 1986) and dialectics (Jay 1996). Hence, there is a connection between Marx’s social theory of power and domination and his methodology/epistemology of historical materialism.

It is a short step to a generalization of the point. For Marx, his historical materialist epistemology inflects his concept(s) of power; for the behavioralists, their methodological individualism inflects their concept of power; as philosophers of social science have made clear, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim thought about the epistemology and methodology of sociological explanation, and in particular social causality, in very different ways (Benton 1977; Hollis 1994; see also Ragin 1987:30–33). One could certainly catalogue the history of theories of power this way. But there is also another possibility: one could develop the power-causality link into a typology of the dimensions of power.<sup>3</sup>

Such a typology would be provisional and nonexhaustive. The point would not be to settle, once and for all, epistemological/ontological disputes about causality but rather to mobilize certain epistemological-ontological constructs—constructs that have already proved useful for grasping how the social world works—to develop a typology useful for research on power and domination. Such an argument takes as a starting point the premise that sociological languages of cause do manage, some of the time, to comprehend the social world “out there” and thus connect the knower and the world (Dewey and Bentley 1949). Because to exercise power in the world is to make something happen, and because we have, in social theory, a complex and pluralistic account of how things are made to happen in the world, we can use our notions of causality to illuminate the concept of power. Three different contemporary epistemologies of social causality, in particular, recommend themselves as the basis for a typology of power’s dimensions. Although these epistemologies have classical sources, I take them in their more contemporary theoretical manifestations for the purpose of this article.

### *Relational-Realist*

In “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology,” Mustafa Emirbayer (1997) argued for a shift to “relational” thinking as the organizing philosophical framework for sociology. This shift, he wrote, would have implications for fundamental sociological concepts, including power (p. 291), which should be rethought along “transactional” or “relational” lines. Emirbayer’s point was that power should be seen as existing, primarily, in the relations that obtain between actors or between positions in a social structure. This relational context is primary, for it is what gives specific individuals what Pierre Bourdieu called a “quantum of social force” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:230). Emirbayer’s article is but one instance of a slew of recent calls for relational sociology (Donati 2010; Vandenberghe 1999; White 2008), a move that is encompassed by the more general turn to sociological realism (Bhaskar 1998; Hedstrom 2005; Porpora 1989; Smith 2010) and that brings a new epistemological understanding to the long-standing sociological emphasis on *social relations* as real and consequential (Blau 1964; Emerson 1962; Simmel 1971; see also Molm, Peterson, and Takahashi 1999).

The research questions implied by this account of social causality are quite present in debates about power. They tend to concern which social mechanisms are present in different cases or historical moments and how and when individuals or groups can trigger them. Consider research on states and state power. Is the modern U.S. state an arena for class struggle, whose administrative capacities are coercive mechanisms that can be activated by some class fractions and not others (Domhoff 1967; Mills 2000)? Or is it rather the case that the military capacities of states themselves constitute and reconstitute classes at certain junctures in history (Mann 1993; Tilly 1990)? How do differences in the organization of social relations outside the state affect state capacities to build infrastructure or distribute food? How do these capacities of states overlap with or enable domination and coercion via war making or tax collection? And so on.

The relational concept of power is sometimes presented in opposition to understandings of power that explain *social* power as originating in *nonsocial* aspects of the world. Thus, one might explain social power via genetic dispositions or psychological traits that result from natural selection, individual rationality and skill at decision making, and so on.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the many iterations of the idea of social structure in sociology and anthropology, including such classic foci of study as kinship systems (Levi-Strauss 1971; White 1963), organizations (Zald 1970), and states (Evans et al. 1985), suggest that such approaches miss an essential aspect of what makes the world work, and thus an essential aspect of power. The various nonsocial traits of individuals have to find expression within a relational structure; to understand how individuals, or groups of individuals, come to have power and thus to control each other requires that we understand the reality of their relations with each other.

### *Discursive-Hermeneutic*

Empirical explanations, or parts of explanations, that reference “discourse” or “discursive formations” or “cultural structures” tend to have a different epistemic structure than do those that reference “relations.” Relying more on hermeneutics than the theorization of mechanisms, such explanations tend to mobilize the idea that meaning should be understood as a system of signification that is (1) relatively anonymous, (2) arbitrary and conventional in its makeup, and (3) diffuse in its presence and effects. These studies tend to make causal claims by collecting many different specific actions into one whole, and they show how these actions all in some way presuppose or are molded by the discursive formation whose discovery and reconstruction is the main occupation of the analyst.

Furthermore, in this approach, explanations often rely upon an insight of social theories of discourse, namely, that meaning can be most effective when it is imprecise, ambiguous, or referentially vague. The emotional power of certain highly effective tropes whose precision and coherence are wanting, or whose referential, or even semantic, meaning is unclear (e.g., “there is nothing to fear but fear itself,” “to dare is to do,” “Operation Iraqi Freedom”) suggests that the power of meaning to move the social world is not only holistic in nature but also results, in some cases at least, from its inherent ambiguities and the unpredictable ways in which it can be elaborated. This is important, because it means that discourse or meaning *cannot* be broken down into a series of mechanisms at a lower level of analysis—that it resists, in other words, being fully encapsulated as merely a subspecies of relational-realist causality (Reed 2011).

And so, in this dimension of power, capacity and domination are encoded into discourse, with the result that they are as diffuse, anonymous, and idiosyncratic as discourse is. Discursive capacity would be evident in, for example, the way in which a shifting set of meanings around observation and gentlemanly honor enables the development of a scientific mind-set, which in turn aids the development of technology, and the rejection of alchemy, in early modern England (Shapin 1994). Or, when patients are immersed in therapeutic discourses, perhaps discourses in which dreams are discussed and interpreted, the patients are reconstituted as subjects more capable of acting rationally in the world, thus enabling their capacity. However, as this last example suggests, the discursive-hermeneutic approach also offers an account of domination.

If we follow the logic of the power-causality link, then, we can see Edward Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* as a classic analysis of the discursive dimension of power. Said argued that it was only by investigating and interpreting how British and French administrators and intellectuals *imagined* and *signified* the East that researchers could comprehend fully the domination involved in the colonial ventures of those (and other modern Western) empires. In so doing, he revealed a complex discursive formation that guided the design of colonial

programs of domination and that supported and justified this domination to both Western and Eastern populations. His investigation was of a meaningful whole, whose effects were wide-ranging, diffuse, and constitutive of “the East” as an object of interest to “the West.” Thus the discursive formation is what explains (or helps explain) the social actions of the British and French colonizers of the Middle East and, less directly, some of the actions of the colonized as well.<sup>5</sup>

### *Performative-Pragmatist*

The reengagement with pragmatism entered sociology as a way to reconceptualize social action and, in particular, as a way to avoid the Parsonsian model of norm- and value-guided action, which was tied to the Weberian model of means-and-ends rationality (Joas 1996; Swidler 1986). But more recently, ideas from pragmatist philosophy and sociology have been developed as a response to both mechanistic and discursive models of causality, particularly by refocusing analysis on concrete action sequences. So, the development of “cultural pragmatics” in cultural sociology has emphasized how culture must be made to “walk and talk,” via a “mise-en-scène” (Alexander 2004; Alexander, Giesen, and Mast 2006). Furthermore, a pragmatic account of human actors as oscillating between creativity and habit has been explicitly proposed by Neil Gross (2009) as a different approach to mechanistic causality. “Pragmatists,” he wrote, “would view social mechanisms as composed of chains or aggregations of actors confronting problem situations and mobilizing more or less habitual responses” (p. 368).

In both of these streams of theoretical thinking, the *situated creativity of action* (Joas 1996) is essential to understanding how social life works. This connects to a long-standing sociological tradition of micro-analysis that has used dramatic metaphors and analyzed how interactions proceed via such concepts as “felicity’s condition” and “interaction ritual chains” (Collins 2005; Goffman 1983). Performance, furthermore, does not have to be limited to the micro level. Performative action can have effects on the level of interpersonal dyad, but also in a more “macro” way, as in media events or social dramas (Dayan and Katz 1992; Turner 1975).

If we pursue the power-causality link, pressing on this notion of the “performative” and the focus on creative action, we come across a causal grounding that departs from relational positionings in a social structure and from discursive formations. The performative-pragmatic epistemology, in other words, contains a different image of social causality. I will attempt to show this, first through an analogy from speech act theory and, second, via the approach to action and intersubjectivity pioneered by George Herbert Mead and reconstructed by Hans Joas.

Speech act theory concerns itself with analytically differentiating the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary aspects of utterances. Briefly, the first refers to what is said, the second to what one does in saying something, the third to what one does by saying something. If I say, “This class will end in 10 minutes,” I am making a prediction about a fact in the world (locutionary); constructing a quasi-promise to my students, given how they are likely to interpret me (illocutionary); and, finally, creating an effect on my students’ actions: they will start packing their bags in approximately 10 minutes, even if I am still lecturing (perlocutionary). These dimensions of utterances can be used to distinguish different sorts of speech acts, and originally, J. L. Austin made a distinction between “constative” and “performative” utterances. The implication was that “performatives” such as promises, wedding declarations, and threats lean heavily on their illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects. Constatives can, primarily, be judged referentially for their truth or falsity, while performatives are judged felicitous or infelicitous, depending on whether they *work*. Judith Butler,

drawing on (and creatively interpreting) this work—and the debate between Jacques Derrida and John Searle—pointed out that such utterances can also be thought of as acts of power. The question for speech act philosophy thus becomes how the “illocutionary” and “perlocutionary” forces that inhere in speech acts are also forces that can enact domination, if also enable resistance (Austin 1975; Butler 1997a:9–12; Searle 1974:54–71; see also Bach 2006).

Much of this philosophical work functions within an intellectual space circumscribed by ordinary language philosophy and the emphasis, in poststructuralism, on the ambiguities of the spoken and/or written word. But we can extrapolate from this work an analogy for the analysis of the power-causality link in the social world. The analogy is this: power is *performative insofar as* its carrying through in social action is like a speech act that threatens, pronounces, or promises; it is relational or discursive insofar as its carrying through is like a speech act that states a proposition or reports upon the world. So, just as some speech acts can be “verified” by checking to see if they say something referentially true, some exercises of power can be *referred back to* the relational positionality or discursive codings from which they emanate. In contrast, other exercises of power cannot be referred back to the “map of social power in a fairly fixed way” (Butler 1999:122). Instead, they have to be analyzed as themselves possessing social force, force that derives from their concrete temporal positioning and intersubjective situationality vis-à-vis other actions. Thus “performance” or “performativity” can *create* social power rather than just *expressing* those power relations that already exist, in analogy with how some speech acts can create a marriage or name a ship, rather than just reporting on its existence.

This analogy underwrites a lot of social scientific appropriation of the concept of performativity (particularly given the influence of Butler’s work and the development, in that work, of a certain interpretation of Austin, Searle, and Derrida). However, the ultimate causal imagery underlying this idea is to be found not in poststructuralism per se but in the pragmatist philosophy of G. H. Mead. Mead’s pragmatics transforms the performative metaphor into an ontology. In Mead’s social theory, *acts themselves* matter for future actions, and thus exert power over them, power that is not “delegated” to the act from previously existing power relations (for discussion of this “delegation,” see Bourdieu 1993a; Butler 1999).

In his later writings and lectures, Mead elaborated a philosophy of temporality, and of the interaction of human actors with one another and the physical world, that departed from both mechanistic determinism and teleological philosophies of history. For Mead, the past is contained in the present via the previously made adjustments to habits of action that the actor carries with him; the future is contained in the present via the “control which the changing field of experience during the act maintains over its execution” (Mead 1934:351, cited in Joas 1985). When one adds to this ontology of time the way in which Mead embedded human action in intersubjective praxis, the ontology that results is one in which the socially constituted, physically situated “event” has a causal power of its own. In this view, eventful action exceeds its past determinants and thus exercises its own sort of control on the future.

This is the performative-pragmatic image of social causality in its pure form. When several actors come together to act, the intersubjectively constituted present of the “undertaking” or task, that is, “what we are doing,” connects to the past and the future via conditioning and control, respectively, but the “event” is, *sui generis*, its own form of causal power. This is because the emergent sociality of the event places it precisely “betwixt and between” two well-formed systems of relations: “the novel event is in both the old order and the new which its advent heralds. Sociality is the capacity of being several things at once” (Joas 1985:183; Mead 1932:49).

In this space of the “event,” acts themselves have the capacity to transform the habits and social relations from which they emerge; this temporal philosophy, then, points to the same aspect of social life as do theories of “performative” speech acts: the autonomy of the act itself, situated in time and space vis-à-vis other actors, to affect what happens in the future.

One response to a careful reading of Mead's later philosophy has been to propose it as *the* rendering of reality appropriate for the social sciences, a kind of underlying temporal philosophy for constructing the relationship between history and sociology (Abbott 2001:224–30). My proposal is less bold: it is simply that, in discussing action in this way, Mead has pointed us to *one* mode of causality in the social world. I thus propose to bring this mode of causality into conversation with the others, for the specific purpose of better understanding the dimensions of power.

### *From Epistemology and Ontology to the Dimensions of Power*

Epistemological and ontological arguments are often pitched a metatheoretical level. Even if they do not claim to be “foundational” in some logical-positivist sense, they nonetheless tend to work at the level of “presuppositions” (Alexander 1981) or preliminaries, and as such are often thought to be mutually exclusive. My argument here is for a shift in the level of abstraction, motivated by an intuition that doing so will allow for the development of better conceptual tools to aid research on power and domination. Instead of seeing the three causal images presented above as incommensurable “paradigms,” I propose that we use them to construct a multidimensional account of power in the world. This account is intended to function as a working typology, amendable in various ways, and useful precisely to the degree that it allows an examination of how the different dimensions of power interact, condition one another, and develop historically. It is also intended to cross-cut the theoretical distinctions that define the sources approach to power. To signal this shift, I drop the latter, epistemological part of each of the hyphenated titles of the above sections, rendering a three-fold typology of power: relational, discursive, and performative.

## THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF POWER: DEFINITIONS AND AN EXAMPLE

*Relational power* refers to the degree to which the structure of relations or ties between actors (where relations or ties can be variously constituted, and actors can be individual or collective) determines the ability of some actors to control or limit the actions of others, achieve their intentions over against the will of others, and generally possess the ability to direct social life, often to their advantage. Power, insofar as it is relational, derives from *positionality in a structure of social relations*. This positionality can be dynamic, and some forms of relational power involve social mechanisms.

*Discursive power* refers to the degree to which the categories of thought, symbolizations and linguistic conventions, and meaningful models of and for the world determine the ability of some actors to control the actions of others, or to obtain new capacities. Power is discursive to the degree that it is “written into” signification and perception, and this signification and perception creates or shapes certain kinds of subjects, reinforces certain hegemonic assumptions, and/or naturalizes a particular set of social objects or modality of social relations. Discursive power tends to be diffuse and can often work best when it hides its workings and appears *not* to be an exercise of power.

*Performative power* refers to how situated action and interaction exerts control over actors and their future actions. In performative power, well-timed acts, “in tune” with the situation, provide actors with another route to a “quantum of social force” and to “making B do something he would not otherwise do.” Power is performative to the degree that it rests in the particular “eventness” of a specific set of concrete actions. It often works by transforming actors’ expectations and emotions, and thereby (contributing to the) control or coordination of their future actions. Performative power, in contrast to discursive power, can

often (if not always) magnify itself by becoming a public spectacle or drawing attention to itself. It is successful when a performance “comes off” or is felicitous. In the performative dimension of power, the temporal and spatial dimensions of action are brought to the fore, in contrast to actions’ embeddedness in relational structures or discursive formations.

### *An Example of Power’s Dimensions: Storming the Bastille and the French Revolution*

I take an example here from my own field of study, comparative-historical sociology, in an attempt to make clear how the same process could be analyzed in terms of the three dimensions of power. I rely on classic accounts of the French Revolution and its signal event, the storming of the Bastille, to illuminate the concepts of relational and discursive power; I then add to these readings of the French Revolution the dimension of performative power, relying upon, but rereading, the work of William Sewell Jr. on the Bastille as an event.

### *Relational Power and the French Revolution*

Theda Skocpol’s (1979) argument about revolutions is a classic example of relational power analysis. The relational position of states vis-à-vis other states in international competitions, combined with the structural likelihood of peasant revolt, and of course, the relative autonomy of state and class power are the essential features of her causal analysis of the power grabs that are revolutions. More specifically, however, she explained the events of the summer of 1789, including the fall of the Bastille, in this way:

Thus, by the early summer of 1789, the quarrels within the dominant class over forms of representation culminated in a victory for the Parisian National Assembly and its various liberal, urban supporters throughout France. And a concomitant of this victory was the sudden devolution of control over the means of administration and coercion from the normally centralized royal administration into the decentralized possession of the various cities and towns, mostly controlled by the supporters of the National Assembly. (p. 67)

One can quibble with Skocpol’s emphases on certain relationalities in explaining this key point in the French Revolution, but it is difficult to imagine a more clear indication of the power-causality link as it is understood relationally: at each point, Skocpol relates control and domination to the dynamic, underlying relationalities between different collective actors. More generally, one might posit the relational dimension of power as that which frames most debates in the second wave of comparative-historical sociology (Adams, Clemens, and Orloff 2005).

### *Discursive Power and the French Revolution*

Interest in the discursive dimension of power animates the explosion of research on the “cultural” or “ideological” aspect of the French Revolution. Keith Michael Baker (1990), in his account of the ideological origins of the revolution, explained that

the emergence, elaboration, and interpretation of these three discourses [of justice, will and reason] . . . defined the political culture that emerged in France in the later part of the eighteenth century and provided the ideological framework that gave explosive

meaning to the events that destroyed the Old Regime. The origins of the political language of 1789, the language that came to constitute the grounding of the new order . . . seems to have been created from the competition among them. (p. 27)

In her own study of the “poetics of power” in the revolution, Lynn Hunt (1984) framed her argument about the language of revolution in the following way:

Revolutionary language did not simply reflect the realities of revolutionary changes and conflicts . . . political language was not merely an expression of an ideological position that was determined by underlying social or political interests. The language itself helped shape the perception of interests and hence the development of ideologies . . . revolutionary political discourse was rhetorical; it was a means of persuasion, a way of reconstituting the social and political world. (p. 24)

Perhaps the key phrase here is “helped shape the perception of interests.” Variations on this phrase often accompany an analysis of the discursive dimension of power, and they reach back to Lukes’s argument about power’s third face or dimension. The analysis of the discursive dimension of power is a generalization of this argument, one that detaches the analysis of how discourse inflects social relations from any specific understanding of actors’ objective interests. The point is to hermeneutically reconstruct discourse, so as to understand how the symbolic landscape itself encodes advantage or disadvantage, power to and power over, and so on.

### *The Event of “the Bastille” and Performative Power*

It was in the context of the turn toward discursive power in the study of the French Revolution that William Sewell Jr. developed his argument about the Bastille, namely, that this event “invented revolution.” What the Bastille did, Sewell argued, was articulate through a dialectic of action and interpretation the fusion of popular violence and democratic sovereignty that would come to be known as the French Revolution. This connects directly to arguments in the cultural history of the revolution concerning the emergence onto the political scene of late *ancien régime* France of “the people” or “the public” as a relevant source of political legitimacy.

Although Sewell’s work emerged from a shift in thinking about the revolution that emphasized discursive power, his analysis of the fall of the Bastille pushes beyond this toward a concept of performative power. The Bastille was, after all, an “event,” and it is this “event-ness” that should alert us to its performative dimension.<sup>6</sup> Sewell’s specific historical focus is in fact on the timing and ordering of action in the summer of 1789. Sewell points to the variety of historical contingencies and specific performative maneuvers—actions and rhetoric, made *in medias res* of the event—that brought the revolution into being, and in particular enabled some actors to control others, some violence to be legitimated and other violent acts condemned, and so on. In my view, this is an iconic argument about performative power

However, Sewell does *not* frame his understanding of action and interpretation during events as a study of a different dimension of power, one perhaps particularly likely to emerge during “unsettled times” (Swidler 2001). Rather, Sewell refers to relational power at the very end of his argument about the Bastille as event, in his discussion of the “authoritative sanction” given to a certain interpretation of events by “the central governing authorities” (Sewell 1996:875). In other words, he argues that the interpretation of the Bastille as the beginning of a popular democratic revolution carried weight because as an interpretation, it

happened from a certain position within a relational structure: a powerful institution constituted as an authority before the event. Not just anyone could interpret the Bastille as the expression of the sovereignty of the French people. Rather, it was the institutional location of the National Assembly that made the rhetoric elaborated there so consequential. Sewell expands this argument to suggest that authoritative interpretations will emerge from the institutional location proper to the actions under study:

We should expect the location of rearticulating action to vary with the setting and scope of the event. A religious event might well achieve its authoritative resolution in a religious institutional setting. . . . A rupture in kinship relations might be sanctioned by the elders of the clan or by a tacit agreement on the part of the appropriate kinsmen. Where authoritative rearticulations will be achieved depends on what modes of power are activated or challenged by the event in question and on the particular institutional nodes in which the affected power is concentrated. (p. 875)

This is a useful general hypothesis that implicitly draws on the “sources” approach to power: relational power is the key dimension, and different “sources” generate power, especially for actions that are within their arena.

However, even if one were to find this hypothesis to be true for a wide variety of cases, one might still want to know why some performances in the National Assembly were more persuasive than others, why the actions of storming the Bastille demanded a certain sort of in situ response, and what interpretations of that event were specifically and radically excluded through interaction in the assembly. To do this, one would have to posit that power derives not only from structural position and extant discursive codings but also from the anatomy of performances themselves, which is to say, from action for an audience that occurs in concrete space and time, and draws upon both habit and creativity.

Interestingly, in the empirical part of Sewell’s essay on the Bastille, he is *not* concerned with the relational positioning of the National Assembly (à la Skocpol), *nor* is he concerned with the rise of enlightenment ideology (à la Baker and much of his own work). Rather, he is attuned to the way in which the actions of the crowd and the reporting of the crowd’s actions in popular newspapers such as *Les Révolutions de Paris* combined in an artful dance with the interpretation of popular violence in the National Assembly to produce the “event” of the Bastille and its revolutionary significance (Sewell 1996:852–60). In Sewell’s account, the storming of the Bastille is not something that can be explained with concepts of relational and discursive power; as an “event,” it needs the concept of performative power as well. So, his essay can be read as implicitly posing the question, What is the relationship between relational, discursive, and performative power? It is to this question that I turn next.

## RELATIONS BETWEEN THE THREE DIMENSIONS: HYPOTHESES AND DISCUSSION

### *How Autonomous Is the Performative?*

Discursive power and relational power have to be “acted out.” As countless theorists have shown, social structures and symbolic schemas have to be “instantiated” or “made real” or “find expression in” actions by human individuals; for this reason, “structure” and “action” are intertwined, codependent, or co-constitutive. Does this mean that performative power, as I am developing it here, is just the “other side of the coin” (or coins) of discursive and relational power? I believe it is not, and I will try to explain why.

Rather than just viewing “performance” as a new word for “action,” performative *power* should index the degree to which capacity and domination are traceable to the situated effectiveness of acts themselves as movers of the world. It should be a way to pursue the empirical variability in the degree to which this format of power *exceeds* the typical structure-and-action dialectic. The analogy to speech acts is important here: what performative power traces is when situated action is like a promise or a wedding vow, rather than a statement with a clear reference and truth-value. If, when someone acts, his effectiveness derives from the way he has been *delegated* to act by certain discursive codings or relational positionings, that is, in the analogy, like a constative speech act. If, when someone acts, her effectiveness derives from her performative power, that is, in the analogy, like a performative speech act. Thus what we want to know, with performative power, is when and how situated action itself has outsized impact on social convention, structural arrangements, discursive formations, and so on (for more on this issue, and other theorizations of this analogy, see Bourdieu 1993a; Butler, 1997a, 1999; Derrida 1988).

The move to thinking about performative power in this way—and, specifically, *not* as a retread of structure versus action—has certain positive consequences for research. The much-theorized way in which performativity “cites” discursive codings and social relations that are not immediately present in the act itself becomes a point for empirical research on the interactions between the three dimensions of power. From the dimensional perspective developed here, *the degree to which performative power matters is an empirical question*, rather than a metaphysical constant or metatheoretical assumption. The question becomes, To what degree do the timing, emotional resonance, and rhetorical effectiveness of actions—in contrast to the social position of the actors doing the actions, or the codes and narratives cited by actors who “frame” an issue—give some actors control over others, or give some actors increased capacity to move in the world? The degree to which this is the case, in a given case or situation under study, is the degree to which performative power is autonomous from relational or discursive power.

We have a lot of theories of performance but, in my view, very little empirical research explicitly directed at this issue. To move this question of the autonomy of performative power in the direction of research, I offer two ideas for further research.

1. In one common process, the aggregation of “micro” acts of performative power over time creates a shift in discursive or relational power. What are the institutional conditions that make this process likely to occur?

A relationship of aggregation between micro-performative power and discursive power is the underlying sociological dynamic in many of the cases that Judith Butler relies upon in her theoretical discussions of power. Butler theorizes the reappropriation of pejorative names and slurs as a kind of performativity that can result in a shift in the discursive constructs from which name-calling originally derived. The politics surrounding the term *queer* are perhaps the classic example in this regard, though she extends the analysis to hate speech more generally and to the subtle ways in which hateful speech acts can also create the opportunity for their resistance (Butler 1997a). In this dynamic, “micro-performatives” cycle back into the discursive formations that they themselves cite when they enact reappropriation and resistance. The point is that the citing of discursive codings can, depending on the situation and context, surprisingly twist the taken-for-granted meanings embedded in those codings. Over time, these performative reappropriations can alter the taken-for-granted discursive structure. The question of how this happens is rendered more complex by the question of whether such performatives are uttered by actors in civil society, or by actors acting in the name of the state, thus implying a relationship between micro-performatives and relational power as well.

If this is proposed as a process whereby performative power relates to discursive and relational power, then a key research question emerges: what conditions enable these sorts of aggregations to be effective? Not all attempts to reappropriate a hateful term over time are successful. In the case of *queer*, we might point to the existence of a “civil sphere” that discursively constructs all citizens as entitled to equal access to rights and fair treatment, and the application of this schema to homosexually identified individuals or to the discursive construction of the civil rights movement as a heroic accomplishment whose memory informs later struggles (Alexander 2006).

2. In many situations, macro-performances are parasitic upon, or merely “express,” relational and discursive power. That is, a “performance” takes place, but very little, if any, performative power is exercised. In contrast, there are certain situations in which macro-performative power is vital. Identifying and explaining the difference between these two sorts of situations could become a central focus of empirical research.

It is undoubtedly the case that the president’s State of the Union address is a grand, dramatic, and widely viewed happening in the United States. Many methodological innovations have been developed to gauge its rhetorical effects on various audiences. But its power-effects are, at most, extremely limited vis-à-vis the relational and discursive power formations of American politics. Thus, though it is perhaps usefully interpreted as a sort of “drama,” the actual performative power of the State of the Union is close to nil. With certain interesting exceptions, the State of the Union almost never allows presidents to better leverage Congress—that is, to make congresspersons do something they would not otherwise do—though it can help promote already popular proposals a bit (Canes-Wrone 2001; Edwards 2006; Jones 2010). Thus we can say that the State of the Union address is a case in which performative power has *almost no autonomy whatsoever* from the relational and discursive dimensions of political power; a “performance” exists in some existential sense, but it does not develop autonomous power.

Generalizing from this, we might propose that there are a class of events (pseudoevents?) that are not really contexts for performative *power* per se so much as they are a parasitical dramatization of relational and discursive power. In contrast, it is also clear that there are other events in which performative power takes on a life of its own and becomes incredibly important. One can “invent” revolution by storming the Bastille; one can “proclaim the republic” as Von Hindenberg did; one can found a new legal and political order as the central political act of a revolution (Arendt 1993:138–41). In such moments, certain acts take on outsized importance and exert tremendous control over future actions, placing such situations at the opposite end of the spectrum of performative power from the State of the Union address.

Two research questions emerge from this. First, what accounts for the variation in the importance of performative power for outcomes? One suspects that what is required here is an operationalization of Swidler’s (2001) concept of “unsettled times”—that is, social situations in which the standard (if varied) institutional guides for action disappear or are muted. Second, in the historical contexts in which performative power becomes extremely important, how does the performative dimension of power relate to the classic concerns of social theories of power, namely, the relationship between capacity and domination and the different sources of social power? Are there certain sources of power for which the performative dimension is more important? Is there historical variation in the way in which performative power from one sphere relates to performative power in another? These questions bring me to the final substantive argument of this article.

## DIFFERENTIATING THE SOURCES AND DIMENSIONS OF POWER IN FRAMING SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Consider again the argument—common to Mann, Poggi, and Scott and perhaps implied in field theory and in systems theory—that power is differentiated in terms of its sources. In this view, the capacity to make a difference in how other human beings make a difference (Poggi 2001) is mapped in terms of the institutionally or organizationally defined social means to power—wealth, status, piety, loyalty, command, violence, and so on. As I argued above, this theorization of power's sources suggests certain programmatic research questions: how do the sources of power interact, and how do their relations change historically? Is there a tendency for certain sources of power to become more autonomous from one another over long periods of historical time? Are some societies, or certain practices within those societies, dominated by a given source of power? What is the relationship among different kinds of elites, when elites are defined by their advantages vis-à-vis a given source of power?

I view these questions as essential. The argument of this article is that theorizing power *only* in terms of its sources may underestimate the complexities of power and thus block other essential research questions from view. In particular, the risk is that the different *dimensions* of power (relational, discursive, performative) may be obfuscated by, or conflated with, power's sources (economic, political, military, ideological/religious). In this section, I try to provide a framework for clarifying the distinction.

### *Cross-Tabulating the Dimensions and the Sources of Power*

I propose that the analysis of power could be represented by a three-by-four table, crossing the dimensions with the sources of power, if we follow Mann's sources typology of power (and substituting "cultural" for "ideological"). In Table 1, I have given a typified example of for each cell.

Such a table is necessarily schematic and does *not* address what surely would be some of the most vital information in any empirical study, namely, the relationships that obtain among different cells in the table. But what it does suggest is a way to ask more nuanced questions about power by using both the "sources" and "dimensions" axes. So, for example, let us say that a researcher is pursuing a hypothesis about the existence of a "power elite." In particular, she has evidence to show how, at a certain time in a certain society, the political elite, economic elite, and military elite are, comparatively speaking, more unified than in other societies. Using the dimensions question, she might ask how this commonality among the power elite came to be and how it holds together. Is it, for example, primarily an issue of exchange relationships and patronage, or does a shared worldview that encodes certain people as inherently, naturally superior, really matter? Or was there a massive crisis in which members of the previously differentiated military, economic, and political elite publically acted in a way that bound them together, performatively? These are the kinds of questions that could be asked, if the dimensions of power are not conflated with its sources.

### *An Example: Differentiating Discursive from Cultural Power*

The utility of separating power's dimensions from its sources is perhaps most evident in the way it can resolve a fundamental ambiguity about "cultural" or "ideological" power that runs through the sociological literature. There is a tendency to fail to differentiate between culture as a separate *source* of power (and thus the "sphere" or location of the resource of

**Table 1.** Examples of Power, Tabulated by Source and Dimension.

| Dimensions of Power | Relational   | Sources of Power                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                     |              | Economic                                                                                                                                                                                  | Political                                                                                                                                                       | Cultural                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Military                                                                                                                              |
|                     |              | Tendency of the general rate of profit to fall because of the falling ratio of surplus value to invested total capital (Marx, <i>Capital</i> , vol. 3, chap. 13)                          | The network structure of different absolutist regimes in early modern Europe (Mann 1993:177)                                                                    | The institutionalization of a distinction between “high” and “popular” culture (Dimaggio 1991:376); the development of a “spiritual marketplace” (Roof 2001)                                                        | The development of semiautonomous military networks as a part of state building (Hyslop 2009)                                         |
|                     | Discursive   | The construction of consumer expectations of the future through the media (Block 1990:31); the reframing of workers’ demands and strikes as “communist” and “the very devil” (Isaac 2002) | The construction of “the public” or “the people” as an important political actor (Baker 1990:172)                                                               | The structuring of the religious field (in part) by the distinction between “sacred” and “profane” (Bourdieu 1991; Durkheim 1995)                                                                                   | Reconstruction of the soldier from a subject to be found or discovered to a subject that can be made or molded (Foucault 1995:135–36) |
|                     | Performative | The impact of public disclosure of sweatshop practices on stock prices (Rock 2003)                                                                                                        | The “founding act” of a constitution that establishes a legal order (Arendt 1993:138–41); the negotiation of a scandal by a president and his staff (Mast 2012) | The miracles enacted by a charismatic religious leader (Weber 1978:1111–57); the constructive innovation of form in a literary work, particularly during a time of crisis in the literary field (White 1975:108–10) | The effect of nuclear weapons tests on the balance of power between nations (Paul 2003:26)                                            |

prestige, honor, lifestyle or holiness) and culture as a *dimension* of power. Following Foucault and several of the historians of political culture, I suggest we call the cultural *dimension* of power “discursive power” or the power of “discursive formations,” so as to differentiate it from the idea that one of the sources of power is “culture-producing” institutions, organizations, and fields such as art and religion. It is of course difficult to corral any use of the term culture in the social sciences, but I will try to justify this suggestion briefly.

Generally speaking, when we refer to networks of cultural elites—such as Boston Brahmins who design the organizational basis for symphonic music (Dimaggio 1991)—and

ask empirical questions about the overlap of those elites with political and economic elites, we are asking about cultural power in sense of the *sources* of social power. But if we ask about the “cultural” dimension of economics and fiscal policy, or the framing techniques of social movements, we are asking about discursive power in *dimensional* sense. The sources notion of cultural power is the basis for the sociology of culture, which has, since the sociological classics, taken art and religion as the “model systems” of culture (Guggenheim and Krause 2012). The dimensional analysis of discourse, on the other hand, refers not to an institutional sphere of human activity but rather to a causal feature of the social world. Discursive power is potentially present, in empirically variable ways, in any sphere of activity.

Both ideas—cultural sources of power and the discursive dimension of power—are present in the work of Pierre Bourdieu. The literature on Bourdieu’s conceptualization of culture and power is voluminous and could be the subject of an article unto itself (and see especially Swartz 1997), but even a brief examination of some different Bourdieusian arguments will reveal what I mean. On one hand, Bourdieu was at repeated pains to analytically distinguish—and then show the relations that obtain between—discursive and relational power in a given field, and highly critical of any tendency in the sociology of religion, art, education, the state, politics, and so on, to underestimate one or the other (e.g., Bourdieu 1991, 1995). Fields, in other words, have symbolic (i.e., discursive) and social (i.e., relational) aspects that structure the complex strategies of the actors therein. So, they can be analyzed *internally* for the interactions between symbolic oppositions and social groupings. This sort of analysis can be performed on fields that are, and are not, tagged as “cultural.” Thus, Bourdieu’s (1993b:72–74) account of field-specific capitals, or of the “laws” of field formation, constructs a research program on the relationship between discursive and relational power in different arenas of struggle and the expression of this relationship in the habitus of actors involved in a given field.

On the other hand, Bourdieu’s analysis of the relations *between* different fields, and in particular his critical engagement with both orthodox and Althusserian Marxism on the relationship of economy, state, and culture, constitutes an argument about the different *sources* of power. In particular, Bourdieu marshaled a great deal of evidence, and theoretical concepts such as habitus and structural homology, to explain how cultural power (produced in such fields as religion, art, and science, for example) influenced modern, differentiated societies (Bourdieu 1984). He thus developed a theory about the relationship of cultural to political and especially economic power.<sup>7</sup>

## CONCLUSION: THEORIZING THE DIMENSIONS OF POWER WITH, AND BEYOND, LUKES

In his text *Power: A Radical View*, originally published in 1974, Steven Lukes proposed to analyze power’s “dimensions.” Since that time, debate on power has proliferated in many different intellectual directions, some of them deeply influenced by the work of Michel Foucault on power, others taking place in the arena of neo-Weberian considerations of the different sources of social power. Lukes (2005), in his updated edition of *Power: A Radical View*, directly engaged Foucault-inspired studies of power as the “ultraradical” view of power, an engagement prompted, perhaps, by claims that Foucault had discovered or theorized a “fourth dimension” of power in his studies on discourse and the constitution of subjects.

For Lukes, the analysis of the dimensions of power maintains the concept of power as simultaneously analytical and moral. The dimensions of power are articulated in relation to the concept of interest, a concept that is understood to be normatively loaded. Lukes’s three

dimensions of power are three different ways in which the workings of the social world intersect with the capacity of reason-possessing human actors to recognize, articulate, represent, and accomplish their interests. In the first dimension, interests are clear, important issues are up for debate, and power is exercised by those who see their interests through, over and against those who fail to do so. In the second dimension, certain interests are kept out of the public eye, off the bargaining table, or relatively unarticulated, though they nonetheless exist for some actors who are affected by decisions and nondecisions. In the third dimension, wants and desires are manipulated to the point that actors' real or objective interests become shrouded from the actors themselves, replaced by the subjective interests produced by the various structures that surround them. This I take to be the uncontroversial understanding of Lukes's schema. It has resulted in the well-known controversy over when and how an observer can claim that a certain set of actors have "real interests" that differ from what those actors say or see their interests to be.

Lukes deliberately connects his work on power to normative concerns in social science. And it is this connection—between his articulation of the dimensions of power and the concept of interests—that enables him to argue in considerable detail that although Foucault's work has vastly expanded our understanding of the mechanisms by which willing compliance is achieved, it has not succeeded in overthrowing or replacing the fundamental conceptual connection between evaluating a situation to be one of "domination" and the normative commitment to certain ideas of freedom, reason, and individual interest.

In this article, I have picked up on a different theme in Lukes's work, namely, the connection between our ontologies of the social world and theorizing power. Rather than relating power to interests, and parsing that relation into three (or four) dimensions, I have returned to the fundamental analytic break that Lukes made with the pluralists and sought an analytics of power grounded in different causal images of the social world. From this point of view, Lukes's argument was an argument to broaden the analytical toolkit we possess for studying power in sociology.<sup>8</sup> In the terms of this article, Lukes's development of the Gramscian-Marxist view emphasized a central way in which discursive and relational power intersect in modern, capitalist societies. This was a format of power that, Lukes argued, could not be adequately analyzed within the behavioralist framework then dominant in American political science.

By using the language of dimensions to highlight the link between power and causality, I am arguing in this article that we need to *further* expand the conceptual repertoire of sociology for understanding power. My efforts in this regard have been motivated pragmatically: I have taken three epistemological constructs of social causality that I take to be useful in understanding how the social world works and turned them into a typology of power's dimensions. Other inquiries into the dimensions of power are possible.<sup>9</sup> But in this article, I have attempted in particular to show that we need, in sociology, to analytically separate performative power from discursive and relational power and that doing so will allow us to expand the sorts of questions we can ask when we research power.

In the end, to start making judgments about domination, all three of the dimensions of power here would have to be related to a concept of actors' interests, or perhaps a more general normative account of the good society. My argument here has not been for a better critique of power but rather for a better analysis of it. If sociologists were to mobilize the conceptual link between power and causality in empirical research, and thus study not only power's sources but also its dimensions, I believe our analytic understanding of, and store of knowledge about, power would improve. This, in turn, would better inform normative debates about domination and how to alleviate it.

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## NOTES

1. Adam Slez and John Levi Martin (2007) argued that examining the “temporal dynamics of political action” allows one to better explain what happened at the Constitutional Convention. In particular, they “find that the meaning of any one issue—what it implied for alignments and oppositions between actors—was conditional on how previous questions had been decided” (p. 43).
2. Some commentators have attempted to separate out “modern” concepts of power focused on the state, the economy, and ideology from “postmodern” concepts of power focused on micro-processes and discursive effects, often with the implication that the first is “causal” and the second “interpretive” (Clegg 1989; Torfing 2009). But this division of the field is rendered somewhat suspect by commentators who have connected Foucault’s theory of power to that of Parsons (Brenner 1994; Giddens 1984; Kroker 1984), noting that both emphasized power as an ever present, systemwide property of modern societies.
3. Interestingly, in Dahl’s 1957 article “The Concept of Power,” he explicitly stated that he would “steer clear of the possible identity of ‘power’ with ‘cause,’ and the host of problems this identity might give rise to” (p. 203).
4. Famously, the status attainment research program attempted to parse how factors such as parents’ education and income, compared with innate cognitive ability, predicted mobility or status achievement; this literature has been given new “nonsocial” factors to consider by work on gene and environment interactions (Adkins and Guo 2008; Adkins and Vaisey 2009).
5. Said’s explanations have been criticized by sociologists as too discursive in orientation, not only from the perspective of those more interested in the political economy of colonialism but also by those who want to specify how the discursive formation of Orientalist representations of the non-Western was institutionalized in specific ways. According to George Steinmetz (2007), Said’s discursivism, “is reductionist in its causal imagery and its lack of attention to social and psychic levels of causality” (p. 26). Steinmetz’s critique highlights the need to analytically separate the dimensions of power, so that their various intersections and interactions can be examined empirically.
6. For the social theory of events, see Wagner-Pacifi (2010).
7. For extended debate on how fields relate to one another, and the strengths and weaknesses of Bourdieu’s social theory in this regard, see Calhoun (1993) and Eyal (2011).
8. Hence his willingness to pursue counterfactuals as part of arguments about the third dimension of power (Lukes 2005:44).
9. Thus, in contrast to the focus here, one might develop the causal schemas associated with psychoanalytic theory—in particular, perhaps, those that refer to the unconscious motivations of behavior and sexual symbolization—into a dimension of power. See Butler (1997b) and Steinmetz (2007:55–65).

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