Vive la crise?! Autonomy and Heterodoxy in and of the Social Sciences

Anniversary Conference Marking the 25th Anniversary of Pierre Bourdieu's Death and the 35th Anniversary of the Centre Marc Bloch

Date: 30/09/2027 - 02/10/2027

Pierre Bourdieu unquestionably ranks among the most influential sociologists of the twentieth century. Far from diminishing during the first decades of the twenty-first century, the impact of his work has continued to generate new waves of reception and to inspire a wide range of research projects. His writings, devoted to establishing a relational nexus between social theory, reflexive methodology, and empirical research practice, remain a foundational source of inspiration for scholars across diverse traditions and subfields of the social sciences engaged in the critical analysis of contemporary social transformations. The distinctive style of thought and inquiry developed by Bourdieu is documented in a substantial body of work, several milestones of which will themselves celebrate anniversaries in 2027. Among these are *La misère du monde* (1993) and *Le Sens pratique* (1980), which appeared in German translation thirty and forty years ago respectively, as well as major works such as *Les règles de l'art* (1992), *Réponses: Pour une anthropologie réflexive* (1992), and *Méditations pascaliennes* (1997), each of which can now look back on thirty-five to forty years of international reception. Rather than gathering dust in the sociological pantheon and losing their relevance, these and many other works appear perhaps more insightful and indispensable than ever before, particularly in light of current societal transformations both within and beyond academia. The international conference "Vive la crise?! Autonomy and Heterodoxy in and of the Social Sciences" is dedicated to the style of thought and inquiry indebted to Bourdieu's legacy. It seeks to explore its effects across diverse (thematic, national, cultural) academic contexts, to critically examine the conditions under which it can be productively reactivated in the present, and to assess its analytical potential for understanding contemporary social developments.

The conference is structured around a twofold heuristic strategy. *On the one hand*, it seeks to investigate the influence of Bourdieusian modes of inquiry on research that subjects the challenges and "crises" of the present—and the social responses they provoke—to critical scrutiny, aimed at opposing tendencies toward affirmation, naturalisation, and, consequently, the reproduction of doxa. With this in mind, the conference aims to assess—and perhaps take stock of—the contribution that a Bourdieusian-inspired relational empirical social science can make to understanding phenomena such as climate change and the growing threat to planetary habitability; financial capitalism and its logics of exploitation and exhaustion; neoliberal regimes of surveillance and incarceration; the global resurgence of authoritarianism and the erosion of democratic institutions; the accompanying restriction and endangerment of academic freedoms; the increasing concentration of wealth and the intensification of social inequalities at both national and global scales; diverse processes of discrimination and marginalisation; as well as contemporary psychopathological tendencies, including forms of exhaustion, novel dimensions of alienation, and an increasing experience of world-loss. Across these and related fields of inquiry, the central question concerns the specific contribution that a sociology informed by Bourdieu's work can make to an analysis of the present that strives to simultaneously uphold its autonomy and heterodox style of thinking.

On the other hand, and in order to address more precisely the social conditions of possibility underlying such a contribution—that is, the conditions governing the production of scientific knowledge and legitimacy—the conference also turns its attention to the praxeological style of thought and inquiry itself as

an object of struggles over autonomy and positionality within the scientific field. Irrespective of particular empirical interests, and in line with the reflexive "sociology of sociology" (Bourdieu 2004), whose simultaneous enactment Bourdieu regarded as a prerequisite for successful sociological inquiry, the conference asks what contribution research inspired by this tradition can make to the production and defence of the very conditions that enable heterodox social science. Consequently, the substantive issues outlined above *simultaneously* touch on the constitution and protection of autonomy and heterodoxy within knowledge production itself. Since the aforementioned contemporary challenges also constitute threats to the autonomy of social-scientific inquiry, the two heuristic dimensions structuring the conference are ultimately inseparable aspects of the same problem: Against the backdrop of globally diverse and increasingly severe political, legal, and economic intrusions into the academic field—pushed by technocratisation, instrumental rationalisation, governmentalisation, libertarianisation, authoritarianisation, and even fascisation—questions concerning the conditions of autonomous and heterodox social science acquire renewed urgency.

Yet the autonomy of scientific inquiry—and, with it, the collective practices of reason upon which the production of knowledge depends—is currently rendered precarious not only through external pressures but also, in a certain sense, from within. For Bourdieu, both the relational mediation between subjectivism and objectivism and the *double rupture* with, on the one hand, the preconstructed concepts and classifications of the discipline and, on the other hand, the primary evidences of everyday subjective perception constituted indispensable conditions for the production of objectified knowledge—conditions that must be continuously re-established against the situatedness of all practices of knowledge production, including one's own. Today, however, these methodological achievements appear in some instances to be increasingly on the defensive even within the social sciences themselves. The fundamental principle of relational and reflexive object construction is increasingly challenged by a valorisation of proximity to the object of inquiry, by forms of identity-centred anti-objectivism, and by the elevation of subjective experience to a superior epistemic principle. Such tendencies risk dissolving the boundaries separating social-scientific inquiry from everyday owledge knowledge and political practice and, in doing so, threaten to deprive sociological research of its specifically critical autonomy. Here, too, an analytically reflexive mode of inquiry appears as a condition of scientific autonomy that requires active defence.

Against this background, and through the necessary articulation of both thematic dimensions, the conference seeks to reopen fundamental debates concerning the relational logic of sociological inquiry and the ethics of research in the spirit of an "objectification of objectification" (Bourdieu 1984). This entails not only subjecting one's own research practices to reflexive scrutiny, but also actively engaging with the contributions and blind spots of other currents within critical and heterodox social science, including those associated with Critical Theory, New Materialism, and Postcolonial Studies.

Under the slogan "Vive la crise?!" (cf. Bourdieu 1988), we emphasise the epistemic opportunities that emerge from disruptions of established social and disciplinary orders of knowledge and power. Such moments of destabilisation can open new intellectual and political spaces for heterodox forms of inquiry and interpretation. We therefore invite a critical discussion of methodological standards, of the unreflective reproduction of entrenched positional antinomies (theory versus empiricism, subjectivism versus objectivism, qualitative versus quantitative approaches, and so forth), and of renewed—hopefully controversial—dialogue across paradigmatic boundaries. With the aim of fostering a collective and intellectually productive discussion, we invite contributions that engage with the critical renewal and further development of the Bourdieusian style of thought and inquiry, particularly in relation to the following questions:

- What specific contribution can a sociology grounded methodologically and systematically in Bourdieu's work—and thus necessarily concerned with relations of inequality and domination—make to a deeper understanding of contemporary social challenges, crises, and dislocations, as well as of the ways in which these crises are socially processed, interpreted, and managed?
- How are the spaces of autonomy available to social-scientific research being transformed in the context of these developments, and what forms of heteronomous influence can be observed both within and beyond the boundaries of the scientific field, nationally and internationally?
- What role can or should a relational and emancipatory sociology play under these conditions, and how should the discipline position itself in current debates concerning the public role and politicisation of sociology, restrictions on scientific autonomy, and threats to academic freedom?
- To what extent might critical sociological practice itself generate unintended consequences or even paradoxical threats to scientific autonomy and heterodoxy, and how might such blind spots be reflexively illuminated through processes of mutual confrontation and dialogue among different traditions of critical sociology?
- Conversely, what parallels, complementarities, and methodological interactions can be identified between a Bourdieusian style of thought and inquiry and other traditions of critical social theory in their analyses of contemporary social problems and threats? How might these affinities be rendered theoretically and empirically productive, and what consequences follow from their differing modes of object construction?

Contributions from a wide range of theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary backgrounds are expressly welcome. We particularly encourage submissions that address the issues outlined above from local, national, transnational, or global perspectives. The conference language will be English. Presentations may be delivered in either English or French.

The following speakers, amongst others, have already confirmed their participation in keynote lectures and a panel discussion on the future of critical sociology after Bourdieu: Gisèle Sapiro, Julian Go, Peter Gordon, Stephan Lessenich and Nina Zahner.

Proposals may be submitted until **January 31st 2027** to the following email address: **vive-lacrise2027@googlemail.com**

If you have any queries, please feel free to contact the organisers at any time:

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