

For a Sociology of Flesh and Blood

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Abstract This article elaborates the social ontology and methodology of carnal sociology as a distinctive mode of social inquiry eschewing the spectatorial posture to grasp action-in-the-making, in the wake of debates triggered by my apprenticeship-based study of boxing as a plebeian bodily craft. First I critique the notions of (dualist) agent, (externalist) structure, and (mentalist) knowledge prevalent in the contemporary social sciences and sketch an alternative conception of the social animal, not just as wielder of symbols, but as sensate, suffering, skilled, sedimented, and situated creature of flesh and blood. I spotlight the primacy of embodied practical knowledge arising out of and continuously enmeshed in webs of action and consider what modes of inquiry are suited to deploying and mining this incarnate conception of the agent. I argue that *enactive ethnography*, the brand of immersive fieldwork based on “performing the phenomenon,” is a fruitful path toward capturing the cognitive, conative, and cathectic schemata (habitus) that generate the practices and underlie the cosmos under investigation. But it takes social spunk and persistence to reap the rewards of “observant participation” and achieve social competency (as distinct from empirical saturation). In closing, I return to Bourdieu’s dialogue with Pascal to consider the special difficulty and urgency of capturing the “spirit of acuteness” that animates such competency but vanishes from normal sociological accounts.

Keywords Action · Structure · Knowledge · Body · Incarnation · Habitus · Social ontology · Observant participation · Enactive ethnography · Bourdieu · Pascal

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the European University Institute in Florence) and his colleagues for inclusion in a collective volume exploring the relationship of “embodiment and explication” in social analysis (Adloff et al. 2014). I use these queries as a springboard to clarify issues raised in a string of debates around Bourdieu’s dispositional theory of action in which I have been involved over the past decade, at various conferences as well as in print, in the wake of my incarnate investigation of prizefighting as a plebeian bodily craft (see, in particular, the special issue of *Qualitative Sociology* on *Body and Soul*, Summer 2005, Auyero [2005], and the symposia on “Habit in *Body & Soul*,” *Theory & Psychology*, December 2009, Henderikus [2009], and on “Homines in Extremis,” *Body & Society*, Spring 2014, as well as Wacquant 2009).

First, I critique the notions of (dualist) agent, (externalist) structure, and (mentalist) knowledge prevalent in the contemporary social sciences and I sketch an alternative conception of the social animal. I propose to characterize the latter not just as a neo-Kantian creator and wielder of symbols—in the mold of Ernst Cassirer, George Herbert Mead, and John Searle (2009, ix), for whom humans are “mindful, rational, speech-act performing, free-will having, social and political beings”—but as a sensate, suffering, skilled, sedimented, and situated corporeal creature. I spotlight the primacy of embodied practical knowledge arising out of and continuously enmeshed in webs of action, upon which discursive mastery comes to be grafted. I then consider what modes of inquiry are suited to deploying and mining this incarnate conception of the human animal. I argue that *enactive ethnography*, the brand of immersive fieldwork based on “performing the phenomenon,” is a fruitful path toward disclosing the cognitive, conative, and cathectic schemata (that is, habitus) that generate the practices and underlie the cosmos under investigation. But it takes social spunk and persistence to burrow into a suitable position of “observant participation” and reap its rewards. Specifying the social ontology and methodology of carnal sociology leads me to return to Bourdieu’s dialogue with Pascal to consider the special difficulty and urgency of capturing the “spirit of acuteness” that animates social competency but gets erased from normal social scientific accounts.

How important is it in your view to focus on the implicit dimensions (tacit knowledge, knowing-how, *sens pratique*, etc.) of social interaction?

It is crucial if we are to overcome three perennial flaws that cramp social science and prevent us from developing vibrant, full-color accounts of society and history: a dualistic and disincarnated vision of the *agent*, constituted of an active mind mounted on an absent, inert, and dumb body; a flattened and negative notion of *structure* construed as a set of external constraints; and a mentalist understanding of *knowledge* as made up of chunks of information and stocks of representations. These three conceptions are mutually reinforcing and conjoin to literally take the life out of social life, leaving us with an incomplete and inadequate grasp of the social as a fluid albeit patterned conative domain.

Consider each of these elements briefly. Conceptions of the agent across the social sciences are polarized by an opposition between *homo economicus*, the rational computing machine that maximizes individual utility, descended from Bentham and developed by neo-classical economics, and *homo culturalis*, the symbol-manipulating individual motivated by moral norms, inherited from Kant and lionized by cultural anthropology, with sociology clumsily stretched across the two poles. These two reigning models, “rational man” and “plastic man,” as Martin Hollis (1977) once characterized them, are equally mutilated and mutilating. What is it that they share over and beyond their frontal clash? Both are disembodied and erase from analysis the flesh, desire, and passion as a modality of social existence. These are the ingredients of action that William James wrangled with and that Sigmund Freud’s depth

psychology sought to capture, but only at an ontogenetic level. The embodied strands of contemporary cognitive science, cutting across artificial intelligence, psychology, neurobiology, linguistics, and philosophy, are fast rediscovering them at the phylogenetic level (Clark 1999; Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Chemero 2013; Shapiro 2014). But they continue to be censored, ignored, or sidelined in standard social scientific accounts.

However “polythetic and polymorphic” the notion may be according to Merton (1976), the predominant conception of social structure locates it squarely outside of the agent, in the guise of a fence or funnel, and this is similarly truncated and limiting. For structures do not exist simply as Durkheimian facts that persons encounter in their extant environment, in the form of invisible relations, objective distributions of resources, or systems of constraints and opportunities that press or limit them from without. They are also dynamic webs of forces inscribed upon and infolded deep within the body as perceptual grids, sensorimotor capacities, emotional proclivities, and indeed as desire itself. Structures are internal springs or propellers as much as they are external containers, beams, or lattices. They are limber and alive, not inert and immobile.

Finally, the social sciences work with an excessively cerebral and passive notion of knowledge. We grant the dignity of knowledge to propositional information carried by language and located in the mind. We overlook procedural or practical knowledge acquired and manifested in concrete deeds (*pragmaticos* in ancient Greek means active, adroit in affairs or public business). We must eschew this top-down conception to overcome what Elizabeth Anscombe (1957) rightly diagnosed as the “incurably contemplative conception of knowledge” inherited from the rationalist revolution, and thence break with the mentalist (or discursivist) concept of culture associated with it. We need to recognize the reality and potency of *carneal know-how*, the bottom-up, visceral grasp of the social world—in the double sense of intellectual understanding and dexterous handling—that we acquire by acting in and upon it.

What properties of the human actor need to be spotlighted to catch this embodied practical knowledge?

The great neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1944) was right to characterize “man” as a “symbolic animal” and to see in language, myth, art, religion, and science the main symbolic systems that human beings have invented to grapple with and shape their environment. But this property alone does not make a viable philosophical anthropology. I would supplement it with an additional five properties, all conveniently starting with S, so what we might call this expanded vision the “Six S” conception of the agent.

In addition to being a wielder of symbols, the human animal is sentient, suffering, skilled, sedimented, and situated. *Sentient*: the agent is not only endowed with senses, exteroceptive, proprioceptive, and interoceptive; she also makes sense of what her sensorium captures. She is both capable of feeling and conscious of those feelings; and the body is the synthesizing medium of this feeling awareness, as neurobiologist Antonio Damasio shows in *The Feeling of What Happens* (1999). *Suffering*: the agent is exposed to the threats and blows of the natural and social worlds; she has needs, yearnings, and desires that do not get fulfilled; she is constantly subjected to the judgment of others and faces the inescapable coming of death. As such, she lives in anguish, distress and pain, and yet she endures. *Skilled*: the social agent can “make a difference” (the original meaning of the Old Norse *skil* is to discern and adjust) because, through experience and training, she acquires capacities to act and the dexterity to do things competently. *Sedimented*: all of these elements, our senses, suffering, and skills are not given at birth, generic, or constituted in a solipsistic relation to self. Rather, they are implanted,

cultivated, and deployed over time through our engagement in the world, and they are gradually deposited in our body as the layered product of our varied individual and collective histories. (Merleau-Ponty [1945], relying on Husserl, calls the “habitual knowledge of the world” lodged in the body proper an “implicit or sedimented science”). *Situated*: this sedimentation is shaped by our unique location and peregrinations in physical and social space, precisely because we are both protected by and locked in the fragile physical envelope of our mortal organism, which cannot be at two places at a given time but integrates the traces of the many places we have occupied over time.

Lastly, all six of these elements are jointly *structured* and flowing as well as growing through *time*. Our conception of the agent, structure, and knowledge all need to be radically temporalized, as Bourdieu (1980/1990, 98–111) urged long ago in “The Work of Time.” Once we acknowledge that cognition is a situated activity growing out of a tangled dance of body, mind, activity, and world, we can begin to retrieve the tacit knowledge enfolded in cultural and social practices, and thereby enrich our descriptions and deepen our explanations of them. Put these three revamped ingredients together, an incarnate being engaging practical know-how as she navigates active and mobile configurations of affect, action, and powers, and you have the building blocks for a *flesh-and-blood sociology*, capable of producing multidimensional, polychrome accounts of social life that seize life as it actually unfolds, instead of the torpid reports in black and white that we now read in academic journals.

Which research methods do you recommend to detect the invisible dimensions of action, structure, and knowledge?

On principle, the four main methods of social science, ethnographic, hermeneutic (encompassing interviewing and textual analysis), historical, and statistical, can all tackle any object. But it is clear that they are unequally equipped to ferret out those components of practice that do not get articulated, symbolized, and objectified as such: doxic categories, phronetic abilities, and ordinary ways of being, feeling, and acting. One method is the royal road to the tacit texture of social action and cognition: **close-up observation by means of pragmatic involvement in the activity studied.**

Ethnography—that particular technique of data production and analysis that relies on the skilled and sensate organism of the observer as chief investigative tool—is uniquely suited to helping us *re-incarnate society* by restoring the praxeological dimensions of social existence. But for this we must, first, come to a clearer understanding of the distinctiveness and special virtues (as well as the correlative limitations) of ethnography as *embedded and embodied social inquiry* based on physical co-presence with(in) the phenomenon in real time and space and, second, we must reform our practice of it in two complementary if seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand, we must *bind ethnography more firmly to theory*, against the epistemological illusions of Geertzian “thick description,” the philosophic naïveté of Chicago-style empiricism, and the glamorous seductions of postmodern storytelling (Wacquant 2002, 1469–71, 1481–82, and 2009, esp. 118–122). On the other hand, we need to foster long-term, *intensive, even initiatory, forms* of ethnographic involvement liable to allow the investigator to master in the first person, *intus et in cute*, the prediscursive schemata that make up the competent, diligent, and appetent member of the universe under examination.

To make the most of ethnography, the field sociologist must methodically mine and thematize the fact that, like every social agent, **he comes to know his object by body**; and he can leverage carnal comprehension by deepening his social and symbolic insertion into the universe he studies. This means that we can and **should work to become “vulnerable**

observers” in our practice of fieldwork –and not on paper, in “writing vulnerably” by injecting large doses of “subjectivity into ethnography,” as proposed by Ruth Behar (1996, 16 and 6). The methodological stipulation here is to dive into the stream of action to the greatest possible depth, rather than watch it from the bank; but to dive and swim along with method and purpose, and not with reckless abandon that would cause us to drown in the bottomless whirlpool of subjectivism.

In your Book *Body and Soul* (Wacquant 2000/2004, new expanded edition 2014) and related essays, you have sought to develop what you call “carnal sociology”: what differentiates it from a sensual ethnography inspired by phenomenology?

Put tersely, carnal sociology is a sociology not *of* the body as sociocultural object but *from* the body as fount of social intelligence and sociological acumen. It starts from the brute fact that, as argued above, the human agent is a sentient and suffering being of flesh and blood. (Flesh refers here to the visible surface of the lived body while blood points to the inner circuitry of life pulsating in the depths of the visceral body, as in Leder’s [1990] revision of Merleau-Ponty. I join here with the characterization of “who we are” proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999, 3–4 and *passim*) in their book *Philosophy in the Flesh*, for whom “the mind is embodied, thought is mostly unconscious,” and reason is “largely metaphorical and imaginative” as well as “emotionally engaged”). **It situates itself not above or on the side of action but at its point of production.** Carnal sociology strives to eschew the spectatorial viewpoint and to grasp **action-in-the-making, not action-already-accomplished.** It aims to detect and document the deployment of the practical schemata that fashion practice: the cognitive, conative, and affective building blocks of habitus, whose layering and operations are fully open to empirical investigation (Wacquant 2014a, 2014b). It diverges from sensual ethnography as the field study *of* the senses, which has a distinguished lineage running from Simmel, Mauss, and Lucien Febvre, to Elias and the *Lebensphilosophie* of Arnold Gehlen and Helmut Plessner, to contemporary strands of medical and phenomenological anthropology, in that it takes **“sensory formations” not as its object of study (as does Howes 2003) but as its means of study.**

Carnal sociology applies to any object and can use a variety of methods so long as these treat the **social agent as embodied and embedded.** For instance, practitioners of *Alltagsgeschichte*, microhistory, and the recent historiography of sensibilities frequently come into its ambit, although they might not know it or intend to. When Carlo Ginsburg (1976) reconstructs the lived cosmos of the sixteenth-century miller Menocchio before he was burned at the stake for being a suspected heretic in *Il formaggio e i vermi*; when Alf Lüdtke (1993) tracks down the social roots and effects of *Eigensinn*, the obstinate “self-will” feeding strategies of recalcitrance midway between accommodation and resistance to power among German laborers in the first half of the twentieth century; when Alain Corbin (1988) maps the changing sensorial and epistemic cultures that turned the seaside from an object of repulsive fear to an attractive site of contemplation and spawned a new posture toward “nature,” they are doing carnal historical sociology.

For contemporary objects, the best method is what I now call *enactive ethnography*, that is, immersive fieldwork through which the investigator *acts out (elements of) the phenomenon* in order to peel away the layers of its invisible properties and to test its operative mechanisms. I adapt the term *enactive* from my Berkeley colleague, the philosopher Alva Noë in his book *Action in Perception* (2004, 2), in which he proposes that perception is “a skillful activity on the part of the animal as a whole,” which I find to be a very apt characterization of the ethnographer at work (Noë himself borrows the adjective from the influential “embodied

mind” theory of Francesco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch [1991]). The first commandment of incarnate inquiry, then, is to *enter the theater of action in some ordinary capacity* and, to the highest degree possible, apprentice in the ways of the people studied –be they pugilists, professors, or prosecutors– so as **to gain a visceral apprehension of their universe** as materials and springboard for its analytic reconstruction.

But what about those situations in which, for practical, legal, or moral reasons, you cannot turn yourself into the phenomenon?

Of course, it is not always easy and straightforward to gain access to and perform on the target social scene: becoming an active member often takes time, having special qualities, or obtaining certification. You may just not possess the sang-froid needed to be a police officer or the litheness to be a ballerina, you cannot hope to become a judge on short order, and you will hopefully not be authorized to perform brain surgery at a top hospital for purposes of sociological understanding. But you could well become a props technician for the ballet, sign up as an intern with pretrial services, or work as an orderly in the operating ward. There are always multiple doors onto any stage “where the action is” –to invoke Goffman’s (1967) classic essay by that title– and this provides varied opportunities to experience, and thereby experiment with, components of the phenomenon by learning the part and taking up the position of one or another protagonist in the social drama at hand, be it a minor one.

Too often, sociologists do not get in the door because they fail to even knock on it to check how far inside they might get invited. One example: there are dozens of field monographs on homelessness, some of them quite admirable—in very different styles, I recommend Snow and Anderson’s (1993) *Down on their Luck*, Bourgois and Schoenberg’s (2009) *Righteous Dopefiend*, and Gowan’s (2010) *Hobos, Hustlers, and Backsliders*. Yet none of their authors have spent extended stretches sleeping on the streets, shacking up in a SRO hotel, or checked in at a city shelter –not to mention circulating among these three, which, along with the local jail and the city public hospital, form the web of interconnected institutions that effectively handle unhoused people when their defining status becomes acutely problematic. (You have to go way back to the WPA-inspired team study of Sutherland and Locke, *Twenty Thousand Homeless Men* [1936], to find a monograph in which sleeping in the shelters is a core element of the research design). The typical student of the homeless leaves the scene at dusk, just when the pivotal practical and central existential problem gets posed and resolved: where am I going to sleep tonight? Yet there is so much to be learned from testing out in person, night in and night out, the different techniques evolved to make a suitable mock “bed” for oneself on and about the streets, to manage the brittle relations entailed, to ensure minimal safety, to tame the aches and emotions, to soak the smells, to alter one’s sense of time, and so on. So many facets of the phenomenon that can best be revealed by body, in the very enactment of homelessness – be it willful and temporary, in the case of the investigator– because they are woven into the very fabric of *urgent yet banal action* and thus become partly imperceptible to and indescribable by those most inured to it.

Incarnate investigation takes a bit of spunk and a lot of persistence. Aside from overlooking the embodied nature of action, knowledge, and structure, a major reason why most ethnographies fall back into to the textual or hermeneutic vision of the social world fed by a *contemplative posture* (by definition foreclosed to those who practice “observant participation”) is that their authors simply do not persevere in their efforts to gain access and deepen their embeddedness. They quickly back off or stall instead of pushing forward and trying every which route to penetrate the arena of action. But tenacity pays off: Joan Cassell (1991) was

initially refused entry into a surgery ward, and advised to study the ladies' auxiliary instead, but by dint of obstinacy she ended up observing senior general surgeons in a dozen hospitals, two health maintenance organizations, and a public clinic performing some 200 operations. Cassell had planned for a study of 18 months; she ended up spending 33 months in the field, at the end of which she was allowed to “scrub” and manipulate retractors along with the interns. Similarly, Gretchen Purser (2012, 2015) spent nearly 3 years getting herself hired out by day-labor agencies in inner-city Oakland and Baltimore to generate an embodied account of the social strategies and experiences of marginal just-in-time laborers at the intersection of the deregulated employment market, the denuded hyperghetto, and the overgrown prison system. Now, how likely is it that a petite, bespectacled, vegan white woman will make it among hulking black ex-convicts in the daily tussle for “tickets” out of a “body shop” doing the most degraded kinds of chores? Yet she endured and emerges at the other end of this social experiment with an incandescent account of the flesh-and-blood reality of “flexploitation” in the bloated underbelly of the American economy.

Carnal sociology is premised on a syllogism and a dare. The syllogism is the following: if it is true that the body is not just a socially construct-ed product but also a socially construc-ting vector of knowledge, practice, and power, then this applies to the body of the sociologist as inquirer. The dare is to overcome two millenia of “scorn for the body,” to quote Nietzsche, that have led us to construe the sensate organism as an obstacle to knowledge and to turn it into a bountiful resource for social scientific inquiry. Methodically deploying one's body as an intelligent instrument of practical knowledge production speeds up the acquisition of basic social competency—the *operant capacity to feel, think, and act like a Whatever among the WhatEVERs*—which, in turn, offers a better criterion than data saturation for deciding when you have accomplished your mission.

Is “enactive ethnography” a new way of practicing the craft?

I am tempted to say, on the contrary, that it is an old and venerable brand of ethnography, harking back to its origins and golden age, which stressed “learning by doing” through lasting and intimate contact with “the natives” –in his *Poetics*, Aristotle reminds us that humans acquire their first knowledge through mimesis. Enactive ethnography does no more than make explicit and then intensify the two distinctive features of any ethnography worthy of the name: that the investigator is embodied and has embedded herself into the social and symbolic structure examined. Another way to characterize it is to say that it uses habitus as both object and method of analysis (Wacquant 2011): the inquirer uncovers and tests the pertinence of practical schemata by acquiring them *in actu*, by focusing intensively on the pedagogical techniques whereby they are forged, or by dissecting the pragmatic designs through through which they are implemented. In that regard, enactive ethnography goes against those currents of contemporary anthropology that have become so obsessed with tropes, positionality, ethics, the openness and multiplicity of sites (or “para-sites” lodged in “the complexities of our time,” no joke), and the foibles of professionalization that they have reached a state of ethnographic paralysis by meta-analysis (Faubion and Marcus 2009).

I previously proposed that, whenever the practical configuration permits, we can and should “go native, but go native armed, and return” (Wacquant 2009, 119), in a deliberate corrective to the prevalent vision of fieldwork in mainstream social science. I wish now to amend this formulation because “going native” is an ambiguous slogan that gets us off on the wrong epistemic footing. For what is “the native's point of view” that Malinowski (1922/2014) canonized in *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and that Geertz (1974) invited us to honor

as the standpoint of ethnography? Whose point of view is it and taken at what moment in time? Even in a small-scale, kinship-based society approximating Durkheim's "mechanical solidarity" such as the Trobriand Islands, there is social differentiation and hierarchy. Indeed, Malinowski (1922/2014) stresses distinctions of rank and power between districts, tribes, and totemic clans. Obviously, the point of view of the village chief is not that of a commoner; the perspective and dispositions of an elderly male widower from a high-ranking lineage are not those of an unmarried teenage girl from a lower totemic clan. In any system of action there is a division of labor such that there are *points of views, plural*, as views taken from evolving points in the objective structure of the local social space. Moreover, there is a struggle, at any moment, to determine what properties and position qualify as "native." Who is and who isn't a *bona fide* member? The answer to this question is always at stake in the social world itself and therefore it should be not resolved by fiat on paper by the analyst. As I show in *The Prizefighter's Three Bodies*, any singular point of view, such as the pugilistic one, is always a *selective synthetic construction by the analyst* that captures a moment in this dynamic contest of situated perspectives, not a raw empirical induction from ethnographic observation (Wacquant, *forthcoming*).

In his greatest book *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu (1997/2000) deepens his theory of implicit knowledge through a shadow dialogue with Pascal. What are we to make of this self-affiliation of Bourdieu with the author of *Les Pensées* (Pascal 1670/1976)?

This connection has surprised many because Pascal is an obscure and enigmatic thinker who, aside from his contributions to geometry and probability theory, is best known as an apologist of Christianity, a thinker of existential abyss, and a master prose stylist. Few social scientists have encountered him in their intellectual tribulations and Bourdieu rarely mentioned him openly in his writings. But the connection operates at several nested levels. It is first a prophylactic reference intended to ward off false genealogies (late McCarthyite accusations about Bourdieu being a crypto-Marxist) and bad readings (Bourdieu as the advocate of a strategic vision of action in the mold of rational choice theory, of which he was a tireless opponent). Next, it is an ironic wink to the philosophy of the subject as sovereign consciousness, running from Descartes to Sartre via Husserl (and his *Cartesian Meditations*, whose title Bourdieu riffs on), with which the French sociologist crossed swords for the better part of 40 years. With Leibniz and especially Spinoza, another major inspiration of Bourdieu and forceful advocate of a monist conception of human activity, Pascal represents the non-Cartesian wing of the rationalist revolution, which the author of *Distinction* sought to reinforce and extend.

But there is above all a deep affinity at the level of philosophical anthropology and social ontology: the human creature is a suffering being, caught in and by the world, who tears herself from the utter absurdity of her condition, caught "between infinity and nothingness," through knowledge and action, even as this knowledge can never be grounded. This being and this world are kneaded by antinomies, hierarchical couples liable to be turned upside down on a dime: the human is both "angel and beast," submitted to the determinisms of the universe and yet capable of escaping them by the very fact that she can know them and thus know herself; institutions present themselves as founded in nature when they are nothing but "custom" ("this second nature which destroys the first one"); the social order seems necessary even as it is fundamentally contingent.

The arbitrariness of hierarchies that depend "on the whims of men" and the incommensurability of powers ("the order of bodies, the order of minds, the order of charity"), the centrality of the symbolic, the role of deception and belief (in the sense of *fides*, faith that things are the way they appear to be: "to deny, to believe, and to doubt well, these are to men what galloping

is to horses”) as springs of action and glue of collective life: Pascal offers Bourdieu not a system –the author of *Les Provinciales* never produced one– but pillars and levers to “confront in its truth the enigma of fiction and fetishism” (Bourdieu 1997/2000, 6) that are at the basis of society and thus to operate a triple historicization, of social being, of the social world which makes him and which he makes, and of the knowledge that one may produce of it.

Can one draw on Pascal to deepen our understanding of the manifold ways in which tacit knowledge operates in everyday life by both veiling and unveiling Itself? Can he help us develop a sociology of the implicit?

“The sensibility of man to small things and his insensibility to great things, sign of a strange reversal,” writes Pascal (1670/1976), and yet “it is the condition of men.” Bourdieu enrolls the Jansenist philosopher mostly to advance his thinking on symbolic power, its modalities and effects, and for rethinking recognition as a commutator of social existence. This leads him to cast the conceptual triad of *cognition, recognition and misrecognition* in everyday life as well as in institutional functioning at the epicenter of his social ontology. One can go a step further and deploy the quarrelling couple of the “reasons of the heart and of reason” to take seriously profane beliefs and develop a political microsociology fusing rationality and sentiments. Likewise, with the concept of “*divertissement*” and the corollary idea that “it is the chase, and not the catch” that people seek in any activity, Pascal opens wide the doors of a sociology of passion as a modality of our relation to the world, implying love, desire, and suffering, which can assume an infinite variety of forms (philosophical, political, pugilistic, amorous, etc.).

Finally, at the outset of his *Pensées*, Pascal broaches a subtle but luminous distinction between “*esprit de géométrie*” and “*esprit de finesse*,” two modalities of reasoning that social scientists would be well advised to reflect upon (see Force [2003] for pointers and Pascal [1657/1985] for extensions). Our geometric mind proceeds from a small number of principles to cut up the world, deduce with logic, and conclude with clarity; by contrast, intellectual acuteness feeds on a multitude of implicit principles ensconced in experience and riding on local intuition and felt analogy. The former is abstract and artificial, born of the specialized training of the mind; the latter is concrete and natural, springing synthetically from the flow of life and, we now know from cognitive science, rooted in sensorimotor moves. Pascal likens the geometric spirit to the gaze and the spirit of acuteness to the palpation of the hand. This opposition can help us discern the particular quandary of social science that the study of the implicit exacerbates: **normal science runs on the spirit of geometry while social life runs on the spirit of acuteness.** The task of an incarnate social science, then, must be to reconcile these two diverging forms of reason. “We are automatons as much as minds,” Pascal points out, and for this reason we must strive to avoid “two excesses: to exclude reason, to admit only reason.” Not a bad starting axiom for a sociology of flesh and blood.

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