
*Combat in the Dissertation Zone**

MICHAEL BURAWOY

It would seem that dissertations appear by immaculate conception. No one tells you how to write them, no one tells you how to supervise them. It's an ineffable, unique production—a joint product about which we can say nothing, whose fruition is as miraculous as the parting of the Red Sea. Dissertating is so central to the sociological career, and yet so unexamined. We have, it seems, a vested interest in putting the dissertation beyond sociological analysis as though it would endanger the creative process itself. To be sure there is the lore, the murmurs, the gossip, the *Sturm und Drang*, the fury and devotion, the comedy and the tragedy, but they only further contribute to mystification. To move from anecdote to analysis, to socioanalysis, is profoundly threatening, a transgression across some sacred line.

But why the fear? Why is it so shocking to subject the dissertation zone to the sociological gaze? Is it impossible to be dispassionate about a relation in which each side is deeply invested, emotionally and intellectually, sometimes locked in mortal combat, sometimes dancing in complete unison? Or is it that we will discover that we are not the individual authors of our own work? Or that we will debunk the mythology of the disinterested pursuit of truth? Or that we will disclose the symbolic power that lies at the heart of the process? Or that by removing the veil on the field of power, we will demonstrate the careerist strategies that lie behind our dissertating game? Or is it we just cannot bear to objectify so personal, so sanctified a relation?

If sociology is the force of enlightenment that we claim it to be, then we should be able to withstand our own penetrating eye. There is no reason to exempt ourselves from the weapons we so gleefully brandish upon others. After 25 years of chairing dissertations, as well as a lifetime writing about work, I feel obliged to risk exposure, if only to incite others to do the same. Exposing myself will, I hope, leave others exposed too, moving them to assess their own experiences and perhaps even write about them, wherever they are located in the dissertating process or more broadly in the field of sociology.

Supervision and the Independent Scholar

Before taking the plunge, I need to settle a terminological issue. There are a number of expressions used to refer to the dissertation labor process—mentoring, advising, di-

Michael Burawoy teaches sociology at University of California, Berkeley and is interested in work and politics. He may be reached at burawoy@berkeley.edu.

recting, but I prefer supervising. “Mentoring” conveys a relation of one individual molding another whereas I want to put greater emphasis on the process of production. “Advising” is better but also focuses on the individual. It implies that the dissertator is free to accept or reject the advice. It mystifies what is central to the relation, namely power. “Directing” moves in the direction of power, but super-vision best captures the gaze that forms labor into the recognizable and congealed product we call a dissertation. But, as should be clear, super-vision never goes uncontested. It is a battle, a combat, often subterranean, to the end and beyond, often as much as with the internalized supervisor as with the actual supervisor. In drawing on the analogy to a labor process, one should not forget that the dissertation supervisor, unlike the supervisor of wage-labor, has an interest in the creativity of the supervisee, turning the supervisee into another supervisor, that is an interest not in deskilling but promoting the direct producer in every sense of the word. But that doesn’t mean there is no struggle. Far from it, since behind production there is also the expropriation of symbolic profit.

In tempting me to contribute to this special issue of *The American Sociologist* Ira Silver recalled a mantra I, apparently, frequently uttered during a fieldwork seminar I ran at Northwestern University, “my job is to convince you that your ideas are worth pursuing.” That, indeed, is what I tell myself (and obviously others too) about myself—I’m here to give you confidence to pursue your ideas, or those, at least, I consider worth pursuing. On a good day that’s what I believe I do. That’s my official truth, the declared truth. I have tried to work it up into a half-formed, still inchoate pedagogy, what Michael Polanyi might call a “personal knowledge.” But, as I have painfully discovered in preparing this essay, it’s not the only truth. It’s a truth that comes from a definite position and disposition and will generate in my readers counter-truths, protestations from other positions and dispositions. Inevitably, in publicly presenting my vision of supervision, what it is I think I do, I’m inviting a range of very different perceptions and appreciations, and some very harsh criticisms.

Let me set the stage. I teach at Berkeley where the ethos has always been to encourage graduate students to develop their own projects independent of faculty research. We call it the “independent scholar” model as opposed to the “apprenticeship” model in which students work on, elaborate the research of their supervisor. I see the distinction as follows: independent scholars take themselves as point of departure, whereas the apprentice looks to the master to initiate and then direct his or her research. Independent scholars are expected to be their own craftworkers while the apprentice belongs to a shop, like the natural scientist belongs to a laboratory. In the former the focus is first on producing the product and second on producing the producer, whereas in the latter the order is reversed, training the sociologist comes first. Out of the independent scholar typically come dissertations as solo-authored books, perhaps the best piece of scholarship you will ever complete, while out of apprenticeship emerge jointly authored articles, preparation for a career that only really begins after the dissertation.

The independent scholar model has always prevailed at Berkeley. Ever since it came of age in the 1950s recruiting such luminaries-to-be as Reinhard Bendix, Leo Lowenthal, Erving Goffman, Bill Kornhauser, David Matza, Philip Selznick, Franz Schurman, Hal Wilensky, Seymour Martin Lipset, Herbert Blumer, Neil Smelser, and Guy Swanson, the department thought of itself as pioneering new areas. It encouraged the blooming of a thousand flowers, which was how it survived the fissiparous 1960s and their aftermath. The result is a broad tolerance of diversity in sociological style, both in theory and in method, that extends to the graduate student body. There is no attempt to come up

with any invidious ranking of students nor even standardize reading lists for qualifying examinations. Everything is tailored to the individual. Significantly, we don't even have a public dissertation defense, that stamp of professional consensus and accreditation. Final approval is negotiated independently with the members of the dissertation committee with the supervisor taking the lead role. This is the context from which I launch my personal reflections on the dissertating process.

The Dissertation Labor Process

In his memorable appendix to *The Sociological Imagination* C. Wright Mills spells out the craft of intellectual labor as the avoidance of rigid procedures, cultivating the sociological imagination through the devotion of life to work, and bursting the bounds of disciplinary convention. He paints the picture of the renaissance scholar, disconnected from any social context except the one being investigated and to which he or she is riveted. This is the craft of sociology but without a sociology of the craft. It is a fairy tale that an alienated intellectual tells himself about his life of persecution. It is a tale that no sociologist can swallow.

Independence does not mean isolation. Doctoral students are embedded in many communities, in membership groups—graduate student support groups, dissertation groups, friendship groups, kith and kin—but also in reference groups, ranging from the future professoriate they hope to join to the company of God who guides them through this at once trying and miraculous process. The acknowledgments to dissertations reveal the rich social embeddedness of graduate student life without which completion would be both a different and a difficult proposition. In this obvious sense the dissertation is always more than an individual product, more than a joint-product of advisor and advisee. Indeed, as we shall see it is embedded in a much wider field of forces.

Biography is also important, more important than we let on, in determining the fateful choice of dissertation topic. You study Ireland because you are Irish, you study Filipina labor because you have known the struggles of Filipina workers, you study how Latinas survive graduate school because you are one of very few Latinas yourself, you study domestic workers because your mother was one, you study schooling because your parents were teachers, you study construction workers because you've been one much of your life, you study the dilemmas of job search because your family has suffered unemployment, you study job satisfaction because you've led an unfulfilling existence as a corporate lawyer, you study labor because you were a union organizer, you study autism because you grew up with an autistic sibling. Scratch a topic and you will probably find at least a biographical trace. But there are other sources too: formative courses, brilliant books, impressive teachers, political causes, and moral passions. The independent scholar has free rein in choosing the direction of research, independent of any supervisor, who in any case has yet to be chosen, but once a topic emerges it has to be chiseled into a question, a problem, a puzzle—it has to be made interesting to other sociologists not just oneself. That's where the literature comes in.

Literature is not mastered for its own sake. It is not only a ritual demonstration that allows you to pass as a knowledgeable scholar. To be sure when I'm not familiar with the concrete substance of a topic, which often happens, you have to demonstrate your mastery of the relevant literature. But engaging the literature serves a deeper purpose—to convince first yourself and then others that you are indeed grappling with a problem of some weight, some significance to a community of scholars. It is a problem that will

preoccupy you, from several years to a lifetime. You have to persuade fellow sociologists that a question has not been dealt with adequately, or a problem has been left untouched or a puzzle unresolved. Hence the panic when you discover someone is working on a closely allied topic, which in principle should be something to celebrate. It almost invariably turns out that you can exploit the nuances of difference and an apparent disaster turns into a golden opportunity. In short, you use the literature to invest your dissertation with community meaning, so that it is destined to become part of the accumulated body of sociological knowledge.

Accordingly, we may say there are two bodies of theory: the one you don't like and the one you like; the one you criticize in order to reject and the one you criticize in order to improve; the one that is superficially relevant yet inadequate to the task you have set yourself and the one that, with augmentation and reconstruction, has the greatest potential for dealing with your question. You want to concentrate your critical energies on the theories to which you will contribute and not on the ones you discard. Thus, you never start from scratch, *tabula rasa*, as if the data says it all and as if no one has ever done any research in your area before. You place yourself in a scientific lineage rather than as a genius outside history, within rather than outside a field of academic contestation.

Following this logic, the dissertation prospectus is only superficially and partially about design, which generally evolves with the research itself, but all about convincing yourself and others that you are on to something important, worthy of your total commitment. To be sure the dissertation prospectus has to demonstrate that you are in fact capable of tackling the problem it defines, that you have the methodology, the background, and the devotion to actually solve the problem. Indeed, the prospectus is already a preliminary attempt not only to formulate, but additionally to solve the problem. The prospectus is, therefore, not just a bureaucratic hoop to jump through, a rite of passage, but is the first draft of your dissertation, the first attempt at the final product. Here you already speculate about what you will find, but you do this not in order to be right, which would be uninteresting, but in order to be wrong, in order to be surprised. As supervisor I'm there to stretch and imbue the prospectus with your imagination rather than to promote a litany of hypotheses. This is not a time to play it safe, but a time to dare to think, dare to startle, a time to define a long-lasting commitment. It's your marriage vow.

You don't leave the prospectus behind, but take it with you into the field, whether this be survey or archival research, interviews or participant observation. With your prospectus as your lens you see things that otherwise would be ignored. It becomes your guide, your map, your personal bible, but it is not cast in stone. It is a malleable instrument that expands and self-transforms with the data you collect. It becomes your accordion. Research itself becomes a running experiment through which the prospectus is rewritten, expanded, and elaborated. If the prospectus is found wanting, if it breaks down under the pressure of evidence, if it no longer makes sense then a new revised edition has to be written. At any moment of your research, you must know—however tentative—what your dissertation is about, its major claims and their significance. From the beginning your dissertation must have a title, a changing title that captures, as succinctly as possible, its overall claim, its genetic code. It's a perpetual guide, a reminder of what you are up to. You cannot wait until the data is in, and then to laboriously erect the edifice, brick by brick, as though it will build itself of its own. From the beginning, nay from before the beginning, you are always already writing your dissertation in dialogue with a visible or invisible community of scientists.

Dissertations are not novels, which keep the reader guessing what is coming next, to be revealed only at the end. No, dissertations are more like mathematical proofs in which the claims are laid out clearly and succinctly at the beginning so that the reader can follow the proof step by step. Unlike the Victorian novel there is no virtue in length. Quite the opposite, the longer it gets the more demanding it is on the structure to keep the whole thing in shape. I remember one of the early dissertations I supervised that kept going on and on, from one volume to the next. I was helpless and so was the student. It had been incubating in his mind for years and then uncontrollably gushed forth. I now have a rule—dissertations have to be less than 350 pages. If it's longer you are probably unclear about what you want to say or you are being repetitive. And certainly no one will want to read it.

So, when it comes to writing chapters you should not follow the example of the Leaning Tower of Pisa with every chapter an intriguing interpretation of the one that came before, a succession of loosely linked epicycles, that eventually keels over. Rather you spend a lot of time designing and redesigning the whole. As supervisor I want to know how each chapter fits into the total argument. Indeed, I will only accept a chapter if it is accompanied by the ever-changing synopsis of the whole dissertation and a short summary of each chapter—the emerging scaffolding that holds the project together. I want to know the state of play in order to assess the contribution of the chapter I'm reading. The dissertation mustn't run off in different directions like a headless chicken, my role is to continually rein back chapters into a systematic relation with each other.

This affects the way I write comments. Colleagues often write detailed comments in margins of dissertation chapters. I hardly ever do that, preferring to offer on-going interrogations of the dissertation's inner logic, anything up to 40 typed interrogations per dissertation. As I've aged, the number of comments have grown more numerous and less voluminous. I used to make detailed comments that would go on for pages and totally overwhelm and even paralyze you. Sometimes you would never come back. It was rather disingenuous of me to complain about your retreat since I suspect that my barrage aimed to establish my authority, my credibility as a young sociologist—with little thought as to what might be helpful to you.

So now, when it comes to comments, I'm less overwhelming, less pursuant of instant truth than the slow reduction of erring. I don't try to perfect a chapter, a dissertation in one fell swoop but think of a rectification campaign of successive approximations that starts with the scaffolding—detailed chapter outline—but slowly over time focuses in on the building details. In trying to keep the whole in view, I fetishize chapter titles and headings. As chapters emerge so the scaffolding adjusts and with it all the other chapters, so that in the end the scaffolding and the building become indistinguishable, and the scaffolding dissolves into the building which then stands alone, resplendent, glistening.

Beyond the Dyad

You only write one dissertation, but you may supervise many. You can learn to supervise, first perhaps at the feet of a virtuoso, by being second person on a committee—although that way you can end up doing all the work and getting little recognition. More than likely you learn, like I did, from your own mistakes. In the beginning of your career, so unsure are you of the supervisory path to be taken that it's often unclear who is supervising whom. In those early years the “internalized student” can be severe and censori-

ous, punishing your every comment, your every move. Only slowly do you gain the upper hand over those inner demons, as you gain confidence in your judgments, suggestions, and directions.

I often wonder about the source of my own confidence to give students the confidence in their ideas. I think it was forced upon me in the participant observation seminars I used to run almost every year. Then I had a semester to take students from nowhere through a proposal, data collection, literature review, and thence to successive drafts of a paper that refine and engage a defining problem—a dissertation in miniature. As dissertation supervisor it's my position that thrusts upon me the responsibility to unveil and thematize just one idea, it's your desperate need for order that makes my intervention imperative, it's my authority and your need to believe in me that makes me believable. The more often I do it the more confidence I develop in my own judgment, the more confidence you develop in me as a supervisor, and thus the more likely things will work out. Pascal said kneel and ye shall believe, so supervise and ye shall find the idea. The danger, of course, is that I become too confident and miss the chrysalis, budding in your half-conscious imagination.

Although as dissertation supervisor I take the lead role. I am not alone in this process. Supervision, in theory and in practice, is a shared responsibility. I spend countless hours comparing notes with my colleagues on your progress or regress, airing my frustrations and listening to the frustrations of others. Sometimes, when you have the confidence to deal with conflicting perspectives, I might enter into public battles with another member of the committee about the real significance or direction of your dissertation. Sometimes the battles are more subterranean. Usually I will conspire with colleagues in private to develop a concerted strategy and a common front to assure the gestation and growth of your dissertation. When the time is opportune I might call a meeting of the dissertation committee, but in the full knowledge that if the time is not ripe such a meeting can easily lead to confusion and despair.

After all the building of confidence in an idea, this uncertain convergence of data and theory is a fragile affair, always on the verge of breaking down. Ideas have a habit of turning to dust. So I can be quite protective—some would say over-protective—shielding you from the critical eyes of my colleagues. Until you have confidence in your ideas, until you are at home with them, convinced by them, it is necessary to paddle in the shallow end, and, if necessary, with a life belt on. If I am successful, in the end, power is transferred as you gain confidence in your own ideas, and you take-off, soaring like a fine eagle.

Before you take-off, lacking confidence in your ideas or disagreeing with my assessment of what you are up to, you may seek life support from other faculty authorities who have not held your hands through the agonizing process. But their off-the-cuff remarks, made in the hurried moments of office hours, can have a devastating impact. Subject to a barrage of innocent questions for which you are not prepared, you are thrown off balance. You are interrogated: How can you compare workers' movements in Brazil and South Africa, or labor organizing in South Korea and the United States? How can you compare the African National Congress and the Palestinian Liberation Organization? How can you compare gambling in South Africa and Nevada, economic planning in Turkey and in France, or state security in Zimbabwe and Northern Ireland? How dare you compare Serbian ethnic cleansing in Bosnia with Israeli occupation of Palestine? How often have I heard the song of the proverbial apples and oranges? This complaint

too easily misses the point: the sociological magic is precisely comparing the incomparable, comparing apples and oranges by turning them both into pears! The more counterintuitive the comparison, the deeper and daring the sociology.

These well-intended challenges from my colleagues can spark new directions, trigger new insights, but it can also feed your mounting insecurities and undermining your self-confidence—the self-confidence necessary to write an ambitious dissertation. It's left to me, your supervisor, to pick up the pieces, put them together again, so that you can recover and move forward. At crucial moments my passion, my commitment is important to carry you forward. But I have to beware of not getting overcommitted. I have to be able to see a new move, a new strategy, a new direction, a new crystal. For this it is necessary for me to give you the space to press back, to challenge and contest my direction. You must be able to enter combat without appearing disloyal or untrusting. You must be able to tell me that I'm simply wrong or, as one student was found of telling me, "I'm off my rocker." The continuous banter, resistance, contestation, struggle that so shocks more respectful students, and sometimes even shocks myself, is part of an essential looseness and flexibility that keeps your dissertation on track. That it so rarely gets out of hand suggests that both sides recognize not only how necessary it is, but also the fundamental trust upon which it is founded.

But, fortunately, it's never just you and me in combat. We are never alone, or at least I try to make sure we are never alone. Apart from the faculty dissertation committee there are the many support groups you develop on your own with fellow students. I rely too on a group—anywhere from five to ten students depending who is around at the time and who wants to participate—drawn from those whose dissertations I am supervising. They develop a rare commitment to one another's work. We meet every two weeks for a potluck dinner at my apartment. One person has submitted a chapter a week ahead and everyone else has already sent in a page or two of comments a few days before the meeting. The person on the hot seat prepares responses and leads the discussion. By the end of the evening we will—if things go according to plan—have taken out the white board and replotted the entire dissertation—from preface to conclusion. Or perhaps the dissertator is at a more preliminary stage, still in the field, so we discuss how to move forward toward the scaffolding.

It's amazing how quickly everyone gets on board with the project, how comments converge on issues that lead beyond the submitted chapter into the body of the dissertation. How quickly the graduate student disposition to tear asunder is laid to rest as we become fixated on one another's work, on erecting the dissertation on sturdy foundations. Sure the next day it may not look so erect, the pieces don't quite fit as neatly as we thought, but, at least, the whole has been mapped out and you'll feel more rooted, ready to go on. When you see the whole then you see equally what needs mending, repairing. But you also believe in the dissertation, in its feasibility. There is nothing like a picture to conquer reality.

The side benefit of the dissertation group is that each of us learns what it means to put together a dissertation, so that in effect you are participating not just in your own dissertation but in the development of several others. You learn how to make constructive comments and how to respond to them, how to lead a seminar on your own work. You learn that others are going through the same agonies as yourself and you learn the different ways of coping. This is excellent preparation for when you yourself will be supervising students.

Styles of Supervision

As you can see, there's more than one way of supervising the independent scholar. When I look back on the dissertations I have supervised I think of myself as the midwife, who nurtures and delivers what is already there. This, it turns out, is self-deception, denial, or simply memory loss. If I'm a midwife, then I'm too often the master of the caesarian. Midwifery is a convenient way of concealing from myself a very rough delivery, as I say, more like combat. My co-authors of *Global Ethnography*, all students dissertating with me, had a particularly hard time. Brilliant students with minds of their own are hard to corral between two covers of a book that ploughs a common field. They called me Bela Karolyi after the trainer of the successful American women gymnasts in the Olympics of 1996—famous for his patriarchal, often despotic, treatment of his teenage wards, goading them into performing beyond their capabilities. He would stop at nothing, and nor apparently do I. To get you to produce I cajole and bribe, flatter and punish. As you reach higher and higher standards, the bar rises too—until you can stand it no more and you tell me to sign. So perhaps I should call mine the *coach model* of supervision, caring about the producer but only to produce the product.

My colleagues generally take a more gentle approach. I remember sharing thoughts on supervision with one of my senior colleagues. We were taken aback by each other's approach—she at my instrumentalism and I at her parentalism. She saw herself *in loco parentis*, caring for her students' many needs, knowing details about their lives and they about hers. I, on the other hand, care only about the dissertation and the rest will have to take care of itself, unless, of course, it interferes with academic progress. You are but the instrument for realizing your dissertation rather than the dissertation as a means for realizing yourself. There's an inescapable gender component here. It's not only that my colleague is female and therefore adopts a more expressive and holistic approach, although that's how it might appear, but also students expect, even demand, that women tend to their personal as well as their professional lives. It's often an appeal for sympathy, a strategy of power, a weapon of the weak. With me such demands are more likely to appear as a declaration of vulnerability, a risky move. Gendered supervision is constituted interactively, but in a context of wider fields of dispositions and expectations.

Parental and coach models are by no means exhaustive of the styles of supervision. There is also the *boot-camp approach*—tough military discipline. That was the model in my own graduate years at Chicago. At the end of the first year we had to take preliminary examinations to weed out the misfits who could not regurgitate the local lore. Even if few were actually expelled (and I'm not sure how I survived), the very endeavor, the disciplinary exercise contaminated the atmosphere for all. For those who pass muster, well then they enter the kingdom of dissertating freedom, the wondrous free market place of ideas, where everyone is playing on a level playing field. Sink or swim by your own bootstraps, unless you are lucky enough, as I was, to find a branch to cling to.

The boot-camp approach can lead to another popular model—popular among both students and faculty—which is, *mock supervision*, in other words benign neglect. It's not as bad as it sounds. On a bad day I think my dissertators would be better off without me, and some certainly would. Perhaps I'm too overbearing, too sure of my own judgment about the direction of your dissertation. Some students after all thrive on autonomy. They simply want to be left alone to get on with their own project with a minimum of interference. All they want is my moral support. In effect they want a specific variant of

mock-supervisor—the cheerleader who is always on call for rousing enthusiasm and support, telling you that you can do it.

But let us not forget that faculty are often only too happy to oblige with such a *laissez faire* model. It's neither intellectually taxing nor time consuming. It was all too common in Berkeley when I arrived in 1976, a legacy of the wars of the 1960s. Today, the department is more deeply professionalized, so such irresponsibility is unacceptable. Perhaps dissertations were more creative in the 1970s, but that was as much the result of a discipline in crisis, badly needing an injection of new ideas. Mock-supervision may have benefited those who were at home in academia, but it wasn't a choice for the many who fell by the wayside. Mock-supervision can leave students to drown.

While faculty veer toward one style or another, they have also to adapt their models to the students they work with. Some models call for more adaptation than others. As a coach I recognize that some of you are simply uncoachable and I give up, adopting mock-supervision. The combat is not worth it. Even among those who respond better to my urgings and promptings, there is much variety. After all in trying to get you to perform to the best of your abilities, to realize your fullest potential, one has to assess your strengths and weaknesses, not pushing too far but not holding back. Most important of all it means taking account of what, for want of a better term, we might call “cultural capital,” the fit between your experiences and dispositions on the one side and the ethos and expectations of the department on the other. Broadly speaking, and all other things being equal, those who descend from academic parentage adjust more easily. They have a prefabricated habitus that makes everything natural and normal. Those who come from very different backgrounds from barrios and ghettos, those who come from the marginalized sectors of society, those from religious or military backgrounds whose values jar with the smug liberal ethos of sociology, and for so long women—you all have a much harder time.

Dorothy Smith summarized her experiences as a graduate student at Berkeley in the late 1950s and early 1960s as “a woman peeing in a men's john.” But she never stopped peeing, whatever suffering it entailed. And the result was a pioneering feminist sociology—among the most original work to come out of Berkeley. Today women are the majority of graduate students and nearly half the faculty, beneficiaries of the struggles waged by Dorothy Smith's generation. Of course, there's still a gender moment. Men still hide their vulnerabilities behind a bravado that I can easily mistake for excessive confidence. It can be easier to recognize the scars, the hidden injuries of class and race among women.

The coach must recognize and identify the source of suffering, and work to make you, the dissenting dissertator, feel more at home, at least with your dissertation—work with you attentively, patiently, and individually to prepare you for the armed struggle of academic life. I have to learn to listen, to ask questions, to observe, and above all to be patient. Supervising is like doing fieldwork, participant observation all over again. I have to work from your strengths, your comparative advantage, your insights into the blindnesses, silences of conventional sociology. I have to give you the extra confidence you need to make the contribution sociology badly needs, to help you exploit the disjuncture between lived experience and academic discipline. Here we are in combat together against the unexamined stereotypes and truisms of our discipline, expanding the horizons of what can be questioned, in combat to defend outsider perspectives. Indeed, it is the stranger, the immigrant, the woman, the gay, the African American, the alienated

intellectual, by bringing their outsidersness to the surface, who have so often made the breakthroughs in sociology. Sociology has a place for everyone if only I can sustain your courage to find and claim that place. I'm still a novice at making a home for the "misfits" who feel uncomfortable in the academic fold but it's the most important thing I can do.

Merchants of Symbolic Power

So far my account has been at the level of the logic of practice, the common sense analysis I tell myself about myself. I'm convinced by the coach model but you, who work with me, may be less convinced. From time to time an outburst tears away the veil of ideology to reveal the symbolic violence upon which it rests. There is the *securing* of consent to supervision but there's also the *obscuring* of the frightening power that makes it all possible—the double truth of production. Facing one rejection after another, whether articles submitted, applications for funding turned down, or job offers never received, you desperately turn to coach for the confidence to continue. Or hopelessly depressed about your progress, paranoid about my intentions, my motivations, my unspoken accusations, you withdraw from sight, slink away like a shamed cat. Just one set of negative comments on a chapter, or a thoughtless remark can send you into a tailspin. It's almost as though I possess your life.

There are the petty rites of graduate school, waiting outside my office, queuing or signing up for an appointment, waiting for comments or grades, for letters of recommendation. There's nothing like the regulation of time to establish who is in control. Perhaps I'm more responsive than some of my colleagues, and that makes me look a little better, thus mystifying the overriding reality, the constancy of domination. While outside my office you exchange words—is he in a good mood today? When it comes to generating fears and anxieties there is nothing more effective than blowing hot and cold. They used to call me the Godfather, perhaps they still do, sometimes benevolent, sometimes autocratic. And then there are institutional rites—the qualifying examinations—when the anointed sit in judgment to determine whether you may go forward or not. Even if you always do, it's still a painful exposure.

When I myself was a graduate student it all came rather as a shock. In my first quarter at the University of Chicago in 1972, fresh off the boat from England, I remember witnessing celebrations of an anthropology Ph.D. who had just successfully defended her dissertation. She regaled the assembled students with a blow-by-blow account of her little victories through a ten-year ordeal, and now she sat there perched on a chair, as though on top of Mount Olympus, with those around gazing up in admiration, awe-struck, doubting they would ever rise to that momentous height. The charisma of consecration! My point is this: power is so built into the supervisory relation that it becomes natural and inevitable, taken-for-granted, and over time barely noticed. Or, if it is noticed, it is because the bounds of acceptable behavior have been violated, such as in instances of sexual harassment, deflecting attention from the power embedded in the norm itself.

What is this power, this symbolic power? It is the power to withhold or bestow *recognition*. Whatever the style, the supervisor is in the business of conferring honor, just like the priest commends good works, and admonishes bad works. In return you openly revere, admire, respect your supervisor, although in private you may give vent to a litany of complaints. The supervisor looms heavily in your psyche. A group of my dissertators,

once got together to discuss their relations with me. They were shocked how closely they paralleled their relation with their father—seeking from me, for example, the approval they never got from him. And this perhaps explains why men are more likely to experience the relation as one of struggle—although I’ve had some pretty tempestuous relations with women! Transference runs deep in the dissertation zone.

This is not an equal exchange since you need my approval more than I need yours. No matter how exuberant and devoted you are, no matter how much you suck up to me, it is impossible to make up the asymmetry. You have no one else to turn to if I withdraw support and recognition. You cannot reject me easily for another faculty person—that would risk ignominy, you would become soiled goods. Although, it must be said, that the one student who did switch supervisors on me, early on in her dissertation career, went on to a most illustrious career. Still, this is not a relation of wage labor where the laborer is formally free to change employers. This is servitude, often servitude for life. And on both sides—mutual bondage. To be sure you can solicit recognition from other faculty or even begin to build an independent store of academic capital in the form of published articles, papers at conferences, but the anchor to the future still lies with me, your all-mighty supervisor.

The danger is that I will abuse my power and violate your trust, but then I’d probably find myself without any supervisees. Fortunately, one doesn’t have to be a sexual harasser or plagiarist if one wants students to leave one alone. There are definite rules and boundaries to the deployment of symbolic power whose violation is quickly and widely disseminated. Although there is profound inequality of power, when the relation is working well both supervisor and supervisee gain recognition from each other. That indeed can be the basis of the mutual reverence and love, which nonetheless work in and through power.

Manufacturing Academic Capital

Supervisors may be simply satisfied with a job well done, they may get a thrill from participating in breaking a puzzle, pushing a research program forward, watching a dissertation evolve from nothing. They may bask in the glory of the recognition, and devotion of their students, but they may also seek recognition beyond, from their own peers and colleagues, and from the professional establishment, for their teaching. The academic field is a peculiar one in that the producers are also the consumers—those who seek recognition are the same people who bestow it! What a complexity! So faculty can build their reputations among the colleagues of their department as someone whom the next generation of sociologists respect. Although that can sometimes be a mixed blessing!

We may claim returns on the recognition received by our students—and indeed may construct fictitious connections to their successes to bring us a little symbolic inheritance. Dissertators then become an investment of time and energy for profits that can be traded in as academic capital for all sorts of symbolic benefits in the wider disciplinary field. Of course, the immediate “cash value” of a dissertation does not approach a refereed article, but articles generally sink without trace whereas students live on and perhaps spawn more students. Articles don’t greet you at ASA meetings, but nor do they ask you for letters of recommendation.

Faculty have an interest, therefore, in accumulating their own capital through building the academic capital of their students, making sure their dissertations are original, but not too original, that they recognize the contributions of other sociologists by stand-

ing on the shoulders of giants. Faculty have an interest in their students publishing articles, the surest currency of academic capital, but also giving papers at conferences, winning prizes, and so forth. Although, of course, there are always those, who are so insecure or so domineering as to see the success of their students as threatening to their status. From the other side, other things being equal—but they rarely are—students have an interest in attaching themselves to those faculty with the greatest academic capital, who will then deploy that capital in helping them obtain jobs—whether through their letters or their contacts. A student's success on the job market redounds to the cumulative advantage of the supervisor and to a lesser extent the supervisory committee. Students come to be known by the name of their supervisor, so-and-so's student. Or more broadly students are symbolic goods exchanged between departments, much as Levi-Strauss saw women as symbolic goods exchanged between clans.

It is difficult to opt out of this game of academic recognition if one takes seriously the placing of one's students. I recall the first student I supervised—a prominent feminist to be—going out on the job market, cavalierly contemptuous of sociology, wrecking her chances at the major departments, and permanently savaging the little academic capital I had accumulated! I didn't know any better, I was still without tenure. I like to think that today's junior faculty are mentored in the art of supervision, in preparing students for the job market. This traumatic experience changed my approach so that when my second student got her first interview, I told her she had to do a practice job talk with me. I still remember her look of disdain—what an insult. Who was I to be telling her to do a practice job talk! Over time I developed an idea of what is a good job talk, the dos and don'ts of the job interview, the little things, the dress codes, and so forth. Over time job market strategy became part of the lore of the department, passed down from one generation of students to the next. At Berkeley graduate students organize their own job practice talks and their comments are as astute as any I've heard.

The stakes are high on every side. Anxiety and worry is greatest if, inexplicably, you do not get any interviews. As coach I have to keep up morale and assure you that your turn will come if only you persist. And coach is usually right. When you do get an interview then capital investment is on display, your reputation and mine are on the line. Not for nothing does the coach go over the job talk countless times. I've been known to hear practice job talks over the phone, to recall you from foreign countries, or even invade your home—all to shape and vet the job talk. Not so long ago, I found myself yelling at a student on the verge of what I considered self-destruction, taking me down with him, by deploying the concept of habitus in a way that would have made him a sitting duck at interviews. Of course, it's in preparing and delivering a job talk that you learn what your dissertation is really about, and its problems. It's exciting, and sometimes overwhelming, to have other sociologists, strangers, respond to your ideas.

The academic field is not as simple as this. There are strategic locations from which certain types of dissertations are more acceptable. Like any other discipline, there are warring camps that will not hire enemy students, camps engaged in struggles to define the terrain of the discipline. How many years was it before certain departments would even interview a student associated with me—dismissed as a Marxist or an ethnographer, or even worse, a combination of the two? I might not think I'm running a shop but those evaluating the students I work with have definite preconceptions of what they are getting. Just as decisive as the disciplinary wars, however, is the ranking of departments, which inflates or deflates the academic capital of their students, and the ranking system itself is quintessentially reputational, based on the assessments of faculty. All things

being equal the bigger departments produce the greater number of students and thus boost their ranking. Within the rankings there develops a caste system, whose upper layers are defined by the exchange of offspring, much as the rich and the super-rich develop matrimonial strategies to retain their concentration of wealth.

If the competition for academic capital drives the disciplinary field and thus the relations of symbolic power, does this detract from the “scientific value” of sociology? Does the “exchange value” of the dissertation, the academic capital it awards author and supervisor, correspond to its “scientific value”? Does the pursuit of recognition, of symbolic profits detract from the science, denature the aesthetics, distort the truth, discredit the insight of the dissertation? Or is power a necessary condition for creative production? Is power productive? Is the need for recognition from others a motivator of excellence or mediocrity? Indeed, one might say that because the readers of dissertations are fellow sociologists, the process is not corrupted by the venal desires of commodification, for satisfying some commercial exploit or some political sales talk. Still, that is to give too much credit to sociologists, projecting them as a seamless community of consensus, insulating them from the world beyond, whereas it is, of course, a community divided in struggle over what constitutes good work, a community defending its boundaries with other disciplines, a community locked into a university under siege, a community competing for patrons and clients.

Public sociology short-circuits all these tensions. Being attentive to the concerns and values of non-academics, it challenges the control of the gate-keepers of our profession, who see it as the Trojan Horse of “declining standards,” “politicization,” and “extraneous values.” It forsakes the accumulation of academic capital for other forms of recognition. It has excited so much interest because it appeals to our shared ideals, particularly among those less well placed in the profession. Graduate students are told they will not get jobs if they design their dissertations to reach publics. And, of course, there’s some truth to that. Yet dissertations can be both scientific, addressed to peers, while also addressing significant problems of today—although it turns out few departments can afford, or feel they can afford, to allow their students to take this path.

Whatever your dissertation, however, there’s no reason to postpone sorties into public sociology until tenure, until one is old and cynical, inured by the labyrinths of normalization. Indeed, many students would never survive graduate school if they did not mobilize their sociology in public directions, albeit often kept secret from their supervisors. Professional and public sociologies are not enemies but mutually invigorating partners. The synergy can be found not just in Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Du Bois, and Addams, but, with a little scratching, it can also be found in the great professionals, Merton, Lazarsfeld, Stouffer, Shils, and Parsons. The issue, it turns out, is not public sociology per se, although that’s how it is presented, but who should be allowed to practice it, who should be allowed to convert their academic capital into political capital.

Taking the Reflexive Turn

As I look back on my 25 years supervising, I think about all those students I had the privilege to work with, how they have taught me so much, nudged my own work into unexpected channels, started me down paths I would otherwise never have taken. Even though I don’t think I took on individual students because I would learn something in particular from them, undoubtedly that has been the result. I recall with delight and awe the revelations to which I have been privy as dissertations unfolded—the new vistas on

the meaning and organization of work, the daring comparisons between nations that shone light on each, the recovery of hidden and unexpected dimensions of socialism, the redefinition and ubiquity of politics, novel explorations of gender as well as class, new approaches to social movements attentive to the societies in which they arise and so on and so forth.

It is not just the intellectual excitement, but there's a passion to the game itself, to seeing a dissertation through to its end, overcoming the most variegated obstacles. When students finish I have flash backs to the beginning of their careers—our first meetings, their first research, a startling paper, their early disappointments, crises of despair, disturbing confrontations, dead ends that are now forgotten—and then to the moment their dissertations suddenly, magically crystallize, then surge forward (or not). It is the uncertainties and the challenges of this game that suck me in and, at the same time, obscure the inequalities and privileges, normalize the market of symbolic power, upon which the game rests.

The academic life can be so absorbing that one rarely thinks of subjecting it to sociological analysis, to ferret out the logic of the practice and then behind the practice, unveiling the magical production of the producer and the product. Writing this essay, therefore, has revealed much that was liminal or even unknown to me. It has been a painful six months as I have struggled to discover the social relations of supervision, just as, no doubt, it may be painful to read—to have supervisory relations unmasked by the disenchanting art of sociology. But that's what we do to others, so we should do it to ourselves.

Note

- * For their comments, challenges, and encouragement I'd like to thank Wendy Espeland, Zsuzsa Gille, Lynne Haney, Sean ÓRiain, and Sandra Smith, as well as Ira Silver and David Shulman, editors of this special issue, and Larry Nichols, editor of *The American Sociologist*.