

but already they are subverting, contesting and reconstructing the dominant narratives.³ Race plays a critical part in this, as do new narratives about our colonial history and post-colonial reality, and a reconsideration of the canon itself, including Bourdieu. New forms of combat in the scholarly fields of sociology and its sister disciplines should therefore be anticipated and welcomed.

NOTES

- 1 See the responses of Anderson (2002), Duneier (2002) and Newman (2002) to Wacquant's (2002) attack on their work.
- 2 There is, of course, an element of combat in Parsons too, for example, in the way he deals with Marx at a time when Marxism was enjoying a certain renaissance in US sociology: '[J]udged by the standards of the best contemporary social-science theory, Marxian theory is obsolete' (1967: 132). Marx was a 'social theorist whose work fell entirely within the nineteenth century ... he belongs to a phase of development which has been superseded' (1967: 135).
- 3 For recent interventions, see Ally (2005), Buhlungu (2006), Naidoo (2010) and Pillay (2009).

CONVERSATION 2

THEORY AND PRACTICE

MICHAEL BURAWOY

Marx Meets Bourdieu

The historical success of Marxist theory, the first social theory to claim scientific status that has so completely realized its potential in the social world, thus contributes to ensuring that the theory of the social world which is the least capable of integrating the theory effect – that it, more than any other, has created – is doubtless, today, the most powerful obstacle to the progress of the adequate theory of the social world to which it has, in times gone by, more than any other contributed.

Bourdieu (1991 [1984]: 251)

What is Bourdieu saying here? The historical success of Marxism is to have constituted the idea of class out of a bundle of attributes shared by an arbitrary assemblage of people, what he calls 'class on paper'. Aided by parties, trade unions, the media and propaganda – an 'immense historical labor of theoretical and practical invention, starting with Marx himself' (Bourdieu, 1991 [1984]: 251) – Marxism effectively called forth the working class as a real actor in history, an actor that otherwise would have had only potential existence. However, Marxism did not see itself as constituting the working class, but as discovering and then reflecting the prior existence of an objective class that was destined to make history in its own image. Marxism did not have the tools to understand its

own effect – ‘theory effect’ – without which there would be no ‘working class’. In short, Marxism did not comprehend its own power – the power of its symbols – and thus missed out on the importance of symbolic domination.

But why does Marxism constitute such a ‘powerful obstacle to the progress of the adequate theory of the social world’ (Bourdieu, 1991 [1984]: 251) *now*, if before it had been so successful? Here I conjecture the answer to be as follows. In failing to recognise the symbolic world, Marxism fails to anticipate the emergence of fields of symbolic production – fields of art, literature, science, journalism – that engender their own domination effects, overriding and countering Marxism’s symbolic power. Marxism cannot understand that a classification or representational struggle has to precede class struggle, i.e. classes have to be constituted symbolically before they can engage in struggle. Unable to compete in the classification struggle, Marxism loses its symbolic power and the working class retreats back to a class on paper, no longer the effective actor that it was. When the economic was being constituted as an autonomous field in 19th-century Europe, Marxism had a firm grasp of reality, but with the rise of cultural, scientific and bureaucratic fields, Marxism lost its grip on reality and its theory became retrograde.

Bourdieu never examines his claims about Marxism, but that is precisely what we will do, starting with Marx himself. I will let Marx respond through a dialogue with Bourdieu, taking as my point of departure their common critique of philosophy. From there I construct a conversation that reveals their divergent theories, showing how the one ends up in a materialist cul-de-sac and the other in an idealist cul-de-sac. Each breaks out of the prison he creates, but in ways he cannot explain, which becomes the paradox of the gap between theory and practice.

THE CRITIQUE OF PHILOSOPHY

Uncanny parallels join Marx and Engels’ critique of the ‘German Ideology’ (Marx & Engels, 1978 [1845–46]) and Bourdieu’s critique of ‘scholastic reason’ in *Pascalian Meditations* (2000 [1997]). In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels settle accounts with Hegel and the Young Hegelians, just as in *Pascalian Meditations* Bourdieu settles his scores with his own philosophical antecedents. Both condemn philosophy’s disposition to dismiss practical engagement with the world. As Marx writes in the first Thesis on Feuerbach, the German philosophers elevate the theoretical attitude as the ‘only genuinely human attitude’, while practice

is only conceived in ‘its dirty-judaical manifestation’. Bourdieu’s immersion in the Algerian war of independence and his experience of the raw violence of colonialism made nonsense of his philosophical training at the École Normale Supérieure.

Still, *Pascalian Meditations* is Bourdieu’s culminating theoretical work in which Pascal is presented as an inspirational philosophical break with philosophy, centring the importance of the practice of ordinary people, emphasising symbolic power exercised over the body and refusing pure philosophy emanating from the heads of philosophers. *The German Ideology*, by contrast, is not a culminating work, but an originating work that clears the foundations for Marx’s theory of historical materialism and materialist history. The different titles reflect their different location in the biography of each of their authors, but the argument against philosophy is, nonetheless, surprisingly similar.

Let us begin with Marx and Engels scoffing at the Young Hegelians who think they are making history, when they are but counter-posing one phrase to another:

As we hear from German ideologists, Germany has in the last few years gone through an unparalleled revolution. The decomposition of the Hegelian philosophy ... has developed into a universal ferment into which all the ‘powers of the past’ are swept. ... It was a revolution besides which the French Revolution was child’s play, a world struggle beside which the struggles of the Diadochi appear insignificant. Principles ousted one another, heroes of the mind overthrew each other with unheard-of rapidity and in the three years 1842–45 more of the past was swept away in Germany than at other times in three centuries. All this is supposed to have taken place in the realm of pure thought (Marx & Engels, 1978 [1845–46]: 147).

Here is Bourdieu’s attack on modern and postmodern philosophers:

Now, if there is one thing that our ‘modern’ or ‘postmodern’ philosophers have in common, beyond the conflicts that divide them, it is this excessive confidence in the powers of language. It is the typical illusion of the *lector*, who can regard an academic commentary as a political act or the critique of texts as a feat of resistance, and experience revolutions in the order of words as radical revolutions in the order of things (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]: 2).

The argument is the same: we must not confuse a war of words with the transformation of the real world, the things of logic with the logic of things.

But how is it that philosophers mistake their own world for the real world? The answer lies in the fact that they are oblivious to the social and economic conditions under which they produce knowledge. For Marx, it is simply the division of mental from manual labour that permits the illusion that ideas or consciousness drives history:

Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears. *From this moment onwards consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice*, that it really represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of 'pure' theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc. (Marx & Engels, 1978 [1845–46]: 159; emphasis added).

Emancipated from manual labour, upon which their existence nevertheless rests, philosophers imagine that history is moved by their thought. 'It has not occurred to any one of these philosophers', Marx and Engels (1978 [1845–46]: 149) write, 'to inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the relation of their criticism to their own material surroundings.' In identical fashion, Bourdieu argues that philosophers fail to understand the peculiarity of the material conditions that make it possible to produce 'pure' theory:

But there is no doubt nothing more difficult to apprehend, for those who are immersed in universes in which it goes without saying, than the scholastic disposition demanded by those universes. There is nothing that 'pure' thought finds it harder to think than *skholè*, the first and most determinant of all the social conditions of possibility of 'pure' thought, and also the scholastic disposition which inclines its possessors to suspend the demands of the situation, the constraints of economic and social necessity (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]: 12).

The scholastic disposition calls forth the illusion that knowledge is freely produced and that it is not the product of specific material conditions. Bourdieu does not limit his critique of the scholastic fallacy – i.e. repression of the conditions peculiar to intellectual life – to philosophers, but broadens it to other disciplines. He criticises anthropologists, such

as Lévi-Strauss, and economists for universalising their own particular experience, foisting their abstract models onto the recalcitrant practice of ordinary mortals. Only sociologists, reflexively applying sociology to themselves and, more generally, to the production of knowledge, can potentially appreciate the scholastic fallacy of others, and the necessary separation of theory and practice.

In Bourdieu's eyes – and here I am imputing an argument to Bourdieu that, as far as I know, he never made – Marx contravenes his own critique of idealism and becomes the perpetrator of a scholastic fallacy. He is guilty of inventing the idea of the proletariat that carries the burden of humanity by fighting against dehumanisation to realise another scholastic invention – communism – a world community populated by renaissance individuals, rich in needs and varied in talents. These ideals are but the projection of the intellectuals' sense of alienation from their own conditions of existence. Real workers, Bourdieu would argue, are only concerned to better their material conditions of existence, bereft of such lofty Marxian dreams. Just as Bourdieu could turn Marx against Marx, so, as we will see, Marx could turn Bourdieu against Bourdieu. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that both Marx and Bourdieu insist on a break with the logic of theory by turning to the logic of practice.

FROM HISTORICAL MATERIALISM TO COEXISTING FIELDS

Out of these common critiques of philosophy arise divergent social theories. Since Bourdieu's social theory is so clearly a response to Marx, we should begin with the latter. For Marx, the logic of practice refers to economic practice, understood as the concrete social relations into which men and women enter as they transform nature. These social relations form the mode of production with two components: the forces of production (relations through which men and women collaborate in producing the means of existence, including the mode of cooperation and the technology it deploys) and the relations of production (the relations of exploitation through which surplus is extracted from a class of direct producers and appropriated by a dominant class). The mode of production gives rise to Marx's three histories: (1) history as a succession of modes of production – tribal, ancient, feudal and capitalist; (2) history as the dynamics of any given mode of production as the relations of production first stimulate and then fetter the expansion of the forces of production – a theory that Marx only works out for capitalism; and (3) history as the history of class struggle that propels the movement from one mode of production

to another when the material conditions of such a transition are met. Capitalism gives way to communism, which, being without classes and thus without exploitation, is not a mode of production. The key to history lies in the mode of production, but it is only within the capitalist mode of production that the direct producers, i.e. the working class, through their struggles come to recognise their role as agents of revolution.

Bourdieu will have no truck with such economic reductionism, such a theory of history and of the future, this projection of intellectual fantasies onto the benighted working class. But let us proceed step by step. When Bourdieu turns to the 'logic of practice', he goes beyond economic activities to embrace activities in all arenas of life, and furthermore those activities are seen less in terms of 'transformation' and more in terms of bodily practices that lead to and evolve from the constitution of the habitus, the inculcation of dispositions of perception and appreciation. Here is how Bourdieu defines habitus in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*:

The habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977 [1972]: 78).

The habitus generates practices that, like moves in a game, are regulated by the regularities of the social structure and in so doing they reproduce these structures. But practices and knowledge are bound together by the body whose importance the intellectualist vision misses. The social order inscribes itself in bodies; that is to say, we learn bodily and express our knowledge bodily – all under the organising power of the habitus, itself largely unconscious.

The notion of habitus gives much greater weight and depth to the individual, who in Marx is simply the effect or carrier of social relations. Nevertheless, in the account of these social relations, Bourdieu's notion of field draws on and generalises certain features of Marx's concept of mode of production, or at least his conception of the *capitalist* mode of production elaborated in *Capital*. Indeed, underlining the parallels, Bourdieu refers to the *political economy of symbolic goods* (science, art, education). As with the capitalist mode of production, so with the notion of field, individuals are compelled to enter relations of competition in order to accumulate capital according to the rules of the marketplace. Bourdieu's fields have the

same character, each having their own distinctive 'capital' that agents seek to accumulate, bound by rules of competition that give the field a certain functional integrity and relatively autonomous dynamics. If there is any overall historical tendency of fields, it is toward the concentration of field-specific capital, as when Bourdieu (1975) writes of the scientific field as being dominated by those who increasingly monopolise scientific capital.

However, there are fundamental differences between Marx and Bourdieu. In Bourdieu's field, most fully elaborated for the literary field in *Rules of Art* (Bourdieu, 1996 [1992]), but also in his account of the scientific field, the notion of exploitation, so essential to Marx, is absent. Instead we have a field of domination governing the struggle between the consecrated incumbents and the new challengers, the avant-garde. It is as if capitalism were confined to just the competition among capitalists, which is, of course, how conventional economics thinks of the economy. Indeed, the only book Bourdieu devotes to the economy as such, *The Social Structures of the Economy* (2005), focuses on the role of habitus and taste in the matching of supply and demand for different types of housing. It is all about the social underpinnings of the housing market. There is no attempt to study housing from the standpoint of its production process – from the standpoint of construction workers, for example. The very concept that is definitive of the capitalist economy for Marx, namely exploitation, is absent in Bourdieu's concept of the field.

More to the point, the architecture of fields is profoundly different in the two theories. In Marx, there is essentially just one major field – the capitalist mode of production with its inherent laws of competition leading to crises of overproduction and falling rates of profit, on the one hand, and the intensification of class struggle, on the other. The only thing holding back the demise of capitalism is its superstructure, composed of, you might say, a series of subsidiary fields – legal, political, religious, aesthetic and philosophical. Bourdieu transposes the base-superstructure model into a system of coexisting fields. Although the economic field is, in some undefined sense, still dominant and threatens the autonomy of other fields, Bourdieu pays attention to the inner workings of the 'superstructure' that in Marx is more or less dismissed as epiphenomenal.

No less fundamental is the way they conceive of the relation among fields. If Marx has a *historical succession* of economic fields, Bourdieu has a *functional coexistence* of fields. Bourdieu's multiplication of coexisting fields poses a host of new problems with respect to the relations among fields, which is why one axis of differentiation and struggle within any field is over its autonomy/heteronomy with respect to

other fields, usually the economic field. In his later writings, Bourdieu engages in a polemical defence of science and culture, education, and politics against the corrosive influence of the invading economy. The creation of the literary field in 19th-century France required the break from bourgeois literature, on the one hand, and social realism, on the other, to an autonomous literature-for-literature's sake. But autonomy brings with it another kind of relation among fields, a relation of *misrecognition*. The autonomy of the educational field or of various cultural fields leads to the misrecognition of their contribution to the reproduction of relations in other fields, most notably class relations in the economic field. Whether in *distinction* or in *reproduction*, the pre-existence of class structure is taken as given and the focus is on how culture or education simultaneously secure and obscure class domination.

The coexistence of fields raises a further question: that of their effect on the action of individuals as they move across fields. In Marx, individuals are only studied in one field and there they act out the imperatives of the relations in which they are embedded. Bourdieu's analysis is more complex, for he has to ask how individuals nurtured in one field behave in another field – how do students coming from peasant families (as opposed to the urban middle classes) behave within the educational sphere? Does it make no difference or is there something in their cultural capital or their habitus that makes them behave differently? Each field may have its logic, but sometimes the strength of the habitus that agents bring from another field – the peasant who comes to town – may lead to a tension, conflict or even rupture with the new order in what he calls a 'misfiring' of habitus. It is the durability of the habitus that can lead to what Bourdieu calls *hysteresis* – how an individual's inherited and obdurate habitus inhibits adaptation to successive fields.

Bourdieu's favourite example of hysteresis is the devaluation of educational credentials that, in his view, explains the student protest of May 1968. In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu (1988 [1984]) describes how the expansion of higher education created an oversupply of assistant lecturers whose upward mobility was consequently blocked. The ensuing tension between aspirations and opportunities not only affected the young assistants, but students more generally, who found that their degrees did not give them access to expected jobs. The result was a discordance between class habitus and the labour market in a number of fields simultaneously, so that their normally disparate temporal rhythms were synchronised, merging into a general crisis conducted in a singular public time and producing an historical event that suspended common sense.

This is a repotted version of the theory of relative deprivation that once informed so much social psychology and social movement theory. It does not take seriously the self-understanding of the actors, nor even the resources they have at their disposal. The disjuncture of habitus and field, expectation and opportunity, disposition and position is always a potential source of change, but we need to know when it leads to adjustment to the field, when it leads to innovation and when it leads to rebellion. In these regards, Bourdieu's theory of habitus has little to offer – even less than Robert Merton's (1968 [1947]) famous essay on social structure and anomie that more systematically examined the consequences of the gap between aspirations and possibilities, namely, rebellion, ritualism, retreatism, innovation and conformity. In Bourdieu's hands, habitus remains a black box, yet one that is nonetheless essential to thinking about the effects of mobility between fields both on the individual and on the transformation of the fields themselves.

We can now put the two models side by side: Marx's succession of modes of production through history with its problematic dynamics and transition, its unjustified linear progress to communism; and Bourdieu's unspecified totality made up of coexisting and homologous fields with unexamined and untheorised interrelationships. If Marx's totality is governed by a richly developed base and a weakly understood superstructure, Bourdieu's unspecified history can at best be seen as the development of a differentiated set of fields with no mechanisms of propulsion, reminiscent of Durkheim's or Spencer's models of differentiation, or Weber's coexisting value spheres. Thus, in Bourdieu's account, the Kabyle form an undifferentiated society without the separate fields that characterise advanced societies, but there is no notion of how one gets from the undifferentiated to the differentiated society. Or, to put it even more crudely: if Marx's theory of history is deeply flawed, Bourdieu has no theory of history, even if his work is historically rooted.

SYMBOLIC DOMINATION: FROM WEAK TO STRONG

Marx's strong sense of social transformation is accompanied by a weak theory of symbolic domination, in contrast to Bourdieu's strong theory of social reproduction, at the heart of which is symbolic domination. Still, there remains an uncanny convergence in the way they both conceive of symbolic domination. Let us return to *The German Ideology* and to the much-quoted passage on ideology:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, *the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it* (Marx & Engels, 1978 [1845–46]: 172; emphasis added).

Here, Marx and Engels advance from a dismissal of ideology (in contradistinction to science) to the real effects of those illusory ideas in sustaining the domination of the dominant class. We do not know, however, what they intended when they wrote that the dominated class, i.e. those who don't have access to the means of mental production, are *subject to* the ruling ideas. Bourdieu takes up the issue and sees subjection as deep and almost irreversible:

Symbolic violence is the coercion which is set up only through the consent that the dominated cannot fail to give to the dominator (and therefore to the domination) when their understanding of the situation and relation can only use instruments of knowledge that they have in common with the dominator, which, being merely the incorporated form of the structure of the relation of domination, make this relation appear as natural; or, in other words, when the schemes they implement in order to perceive and evaluate themselves or to perceive and evaluate the dominators (high/low, male/female, white/black, etc.) are the product of the incorporation of the (thus neutralized) classifications of which their social being is the product (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]: 170).

The parallels are astonishing, except that Bourdieu puts symbolic violence at the centre of his account. For Marx, of course, symbolic violence does not only originate from the superstructure, but is powerfully present within the economic base itself. Exploitation itself is mystified by the very character of production, which hides the distinction between necessary and surplus labour, since workers appear to be paid for the entire work day. Participation in the market leads to commodity fetishism wherein the objects we buy and sell and those we consume are disconnected from the social relations and human labour necessary to produce them. Again, the essence of capitalism is mystified.

For Marx, however, these expressions of ideology – whether ideology is understood as ruling ideas or as lived experience – are dissolved

through class struggle, leading the working class to see the truth of capitalism, on the one hand, and their role in transforming it, on the other:

It is not a matter of what this or that proletariat or even the proletariat as a whole *pictures* at present as its goal. It is a matter of *what the proletariat is in actuality*, and what in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do. Its goal and its historical action are prefigured in the most clear and ineluctable way in its own life-situation as well as in the whole organization of contemporary bourgeois society. There is no need to harp on the fact that a large part of the English and French proletariat is already *conscious* of its historic task and is continually working to bring this consciousness to full clarity (Marx & Engels, 1978 [1845–46]: 134–35).

This optimistic teleology is deeply flawed. For the proletariat to rid itself of the 'the muck of ages', as Marx and Engels put it in *The German Ideology* (1978 [1845–46]: 193), is not so easy. Only under unusual circumstances does class struggle assume an ascendant path, intensifying itself as it expands. On the contrary: through its victories, through the concessions it wins, its revolutionary tempo is dampened and its struggles come to be organised, most frequently *within* the framework of capitalism. In this, the state, under-theorised by Marx, plays a key role. In such a context, the symbolic violence of dominant ideologies incorporated in lived experience prevails over the cathartic effect of struggle.

Bourdieu indicts the whole Marxist tradition – and not just Marx – for its revolutionary optimism, labelling it an intellectualist fantasy or scholastic illusion, and then bends the stick in the opposite direction:

And another effect of the scholastic illusion is seen when people describe resistance to domination in the language of consciousness – as does the whole Marxist tradition and also the feminist theorists who, giving way to habits of thought, expect political liberation to come from the 'raising of consciousness' – ignoring the extraordinary inertia which results from the inscription of social structures in bodies, for lack of a dispositional theory of practices. While making things explicit can help, only a thoroughgoing process of countertraining, involving repeated exercises, can, like an athlete's training, durably transform habitus (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]: 172).

What this 'countertraining' might look like is never elaborated. Whether class struggle might be a form of 'countertraining' is especially unclear,

because Bourdieu never entertains the idea of class struggle or even allows for 'collective resistance' to the dominant culture. The working classes are driven by the exigencies of material necessity, leading them to make a virtue out of a necessity. They embrace their functional lifestyle rather than reject the dominant culture. An alternative culture remains beyond their grasp, because they have neither the tools nor the leisure to create it (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]: chap. 7).

Having thus written off the working classes as incapable of grasping the conditions of their oppression, Bourdieu is compelled to look elsewhere for ways of contesting symbolic domination. Having broken from a fallacious logic of theory to the logic of practice and having discovered that the logic of practice is no less fallacious, he breaks back to the logic of theory, to the emancipatory science of sociology and to struggles within the dominant class. Let us follow his argument.

FROM CLASS STRUGGLE TO CLASSIFICATION STRUGGLE

In his writings on the period 1848–51 in France, Marx has a complex analysis of the struggles among the fractions of the dominant class that cannot be summarised here. Suffice to say that intellectuals played a significant role. In a succinct paragraph in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels wrote of a cleavage within the dominant classes, between its economic part and its intellectual part, as follows:

The division of labour ... manifests itself also in the ruling class as the division of mental and manual labour, so that inside this class one part appears as thinkers of the class (its active conceptive ideologists, who make the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood), while the others' attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of the class and have less time to make up the illusions and ideas about themselves. Within this class this cleavage can even develop into a certain opposition and hostility between the two parts (Marx & Engels, 1978 [1845–46]: 173).

Without referring to Marx, Bourdieu calls these the dominant and dominated fractions of the dominant class, giving the latter a 'chiastic' structure in which one part is well endowed with economic capital (and relatively low in cultural capital), while the other is well endowed with cultural capital (and relatively low in economic capital). Bourdieu, too,

recognises the conflict between the two fractions, but casts that conflict in terms of struggles over categories of representation – so-called classification struggles. Recognising that intellectuals are the source of ruling ideology – 'the illusion of the class about itself' – Bourdieu also sees the possibility of their generating a symbolic revolution that can shake the 'deepest structures of the social order':

Likewise, the arts and literature can no doubt offer the dominant agents some very powerful instruments of legitimation, either directly, through the celebration they confer, or indirectly, especially through the cult they enjoy, which also consecrates its celebrants. But it can also happen that artists or writers are, directly or indirectly, at the origin of large-scale symbolic revolutions (like the bohemian lifestyle in the nineteenth century, or, nowadays, the subversive provocations of the feminist or homosexual movements), capable of shaking the deepest structures of the social order, such as family structures, through transformation of the fundamental principles of division of the vision of the world (such as male/female opposition) and the corresponding challenges to the self-evidences of common sense (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]: 105).

It is not clear whether this 'shaking' will actually undermine the domination of the dominant class; there is not even a hint that it will create opportunities for the dominated to challenge their subjugation. One has to ask, therefore, what are the interests that lie behind any such 'symbolic revolution'?

As the dominated fraction of the dominant class, intellectuals are in a contradictory position. Certain parts may identify with the dominated classes and, indeed, try to represent the latter's interests. As such, they may even pursue an agenda hostile to the dominant class as a whole. In the final analysis, however, it is an intellectualist illusion that they share interests with the dominated, as there is little basis for an enduring connection between intellectuals born out of *skholé* and workers born into material necessity.

Rather than turning to any presumed universalism from below, Bourdieu commits himself to what he calls the Realpolitik of reason, the pursuit of universality that is wired into the character of the state:

Those who, like Marx, reverse the official image that the State bureaucracy seeks to give of itself and describe the bureaucrats as usurpers of the universal, acting like private proprietors of public resources, are

not wrong. But they ignore the very real effects of the obligatory reference to the values of neutrality and disinterested devotion to the public good which becomes more and more incumbent on state functionaries in the successive stages of the long labor of symbolic construction which leads to the invention and imposition of the official representation of the State as the site of universality and the service of the general interest (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]: 124).

In this remarkable passage, written at the very time he is attacking the French state for continuing to violate its public function, in which the (conservative) right hand of the state is displacing the (socialist) left hand, when the state is openly pursuing an aggressive assault on the working class, Bourdieu is also appealing to its 'disinterested devotion to the public good' that will, he claims, eventually assert itself against the state's usurpers. In the long run, therefore, the state will become the carrier of the general interest, but how?

The idea of universality will not prevail simply because it is an attractive ideal – that would be the worst form of idealism – but because there are certain fields that by their very functioning, by virtue of their internal struggles, give rise to a commitment to the universal:

In reality, if one is not, at best, to indulge in an irresponsible utopianism, which often has no other effect than to procure the short-lived euphoria of humanist hopes, almost always as brief as adolescence, and which produces effects quite as malign in the life of research as in political life, it is necessary I think to return to a 'realistic' vision of the universes in which the universal is generated. To be content, as one might be tempted, with giving the universal the status of a 'regulatory idea', capable of suggesting principles of action, would be to forget that there are universes in which it becomes a 'constitutive' immanent principle of regulation, such as the scientific field, and to a lesser extent the bureaucratic field and the judicial field; and that, more generally, as soon as the principles claiming universal validity (those of democracy, for example) are stated and officially professed, there is no longer any social situation in which they cannot serve at least as symbolic weapons in struggles of interests or as instruments of critique for those who have a self-interest in truth and virtue (like, nowadays, all those, especially in the minor state nobility, whose interests are bound up with universal advances associated with the State and with law) (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]: 127).

Let us recall that Bourdieu sets out on his journey with a critique of scholastic reason that misses the ways in which theoretical models, such as those of 'rational choice' or 'deliberative democracy', are but projections of the very specific conditions under which academic knowledge is produced. After turning from this fallacious logic of theory to the logic of practice and finding there only misrecognition, Bourdieu returns to the same universalities produced in the scientific, legal and bureaucratic fields, universalities that he had earlier called into question as scholastic fallacies – the product of the peculiar circumstances of their production. But now he turns to them as the source of hope for humanity.

We are back with the Enlightenment, with Hegel's view of the state criticised by Marx as portraying a false universality that masks the interests of the dominant class by presenting them as the interests of all. Not just Marx, but Weber too saw the danger that such universality would become a formal rationality and, thus, the perfection of domination. We can see this Enlightenment faith in Bourdieu's proposals for an International of intellectuals, recognising that they are a corporate body with their own interests, but at the same time regarding them as the carriers of universalism and forming a corporatism of the universal. They are what Alvin Gouldner (1979) calls a flawed universal class. Bourdieu was not only organising intellectuals, but paradoxically he was also to be found on the picket lines of striking workers, haranguing them about the evils of neoliberalism – even as he claimed they could not understand the conditions of their own oppression. No different from the people he studied, he too created a gap between his theory and his practice, especially when his theory led him into a political cul-de-sac.

CONCLUSION

Marx and Bourdieu set out from similar positions, but they end up in divergent places. They both start out as critics of intellectualist illusions or scholastic fallacies that privilege the role of ideas in the making of history. They both move to the logic of practice, but where Marx remains wedded to this logic, seeing in it a future emancipation realised through working-class revolution, Bourdieu sees it as a cul-de-sac mired in domination. So he breaks away from the logic of practice back to the practice of logic and to a faith in reason, whether embodied in an International of intellectuals or the universality of the state. In short, if Bourdieu starts out as a critic of philosophy and ends up as a Hegelian, believing in the universality of reason, Marx also starts out as a critic of philosophy, but

ends up with material production, but no considered place for intellectuals or for himself. Marx cannot explain how he produced his theory of capitalism, sitting in the British Museum removed from the working class and writing in a place remote from their experiences. We are on the horns of a dilemma: intellectuals without the subaltern or the subaltern without intellectuals.

Each recognises the dilemma and, in his practice, each breaks with his theory: Bourdieu joins workers as allies in the struggle against the state, while Marx battles with intellectuals as though the fate of the world depended on it. Can we bring theory and practice closer together? Gramsci, with his theory of hegemony and intellectuals, seeks to do just that, trying to transcend the theoretical opposition: faith in the subaltern, on the one hand, and in intellectuals, on the other. In the next conversation, we will see how he fares, and where this will leave Bourdieu.

KARL VON HOLDT

Bodies of Defiance

Bourdieu is interested in the subordinated body that the subaltern habitus predisposes to manual labour, as well as to deference, humility and a physical stance of submission. This immediately poses the question of the body in resistance. The body on strike is already a body of defiance, refusing the routines of subordination and of the supervisor's instruction, disrupting authority. Striking workers today chant songs with their roots in the freedom songs of the 1980s, dance the toyi-toyi war dance that originated in the military camps of Umkhonto we Sizwe, and carry sticks that they understand to symbolise acts of fighting or war.

Where does this – the refusal, the defiance – fit into the idea of habitus, which predisposes the dominated to find domination invisible and submit to it? Nor does the body of resistance only come into being at the

moment of explicit collective mobilisation. In my study of workers' struggles at Highveld Steel in the apartheid era, workers talked about a continual resistance to the pace of white managers and their machinery, about an 'apartheid go-slow' on the part of African workers. Workers at the Daimler-Benz plant in East London wore wooden AK-47s strapped to their bodies on the production line, symbolising the connection between their struggles and the military struggle of the African National Congress (ANC), while supervisors locked themselves in their offices (Von Holdt, 1990). Can Bourdieu's theory account for the resistant body, the body that refuses the machinery and structures of domination?

According to Bourdieu (2000 [1997]: 182), historical critique is 'a major weapon of reflexivity' which 'makes it possible to neutralise the effects of naturalisation'. For Bourdieu, it is the scholar who has the time and occupies a location that makes it possible to pursue this task. The first strike I went to after arriving in Johannesburg in 1986 was an occupation strike in a big engineering works. Hundreds of workers were gathered in a solid and disciplined phalanx, toyi-toyi slowly up the main roadway between the factory buildings. Many were bearing cardboard shields and steel replicas of spears turned on factory lathes, and in front of them whirled and danced two of the strike leaders, their factory overalls supplemented with animal furs and beads, referencing pre-colonial culture and resistance to colonial conquest.

History is not something that is solely available to social scientists toiling away in scholarly fields; it is available to be appropriated and reinvented and marshalled afresh by subalterns. In the colony, history is embodied. The bodies of the colonised constitute a site of struggle in the form of conquest and resistance, and in the various endeavours of colonial authority to order and subdue the subject body. Racial classification systems – which reached their apogee under apartheid – provide the foundation for physical and symbolic assault. When the railway strikers in 1987 made use of traditional medicine to protect them before going out to confront the guns of the police, they were drawing on all the resources of their history. Rationalists may point out that the bullets drew blood anyway, but if the medicine gave the strikers strength to challenge the apartheid order, is that not how apartheid was brought to the negotiating table?

In the colonial experience, history has a bodily presence that has to be accommodated in any attempt to make use of Bourdieu's concept of habitus or of bodily dispositions; it may not be impossible for anthropologists or sociologists to make similar arguments about the subordinated body in the metropolis.

In Bourdieu, for the most part, habitus and symbolic violence fit the embodied individual – the social body – seamlessly into social structure, so that social reality appears most of the time as ordered and coherent, and domination becomes natural and invisible. This is how Bourdieu resolves the opposition between agency and structure, but he does so in a way that removes agency from the picture. ‘The body is in the social world but the social world is in the body’, so that the body can only act in accordance with the social world, by which it is ‘pre-occupied’ before it acts (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]: 142, 152). This comes close to constituting a tautological circle that allows little room for agency or volition.

In contrast, the colony poses the question of the *limits* of order and the limits of authority’s power to occupy the body. The potentiality of the body for defiance is present within the body of submission, corresponding to the distinction James C. Scott (1990) draws between ‘the public transcript’ of deference and submission and the ‘hidden transcripts’ of resistance. It is quite intriguing to read the early Bourdieu on the anti-colonial struggle in Algeria: in his account of settler colonialism, racialised oppression is totally transparent and resistance is inevitable – to the extent that it requires no explanation (Bourdieu, 1962 [1961]). This is, of course, too simple an account of colonial domination, as we shall see in the conversation between Frantz Fanon and Bourdieu, but its interest lies in the contrast with his later work on the invisibility of domination in the West.

Echoes of the Algerian experience do surface at critical moments in Bourdieu’s text, particularly when he considers the possibilities of social change and the disruption of domination. Contradictory positions in social structure may generate ‘destabilised habitus, torn by contradiction and internal division, generating suffering’, and the same effect may occur ‘when a field undergoes a major crisis and its regularities (even its rules) are profoundly changed’; this happens ‘in situations of crisis or sudden change, especially those seen at the time of abrupt encounters between civilisations linked to the colonial situation or too-rapid movements in social space’. But, strangely, this disjunction does not culminate in collective struggle; instead, Bourdieu emphasises the difficulty agents then have ‘in adjusting to the newly established order’, and the durability of these now maladjusted dispositions creates the ‘Don Quixote effect’: the disoriented individual is reduced to tilting at windmills and the possibility of subaltern mobilisation to restructure the field itself is elided (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]: 160–61).

But the question of subaltern agency reappears several times in Bourdieu’s text, mostly as a possibility to be gestured towards rather than

something fully explored. Thus, 20 pages from the passage discussed above, we find the following:

The specifically political action of legitimation is always carried out on the basis of the fundamental given of original acceptance of the world as it is, and the work of the guardians of the symbolic order, whose interests are bound up with common sense, consists in trying to restore the initial self-evidences of *doxa*. By contrast, the political action of subversion aims to liberate the potential capacity for refusal which is neutralised by misrecognition, by performing, aided by a crisis, a critical unveiling of the founding violence that is masked by the adjustment between the order of things and the order of bodies (Bourdieu, 2000 [1997]: 181).

For Bourdieu, it is only intellectuals who can see through the silent ‘self-evidences’ of the given order of things. But what if in the colonial world it is domination that is self-evident? Then what becomes of subaltern agency and intellectuals’ monopoly of the power to understand?

Notwithstanding their ambiguities and briefness, it is these passages in Bourdieu that I read most avidly, gesturing as they do to our history of resistance and contestation, and at the fractured and endlessly subverted reality we inhabit in Johannesburg today – which demonstrates so forcefully the limits of authority in post-apartheid South Africa; and they seem to gain an added charge of theoretical explosiveness precisely because of their sparseness and elliptical brevity, surrounded as they are by the overwhelming accumulated weight of domination that is the main emphasis of his texts, as Michael points out.

When Bourdieusian theory, drawing on anthropological insights into indigenous society in the colonies and elaborated in the advanced capitalism of France, is returned to Johannesburg and South Africa, it is confronted by disjunction, fragmentation and subversion, where passages such as those I have quoted above are the ones that really make sense. They need to be expanded and elaborated on.

Colonial and post-colonial realities that are deeply structured by their ‘founding violence’, by domination and by the uneven distribution of power suggest that the social world may better be understood as contradictory, inconsistent, polyvocal, paradoxical, and full of tensions and uncertainties than as a coherently structured order. In this case, the habitus too should be regarded as complex and contradictory, where different dispositions may be at odds with one another and a particular disposition may even be dogged by a shadow counter-disposition, to

which at times the individual may give way. When considered in this way, the relationship between habitus and social world, while structured, is not seamless. The potentiality of the body of defiance is present within the body of submission.

The subaltern has to be brought back in and theorised as an agent capable of mobilising to change the fields of domination.¹ But what kind of subalterns would these be? Would they be workers in their trade unions, which may bear at least a family resemblance to the labour organisations of classical sociology? Or the residents of informal settlements where the state has a minimal presence and is unable to impose its authority in the face of informal local elites who control land, law and punishment? Or the intellectuals, fighting back against the accumulated weight of the imperialism of reason? Does the agency and mobilisation of subalterns such as these bear any resemblance to Marx's conception of a working class whose historical agency is derived from its essential relationship with capitalism?

NOTES

- 1 As Jennifer Chun (2009) does in her study of the ways in which casualised workers and their organisations seek to challenge their labour market status in Korea and the United States.

CONVERSATION 3

CULTURAL DOMINATION

MICHAEL BURAWOY

Gramsci Meets Bourdieu

It would be easy to enumerate the features of the life-style of the dominated classes which, through the sense of their incompetence, failure or cultural unworthiness, imply a form of recognition of the dominant values. It was Antonio Gramsci who said somewhere that the worker tends to bring his executant dispositions with him into every area of life.

Bourdieu (1984 [1979]: 386)

It's like when these days people wonder about my relations with Gramsci – in whom they discover, probably because they have [not] read me, a great number of things that I was able to find in his work only because I hadn't read him (The most interesting thing about Gramsci, who in fact, I did only read quite recently, is the way he provides us with the basis for a sociology of the party apparatchik and the Communist leaders of this period – all of which is far from the ideology of the 'organic intellectual' for which he is best known.)

Bourdieu (1990 [1986]: 27–28)