

can be rendered visible and challenged. The numerous women's organisations and movements that have championed women's rights and contributed to progressive legislation and policies, and the difficult battles they take on in their communities are evidence of this. Even when the impact is limited, new rhetoric and new formal rights bolster discourses through which oppressed women may see their world afresh, its opacity becoming transparent, and find ways to challenge their domination. Indeed, in the same focus group described above, a feisty young woman drew on such discourses to challenge the men's views and made it clear that she would never tolerate such abuse.

It may indeed be that stripping away or rooting out one layer of symbolic violence simply reveals other, deeper and more intractable layers. But this is no reason to abandon the idea of freedom that is enshrined in our constitution and in much of the legislation enacted by the post-apartheid democratic parliament.

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#### NOTES

- 1 An obvious reference to *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, the first volume of Beauvoir's autobiography.
- 2 I will rely on the original English translation of *The Second Sex*, despite its known problems; see Moi (2002).
- 3 Toril Moi says as much herself in her essay, 'Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist theory and Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of culture' (Moi, 1999; see p. 283, footnote 21). There is nothing original in his gender analysis, but, so she argues, his concepts are nonetheless very useful for feminism. This is also the general tenor of the collection *Feminism after Bourdieu* (Adkins & Skeggs, 2004).
- 4 Beauvoir devotes a whole chapter to prostitution as an alternative to marriage. Just as lesbianism is a departure from normal sexualisation, so prostitution is a similarly alternative road to marriage whose significance and evaluation differs from society to society.
- 5 The same structure can also be found in Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1948 [1946]), which appeared, probably not coincidentally, just as Beauvoir began work on *The Second Sex*.
- 6 This is what Patricia Collins 40 years later (1991) will call the perspective of 'the outsider within', although she will trace its genealogy not to Beauvoir, but to George Simmel.

## CONVERSATION 7

### INTELLECTUALS AND THEIR PUBLICS

MICHAEL BURAWOY

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#### Mills Meets Bourdieu

*It is the political task of the social scientist – as of any liberal educator – continually to translate personal troubles into public issues, and public issues into the terms of their human meaning for a variety of individuals. It is his task to display in his work – and, as an educator, in his life as well – this kind of sociological imagination.*

Mills (1959: 187)

*Political competence, inasmuch as there can be a universal definition of it, undoubtedly consists in the ability to speak in universal terms about particular problems – how to survive dismissal or redundancy, an injustice or an accident at work, not as individual accident, a personal mishap, but as something collective, common to a class. This universalization is possible only by way of language, by access to a general discourse on the social world. This is why politics is in part bound up with language. And here again, if you like, we can introduce a bit of utopia to attenuate the sadness of sociological discourse, and convince ourselves that it is not too naive to believe that it can be useful to fight over words, over their honesty and proper sense, to be outspoken and to speak out.*

Bourdieu (2008 [1977]: 76–77)

All this means that the ethno-sociologist is a kind of organic intellectual of humanity, and as a collective agent, can contribute to de-naturalizing and de-fatalizing human existence by placing his skill at the service of a universalism rooted in the comprehension of different particularisms.

Bourdieu (2008 [2000]: 24)

So far, I have created imaginary conversations between Bourdieu and Marxism: how Bourdieu appropriated so much of Marx, but took it in a direction unimagined by Marx, namely the political economy of symbolic goods; how in many ways Gramsci and Bourdieu are at loggerheads over the sources of the durability and depth of domination; how, despite their common views of colonialism, Bourdieu and Fanon clash over the means of its transcendence; and, finally, how Bourdieu's understanding of masculine domination as symbolic power was a pale replica of Beauvoir's feminism. We turn now to another conversation, between Bourdieu and Mills. Both deeply ambivalent about Marxism, they shared similar sociological and political projects, despite living half a century apart and on different continents.

The quotes from Bourdieu and Mills above are chosen to underscore their convergent views on the relations between sociologists and their publics, a notion of the traditional intellectual who can potentially challenge domination by denaturalising and defatalising what exists, demonstrating the links between the taken-for-granted lived experience (the particular) and the social forces that constitute it (the universal). They differ, however, in that Bourdieu recognises and lives out the contradictions between 'science as a vocation' and 'politics as a vocation', to use Max Weber's terms, since science rests on a *break* with common sense and politics on an *engagement* with common sense. Mills, on the other hand, would probably have as little tolerance for Bourdieu's scientific 'jargon' as he did for Parsons's, since he doesn't see a fundamental break between science and common sense, identifying the sociological imagination (linking micro and macro) with the political imagination (turning personal troubles into public issues). We will return to this question in the conclusion to this conversation, but first we must build up the case that, despite their obvious differences, Mills is Bourdieu draped in 1950s American colours.

## STRIKING CONVERGENCES

Bourdieu's major methodological text, *The Craft of Sociology* (written with Jean-Claude Chamboredon and Jean-Claude Passeron in 1968), exhibits uncanny parallels with C. Wright Mills's famous elaboration of the sociological imagination in 1959. Indeed, one cannot but notice that the title of Bourdieu's book is borrowed from Mills's famous appendix, 'On intellectual craftsmanship'. Both books are critical of the divorce of theory from empirical research; both emphasise social science research as process – a *modus operandi* rather than an *opus operatum*, as Bourdieu would say. Bourdieu follows Mills in attacking US sociology for its professionalism, its formalism, its empiricism and its provincialism. Yet there is not a single reference to Mills in Bourdieu's writings, except the inclusion of a short extract – one of 44 'illustrative texts' – from *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), in which Mills criticises public opinion research for creating its own spurious object, an argument also found in *The Craft of Sociology* and one that Bourdieu will elaborate later in his career.

Given their similar methodological outlooks and empirical foci, the comparison of Bourdieu and Mills underlines how the world has changed since the 1950s (while in some ways reverting back to that era), as well as the abiding differences between the United States and France. Still, there are parallels in the political context that shaped their writing. In the United States, the years immediately after the Second World War witnessed the continuity of the radicalism that had begun in the 1930s, but it wasn't long before reaction asserted itself in the form of McCarthyite witch hunts, a broad anti-communism, American triumphalism and the 'end of ideology'. Just as Mills confronted the swing away from the political configuration of the New Deal, much of Bourdieu's writings can be seen as coming to terms with the *dénouement* of the 1960s and the rightward turn in the 1980s and 1990s. Both sustained a critique of the present at a time when progressive alternatives were in retreat.

Biographically, Mills and Bourdieu came from very different backgrounds – the one grew up the son of a postman in a village in the French Pyrenees, the other from middle-class stock in Texas. More interesting, however, they both began as philosophy students, but quickly turned from abstract and abstruse intellectual preoccupations to a more direct engagement with the world. For Mills, his interest in pragmatism gave him a particular stance on sociology that was opposed to structural functionalism and survey research, just as Bourdieu reacted against the pretensions of Sartre and his circle, as well as against social reform sociology.

Like Bourdieu, who developed a knee-jerk reaction against the Marxism of the communist intellectuals who surrounded him at the École Normale Supérieure, Mills had his Marxism refracted through the milieu of New York leftism. Only very late in his life would Mills take up a serious engagement with the history of Marxism. Like Bourdieu, he borrowed many ideas from Marxism, but, also like Bourdieu, he never quite identified with its political project. Thus, both were hostile to the Communist Party and were never members, although – again – both exhibited sometimes overt and sometimes covert sympathies for democratic variants of socialism.

Both openly recognised the influence of Weber, with whom they shared a pre-eminent concern with domination, its reproduction and its repercussions. Like Weber, they never spelled out any future utopia. Both had only a weakly developed theory of history: Mills focused on the shift from a 19th-century aristocratic order (alongside putative democratic publics) to the new regime of power elite and mass society, while Bourdieu subscribed to modernisation theory based on the differentiation of relatively autonomous fields, analogous to what Weber called value spheres.

Mills and Bourdieu were reflexive sociologists inasmuch as they dissected the academic and political fields in which they operated – although they were more adept at applying that reflexivity to others than to themselves. Both were invested in the sociology of knowledge, both a sociology of sociology and a sociology of the academy. Mills's dissertation was a study of the history of pragmatism – the secularisation and professionalisation of philosophy. Following in the footsteps of Veblen, Mills was always critical of the American system of higher education, but, again like Bourdieu, had a fondness for its elitist aspects that gave them the space and autonomy to develop their distinctive sociologies. Still, both felt themselves to be outsiders in the academy and from this vantage point wrote their savage criticisms, lambasting the establishment and generating the hostility of their colleagues and the adoration of new generations of students.

Both were public sociologists, but also major public intellectuals, and not just in their own countries, but across the world. Both served their scholarly apprenticeships as professionals, but soon sought out wider audiences. Neither hesitated to enter the political arena as an intellectual, and their careers displayed a steady movement from the academy into the public sphere. Mills was writing in an era of passivity, and his notions of mass society reflect this. Like Beauvoir, he inspired a movement he never anticipated – the New Left of the 1960s. It remains to be seen whether Bourdieu will inspire such a movement – certainly his political writings

and addresses played an important role in public debate in France. Both held out hope for intellectuals as a 'third force', as Mills once called it, that would pioneer progressive politics in the name of reason and freedom.

## CLASSES AND DOMINATION

Bourdieu has come to be known for his meta-theoretical framework – centring on fields, habitus and capital, and above all on symbolic violence – that transcended his own empirical projects, a theoretical framework that has been taken up by others. Mills's only venture into broader theoretical issues, *Character and Social Structure*, written with Hans Gerth (Gerth & Mills, 1954), was never taken up by sociologists. Nonetheless, Mills's critical evaluation of the social structures of his time and his invitation to the sociological imagination have inspired successive generations of students. There are definite parallels in Bourdieu's corpus, since, like Mills, he rarely made sorties into pure theory, even though his empirical research was always more theoretically self-conscious than Mills's. Its impact transcends sociology not just in reaching the public realm, but it has also spread into many disciplines, beyond sociology and beyond the social sciences into the humanities.

The three major works of Mills to address US society in the 1950s dealt sequentially with labour and its leaders (*The New Men of Power*, 1948), the new middle classes (*White Collar*, 1951) and the dominant class (*The Power Elite*, 1956). Mills's framework for studying US society does develop over the decade of his writing, but there is also a clear continuity in his approach to that society: ever-greater concentration of power in a cohesive economic-political-military elite; a passive, but burgeoning new middle class of professionals, managers, sales workers and bureaucrats; and, finally, a working class betrayed by its leaders. These are also the three classes treated in Bourdieu's monumental *Distinction*. Whereas Mills works his way up the social hierarchy, Bourdieu works his way down, from the dominant classes to the petty bourgeoisie, and finally to the working class. Both study the way the dominant classes impose their will on society, but where Mills focuses on the concentration of resources and decision making in the power elite, Bourdieu takes this concentration of power and wealth for granted, instead focusing on how domination is hidden or legitimated by the categories that the dominant classes use to secure their domination.

Bourdieu, therefore, aims his analysis at symbolic domination – the exercise of domination through its misrecognition. Simply put, the

dominant class distinguishes itself by its cultural taste. Whether this be in art, architecture, music or literature, the dominant class presents itself as more refined and more at ease with its cultural consumption than the petite bourgeoisie, whose taste is driven by emulation, and the working class, whose lifestyle is driven by economic necessity. The distinction of the dominant class actually derives from its privileged access to wealth and education, but it appears to be innate, thereby justifying its domination in all spheres of life. According to Bourdieu, the popular aesthetic of the working class – its concern with function rather than form, with the represented rather than the representation – is a dominated aesthetic, bereft of genuine critical impulse. Bourdieu's innovation, therefore, turns on viewing class not just as an economic-political-social formation, but also as a cultural formation. Class members possess not just economic capital, but also cultural capital, so that a class structure is a two-dimensional space defined hierarchically by the total volume of capital, but also horizontally (within class) by the composition of capital (i.e. the specific combination of economic and cultural capital). He shows how this class structure is mirrored in the distribution of cultural practices and patterns of consumption.

It is interesting to compare this vision of class structure with Mills's *Power Elite*, where he describes the dominant class as three interlocking sets of institutions – economic, political and military. He calls them 'domains', but he might as well have called them fields. He also writes about their distinction and their ruling-class lifestyle, inherited through families, acquired in elite schools and colleges, and developed through networks of self-assurance. Mills even devotes a chapter to 'celebrities' who distract attention from the concentration of power. Symbols of prestige hide the power elite from public view. This is all quite parallel to Bourdieu, but ultimately the emphasis is very different. Mills is not interested in the relation between cultural and economic-political elites – between the dominant and dominated fractions of the dominant class, as Bourdieu puts it – but in the changing relations among the three pillars of the power elite, and in particular the ascendancy of the military (the warlords). This different emphasis reflects the very different place of the United States and France within the world order – the one a dominant military power, the other a cultural nobility.

If there is divergence in the conceptualisation of the dominant class, there is more convergence in their respective discussions of the middle classes. A theme that threads through both discussions is the insecurity of the middle class, trying to maintain its position within the stratification

system. As the gap between the middle classes – especially the old middle classes subject to deskilling, but also the new middle classes subject to bureaucratisation – and the working class closes, so the status panic of the former intensifies. As a form of capital, education becomes more important than property in asserting middle-class distinction. *White Collar* makes much of the rising importance of education, but also the role of the mass media and the illusory world it creates. Mills devotes considerable space to the fate of the intellectuals and their loss of independence through bureaucratisation, becoming a technocracy-serving power that is unresponsive to publics. Mills describes, in terms directly analogous to those of Bourdieu, how the academic field is looking more and more like an economic market, invaded by the logic of corporate capital.

On the subject of the working class, both Bourdieu and Mills have much less to say. Bourdieu's more ethnographic *The Weight of the World* has a richer, if untheorised, exploration of working-class life than *Distinction*, which is reliant on survey research. The culture of the working class is a dominated culture, responsive to the pressing needs of economic necessity and the prestige of the dominant culture. Mills's analysis of the working class is thinner, since *The New Men of Power* is devoted more to labour leaders than to the led. The argument is very similar to the one Bourdieu makes in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) – the representatives of subordinate classes enter the field of power, where they engage in a competitive game among themselves and the logic of the field of power trumps their accountability to the dominated. Mills describes how labour leaders, through their negotiations, are co-opted onto the terrain of the business class. They seek to attach themselves to the lower levels of the power elite. Both Mills and Bourdieu, therefore, see leaders manipulating the led – representation becomes rhetoric used to simultaneously pursue and hide games within the higher reaches of society. Bourdieu's (1990 [1982]; 1993 [1984]) essays on public opinion follow Mills's contempt for mass society.

Yet alongside Mills's cynicism is an alternative political vision, albeit a political vision that becomes more utopian over time. *The New Men of Power* describes the absorption of labour leaders into the power elite, accomplices of the 'main drift', but it also maps out the political field of the immediate post-war period as an array of publics that includes the Far Left (Leninist Left), the Independent Left (more critical than interventionist), the Liberal Centre (which might include support for trade unions), the Communists (which he sees as anti-democratic fifth columnists), the Practical Right (which supports class war against

unions and leftists), and Sophisticated Conservatives (corporate liberals tied to the military-industrial complex who see unions as a stabilising force that manages discontent). Like so many commentators of his time, Mills expected capitalism to undergo another 'slump' that would force the hand of the Sophisticated Conservatives, but also attract popular support to a true Labour Party (Mills supported Norman Thomas's 1948 presidential bid as a candidate of the Socialist Party) that would organise worker control and democratic planning. Socialism, he asserted, had been derailed by social democracy, petty trade unionism and communism. In line with this programme, Mills hoped for a new type of intellectual, a 'labour intellectual', independent of, but also committed to the working class, capable of forging a new vision and a new collective will.

Mills's political optimism did not last long. Reaction swept across the country, so that when he turned to *White Collar* (1951) he came up with a much bleaker scenario. There he refers to the middle classes as a rearguard, without a will of their own, siding with the prevailing forces in society, and, pending a slump, the prevailing forces lay with the power elite. When it comes to *The Power Elite* (1956), Mills is consumed by despair. Denouncing the 'higher immorality' and 'organized irresponsibility' of the dominant classes, his political imagination turns from the bleak future to the radiant past. He contrasts the mass society he sees around him with a democracy of publics – the founding dream and early practice of American society. Mills never reconciles himself to the present, never withdraws from the intellectual battle for another world.

If there was always a strong utopian element in Mills's writings – at first projected onto leftist political forces and then as emancipatory projects buried in history – one is hard pressed to find any equivalent in the writings of Bourdieu, who saw his public jeremiads as being adequately political in their own right. They would be less effective if connected to utopian thinking. In part, this was because of the historic role of French intellectuals, starting with Zola, and the openness of the public sphere to such intellectuals – so different from their more marginal place in US politics. No less important, Bourdieu was always opposed to conjuring up false hopes in the transformative potential of the dominated classes. His political engagement around issues of human rights, labour rights, education and so forth was firmly rooted in the concrete present. Bourdieu mobilised his analysis of the subjective experience of domination, so absent in Mills's writings, against what he regarded as the illusions of leftist intellectuals. Bourdieu refused speculative connections across the

yawning gap between hope and reality, the yawning gap that separated Mills's utopian schemes and his sociological analysis, political imagination and sociological imagination.

## THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

The refusal to confront the gap between sociological imagination and political imagination – indeed, the confusion of the two – can be found in *The Sociological Imagination*, one of the most widely read and inspiring introductions to sociology. *The Sociological Imagination*, published in 1959 just three years before Mills died, looks two ways – back to sociology and forward to politics. When looking back to sociology, it is a devastating and memorable indictment of professional sociology for the sins of abstracted empiricism and grand theorising. Abstracted empiricism refers to survey research divorced from any historical or theoretical context, typified in Mills's mind by the work of his titular boss, Paul Lazarsfeld, with whom he had a most rocky relationship. Abstracted empiricism approximates to market research and exemplifies the bureaucratisation of sociology, and more generally to how intellectuals were increasingly serving the corporate world as consultants and experts, and as orchestrators of public opinion. Grand theory, on the other hand, refers to the hegemony of structural functionalism within the world of theory – formal theory, arcane and inaccessible except to the initiated elite around Talcott Parsons. Grand theory builds an elaborate, but empty architecture of the most mundane, yet unsubstantiated claims.

Against abstracted empiricism and grand theory, Mills celebrated the sociologist as craft worker, uniting in one person the development of sociological theory through engagement with empirical data. He paints a romantic image of the lone sociologist uncorrupted by the academic environment – a self-portrait of his isolation in and alienation from the academic world. This image is an absurdly unsociological vision of professional sociology – a Manichean struggle between God and the Devil – but one that justified his own abandonment of that world.

If the first romance in *The Sociological Imagination* is with the sociologist as craft worker, the second is with the sociologist as 'independent intellectual', looking outwards into politics rather than inwards into academia. Here too there are two positions to avoid: on the one hand, the sociologist as adviser to the prince – the technician, the consultant – and, on the other hand, the philosopher king who aspires to rule the world. In the political realm, the adviser to the prince and the philosopher king

are the counterparts to the abstracted empiricist and the grand theorist in the academic realm, while the independent intellectual is the counterpart of the craft worker. The independent intellectual speaks to publics and at rulers, maintaining a distance from both. Here indeed is Mills's notion of the public sociologist – a concept he describes, but does not name – for him a traditional rather than an organic intellectual.

The connection between the craft worker and the independent intellectual is made through the idea of the sociological imagination that famously turns private problems into public issues. But here the slippage begins: between, on the one hand, the *sociological imagination* – i.e. the connection between social milieu and social structure, micro and macro – and, on the other hand, the never-specified *political imagination* that connects private troubles to public issues. It is one thing to demonstrate that unemployment is not a problem of individual indolence, but one of the capitalist economy; it is another matter to turn that sociological understanding into a public demand or a social movement for security of employment. Indeed, appreciating the broad structural determinants of one's personal troubles is as likely to lead to apathy and withdrawal as to engagement. *The New Men of Power*, *White Collar* and *The Power Elite* each attempts to bridge the divide between sociology and politics, but in an abstract way as though sociological imagination inevitably leads to political engagement. Political imagination cannot be reduced to sociological imagination, as Bourdieu knows only too well.

The first problem concerns the very existence of publics for Mills's public sociologist to address. His books all point to the disappearance of publics and the rise of mass society, so with whom, then, will the public sociologist converse? Bourdieu recognises the dilemma quite explicitly, albeit in a specific way. The argument is laid out in *The Craft of Sociology*, which speaks directly to Mills's sociologist as craft worker. It criticises both existentialism (the counterpart to Parsons's structural functionalism) and the reaction to it in the form of imported American empiricism. Like Mills, Bourdieu's work is a continual dialogue of theory and empirical research: the one cannot exist without the other. Bourdieu rarely indulges in flights of political fancy;<sup>1</sup> his claims are always empirically grounded. On the other hand, he closely follows Bachelard, the French philosopher of science, by insisting on the break between science and common sense, or what Bourdieu calls *spontaneous sociology*. For sociology, such a break with common sense is especially important, because its subject matter deals with familiar problems about which everyone has an opinion. Throughout his academic life, Bourdieu will be

fighting against what he regards as amateurish commentators – so-called 'doxosophers' – who claim to know better than sociologists.

Although the home of sociology, France has always had difficulty developing an autonomous professional sociology and separating itself from social reform and public discourse. In this sense, the academic context of Bourdieu is very different from that of Mills. The one faces the struggle to create a science against common sense, while the other is suffocated by professionalism and struggles to reconnect science to common sense. This accounts, at least in part, for their opposed genres of writing, the one always simple and accessible, the other dominated by complex linguistic constructions and the coining of esoteric concepts.<sup>2</sup> For a renewal of sociology to be accepted by the French academic pantheon, it was necessary to adopt the style of writing of the discipline with the highest distinction, namely philosophy. While denouncing the detachment of philosophy from everyday reality, Bourdieu nevertheless replicates a philosophical rhetorical style to establish sociology's distinction, but the result can be separation from the wider publics he seeks to reach. He is only too aware of the gap between sociology and politics, even as he tries to overcome the gap in his later years. Mills suffers from the opposite problem – by making his books accessible and by resisting the idiom of science and high theory, he loses credibility within the world of sociology, and mistakes his sociological imagination for political imagination.

Still, reacting to opposite challenges – Bourdieu embracing science against common sense; Mills embracing common sense against hyper-science – they converge on a common understanding of methodology, represented in the idea of craftwork as the interactive unity of theory and research. Likewise, Bourdieu, no less than Mills, is committed to the idea of the independent intellectual. Moreover, his targets are the same as Mills's. On the one hand, he denounces the philosopher king, or what he calls the 'total intellectual' epitomised by Jean-Paul Sartre and, on the other hand, he denounces the advisers to the king – the technocrats, experts, consultants to the state and servants of power. The philosopher king – the public intellectual as total intellectual – has a certain reality in France that it does not have in the United States. Notwithstanding the higher appreciation of the intellectual in France, Bourdieu nonetheless faces the same dilemma as Mills. Neither sees a public out there that he can address. Mills talks of a mass society, atomised, withdrawn, and alienated from politics and public discussion, whereas for Bourdieu the problem is, if anything, even more serious. The habitus is so deeply inculcated that the dominated are unreceptive to criticism of domination.

Furthermore, the independent intellectual faces the power of the media and their own mediators. Bourdieu lost no opportunity to attack the media's power to determine the message, to even shape the research that becomes the message. Although Mills was also aware of the power of the media, he never wrote such a broad assault on the media as Bourdieu carries out in *On Television* (1999 [1996]).

Whether they sought it or not, both – but Bourdieu more than Mills – became celebrities in their own time for their angry oppositional views. They became media events in their own right, and the more they railed against the establishment, the more celebrated they became! Yet both were opposed to the idea of the organic intellectual who would circumvent the media and engage directly with publics. In theory, both opposed the organic intellectual on the grounds that it compromised their independence, yet their actual practices were quite different.

C. Wright Mills rarely so much as participated in any collective demonstration, protest, refused to sign petitions and generally avoided the people he somewhat contemptuously dismissed as the masses. He was a pure intellectual, speaking down to the people from his pulpit. Bourdieu, however, was very different. He was always ready to initiate or sign a petition, he was ready to talk to all sorts of publics and he could be found addressing workers on picket lines. He had no allergy to the people in whose name he spoke. Quite the contrary, he had enormous sympathy for those at the bottom of social hierarchies, vividly expressed in *The Weight of the World*, which describes the plight of the lower classes and immigrants under modern capitalism. Here lies the paradox – according to his theory, such unmediated engagement is not only a futile, but a dangerous activity. Yet he also saw this practice of public sociology as developing a political imagination out of his sociological imagination. Mills was always truer to the idea of the traditional intellectual, standing aloof from the individual and collective struggles below, but even he, in the last three years of his life, compromised his independence in a desperate political partisanship.

## FROM SOCIOLOGY TO POLITICS

*The Sociological Imagination* (1959) was Mills's farewell to sociology. In the remaining three years of his life he became a public intellectual, writing two short polemical books intended to capture the public imagination. The first was *The Causes of World War Three* (1958), a continuation of the arguments of *The Power Elite*, but written for an even broader public.

It condemned 'crackpot realism' and 'organized irresponsibility' not just in the United States, but in the Soviet Union too. Together, these power elites were ushering in World War Three. He ends the book with an appeal to intellectuals to fight against the insanity of 'rationality without reason', calling instead, you might say, for Bourdieu's 'Realpolitik of reason'.

The second book was of a very different character. If *The Causes of World War Three* diagnosed the way the power elites of the two superpowers were heading toward the annihilation of the human race, *Listen, Yankee*, written in 1960, pointed to an alternative scenario – a socialism that was neither capitalist nor communist. The Cuban Revolution served to make the alternative real – as a 'concrete fantasy' intended to galvanise a collective political imagination. *Listen, Yankee* is based on Mills's short, but intense visit to Cuba in 1960. He spent three-and-a-half long days with Fidel Castro and nearly a week with the head of the Institute for Agrarian Reform. In his account of the Cuban Revolution through the eyes of its leaders, Mills points to the already ongoing and remarkable experiments in economic planning, education expansion, welfare provision and land reforms – experiments that would be institutionalised as the mark of Cuban socialism. He undertakes a class analysis of the social forces that are driving the social transformations and the counter-revolutionary forces opposing it, not least the support being given to the counter-revolution by the United States. He describes the challenges Cuba faced both domestically and internationally. The open hostility of the United States, Mills says, was driving Cuba into the arms of the Soviet Union, which thereby intensified US military threats. *Listen, Yankee* addresses the US public, befuddled by the jingoist media and ignorant of the destructive path of US imperialism throughout Latin America, but particularly in Cuba – imperialism justified under the Monroe Doctrine. The Cuban Revolution should be seen, he argued, as a reaction to Yankee supremacy, an experiment in true democracy, an experiment that all people of conscience can learn from, an experiment they must defend.

It was only two years before the end of his 46-year life that Mills discovered the potential of Third World revolutions. He was ahead of his time. In its class analysis, in its understanding of colonialism and imperialism, in its vision of socialism, *Listen, Yankee* is a precursor to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, which appeared in the following year – the same year that its author died at the age of 35. These two sadly curtailed lives – Mills's and Fanon's – ended within three months of each other, inspiring in their different ways social movements across the world. Both saw the key role of intellectuals in forging revolution, but Mills developed



this idea very late in life, only when he began travelling abroad, especially to Latin America, where he discovered first hand the significance of revolutionary theory, which he had previously dismissed as a Marxist ruse.

Just as Mills became ever more outspoken and radical during the last three years of his life, so in the last decade of his life Bourdieu also became more angry, more public, more accusatory. He had always seen sociology – or, at least, his sociology – as having political consequences in the sense that it revealed the hidden bases of domination; nonetheless, his denunciations took on polemical force when faced with the conservative turn of politics in France and elsewhere. His book *On Television* (1999 [1996]) and then the two short collections of essays *Acts of Resistance* (1998 [1998]) and *Firing Back* (2003 [2001]) spoke out against neoliberalism and the tyranny of the market. He established his own press, *Liber-Raisons d'Agir*, to publish such politically motivated and publicly accessible books. His magazine *Actes de la Recherche de Science Sociales* had always had a broad intellectual audience. He became a major intellectual spokesman of a broad left front in France, but also worked to develop what he called an 'International of intellectuals'. He could be found on picket lines with workers, as well as writing open letters to prominent leaders protesting against violations of human rights. He was committed to intellectuals as an independent collective force, to the intellectual as an 'organic intellectual of humanity', as he once called it. C. Wright Mills had a similar vision of intellectuals as a 'third force', an idea he had formulated as early as the Second World War when he taught at the University of Maryland, a view that stuck with him until his dying days. In *Listen, Yankee* he wrote of Cuba as a cultural centre of the world, proposing to establish a 'world university' and with it create an international community of progressive intellectuals. The parallels between Mills and Bourdieu are perhaps astonishing, but then they are also expressing the unconscious desires of intellectuals as a class.

Yet here is the paradox: Bourdieu recognises that ideas can have only limited effect on social change. The dominated, who have an interest in a critical sociology, cannot grasp their meaning, because their submissive habitus is so deeply inscribed, whereas those who can grasp their meaning have no interest in the message. There is a mismatch, as I have said before, between Bourdieu's logic of theory and his logic of practice. His theory says such interventions are futile, yet his actions imply that such interventions might dislodge public discourse and thus destabilise symbolic violence. In the final analysis, his own political engagement contradicts his attacks on ideology and consciousness as too thin to grasp

the depth of domination. In the end, despite his theory, Bourdieu cannot but subscribe to the idea of the organic intellectual engaged directly with publics, as well as the traditional intellectual speaking from the tribune, addressing humanity. He feels compelled to supplement his sociological analysis with political engagement. We need to make sense of this by turning Bourdieu on Bourdieu.

## INTELLECTUALS AND THEIR PUBLICS

One of the curious features of Bourdieu's writings, as we have seen time and again, is his simultaneous insistence on reflexivity and his failure to apply this to himself. To do so would have meant placing himself inside various academic fields, relativising his knowledge and thereby weakening his position in the combat sport that is sociology. To wrestle with the question of science and politics it is necessary to restore the idea of sociology as a field of contradictions and antagonisms. Bourdieu provides us with the ammunition to do precisely this. We can turn, for example, to his analysis of the scientific field in which established players compete to accumulate academic capital in the face of challenges from the new generation, but it is more fruitful to go further afield and appropriate his analysis of the literary field in *Rules of Art* (1996 [1992]) as a framework for examining the sociological field.

The literary field begins with an account of 'bourgeois art', i.e. art sponsored by the dominant classes. In the context of sociology, this is what I call the *policy moment* in which sociology enters the service of various clients. The first rebellion against bourgeois literature comes from writers attentive to an audience of subaltern classes – what Bourdieu calls 'social art'. Within sociology, this corresponds to *public sociology*, i.e. a sociology that is accessible and accountable to diverse publics, and entering into a dialogue with such publics. The literary field, however, is only really constituted when writers separate themselves both from the patronage of bourgeois art and the affiliations of social art to constitute 'art for art's sake', i.e. 'pure art' following its own autonomous principles. For sociology, too, this is the moment of its true birth. It comes with the constitution of what I call *professional sociology* – a sociology that is accountable to itself – i.e. to the community of scholars who develop their own research programmes. Finally, the dynamism of the literary field comes from challenges to the consecrated artists, i.e. challenges from the avant-garde who seek to further the autonomy of art, but also shift the principles upon which its autonomy rests. Today's consecrated



art can be found in yesterday's avant-garde. Within sociology, this is the *critical moment* in which the assumptions of professional sociology are interrogated and transformed. New research programmes emerge – at least in part – from the critical theorists of yesterday.

**Table 1. Division of academic labour**

	SCIENCE Academic audience	POLITICS Extra-academic audience
DOMINANT Instrumental knowledge	PROFESSIONAL	POLICY
SUBORDINATE Reflexive knowledge	CRITICAL	PUBLIC

We can now look upon the field of sociology – or, indeed, any other academic discipline – in terms of the relations among these four types of knowledge: what we might call the division of sociological labour. The four types can be arranged along two dimensions, as in table 1. On the one hand, there is the distinction between, on the one side, science with its academic audience (Bourdieu's autonomous pole) that includes professional and critical knowledge, and, on the other side, politics with its extra-academic audience (Bourdieu's heteronomous pole) that includes policy and public knowledge. The other dimension is defined by the distinction between dominant or consecrated knowledges (professional and policy), as opposed to the subordinated or subversive knowledges (critical and public). The dominant knowledges involve an *instrumental rationality* – solving puzzles defined by research programmes (professional sociology) or problems defined by clients (policy sociology) – whereas subordinate knowledges involve value rationality, or what I call *reflexive knowledge*, i.e. dialogue either among sociologists themselves about the foundations of their discipline (critical sociology) or between sociologists and their publics (public sociology).

Any disciplinary field consists of these four interdependent and antagonistic knowledges. Without professional knowledge of the sort that Bourdieu created in most of his classic works, there cannot be a public sociology, whose intensity rose in his later life. Public sociology requires the translation of professional sociology into an accessible language, but it also requires an accountability to publics achieved through dialogue. This is what Bourdieu tries to conjure up in *The Weight of the World*,

but the dialogue is at odds with his theoretical claims about the deep misrecognition of the dominated. His more polemical tracts, such as *On Television*, are widely read and discussed, and thus generate dialogue, but it is a dialogue conducted, in a sense, at arm's length.

Just as one can study the history of a field by studying the shifting patterns of relations among the four knowledges, so one can trace an individual's career through these knowledges. Looking at Bourdieu's academic trajectory, one might argue that he sets out as a critical sociologist, but over time his critique becomes absorbed as a reigning orthodoxy, at which point he turns to public engagement. Although he is critical of policy science and its army of consultants, media celebrities and experts of one form or another, all servants of power, he nonetheless sits on government-sponsored commissions for educational reform. The policy world cannot be excised from the discipline, although, like the other knowledges, it must not come to dominate the discipline – the heteronomous pole must be kept in check. Likewise, instrumental knowledge can prevail, but not to the exclusion of reflexive knowledge.

We can now better appreciate the problems with Mills's view of sociology. By celebrating the sociologist as a romanticised craft worker and independent intellectual, and by reducing policy sociology and professional sociologies to their pathological types (abstracted empiricism and grand theory), he is denying the existence of a viable division of academic labour. He collapses all four types of knowledge into a single type of public sociology defined as the sociological imagination. Table 1 situates his early career as a professional sociologist in Wisconsin and Maryland, and his early years at Columbia. But as he writes his famous trilogy, he cuts himself off from professional sociology to become a public sociologist, from which vantage point he writes *The Sociological Imagination* – critical sociology par excellence – before leaving the field of sociology altogether.

Mills's critique of professional and policy sociology underscores the ever-present danger of professional sociology becoming irrelevant through self-referentiality and of policy sociology being captured by the client. These warnings are especially relevant today when regulation of the profession and the commodification of knowledge threaten to cut off instrumental knowledge from its lifeblood – reflexive knowledge. We have, therefore, to apply the sociological imagination to the field that is sociology, recognising the broader forces at work in shaping its contours. Indeed, each type of knowledge can be divided into two zones, one looking inward and the other outward. Thus, policy sociology can be of the sponsored type, but it can also be more independent and assume an

advocacy role. Professional sociology can take the form of ritualised processes of regulation and control, but it can also advance exciting research programmes, especially when open to critical sociologists. Critical sociologists also suffer from a dogmatism often rooted in subservience to other disciplines rather than a carefully trained critique of professional sociology as it is practised.

Finally, we come to the two faces of public sociology. Mills's public sociology sustained the independence of the sociologist through the dissemination of widely read exposés of domination and its ideological justification. It was a traditional form of public sociology addressed to publics without direct conversation with them, although his writings did, and still do, generate much debate. He stood aloof from the organic public sociology that would have brought him into dialogue with the very people he was writing about. Mills kept his distance from the 'cheerful robots' – the duped and manipulated citizens of mass society – as though any engagement with them would contaminate his intellectual endeavours.

Similar sentiments can be found in Bourdieu, but his venom was more usually aimed at the 'organic intellectuals' who misguidedly think they can overcome the hiatus of habitus – intellectuals who do not appreciate that the dominated adjust to the conditions of domination in ways that are difficult for intellectuals to comprehend. Yet Bourdieu violates his own admonitions and crosses over from traditional to organic public sociology when representing the voices of the dominated in *The Weight of the World*. He can no longer remain aloof from the plight of the subaltern. Although it requires a move outside the United States, even Mills discovers organic intellectuals in the Cuban Revolution and, indeed, becomes their spokesperson to the American people. In the end, both Mills and Bourdieu joined Marx, Gramsci, Freire and Fanon in recognising organic intellectuals as playing a crucial role in ideological warfare against the dominant classes. As Gramsci might say, by themselves, intellectuals cannot fight a war of position; they need allies from the popular classes.

## The Symbolic World of Politics

Bourdieu writes about the 'Realpolitik of reason' or the 'Realpolitik of the universal' as the form of politics engaged in by the public sociologist – in other words, the struggle to defend the social conditions of the exercise of reason and expand access to its fruits. What might this mean in a country such as South Africa, emerging from a long history of colonialism and apartheid into a world order still dominated by the West?

As we noted in Conversation 5 (p121), Bourdieu understands the 'ambiguity of reason': on the one hand, it is a form of symbolic capital that serves 'as an instrument of domination and legitimation' for injustice and inequality; on the other, it is the basis of emancipation, democracy and human rights. Bourdieu argues for mobilisation and struggle through which those who are denied access to the universal can claim and realise such access (2000 [1997]: 70–72, 77–80), but his formulations are elliptical. What might they mean in practice? And what might they mean in a country of the Global South?

Bourdieu's text conveys a sense of the social scientist whose scholarship provides a unique access to the truth, which, as public intellectual, he conveys to society from his lectern – but at the same time the symbolic weight of the lectern and of his professorial knowledge serves to legitimate the existing authorities and hierarchies of society. There is little sense here of knowledge gained through concrete practice, which is consistent with Bourdieu's distinction between the logic of theory and the logic of practice. The impression is reinforced by the closing scenes of the documentary film on his life and work, *La sociologie est un sport de combat*, in which he attempts to persuade a militant meeting of immigrant community members in France that they cannot understand their own situation and should therefore read works of sociology – which they angrily reject, asserting the clarity of their own understanding of their oppression as they do so.

This is almost the public sociologist as parody. Any sociologist in South Africa who in the times of struggle against apartheid attempted

such a role would have been met with a similar response. The inability of either side in this interchange to hear the other illustrates the breakdown of language that occurs at the interface of sociology and the public or political sphere, and the profound challenges confronting any project for the Realpolitik of reason. The discourse of reason encounters in the public sphere a symbolic order, or a symbolic contest, which demands a distinctive discourse of its own, and the sociologist who fails to translate his/her thought into this symbolic contest and its discourse literally cannot be heard.

While both Bourdieu and Mills wrote in the context of right-wing ascendancy and the demobilisation of mass society – a context that posed the question ‘what public?’ to the would-be public sociologist – in South Africa in the 1980s we lived and worked in the context of an increasingly polarised and mobilised public. Apartheid, on the one hand, and the democratic movement, on the other, posed intellectuals and social scientists with stark choices: whose side were we on? Which power would reason serve – that of the apartheid regime or that of the emerging popular movement?

While many progressive white scholars desisted from entering this terrain, and concentrated on their research and teaching – through which generations of white and black students did indeed gain access to historical and political knowledge, which constituted an important resource for those who went on to participate in student and popular struggle – others chose to engage in a more organic relation with popular politics, working with trade unions or the United Democratic Front (UDF), often through non-governmental organisations. A handful straddled both roles.<sup>3</sup> Here we found sharp clashes over ‘truth’ and the meaning of reason, both within the popular movement and, often, between ‘organic’ intellectuals and the more ‘traditional’ intellectuals in the academy.

Take, for example, the case of the re-emergent trade union movement. In the early 1970s radical white students, rebuffed by the Black Consciousness movement, turned towards the working class and played a significant role in the formation of the new black trade unions. They did this as Marxists, many of them with a strong critique of previous periods of black trade unionism in South Africa, in particular the history of alliances between trade unions and the African nationalist political movement. There were different currents within the new trade unions, but the biggest and strongest formation, the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), was characterised by an aversion to such alliances and an allegiance to ‘working-class politics’ – and, many suspected,

to the formation of an independent workers’ party. When, in the early 1980s, the question of trade union unity rose to the top of the labour agenda, fierce struggles broke out between the different factions.

On the one side were the ‘workerists’, strongly influenced by the perspective of the white Marxists described above, who rejected the ANC and UDF, and their guiding document, the Freedom Charter, as a petty bourgeois, populist movement that was bound to sell out the working class, and on the other were the ‘populists’, who supported the liberation movement, advocated a multiclass popular alliance against apartheid, and argued that workers were being misled by white agents of liberalism and imperialism. Both sides imagined that reason was on their side; both were economical with the truth. FOSATU newspapers avoided naming or referring to the UDF, at the time a massively growing movement with hundreds of affiliated organisations and hundreds of thousands of supporters. On the other side, I remember a seminar in one of the populist unions where the leading white intellectuals of a rival workerist union were denounced as agents of the Central Intelligence Agency. In the end, the popular insurgency in the townships drew in entire working-class constituencies, and the trade union movement swung into alliance with the UDF and the ANC, albeit with a strongly independent stance.

This is a schematic representation of a complex series of political contestations and shifts in the politics of the trade union movement, but the point is to consider its implications for Bourdieu’s idea of the Realpolitik of reason and the role of the public sociologist. Firstly, oppression was not opaque to workers, and it was not social science that opened their eyes, but rather the interaction between the daily logic of practice and the symbolic world of politics. Social science (knowledge of history, economics, corporate analysis, etc.) could of course play an adjunct role, but what workers needed most was organisation, and in those early days white intellectuals brought important organisational, legal and negotiating skills to the fledgling movement. Education programmes were important, but many of them were technical and organisational. When education became more political as the movement grew, it was precisely the critical line on alliances and the Freedom Charter introduced by white intellectuals that aroused resistance.

Which brings us to the second point: workers’ consciousness was not a tabula rasa on which intellectuals could inscribe the truths discovered by reason. Workers already had ideas and allegiances and the language that went with this – precisely, symbolic power, or what Bourdieu would call symbolic capital (1994) – influenced as well by the long history of

Communist Party involvement in the national liberation struggle. Indeed, the new white intellectuals from the universities were frequently unaware of this history, and unaware too that black working-class activists with roots in communist and national liberation histories were quietly active in the new trade unions as well – showing a caution fashioned by long histories of state and employer repression against the Communist Party and black trade unions. In both the trade unions and community organisations, white students and intellectuals, inspired by the New Left Marxism of the 1960s, came up against the orthodox communism of the South African Communist Party (SACP).

In other words, the public sociologist does not address a public sphere founded on reasoned debate – a point Bourdieu makes in his criticism of Habermas. Rather, in a situation such as that presented by South Africa in the 1980s, the public sociologist is confronted with an already existing politics, a terrain of contending movements, organisations and publics in which his/her voice may be drowned or denounced or, worse, fail to find any audience at all. What we became in the 1980s were *activist* intellectuals, deeply involved, partisan, passionate. We engaged in continuous dialogue and negotiation with our chosen, partisan publics. We negotiated truth and we negotiated reason. Scholars who preferred not to dirty their hands or compromise their views remained in the academy – but at the cost of choosing silence in the symbolic world of politics (Muller & Cloete, cited in Morphet, 1990: 97).

Did intellectual practice of the activist kind approximate what Bourdieu meant by the Realpolitik of reason, or were we mere fellow travellers, as Bourdieu called Gramsci's organic intellectuals, who had abandoned the path of reason? Of course, there were many variants to this practice, and some behaved merely as cheerleaders for the movement, while others pursued a role of critical engagement. In a profound way, though, despite the many sordid events in its history and despite untruths it may have uttered, the popular movement did represent truth in our world – the truth that denounced apartheid and spoke for freedom, democracy and human rights. I well remember Dullah Omar, an intelligent, principled, steely and gentle UDF leader, telling a mass rally in the early 1980s that the liberation movement was the only beautiful thing in a land made ugly by oppression and exploitation.<sup>4</sup> The kind of truth and beauty we are discussing here belongs to the symbolic world of politics, where it wields an immense power to move people to struggle and sacrifice – but it is nonetheless true: true to a vision of how people can live their lives differently. Beside them, the truth of the scholar may

appear paltry and threadbare. It is this interface that the Realpolitik of reason has to negotiate.

Where does this leave us now? The public sphere is still undergoing a series of transformations. Processes of class formation; growing divergences within the Tripartite Alliance among the ANC, COSATU and the SACP; and the many failings of the post-apartheid state are the source of increasing contention in the public sphere. These trends, perhaps, create a greater scope for a more independent public sociology. However, the public is still sharply divided into deeply racialised partisan blocs, into those who owe a broad allegiance to transformation and therefore to the ANC alliance, and those, mostly white, who are resistant (and who have a less automatic allegiance to the political party that most represents this camp, the Democratic Alliance or DA, than do their counterparts in the opposite camp).

In such a context, public criticism of the government or the ANC plays easily into the symbolism of the racial colonial gaze discussed by Frantz Fanon, can thereby be construed as pro-DA rhetoric, and is dismissed or simply not heard by the majority bloc. Once again, the Realpolitik of reason encounters the symbolic power of the political world and finds itself translated or appropriated into meanings that it cannot recognise. The political world itself is divided into two worlds, the product of the colonial and apartheid experience, each of which is characterised by mutually unintelligible understandings and meanings. It is as if there are two musics composed of mutually incompatible harmonic schemas, which, played at the same time, produce only a cacophony.

It is also true, as Bourdieu points out, that in this world, reason is yoked to the order of capital and the order of the imperialism, and the full weight of its authority is invoked to justify the current order of things and people, and to explain why economic orthodoxy defines the outer limits of what it is possible to do – that is, what problems can be admitted as problems and what may be done about them. Yesterday's revolutionaries become today's paragons of fiscal prudence, and freedom has become the right of a few to celebrate their sudden access to wealth by eating sushi off the bodies of naked women. It should no longer be possible for the liberation movement to claim it is the only beautiful thing in an ugly landscape, but old truths die hard. The Realpolitik of reason, if it wishes to make its mark on this world, will be forced as before to find a language with which to negotiate its way in the symbolic world of politics.

If the situation in South Africa reveals the limits of public sociology and the Realpolitik of reason, on the one hand, on the other, it makes it

all the more necessary. Bourdieu's vigorous defence of reason, scholarship and the logic of theory is attractive in a society rapidly losing its way, and where an increasingly divided and paralysed ANC becomes susceptible to defensiveness and the seductions of control and repression. Indeed, it may evoke a longing to abandon the compromised truth that seems so much part of the symbolic negotiation with the world of politics, for an uncompromised and denunciatory truth freed from politics. The transformation of our society requires the defence of reason and poses the obligation to speak truth to power, nothing less.

But what our history of practice suggests is that such truth does not emerge only from the practice of theory in scholarly fields, but also from the actions and thoughts of the people, that is, from the logic of practice, from the truth of ordinary lives. Moreover, and necessarily, it has to find an existence in the form of a symbolic power that can enter into symbolic contestation in the political field. Once again, we return to the necessity for negotiation. Only from a dialogue between these two truths may emerge a combined truth that has the symbolic force to truly remake authority.

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#### NOTES

- 1 Thus, one is surprised by the way he treats 'love' and gay-lesbian movements in *Masculine Domination*.
- 2 Obviously, Mills and Bourdieu are also affected by the styles of thinking and writing that prevail in their own national intellectual fields, manifested in the opposed styles of Continental and Anglo-American philosophy.
- 3 Those who did had, perforce, to engage the political, developing what Burawoy in his study of Eddie Webster's sociological life calls a 'political imagination', in contrast to Mills's idea of a 'sociological imagination' (Burawoy, 2010).
- 4 Omar was a leading figure in the Unity Movement, a Trotskyist grouping in the Cape, shifted allegiance to the Congress movement in the early 1980s, and served as justice minister and transport minister in post-apartheid governments.

## CONVERSATION 8

### MANUFACTURING DISSENT

MICHAEL BURAWOY

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#### Burawoy Meets Bourdieu<sup>1</sup>

*Like the gift, labour can be understood in its objectively twofold truth only if one performs the second reversal needed in order to break with the scholastic error of failing to include in the theory the 'subjective' truth with which it was necessary to break, in a first para-doxal reversal, in order to construct the object of analysis. The objectification that was necessary to constitute wage labour in its objective truth has masked the fact which, as Marx himself indicates, only becomes the objective truth in certain exceptional labour situations: the investment in labour, and therefore miscognition of the objective truth of labour as exploitation, which leads people to find an extrinsic profit in labour, irreducible to simple monetary income, is part of the real conditions of the performance of labour, and of exploitation.*

Bourdieu (2000 [1997]: 202)

*The defining essence of the capitalist labor process is the simultaneous obscuring and securing of surplus value. How does the capitalist assure himself of surplus value when its production is invisible?*

Burawoy (1979: 30)