

# SOCIOLOGY IS A COMBAT SPORT

## From Parsons to Bourdieu

I often say sociology is a combat sport, a means of self-defense. Basically, you use it to defend yourself, without having the right to use it for unfair attacks.

— BOURDIEU

These sentences are taken from *La sociologie est un sport du combat*, a popular film produced by Pierre Carles in 2001 about the life of Pierre Bourdieu, featuring him at demonstrations, in interviews about masculine domination, in humorous banter with his assistants, in an informal research seminar with his colleagues, in the lecture hall, on television debating with Günter Grass, and, in a final dramatic scene, facing the wrath of Beur youth from a Paris banlieu. We see Bourdieu voicing opposition to government policies, especially neoliberalism, but we also see him on the defensive—stumbling to explain sociology in simple terms to a confused interviewer, or sweating under pressure of interrogation, or intensely nervous when he has to speak in English.

Is this sociology as a combat sport? If so, where are the combatants? We see Bourdieu, but where is the opposition? Where are the other contestants? It's like watching a boxing match with only one boxer. No wonder he can talk of sociology as "self-defense"; no wonder he can seem so innocent and charming with the opposition absent. Where is the reviled Bourdieu, "the sociological terrorist of the Left," "the cult leader," "the intellectual

dictator"? Even the Spanish feminist interviewing him about masculine domination lets him off the hook when it comes to his own masculinity—at which point he leans on Virginia Woolf—or when he claims to understand masculine domination better than women do. Significantly, the only time he comes under hostile fire is when young Beurs tell him they are not interested in his disquisitions on oppression—after all, they know they are oppressed—whereupon Bourdieu goes on a tirade against their anti-intellectualism. It seems he has nothing to offer them but words. Here, only at the end of the film, are the first signs of combat.

This absent combat with the absent enemy is not peculiar to the film. Throughout Bourdieu's writings, combatants are slain off-stage with no more than a fleeting appearance in front of the readership. Sociologists, economists, and philosophers come and go like puppets, dismissed with barely a sentence or two. What sort of combat sport is this? He says sociology shouldn't be used for unfair attacks, but how fair is it to tie up the enemy in a corner and with one punch knock them out of the ring? What is this combat without combat? I've searched through Bourdieu's writings to find elaborations of "sociology as a combat sport" but to no avail. Minimally, if this is a true combat sport, there should be rules of play that allow all contestants to show their abilities—their strengths as well as their weaknesses. And the rules should apply equally to all. There is not much evidence of fair play either in the film or in his writings.

The purpose of these conversations, then, is to restore at least a small band of combatants who, broadly speaking, are Marxist in orientation. They are there in Bourdieu's "practical sense" beneath consciousness, circulating in the depths of his habitus and only rarely surfacing in an explicit and verbal form. To attempt such a restoration is to counter the symbolic violence of their erasure with a symbolic violence of my own. It involves a certain intellectual combat. Still, I restore these Marxists not so much to issue Bourdieu with a knockout blow (as if that were even possible), but rather to orchestrate a conversation in which each learns about the other to better understand the self. In this opening conversation, however, I will probe the idea of sociology as a combat sport as it applies to Bourdieu's own practice, leading to his contradictory postures in academic and non-academic fields. I will suggest that a better model than combat is the more open and gentle one of conversation—a conversation between Bourdieu the academic theorist and Bourdieu the public intellectual—if we are to unravel the paradoxes of his life's work.

## COMBAT VS. CONSENSUS

I am struck by the translation of the film's title into English: *La sociologie est un sport du combat* becomes *Sociology Is a Martial Art*. There is no warrant for translating *combat sport* as *martial art*. Both words exist in French as they do in English, so why this deliberate mistranslation? I can only conjecture that this is a maneuver to attract an English-speaking—and especially an American—audience for whom labeling an academic discipline as a combat sport would discredit both sociology and the film. It does not suit the sensibility of US academics and would have an effect opposite to the one in France, where academics do indeed seem to relish the idea of combat, where struggles are held out in the open, public arena, and where the academic world merges with the public world. In the United States, on the other hand, the academic world is at once more insulated from the public sphere and also more professional. It is dominated by ideologies of consensus formation and peer review. Here, *martial art*, with its connotations of refinement and science, is a more appropriate and appealing metaphor. Academic exchange operates not according to explicit rules of combat but with unspoken understandings based on a specific culture of engagement. Thus, French-trained Michèle Lamont (2009) is fascinated by the “North American” culture of peer assessment based on trust and mutual respect, just as ignominy befalls Loïc Wacquant when he displays French-style combat in the US academy.<sup>1</sup>

We can better understand Bourdieu's milieu and the work he produced by comparing him to Talcott Parsons, who was born and bred American. Both were the most influential world sociologists of their time. Both conquered their national fields of sociology from the summit of their respective academies—Harvard and the Collège de France. Both reshaped the discipline around the world and in their homelands. Both exerted influence on a variety of disciplines beyond their own. Both wrote in difficult prose that only seemed to magnify their appeal. Both generated waves of reaction and critique, dismissal and contempt, as well as ardent disciples.

The parallels extend to the substance of their social theory. Thus, both were primarily interested in the problem of social order, which they tackled with parallel, functionalist schemes. Parsons focuses on the institutionalization and internalization of common values, whereas Bourdieu explores the constitution of habitus, an enduring set of dispositions acquired in early life and then later modified through participation in multiple fields. Thus, socialization figured equally prominently in both their accounts of social order. Both had difficulty developing an adequate theory of social

change, and their thin theories of history relied on the idea of spontaneous differentiation—in Parsons the rise of subsystems of action and in Bourdieu the emergence of differentiated fields. Neither saw the future as very different from the present: revolutionary change was not part of their conceptual repertoire.

Moreover, both were deeply committed to sociology as a science. Indeed, both conceived of sociology as the queen of the social sciences—other disciplines were a special case of or subordinate to sociology. At the same time, both drew heavily on the vocabulary and ideas of the discipline of economics, just as both were hostile to its reductionism. Despite their claims to universalism, their theories were distinctively products of the society they theorized, in the one case the pre-1960s United States and in the other post-1960s France. They were both masters of the art of universalizing the particular—the particular being the social structure of their own countries as they saw it—as neither took comparative research seriously.

But here the parallels cease. If Parsons's social order rested on *value consensus* that prevented a brutish Hobbesian war of all against all, then Bourdieu's rested on *symbolic violence* that secured silent and unconscious submission. Where Parsons endorsed value consensus as freedom, Bourdieu condemned symbolic violence as debilitating to both the dominant and the dominated. Accordingly, if Parsons was rather complacent about the world in which he lived, Bourdieu was consistently critical of it. If Parsons stood aloof from society, in the final analysis, Bourdieu was always deeply engaged with it. Where Parsons saw science and society as based on consensus, Bourdieu took an agonistic view, seeing society as a field of contestation. Science in particular was an arena of competition and struggle through which truth emerges. Where Parsons brushed aside intellectual and political antagonisms that divided the academy, Bourdieu made them definitive of the academic field and of scientific progress.

Their divergence is most clear in the way they built their theoretical frameworks. Parsons's (1937) voluntaristic theory of action, which, like Bourdieu, sought to transcend the dichotomy of structure and agency, laid claim to a grand synthesis of four canonical thinkers—Durkheim, Weber, Marshall, and Pareto. Later, he would incorporate Freud. Parsons not only basked in the glory of canonical figures; he actually created the canon himself by examining their writings in meticulous detail. He brought Durkheim and Weber to the center of the US sociological tradition.<sup>2</sup> He is not alone in building on so-called founders: Jürgen Habermas (1984) follows a similar strategy in his two-volume theory of communicative action, building on

the work of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, Lukács, and the Frankfurt School, as well as Talcott Parsons himself.

Bourdieu, by contrast, took a dismissive stance toward his competitors and forerunners, largely silencing the giants upon whose shoulders he perched. There is rarely a systematic engagement with any sociological work other than his own. Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Lévi-Strauss, Pascal, and others lurk in his writings, but he refers to them only in passing, as if to do otherwise might minimize his own contributions. He presents himself as the author of his own tradition, committing the sin he accuses other intellectuals of, namely their adhesion to the “charismatic ideology” of autonomous “creation,” forgetting that the creator too has to be created (Bourdieu [1992] 1996, 167). In re-creating sociology, Bourdieu fashioned himself after Flaubert, whom he regarded as the creator of the French literary field because he had such a subtle command of its elementary forces. If sociology is a combat sport, then Bourdieu was its grand master, so effective that the combat becomes invisible, taking place backstage.

Parsons was the great synthesizer and systematizer, ironing out differences and contradictions, thereby generating his ever more elaborate architecture of structural functionalism with its own concepts and vocabulary, liable to collapse under its own weight. Bourdieu, by contrast, refused all systematization. His works are incomplete, full of fissures and paradoxes, a labyrinth that provides for endless discussion, elaboration, and critique. As a gladiator he was the expert at defensive maneuvers to elude his assailants. Whereas Parsons specialized in grand theory, at home with rarefied abstractions, far removed from the concrete, everyday world, Bourdieu rarely wrote without empirical reference. For all its difficulty—its long and winding sentences that continually double back and qualify themselves—Bourdieu’s theorizing is deeply engaged with lived experience and follows rich research agendas. Where Parsons’s architectonic scheme disappeared without so much as a whimper once its founder passed away, its brittle foundations having lost touch with the world, Bourdieu’s ideas outlive their author and are far more flexible in their wrestling with an ever-changing reality.

Unlike Parsons—and more like Marx, Weber, and Durkheim—Bourdieu was steeped in the history of philosophy and, like them, his works are relentlessly empirical, ranging from the study of photography, painting, literature, and sport to the analysis of contemporary stratification, education, the state, and language. His writings straddle sociology and anthropology, including studies of peasant family strategies in the villages of the Béarn, where he grew up, as well as his books on Algeria that dwelt on the

social order of the Kabyle, written during the period of anticolonial struggles and marking the beginning of his research career. His methods range from sophisticated statistical analysis to in-depth interviewing and participant observation. His metatheoretical innovations, relentlessly applied to different historical contexts and different spheres of society, revolve around his notions of field, capital, and habitus. Even though Parsons was well versed in anthropology, economics, and psychology as well as sociology, in the end even he cannot compete with Bourdieu’s originality or scope, nor with his influence across a range of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities.

Parsons was like a vacuum cleaner, sucking in everything that came into his sphere of influence, whereas Bourdieu was more like a mop, pushing backward and forward in all directions. The imagery of the one was consensus building; the imagery of the other was combat; their divergence is reflected in the social theories they developed. Let me turn to that link between the substance of Bourdieu’s social theory and sociology as a combat sport.

#### UNMASKING DOMINATION

Symbolic violence is at the center of Bourdieu’s sociology. It is a domination that is not recognized as such, either because it is taken for granted (naturalized) or because it is misrecognized—i.e., recognized as something other than domination. The prototype of symbolic violence is masculine domination. According to Bourdieu, it is not generally perceived as such, so deeply is it inscribed in the habitus of both men and women. He defines habitus—a central concept in his thinking—as a “durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations,” producing “practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle” (Bourdieu [1972] 1977, 78). We are thus like fish swimming in water, unaware of the symbolic violence that pervades our lives, except that the water is not just outside us but also inside us. Drawing on his fieldwork among the Kabyle, Bourdieu ([1998] 2001) describes the way gender domination is inscribed in daily practices, in the architecture of houses and in the division of labor, so that it appears as natural as the weather.

In modern society, education provides one of Bourdieu’s most important examples of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron [1970] 1977, [1964] 1979). The school appears as a relatively autonomous institution following universal rules and eliciting the active participation of teachers and students in the acquisition of labor market credentials. This meritocratic



order obscures the bias of the school, whose pedagogy favors those middle- and upper-class students endowed with cultural capital (i.e., those already equipped with the capacity to appropriate mental and abstract teaching—the symbolic goods on offer). The school advantages the dominant classes and reproduces their domination through the participation of the dominated, a participation that holds out the possibility of upward mobility, thereby obscuring the class domination that it reproduces as its basis.

More generally, the dominant classes obscure their domination behind the distinction they display in the cultural sphere (Bourdieu [1979] 1984). Their familiarity with high culture—what Bourdieu calls legitimate culture—is conventionally viewed as a gift of the individual rather than an attribute of their class, acquired through socialization. The dominated are ashamed of their inadequate appreciation of legitimate culture, sometimes pretending to claim knowledge of it that they don't have and endowing it with a prestige that obscures its basis in class-determined cultural capital. Dominated cultures are just that—dominated by material necessity, on the one hand, and by the distinction of legitimate culture, on the other.

We will have reason to interrogate these claims in later conversations, but for now I am concerned with the implications of symbolic violence for Bourdieu's conception of sociology as a combat sport. If society is held together by symbolic violence that misrecognizes the grounds of class domination or gives it false legitimacy, then the task of the sociologist is to unmask the true function of the symbolic world and reveal the domination it hides. This, however, proves to be a most difficult task—symbolic violence is rooted in the habitus, that is, in dispositions that lie deep in the unconscious, inculcated from childhood onward. Even leaving aside the question of habitus, Bourdieu maintained that the dominant classes have no interest in unmasking domination, whereas the dominated do not have the capacity—the instruments of sociological knowledge—to see through domination:

The sociologist's misfortune is that, most of the time, the people who have the technical means of appropriating what he says have no wish to appropriate it, no *interest* in appropriating it, and even have powerful interests in refusing it (so that some people who are very competent in other respects may reveal themselves to be quite obtuse as regards sociology), whereas those who would have an interest in appropriating it do not have the instruments for appro-

priation (theoretical culture etc.). Sociological discourse arouses *resistances* that are quite analogous in their logic and their manifestations to those encountered by psychoanalytical discourse. (Bourdieu [1984] 1993a, 23)

From a theoretical point of view, therefore, dislodging symbolic violence would seem to be virtually impossible, requiring “a thoroughgoing process of countertraining, involving repeated exercises” (Bourdieu [1997] 2000, 172), but this never deterred Bourdieu from combating it wherever and whenever he could.

### COMBAT IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

From early on, Bourdieu's scholarly career went hand in hand with public engagement. Formative of his outlook on sociology and politics was his immersion from 1955 to 1960 in the Algerian war, first enlisted in the army and then as an assistant professor at the University of Algiers. It was here that he turned from philosophy, which seemed so remote from the Algerian experience, to ethnology, or what we might call a sociology of everyday life. His earliest writings displayed a fascination with the diverse traditions of the Algerian people, but it was not long before he broached the question of the day—the question of liberation—and how colonialism was creating struggles that were transforming the cultural and political aspirations of the colonized.

On his return to France, he would write blistering articles on the violence of colonialism. Soon, however, his sociological research led him away from brutal colonial violence to an analysis of symbolic violence, in particular the way education reproduced class domination. His two books on education, both written with Jean-Claude Passeron, especially the second and better known, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* ([1970] 1977), became controversial for their uncompromising refusal to entertain the view that education can reform society. In the 1970s, rather than write of burgeoning social movements from below, as other sociologists, such as Alain Touraine, were doing, Bourdieu examined the way language and political science conspired to dispossess the dominated, effectively making them voiceless in the political arena. Opinion polls, with their artificial construction of public opinion, served as an archetypal instrument of disempowerment. For Bourdieu, democracy concealed competition among elites within the field of power—elites whose appeal for popular support

was driven not so much by a concern for the dominated but by maneuvers within this field of the dominant.

As he ascended the academic staircase, Bourdieu converted his academic capital into political capital, engaging directly in the public sphere. He used his position as professor at the Collège de France, which he assumed in 1981, to draw attention to the limits of educational policy and to begin his attacks on the academy. Still, at the same time, he placed his hope in the potential universality of the state and the creation of an “international” of intellectuals. In the 1990s he deliberately gave voice to the downtrodden in the bestseller *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al. [1993] 1999), a collaborative work of interviewing immigrants, blue-collar workers, and low-level civil servants—in short, the dominated. He joined social struggles, most famously the French general strikes of 1995 that opposed the dismemberment of the welfare state. He spoke out against the socialist government that was socialist in name but neoliberal in content. As he aged, his assaults on neoliberalism and the distortions of the media, especially television, took a popular turn in the book series *Liber-Raisons d'Agir*. Gone were the long and tortured sentences; in their place he delivered uncompromising attacks written in an apocalyptic tone. Neoliberalism, he warned, meant the subjugation of education, art, politics, and culture to the remorseless logic of the market, not to mention the “flexploitation” of workers and their ever more precarious existence.

His combative spirit in the public sphere, however, collided with his theoretical claims. For a long time Bourdieu had been contemptuous of sociological interventions in politics—social movement sociology or “charitable sociology,” as he once called it (Bourdieu, Passeron, and Chamboredon [1968] 1991, 251). He insisted that sociology had to be a science with its own autonomy, its own language, and its own methods inaccessible to all but the initiated. He had dismissed the idea of the organic intellectual as a projection of the habitus and life conditions of intellectuals onto the benighted, yet here he was on the picket lines, leading the condemnation of the socialist government. Having insisted on the depth of symbolic violence, how could he work together with the subaltern? Was he just manipulating them for his own ends, as he accused others of doing? If the social struggles of the subaltern are misguided, rooted in a misrecognition of their own position, was Bourdieu being led astray by joining workers in their protests? We don't know—his practice was at odds with his theory, and he never seemed to interrogate the contradiction. This is what he writes in *Acts of Resistance*:

I do not have much inclination for prophetic interventions and I have always been wary of occasions in which the situation or sense of solidarity could lead me to overstep the limits of my competence. So I would not have engaged in public position-taking if I had not, each time, had the—perhaps illusory—sense of being forced into it by a kind of legitimate rage, sometimes close to something like a sense of duty. . . . And if, to be effective, I have sometimes had to commit myself in my own person and my own name, I have always done it in the hope—if not of triggering mobilization, or even one of those debates without object or subject which arise periodically in the world of the media—at least of breaking the appearance of unanimity which is the greater part of the symbolic force of the dominant discourse. (Bourdieu 1998, vii–viii)

Here, Bourdieu is attributing a certain rationality—you might say “good sense”—to the publics he is addressing, a “good sense” such publics don't have in his earlier writings.

This is the first paradox, the *paradox of public engagement*—the simultaneous claim of its impossibility and its necessity. It leads to the second paradox, the *paradox of relative autonomy*. In fighting neoliberalism, Bourdieu finds himself defending the very autonomy of educational, cultural, and scientific fields that earlier he had claimed were responsible for the reproduction of domination. In the end, he finds himself defending the great institutions of French culture, notwithstanding their role in reproducing domination. A child of the French Enlightenment, Bourdieu claims that the institutions he condemns—the state, the university, literature, and art—do have a universal validity and do represent a rich cultural heritage that should be accessible to all.

You might say Bourdieu is defending not the status quo ante (i.e., the relative autonomy of these institutions) but their full autonomy, so that they become the privilege of all. Yet if this is the case, then it is an entirely utopian project, so that the paradox remains: defending the relative autonomy of cultural fields against market invasion is the defense of the very thing he denounces—symbolic violence. But there is a political project here. In calling for the defense of the cultural, bureaucratic, and educational fields, he aims to rally the interests of intellectuals, artists, and academics—fractions of both the dominant classes and the new middle classes—against market tyranny.

## COMBAT IN THE ACADEMIC FIELD

It is easier for intellectuals and academics to attack the excesses of the market than to see themselves exercising symbolic violence over society by virtue of the autonomy they so stoutly defend. While intellectuals denounce physical violence throughout the world, they are reluctant to recognize that they, too, are the perpetrators of violence, that is, a symbolic violence that ensures a taken-for-granted—what Bourdieu calls “doxic”—submission to domination incorporated in bodies and language. Thus, although they may see themselves as autonomous, intellectuals are implicated in the state through its monopoly of the legitimate use of symbolic violence, through consecrated classifications and categories.

But intellectuals, academics, and social scientists are not all of a piece. While most do not recognize their contribution to symbolic violence, some, like Bourdieu, spell out the truth of symbolic violence. This division of intellectuals into those who have good sense and those who have bad sense calls for an analysis of academic fields that reveals what we are up to behind our screens of objectivity, pointing to the ways we deceive both ourselves and others. In short, the sociology that we apply to others must be applied equally to ourselves. The purpose of such reflexivity, however, is not to denounce our fellow scientists but to liberate them from the illusions—scholastic fallacies—that spring from the conditions under which they produce knowledge, namely their freedom from material necessity. Bourdieu criticizes his fellow academics for not recognizing how their material conditions shape their knowledge production, and so they mistakenly foist their theories onto the subjects whose actions they theorize. For Bourdieu, to better understand the conditions of the production of knowledge is a condition for producing better knowledge.

This sounds very fine in principle, but in practice the scientific field, no less than any other field, is a combat zone in which actors struggle to enforce their view of the world—their theories, methodologies, and philosophies. Indeed, Bourdieu ([1997] 2000, 116) refers to the scientific field as one of “armed competition” in which some actors manage to accumulate capital at the expense of others. He assumes, however, that the rules of such combat ensure the production of truth—or, more accurately, the reduction of falsehood—even though, as he says in his article on the scientific field, there is an ever-increasing concentration of capital with its own conservative tendencies. What happens to that open competition for truth when the scientific field is monopolized by a few powerful actors? What ensures the ascendancy of good sense over bad sense, Bourdieusian

sociologists over neoliberal economists? Are there rules of combat, or does anything go?

In his own practice of science Bourdieu can be quite ruthless in establishing his domination. As already mentioned, he devotes little time to recognizing the contributions of others, tending to constitute himself as the soul originator of his ideas. He may be standing on the shoulders of giants, but they are invisible, repressed below the surface. He seems to deploy the recognition of others in footnotes and acknowledgments to maximize the recognition that he receives. His very writing is a form of symbolic violence, trying to impress upon the readers his own distinction through esoteric references, appeals to Greek and Latin, and long-winded sentences, all of which have an intimidating effect. Those who dare to openly disagree with him—if they are sufficiently important—are deemed to suffer from irrationality, weak-mindedness, or even psychological disorders manifested in repression and defense mechanisms. Or, more simply, they express the interests that they have by virtue of their place in the academic field. He exercises symbolic violence within the field of science against these infidels, all in the name of the *realpolitik* of reason and to unmask symbolic violence in wider society. Throughout, he is so sure that he is right that any stratagem to vanquish the opposition seems justified. Here, combat often appears not as self-defense but as “unfair attacks” on enemy combatants.

While content to locate others in the academic field and explain their perspectives in terms of that position, he fails to apply the same principle to himself. The nearest we get to such a self-analysis are his claims to outsider status, coming as he did from peasant background with a “cleft habitus,” which allows him greater insight into the workings of the academy and, indeed, of the world. His *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* (Bourdieu [2004] 2007) is just that—a sketch that describes his sufferings in boarding school and as an outsider in the *École Normale Supérieure* but tells us next to nothing of Bourdieu as a combatant in the scientific field. Indeed, Bourdieu never undertook a systematic sociological investigation of the French field of sociology, in which he became a, if not the, central player. The nearest he gets is *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu [1984] 1988), which is an incomplete examination of the French academic field as a whole—an examination of the relations among disciplines but not of the disciplinary field itself.

Here, then, we come to the third paradox, *the paradox of reflexivity*. On the one hand, he argues that an analysis of the academic field in which one operates is a precondition of scientific knowledge. On the other hand, he himself undertakes neither an analysis of his own place in the field of



sociology nor even an analysis of the field of French sociology itself, as if none of his competitors is worthy of serious examination. Bourdieu's interest in reflexivity—i.e., in scientifically assessing the field of sociology and his position in it—clashes with his interests as an actor, namely to accumulate academic capital, which means to elevate the status of sociology and his position within it. To accomplish these ends, Bourdieu mobilizes the cultural capital that derives from a philosophy degree at the École Normale Supérieure and builds a school of sociology with its own vocabulary, methodology, theory, journal, etc. It involves dis-recognizing others and exercising symbolic violence over them, which, if successful, is at odds with the project of reflexivity and endangers the very project of science.

In these three paradoxes—the public engagement of sociologists, the relative autonomy of fields, and the reflexivity of scientific analysis—we see the contradiction between theory and practice. But according to Bourdieu's own theory, this is to be expected—there is always a gap between theory and practice. We find this argument in all his metatheoretical writings, from *Outline of a Theory of Practice* ([1972] 1977) to *The Logic of Practice* ([1980] 1990) to *Pascalian Meditations* ([1997] 2000). He shows the necessity of the rupture between sociological understanding and common sense, between theory and practice, and how practice reproduces this separation. If people truly understood what they do, if they understood how their practices reproduce their subordination, then the social order would crumble. But for all his interest in reflexivity, Bourdieu does not turn this analysis back onto *himself* and examine the ways in which *his* theory and practice are at odds with each other. There is no internal conversation between Bourdieu and Bourdieu, between his theory and practice, although we will attempt such a conversation in deciphering *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al. [1993] 1999).

The following engagements with Bourdieu, therefore, will study the paradoxical relations among and within the three nodes of Bourdieu's meta-framework: how he condemns symbolic violence but defends the very institutions that reproduce that domination; how he advocates reflexivity by locating intellectuals within their fields of production but fails to do the same for himself; and finally, how he is critical of public engagement and yet this becomes so central to his own identity.

### CONVERSATIONS WITH BOURDIEU

Bourdieu's model of sociology as a combat sport certainly casts doubt on the conventional collective self-understanding of scientists as building science through consensus. In his celebrated model, Robert Merton ([1942]

1973) defines the ethos of science as made up of four elements: universalism, communism, disinterestedness, and organized skepticism. Competition is there, but it does not take the form of a combat sport in which the goal is to annihilate adversaries in “armed struggle.” Yet, of course, inasmuch as science is a field in the Bourdieusian sense, it must have relations of domination and subjugation that play themselves out as combat. On the one hand, to deny those relations of domination, as is the wont of the dominant, is itself a strategy of domination. It is not surprising, therefore, that Parsons and Merton, who dominated US sociology in the 1950s, should have a consensus view of science. On the other hand, to endorse the idea of sociology as a combat sport without any further elaboration of the rules of that combat excuses opportunistic strategies of dis-recognition, expropriation, and distortion that are inimical to science.

Here, therefore, I want to consider a third model of science, one based on dialogue. The idea is not to suppress difference in the name of consensus but to recognize difference as a challenge to existing assumptions and frameworks. Here one challenges not in order to vanquish but rather to converse in order to better understand others and, through others, to learn the limits and possibilities of one's own assumptions and frameworks. A model of dialogue is not exclusive of the other two models. In order to converse, there must be some common ground to make conversation possible. An inner circle of agreement is necessary for an outer circle of disagreement. Equally, in order to converse within a scientific field, it may be necessary to give voice to subaltern perspectives that are repressed, and that usually requires combat. In a field of domination, conversation cannot be taken for granted; it has to be advanced and defended.

In the conversations that follow, we will bring to life some of the combatants Bourdieu has repressed. I will follow Bourdieu's prescription that to read an author it is necessary to first place him or her in the context of the field of production—competitors, allies, and antagonists who are taken for granted by the author and invisibly shape his or her practice. I cannot re-create all the academic fields within which Bourdieu was embedded. That would be a task far beyond my capabilities, covering as it would philosophy, linguistics, literature, painting, and photography, as well as sociology and anthropology—indeed, the entire French intellectual field. So I have chosen a distinctive group of social theorists who wander like ghosts through Bourdieu's opus, because, unlike Bourdieu, they believe the dominated, or some fraction thereof, can indeed under certain conditions perceive and appreciate the nature of their own subordination. I am, of course, thinking of

the Marxist tradition that Bourdieu engages, usually without recognizing it and even to the point of denying it a place in his intellectual field. This is ironic indeed, but perhaps not surprising, since these social theorists were all powerful combatants, both Bourdieu's equals and tackling the same issues that obsessed him.

Like Parsons, Bourdieu considered it sufficient to discredit Marx's ideas as belonging to the nineteenth century to dismiss the Marxist tradition. Effectively, they deny the possibility that those who follow in the path of Marx may have made distinctive contributions through reconstructing the founder's theories. Both Parsons and Bourdieu reduced all Marxists to the same obsolete theory, rather than recognizing the originality of the Marxists who followed Marx, an originality prompted by the internal contradictions and external anomalies in Marxian theory, highlighted by the challenges they faced in their different places and their different times. The original contributions of Gramsci, Fanon, Freire, and Beauvoir (to mention just four who concern us here) are repressed even though, as we will see, they focus on questions parallel to those posed by Bourdieu—questions of cultural domination, colonialism, education, gender, and common sense.

The growth of Marxism has always benefited from an engagement with sociology as its alter ego, and in our era the preeminent representative of sociology is undoubtedly Pierre Bourdieu. He provides an important impetus for reconstructing Marxism for the twenty-first century. That is the ultimate purpose of these conversations. But there is an important lesson here for the followers of Bourdieu. Will they regard themselves as disciples and view the master's work as a finished product with neither internal contradictions nor external anomalies? Will they do to Bourdieu what Bourdieu does to Marxism, deny its historicity? If so, the chance to build a Bourdieusian tradition will be lost, and Bourdieu's work will die on the vine just like that of Talcott Parsons. One can pick grapes only so many times before they perish if the vine itself is not replenished. So will Bourdieu's apostles see a virtue in dialogue with other parallel traditions and thereby recognize the limitations of their founder and build on his ideas?

## THE POVERTY OF PHILOSOPHY

### Marx Meets Bourdieu

Economic conditions first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle.

— MARX, *THE POVERTY OF PHILOSOPHY*

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, "SOCIAL SPACE AND THE GENESIS OF 'CLASSES'"