

It would take another Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, to transcend the separation of theory and practice. In a world defined by cultural domination, what he called hegemony, Gramsci develops a more balanced conception of class struggle, organized on the terrain of dominant ideology. In so doing he distinguishes between traditional intellectuals like Bourdieu, who protected their autonomy in order to project themselves as carrying some universal truth, and organic intellectuals like Marx, who sought a closer alliance with the dominated, elaborating their kernel of good sense—good sense acquired in the collective transformation of nature.

As we shall see, Gramsci is just one of a succession of Marxists who have dealt with questions that Marx failed to address adequately. This is what we might call the Marxist tradition or the Marxist research program. The question is whether a Bourdieusian research program will develop, tackling the abiding anomalies and contradictions of his corpus, or whether his followers will be content to apply the lexicon of “capital,” “habitus,” and “field” to different situations and allow his body of theory to be defined as a final and incontrovertible truth. The question, in other words, is whether Bourdieu’s disciples will do to Bourdieu what he erroneously tries to do to Marxism, to reduce everything to the founding figure as if there could never be any further advances. If Bourdieu is to live on and be a worthy competitor to Marx, it will be necessary to think with Bourdieu against Bourdieu.

## CULTURAL DOMINATION Gramsci Meets Bourdieu

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

— BOURDIEU, *DISTINCTION: A SOCIAL CRITIQUE  
OF THE JUDGMENT OF TASTE*

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

— BOURDIEU, “FIELDWORK IN PHILOSOPHY”

This is an additional reason to ground the corporatism of the universal in a corporatism geared to the defense of well-understood common interests. One of the major

obstacles is (or was) the myth of the “organic intellectual,” so dear to Gramsci. By reducing intellectuals to the role of the proletariat’s “fellow travelers,” this myth prevents them from taking up the defense of their own interests and from exploiting their most effective means of struggle on behalf of universal causes.

— BOURDIEU, “THE CORPORATISM OF THE UNIVERSAL”

If there is a single Marxist whom Pierre Bourdieu should have taken seriously, it would have to be Antonio Gramsci. The theorist of symbolic violence must surely engage the theorist of hegemony. Yet I can only find passing references to Gramsci in Bourdieu’s writings. In the first epigraph to this chapter, Bourdieu appropriates Gramsci to his own thinking about cultural domination, in the second he deploys Gramsci to support his own theory of politics, and in the third he ridicules Gramsci’s ideas about organic intellectuals.<sup>1</sup>

Given the widespread interest in Gramsci’s writings during the 1960s and 1970s, when Bourdieu was developing his ideas of cultural domination, one can only surmise that the omission was deliberate. Bourdieu’s allergy to Marxism here expresses itself in his refusal to entertain the ideas of the Marxist closest to his own perspective. He openly declares that he has never read Gramsci and that, if he had, he would have made his criticisms abundantly clear. Of all the Marxists, Gramsci was simply too close for comfort.

Indeed, the parallels are remarkable. Both repudiated Marxian laws of history to develop notions of class struggle in which culture played a key role, and both focused on what Gramsci called the superstructures and what Bourdieu called fields of culture, education, and politics. Both pushed aside the analysis of the economy itself to focus on its effects—the limits and opportunities it created for social change. Their interest in cultural domination led both to study intellectuals in relation to classes and politics. Both sought to transcend what they considered to be the false opposition of voluntarism and determinism, and of subjectivism and objectivism. They both openly rejected materialism and teleology and instead emphasized how theory and theorist are inescapably part of the world they study.

If one is looking for reasons for their extraordinary theoretical convergence, their parallel biographies are a good place to begin. Unique among the great Marxist theoreticians, Gramsci—like Bourdieu—came

from a poor rural background. They were similarly uncomfortable in the university setting, although for Gramsci this meant leaving the university for a life of journalism and politics, before being unceremoniously cast into prison by the fascist state. Bourdieu, by contrast, would make the academy his home, climbing to its very peak and becoming a professor at the Collège de France. It was from there that he made his sorties into political life. No matter how far removed they became from the rural world into which they were born, neither ever lost touch with that world. They both made the experience of the dominated or subaltern an abiding preoccupation.

Given the similarities of their social trajectories and their common theoretical interests, their fundamental divergences are all the more interesting—closely tied, one might conjecture, to the very different historical contexts or political fields within which they acted. Gramsci, after all, remained a Marxist and engaged with questions of socialism at a time when it was still very much part of the wider political agenda, whereas Bourdieu distanced himself from Marxism, prefiguring what would become a post-socialist world. A conversation between Bourdieu and Gramsci built on their common interest in cultural domination promises to clarify their divergent politics. I begin such an imaginary conversation by tracing the intersection of their biographies with history, and then I draw out the parallels in their frameworks, before examining their divergent theories of cultural domination—hegemony versus symbolic violence—and their opposed theories of intellectuals.

### PARALLEL LIVES OF PRACTICE

In seeking to comprehend human political interventions, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus—the embedded and embodied dispositions acquired through life trajectories—invites us to examine the intersection of biography and history. The political lives of Gramsci and Bourdieu are the cumulative effects of four sets of experiences: (1) early childhood and schooling that saw each migrate from village to city in pursuit of education; (2) formative political experiences—i.e., Bourdieu’s immersion in the Algerian revolution and Gramsci’s participation in the politics leading up to the factory council movement; (3) theoretical development—for Bourdieu in the academy, for Gramsci in the communist movement; and (4) final redirections, in which Bourdieu moves from the university into public sphere, while Gramsci is forced to retreat from party to prison. At each successive moment, Bourdieu and Gramsci carry with them a habitus or, as Gramsci (1971, 353) calls it, the *précis* of their past, which guides their interventions in new fields.

Both Gramsci and Bourdieu grew up in peasant societies. Gramsci was born in Sardinia in 1891; Bourdieu was born in 1930 in the Béarn in the Pyrenees. Both were children of local public employees: Bourdieu the son of a postman who became a clerk in the village post office; Gramsci the son of a clerk in the local land registry who was imprisoned on charges of malfeasance. Bourdieu was an only child, but Gramsci was one of seven children, all of whom played a major role in his early life. Both were very attached to their mothers—in both instances women from higher-status backgrounds than their husbands. They both shone at school and by dint of willpower advanced from their poor villages to metropolitan centers, each with the support of devoted schoolmasters.

Undoubtedly, Gramsci's life was more difficult. Not only was his family far poorer, but he also suffered from the physical and psychological pain of being a hunchback. Only with his deep reserves of determination and with support from his elder brother could Gramsci in 1911 make his way to the mainland of northern Italy, on a scholarship to study philosophy and linguistics at the University of Turin. In similar fashion, Bourdieu would make his way to the preparatory lycée and then enter the *École Normale Supérieure*, where he studied philosophy, then the apex of the French intellectual pyramid.

Coming from a rural background to the urban metropolis, whether Turin or Paris, was daunting—both were fish out of water in the new middle- and upper-class milieu of the university. Bourdieu writes of his disjointed habitus: “the durable effect of a very strong discrepancy between high academic consecration and low social origin, in other words a *cleft habitus*, inhabited by tensions and contradictions” ([2004] 2007, 100). Although they both became brilliant intellectuals and political figures, neither lost touch with the sources of his marginality, his village and his family. Gramsci's devotion to his family and rural mores is captured in his letters from prison, just as Bourdieu remained similarly close to his parents, returning home periodically to conduct field research. Their rural upbringing is deeply embedded in their dispositions and thought, whether by way of an obdurate inheritance or a vehement reaction.<sup>2</sup>

Gramsci never finished university but dived into Turin's working-class politics, which was heating up during the First World War. He began writing for the socialist newspaper *Avanti!* and also for *Il Grido*. After the war he became the editor of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, the magazine of Turin's working class, designed to articulate its new culture and destined to become the mouthpiece of the factory council movement and the occupation of the fac-

tories of 1919–20. Bourdieu, on the other hand, left university and after a year teaching in a lycée was drafted for national service in Algeria in 1955. He would remain in this war-torn country for five years, conducting fieldwork when his military service was over, teaching at the university, and through his writing representing the culture and struggles of the colonized, both in town and village. With the political clampdown after the temporary setback to the anticolonial movement in the 1957 Battle of Algiers, Bourdieu's position became untenable and he was eventually forced to leave in 1960. Thus, in their formative years after university, both Gramsci and Bourdieu were fundamentally transformed by struggles far from their homes.

Even during these years, however, Gramsci was politically much closer to his allies than was Bourdieu, whose political engagement manifested itself at a scientific distance. The bifurcated world of colonialism removed Bourdieu from the colonized, just as the class order of Italy thrust Gramsci, although an émigré from the semi-feudal Sardinia, into working-class politics. Accordingly, at this point the two men took very different roads. Following the defeat of the factory councils, Gramsci became a leader of the working-class movement, a founding member of the Communist Party in 1921, and its general secretary in 1924, precisely when fascism was consolidated. He spent time in Moscow with the Comintern and in exile in Vienna, but traveled throughout Italy after 1923 at a time when being an elected deputy gave him political immunity. This ended in 1926 when he was arrested under a new set of laws, and in 1928 he was brought to trial. The judge declared that Gramsci's brain must be stopped for twenty years. He was sent to prison where, despite contracting numerous and ultimately fatal diseases, he produced the most creative Marxist thinking of the twentieth century—the famous *Prison Notebooks*. Ironically, it was the fascist prison that kept Stalin's predators at bay. Gramsci's health deteriorated continuously, until he died in 1937 of tuberculosis, Pott's disease (which eats away at the vertebrae), and arteriosclerosis, just as an international campaign for his release was gaining momentum.

Bourdieu's trajectory could not have been more different. After Algeria, he passed into the academy, taking up positions in France's leading research centers and writing about the place of education in reproducing the class relations of French society. Bourdieu was to be elected to the prestigious chair of sociology at the Collège de France in 1981, which made him a preeminent public intellectual and an inheritor of the mantle of Sartre and Foucault. From the beginning, his writings had political import and bearing, but they took on a more activist and urgent mission



in the mid-1990s, especially with the return to power of the socialists in 1997. He publicly defended the dispossessed, attacked the ascendant technocracy of neoliberalism, and above all assailed the mass media and journalists in his book *On Television*. He undertook various publishing ventures, from the more academic *Actes de la Recherches en Sciences Sociales* to the more radical *Liber-Raisons d'Agir* book series. In his last years he would try to forge a "collective intellectual" that transcended national and disciplinary boundaries, bringing together progressive minds to shape public debate.

If Gramsci moved from party political engagement to a more scholastic life in prison, where he reflected on the failed socialist revolution in the West, Bourdieu took the opposite path, from the scholastic life to a more public opposition to the growing tide of market fundamentalism, even addressing striking workers and supporting their struggles. Gramsci's organic connection to the working class through the Communist Party exaggerated the revolutionary potential of the working class. Thus, in prison he devoted himself to understanding how the elaborate superstructures of advanced capitalism, which included an expanded state as well as the state's relation to the emergent trenches of civil society, "not only justifies and maintains its domination but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules" (Gramsci 1971, 245).

By contrast, Bourdieu's adoption of a more overt political posture toward the end of his life came with an already elaborated theory of cultural domination, one based on an analysis of strategic action within fields and its allied concept, *habitus*. In the late 1990s, finding the public sphere increasingly distorted by the media, Bourdieu assumed a more offensive posture, even to the extent of openly supporting protest movements. His spirited defense of intellectual and academic autonomy and his aggressive attacks on neoliberalism made him one of the most prominent public figures in France.

Gramsci's prison writings reflected on and advanced beyond his political practice. He wrote about the ideal Communist Party—the "Modern Prince"—but he could never find one in reality. If Gramsci's theory advanced beyond his practice, the reverse was true for Bourdieu in his last years. He burst onto the political scene without any warrant from his theorizing, which pointed to actors lost in a cloud of misrecognition. Here, practice moved ahead of theory. To examine the respective disjunctions of theory and practice, we need to put their theories into dialogue with each other.

## CLASS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

It is difficult to slice up these two bodies of theory into parallel and comparable segments, since each segment achieves meaning only in relation to the whole. Still, I will make parallel cuts into each body of theory, even at the cost of overlap and repetition. I begin with their broad frameworks for the study of class, politics, and culture that can be found in *The Modern Prince* (Gramsci 1971, 123–205) and *Distinction* (Bourdieu [1979] 1984). In these writings, both Gramsci and Bourdieu divide a social formation into parallel homologous realms—the economic, which gives us classes; the political-cultural, which gives us domination and struggle; and, for Gramsci, the military, which sets limits on struggle.

For Gramsci, the economy serves to provide the basis of class formation—working class, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie, and capitalist class. The economy determines the objective strength of each class, while setting limits on the relations among those classes. But the struggles and alliances among classes are organized on the terrain of politics and ideology, a terrain that has its own logic. The political structure, for example, organizes the forms of representation of classes, in particular political parties. Each political order also has a hegemonic ideology, that is, a hegemonic system of ideologies that provide a common language, discourse, and normative visions shared by the contestants in struggle. Class struggle is not a struggle between ideologies but a struggle on the terrain of ideology over the articulation of the different elements of a single ideological system. Alternative hegemonies can emerge in moments of organic crisis, but otherwise they have little support. Finally, there is a military order that, in relation to class struggle, for the most part is invisible, entering only to discipline the illegalities of groups and individuals or to restore order in times of fundamental crisis. Gramsci is as concerned about its political moment (i.e., the subjective state of military personnel) as about the technical preparedness of the coercive forces.

Similarly, Bourdieu has homologous realms, with the major division between the economic and the cultural realm. Again, there is no analysis of the economic as such, and classes, as in Gramsci, are taken as given: dominant classes, petite bourgeoisie, and working class. But classes cannot be reduced to the purely economic; they contain a combination of economic and cultural capital, so that the dominant class has a chiasitic structure divided between a dominant fraction strong in economic and weak in cultural capital and a dominated fraction strong in cultural and relatively weak in economic capital. Equally, the middle classes are also divided between the

old petite bourgeoisie (emphasizing economic capital) and the new petite bourgeoisie (emphasizing cultural capital). Finally, the working class has a minimal amount of both types of capital, and so its members are forced into a life governed by material necessity.

Gramsci wheels his classes into the political arena, where their interests are forged and organized. Here we find political parties, trade unions, chambers of commerce, and so forth representing the interests of given classes in relation to other classes, each class battling to advance its own narrow corporate interests. Two classes—specifically capital and labor—also seek to reach the hegemonic level and represent their own interests as the interests of all. In parallel fashion, Bourdieu focuses on the way the cultural realm masks the class stratification upon which it is founded. Absorption in the practices of the dominant—“legitimate”—culture hides the class-based cultural resources that make these practices possible. The appreciation of art, music, and literature is possible only with a leisured existence and inherited cultural wealth, but it is presented as an attribute of gifted individuals. In their self-representation, individuals are in the dominant class because they are gifted; they are not gifted because they are in the dominant class. All cultural practices—from art to sport, from literature to food, from music to holidays—are ranged in a hierarchy that is homologous to the class hierarchy. The middle classes seek to imitate the cultural practices of the dominant class, while the working class grants legitimacy by abstention—high culture is not for them. They are driven by functional exigencies adapted to material necessity.

If for Gramsci the cultural realm is a realm of class struggle, for Bourdieu it dissipates class struggle. Struggle takes place within separate cultural fields or within the dominant classes, but it is not a class struggle. It is a classification struggle—a struggle over terms and forms of representation. Bourdieu rarely goes beyond classification struggles within classes to class struggle between classes, which perhaps explains why military force never appears in his theoretical accounts.<sup>3</sup> These divergences between Gramsci's and Bourdieu's notions of politics require us to attend to the differences between two very different terrains of contestation—civil society and the field of power.

### CIVIL SOCIETY VS. FIELD OF POWER

Gramsci's innovation was to periodize capitalism not in terms of the transformation of the economic base (competitive to monopoly capitalism, or laissez-faire to organized capitalism, etc.), but in terms of the rise of civil

society—the associations, movements, and organizations that are separate from the economy and the state. Thus, he was referring to the appearance of trade unions, religious organizations, media, schools, voluntary associations, and political parties that were relatively autonomous from but nevertheless guaranteed and organized by the state. The “trenches of civil society” effectively organized consent to domination by absorbing the participation of the subaltern classes, giving space to political activity but within limits defined by capitalism. Participating in elections, working in trades, attending school, going to church, and reading newspapers had the effect of channeling dissent into activities within organizations that would compete for the attention of the state.

This had dramatic consequences, Gramsci argued, for the very idea of social transformation. Attempts to seize state power would be repulsed so long as civil society was left intact. Rather, it was first necessary to carry out the long and arduous march through the trenches of civil society. Such a *war of position* required the reconstruction of civil society, breaking the thousand threads that connected it to the state and bringing it (civil society) under the direction of the revolutionary movement, in particular its party, which Gramsci calls the “Modern Prince.” The seizure of state power (i.e., the *war of movement*) was but the culminating act in a long, drawn-out conflict. The century-long struggle against South African apartheid, especially in the 1980s, the advance of Solidarity in Poland during 1980–81, and even the civil rights movement in the United States—all are examples, more or less partial, of a war of position. The point is simple: assault on the state might work where civil society was “primordial and gelatinous” (e.g., the French Revolution or the Russian Revolution) but not in advanced capitalism. Lenin's theory of revolution, which prioritized assault on the state, as formulated in *State and Revolution*, is not a general theory but reflected the specific circumstances of Russia.

Although it does contain elements of a classification struggle, the idea of a war of position on the terrain of civil society, forging a popular challenge to the social order, finds little resonance in Bourdieu's theory. Strangely for a sociologist, Bourdieu has no notion of civil society. What we find instead are leaders of the organizations of civil society—party leaders, trade union leaders, intellectual leaders, religious leaders—competing with one another in the *field of power* above civil society, employing their representative function to advance their own interests, more or less unaccountable to their followers (Bourdieu 1991, part 3). Where Gramsci emphasizes class struggle—although by no means to the exclusion of struggle within

classes, especially within the dominant class—Bourdieu, as we have seen, focuses on classification struggles, that is, struggles within the dominant class about dominant classifications. Just as in Gramsci's analysis the state coordinates the elements of civil society, so in Bourdieu's the state regulates the classification struggles through its ultimate monopoly of the legitimate means of symbolic violence.

Classification struggles have consequences for, but are not affected by, the dominated. Bourdieu makes no reference to civil society—for him there is no effective politics except in the field of power, confined to the dominant classes. As for Weber, the majority are steeped in the stupor of subjugation, manipulated by their spokespeople.

### HEGEMONY VS. SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

At first blush, hegemony and symbolic violence appear very similar, ensuring the maintenance of the social order not through coercion but through cultural domination. Indeed, there are places where they appear to be saying the same thing, but that would be to obscure fundamental differences—differences that ultimately reside in the capacity of the dominated to understand and contest the conditions of their existence.

Hegemony is a form of domination that Gramsci famously defined as “the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority” (Gramsci 1971, 80). Hegemony has to be distinguished from dictatorship or despotism, where coercion prevails and is applied arbitrarily without regulatory norms. Hegemony is organized in civil society, but it embraces the state too: “The State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (244). A lot rests on the idea of consent, of a knowing and willing participation of the dominated in their subjugation.

Bourdieu sometimes uses the word *consent* to describe symbolic violence, but it has a connotation of much greater psychological depth than hegemony. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu writes of habitus as the “internalized form of class condition and of the conditioning it entails” ([1979] 1984, 101). “The schemes of the habitus, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of the consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will” (466). In *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu writes,

The agent engaged in practice knows the world but with a knowledge which . . . is not set up in the relation of externality of a knowing consciousness. He knows it in a sense, too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he is caught up in it, bound up with it; he inhabits it like a garment [*un habit*]. He feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of habitus, a virtue made of necessity which implies a form of love of necessity, *amor fati*. ([1997] 2000, 142–43)

Thus, symbolic violence does not depend on physical force or even on legitimacy. Indeed, it makes both unnecessary:

The state does not necessarily need to give orders and to exert physical coercion, or disciplinary constraint, to produce an ordered social world, so long as it is able to produce incorporated cognitive structures attuned to the objective structures and secure doxic submission to the established order. (178; see also 176)

Symbolic violence is defined in opposition to the notion of legitimacy, which is skin deep, but also to hegemony, which is based on an awareness of domination, a practical sense that is also conscious. In a telling passage, Bourdieu dismisses the notion of false consciousness, not by questioning the notion of falseness (as is usually the case) but by questioning the notion of consciousness:

In the notion of “false consciousness” which some Marxists invoke to explain the effect of symbolic domination, it is the word “consciousness” which is excessive; and to speak of “ideology” is to place in the order of representations, capable of being transformed by the intellectual conversion that is called the “awakening of consciousness,” what belongs to the order of beliefs, that is, at the deepest level of bodily dispositions. (177)

Instead of false consciousness, Bourdieu talks of “misrecognition”: the way in which people spontaneously recognize the world as a *misrecognition* that is deeply rooted in the habitus and seemingly inaccessible to reflection.

Gramsci couldn't be more different. Instead of misrecognition, we have a knowing, rational consent to domination, and instead of habitus,



he develops the notion of “common sense” that contains a kernel of “good sense”—practical activity that can lead to genuine understanding—as well as inherited folk wisdom and invading ideologies:

The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding the world in so far as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world: and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. But this verbal conception is not without its consequences. It holds together a specific social group, it influences moral conduct and the direction of the will, with varying efficacy, but often powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit of any action, any decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral passivity. Critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political “hegemonies” and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one’s own conception of reality. (Gramsci 1971, 333)

Here we enter the crux of the difference between Gramsci and Bourdieu. Whereas Gramsci looks upon the practical activity of collectively transforming the world as the basis of good sense and potentially leading to class consciousness, Bourdieu sees in practical activity the opposite: it leads to a class *un*consciousness and acceptance of the world as it is. Compare the astonishingly parallel passage in Bourdieu:

To point out that perception of the social world implies an act of construction is not in the least to accept an intellectualist theory of knowledge: the essential part of one’s experience of the social world and of the labour of construction it implies takes place in *practice*, without reaching the level of *explicit* representation and *verbal* expression. Closer to a class unconsciousness than to a “class consciousness” in the Marxist sense, the sense of position

one occupies in the social space (what Goffman calls the “sense of one’s place”) is the practical mastery of the social structure as a whole which reveals itself through the sense of the position occupied in that structure. The categories of perception of the social world are essentially the product of the incorporation of the objective structures of the social space. Consequently, they incline agents to accept the social world as it is, to take it for granted, rather than to rebel against it, to put forward opposed and even antagonistic possibilities. (Bourdieu [1984] 1991b, 235; emphasis added to underline the parallels with Gramsci)

In other words, for Bourdieu, common sense is simply a blanket of bad sense, seemingly for everyone, except for a few sociologists in the scientific field, who miraculously see through the fog, whereas for Gramsci different classes have different potentials for developing insight into the world they inhabit, differently endowed with good sense depending on their relation to production. The working class in particular is favored through its collective transformation of nature, whereas production among the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie is too individualized, and the dominant class does not engage directly in production.

The contrast with Lenin is illuminating. Like Bourdieu, Lenin considered the working class by itself to be incapable of reaching more than trade union consciousness. Lenin concluded that truth—carried by the collective intellectual—has to be brought to the working class from without ([1902] 1975, [1917] 1975). From this, Bourdieu recoils with horror—the working class is too deeply mired in submission to be altered by such presumptuous vanguardism, which endangers both intellectuals and workers. Gramsci, on the other hand, argues against Lenin’s notion of “falseness,” and instead emphasizes the duality of consciousness. He grants the working class its kernel of truth that opens the door to intellectuals, who can then elaborate that truth through dialogue. From these profound differences emerge contrary views not only of class struggle but also of the role of intellectuals.

#### INTELLECTUALS: TRADITIONAL VS. ORGANIC

Unique among classical Marxists, Gramsci devotes much attention to intellectuals and their relation to themselves, to the working class, and to the dominant classes. We saw how Marx was not able to explain himself to himself—first, how a bourgeois intellectual could be fighting with the working class against the bourgeoisie and, second, how and why all his literary

efforts mattered for class formation and class struggle. He simply had nothing systematic to say about intellectuals. Gramsci's interest in cultural domination and working-class consciousness led him to take seriously the role and place of intellectuals.

He begins with the important assumption that everyone operates with theories of the world, but there are those who specialize in producing such theories, whom we call intellectuals or philosophers. Of these, there are two types: organic and traditional intellectuals. The first is organically connected to the class it represents, while the second is relatively autonomous from the class it represents. Under capitalism, subordinate classes rely on the first, while dominant classes are advantaged by the second. Let us explore the distinction further.

For the working class to become a revolutionary force, it requires intellectuals to elaborate its good sense within common sense. Such an elaboration takes place through dialogue between the working class and a collective intellectual—the Communist Party that Gramsci refers to as the “Modern Prince” as permanent persuader. This is a matter not of bringing consciousness to the working class from without, which marks Gramsci off from Lenin, but of building on what already lies within it. The organic intellectual can only be effective through an intimate relation with the working class, sharing its life, which, in some readings of Gramsci, means coming from the working class.

We can see why Bourdieu dismisses the idea of “organic intellectual” as mythological. Since the common sense of the working class is all bad sense, there is therefore no good sense, no kernel of genuine understanding within the practical experience of the working class, and thus nothing for intellectuals to elaborate. There is no basis for dialogue, which therefore degenerates into populism—an identification with the working class, which is none other than a projection of their own desires and imaginations onto the working class, a class that intellectuals mistakenly claim to understand:

It is not a question of the truth or falsity of the unsupportable image of the working class world that the intellectual produces when, putting himself in the place of a worker without having the habitus of a worker, he apprehends the working-class condition through schemes of perception and appreciation which are not those that the members of the working class themselves use to apprehend it. It is truly the experience that an intellectual can obtain of the

working-class world by putting himself provisionally and deliberately into the working-class condition, and it may become less and less improbable if, as is beginning to happen, an increasing number of individuals are thrown into the working-class condition without having the habitus that is the product of the conditionings “normally” imposed on those who are condemned to this condition. Populism is never anything other than an inverted ethnocentrism. (Bourdieu [1979] 1984, 372–74)

In other words, the intellectual, whose habitus is formed by *skhole* (a world that is free of material necessity), cannot appreciate the condition of the members of the working class, whose habitus is shaped by the endless and precarious pursuit of their material livelihood. Temporary immersion into factory life generates in the intellectual an abhorrence for the conditions of working-class life, while the working class itself, inured to its subjugation, looks at the intellectual with incomprehension.

Intellectuals, being part of the dominated fraction of the dominant class, experience their lives as subjugation, leading some to identify with the dominated classes. But this identification is illusory. They have little in common with the working class. Intellectuals are much better off explicitly defending their own interests as the interests of all—the universal interests of humanity:

Cultural producers will not find again a place of their own in the social world unless, sacrificing once and for all the myth of the “organic intellectual” (without falling into the complementary mythology of the mandarin withdrawn from everything), they agree to work collectively for the defense of their interests. This should lead them to assert themselves as an international power of criticism and watchfulness, or even of proposals, in the face of the technocrats, or—with an ambition both more lofty and more realistic, and hence limited to their own sphere—to get involved in rational action to defend the economic and social conditions of the autonomy of these socially privileged universes in which the material and intellectual instruments of what we call Reason are produced and reproduced. This *Realpolitik of reason* will undoubtedly be suspected of corporatism. But it will be part of its task to prove, by the ends to which it puts the sorely won means of autonomy, that it is a corporatism of the universal. (Bourdieu [1992] 1996, 348)



We are back with the realpolitik of reason—a claim that in protecting their own autonomy, intellectuals can at the same time defend the interests of humanity. Bourdieu proposes the formation of an Internationale of intellectuals, but why should we have any more confidence in his “Modern Prince” than in Gramsci’s? What ends—what visions and divisions—has Bourdieu in mind for this “organic intellectual of humanity”?<sup>4</sup> Why should we trust intellectuals—the historic bearers of neoliberalism, fascism, racism, Bolshevism, and so forth—to be the saviors of humanity? In dissecting the scholastic fallacies committed by others, is Bourdieu not committing the greatest fallacy of all, the self-misrecognition of the intellectual as (potential) bearer of a deceptive universality? Bourdieu has replaced the universality of the working class based in production and carried by the political party with the universality of the intellectual based in the academy.

In Gramsci’s eyes, Bourdieu’s universalistic defense of intellectuals is the ideology of the traditional intellectual, who, through defending autonomy, becomes all the more effective in securing the hegemony of the dominant classes. The latter seek to present their interests as the interests of all, and for that they require relatively autonomous intellectuals who genuinely believe in their universality. Intellectuals who are closely connected to the dominant class cannot represent the latter as a universal class. Thus, a thoroughgoing critical stance toward the dominant class for pursuing its own corporate interest—to wit, its uncompromising and short-sighted pursuit of profit—can still advance bourgeois hegemony. Can intellectuals represent their autonomy in opposition to bourgeois hegemony without being accountable to another class? Bourdieu says yes: intellectuals can represent interests above class. Gramsci says no: in the final analysis, there are no interests above class. Gramsci’s organic intellectual not only elaborates the good sense of the working class but also attacks the claims of traditional intellectuals to represent some true universality independent of class.

### CONCLUSION

Gramsci and Bourdieu may appear convergent at one level, but at a deeper level they are mirror opposites: Bourdieu attacks Gramsci’s organic intellectual as mythical, while Gramsci attacks Bourdieu’s traditional intellectual as self-deluding. At bottom, the divergence rests on claims about the (in)ability of the dominated to understand the world and the (in)ability of intellectuals to transcend their corporate or class interests. To these two questions, Gramsci and Bourdieu have opposite answers: Gramsci claims the dominated can have a partial insight into their worlds and organic intellectuals

exist to elaborate that insight; Bourdieu, by contrast, claims the dominated cannot comprehend their subjugation, while intellectuals, so long as they are autonomous from classes, can see and represent the truth through the fog of cultural domination.

Their opposition does not mean that conversation is futile. Throughout his prison writings, Gramsci shows how aware he is of the Bourdieusian critique by returning time and again to the difficulties of sustaining a reciprocal dialogue between the party and its followers, between leaders and led. As we know, in his own critique of the organic intellectual, Bourdieu drew on Gramsci’s reflections on the alienation of politics from the rank and file. On the other hand, Bourdieu knows only too well the limitations of intellectuals’ claims to universality and the danger of scholastic fallacies that trap them into a parochial corporatism. In other words, each recognizes the partial truth of the other; so they can provide each other with important correctives.

More than that, as we shall see, there are surprising crossovers. In the argument between Freire and Bourdieu, Gramsci will side with Bourdieu, defending conventional schooling for all. Even more surprising is Bourdieu’s embrace of the organic intellectual in *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al. [1993] 1999), an ethnography of suffering in French society that I discuss in chapter 9. In the next conversation, with Fanon, Bourdieu will reproduce the Gramscian position, claiming good sense for the Algerian working class and bad sense for the peasantry. Caught in the contradictions between theory and practice, different historical conjunctures led him to adopt different positions.