

THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

Bourdieu Meets Bourdieu

It is quite illusory to think that symbolic violence can be overcome solely with the weapons of consciousness and will.

— BOURDIEU, *PASCALIAN MEDITATIONS*

I would say that the interview can be considered a sort of spiritual exercise that, through forgetfulness of self, aims at true conversion of the way we look at other people in the ordinary circumstances of life.

— BOURDIEU, *THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD*

It is likely that those who are “in their right place” in the social world can abandon or entrust themselves more, and more completely to their dispositions . . . than those who occupy awkward positions, such as the *parvenus* and the *déclassés*; and the latter are more likely to bring to consciousness that which, for others, is taken for granted, because they are forced to keep watch on themselves and consciously correct the “first movements” of a habitus that generates inappropriate or misplaced behaviours.

— BOURDIEU, *PASCALIAN MEDITATIONS*

Bourdieu's most acclaimed and successful work of public sociology is *La Misère du Monde* (1993), translated into English as *The Weight of the World*

(Bourdieu et al. [1993] 1999)—a best-selling, popular, and accessible voluminous book that was turned into a film.¹ It is a collection of sixty-nine in-depth interviews—fifty-four in the English edition—with people from many walks of life: farmers, blue-collar workers, service workers, lawyers, social workers, teachers, students, and immigrants. The interviewers are sociologists—Bourdieu's colleagues as well as himself—who come from backgrounds similar to their respondents in order to facilitate mutual trust and understanding. The interviewers also write lengthy interpretative essays introducing each excerpted interview.

The interviews themselves offer a richly textured account of lives from the underbelly of French society, while the introductions summarize the content of the interview as well as giving context. The two perspectives neatly dovetail, so that there is no break between the interviewer's sociology and the interviewee's lived experience. The introductory essays don't refer to Bourdieu's conceptual triad (capital, habitus, and field). Except possibly in the case of the more right-wing respondents, there is no attempt to offer an interpretation of the world that is at odds with the participants' understanding. What has happened to symbolic violence—the necessary false visions that are at odds with those of the sociologist? What has happened to the twofold truth—that of the sociologist and that of the participant? What has happened to the great divide between the logic of theory and the logic of practice that can only be understood from the standpoint of theory? What has happened to Bourdieu's strong notion that the dominated cannot comprehend their subjugation? In short, what has happened to “misrecognition,” so key to the reproduction of domination? *The Weight of the World* appears to be a direct challenge to Bourdieu's conception of sociology.

The Weight of the World suggests there are two Bourdieus²—one who puts the sociologist on a pedestal, making insight into the world the privilege and monopoly of the sociologist, as opposed to one who descends into the life of participants, crediting them with the capacity to see the world through the eyes of the sociologist. *The Weight of the World* makes the paradox acute: the sociologist-interviewer and the participant-interviewee present their understandings alongside each other, yet rarely do their separate interpretations conflict. The “twofold truth”—dividing the scientist from the participant—so emphasized in *Reproduction*, *Distinction*, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, *The Logic of Practice*, and *Pascalian Meditations* simply evaporates. Instead of being mired in misrecognition, participants can, with a little help, become sociologists of their own lives.

The divide between works that give credence to the perspective of the participant and those that don't runs through Bourdieu's oeuvre. We have already studied his inconsistent approach to Algeria—the self-mystifying world of the Kabyle versus the transformative consciousness of the anticolonial movement. Turning to France, the serious engagement with workers' movements and more broadly social movements against neoliberalism as found in *Acts of Resistance* and *Firing Back* contrasts with the major treatises where subjects are depicted as misrecognizing their own subjugation.

Great theorists display great contradictions. Such contradictions can be used to dismiss a theory as confused. Bourdieu contradicts himself over the key concept of symbolic violence and, therefore, some will say, his theory cannot be taken seriously. That's the approach of the dismissive critic. On the other hand, contradictions can be repressed or denied so as to behold the theorist in pristine perfection. In this view Bourdieu's scholarship assumes a finished and flawless form, taking on biblical status. All one has to do is to put him to work, apply his ideas. That's the devotion of the acolyte or disciple. Alternatively, there is a third approach in which contradictions are investigated to initiate, deepen, and advance a theoretical tradition. Here Bourdieu is no transcendent God: he is a human situated in history and society; his works do not assume a seamless whole. They are inspirational because they are imperfect, providing challenges for his followers.

I take this last approach to *The Weight of the World*, exploring possible interpretations of the Bourdieusian paradox, interpretations consistent with an evolving research program. In this approach it is important to consider Bourdieu's scholarship as a whole and not piecemeal. The oeuvre is not a supermarket from which we pick out whatever items we please and as our taste dictates, but a jigsaw puzzle in which the meaning of each part rests on its contribution to the whole.

THE DISRUPTION OF SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

The most obvious interpretation of *The Weight of the World* is that there is no paradox. It was never intended as a sociological analysis but simply as a representation of subjugated populations through their own telling of their own vivid experiences. As Bourdieu writes in *Firing Back* ([2001] 2003, 22), “*The Weight of the World* . . . brought to light new forms of social suffering caused by state retrenchment, with the purpose of compelling politicians to address them.” In his postscript to *The Weight of the World* he also underlines how science can contribute to a political project. Rather than portray the subjugated as victims of their own habitus, Bourdieu and colleagues pre-

sent them as wrestling with forces they don't control—the neoliberal policies of the socialist governments under Mitterrand.

Undoubtedly, this is a political project but what is the scientific project? One is looking for a sociological interpretation that goes beyond the self-understanding of the participants. There are forays in that direction, but they are not so much moving behind and beyond the lived experience as loose generalizations of that experience. So the book is divided into the following themes: “The Space of Points of View” (the world looks different from different places in the social structure); “Site Effects” (relation between physical space and social space); “The Abdication of the State” (the changing character of the state and its effects); “On the Way Down” (the consequences of downward mobility); “Outcasts on the Inside” (the result of democratizing access to schools); and “The Contradictions of Inheritance” (intergenerational relations). Again, there is a noticeable absence of references to habitus, capital, and field, and there's hardly a whiff of misrecognition and symbolic violence.

Perhaps, *The Weight of the World* is simply an expression of the logic of practice, making the logic of theory a separate endeavor. This seems to fit with Bourdieu's claims in *Pascalian Meditations*, his final theoretical treatise, in which *The Weight of the World* offers a methodological innovation—the extended interview as a device to induce a “quasi-theoretical” narrative by “assisting those respondents who were furthest from the scholastic condition in an effort of self-understanding and self-knowledge which . . . is ordinarily reserved for the world of *skholè*” ([1997] 2000, 60). This still leaves unexamined the relation between the logic of practice and the logic of theory.

I do not reject either of these interpretations—that *The Weight of the World* is a political tract or that it awaits sociological analysis—but both make the theory of symbolic violence irrelevant to the project of the book. An alternative approach is to run with the paradox, asking how it is that the respondents in *The Weight of the World* develop a sociological perspective. The task, then, is to explain how the world has become transparent to the participants themselves, how the understanding of the participant converges with the analysis of the sociologist. In this view, *The Weight of the World* is not sidestepping the question of symbolic violence but announcing its dissolution. There are two possible conditions for its dissolution.

We have already had a hint of the first. It focuses on the interviewer-as-sociologist who becomes the “midwife” of truth, as Bourdieu says in the methodological essay “Understanding,” appended to *The Weight of the World*:

Like a midwife, the sociologist can help them [respondents] in this work [bringing to light what is deeply buried] provided the sociologist has a deeper understanding both of the conditions of existence of which they are the product and of the social effects that can be exercised by the research relationship (and through it by the position and primary dispositions of the researcher). . . . This craft is a real "disposition to pursue truth" . . . which disposes one to improvise on the spot, in the urgency of the interview, strategies of self-representation and adaptive responses, encouragement and opportune questions, etc., so as to help respondents deliver up their truth or, rather, to be delivered of it. (ww, 621)

Using a "Socratic method" of interviewing, the sociologists draw their subjects toward a broader vision of their life, but only because the interviewers are deliberately chosen for their "social proximity and familiarity" (610) with the life experiences of the respondents. The interviewer has to be a sociologist somehow connected to the life of the respondent. In other words, the interviewer is an "organic intellectual" but not the "organic intellectual" Bourdieu disparages for foisting their views, reflecting a particular habitus, onto the working class with a very different habitus (Bourdieu [1979] 1984, 372–74). This only leads to a downward spiral of mutual misunderstanding, whereas Bourdieu's matching of the habitus of interviewer and interviewee leads to an upward spiral of mutual enlightenment. Bestowing such power on the interviewer-sociologist still flies in the face of Bourdieu's scorn for consciousness raising. So what other conditions are necessary for the reshaping of habitus?

Under what circumstances might the sociologist-interviewer overcome resistance to disclosing "those aspects of the social determinants of their [respondents'] opinions and their practices which they may find it most difficult to openly declare and assume" (ww, 616)? Although *The Weight of the World* is not explicit about this, examination of the interviews reveals a common thread, namely a tension between expectations and opportunities, aspirations and resources, dispositions and positions, or in Bourdieusian language, habitus and field. Elsewhere Bourdieu ([1997] 2000, 159–63; [1979] 1984, 142–68; [1984] 1988, chaps. 4 and 5) regards this disjuncture as the source of *allodoxia*, a state of confusion that, under the direction of the interviewer as socio-analyst, can lead subjects to become aware of the conditions of their existence, of the broader forces shaping their worlds. I have reorganized the interviews from *The Weight of the*

World to highlight different disjunctures that disrupt the smooth operation of symbolic violence: (1) declining opportunities facing farmers and factory workers; (2) rising aspirations induced by education and immigration; and (3) contradictory positions held by professionals disrupting the smooth operation of symbolic violence. If successful, the sociologist as socio-analyst brings clarity to confusion.

If symbolic violence dissipates in the face of *allodoxia*, how, then, is domination nonetheless sustained? Here I draw on Bourdieu's theory of politics based on symbolic dispossession. The dominated can only partake in politics, says Bourdieu (1991, chaps. 7–10; [1979] 1984, chap. 8), by delegating their power to others—leaders, organizations, parties—who claim to speak on behalf of the dominated but who also act on their own behalf within the elevated field of power, where the competition among representatives leads to *misrepresentation*. While misrecognition may give way to recognition, this does not imply a corresponding transition from misrepresentation to representation. Instead, as I will suggest, we get recognition without representation.

In short, this conversation of Bourdieu with himself brings to light different sources of *allodoxia*, which sets the conditions for respondents to recognize their subjection under the questioning of the sociologist-interviewer. At the same time, it is a recognition without representation, a dull subjugation to forces out of their control, in the absence of effective organs of representation. What emerges is a political sociology of suffering that increasingly defines an era of precarity.³

DECLINING OPPORTUNITIES: FARMERS AND FACTORY WORKERS

In *The Bachelors' Ball* Bourdieu ([2002] 2008a) returns three times to his homeland in the Béarn (1962, 1972, and 1989) to describe the plight of farmers who face the loss of their patrimony because of forces beyond their control—the land is poor, government subsidies are falling, and the European Union quotas intensify competition. Women do not see a future in rural existence that condemns them to arduous labor. They seek a new life in towns, replete with consumerist temptations and a chance to advance their opportunities through education. The bachelors left behind are discredited and humiliated, that is, if they too don't abandon the farm for the city.

In *The Weight of the World* Bourdieu interviews two aging farmers, also from the Béarn, struggling to make ends meet (381–91). Pierre's son has remained loyal to his inheritance and works the land with his father, but he

is not married. Pierre realizes that no woman would marry his son, whose inheritance is now a losing proposition. Sizing up the situation, Henri's son adopts a different strategy. He decides to abandon his father and his inheritance to seek his fortune in the town with his new urban wife, living with his in-laws. He refuses his inheritance, effectively murdering his father and all he stood for. Both farmers face a reality which is at odds with their deepest dispositions—dispositions cultivated by a life dedicated to farming and the expectation that their patrimony will continue as it has for generations. They are forced to problematize a world they had taken for granted. They go into internal exile, reflecting on their disappearing inheritance.

In an interview with a different Pierre, this time a garrulous and despondent entrepreneur who inherited a wine dealership in rural eastern France, Patrick Champagne (*WW*, 392–407) describes another form of disinheritance. It seems Pierre let his dealership run down and now blames the French taxation structure, the European Union, and the strangulation by supermarket chains for his downfall. He denounces the Pieds-Noirs from North Africa, who together with Arabs, have brought ruin to the French people. He is jealous of his sister and brother, who are doing very well for themselves, having married into upper-class families. The interview turns into a tirade about the state of the world that melds both truth and paranoia. Champagne writes, “He doesn’t need to understand what’s going on since he knows it already. Except that everything pushes him to reject these transformations and carries him on to a failure that he knows is inevitable” (*WW*, 396). Pierre has no time for socialists like Mitterrand and is more inclined to support right-wing politicians, especially Jean-Marie Le Pen. There is no neat fit between habitus and field, between expectations and opportunities—they are deeply at odds with one another, driving Pierre into an escapist politics.

We find a similar account of disinherited factory workers. In several interviews (*WW*, 257–66, 267–81, 282–96, 321–37), Michel Pialoux and Stéphane Beaud describe the downward spiral of permanent workers at the Peugeot plant in Sochaux and the precarious “temporary” workers who replace them. The old working class, solidary and political, cannot adapt to the new conditions—new industrial relations, new pressures, new work organization, and the spreading distrust even among the unionists. The temp workers, who are recruited from all over France, are resentful of the old-timers they are slowly replacing—jealous of the better conditions the permanents still retain, disaffected by the uselessness of their trade certificates, saying that even immigrants get a better deal than they do. Gerard, an activist old-timer, worrying about his two sons, tries to encourage them to

take the academic rather than the vocational track in school. If they take the vocational track, very easily his sons could end up as temps. Hamid, an immigrant and a devoted shop steward, expresses his anger with fellow workers for not standing up to the company, for allowing the company to erode working-class solidarity. The young workers turn on him as a wind-bag, always complaining about management, handing out leaflets. Even his own buddies have lost interest in the union.

If the farmers of the Béarn are losing their patrimony as the next generation leaves for the towns or stays behind but is unable to create heirs, the workers of Peugeot are being disinherited by a successor generation that has lost touch with working-class culture in the face of despotic management policies. The habitus that used to be handed on from father to son cannot cope with declining agriculture or Japanese-style management. In both cases, there is a despondent recognition, expressed with a mixture of anger, nostalgia, humiliation, and cynicism. The scholar-interviewers may decorate the lived experience of their respondents with a coat of sociology, but they don’t contradict it. There is no sign of misrecognition, naturalizing domination, or even making a virtue of necessity. Let us now turn from those who are downwardly mobile to those who aspire to upward mobility.

EXPANDING ASPIRATIONS: STUDENTS AND IMMIGRANTS

In *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society*, children of the dominant classes, inculcated with symbolic mastery, adapt well to the school, whereas those coming from dominated classes with practical mastery are shunned and shamed. The “arbitrary culture” of the school emphasizes meritocracy and scholastic achievement, thereby privileging those with a privileged background. The relative autonomy of the school presents “the arbitrary culture” as universal, and the privileged students appear as simply gifted while the underprivileged are made to appear dumb. That is the basis of misrecognition. They are eliminated from the school or, more likely, eliminate themselves. Because the school does not overtly distinguish class, so qualifications become all the more important in channeling students into the labor market, thereby securing as well as obscuring class domination.

This original account of symbolic violence and misrecognition is quite different from the accounts in *The Weight of the World* (*WW*, 421–26, 427–40, 441–54), where democratization of access to the lycée led, on the one hand, to heightened student aspirations and, on the other hand, to devaluation of the credential and, thus, more limited opportunities. As children of the working class are subject to processes of internal tracking into

less valued curricula, they begin to recognize the biases of the school and how the school is systematically thwarting their aspirations. Teachers are no longer awarded unimpeachable authority but bear the brunt of hostile and rebellious students who see the school as a swindle (463–83, 484–87). As Bourdieu writes, “This is the contradiction of a social order that has a growing tendency to give everything to everybody” but only in the form of simulacra, keeping the real goods for the few (*WW*, 426). He describes how schools perpetuate illusions, how students cling to hopes of success, leading to anxious submission or powerless revolt. Sylvain Broccolichi (*WW*, 441–54) interviews three girls going through the lycée—two from the working class and one from the middle class. They describe how the struggle to enter the prestigious streams—the competition, remote teachers, pressure from parents, endless homework—all leads to protest. The contrast between the comforting and supportive experience in their previous school and the anonymity of the lycée feeds their critique even if they do not see it in class terms.

Behind student aspirations are those of their parents. Bourdieu (*WW*, 6–22) interviews parents of two teenage girls whose future is uncertain. The father, LeBlond, is the latest of several generations of steel workers, now part of an aging labor force facing a new order of discipline, deskilling, and lower wages, but he still has employment security. Bourdieu interweaves the biography of the steelworker with an unemployed Algerian. Pushed into the subproletariat, he has no security and lives an impoverished existence from hand to mouth. He thinks of returning to Algeria but he knows that is unrealistic. His children are academic failures, objects of discrimination. LeBlond himself expresses a subdued racism in complaining about the cultural practices of his Algerian neighbors. In the next interview, Abdelmalek Sayad (*WW*, 23–36) describes the mutual hostility and incomprehension between an immigrant family and their white neighbors.

Yet there are also those who struggle against racism. In an interview conducted by Bourdieu himself (*WW*, 60–76), a French youth tries to protect his Algerian friend from the racism of the housing projects where they both live. In their representation, the youths are unable to project themselves beyond the immediacy of their relations, a representation fostered, perhaps, by the interviewer’s remoteness.

Like those of students, immigrant stories are ones of aspirations dashed by the obduracy of social structures. As an Algerian, as well as Bourdieu’s long-term research assistant and collaborator, Abdelmalek Sayad was able to get inside the skin of immigrants and render their accounts sociological. In one interview, entitled “The Curse” (*WW*, 561–79), Abbas—an old

and lonely Algerian immigrant widowed by his wife and orphaned by his children, who are now absorbed into French society—recalls his father’s dismay when he (Abbas) departed for France at an early age. At first, Abbas had considered it just a short-term move to obtain some badly needed income, but his father warned him of the curse of migration, the polluting power of money, and the liability of betraying the homeland. Abbas’s father had been disinherited of his own patrimony, forced to become a seasonal laborer in Algeria. When his father was killed in the Algerian war, Abbas found himself in France cut off from his home. His wife joined him and a new struggle for survival began in an alien land. Ostensibly, his children did well, but the curse followed them—his son, an engineer, doesn’t like to work, and his daughter, suffering a mental breakdown from being locked up in the home, has abandoned him. From Abbas’s point of view his family is no family, just a collection of individuals going their separate ways. His original sin follows him and whomever he touches. France has devoured him and his family.

This is a perspective of an immigrant, but what about the perspective of his children? In a separate interview Sayad (*WW*, 580–89) presents the perspective of the succeeding generation in the heroic story of Farida. Her father, fearful of the corrupting influence of French society, followed her every day to school and, for the rest of the time, he imprisoned her in the home. Hostile to her father but also to his accomplice, her mother, Farida rebelled by retreating into her own space and devoting her life to reading. When her cousin invited her to stay, and with her father relenting, she seized on this opportunity as a route out of isolation. She then took a secretarial job and moved into her own apartment. When her mother was hospitalized with a liver disease, it was Farida who looked after her. She blazed a trail for her younger sisters and brothers—her sisters went to university, and her brothers gave their silent consent; she established a close and devoted relation to her mother; and even her father began to accept her independence. Sayad treats this as a case of socio-analysis in which a sociological examination of self becomes the road to emancipation.

If encountering unequal situations often reinforces the dominator in his sociocentrism, it obliges the dominated person (colonized, black, Jew, woman, immigrant, etc.) to work at clarifying the relationship, which means working upon oneself. It is a necessary, one might even say vital, practice which imposes an inclination to socioanalysis, this predisposition ends up by becoming “second nature” and guides all the individual’s acts and gestures. (*WW*, 581)

In this view the dominated are no longer mired in irreversible misrecognition. Quite the opposite: by virtue of their *subjugation*, the subaltern becomes the sociologist, gaining clarity into their circumstances. From being trapped by her environment, Farida wends her way toward emancipation, drawing others after her.

CONTRADICTIONARY LOCATIONS: PROFESSIONAL WORKERS AND ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS

So far we have seen how dispositions come up against structures when exogenous forces close down opportunities (farmers and autoworkers) or when inflated aspirations are blocked (students and immigrants). There is a third situation in which subjective disposition and objective circumstances clash—one that appears frequently in *The Weight of the World*—for individuals located at the intersection of competing fields. Bourdieu writes,

This explains the way that narratives about the most “personal” difficulties, the apparently most strictly subjective tensions and contradictions, frequently articulate the deepest structures of the social world and their contradictions. This is never so obvious as it is for the occupants of precarious positions who turn out to be extraordinary “practical analysts”: situated at points where social structures “work,” and therefore worked over by the contradictions of these structures, these individuals are constrained, in order to live or to survive, to practice a kind of self-analysis, which often gives them access to the objective contradictions which have them in their grasp, and to the objective structures expressed in and by these contradictions. (*ww*, 511)

Once again misrecognition dissolves, giving way to the transparency of objective structures, when people are placed in contradictory positions. Bourdieu (*ww*, 189–202) offers the example of the social worker, who presents an astute account of her predicament. She was very effective in her previous job, allocating apartments to the needy, until her success threatened local politicians, whereupon she was transferred to another municipality. In her new job, bureaucratic infighting frustrated her organizational skills. She understood only too well how she was caught between needy clients and an unresponsive bureaucracy.

In an interview with a sentencing judge with social concerns, Bourdieu (*ww*, 203–5) describes the judge’s battle with the prosecuting magistrate,

public prosecutor, and director of the prison who have conflicting interests governed by the logic of their own office. The judge recognizes his place under cross-pressures of the left hand and right hand of the state. Remi Lenoir (*ww*, 239–54) offers an interview with another judge caught between his commitment to justice and conformity to the powers that be, appalled by the cover-ups and laziness he sees all around him. From their position judges have to wrestle with the contradictory logics of the legal field and the call for justice.

Of all the interviews with professionals, those with teachers are the most revealing. Overworked and underpaid, they are only too aware of the disaster that follows increasing student enrollments when resources and labor market opportunities remain unchanged (Sylvain Broccolichi and Françoise Cœvrad, *ww*, 455–62). Rosine Christin’s (*ww*, 484–87) interview with Collette, who is teaching in a collège (junior high), presents a graphic description of the anarchy in schools located in poorer neighborhoods—the graffiti, the disrepair of buildings, the challenge of getting students into the classroom and then getting them to sit down and focus on learning, their rudeness if not impertinence. This is a far cry from Bourdieu and Passeron’s ([1970] 1977) elaboration of symbolic violence according to which teacher and curriculum are endowed with unquestioned legitimacy and the stamp of authority.

Sylvain Broccolichi’s (*ww*, 488–91) interview with a teacher in a vocational high school paints a similar picture of degradation. Rejected by society, students see no value in their credentials, and teachers compete with gangs for the control of the school. The school responds with a bevy of psychologists, counselors, and social workers. In a moving interview, conducted by Gabrielle Balazs and Abdelmalek Sayad (*ww*, 492–506), a dedicated principal describes the “institutional violence” that has gripped his collège in one of Lyon’s poorest neighborhoods. The principal recounts his efforts to patrol the premises, prevent the invasion of youth gangs, and keep the school clean of drugs. However, the last thing he wants is for his school to become a police station. He sees all too clearly how it has become the focus of despair for children of North African immigrants—with few job prospects and scavenging for existence. Far from suffering from misrecognition, the principal oversees what is effectively a sociological laboratory where exclusion and violence converge. The school and the neighborhood beyond are dominated by hard material violence, reminiscent of colonialism, not the soft symbolic violence described in *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture, Distinction*, or even *Pascalian Meditations*.

The professional classes—social workers, teachers, lawyers—find themselves in a contradictory position as agents of the state, responsible for

regulating insurgent populations. At the intersection of antagonistic fields they are forced to reflect on the wider social order. Similarly, there are those who emerge from below to represent the subaltern. Mme. Tellier (*WW*, 88–94) became a political actor after being involved in a factory takeover. She entered municipal politics, becoming responsible for sports activities. She then opened her own sports shop, which was vandalized in riots. She attributes the violence to social causes—the absence of jobs and meaningless schooling—not to the victims and still less to their “habitus.” Tellier’s political engagement led to militant sociology, similar to an upwardly mobile Tunisian blue-collar worker who partakes in a tenants’ association. He also refuses to blame the riots on the rioters, pointing to the provocation of the National Front, which was trying to make political hay at the expense of the left-wing mayor. He is incensed by the picture of immigrants painted in the media.

Here then are two examples of organic intellectuals, spokespersons of the maligned, similar to the street educator interviewed by Bourdieu and Balazs (*WW*, 206–12). Working closely with drug addicts, he builds ties to the mayor, a judge, social workers, and pharmacists, trying to create job opportunities for these unemployed youth. But as soon as he steps out of line and engages in oppositional politics, the local power elites descend on him like a ton of bricks. He is embraced as long as he is attending to addicts, forging individual solutions, but as soon as he crosses from social control into political organization, he is stopped dead in his tracks. The astute critical sociology that springs from his daily practice on the streets makes him a frustrated spokesman of the subaltern.

Whether officially representing the state and “cooling out” the subaltern, or representing the subaltern and frustrated by local power structures, these actors are caught between contradictory forces. They contest the mythologies put about by the press and struggle on behalf of their co-residents, their neighbors, and their community, leading them to a festering critique of domination. At no point does the sociologist qua interviewer contest their understanding of the world. There is not a hint of misrecognition.

RECOGNITION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION

There is a sort of antinomy inherent in the political sphere which stems from the fact that individuals—and this is all the more true the more they are deprived—cannot constitute themselves (or be constituted) as a group, that is

as a force capable of making itself heard, of speaking and being heard, unless they dispossess themselves in favour of a spokesperson. . . . In fact, isolated, silent, voiceless individuals, without either the capacity or the power of making themselves heard and understood, are faced with the alternative of keeping quiet or of being spoken for by someone else.

—BOURDIEU, “DELEGATION AND POLITICAL FETISHISM”

In order to pursue their collective interests the subaltern must first dispossess themselves of their own political voice, delegating representation to others who actually speak for themselves as much as for those they represent. The delegates, according to Bourdieu, operate in the field of politics, where they compete with other elites to accumulate political capital. Inasmuch as the subaltern don’t possess material and cultural resources to directly defend and expand their own interests, they are unable to impose their will on their spokespeople. To advance their interests in the field of politics, “representative” organs such as parties, trade unions, and associations compete with one another. In so doing they *may* bring benefits to those they supposedly represent, not through direct representation but through a “homologous” competition in the field of power.

When the subaltern recognize their subjugation, are they more likely, more able to directly represent themselves outside the field of power? For the most part, *The Weight of the World* confirms Bourdieu’s bleak hypotheses that “recognition” of their own subjugation is no guarantee of “representation.” If there is one theme that threads through the suffering expressed in the interviews it is political alienation. Here and there we catch glimpses of independent political engagement as a reaction against an unresponsive state bureaucracy, against the decline of the industrial working class, against violence in schools. Several interviewees speak of their impotence before misrepresentation by the media—Patrick Champagne’s (*WW*, 213–19) account of the way public opinion is forged against the experiences of the subaltern, Abdelmalek Sayad’s (*WW*, 219–21) analysis of the way the state turns political issues into technical problems, through cost-benefit analysis of immigration. The subaltern don’t speak, they are spoken for. When they do have access to the media, as in the case of the Tunisian worker who, as head of a tenants’ committee, participates in filming of the housing projects, their views are distorted or ignored (*WW*, 95–105).

When representatives try to directly defend the interests of the subaltern, they seem to only experience frustration, whether it is Hamid, the committed shop steward (321–37), the social worker who distributes housing (189–202), the street educator who works with drug addicts (206–12), the judge who tries to be sensitive to social concerns (203–5), or the school principal who tries to bring order into the school (492–506). In each case attempts at fermenting change are stymied by the rigidity of state bureaucracy, which ensnares the reformer. Although political struggles in the community may give rise to recognition, it does not reverse political dispossession or undo misrepresentation. There is, in short, no civil society made up of institutions, organizations, and movements that can represent the interests of the subaltern. Indeed, Bourdieu studiously avoids the concept of civil society, with its optimistic politics, as ill-fitting the political alienation conjured up by the interviews.

What then is *The Weight of the World*—as a work of sociology that found resonance with French publics? As opposed to public opinion polls that are constructed to endorse the dominant view of society (Bourdieu [1984] 1993), *The Weight of the World* becomes a political intervention from below—a representation of political dispossession as experienced by the subaltern and as witnessed by an army of street-level workers whose labors are made all the more difficult as the center of gravity within the state shifts from the left hand to the right hand. It is, indeed, a case of intellectuals forging an uneasy alliance with the subaltern to challenge dominant cultural representations.

CONCLUSION: TWO BOURDIEUS OR THE END OF SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE?

In searching for antecedents to *The Weight of the World* I am led back to Bourdieu's early writing on Algeria, in particular *Algeria 1960*, where he describes the working classes of Algiers, and *Le déracinement* (*The Uprooting*), which describes the effects of resettlement camps. For Bourdieu the colonial situation is exceptional in that it represents an external imposition of “modern” norms and values, thereby disrupting “traditional” society. It is an anomalous situation that highlights all that is taken for granted in the social order of capitalism, all that has been repressed in the long historical processes of its formation and stabilization. Rather than the anomie that is the result of the “clash of civilizations” in urban Algeria, Bourdieu draws on his conception of the Kabyle as a self-reproducing society for concepts that

illuminate the stability of French society. Habitus, capital, misrecognition, and symbolic violence all derive from his idealized portrait of the Kabyle. It is a strange and brilliant move to see in Kabylia the elementary forms of symbolic violence just as Durkheim saw in the Australian tribes the elementary forms of religion. And yet, *The Weight of the World* suggests that modern France may be closer to the colonial context of urban Algeria than to precolonial Kabylia.

Bourdieu develops his key concepts in his study of Kabylia, but one in particular is missing, namely the concept of “field”—a reflection of the undifferentiated character of a “traditional” society. At the end of *Outline of a Theory of Practice* Bourdieu argues that symbolic violence requires much hard work to uphold the notions of honor and status in order to obscure underlying traditional hierarchies, whereas in a modern society *institutional differentiation spontaneously leads to its own misrecognition*: participation in education, consumption, art, work, and politics involves absorption into a hierarchical ordering homologous to class domination but, at the same time, obscuring that domination. Differentiation generates symbolic violence independent of human will.

But only at a secondary level does Bourdieu see that differentiation involves people moving between different structures, institutions, and fields so that there is continual disruption of dispositions, learned in one institution and requiring modification in another. The deeply implanted habitus inculcated by the family faces different demands in the school, the workplace, the church. Even more salient are the clashes between habitus and field when people are upwardly or downwardly mobile or when they are in the cross-pressure of intersecting fields. The more entrenched is primary socialization and the more differentiated society, the greater the potential of societal transparency. That potentiality can be realized through the midwifery of the sociologist (socio-analysis) who can turn the disorientation (*allodoxia*) of the respondent into a sociological understanding. This is the conclusion I draw from the analysis of the interviews in *The Weight of the World*.

There appear to be two Bourdieus: the first is the Bourdieu of *Reproduction* and *Distinction* in which misrecognition is inherent to modern society as we get absorbed into structures that mask their underlying conditions of possibility. The working class cannot live with its crushing subordination and so makes virtue of necessity; it becomes inured to suffering. The middle classes distract themselves from their subjugation by imitating

the dominant class, accepting its values, its patterns of consumption, hoping against hope to promote their children if not themselves into the dominant class. At the same time the dominant class reigns supreme, confident in its own superiority, its distinction, its giftedness. Their domination is seen not as a function of their class position that gives them the possibility of all sorts of leisure pursuits denied to the other classes but as a function of their in-born talents.

The empirical evidence for this theory is flimsy at best. Bourdieu tries to make it consistent with surveys of people's patterns of consumption. But there is no interrogation of individuals or observation of their practices—the sort of empirical research that his theory calls for. The critiques he applies to opinion polls—questions constructed from the standpoint of the dominant class and its intellectuals, asking questions removed from the concerns and interests of the working class—applies to the methodology of *Distinction* itself. The survey, the asking of questions about habits of consumption, is itself an act of symbolic violence, imposed on the working class and thereby representing it as passive and resigned, just as it gives rise to the opposite response from the middle classes, eager to emulate and thus legitimate the dominant class. The methodology of *Distinction*, its reliance on survey research, violates all the principles laid out in Bourdieu's essay titled "Understanding," where the interviewer must avoid imposing categories and prepackaged questions.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the very different methodology of *The Weight of the World* (in which sociologists intimately familiar with the experiences and life-world of their subjects conduct the interviews) elicits a very different picture—a picture of individuals battling to make ends meet, to uphold a certain dignity against all odds, projecting their frustration onto external forces. We don't find processes of naturalization, legitimation, and emulation, but painful struggles in a world they did not create—building a better life for their children, contesting images of the media, trying to keep schools working, keeping the fabric of society intact. The interviews get at the logic of practice, the daily transformations that make life livable, and curiously so many of the interviews revolve around the experience of work rather than consumption. Again there is a Marxist flavor to these renditions of daily life.

In *Distinction* (and in *Reproduction*) the sociologist is aloof, a god-like figure disclosing the truth behind symbolic violence—a truth accessible only to the sociologist. This is Bourdieu the traditional intellectual pur-

suing his own corporate interests. In *Weight of the World* (and his polemics against the media and the market), the sociologist has now joined the dominated, elevating them to a force against the devastation of modern-day capitalism. The sociologist has become an organic intellectual tied to the subaltern, has forged a collaboration with the subaltern. Paradoxically, after being so dismissive of the "myth of the organic intellectual," Bourdieu becomes one himself—of course, he may regard himself as special with his "cleft habitus" marking his lower-class origins, but an organic intellectual nonetheless.

The contradictory portraits of class structure as found in *Distinction* and *The Weight of the World* can be attributed to their divergent methodologies, but behind the different methodologies, could there be different political programs? What explains Bourdieu's moves between traditional and organic sociologist? Are they a function of Bourdieu's career in which he first has to make it as a scientist in the academic field and only then, when he becomes an established figure, can he project himself onto the political field as a spokesperson of the dominated? Undoubtedly there is truth to that, but the shift can perhaps also be attributed to changes in the social, political, and economic order. The 1960s and 1970s may have been politically turbulent, but even then the turbulence rested on a certain common understanding and acceptance of France, its hierarchies, and its distinctions. But the 1980s and 1990s—in France as elsewhere in advanced capitalism—brought the hammer blows of neoliberalism, and with them the securities of the previous era dissolved. We entered the age of precarity—a notion that Bourdieu himself popularized. For so many life lost its guarantees and uncertainty became ubiquitous. The disruption of the old order dissolved misrecognition, and social structure became transparent to itself. The old institutions of education, political parties, and trade unions lost their legitimacy, and people sought out alternative paths, not least the rising popularity of parties and movements, both of the Left and of the Right, that were detached from mainstream institutions. The disconnection of habitus and habitat, of expectation and opportunities, made France and other countries ripe for symbolic revolutions.

Bourdieu, you might say, is a prophet of the present, but in so being he became more rather than less Marxist, even as his hostility to Marxism intensified. His angry polemics against neoliberalism, however, lacked what Marxism has to offer, namely a theory of neoliberalism's origins, expansion, and crises. While Bourdieu adopted Marxian economic ideas, brilliantly

turning them into an analysis of cultural production, he never managed to develop a political economy that would ground his political and social analysis; he never managed to grasp the totality of the modern era as a form of capitalism. In the end he remained a modernization theorist who had no explanations for the twists and turns of modernity.

CONCLUSION

THE LIMITS OF SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

How should we engage our intellectual opponents? Ignore them? Demolish them? Absorb them? Within academia, where recognition is everything, denying recognition is often the most effective and least costly weapon. Refusing to recognize opponents only works, however, if they are not already in the limelight. When our opponents have won recognition, when they are powerful figures, what is to be done?

Within Marxism demolition has been a frequent practice, reducing opponents to intellectual rubble. Think of Lenin's withering criticism of opportunists, anarchists, social democrats. The only people worthy of such aggression, however, were competitors in the political field. There is a second tradition within Marxism: interrogating powerful opponents to assess their strength and then appropriating their ideas under an enlarged canvas. This is not vanquishing through demolition but domination through containment. Here the strategy is to critically appropriate the truth of the opponent by absorbing it within one's own expanded framework. This requires a certain appreciation of the opponent. Gramsci's critical appropriation of Croce, Marx's critical appropriation of Hegel or Ricardo, Lukács's critical appropriation of Weber, and Marcuse's critical appropriation of Freud come to mind.

Every strategy comes with risks. *Ignoring* the opponent leaves one unscathed, but it can also leave one out of touch with emerging intellectual currents. It can turn into a lost opportunity to expand one's own horizons through engaging others. *Demolition* can win one acclaim, and it can be accomplished without being accountable to an alternative perspective. But it can also bring free publicity and even support to the opponent. Distorting