III: DOES THE WORKING CLASS EXIST?
BURAWOY MEETS BOURDIEU

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I am starting to wonder more and more whether today’s social structures aren’t yesterday’s symbolic structures and whether for instance class as it is observed is not to some extent the product of the theoretical effects of Marx’s work.

Pierre Bourdieu, “Fieldwork in Philosophy”, p.18

Is the idea of the working class a projection, with real consequences, of the political and intellectual imagination? Once defined as a class, subject to exploitation, can workers comprehend the conditions of their own subjugation? What role can intellectuals play in bringing about such a self-understanding? On these matters, which go straight to the heart of Marxism, Marx himself was ambiguous. Undoubtedly Marx did believe that the working class existed independently of intellectuals, and that through class struggle they would dissolve any “false consciousness,” and liberate themselves and the rest of humanity. At the same Marx’s writing are littered with doubts about the capacity of the working class to see through the mystification produced by capitalism – whether this be the hiding of exploitation in the sphere of production, commodity fetishism in the sphere of exchange, or, moving further afield, the subjection of the working class to the power of ideology.

In this indeterminacy of the consciousness of the working class the role of intellectuals remains unclear. On the one hand, The Communist Manifesto spoke
famously of intellectuals joining the working class when they see the writing on the wall
and victory of the proletariat is in sight. On the other hand, intellectuals can wage war on
behalf of the working class against intellectuals of the ruling class. After all, what were
Marx and Engels, themselves intellectuals, doing when they wrote and disseminated *The
Communist Manifesto* and other brilliant treatises and polemics. Although their works
have had a genuine “theory effect,” as Bourdieu calls it, they never seriously reflected on
what they were up to, what that theory effect might be.

With regard to the theory of intellectuals and class domination there are indeed
two roads from Marx: on the one side Gramsci’s theory of hegemony as the organization
of a socially, politically and economically contingent consent that can be forged or
challenged by intellectuals, and on the other side Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic violence
based on the inculcation of a virtually unalterable misrecognition that leaves intellectuals
floundering in some public sphere. In the former, (organic) intellectuals elaborate the
good sense of workers whereas in the latter there is no good sense to enlarge and the best
(traditional) intellectuals can do is to demystify class domination but with no obvious
audience except other intellectuals. The result is two critical perspectives on social
science – the one favoring its development through collaboration with the dominated
within the framework of a political party, and the other defending an uncontaminated
space -- the freedom and autonomy of the academy -- from which to launch assaults on
the ruling ideology. In Lecture II I tried to show how these two perspectives can be seen
as complementary, we need both traditional and organic intellectuals. In this lecture I
seek to adjudicate between the two on the basis of my own research on the working class
in the United States and Hungary. In the final analysis Bourdieu offers little empirical evidence for his claim about the depth of the domination exercised over the dominated and I shall defend a more situationally and institutionally produced consent.

**Gramsci vs. Bourdieu**

While Lenin provided the inspiration, it was Gramsci who first developed a Marxist theory of intellectuals based on the idea that the working class possesses a good sense – a revolutionary imagination – at the heart of its common sense. It “only” remained for Marxist intellectuals to elaborate that good sense. In the final analysis Gramsci believes that the common sense of workers could not be incompatible with Marxism:

At this point, a fundamental question is raised: can modern theory [Marxism] be in opposition to the “spontaneous” feelings of the masses? (“spontaneous” in the sense that they are not the result of any systematic educational activity on the part of an already conscious leading group, but have been formed through everyday experience illuminated by “common sense”, i.e. by the traditional popular conception of the world—what is unimaginatively called “instinct”, although it too is in fact a primitive and elementary historical acquisition.) It cannot be in opposition to them. Between the two there is a “quantitative” difference of degree, not one of quality. A reciprocal “reduction” so to speak, a passage from one to the other and vice versa, must be possible… Neglecting, or worse still despising, so-called “spontaneous movement, i.e. failing to give them a conscious leadership or to raise them to a higher plane by inserting them into politics, may often have extremely serious consequences (PN, pp.198-9).

Here organic intellectuals elaborate the good sense through dialogue with the working class, and at the same time repudiate the ruling ideologies perpetrated by traditional intellectuals. Aided and abetted by structural conditions, specifically organic crises, the
organic intellectual breaks the consent to bourgeois domination, turning it into support for an alternative, socialist hegemony.

By contrast, Bourdieu regards this Marxist tradition that confuses “class on paper” with “class in action” -- epitomized by the organic intellectual who makes that illusory connection -- as dangerously deluded, and an obstacle to the advance of science.

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

(Language and Symbolic Power, p.251)

Marxism has exerted a powerful influence (“theory effect”) on the world but it has not understood how it has accomplished this, namely by working class representatives constituting an imaginary conflation of “class on paper” and “class in reality,” expressed in the mythology of the “organic intellectual.” Inured to the coercion of material necessity, the working class does not have the transformative potential attributed to it. Such a false attribution makes for bad science. Without “good sense” to elaborate, close encounters between the working class and intellectuals, either contaminates the intellectuals’ worldview or subjects workers to the will of intellectuals. Either way there is no basis for dialogue, and so the intellectual qua scientist must stand aloof from the dominated class, making an epistemological break with its practical (common) sense – a practical sense that blinds it to the very conditions of its own subjugation.
Thus, we have two visions of the engaged intellectual: Bourdieu’s traditional intellectual, unmasking symbolic violence exercised over the working class, but an unmasking that takes place at a distance from the working class, and Gramsci’s organic intellectual working out the theory of hegemony and consent in close connection with the working class. How do my own studies of the working class accord with these two theories? What I will do here is reconstruct my own ethnographies of working class consciousness. I present first the original interpretation of the capitalist workplace, second how my subsequent reading of Bourdieu altered that interpretation, third how the study of the state socialist workplace and its collapse provides a critique of the Bourdieuvian perspective, and finally, how the postsocialist transition and the building of something new, can be read as a vindication of Bourdieu.

**Take I: Manufacturing Consent**

Gramsci’s originality lay in his periodization of capitalism not on the basis of its economy but on the basis of its superstructures, in particular the ascendancy of the state-civil society nexus that absorbed challenges to capitalism. The turn to superstructure reflected the need to contain the parasitic residue of pre-capitalist European social formations. In *American and Fordism*, however, he wrote that such residues did not exist in the United States and so “hegemony was here born in the factory,” allowing the forces of production to expand much more rapidly than elsewhere.

*Manufacturing Consent* (not to be confused with Chomsky’s later and much more famous book) endeavored to elaborate what it might mean to say that in the US
hegemony is born in the factory. The book was based on participant observation in a South Chicago factory where I was a machine operator for 10 months, from July 1974 to May 1975. I was a wage laborer like everyone else, although it was apparent that I was from a very different background than they, not least because of my English accent which many of my co-workers founds impenetrable. I made no secret of my purpose for being there, namely to gather the material for my dissertation.

Influenced by the French structuralist Marxism of the 1970s appropriations (represented as rejections) of Gramsci, I argued that theories of the state developed by Althusser, Poulantzas and Gramsci could be applied to the internal workings of the factory. An internal state (what I would also call the political and ideological apparatuses of production) constituted workers as industrial citizens, individuals with rights and obligations, recognized in grievance machinery and in the details of the labor contract. Here you could see in miniature Poulantzas’s national popular state. At the same time the internal state oversaw the concrete coordination of the interests of capital and labor through collective bargaining. The material basis of hegemony could be found directly in the economic concessions granted by capital to labor, concessions, as Gramsci says, that do not touch the essential. Finally, following Poulantzas again, I saw enterprise management as a power bloc, made up of different divisions, under the hegemony of manufacturing.

As well as an internal state there was also an internal labor market that reinforced the atomizing effects of the internal state. It gave workers the opportunity to bid on other
jobs within the factory, allocated on the basis of seniority and experience, and giving workers power and leverage against management. If workers did not like their job or their supervisor they could bid on an alternative job in their department. Workers who somehow made themselves indispensable to their foremen could wield considerable power. Like the internal state, the internal labor market constituted workers as individuals and, through rewards based on seniority, tied their interest to capital. That is to say workers not only had an interest in capital accumulation, even at their own expense, but also in staying with the same firm because moving to another one would put them at the bottom of the seniority ladder.

The internal state and internal labor market were the conditions for a third source of consent, the constitution of work as a game, in my case the game of making out, whose rules were understood and acknowledged by operators, auxiliary workers and shop floor supervisors alike. It was a piecework game and the goal was to “make out,” i.e. make an acceptable percentage output, one that was not higher than 140% and not lower than 125%. The details need not detain us here, suffice to say that constituting work as a game is common in many workplaces because it counters ennui and arduousness, it makes time pass quickly, enabling workers to endure otherwise meaningless work. There were good psychological reasons to participate in such a game, but just as important the social order pressured everyone into playing the same game with more or less the same rules. We continually evaluated each other as to how well we were playing the game. It was difficult to opt out without also being ostracized.
Playing the game had two important consequences. First, the game certainly limited output through goldbricking (taking it easy on difficult piece rates) and quota restriction (limiting output to 140% so as to avoid rate increases), but it also got operators to work much harder than they otherwise might. It was a game that favored the application of effort that advanced profits for management, and with only small monetary concessions. Second, it not only contributed to profit but also to hegemony. The very act of playing the game simultaneously produced consent to its rules. You can’t be serious about playing a game, and this was a very serious game, if, at the same time, you question its rules and goals. Making out not only produced consent to the rules of the game, it also concealed the conditions of its existence, the relations of production between capital and labor. In the language I used at the time the effect of organizing work as a game simultaneously secured and obscured surplus appropriation.

If the organization of work as a game was the third prong of hegemony, it was effective in generating consent only because it was separated from the armor of coercion – a separation that was made possible by the constraints imposed on management by the internal labor market and internal state. This three pronged hegemony was a distinctive feature of advanced capitalism where management could no longer hire and fire at will. No longer able to rely on the arbitrary rule of a despotic regime of production, management had to persuade workers to deliver surplus, that is management had to manufacture consent. Thus, the internal state and the internal labor market were the apparatuses of hegemony, constituting workers as individuals and coordinating their

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1 There is no shortage of studies that suggest the ubiquity of games. For some outstanding recent examples see Ofer Sharone’s study of software engineers, Jeff Sallaz’s study of casino dealers, or Rachel Sherman’s study of hotel workers.
interests with those of management, applying force only under well defined and restricted conditions. Facing a crisis, for example, management could not arbitrarily close down the game down or violate its rules, at least, if it wanted to uphold its hegemony.

A game has to have sufficient uncertainty to draw in players but it also has to provide players with sufficient control over outcomes. A despotic regime, in which management can hire and fire at will, creates too much arbitrariness for a game to produce consent. In short, the hegemonic regime creates a relatively autonomous arena of work, with an appropriate balance of certainty and uncertainty, so that a game can be constituted and consent produced. In a hegemonic regime the application of force (ultimately being expelled from work), whether it occurs as a result of a worker’s violation of rules or as a result of the demise of the enterprise, must itself be the object of consent.

So far so good: the economic process of production, I argued, is simultaneously a political process of reproduction of social relations with the help of the internal state and internal labor market and an ideological process of producing an experience of those relations, particularly through the game of making out. I had advanced Gramsci’s analysis by taking his analysis of the state and civil society into the factory, applying it to the micro-physics of power and, further, adding a new dimension to organizing consent – the idea of social structure as a game.2

2It was while working and teaching with Adam Przeworski (1973-1976) that I developed the idea of social structure as a game. It was during this time that he was developing his Gramscian theory of electoral politics in which party competition could be thought of as an absorbing game in which the struggle was
Take II: Symbolic Domination and Hegemony in Advanced Capitalism

Thirty years later I read Bourdieu’s account of the two-fold truth of labor in *Pascalian Meditations* where, to my astonishment, I found him making a similar argument:

The objectification that was necessary to constitute wage labour in its objective truth has masked the fact which, as Marx himself indicates, only becomes the objective truth in certain exceptional labour situations: the investment in labour, and therefore miscognition of the objective truth of labor as exploitation, which leads people to find an extrinsic profit in labor, irreducible to simple monetary income, is part of the real conditions of the performance of labour, and of exploitation. (*Pascalian Meditations*, p.203)

What is Bourdieu saying? There is an objective truth of labor, which, following Marx, is exploitation, the appropriation of surplus labor from the direct producer. This objective truth, however, is not recognized as such. The distinctive feature of capitalism is that exploitation is hidden, or as I put it *obscured*, to be revealed to workers only under certain conditions. Under feudalism, by contrast, exploitation was transparent – the necessary labor of the serf to maintain himself and his family was separated in both time and space from the surplus labor he produced for the lord. This clear distinction between surplus labor and necessary labor becomes invisible under capitalism so that workers appear to be paid for the entire time they labor for their employer whereas they are actually paid for only a proportion of that labor. It is this experience of an absence not known that is the basis of the *subjective truth* of labor.

over distribution of economic resources at the margin and eclipsed the fundamental inequality upon which the game was based.
Since surplus is invisible to all and its existence is only known by its effects, namely profit realized in the market, employers never know whether their workers are working hard enough to assure that profit. The problem for the employers is, thus, the securing of surplus which they make the problem of workers either through despotic rule or by coordinating the interests of workers with those of capital. In other words, the securing of surplus through the organization of work depends upon the active agency of labor wherein workers, as Bourdieu puts it, “find an extrinsic profit in labor,” which is to say they play games, trying to appropriate freedoms that effectively contribute to and further hide their exploitation. These freedoms won at the margins become central to their production lives. Through these small gains and the relative satisfactions they bring, work not only becomes palatable, but workers think they are outwitting management even though they are unwittingly contributing to their own exploitation. As Bourdieu writes:

A whole process of investment leads workers to contribute to their own exploitation through their effort to appropriate their work and their working conditions, which leads them to bind themselves to their ‘trade’ by means of the very freedoms (often minimal and almost always ‘functional’) that are left to them… Indeed, setting aside the extreme situations that are closest to forced labor, it can be seen that the objective reality of wage labour, i.e. exploitation, is made possible partly by the fact that the subjective reality of the labour does not coincide with its objective reality. (Men and Machines, p.314-5, original in Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales (1980) 32-33: 3-14)

If the couplet obscuring-securing surplus is none other than Bourdieu’s double truth of labor, then how can I reconcile my own analysis with the theoretical perspective of Gramsci upon which it was supposedly based. I seemed to be arguing that workers did not have a kernel of good sense within their common sense, they did not recognize the conditions of their subordination and, therefore, while they were consenting to
domination, at the same time, the organization of consent was based on the *mystification* of exploitation (obscuring of surplus).

Whereas Gramsci’s idea of hegemony involves the *naturalization* of domination it does not connote *mystification* and in this regard he is different from Marx and the tradition of “false consciousness” that leads from Marx to Lukács and beyond. Reading Bourdieu makes it clear how different Gramsci is, not just from Bourdieu, but also from Marx. It is interesting to ask why Gramsci might have overlooked the mystification of capitalist exploitation, and instead basing his theory on a conscious consent? The most general answer must be that he participated in revolutionary struggles at a time when socialist transformation was on the political agenda, when capitalism did appear to be in some deep organic crisis that would, in the end, give rise to fascism rather than socialism – all these factors suggest that support for capitalism was shallower than it appears to us today in our postsocialist epoch.

A more specific answer has to do with his participation in the factory council movement, and the occupation of the factories in Turin, 1919-1920. As skilled workers, many of them craft workers, they felt the expropriation of skill and means of production much more directly than the unskilled workers of today who take for granted the private ownership of the means of production. Moreover, the occupation of their factories and the collective self-organization of production through their councils meant that they understood only too well the meaning of capitalist exploitation! For Gramsci, whose experience of the working class was through the factory council movement, exploitation
was hardly hidden and the working class really did exhibit a good sense within the common sense. In Gramsci’s eyes the occupation failed because working class organs – trade unions and the socialist party – were deeply wedded to capitalism, their interests were coordinated with those of capital. For Gramsci this betrayal would have to be rectified by the development of a Modern Prince – the communist party -- that understood and challenged capitalist hegemony. There was nothing hidden or unconscious about the consent of parties and trade unions to capitalism.³

Bourdieu makes the opposite argument, namely that craft workers are not the most likely but the least likely to see through their subjective experience to the objective truth of exploitation: “It can be assumed that the subjective truth is that much further removed from the objective truth when the worker has greater control over his own labour…” (PM: 203). Curiously, Bourdieu is at his most Marxist here in arguing that the subjective truth converges on the objective truth as labor is deskilled. As barriers to labor mobility are swept away workers lose any attachment to their work and can no longer win for themselves the freedoms “often minute and almost always ‘functional’” (PM: 203) that bind them to work. Fearing such stripped and homogenized labor, modern management tries to recreate those freedoms through participatory management: “…while taking care to keep control of the instruments of profit, leaves workers the freedom to organize their own work, thus helping to increase their well-being but also to displace their interest from the external profit of labour (wage) to the intrinsic profit” (PM: 204-5), that is the profits from active control over work.

³ Indeed, Adam Przeworski has shown just how rational it is for socialist parties to fight for immediate material gains in order to attract the votes necessary to gain and then to keep power.
My argument is rather different. As long as there are internal labor markets and internal states that create attachments to the employer as well as restrictions on employer interventions, so workers will be able to carve out those workplace games that give them the subjective sense of freedom. That is to say, hegemonic regimes may be the necessary and sufficient condition for the mystification of exploitation, no matter how unskilled the work may be. Indeed, the more labor is unskilled, the more important become the games of work as a compensation for arduousness and estrangement.

Bourdieu, however, takes a different tack. Instead of exploring the institutional conditions of mystification – the political and ideological apparatuses of the enterprise – he turns to the dispositional conditions of symbolic domination.

Differences in dispositions, like differences in position (to which they are often linked), engender real differences in perception and appreciation. Thus the recent changes in factory work, toward the limit predicted by Marx, with the disappearance of ‘job satisfaction’, ‘responsibility’ and ‘skill’ (and all the corresponding hierarchies), are appreciated and accepted very differently by different groups of workers. Those whose roots are in the industrial working class, who possess skills and relative ‘privileges’, are inclined to defend past gains, i.e., job satisfaction, skills and hierarchies and therefore a form of established order; those who have nothing to lose because they have no skills, who are in a sense a working-class embodiment of the populist chimera, such as young people who have stayed at school longer than their elders, are more inclined to radicalize their struggles and challenge the whole system: other, equally disadvantaged workers, such as first-generation industrial workers, women, and especially immigrants, have a tolerance of exploitation which seems to belong to another age. ("Men and Machines", p.315)
We are back with a functionalist tautology that those who have been socialized to industrial work or who come from oppressed conditions accommodate to it, whereas those who come from a different background, e.g. those who are downwardly mobile from the middle classes are likely to “radicalize their struggles and challenge the whole system.” In *Manufacturing Consent* I showed that externally derived dispositions made no difference to the way people were inserted into production, or the intensity with which they were drawn into the game of making out. Our experience on the shop floor was more or less the same irrespective of our habitus. Thus, I was struck by my own absorption into the game that occluded those famous relations of exploitation, which took on a mythological character at work, even if they were central to my theoretical conceptions.

So finally we come to my crucial difference with Bourdieu. In contrast to Gramsci both of us recognize a fundamental gap between the objective and the subjective truth of labor but for Bourdieu this is expressed as a *misrecognition* that comes from the individual’s habitus whereas for me it comes from *mystification* that derives from the character of the institutions that organize and regulate work – a mystification that operates on all individuals independent of their inherited dispositions. Symbolic domination rests on the bodily inculcation of social structure, and the formation of a deep unconscious habitus whereas hegemony at work rests on individuals being inserted into specific institutions that organize consent to domination, itself a condition for the mystification of exploitation. *Symbolic domination is seared into the individual psyche whereas hegemony is an effect of social relations on the individuals who carry them.*
If this is the difference that separates us then examining consent/submission under different institutional complexes should corroborate or disconfirm our different theories. State socialism becomes a laboratory for the adjudication of our two theories. In the theory of hegemony and mystification workers under state socialism should exhibit a different consciousness from those under advanced capitalism whereas in the theory of symbolic domination and misrecognition one would expect submission to be as deep if not deeper under state socialism since there the coordination of the party state and its institutions conspire to fashion a more deeply dominated habitus. So let me now turn to my research in Hungarian factories.

Take III: The Fragile Hegemony of State Socialism

There were two reasons why I went in search of factory work in Hungary. The first reason is that I missed the boat with the Polish Solidarity movement, 1980-1981, which had absorbed my attention as the first society wide revolutionary movement of industrial workers. General Jaruzelski beat me to the punch and so I did the next best thing – took up jobs in Hungary and asked why the Solidarity movement took place in Poland rather than Hungary, and, more broadly, why in state socialism rather than advanced capitalism. What were the possibilities for a democratic socialism to emerge from state socialism? The second reason to draw me to the socialist world was the specificity of my Chicago experience – was it the product of capitalism or of industrialism, broadly conceived? There is nothing in the writings of Bourdieu that
suggest that misrecognition would be a feature of capitalism as opposed to state socialism.

Between 1982 and 1989 I spent my summers and three sabbatical semesters studying and working in Hungarian factories. I began in a champagne factory on a collective farm and moved to a textile factory on an agricultural cooperative before graduating to industrial work in a machine shop, very similar to the Chicago plant. Finally, I would spend about 11 months in three separate stints working as a furnace man in the Lenin steel works. Based on this research I concluded that the workplace regimes of advanced capitalism and state socialism were indeed very different: if the former produced consent, the latter produced dissent, the fundamental disposition that fired the Polish Solidarity movement, but also collective mobilization in East Germany in 1953, in Hungary in 1956, even in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

The argument was a simple one: unlike capitalism, the appropriation of surplus under state socialism is a transparent process, recognized as such by all. The party, the trade union and management are all extensions of the state at the point of production, extensions designed to maximize the appropriation of surplus for the fulfillment of plans. Being transparent, exploitation is justified as being in the interests of all. Like any process of legitimation, it is susceptible to being challenged on its own terms – the party state is vulnerable to the accusation that it is not delivering on its promises. Whereas under capitalism ideology is unnecessary (even counterproductive) as a justification
because exploitation is hidden, under state socialism ideology is a necessary feature of
state socialism but also its undoing.

Thus, the party state organizes rituals on the shop floor, what I called painting
socialism, that celebrate its virtues – efficiency, justice, equality – yet all around workers
see inefficiency, injustice and inequality. Workers turn the ruling ideology against the
rulers, making them accountable to their socialist propaganda. The state socialist
bureaucratic regime of production sows the seeds of dissent rather than consent. As
regards the organization of work itself the key games at work are about fulfilling
management quotas rather than individual quotas, so that the relations of exploitation are
not obscured but define the relations between the players. Furthermore, given the
shortage economy -- shortages of materials, their poor quality, the break down of
machinery, and so forth all induced by central administration of the economy – the games
at work aim to cope with those shortages, flagrantly violating the ideological claim about
the efficiency of state socialism. Moreover, this adaptation to shortages required far more
autonomy than the bureaucratic apparatus regulating production would allow. Work
games were transposed into games directed at the system of planning, bringing the shop
floor into opposition to the production regime and the party state.

Far from social structure indelibly imprinting itself on the habitus of the worker
and thus assuring doxic submission, the state socialist regime systematically produces the
opposite, dissent rather than consent, even counter-hegemonic organization to despotic
controls. Indeed, state socialism generated a series of counter-socialisms from below –
the cooperative movement in Hungary, Solidarity in Poland and the civics in perestroika Russia. From the beginning state socialism was a far more unstable order, not because its socializing agencies were weaker – far from it – but because of contradictions generated by the institutions themselves. State socialism was held together by a precarious hegemony, that was always in danger of slipping back into a despotism that relied on secret police, tanks, prisons, and show trials. In other words, where advanced capitalism organized the simultaneous mystification of exploitation and consent to domination, so now we see how the hegemony of state socialism – the attempt to present the interests of the party state as the interests of all – is a fragile edifice that was always threatened by the transparency of exploitation.

The symbolic violence and the accompanying misrecognition that Bourdieu simply takes for granted cannot explain the instability and ultimate collapse of state socialism. Within Bourdieu’s framework there is no reason to believe that symbolic violence and misrecognition were any shallower in state socialism than advanced capitalism. Quite the contrary the coordination among fields – economic, educational, political and cultural -- should have led to a far more coherent and submissive habitus than under capitalism where such fields would have far greater autonomy. An analysis of the logic of institutions and their immediate effects on individual and on collective experience goes much further in explaining the fragility of state socialist hegemony.

This returns us to Bourdieu’s notion of social change, which depends upon the gap between social structure and habitus, between possibilities and expectations. This
hardly amounts to a theory since we do not know whether, when this gap between habitus and field is created nor how it impels people toward rebellion and social movement rather than accommodation and passivity. As we raised in the previous lecture, the question is whether the gap between habitus and field is the result of a sort of “psychic lag” – the clash between habitus shaped in one field and the logic of a different field – or whether it is produced by any given field itself. In the case of state socialism I argued that the regime itself produced the discordance between expectations and opportunities. It propagated ideals it could not realize. This was not only true for workers on the shop floor but it was also true of the dominant class. As the gap between ideology and reality widens, and as attempts to reduce the gap violates the ideology (as in market reforms), so the ruling class, riddled with contradictions, loses confidence in its capacity to rule, and as a result the enactment of socialist ideology is ritualized. Without capacity or belief the dominant class’s hegemony collapses. Again there is no need to resort to the existence of a deep-seated habitus that resists change.

Methodologically, there were corresponding differences in my approach to capitalist and socialist production which reflected something deeper – the presence or absence of good sense. In Chicago I broke with common sense of workers to create social theory based on the idea of an underlying objective truth. I created an “epistemological break” between the logic of practice of the workplace and the logic of theory of the academy. I made no attempt to elaborate some “good sense” in my fellow workers but instead provoked them into an elaboration of their “practical sense,” by asking them why they worked so hard, something they invariably denied! This was the
first Bourdieuan “reversal,” from the subjective truth of making out to the objective truth of exploitation. But it is not sufficient to remain at the level of the objective truth, it is necessary to explain how it is that agents (workers) continue to reproduce the conditions of that objective truth, the possibility of exploitation, and without the agents knowing that was what they are doing! So the second reversal was to return from the objective to the subjective truth, namely how making out contributed to both the securing and the obscuring of surplus.

I was following the rules of Bourdieusian methodology, but not because I had read Bourdieu, but rather because I did not believe that workers understood the conditions of their own subjugation. But, was it because I was an academic – with interests in the superiority of my own scientific knowledge -- that I didn’t find good sense within the common sense of workers, or was there really no good sense, and that workers truly did not understand the nature of their subjugation? My field work in Hungarian factories suggests that it was the latter not the former – for there, still an academic, I did indeed find good sense within the common sense. In Hungary I made no fundamental break with common sense. I took the workers’ immanent critique of state socialism to be the good sense, elaborating that good sense in dialogue with my fellow operators, contextualizing it in terms of the political economy of state socialism. Here in Hungary Bourdieu’s strict opposition of science and common sense was replaced by Gramsci’s account of the dual consciousness.

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
say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is
implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all 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 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 and political 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 working out at a higher level of
one’s own conception of reality.

I was riveted to the consciousness of my fellow workers “implicit” in their activity and
which united them “in the practical transformation of the real world,” paying less
attention to the “superficially explicit or verbal … inherited from the past and
uncritically absorbed,” which included racist, sexist, religious and localist sentiments.
Yet, it is true these verbal expressions formed powerful bonds among workers, often
overwhelming the incipient class consciousness.

Together with my collaborator, János Lukács, we focused on the capacity and
necessity of workers to organize production in the face of shortages. We defended that
practice to management who wanted to impose bureaucratic controls over production.
Infuriated by our claims they insisted that we redo our study. This was not just a struggle
within the consciousness of workers but between workers and management, and once
again it would be the explicit and verbal consciousness perpetrated by management that
ultimately prevailed. By the time Hungarian socialism entered its final years, workers had
lost any confidence in the very idea of socialism, and had no imagination of an alternative
democratic socialism, even though it had been implicit in the logic of their own practice.
Inspired by the “good sense” of workers, what he saw as a great potential for some sort of
worker-owned enterprises, Lukács tried to work with labor collectives to create the
foundations of an alternative to capitalism but this withered on the vine as capitalist
ideology gained the upper hand.

In short, the analysis of state socialism -- how it generated dissent and ultimately
collapsed -- does not require a theory of deep-seated habitus but focuses on its social
relations of production. It could not sustain a fragile hegemony and the attempts to do so
only hastened its demise. By the same token, as we saw earlier, the reproduction of
durable domination under capitalism does not require the inculcation of social structure.
Such submission that exists can be explained by the configuration of institutions that
elicit consent to domination based on the mystification of exploitation. This being the
case, is there no place for Bourdieu’s idea of unconscious habitus?

**Take IV: The Generative Dimension of Habitus**

My focus on the incipient class consciousness was driven by an interest in the
past, in the sources of the Solidarity Movement -- why a working class revolution might
take place in state socialism. It led me to erroneously discern the possibilities of a
democratic socialism to emerge with the collapse of state socialism, overestimating the
strength of the incipient working class consciousness. Working class opposition to state
socialism there was but it led, at best, to a weak demand for democratic socialism. The
notion of habitus, bodily inscribed social structure, does not help understand these macro transformations, whereas a focus on the dynamics and contradictions of the state socialist regime does.

In the same way, understanding the transformation of advanced capitalism is not aided by the ideal of the harmony/disharmony of habitus and field. *Manufacturing Consent* was focused on explaining the rise of the hegemonic regime. However, as in the case of Hungary, here too I missed the fragility of the hegemonic regime because I did not sufficiently appreciate how it sowed the seeds of its own destruction. In constituting workers as individuals with interests tied to management, the internal labor market and the internal state had undermined the organizational capacity of the working class with the result that the hegemonic regime I described in *Manufacturing Consent* easily succumbed to the (unanticipated) twin offensives of global markets and the US state over the last 30 years. Again the focus on habitus gets us nowhere in the explanation of social change.

If the idea of hegemony is more useful than symbolic domination in explaining the breakdown of a social order, is this because social institutions preempt the power of the habitus to dictate practice or is it because there is no such thing as habitus and that there are no cumulative sedimentations in the human psyche from previous fields. When we turn from the break-down of an old order to the creation of new orders I think the idea of habitus and its generative capacity to innovate and improvise comes into its own. I’m
thinking here of my research into the destruction of the Soviet working class and its response to the market forces unleashed in that process.

Research I conducted through the decade of the 1990s into working class families in Northern Russia point to the amazing adaptability of women and the inflexibility of men. The transition to a market economy was propelled by the destruction of the state administered economy that led to the market taking over the functions of distribution and exchange. The sphere of trade, finance, speculation and banking became the most dynamic sphere in the transitional economy but with the result that resources flowed out of production and into exchange – a process I called economic involution. It led to the increasing reliance of workers on the family as a unit of production as well as reproduction. Within this context it was women who proved the most resilient in adapting to the new economic circumstances, establishing their own networks of production, organizing an informal economy based on friends and kin, working not just two but sometimes three shifts. At the same time men were often more parasitical than productive in this new domestic economy, manifested in their demoralization, increased drinking and lowered life expectancy.

An argument could be made that under state socialism working class men had a clearly defined and singular role as breadwinner, whereas women had to juggle two shifts, one at home and one at work. The result was a rather rigid mono-dimensional habitus for men and a flexible, multi-dimensional habitus for women. Thus, women were more responsive and creative under the exigencies of economic involution that they faced
in the post-Soviet era. If this argument is correct then we might say that habitus becomes important when social situations are less structured in times of institution building rather than institutional collapse.

**The Logic of Practice: Beyond Gramsci and Bourdieu**

We can summarize the argument of this lecture by referring back to the notion of *false consciousness*. For Gramsci the problem with false consciousness lies not with consciousness but with the idea of falseness. That is to say, Gramsci believed that workers actively, deliberately and consciously collaborate in the reproduction of capitalism, they consent to a domination defined as hegemony. They understood what they were doing, they simply have difficulty appreciating that there could be anything beyond capitalism. Domination was not mystified but naturalized, eternalized. Yet, by virtue of their position in production, workers did possess a critical perspective on capitalism and an embryonic sense of an alternative, an alternative that could be jointly elaborated in dialogue with intellectuals.

If for Gramsci the problem was the “falseness” of false consciousness, for Bourdieu the problem was the opposite. It lies with the notion of consciousness which is far too shallow to grasp the meaning of symbolic violence -- domination that lodges itself deeply in the unconscious through the accumulated sedimentations of social structure. For Bourdieu consent is far too thin a notion to express submission to domination and instead he develops the idea of misrecognition that is deeply embedded in the habitus. Because the dominated internalize the social structure in which they are embedded they
do not recognize it as such. Only the dominators, and in particular intellectuals, can distance themselves from, and thus objectivize their relation to social structure. Only they can have access to its secrets. Not all intellectuals, to be sure. Only those can understand domination, who are reflexive about their luxurious place in the world and who use that reflexivity to examine the lives of others.

In adjudicating between these positions I have argued that both are problematic. Gramsci’s notion of hegemony does not recognize the mystification of exploitation upon which consent to domination rests. “Falseness” does characterize the consciousness of workers, but this falseness emanates from the social structure itself, which is where I depart from Bourdieu. Insofar as we participate in capitalist relations of production, we all experience the obscuring of surplus labor, independent of our habitus. Whereas mystification is a product of social structure itself and is not so deeply implanted within the individual that it cannot be undone, Bourdieu’s misrecognition comes from within the individual, from the harmonization of habitus and field.

Accordingly, Bourdieu cannot explain why symbolic domination is so effective in some societies but not in others. Thus, why does state socialism, where one would have expected submission to be most deeply embedded, systematically produce dissent? Put in other terms, Bourdieu can explain the durability of domination but not its transformation. Thus, how does Bourdieu explain the social transformations that take place in capitalism, such as the transitions in the US production regime, from despotism to hegemony and then from hegemony to hegemonic despotism? His theory of social change is contingent
on the mismatch of habitus and field, but there is no theorization of how that mismatch is produced, especially whether it is produced situationally or processually. Nor is there a theorization of the consequences of that mismatch, whether it produces accommodation or rebellion.

Far more than Bourdieu, Gramsci is concerned with social transformation. He sees it as the breakdown of hegemony and the creation of a new subaltern hegemony, whether this comes through organic crises (balance of class forces), or through the war of position mounted from below on the basis of the kernel of good sense. What my research suggests is that there is more to hegemony that the concrete coordination of interests or the ties linking state and civil society. There are non-hegemonic foundations of hegemony, namely the mystification of exploitation, which is why hegemony is so effective in advanced capitalism and was so fragile in state socialism.

Because exploitation was so transparent in state socialism it gave far more scope for intellectuals to engage with workers in the elaboration of alternative “hegemonies” from below – the Hungarian worker councils in 1956, the Prague Spring of 1968, the Polish Solidarity Movement of 1980-1981, the market socialism of Hungary’s reform period of the 1980s, the effervescence of civil society under Soviet Perestroika. These counter-hegemonies were formed by different configurations of intellectuals and workers. They were eventually swept away but they did provide the foundations of alternative socialist social orders.
Finally, this is not to deny the existence of habitus. Dispositions are inherited from one situation to the next. Rather they are not so fully determinative, so totalizing as Bourdieu claims, but rather they are pushed into the background by the dull, repetitive and relentless power of social relations into which the dominated and the dominant enter. When these lose their strength and coherence then habitus takes over as we saw in the post-Soviet disintegration and involution. Habitus plays a secondary role in the reproduction of domination but can play a primary role in the creation of new social orders.

We live in depressing times of capitalist entrenchment when the failure of actually-existing-socialism buttresses dominant ideologies. We should not compound the forcefulness and eternalization of the presence by subscribing to unsubstantiated claims about the deep internalization of social structure, reminiscent of the functionalism of the 1950s and its “oversocialized man.” Remember, those theories were overthrown by a critical collective effervescence structural functionalism did not but also could not anticipate.

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