

MAKING SENSE OF BOURDIEU

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How should we engage our intellectual opponents? Ignore them? Demolish them? Absorb them? Within academia, where recognition is everything, denying it 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, or anyone who dared to disagree with him. The only people worthy of such aggression, however, were his competitors in the political field. There is a second tradition within Marxism: interrogating powerful opponents to assess their strength and then appropriating them under an enlarged canvas. This is not vanquishing through demolition but domination through hegemony, or as Antonio Gramsci might say, moving from a "war of movement" to a "war of position." 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 conversation with others. Demolition can win one acclaim, and without having to make contributions of one's own. But it can bring free publicity to the opponent. By forcing the opponent into a straitjacket, it risks heaping disrepute onto the critic, and even provoking a belligerent reaction. Finally, neutralizing the opponent by absorption, taking the enemy seriously, can so transform one's own thinking that allies may accuse one of betrayal. After all, the practice of critique, if carried out properly, shapes the critic as much as the criticized.

The question at hand is how to engage Pierre Bourdieu.¹ In the spirit of full disclosure, I confess that I myself have taken all three approaches to Bourdieu. I began by ignoring and dismissing him, but that could not be sustained as he gathered steam over the last four decades. I then attempted demolition, but I was certainly not adequate to the task. The more I read, the more impressed I became, leading me to a more complex process of absorption and critical appreciation.²

While initially reverential, Dylan Riley's assessment of Bourdieu's class theory quickly turns to demolition.³ His treatment of Bourdieu is reminiscent of Perry Anderson's youthful, sweeping assault on Western Marxism as lost in the ethereal realms of philosophy, ideology, and culture.⁴ Following Lenin, Anderson claimed that revolutionary theory

1 For a short account of Bourdieu's own strategy of dealing with intellectual opponents see the coda at the end of this article.

2 Michael Burawoy and Karl von Holdt, *Conversations with Bourdieu* (Johannesburg; University of Witwatersrand Press, 2012).

3 Dylan Riley, "Bourdieu's Class Theory," *Catalyst* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2017).

4 Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1976).

only develops in close connection to a mass revolutionary movement. Similarly, Riley claims that Bourdieu's appeal, in the final analysis, lies in offering "political relevance to an intelligentsia with little organizational link to popular forces." In other words, like Anderson's view of Western Marxism, Riley's view of Bourdieusian sociology signals a retreat from Marxism and its politics.

Anderson was writing at a time of optimism, a period of leftist insurgency when Western Marxism might appear as a defeatist deviation from a true revolutionary road. Today we live in nonrevolutionary times, and Bourdieu provides an appealing framework for many critically minded scholars. I agree with Riley that the appeal of Pierre Bourdieu cannot be reduced to his science; his voluminous writings are also a political response to the contemporary period, a reaction to the ascendancy of neoliberalism and right-wing populism. Equally compelling, Bourdieu offers ammunition for a critical response to the external assault on academia.

Where Bourdieu has a clear political program, Riley's alternative is unclear. He never tells us *who* are the popular forces nor *how* we should be connected to them. In dismantling Bourdieu, however, his essay forcefully raises the question — if not the answer — as to what it means to be a Marxist in academia today.

Perhaps the first task is simply to maintain the presence of Marxism as a living and open tradition. When the Marxist presence in academia is in retreat and its connection to the world beyond is tenuous, there is always the danger of sectarianism. Marxism risks becoming dogmatic and sclerotic and losing what little support it has. Facing the defeat of the working class as a revolutionary force, Western Marxism sustained itself through engagement with the highest expression of bourgeois thought. Today, Marxism needs to find new sparring partners. I would suggest Pierre Bourdieu is a worthy candidate, the highest expression of critical sociology and, moreover, a very influential presence.

As Riley acknowledges, Bourdieu has become a sanctified figure not just in sociology but also in the humanities as well as in other social

sciences, with an impressive global presence. No other sociologist approaches his influence. The closest parallel was the reign of Talcott Parsons during the 1950s and 1960s when his modernization theory and structural functionalism also took on a transdisciplinary and global presence. While Parsons has since become a relic of history — who now reads Talcott Parsons? — the longevity of Bourdieu is more assured. His work is better equipped to deal with different political conjunctures than the abstract theory of Parsons. That makes Riley’s examination of what places Bourdieu on such a pedestal a critically important project.

OVERVIEW: MAKING SENSE OF BOURDIEU

Riley cannot find any scientific merit in Bourdieu’s social theory. He declares that Bourdieu’s achievements cannot match the macro-sociologies of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim in three key areas: social stratification, social change, and social reproduction. That’s a tall order! Why should failure to reach such lofty heights warrant the dismissal of Bourdieu? Be that as it may, Riley does not actually compare Bourdieu with these three canonical figures. For Riley, it would appear that pointing to the shortcomings of Bourdieu’s theory is sufficient evidence of falling short of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim as if they are without flaws. I will examine Riley’s claims in some detail as they are quite revealing of both Bourdieu and the sociological tradition.

After exposing the limitations of Bourdieu’s theory, Riley concludes that its influence lies in its resonance with the lived experience and career interests of elite academics: competition for distinction, the preservation of privilege, and a form of ersatz politics for a critical community cut off from “popular classes.” In Bourdieu’s terms, to understand the appeal of Bourdieu one must turn from the manifest “logic of theory” to the latent “logic of practice.”

In other words, Riley does to Bourdieu what Bourdieu does to those he seeks to belittle, namely, attributing their influence to the position and disposition of their followers within the academic field, rather than

to the substance of their work. Riley undertakes a double reduction: he reduces Bourdieu's science to a poorly executed positivism and then reduces Bourdieu's politics to insulation in the academic field. This double reduction adopts contradictory standards: Bourdieu is attacked for not conforming to positivist standards of comparative sociology and then, in the same breath, for not being attached to the popular classes. Yet it is hard to simultaneously be a positivist and an engaged intellectual — the one requires autonomy from and the other embeddedness in the wider society.

Riley is barking up the wrong tree. As I shall suggest, Bourdieu is neither a failed positivist nor an isolationist. Riley's double standards are, therefore, doubly inappropriate. I will seek to redeem both Bourdieu's scientific and his political projects, constituting his work as an important critique of and challenge to Marxism.

I will proceed in three steps: demolition, recuperation, and critique. First, I agree with much of Riley's demolition — Bourdieu's class analysis is flawed (if not necessarily for the reasons Riley claims); his theory of social change is at best embryonic; his refusal to conceptualize capitalism is fatal. Still, Riley's mode of demolition is problematic. His three foci — social stratification, social reproduction, and social change — while they appear reasonable enough, force Bourdieu's thinking into discrete problematics that have the effect of rendering his originality banal. I show how each of Riley's questions introduces false divisions while suppressing essential distinctions.

In the second part, recuperation, I will substitute an alternative set of distinctions that emanate from the key notion in Bourdieu's theory, namely, *symbolic domination* — domination that is not recognized as such. I contest Riley's dismissal that this idea has limited applicability within advanced capitalism. Symbolic domination raises the question of *reflexivity* — how is it that sociologists can know something that others don't; how can they produce a truth that is different from and superior to common sense? Furthermore, how is it, as Bourdieu argues, that others can't grasp the sociological truth even when presented with it?

By drawing on the very Bourdieusian theory he has rejected, Riley's demolition backs into the question of reflexivity. Bourdieu's appeal, he claims, resides in its resonance with the defense of the autonomy of the academic field and the struggle for distinction within it. In so doing he makes the questionable assumption that academia is fundamentally different from the world beyond where Bourdieu's theory doesn't work. To the defense of academic privilege and the competition for distinction, Riley adds a further claim to explain the influence of Bourdieu: namely he offers an ersatz politics, a substitute for a "true" politics based on a connection to "popular classes." But this notion of "true" politics not only comes without elaboration or justification but also overlooks Bourdieu's broad engagements with diverse publics, including the dominated classes. In fact, Bourdieu has carved out a royal road to *public sociology* — not only a traditional public sociology in which the sociologist represents some universal interest but also an organic public sociology forged in close connection to the dominated.

These three dimensions of Bourdieu's sociology — symbolic domination, reflexivity, and public engagement — not only provide the three moments of his scientific research program, but also define a political project: intellectuals on the road to class power. To each dimension of his scientific research program, there is a corresponding moment in his political project: symbolic domination gives a privileged place to the sociologist; reflexivity makes the sociologist the vanguard of intellectuals; and public engagement allows intellectuals to represent their interests as the interests not just of other intellectuals but of all classes.

After assembling Bourdieu's scientific-cum-political vision, the third part of this essay turns to critique, assessing its limitations, in particular its misrecognition of capitalism. Refusal to engage the *systemic* character of modern capitalism leads Bourdieu to exaggerate the power of intellectuals, and universalize the notion of symbolic domination. Restoring a focus on capitalism allows a more realistic assessment of the place of intellectuals. The appropriation of Bourdieu's intellectualist project

within a Marxist framework points to an alternative scientific-cum-political project, one that revolves around the capitalist university.

I: DEMOLITION

This first section is a critical appreciation of Riley's demolition of Bourdieu, underlining our substantial agreement yet pointing to the limitations of reducing Bourdieu's influence to his theory's resonance with the academic habitus. There's more to Bourdieu than meets Riley's critical eye.

Class Analysis: From Classes on Paper to Classification Struggle

Riley claims that in each of three defining areas of sociology: stratification, reproduction, and social change, Bourdieu has little to offer. There is much merit in his critique. Let's start with stratification, or class analysis where he takes Bourdieu's *Distinction* to task.⁵ Riley reduces the purpose of this humungous endeavor to showing that class is related to behavior through the mediation of habitus, itself inculcated through processes of class socialization. There is, indeed, a rough correlation between, on the one hand, occupation as measured by economic and cultural capital and, on the other hand, lifestyle based on consumption of food, films, newspapers, etc. As Riley suggests, Bourdieu's claim that class and habitus underlie the ostensible correlation between occupation and lifestyle is tautological given that class and habitus are neither defined independently nor accessible to empirical examination — one knows them only by their putative effects. So Riley concludes that the linear causality between class and behavior cannot be demonstrated so long as class is ill-defined. Moreover, the claim that each class has its own habitus is belied by the simultaneous assertion that all classes also share a common habitus.

5 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984 [1979]).

In focusing only on the way class does or does not shape behavior Riley misses the key to *Distinction*, namely symbolic domination. Although Bourdieu doesn't acknowledge it, his model is parallel to Marx's commodity fetishism in which the exchange relation between objects hides the production relations between humans. Only now it is consumption fetishism in which the status hierarchy among objects consumed hides the class hierarchy between humans. The practices of consumption are organized according to their own hierarchical logic that obscures the homologous hierarchy of class. Habitus, therefore, has a class character but it also transcends class — the class dimension is deeper and preconscious, the product of inculcation; whereas the shared dimension of habitus is more conscious and practical, organizing patterns of consumption in a relatively autonomous social space.⁶ By focusing on the food one eats, the liquor one drinks, the paintings one appreciates, the films one watches, and by recognizing their implicit organization into hierarchies of legitimacy, Bourdieu contends, one overlooks the class domination that they simultaneously hide and

6 There is a burgeoning literature on the concept of habitus, an obscure but key concept in Bourdieu's oeuvre. Because it cannot be identified as such it can be used to explain any behavior. It raises the question of how much of action is conscious/reflexive, how much is unconscious/pre-reflexive, and then what is the relation between the two. Bourdieu doesn't help here so others have had to help themselves. Perhaps the most interesting advances have been made by proponents of a "dual process" model borrowed from cognitive psychology. See Omar Lizardo, "The Cognitive Origins of Bourdieu's Habitus," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 34, no. 4 (2004): 375–401; Stephen Vaisey, "Motivation and Justification: A Dual-Process Model of Culture in Action," *American Journal of Sociology* 114, no. 6 (2009): 1675–1715; Omar Lizardo, Robert Mowry, Brandon Sepulvado, Dustin S. Stoltz, Marshall A. Taylor, Justin Van Ness, and Michael Wood, "What Are Dual Process Models? Implications for Cultural Analysis in Sociology," *Sociological Theory* 34, no. 4 (2016): 287–310. These authors make a Distinction between reflexive action that requires slow, conceptual processes of symbolic mastery and the pre-reflexive spontaneous, impulsive action based on accumulated, embodied processes developing over a long period of time. Focusing on symbolic domination, I have sliced Bourdieu in a different way: an internalization process that is unconscious and a game-like interaction that works at a more conscious level. Bourdieu arbitrarily switches from one perspective to the other without connecting the two. Missing is a theory of the dynamic interplay between the conscious and the unconscious.

express. This is symbolic domination at work — a domination that is hidden, that is not recognized as such, that is, in short, misrecognized.

Still, Riley is right, there is a puzzle: what does Bourdieu mean by class? This is a challenging puzzle indeed — so much so that Marx died trying to solve it. By the end of *Distinction*, Bourdieu, escapes the morass of convoluted definitions of class (which Riley bravely tries to disentangle) by claiming that class is neither given nor some invention of sociologists, but the outcome and object of a *classification struggle*. Paradoxically, however, he can only get the classification struggle going by assuming the existence of class. Despite his attack on the idea of “classes on paper,” that is classes defined abstractly by the theorist, he himself *assumes* from the beginning a Marxist tripartite division between dominant class, petty bourgeoisie, and working class. But even as he borrows Marxist class *categories*, Bourdieu departs from the Marxist notion of class as a *relation* by defining them, instead as the summation of economic and cultural *resources* (capital).

A number of points are noteworthy. First, this a Weberian stratification model of class based on a hierarchy of strata, as opposed to the notion of class domination as a relation of exploitation — a concept that appears almost nowhere in Bourdieu’s theoretical oeuvre. Second, there is no way to access a metric (or exchange rate) that allows one to add up cultural and economic capital, so the volume of capital eludes measurement. Third, Bourdieu stops at classification struggle that takes place within the dominant class and never moves forward (or backward) to class struggle, eliminating it by fiat.

Finally, it means that professors, intellectuals, and artists turn out to be part of the dominant class, albeit a dominated fraction with high cultural capital compensating for low economic capital. Here Bourdieu is borrowing from the well-known formulation of Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*:

The division of labor ... manifests itself also in the ruling class as the division of mental and manual labour, so that inside this class one part

appears as the thinkers of the class (its active, conceptive ideologists, who make the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood), while the others' attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of the class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves.⁷

But Bourdieu takes the idea further than Marx and Engels. Those “conceptive ideologists” who perfect “the illusion of class about itself” are an autonomous fraction of the dominant class whose function is to define the very meaning of class. They are far more powerful than Marx and Engels' ideologists who only “perfect” and elaborate the prior self-understanding of the bourgeoisie.

If at the beginning of *Distinction*, Bourdieu simply asserts the definition of class as an objective entity, by the end he insists on class as an indeterminate product of classification struggles. That being the case, *Distinction* should itself be seen as a contribution not only to the understanding of class but also to a classification struggle, an attempt to project intellectuals, including prominent sociologists, as part of the dominant class.⁸ More broadly, one might say that *Distinction* is not only a work of science that advances the concept of symbolic domination, but also part of a political project to put intellectuals on the road to class power. To sustain such a claim, however, requires a theory of intellectuals as key agents of social change.

7 Robert Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 173.

8 Within *Distinction*, Bourdieu seems to follow the intellectual journey that Durkheim makes from his *Division of Labor in Society*, where the scientist observes the world from without, to *Elementary Forms of Religious Experience* where the scientist is now located within society and science is seen as performing an analogous role to religion.

Social Change — From Algeria to France

When it comes to Bourdieu's theory of social change, the obvious place to begin are his early writings on Algeria. In *Algeria 1960*, Bourdieu⁹ describes social change as the product of colonialism depicted as an unexplained exogenous intervention — a clash of civilizations, or a clash between modernity and tradition. Here he also revises Weber's characterization of the modern bourgeois individual as embodying the spirit of capitalism, the rational pursuit of an irrational goal — accumulation for accumulation's sake, money for money's sake — and an ethic of abstention, self-denial. For Bourdieu, in contrast, the modern individual is defined by a distinctive sense of time. Unlike cyclical time of traditional society in which the future is embedded in the present, always “forthcoming,” the uncertainty of modern society leads to the conceptualization of an alternative future through prophecy, planning, and rationality. Already here, Bourdieu gives modernity an intellectualist bent.

This also leads Bourdieu to recognize the revolutionary potential of the colonial working class. Its relative stability allows it to imagine and direct its efforts toward an alternative future whereas the volcanic sub-proletariat and proletarianized peasantry have no sense of direction — they are a “force for revolution,” not a “revolutionary force.”¹⁰ In “Revolution within the Revolution,”¹¹ Bourdieu extends the “revolutionary” potential of the colonized. Here change is not exogenously induced but endogenous to colonialism bringing about its own downfall. Colonialism creates its own gravediggers — the colonized — who demand the rights denied them. In the war against colonialism, the colonized thus transform themselves into a modernizing movement.

9 Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979[1963]).

10 Bourdieu distinguishes his view of the working class as revolutionary from the “eschatological vision of revolution as a reversal” (*Algeria 1960*, 62). He explicitly opposes the position of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) that claims the peasantry to be the revolutionary class, a view celebrated by Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963 [1961]).

11 Bourdieu, *The Algerians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962 [1961]), chapter 7.

This “dialectical” conception of social transformation acts as a counterpoint to Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic domination in which the dominated never achieve collective self-awareness, let alone revolutionary momentum. His description of the anti-colonial revolution stands in opposition not only to his analysis of contemporary France¹² but also to his anthropology of the Algerian ethnic group, the Kabyle. Thus, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*,¹³ published a decade after leaving Algeria, Bourdieu elaborates a static tradition-bound vision of Kabyle as the foundation of his understanding of modern France. Not urban Algiers but a romanticized rural Kabylia — insulated from history, colonialism, and the wider world — provides the elementary forms of symbolic domination that Bourdieu discovers in France. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu has already advanced his key concepts — habitus, misrecognition, and symbolic capital — to analyze a society governed by honor, rituals of mutual aid, and hierarchies of solidarity. This framework is then superimposed on France but with one difference — social differentiation, represented by the crystallization of relatively autonomous fields.

Bourdieu argues that the laborious interpersonal work of symbolic domination in traditional societies becomes, in modern societies, a symbolic domination organized through impersonal, specialized institutions. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*¹⁴ shows how this works in schooling. The primary socialization of children in the family gives (or denies) them the cultural capital to perform well (or badly) in school. The curriculum is designed to match the symbolic mastery learned in the middle and upper classes, so that such children do well

12 More out of desperation than the realpolitik of reason, in the last decade of his life Bourdieu does appeal to social movements to arrest France’s headlong plunge into neoliberalism. But his politics is ahead of his theory — as Riley points out, Bourdieu has no theory of collective mobilization. It is a curious return of the repressed — his early interest in the anti-colonial revolution.

13 Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977[1972]).

14 Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage, 1977 [1970]).

at school while those endowed only with practical mastery fail. The institutional separation of schooling from the family, that is, its relative autonomy, gives symbolic mastery universal legitimacy so that children from the dominant classes appear to be gifted, while children from the dominated accept their lesser destiny as a product of their lesser talent. Success in school translates into success in the (again, institutionally separated) labor market, which also appears to operate according to class-neutral rules. In this way the technical function of school (slotting people into jobs) hides its social function (reproducing class domination). Schools secure participation by obscuring their class foundations.

The parallels with Durkheim are obvious. The Kabyle play the same role for symbolic domination as the Australian totemic tribes play for Durkheim's elementary forms of religious life; and Bourdieu subscribes to the same modernization theory based on social differentiation that is most fully elaborated in Durkheim's *The Division of Labor in Society*. As in Durkheim so in Bourdieu the sociologist holds the secret of society, only with symbolic domination replacing solidarity as the key concept.

Social Reproduction — From the Béarn to the Grandes Écoles

Theories of social change begin with theories of social reproduction. Thus, Marx shows how the reproduction of capitalist relations is simultaneously their transformation. In order to earn a livelihood, workers are compelled to sell their labor power to a capitalist for whom they expend labor that (re)produces both themselves (necessary labor equivalent to the wage) and the capitalist (surplus labor which is the source of profit). At the same time, capitalists compete with each other and in so doing transform the work process through intensification, deskilling, new technology, multiple-earner families, etc., that leads to the polarization of wealth and poverty. That in turn leads, on the one side, to crises of overproduction, the concentration of capital, and the falling rate of profit and, on the other side, to the deepening of class struggle.

Social reproduction is simultaneously social transformation. Is there anything like this in Bourdieu?

As we have seen, Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction is drawn from an idyllic conception of Kabylia where habitus and social structure reproduce each other.

The habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus.¹⁵

Understood as a set of embodied and embedded “transposable” dispositions that generate practices and appreciations in various settings, habitus is “durably” formed in early life and largely irreversible. It has a certain, unspecified rigidity that can obstruct adaptation to new situations, an obstruction Bourdieu calls “hysteresis.” Thus, when a habitus cultivated in one world comes up against social structures of another world, there is a certain “strain” and the actor enters a state of “alldoxia,” or confusion.¹⁶ (Durkheim might call it anomie.) The Kabyle cook wanders from job to job in Algiers not because he is trying to maximize opportunities nor because he is denied the possibility of stable employment, but because he cannot adapt to the norms of urban life, being dragged down by his rural habitus.¹⁷ In this case, strain is produced through the clash of social structure with an *exogenously* produced habitus.

While Bourdieu's theory of reproduction through the inculcation

15 Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 78.

16 At other points, Bourdieu argues that the clash of position and disposition can lead to heightened reflexivity and “rational” action.

17 Pierre Bourdieu, “Making the economic habitus: Algerian workers revisited,” *Ethnography* 1, no. 1 (2000):17–41.

of habitus points to the ubiquity of such strain, we do not know where this leads: to retreat (downgrading or repression of expectations), making a virtue of necessity, apathy, rebellion, or even innovation? The ubiquity of strain becomes a theory of social change only when we understand its *effects*. That would require a psychology of the malleability of habitus and a sociology of the resilience of social structure — both of which are absent.¹⁸

So far I'm on the same page as Riley: Bourdieu's notion of social change is unconvincing. But does Bourdieu's oeuvre prefigure another theory of social reproduction/transformation? I think so, but it relies less on the notion of habitus. In its fullest form it can be found in *The Bachelors' Ball*,¹⁹ where Bourdieu shows how the reproduction of the kinship structure leads to its demise. Bourdieu conceives of kinship as a card game in which each family is dealt a hand of children of a particular age and gender, defining the basis of marriage strategies. Given the expanding access to education, consumption, and employment beyond peasant society, all of which are especially appealing to young women next to the drudgery of peasant life, mothers try to maximize the family patrimony by marrying off their sons to local girls while encouraging their daughters to marry out of the village. A prisoners' dilemma game ensues resulting in peasant men no longer finding wives to reproduce their patrimony. Bourdieu describes this increasing gap between hopes and possibilities as leading to the humiliation of bachelors. He begins *The Bachelors' Ball* with his bachelors lined up along the edge of the ballroom. Occasionally they are invited to dance by a pitying neighbor, whereupon they clumsily parade their bodies. But they mainly watch their potential brides entranced by the guys from

18 Bourdieu is no nearer to explaining specific outcomes than was Robert Merton in his famous 1938 essay, which discusses the range of responses to the gap between institutionalized means and cultural goals: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. See Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie," *American Sociological Review* 3, no. 5 (1938): 672–82.

19 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Bachelors' Ball* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008 [2002]).

town. All this bodily shame reflects the degradation of the peasant economy. Here the response to the gap between hopes and possibilities, aspirations and opportunities, is retreat and despair — so different from the response of the colonized, also harboring aspirations at odds with opportunities, who rise up against colonialism. Nowhere does Bourdieu explain or even acknowledge the contrast between (internal or external) exit and voice.

The demise of the peasant world fits well with Bourdieu's broader view of history as marked by the ascendancy of education as a vehicle for class reproduction. Inheritance is now mediated indirectly through the relatively autonomous sphere of education, rather than directly through the family as in the peasant economy or feudal society. Bourdieu's two books on schooling written with Jean-Claude Passeron²⁰ show how, through the mediation of cultural capital, classes pass on their position to their children. Later, in *Homo Academicus*²¹ and *Distinction*, Bourdieu shows how the insatiable demand for education leads to the expansion of higher education, devaluing the credential so that student aspirations are no longer in line with their opportunities. The democratization of access to secondary education in the 1980s, again *endogenous*, produces a gap between expectations and achievement.²²

In *State Nobility*,²³ however, we find another “reproductive” role for education in the *longue durée*. In this exhausting and exhaustive empirical analysis, Bourdieu shows how the Grandes Écoles become the instrument for reproducing the dominant class. As the higher reaches of education become the transmission belt of inheritance — intellectuals, and especially the professoriate, become the guardians and gatekeepers

20 Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage, 1977 [1970]); *The Inheritors: French Students and Their Relation to Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979 [1964]).

21 Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988 [1984]).

22 Pierre Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999 [1993]), 421–6.

23 Bourdieu, *State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996 [1989]).

of the dominant class, justifying once again their membership in that class. So, while Bourdieu does not have a fully worked out theory of social change nor a theory of history that *explains* social differentiation, his sociologically inspired vision of historical continuity makes intellectuals crucial players not just in defining the boundaries of class but also in its reproduction.

II. RECUPERATION

Having pointed to the limits of Riley's demolition, this section recovers Bourdieu's project around symbolic domination, reflexivity, and public engagement — three dimensions that drive both his science and his politics.

Symbolic Domination — From Psychology to Sociology

It is one thing to describe the strategies designed to reproduce the *dominant class*, it is another to understand the reproduction of *class domination*, which for Bourdieu revolves around symbolic domination. As we have already seen, this concept ties together class analysis, social change, and social reproduction. While Riley rejects the concept as unable to play the central role Bourdieu assigns it, I regard it as posing Bourdieu's most serious challenge to Marxism — a challenge that must be met, not dismissed.

Symbolic domination has a Marxist ring — it is domination that is not recognized as such, domination misrecognized. At first glance it bears a close relation to the notion of false consciousness, but Bourdieu is most insistent on its difference.

In the notion of “false consciousness” which some Marxists invoke to explain the effect of symbolic domination, it is the word “consciousness” which is excessive; and to speak of “ideology” is to place in the order of *representations*, capable of being transformed by the

intellectual conversion that is called the “awakening of consciousness,” what belongs to the order of *beliefs*, that is, at the deepest level of bodily dispositions.²⁴

Class domination is not simply the product of entry into compulsory social relations, as in Marx, but deeply embedded and embodied, and very difficult to expose. The dispositions of our habitus are unconscious and enduring. Whereas for Marx, individuals are the immediate effects of the relations they *presently occupy*, for Bourdieu they are the cumulative effect of the history of the social structures they *have occupied*. For Marx, relations take precedence over the individual; for Bourdieu, there is a tension between the structured habitus of the individual and the structured social relations they enter, even as they also reproduce each other.

With regard to symbolic domination, therefore, Bourdieu might rightly claim some distance from Marx,²⁵ but he systematically overlooks or denies parallels between his own work and the writings of Marxism, especially Western Marxism. He reduces Marxism to Marx, refusing to recognize the development of a rich Marxist intellectual tradition beyond Marx concerned with questions of cultural domination. For example, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony also contests the idea of “false consciousness”: it is an obvious counterpart to symbolic domination, but we find no serious acknowledgement of such parallels.²⁶ Another example is the Frankfurt School, which adopted psychoanalysis to highlight the internalization of oppression — the squashing of the autonomous bourgeois individual characteristic of advanced capitalism. Herbert Marcuse’s

24 Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000 [1997]), 177. Italics in the original.

25 Pierre Bourdieu, “Social space and the genesis of ‘classes’” in *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991 [1984]), 229–51.

26 Elsewhere I have examined the parallels and divergences between Bourdieu and Gramsci at length. See Burawoy, “The Roots of Domination: Beyond Bourdieu and Gramsci,” *Sociology* 46, no. 2 (2012): 187–206; Burawoy and Karl von Holdt, *Conversations with Bourdieu* (Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand Press, 2012), 51–67.

Eros and Civilization,²⁷ is a brilliant critical appropriation of Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* with a view to understanding capitalist oppression and the possibility of its transcendence. Without so much as a nod in the direction of the Frankfurt School, Bourdieu frequently employs psychoanalytic terms to convey the idea of habitus, though without ever engaging the theoretical baggage of psychoanalysis.²⁸

Lukács's theory of reification offers still another parallel to Bourdieu's symbolic domination. Reification affects the dominant class as it does the dominated class, but whereas the dominant class has no interest in seeing through reification to the deepening crises it generates, the dominated class has an interest in but not the capacity to see the truth of the totality.²⁹ To arouse the working class Lukács appeals to extraneous interventions: the communist party, the dislocation of crisis, or the alienation of the laborer's body that liberates the mind.³⁰ Here and there Bourdieu offers similar openings³¹: symbolic revolutions, crises in which intellectuals can transmit their visions, martial counter-training of the body, but, like reification, they are incidental next to the heavy weight of symbolic domination.

So what is this symbolic domination? Here there is profound ambiguity. At the phenomenal level Bourdieu discusses processes of naturalization in which what exists comes to be accepted as inevitable, the way things are, unalterable like the weather. The distinction of the dominant classes is simply accepted as a natural attribute (gift) of that class. This fatalism can be extended, especially among the dominated, into making a virtue of necessity — the love of one's destiny, *amor fati*.

27 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

28 With the analogy of the patient's resistance to the therapist, Bourdieu refers to sociology as socioanalysis, thereby explaining (or explaining away) the popular resistance to the claims of the sociologist.

29 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin Press, 1967 [1923]).

30 The same argument is made by Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 309. This would appear to be very different from Bourdieu, who refuses the possibility of the mind separating from the body, downplaying the significance of reflexive consciousness.

31 Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 105, 172, 188.

For Bourdieu, by themselves, these processes of naturalization are unstable; their durability resides in an underlying symbolic domination that comes in two versions whose interrelationship Bourdieu leaves open, arbitrarily appealing to one or the other as it suits his argument. First, there is the idea that symbolic domination operates through the forging of a largely unconscious habitus as the internalization of social structure. In this way, the dominant categories through which social life is organized come to be unconsciously accepted. Domination is not recognized as such, it is *misrecognized*. Masculine domination, for example, is the result of the historical labor of dehistoricization.³² It goes along with a *psychology* of inculcation that expresses itself in bodily comportment as well as psychic reflexes. Early socialization takes precedence, upon which is superimposed secondary socialization. Internalization proceeds without resistance, and, for the most part, gives rise to an integrated, singular self.

While in this first version of symbolic domination, the individual takes precedence, in the second version, more like Marx, social relations take precedence. Instead of individuals *misrecognizing* domination as a result of socialization and the creation of an unconscious habitus, social relations *mystify* the conditions of their own effectivity. In the latter case, symbolic domination is not the result of elaborate socialization but comes about through participation in semi-autonomous fields — participation that is viewed as a social game. Through their absorption in the game players accept its rules as given and become oblivious to the conditions of its reproduction. Here the integrated habitus with its stratified layers, rising from the deep and unconscious to the superficial and conscious, should be replaced with a more fluid self, what Lahire³³ calls a “plural self,” responsive to different sets of social relations. This social game approach to practice is Bourdieu’s more original, *sociological* perspective on symbolic domination.³⁴

32 Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001 [1998]).

33 Bernard Lahire, *The Plural Actor* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011 [2001]).

34 Where I distinguish two divergent meanings of symbolic domination, Bourdieu

Riley is skeptical that the game metaphor can be applied to different realms of social life. Thus, he explicitly contests its application to work. Yet, as much research has shown, and as anyone who has worked in a monotonous and arduous job knows, the best way to survive is to give it meaning by constituting work as a game — a game whose outcomes are neither too uncertain as to be beyond human control nor too certain as to fail to command their attention.³⁵ Bourdieu and Passeron's³⁶ account of education can also be read as a social game: schools *secure* the participation of students through holding out achievable goals of economic advancement while at the same time *obscuring* the reproduction of class.³⁷ Of course, if the goals appear unachievable or are too easily achieved then the game can turn into rebellion. Bourdieu's oft-repeated example of gift exchange also has the structure of a game in which gifts are exchanged only after a decent interval, thereby concealing gift exchange as a mechanism of symbolic domination. In this view of symbolic domination, there

(1997 [2000]) tries to make them inseparable. In making the inculcation of habitus integral to social game-playing Bourdieu renders his theory of practice heavily deterministic. For a superb and succinct discussion of the distinction between these two views, see Ofer Sharone, *Flawed System/Flawed Self* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 186–90. As ever, Bourdieu is not interested in discriminating among causal explanations but in holding on to multiple explanations. In trying to explain everything, he risks explaining nothing.

35 Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Jeffrey Sallaz, "The House Rules: Autonomy and Interests among Service Workers in the Contemporary Casino Industry," *Work and Occupations* 29, no. 4 (2002): 394–427; Ofer Sharone, "Engineering overwork: Bell-curve management at a high-tech firm" in Cynthia Fuchs Epstein and Arne L. Kalleberg, eds., *Fighting for Time: Shifting Boundaries of Work and Social Life* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 191–208; Ofer Sharone, *Flawed System/Flawed Self* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Rachel Sherman, *Class Acts: Service and Inequality in Luxury Hotels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Adam Reich, *Hidden Truth: Young Men Navigating Lives in and out of Juvenile Prison*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

36 Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*.

37 Here one might distinguish between *habitus* that is a feature of internalization and *cultural capital* which is a resource mobilized in social games. I haven't found a place where Bourdieu distinguishes between the two in much the same way that he does not distinguish between the two types of symbolic domination.

is no need for an elaborate theory of internalization. Misrecognition becomes mystification, intrinsic to the social relations into which we enter.

Arguing that education is not the only sphere of symbolic domination, Riley goes on to ask why Bourdieu omits the realm of democracy. He's right. Bourdieu ignores electoral politics and civil society to his detriment, believing that real politics is confined to the lofty field of power where elites compete with one another, according to a well-defined set of rules. Adopting Adam Przeworski's³⁸ analysis of capitalist democracy, Riley contends that electoral competition is a critical realm for the organization of consent to capitalism.

But Przeworski's analysis is also based on a game-theoretic logic. Parties compete for votes by developing rule-bound strategies that are based on their assessment of class structure. So socialist parties are drawn into the electoral game because failure to do so would cost them vital support — support based on the delivery of real but limited short-term material gains. The trouble is, there are never enough workers for socialist parties to win elections, so they seek allies from neighboring classes and, thereby, dilute their socialist platform. One interesting result is that class struggle is first a struggle over the meaning of class — a Bourdieusian classification struggle — and only then a struggle between classes. A second result is the sacrifice of long-term goals for short-term gains. A third result is the organization of consent to capitalism: partaking in the game results in consent to its rules.

In the language of games, players accumulate resources and follow strategies within rules they accept but don't make. To be sure, as Bourdieu notes, players can become conscious of the rules, and struggle over their revision, yet the changing of rules is itself rule-bound. The game metaphor not only allows us to think simultaneously about agency

38 Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Adam Przeworski and John Sprague, *Paper Stones: A History of Electoral Socialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

and structure, but it offers us something else: a methodology that helps us think about the relationship of social science and lived experience, logic of theory and the logic of practice. Threading throughout Bourdieu's work is the double truth of social existence: the truth of the actor, absorbed in the game, and the truth of the observer, examining the conditions of the game's existence. Both truths are essential — the logic of practice and the logic of theory — but only the sociologist can connect the two.

The sociologist studies how actors reproduce social structure without acknowledging that they are doing precisely that. Hence the double break: the sociologist first breaks from the common sense of the participant to the underlying truth of social structure. But there must also be a second break back to the perspective of the participants to understand how they reproduce the underlying structures that the sociologist has discovered, be it the world of surplus value or symbolic domination. Thus, the logic of practice and the logic of theory are intimately connected, but in a way that is obscure to the participant. Here lies the originality of Bourdieu's game theory of reproduction: how actors secure domination while simultaneously obscuring that domination from themselves.

The game metaphor opens a door to understanding the relation between structure and agency; it allows us to think about social reproduction as simultaneously a process of social transformation; it gives insight into the organization of consent as well as misrecognition. It is based on a methodology that gives weight to both the logic of practice and the logic of theory, posing the question of the relation between the two. It raises the fundamental question of how the social scientist can have a deeper insight into the world than the participant. In short, it demands a theory of reflexivity, a challenge that Bourdieu tackles head on.

Reflexivity — the Superiority of Sociology

Having suggested that Bourdieu does not have anything to offer by way of science, Riley argues that his appeal must lie in the way his social theory resonates with the lived experience and interests of elite academics — the struggle for distinction and the defense of privilege. Another source of his appeal is an ersatz politics that substitutes critical sociology for connection to popular forces. Here, Riley's sociology of knowledge actually converges with Bourdieu's own theory of the production of science, but with a difference. Whereas Riley's sociology of knowledge entirely replaces Bourdieu's theory, Bourdieu's sociology of knowledge is only a part of his scientific theory. Thus, for Bourdieu, a good social science requires knowledge of the context of the production of knowledge, not to relativize and dismiss its knowledge claims (as in Riley) but to improve them. Here Bourdieu is ahead of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim who make little pretense to account for their own theories and their credibility other than as *deus ex machina* or a mirror of wider historical processes.

If we accept the psychological version of symbolic domination, that deep internalization makes it impossible to recognize the world for what it is, then there is no reason to believe that social scientists are more able to escape misrecognition than anyone else. That rules out the very possibility of science. But the sociological version of symbolic domination — the one that Bourdieu³⁹ actually adopts when he describes the scientific field — means we have to study the conditions and games that distinguish the scientist from the layperson. The conditions that allow scientists to produce knowledge lie in their privileged existence, what Bourdieu⁴⁰ calls *skholè*, a world free of the pressures of material necessity that creates the possibility of competition within the scientific field — a field governed by the interest in disinterestedness. One

39 Pierre Bourdieu, "The specificity of the scientific field and the social conditions of the progress of reason," *Social Science Information* 14, no. 6 (1975): 19–47.

40 Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*.

might say, as Riley does echoing Bourdieu, that scientists engage in a struggle for distinction, seeking recognition from one another. In the scientific field, producers are also the consumers, requiring, therefore, the defense of its autonomy against threats from within and without. As Bourdieu relates in *On Television*⁴¹: on the one hand, scientific pretenders and popularizers, doxosophers, usurp the role of scientist from without by producing an imitation science; on the other hand, there is subversion from within by those who seek celebrity status by colluding with those same doxosophers.

Skholè and competition for distinction are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the advance of social science. Unaware of the conditions of the production of their own knowledge, many disciplines suffer from scholastic fallacies — a form of false consciousness. Such practitioners are unaware that the knowledge they produce reflects the social conditions of its authors and not the objects of their science. Thus, according to Bourdieu, the economists with their utilitarian models, anthropologists with their structuralist models, or philosophers with their deliberative models are handicapped by their misrecognition of the conditions of their own production of knowledge. They mistakenly think people are actually utilitarian or deliberative in the way that their models suggest they should be. But sociologists, at least of the Bourdieusian stripe, by virtue of their simultaneous immersion in the world of science and their engagement with the world of the participant, recognize the distinction between their own logic of theory and the participants' logic of practice.

According to Bourdieu,⁴² Marxist intellectuals are especially guilty of committing scholastic fallacies, unreflective about their own position that generates dispositions very different from those of the working class with which they identify. The Marxist intellectualistic disposition leads them to regard the conditions of the working class as unbearable and, thus, to anticipate revolution; whereas, in reality, workers themselves

41 Bourdieu, *On Television* (New York: New Press, 1999 [1996]).

42 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 373–4.

learn to accept those conditions, making a virtue of necessity. So, for Bourdieu it is important that the intellectual-academic not only secure a privileged autonomy but *recognize* that privileged autonomy by engaging with the practice of those not so privileged. Far from being an ersatz politics, Bourdieu offers us a real politics, as real as any academic Marxist; but it is a politics of intellectuals.

Public Sociology — Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power

Bourdieu⁴³ makes no bones about his political project — the forging of an “international of intellectuals” — the organic intellectual of humanity. The interest of intellectuals is to represent their interests as the interests of all, captured in Bourdieu’s idea of the “corporatism of the universal” — a recognition that intellectuals have a particular interest, but it is a particular interest in the universal. Writing of the realpolitik of reason in *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu⁴⁴ argues that our best chance for the advance of universality and for universal access to the conditions of universality is to work through the state. Although the state can be an instrument of capitalist domination, Bourdieu clings to its potential for approaching universality. Its internal logic, whether of its bureaucracies or of the law, incentivizes its incumbents to strive for equality and inclusion. Even though he sees the field of power as dominating representative state organs, he also sees this same field as progressive to the extent that it becomes autonomous and approximates the scientific field of open and equal competition. Here Bourdieu inherits Hegel, and more generally, the optimism of enlightenment thinking.

This is Bourdieu, the traditional intellectual, standing on Mount Olympus with fellow intellectuals, disseminating the truth behind

43 Pierre Bourdieu, “The corporatism of the universal: The role of intellectuals in the modern world,” *Telos* 81 (1989): 99–110; 1996 [1992]; Bourdieu, *Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996 [1992]), 337–48.

44 Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 122–7.

symbolic domination. But Bourdieu also maintained close connections to the dominated. Throughout his life he engaged with the dominated classes: in Algeria, in the Béarn, and in the most interesting of his public interventions, his ambitious interview project, *The Weight of the World*.⁴⁵ Here, he and his colleagues constitute themselves as organic intellectuals in close connection with blue-collar workers, clerical workers, teachers, social workers, and judges, traders, immigrants, and youth. The interviewers are sociologists conversant with the life-worlds of the interviewees. Through extended interactions they become, in Bourdieu's words, the midwives of truth. Whereas in his theoretical writings, the dominated classes suffer from misrecognition, now they are presented as seeing the world with sociological insights. The interviewers (most of them sociologists and including Bourdieu himself) offer a sociological account of the interviews they conducted without recourse to such notions as misrecognition or habitus. Here the Bourdieusian lexicon has evaporated and the respondents' renditions of their lives coincide with the accounts of the sociologists.

Could it be that their lucidity derives from the "Socratic method" of the in-depth interview — an understanding that is the joint product of interviewer and interviewee? That would suggest that symbolic domination is not opaque and thus not of the psychological type. Or is it that the conditions of precarity already in the 1980s led to a very different picture than the one painted in *Distinction*: the middle classes don't exhibit petty bourgeois emulation but an inventive resistance to bureaucratic strictures while the working class is as likely to exhibit self-conscious struggle as passive adaptation. Again, this points to symbolic domination that is situational — the sociology of mystification rather than the psychology of misrecognition.

The Weight of the World may represent a shift in class portraits, but it also coincides with a shift in Bourdieu's own political orientation. It is the beginning of his more open political engagement on the side of the

45 Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World*.

dominated, joining and encouraging strikers, supporting social movements of the unemployed, writing scathing critiques of French socialist governments and neoliberalism. His political salvos in two collections of essays on the tyranny of the market, along with *The Weight of the World* represent a final phase of intellectuals on the road to class power, when intellectuals represent their interests as the interests of all.⁴⁶

These phases in the intellectuals' ascent to power coincide with the phases of Bourdieu's own career. In his early writings on France — *Reproduction* and *Distinction* — he seeks to establish the distinctive place of the sociologist as scientist. Here Bourdieu develops the unique science of sociology — at that time a moribund discipline in France — centering on symbolic domination, the cement that holds society together. As a science competing with other sciences, its status is measured by its *inaccessibility* to all but the initiated.

Once established as the theorist of symbolic domination, sociologists can presume to represent the interests of all intellectuals, defending cultural production in toto. This second phase of intellectuals on the road to class power coincides with Bourdieu's election to an exalted professorship in the Collège de France, allowing him to move from representing a segment of the intellectual stratum to representing the stratum as a whole. From being the vanguard of sociologists, Bourdieu seeks to make sociologists the vanguard of intellectuals as a whole.

The third and final phase, the hegemonic phase, occurs when Bourdieu presents intellectuals as representing the interests of all — a move that calls for a far more sympathetic view of the dominated. He now dignifies them with a rationality corresponding to their subjugation, rather than pejoratively describing them as blinded by habitus, allodoxia and misrecognition, and bereft of cultural capital. Starting with *The Weight of the World*, the last ten years of Bourdieu's life were, indeed, devoted to intellectuals aspiring to power, standing at the head of social

46 Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (New York: New Press, 1998 [1998]), and *Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (New York: New Press, 2003 [2001]).

movements to combat a deepening neoliberalism. As he writes in *On Television*, the intellectual must pay not only an “entry fee” to acquire expertise in science or art that excludes the dilettante but also an “exit duty” — the obligation to speak to and for all. In his later years, Bourdieu did gather around him a group of internationally distinguished intellectuals who defended social justice and human rights.⁴⁷

III. CRITIQUE

Having recuperated Bourdieu’s theory, we come now to the point of critique, an account of its limitations, separating the wheat from the chaff, appropriating what might be incorporated into Marxism, and responding to the challenge it poses.

Misrecognizing Capitalism

Like Riley, I believe that a major flaw in Bourdieu’s oeuvre is his suppression of the concept and reality of capitalism. In his own terms, Bourdieu misrecognizes capitalism, i.e., does not recognize it as such. Thus, when he rails against neoliberalism, as he does in the 1990s until his death, he does not see it as a necessary effect of a particular phase of capitalism, its contradictions and its dynamics. His vision of society is one of differentiated fields that congeal in a hierarchical space, but there is no theory that connects and assembles the fields into a totality — capitalism or any other totality. As Gil Eyal⁴⁸ has pointed out, for all his interest in relations *within* fields Bourdieu has little to say about the relations *among* fields. To be sure, he recognizes the domination of the economic field, but offers no theory of its means of domination or its internal structure.

47 These three phases correspond to Antonio Gramsci’s (1971, 180–2) three phases of class formation.

48 Gil Eyal, “Spaces between Fields” in Philip Gorski, ed., *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 158–82.

There is a second consequence of the misrecognition of capitalism. It is Bourdieu's failure to develop a comparative analysis that would give historical specificity to his concepts, especially symbolic domination. From the beginning, he was skeptical of comparative analysis, preferring homologies, analogies, and commonalities to the explanation of differences.⁴⁹ For example, Bourdieu⁵⁰ would make connections between Kabylia and the Béarn, claiming that his experience in the one influenced his understanding of the other, yet he never made a systematic comparison of these two peasant societies. That might have led him to discover how symbolic domination operates differently in Algeria and France, even distinguishing domination in the colony from that in the metropolis.

Take the question of intellectuals on the road to class power, which comes from the famous work by Konrád and Szelényi.⁵¹ They claimed that in state socialism the dominant class performed the intellectual function of teleological redistributor, that is, the role of the planner who appropriates and then redistributes goods and services. The planners' job is to define the needs of society and how they should be realized — the function of an intellectual. Of course, it is one thing to say planners perform an intellectual function and another to claim that intellectuals, defined by their specialization in the production of ideas and techniques, actually occupy such a dominant position. In the economic reforms of the 1970s across Eastern Europe, Konrád and Szelényi envisioned intellectuals arriving at their destiny, their true place in society.

But that was not to be.⁵² Instead of intellectuals ascending into command positions, the entire order dissolved. The central appropriation

49 See Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Passeron, and Jean-Claude Chamboredon, *The Craft of Sociology: Epistemological Preliminaries* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991 [1968]), Part II.

50 Bourdieu, 2003 [2000] "Participant Objectivation," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9 (2003 [2000]): 281–94.

51 György Konrád and Iván Szelényi, *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

52 See Gil Eyal, Ivan Szelényi, and Eleanor Townsley, *Making Capitalism without*

and redistribution of surplus was overt and therefore assured through some combination of force and legitimation that often followed each other in cyclical fashion. This proved to be a precarious way of sustaining domination — making legitimate claims for socialism encouraged dissent, which only intensified when force was applied.⁵³

The stability of advanced capitalism and the instability of state socialism cannot be attributed to processes of socialization, as this was as intensive and systematic in state socialism as in advanced capitalism. In explaining the difference, we might do better to consider the structure of these two societies and the social games they generate. Advanced capitalism possesses a relatively open and autonomous civil society that effectively absorbs and diverts practices into self-contained institutions (or fields in Bourdieu's terms). Each institution organizes its own distinctive game or games — defined by taken-for-granted assumptions (*illusio*) and guiding principles (*nomos*). If advanced capitalism is distinguished by its civil society, it might follow that symbolic domination is a phenomenon of advanced capitalism, at least in regard to the game-metaphoric conception of social structure. In state socialism there is only a limited civil society and, moreover, one that superimposes a game-like structure defined by the party state. There's no concealing class domination. For Bourdieu, however, symbolic domination is of universal validity, it has no historical limits. It is a general theory of social order without a corresponding particular theory of particular societies. It is unverifiable and unfalsifiable.

Returning to the question of intellectuals, if they are on the road to class power under state socialism, what is their position under capitalism? Szelényi himself argued that, in contrast to state socialism,

Capitalists: The New Ruling Elites in Eastern Europe (New York: Verso Books, 1998). According to these authors it was only with the transition to capitalism that intellectuals finally ascended to power as managers of post-socialism. They describe this process using a Bourdieusian framework of the conversion of different forms of capital. But this, too, turned out to be a temporary aberration.

53 See Michael Burawoy and János Lukács, *The Radiant Past: Ideology and Reality in Hungary's Road to Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

under capitalism where private property rules and markets distribute, intellectuals play a subsidiary role. They hold a contradictory class position, as Erik Wright⁵⁴ once put it, divided in their allegiance between dominant and dominated classes. Once we introduce capitalism as the context for intellectuals, Bourdieu's project takes on an entirely different meaning. An international of intellectuals, seemingly autonomous from and even critical of the capitalist class, becomes an instrument of the reproduction of capitalism through its false universalization, reinforced by its failure to project an alternative beyond capitalism. In failing to give capitalism its due place in history, Bourdieu exaggerates the importance of intellectuals and the state — overlooking the multiple institutions that conspire to reproduce symbolic domination as mystification, starting with the capitalist economy itself but extending to all the institutions of civil society. One might say that in misrecognizing capitalism Bourdieu is committing his own scholastic fallacy, or even, scholastic fantasy.

BURAWOY

The Capitalist University and the Popular Classes

In summary, like Marx, Weber, and Durkheim before him, the genius of Bourdieu lies in his theory of social reproduction, specifically his *theory of symbolic domination* — less the psychology of internalization and more the sociology of games. His theory of symbolic domination raises the question as to how it is that sociology excavates a truth inaccessible to the agents they study, but also more valid than the truth of neighboring disciplines. Here Bourdieu goes beyond the canon, throwing sociology back into the sociologist's face. He develops a *reflexive sociology* — a sociology of the scientific field that is rooted in his theory of symbolic domination. The sociologist works in a competitive field that incentivizes the advance of science, and that develops an interest in disinterestedness. This is the nature of all scientific fields, but

54 Erik Olin Wright, "Intellectuals and the Class Structure of Capitalist Society" in Pat Walker, ed., *Between Labor and Capital* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1978), 191–212.

sociology is special in that it does not commit the scholastic fallacy of mistaking the field of science for the world of the participant, the logic of theory for the logic of practice. Bourdieu asks how it is that everyday practices create a world which conforms to the social theory discovered in the “laboratory.” Theory is incomplete if the sociologist does not understand how the practice of the subjects makes sociology both true and obscure. This is the third distinctive feature of his sociology — *engagement with the world of the participant*.

This is Bourdieu’s science; the corresponding politics is that of intellectuals on the road to class power. It ascends from the narrow corporate interest of the sociologist, to a second level embracing the broader interest of intellectuals, to a third phase in which intellectuals represent the interests of all. This is broadly Bourdieu’s strategy and trajectory. From a Marxist perspective it seems to be an illusory pursuit, ignoring the spontaneous reproduction of capitalism that takes place, above all, in the self-mystifying processes of production for profit as well as in the realm of civil society.

Bourdieu’s challenge to Marxism lies in his intellectualist theory of knowledge — that truth is produced in artistic and scientific fields, each requiring a certain leisured existence, distant from material necessity. A Marxist theory of knowledge, by contrast, claims that truth is ultimately rooted in and tested by the experience of subjugation. Truth is the standpoint of the subaltern, even if it is produced elsewhere. In Antonio Gramsci’s terms, for Bourdieu the common sense of the subaltern is entirely bad sense, whereas for Marxism the common sense of the subaltern contains a kernel of good sense, even if it is also subject to the distortions of ideology. In the Gramscian view, organic intellectuals exist to elaborate the good sense of the subaltern while traditional intellectuals create ideologies that justify and elicit participation in and consent to capitalism. Class struggle becomes a struggle between intellectuals, but on the terrain of subaltern experience. The more autonomous and critical traditional intellectuals appear to be, the more effective their representation of universality, but it is a false

universality as it obscures the fundamental strictures of capitalism.

For Bourdieu, therefore, the elite university is the golden hearth of the intellectual. Riley may be critical of Bourdieu's defense of the university and its autonomy, it being an appeal to "elite academics," but Riley, too, sees the university as somehow outside politics — true politics involves building a connection to popular forces beyond the academy. Is this because truth ultimately resides with those "popular forces"? In which case, he must confront the question of symbolic domination as it applies to those "popular forces." Or is it that the university is the fount of truth to be transmitted to the same popular forces? In which case he must deal with the question of reflexivity, the validity of knowledge produced in the university.

In the past we could speak of the *university in capitalist society*, hemmed in by all sorts of constraints but still a self-governing knowledge workshop, designed to enhance the public good. It could be conceived of as a "subject" with its own agency or an "object" manipulated by outside forces but, at its best, its internal structure was as close to a large-scale socialist cooperative as you'll find under capitalism. Today, however, we must conceive of the university as a set of social relations embedded in the wider society. More and more it is a *capitalist university* whose very structure mimics a capitalist corporation.⁵⁵

As public funding is withdrawn, the university — the world over — becomes a profit center, cutting costs and creating revenues. It cuts costs through a vast array of strategies: from new digital technology that makes possible distance learning, to the expansion of contingent faculty and the steady decline (in numbers and in power) of faculty with security of employment, to an array of outsourcing arrangements,

55 This distinction between "university in capitalist society" and the "capitalist university" harks back to the parallel distinction in the Miliband-Poulantzas state debate. For Miliband the "state in capitalist society" could be deployed in the transition to socialism whereas for Poulantzas the "capitalist state," not being neutral, has to be destroyed and a new political structure installed as necessary for any transition to socialism. In parallel fashion, the "relatively autonomous university" of the past was more congruent with the principles of socialism than the emerging "capitalist university" of today.

whether to janitors or management consultants. On the other hand, it increases revenue by seeking funds from alumni interested in immortality by sponsoring new buildings or athletics, from industries such as pharmaceuticals seeking partnerships based on cheap graduate student research, and, most notably, by increasing student tuition and creating new degree programs that charge extortionate fees. All this is accomplished by an expanding administration bent on the proletarianization of university labor and the degradation of education, all disguised with corporate-speak. As the university becomes less hospitable to Bourdieu's autonomous scientific field, as its capitalist structure becomes transparent, Riley need only step outside his office to join those popular forces that inhabit the classrooms, laboratories, libraries, sports stadiums, and canteens.

In the US and elsewhere, the university is becoming a playground for the political right as well as the political left. The once-dominant liberal consensus is under assault from conservatives who no longer assume the university to be off-limits for their political projects. Small right-wing student cells with outside funding are abetting the invasion of campuses by extremist political forces. We can no longer imagine the university to be outside politics as both Riley and Bourdieu seem to believe — it is fast becoming a capitalist machine and a political battleground.

Defending its autonomy from enemy forces is still important, but increasingly the university is becoming its own terrain of struggle. It is still an arena for the production and reception of ideas, but the process of production has changed — faculty are losing control of their labor and of its products, while students are rapidly becoming indebted and desperate consumers. The class structure of the university is polarizing, and academics have a choice: to collaborate with the administrative class or side with dispossessed students and beleaguered staff.

Structure and superstructure are becoming one. As the university moves from an ivory tower to a key battleground over ideas, the struggle against pro-capitalist ideologies assumes greater urgency and renewed

vigor. The “autonomous” traditional intellectual is being squeezed out of existence, having now to take sides within as well as beyond the capitalist university — the claim of universality appears increasingly bogus. Anyone who examines the conditions of production of knowledge today cannot misrecognize capitalism. Bourdieusians of today must join the Marxist fold, just as Marxists must face symbolic domination in its capitalist incarnations.

A NOTE ON BOURDIEU’S SOCIOLOGY AS A COMBAT SPORT

This paper considers how to approach Bourdieu: ignore, demolish, or absorb. It is instructive to see how Bourdieu approaches his own intellectual foes. The title of Pierre Carles’s 2002 film on Bourdieu — “La sociologie est un sport de combat” — expresses Bourdieu’s often combative approach towards others for which he has achieved some infamy, especially in France.⁵⁶ We can say he pursues some combination of all three strategies — ignore, demolish, or absorb — varying with the academic game he is playing. As he developed a strategic use and nonuse of citations as a sign of recognition or nonrecognition of competitors, combat became part of his academic habitus. Compared to Talcott Parsons or Jürgen Habermas, who build on the shoulders of giants, Bourdieu tends to repress the shoulders on which he stands, so that he appears as the source of his own genius. He is well-known for appropriating the ideas of opponents without recognition. When the original author is well-known, he often turns them into an enemy, distorts their ideas in order to facilitate their demolition and, thereby, rise above them as a superior thinker. This is especially the case with regard to Marxism. Thus, he tries to hide his adoption of Althusserian structuralism — a point made by Riley — either by making no reference

56 The title “Sociology is a Combat Sport” was euphemistically translated into English as “Sociology is a Martial Art,” no doubt to make it more palatable to the more professional orientation of academia in the US.

to the source or virulently attacking Althusser and his followers. Again Bourdieu's symbolic domination parallels hegemony, but he either ignores the parallel or dismisses Gramsci. Yet when it suits him, he cites Gramsci's critique of political parties. This strategy reaches a climax in his dismissal of Simone de Beauvoir. To hide the fact that *Masculine Domination* is a pale imitation of *The Second Sex*, he ignores Beauvoir's work except in a single footnote where he implies she did not possess a single original idea because she was in thrall to the symbolic domination of Sartre. It is ironic that, in a book devoted to exposing the way men silence women, Bourdieu should belittle and dismiss the author of this classic work on feminism. Not only Marxists are victims of this strategy: a similar fate befalls such figures as Robert Michels, Robert Merton, Basil Bernstein, and William Julius Wilson. One has to wonder whether this characteristic combination of appropriation and denunciation is a reaction to his own sense of marginality, manifested in his proclaimed cleft habitus? Or is it the way academic combat is typically played out in France? All this is emphatically not to say that Bourdieu did not have ideas of his own; nor is it to endorse a similar demolition strategy in dealing with his work. It is only to say that Bourdieu garnered some of his influence by carefully choosing whom and how to attack, whom and how to ignore, and, at times, whom and how to endorse. The opportunistic approach to intellectual enemies is carried on by the inheritors of the Bourdieusian mantle. ✎