

Pierre Bourdieu: Sociologist of Dominance and of the Dominated

On the night of Wednesday January 23, 2002, sociology lost one of the living legends of sociological theory, professor at the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales and the Collège de France, Pierre Bourdieu. His death brought to a close four decades of scientific work during which Bourdieu authored or co-authored more than 40 monographs and countless articles and papers. His death also brought an end to the heated disputes, which had flared especially during the 1990s, concerning Bourdieu's opinions, and often also his person. Pierre Bourdieu was a prime example of a sociologist in action, a sociologist not limited to the pure observation and study of social reality but one actively involved in this reality. His interventions were based on his personal and political beliefs, as well as the results and conclusions of expert analyses.

Bourdieu's life is sometimes described as a journey 'from the periphery to the centre' (Šubrt 2000: 129). Born in the rural region of Béarn, he came to Paris to study at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, one of the most prestigious schools in France. He soon became aware of the difficulty of his position – he found himself in the midst of students from more educated families and with a higher social status, whom he later came to call the 'inheritors'. 'Inheritors' take a condescending view of the 'scholars' and make them feel they are somewhere they do not belong. Inspired by this experience, Bourdieu later developed his brilliant analysis of the French education system.

Instead of setting out along the traditional path of an academic, Bourdieu decided to continue his social studies in Algeria, where he embarked on an ethnological study of the Kabyl society. His observations led him to a critique of the ruling Lévi-Straussian approach in anthropology. Under the guidance of Raymond Aron he then turned to the sociological analysis of cultural practices and the education system. He later distanced himself from Aron, who at that time was already the director of the Center for European Sociology at the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, and in 1975 established his own review '*Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*', his own publication collec-

tions ('Le sens commun' at Minuit, then 'Liber' at Seuil), and his own association for political activism ('Raisons d'agir'). In 1982 he became professor at the Collège de France and in 1993 received the CNRS gold medal, an award rarely bestowed on social scientists.

Bourdieu's 'grand theory', which was closely linked to empirical research, strives to answer almost all the key questions that were posed in sociology in the second half of the 20th century. The central motif of his work is the issue of social dominance: Bourdieu shows in what manner social relations are established based on the unequal distribution of economic, political and symbolic power. Related to this is the study of social reproduction, symbolic violence (in particular within the framework of the French education system), cultural practices, social classes and their strategies, and many other sociological issues.

In his analysis of power and dominance, Bourdieu places critical emphasis on the mechanism of legitimation. Actors involved in one activity clash in a struggle for scarce holdings in an imaginary space, which Bourdieu calls the 'social field', where the actors strive for a dominant position.

He says that the objective is not only to enforce obedience from other individuals or groups, or the acquisition and preservation of a dominant position, but also an attempt to redefine the core of the struggle, i.e. the values on which the legitimacy of dominance is based. More precisely, the struggle is between two segments of the ruling class, one of which has superior economic power and the other superior intellectual power; these two classes clash over the issue of whether greater value will be attributed to economic or to cultural capital. The violence through which power is exercised is not physical in nature but symbolic, invisible to the eyes of the dominated who often themselves actively participate in their own subjugation (Bourdieu 1980: 209-231).

In his 1998 work titled *La domination masculine*, Bourdieu points to the fact that there is a certain type of dominance which may be understood as a model or archetype of all other types: that of men over women. This dominance combines with other types of dominance and rein-

forces them. Taking this type of dominance as an example, it is possible to show sociologically the workings of biologisation and the incorporation of this dominance, whereby the appearance of the naturalness of such dominance is constructed. "The power of the masculine order is clear from the fact that it does not need any justification: the androcentric perception of the world is imposed as neutral and does not require any legitimizing discourses" (Bourdieu 1998:15). This dominance also makes it clear how symbolic violence gradually forces the dominated to accept their subjugation. Dominance is related to forgetting the past, giving it the appearance of a universal truth - thus inequality becomes permanent and natural. It becomes embedded in the spirit and in the body, and it continually reinforces itself.

Bourdieu defines social relations as a struggle between actors, which leads to an accumulation of a certain type of capital; in this struggle, individual actors are motivated by unconscious strategies of profit maximisation. With respect to the economic vocabulary preferred by Bourdieu, the question arises as to what is the role of Marx's theory in Bourdieu's thought. Bourdieu himself does not reject the 'Marxist' label. However, he surpasses Marx in that he attempts to apply the logic of economy to symbolic property: the power of one over the other does not necessarily have to be mediated through wealth or work, as Marx believed, but is often exercised in a different manner - for example, by imposing certain types of concept and terminology schemes. Correspondingly, Bourdieu defines capital differently than Marx. At first Bourdieu identified only economic capital and symbolic capital; later, he reached the conclusion that there were as many types of capital as there were 'fields' (Bourdieu 1980:191-207), where actors clash in a struggle for scarce holdings and legitimacy.

It is precisely Bourdieu's thesis on the conversion of types of capital that penetrated the world of sociology most and which inspired contemporary Czech sociology - it may be used to explain the change from a socialist to a capitalist society. Bourdieu studied the issue of the re-conversion of types of capital, especially in connection with the analysis of social changes, which have resulted in the transfer of impor-

tance from economic capital to cultural and educational capital. Bourdieu's former student, François de Singly, began with the conclusion Bourdieu reached while studying the Kabyl society and the agricultural society in Béarn (Bourdieu 1980: 249-333): in all societies the family fulfills its basic function, which is the transfer of capital from one generation to another with the goal of preserving or advancing the position of the family as a whole. Thus, the family participates in social reproduction. During the course of history, this function of the family has not changed; what has changed is the character of the transferred capital. In view of the fact that contemporary societies are no longer as dependent on land and inherited property, they strive to convert economic capital into other types of capital, particularly educational capital (De Singly 1993:21-26).

With respect to the social transformation at the beginning of the 1990s, a different type of re-conversion of capital was involved. Bourdieu, in fact, did not pay much attention to the analysis of the situation in Eastern European post-socialist countries, and he only mentioned it briefly in a lecture presented on October 25, 1989 in East Berlin (Bourdieu 1998). He questioned whether his theory of capital and social classes may also be used for an analysis of Eastern Germany, and pointed to the main difference between the Western capitalist and Soviet socialist regimes. This difference lies in the fact that here "economic capital - private ownership of production tools - was *officially* (and to a large extent also in reality) outside the game". This led to the fact that other types of capital grew in importance: cultural capital, and, in particular, 'the specific political capital of the Soviet type' which instituted a new type of differentiation and in some ways enabled those who exercised it to privately own assets and public services. "The social capital of the political type, acquired through trade unions and party apparatuses and handed over through a network of family relations, leads to the creation of real political dynasties", says Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1994:33-34).

According to Ivo Možný's essay from *Why So Easily...* (Možný 1991), in some ways Czech society functioned as a pre-capitalist society during the communist regime. Just as in the Kabyl society, money played a negligible role, the state

was weak, laws did not apply to everyone equally, and social position was based on ritualised prestige, i.e. symbolic capital. To a large extent everyday life was ritualised and the social position of the parties involved was continually confirmed through rituals. Relationships of dominance had to be continually produced through and with the help of interactions between individuals. This system, archaic and too expensive, could no longer fulfill its basic function and sooner or later a change had to occur. The members of the ruling class were facing the problem of how to retain their social and economic position during the transition period, i.e. how to convert their political and social capital into capital whose value was less unstable – economic capital. According to Možný, this demanded a renewal of the institution of private property and in particular an increased transparency of ownership relationships with the objective of making these relationships controllable. It was also necessary to change the mode of domination, which involved a transfer from symbolic dominance to subtle economic dominance, also in the interest of the further self-reproduction of the system (Možný 1991:61-68).

In their book, *La grande conversion*, Georges Mink and Jean-Charles Szurek set out from Bourdieu's concept of capital conversion (Mink and Szurek 1999). They analysed the process whereby members of the Polish, Czechoslovak and Hungarian communist *nomenklatura* managed, in the course of the social transformation after 1989, to ensure and retain high political and economic positions, i.e. they managed to carry out a successful political and economic conversion and finally the conversion of historical memory – to create a new acceptable interpretation of their own communist past.

It remains a fact that Bourdieu's primary interest is not the analysis of social change. The central theme of his sociology is social reproduction. Bourdieu's political activity clearly shows that the analysis of reproduction mechanisms in a society does not necessarily lead to the resignation of any attempt to change the system. On the contrary, theory should help propose and implement forms of social organisation and activity which would be capable of shaking up the institutions that participate in the reproduction of the system (Bourdieu 2000a: 7-8). Bourdieu's theoretical system allows us to understand and ex-

plain various sociological problems and issues – from social stratification, through the education system, to the analysis of artistic production. "Bourdieu's work, which has won international acclaim and which warrants international discussion, marked the birth of a critical sociological school, an academic involvement which has recently been accompanied with growing involvement in social movements", wrote *Le Monde* in reaction to Bourdieu's death (Ferenczi, 2002).

Testimony to the significance of the 'Bourdieu phenomenon' in France may also be found in the fact that French cinemas – in reaction to Bourdieu's death – began showing the documentary film dedicated to his sociology, *Sociologie comme un sport de combat*, during prime showtimes. The strongest moments of the film are those that show Bourdieu as a politically involved intellectual who strives to contribute to alleviating the 'misery of the world' with his ideas. His public activities often made the French forget that Bourdieu, pejoratively dubbed the new 'guru' of the radical left, was also a sociologist and the author of many works, in which he offered a dazzling and well-grounded analysis of the operations of society. Bourdieu's star first came to prominence in the media and the political scene during the 1995 strikes. After that he took part in many public debates and his popularity soared. His polemic essays as well as those of his disciples were met with great acclaim (e.g. *Sur la télévision* or *Contre-feux*).

The significance of Bourdieu's legacy is indisputable. The questions he asked are likely to remain topical for all who consider themselves intellectuals, regardless of how they may answer these questions: "I think that the efforts to launch a European social movement are today still quite uncertain. Which leads me to the following question: what can we, intellectuals, do to contribute to this movement, which seems necessary to me in view of the fact that – contrary to the neo-liberal conviction – all social gains have been achieved through struggles and clashes. If we want to have a 'social Europe', as is often said, we have to have a European social movement. But I think – I have this feeling – that intellectuals bear the basic responsibility for creating such a movement because the power of the dominant group is not only economic but also intellectual, and depends on faith and per-

suasion. And therefore I believe that it is necessary to 'open one's mouth' and try to restore utopia (...)” (*Pierre Bourdieu et Günter Grass - la tradition „d'ouvrir sa queue”, 1999*).

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From Economic Planning to 'Historical Social Science': Professor Jaroslav Krejčí at 85

Jaroslav Krejčí, professor emeritus at Lancaster University, Great Britain, and director of the Centre for Research into Socio-Cultural Pluralism of the Academy of Sciences in Prague, has recently - in full health, vitality and scientific activitiveness - reached the age of 85. He studied law and economics in Prague and was one among those who prepared the first plans of economic development of the Czechoslovak Repub-

lic after World War II. His orientation toward the modern schools in economy was the most important grounds for his imprisonment by the communist régime in the 1950s. After his release at the beginning of the 1960s he quite unexpectedly wrote two interesting studies devoted to the sociological theory of revolutions, which were published in the Czech Sociological Journal. After the defeat of the Prague Spring through Soviet intervention, he withdrew into exile and spent decades in research and teaching at Lancaster University. During this time and over the course of the 1990s, when he worked by turns in Great Britain and the Czech Lands, he continued along with other activities in sociological research and publishing. In the early 1960s he wrote a book on social stratification in Czechoslovakia, in the early 1970s he wrote another analysing social structure in divided Germany. He was also the author of a paper on sociology and the future (in which he invokes the spirit of the complexity and synthesisism of the work of J. M. Keynes), and another on Czech elites. He also co-operated on several projects with Czech sociologists, and on a book about Czechoslovakia 1919-1992 as a laboratory of social change. This is the reason why this jubilee year is being commemorated not only by Czech economists but also by the sociological community.

During the past decade of his scientific work, professor Krejčí wrote a series of books and papers devoted to the topics of great revolutions compared, societies in global perspective, Asian civilisations, the human predicament, human rights and responsibilities, economic developments and ethno-politics in the Czech lands and Slovakia, and some studies devoted to the methodology of the social and human sciences.

An as yet incomplete overview of Krejčí's writings characterises him first as an efficient scholar, determined under any circumstances to continue work begun with only one end in sight: to enrich the available knowledge concerning human society, with special regard to his country of origin. It is also clear that he is a bright thinker, capable of transferring theoretical and methodological knowledge and skills from one scientific branch and specialisation to others. Partly compelled by the hard conditions of his life, but mainly owing to his inclination towards polyhistorism and to the abilities mentioned