

I

PIERRE BOURDIEU: THEORY AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

PJER BURDIJE: TEORIJA I JAVNI ANGAŽMAN

INTRODUCTION

Ivica Mladenović and Zona Zarić

PIERRE BOURDIEU: THEORY AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

This topic was inspired by the international conference “Horizons of Engagement: Eternalizing Bourdieu” that took place at The Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory of The University of Belgrade, on December 22nd-23rd 2020, on the occasion of the ninetieth anniversary since the birth of the world’s most cited sociologist – Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002). The aim of this conference was to familiarise the domestic and regional audiences with the work of Pierre Bourdieu, by presenting his academic work alongside his public engagement. We dedicate this special topic to Bourdieu, in order to not only better understand how he became a leading intellectual – after having focused in his early years on following a professional career as a social scientist – but also to fully grasp the enduring political significance of his oeuvre and public engagement, as well as his understanding of the public roles of intellectuals. The three articles in this volume were chosen based on the rigour and depth in which they engage with some of the most prominent and applicable parts of Bourdieu’s work; and the round table discussion because it brought about a lively debate with distinguished guests, familiar with Bourdieu’s engagement in the public sphere, as well as the struggles and ethical dilemmas of the time.

Pierre Bourdieu was a French sociologist, born in 1930 in Denguin, a small rural town in southwestern France. He was educated in Pau and then in Paris, where he integrated the philosophy department of the prestigious *École normale supérieure* in 1951. He finished his studies in 1954. Before being called up for military service in Algeria, he worked as a high school teacher in Moulins. From 1958 to 1960, he worked as Assistant Professor at the *Faculty of Letters* in Algiers where he made a turn from philosophy to sociology. It was during this period that he wrote his first book: *The Sociology of Algeria*. Upon his return to Paris, Bourdieu became Assistant Professor at the *Sorbonne*, then a lecturer at the *Faculty of Letters* in Lille. In 1962, he became the Secretary General of the *Centre de Sociologie Européenne*, one of whose founders was Raymond Aron. In

1964, he became director of studies at the EHESS, and in 1968, he launched the Centre de sociologie de l'éducation et de la culture, which he directed until 1985.

His scientific prestige reached its peak in 1981 when he was appointed Professor of Sociology at the *Collège de France* (one of the highest honors in the French higher education system). By then he had distinguished himself by his editorial activity : in 1964 he launched the collection *Le sens commun* (published by *Les éditions de Minuit*), the journal *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* in 1975, and in 1992 the collection *Raison d'agir* (published by *Le Seuil*). In addition to his gold medal from the CNRS, he also received numerous international distinctions: the Huxley Medal, awarded by the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland; honorary doctorates from : the University of Berlin, the Goethe University in Frankfurt, and the University of Athens; and membership in the European Academy and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. However, the greatest indicator of the scope of Bourdieu's influence is the fact that he is the world's most cited sociologist, ahead of Émile Durkheim and the world's second most cited author in the social sciences and humanities, after Michel Foucault and ahead of Jacques Derrida. As Loïc Wacquant pointed out: "Bourdieu became a name for a collective research endeavour that transcends the borders of states and disciplines".

Pierre Bourdieu's conception of sociology is probably best embodied in the following statement: *sociology is a combat sport*. This is because at the heart of his major critiques lies a systemic critique of the main determinants of the established order: colonialism in *The Sociology of Algeria*, the school system in *The Inheritors*, the aristocratic pretensions of the ruling class in *Distinction*, and the state as an instrument of reproduction of the dominant groups in *The State Nobility*. In his vision, telling the truth about society becomes the issue of social and political struggle. Finally, with his rare direct "escapes" into politics (open support for Coluche in the 1981 presidential elections, his presidency of the commission that determined the content of educational programs during the Mitterrand era 1989-1990, the letter to the French government against the Gulf War in 1990, etc.), it is with the publication of the book *Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* in 1993 – where he pleads for "another way of running the country" – that Pierre Bourdieu becomes one of the most committed intellectuals in France. His support for the strikers and demonstrations against the "Juppé Plan" in 1995, his support for the unemployed who organized the blockade of the *École normale supérieure* two years later, his support for Algerian intellectuals, and for European social movements, are but a few of the many symbolic and political struggles of Pierre Bourdieu, that have earned him the status of intellectual enemy number one, among the most tenacious defenders of the neoliberal system in the French intellectual field. He expressed his political vision of the left in the text entitled "For the left of the left" (*Pour une gauche de gauche*) (*Le Monde*, 8 april 1998). In 1996, he launched a collection of short books of political intervention, the first of which, his own, *On Television and Journalism*, criticizes media intellectuals, "fast thinkers" of the "disposable thought".

In line with *sociology as a combat sport*, we have envisioned this special topic as a selection of articles on the concepts and thoughts at the center of Bourdieu's work, capable of responding or at least of helping us better understand the world around us, even today. Nowadays, in an age in which the perfusion and confusion of information and of knowledge deepens, the very making sense of the social world has become extremely difficult, adding to the complexity of objective informing and forming of opinions, and thus public position taking.

The first article by Marc Crépon – the former head of the philosophy department of the very same École normale supérieure that Bourdieu attended – deals with the erroneous dichotomy between “democratic reason” and “raging passions”, and the demo-phobia that often derives from it, in an attempt to give voice to all those who do not have the right to public space – one of Bourdieu's main preoccupations ever since the publication of the *Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* in 1993. Reflecting on the crisis of political reason through the analysis of demagogic rhetoric, embodied by the elites who claim to recognize themselves in its values and principles, and yet are impermeable to the “conditions of non-existence” in which a considerable part of the population lives. Crépon makes a compelling case for a crisis of political reason, through a nuanced elaboration of a political discourse that has lost touch with “all the misery of the world”, thus pointing out to a new age of inequality.

Further developing the emphasis on the importance of discourse in social life, the second article, written by Miloš Jovanović, compares Pierre Bourdieu's sociological approach with those of Thomas Luckmann and Peter Berger. These approaches are brought together in the article by their intention of overcoming the gap between “objectivism” and “subjectivism” in social theory, as well as their critique of the relativistic tendencies of postmodernism. The author then goes on to elaborate the deepening thematization of the body as a locus of social influences, a topic central to Bourdieu's oeuvre through the notion of incorporation – the pivoting point of theory as well as the practical core of the habitus. The body being the pre-reflexive organ *par excellence*, as well as the locus of action, in which the “interiorisation of exteriority, and the externalisation of interiority” (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*) operate, provides probably the most radical of all examples in Bourdieu's oeuvre, of the many modes of domination and their endurance, analyzing the ways in which it is used, transformed and transfigured by the social world.

The third article by Inga Tomić Koludrović and Mirko Petrić discusses the usefulness of using a bourdieusian framework – by applying the notion of social capital in the study of South East European societies, based on data from projects on survival strategies of individuals and households – in theorizing the modernisation of gender relations. Bourdieu describes the strength, grip and endurance of symbolic power in its inscription in bodies in the form of dispositions that are constitutive of the habitus. Thus the question of gender arises – even though not explicitly theorized by Bourdieu – and offers a novel and captivating lense for the analysis of Bourdieu's main interrogation on

the persistence of domination through often invisible, symbolic power. Thus, establishing and publicly announcing the reality of the social world becomes, in Bourdieu's vision, and our own, the main stake of social struggles. Precisely because of that, he criticises the artificial separation between scientific work that produces knowledge and intellectual engagement that introduces that knowledge into the public sphere. This positioning, coupled with the American translation of *Distinction* by Harvard University Press in 1984, is how Pierre Bourdieu acquired international stardom as one of the most relevant thinkers of the social world, a claim this topic aims to demonstrate is just as relevant today, if not moreso.

Thus, the final, closing article of this special topic, recaps an enriching round table discussion with our distinguished guests: Gisèle Sapiro, Philip Golub, Frédéric Lebaron and Franck Poupeau, as it introduces the reader to Bourdieu's public engagement through direct and enticing recollections of those who have closely collaborated with him over the years, or have been influenced and inspired by his work. Using the tools of empirical sociology, and bringing up phenomena which are not easily understood, this article aims to provide more clarity to those who actually need to use these concepts from the social sciences to be able to own their own lives and become self-determining actors. Just as Bourdieu always approached the "hot topics" of the time, and current events as a *specific intellectual* – but also as a *collective intellectual*, through collaborations and public engagements with like-minded individuals – putting his symbolic capital at the service of others and political causes, thus practicing science as a "work in progress" rather than "a ready-made set of concepts".