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# THE IMPORTANCE OF PIERRE BOURDIEU TODAY. ON CONSENT TO MISERY

**ABSTRACT**
This article reflects on the crisis of political reason in this heyday of populistic rhetoric, proposing to move beyond the erroneous dichotomy between "democratic reason" and "raging passions," and the demo-phobia that often derives from it. We propose instead to follow Bourdieu's footsteps in bringing our attention to the forms of impermeability that fracture our contemporary political and social life, establishing the conditions of possibility of the reasonable and the unreasonable. What marks contemporary political passions as particularly dangerous is their impermeability to the lessons of our historical past, to the moral condemnation of the political instrumentalization of difference and to the sacred character of fundamental principles. This hermeneutical gap, however, is later explained by a more fundamental analysis of the problem of contemporary impermeability, one which operates as a reversal of the dichotomy between political reason and passion. It is no longer the electorate, seduced by the sirens of populism, which is impermeable to the voice of political reason; it is, instead, this very reason, embodied by the elites who claim to recognize themselves in its values and principles, which has become impermeable to the "conditions of non-existence" in which a considerable part of the population lives. If there is a problem of contemporary impermeability, or imperturbability, it is that of a political discourse that has lost touch with "all the misery of the world".

**KEYWORDS**
Pierre Bourdieu, consent, democratic reason, raging of passions, contemporary impermeability, populism

*To my students, with gratitude*

## I

We wanted to regard the elections that brought to power charismatic populist, reactionary, sexist and xenophobic leaders all around the world as an accident of history, a fit of bad temper or an outbreak of fever. We wanted to believe that this was a moment of bewilderment of angry peoples, disappointed in politics, and that the first steps of these leaders in violating the principles and

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values of democracy would soon bring the voters back to "reason". We imagined that, in spite of everything, there existed a consensus on democratic values and principles, a consensus stronger than negative passions and constitutive of a shared heritage; a consensus strong enough to reconstitute, if not impose, a symbolic barrier against the questioning of these principles, or their destruction. This consensus had certainly given way once, but we thought it deeply rooted in the spirit and democratic culture of men and women who were not prepared to give it up permanently. We were mistaking our desires for actual reality. In Europe or the United States alike, the infatuation of a large fringe of the electorate for the populist rhetoric of these vehement and often caricatural leaders – the very ones whose gestures, language, and violence offend the intellectual, cultivated, and comfortably installed elites – seems to be confirmed with each new election.

The recent American presidential election almost gave us another confirmation. For months, a landslide victory for the Democratic candidate had been anticipated, which the same elites had been waiting for as a return to normality. This did not happen. Not only was the democratic success hard-won, but its very conditions, namely the suspicions of fraud and the contestation of the result, confirmed the magnitude of people's distrust in the institutions, in the State administration and in the media. The very image of the democratic process was weakened when the imperative to "count every vote", because "the choice of each individual is equally important", was no longer agreed upon. To refuse such a count, in a helpless attempt to forge a victory for Trump, meant not only turning one's back on that basic form of political decency which is based on the acceptance of alternation; it meant, most importantly, turning a partisan and perverse invocation of democratic rules into the springboard for their destruction. Now that the confidence required by the democratic process in order to assure a peaceful transition was compromised, one could foresee that uncontrolled manifestations of violence would ensue.

This mistrust was not insignificant. It confirmed a gap. Suddenly, it reminded us of how fragile "democratic reason" is when confronted with the "rage of negative passions" that fracture society, while at the same time distancing it from the principles that are supposed to ensure its unity and coherence. It attested to the reality of a country so fractured that eventually the two camps no longer speak the same language, becoming irreconcilable as words have lost their common meaning and nothing can be agreed upon. The words "freedom", "equality", "democracy" no longer convey a shared meaning, if they ever did. Paradoxically, it became possible to use these words to justify and endorse their historical antonyms: discrimination, inequality, injustice. This was not surprising. Language is a weapon that few governments and political leaders have the wisdom to mobilize without creating disorder and confusion, to capture the attention of voters or discredit their opponents. With populism, however, a new threshold is crossed with the deliberate use of a vulgar language that does not shy away from provocation, choosing to cut itself off from the most elementary rules of democratic decency. The most sacred words of

language, bearers of values that one would expect to be commonly shared, find themselves drowned, overused, diverted from their meaning, caught in the net of passions, and instrumentalized by part of the elite to trick people into espousing causes that go to their own detriment.

There is no doubt that hatred, resentment, envy, and revenge are at work in populist rhetoric. However, are we deluding ourselves again in thinking of the gap as an opposition between "democratic reason" and "raging of passions"? Are we not, once again, demonstrating bad faith and blindness by belittling the "vox populi," as the elites are always inclined to do when it disturbs their frames of thought and linguistic codes? Let us remark on three traits of impermeability which these negative political passions display throughout the world. First of all, they are impervious to the warnings of history against the disastrous effects of any renunciation of fundamental rights and freedoms. Secondly, they are impermeable to the commonly accepted condemnation of all political instrumentalization of differences and of their phobias (homophobia, xenophobia, islamophobia, etc.). Finally, they are impermeable to the sacrosanct character of fundamental principles such as the separation of powers, the equality of rights, the right of asylum, academic freedom, etc.

However, one must be careful not to misinterpret this impermeability, which can be understood in two ways. The first is to put it down to ignorance and the weight of affects. It amounts to thinking that once voters are seduced by the radicalism of populist discourse, if not its extremism or even fanaticism, their attachment to fundamental rights and freedoms can no longer shepherd their political choices. This somewhat arrogant view postulates that voters, glued to the screens that capture their attention and their emotions, prioritize the self-interested and partisan mimicry of their "passions" over any other consideration. What matters to such an electorate, so the argument goes, is neither the truth and correctness of the analyses offered by the political leaders who demand their votes, nor their fidelity to the principles and values of democracy.

What matters to such voters is the skill with which politicians declare themselves in unison with voters' emotions, persuading them that they feel, live and think things as they do — reaching out to their desires. This way of representing the vox populi, which I once called "demophobia" (Crépon 2012a) produces a pejorative image of the people in order to govern them without consent or consultation. Demo-phobia is defined by two features. On the one hand, it institutes and systematizes the discrediting of any opinion that expresses mistrust, discontent, or even criticism of institutions. It thereby denies any power to the people by performing a perverse reversal of the legitimacy of democratic suffrage. On the other hand, it establishes a hierarchy of opinions, differentiating between the informed, educated and competent, and the captive and manipulated, or even the idiosyncratic, instinctive and impulsive.

The second way of understanding impermeability discredits this (Nietzschean and Platonic) demo-phobia. It turns it on its head, switching subject and object. In this second interpretation of the impermeability of political passions, it is no longer the electorate which is seduced by the sirens of populism and

impermeable to the voice of "political reason"; it is, instead, this very "reason", embodied by those who claim to recognize themselves in its values and principles, which has become impermeable. But impermeable to what? This is the main question that I will try to address.

If we are to speak of impermeability, we should do so with regards to the "conditions of non-existence" in which a considerable part of the population lives without any form of social recognition. I will follow in Bourdieu's footsteps to show this claim. If there is a problem of contemporary impermeability, or imperturbability, it pertains to a political discourse that has lost touch with "all the misery of the world" (Bourdieu 1993), to quote the title of a book Bourdieu wrote in 1993, which should have alarmed us while there was still time. The category of *misery* refers to those who, struggling to make ends meet, perceive themselves as the vanquished of history, accompanied by the permanent feeling that their sufferings are ignored, and their claims never heard. "Political reason", to which they are asked to subscribe – keeping silent, letting others decide for them with patience and confidence, waiting for better days – no longer speaks to them, as it is built upon their erasure. To use Foucault's term, not only "political reason" makes of their sufferings "a mute remnant of politics", but, even more violently, turns them into the blind spot of political analyses and calculations, a collateral damage of economic development at a time of globalization, a fatality of history. This language no longer speaks to them because it has remained for too long impermeable to their needs and expectations.

## II

Bourdieu's reflections are therefore about "misery" and ignorance thereof: what we neither knew nor wanted to see, a fracture, if not a cut, which has for too long been considered incidental and inconsequential. A large part of the intellectual elites, those called by Bourdieu the "heirs", are confronted with the success of populism, with its verbal and physical violence, with racism, sexism, chauvinism, xenophobia and ultranationalism. With the notable exception of those who feed this vehemence with ambiguous statements and inflammatory speeches, the heirs do not understand what is happening, no matter their education, knowledge and culture.

They are heirs to this culture and the codes it has adopted, the languages it speaks, and they are sure to feel the impotence of their heritage to stop the inexorable rise of an infatuation made of false promises and bad solutions, which they know to have never contributed anything but a surplus of misfortune and misery to human society. They repeat this to no avail. Is their voice less booming than in the past? The authority attached to their knowledge and titles is no longer recognized, if not in a very partial way and by those who solicit their complicit expertise, which is part of what marks their separation from the rest of the population. Is it "the people" who have turned away from them? Or should it be said, on the contrary, that today the elites are paying

for the forgotten and repressed truth of their condition, namely their own indifference to the misfortune of men?

This is the question that leads us, today more than ever, in Bourdieu's footsteps. I wonder whether the elites could be accused of what Bourdieu called "an excess of confidence in the powers of discourse", and because of a lack of timely assessment of their impermeability they find themselves brutally exposed to doubts about the capacity of their work to change the course of the world – even a little! Is it for this reason that they show themselves, once again, powerless to prevent the worst from happening, wherever it is likely to happen, starting with the proliferation of authoritarian regimes, with all their impacts on the management of migratory, health, social, environmental, and climatic disasters?

Everything becomes unstoppable and their discourses flounder against the vanity of their effects; it is an understatement to say that this results in the kind of melancholy of history that usually accompanies the disillusionment of the powers of the mind. It would be wrong to reduce it to wounded pride. This would disregard the nihilism that lies in wait and consents to the worst with this simple utterance: what's the point! There is nothing we can do about it! All that can be said and done to analyze, criticize and warn against the evil that is brewing and try to prevent it will not change the course of history. It carries too little weight to counter the seductive power of verbal outrages and extreme measures, of the murderous adventurism (actually very organized) of a charismatic leader and his servants who do not care.

To abandon oneself to this melancholy, according to which the destiny of the intellectual elite would be to see catastrophes arrive inexorably, without having the slightest chance of avoiding them, is nevertheless to miss the point, which is not so much about the limits and powers of thought as about the conditions of its practice. If we consider our analysis of demo-phobia and of the reversal of impermeability, this amounts to saying that the analysis of populisms should not focus exclusively on the permeability of hearts and minds to the extreme theses conveyed by populist ideologies, but on the impermeability of the elites to the sense of abandonment, distress, helplessness and misery of those they have cut off themselves from, whom they do not see and do not hear except from afar. This amounts to questioning the resulting complicity, which I will call "consent to misery", as I have elsewhere spoken of "murderous consent" (Crépon 2012b).

The critique of scholarly reason that the *Meditations pascaliennes* deploy proves decisive here. Mocking the pretension of some intellectuals to experience revolutions in the order of words as radical revolutions in the order of things, Bourdieu invites them to pay greater attention to the course of the world and to be more humble: "Intellectual powers", he writes, "are most efficacious when they are exercised in the same direction as the immanent tendencies of the social world, at which time they indubitably redouble, through omission or compromise, the effects of the forces of the world, which are also expressed through them". (Bourdieu 2000: 3)

## III

Let us stop and think about the gulf that separates the elites (cultivated, educated in prestigious schools and universities) from this poor, vulnerable and disillusioned fringe of the population, which, at the very least, no longer gives them the credit of reason and truth, because they don't expect anything good from them! Let us take seriously an observation that is easy to make, in Europe, Brazil, the United States and all over the world: knowledge and information technologies have long ago dethroned all forms of authority that had arrogated to themselves the power to instruct and enlighten... by inviting the vanquished of history to be patient! To understand this fracture – and this is Bourdieu's lesson – we should start afresh from our *involvement* in the world, inasmuch as it *implicitly* determines the limits of what we take the *trouble* to see and hear, the constitution within us of the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, according to which we decide what revolts us and moves us to action because we are determined to reject it.

Considering the failings, the bankruptcy, the very injustice of this partiality, we can no longer act as if we were not dependent on a collective history that has produced the categories of thought with which we apprehend the world and society, in its fractured diversity. By the same token, we cannot act independently of an individual history that has created the conditions of family, society, and schooling according to which we have appropriated those same categories of thought, while others were immediately deprived of any possible appropriation of this epistemic order.

The meaning and value we give to words, in which our perception and apprehension of the world is constructed, are themselves dependent on this double history. Against the illusion of a transparency of consciousness to itself, we must admit that this apprehension is opaquer than we are ready to acknowledge, and that being partial (in all senses of the term) is at the same time problematic. This partiality, on which I insist, is the price to pay for the implicitness that Bourdieu points out. "It is because we are implicated in the world that there is implicit content in what we think and say about it" (ibid.: 9). What is he talking about? What exactly is "implicit"? I will argue that the *implicit* determines and masks everything that may be partisan (and therefore truncated, forgetful, and ignorant) in our perception and condemnation of violence in the world – that is to say on our doorstep, in subway corridors, in suburbs and underprivileged countryside's. The *implicitness* of our condition and of our history thus offers a key to grasping not only the nature and origin, but also the configuration and extent of the "consents to misery" that define us. Amongst such forms of consent to misery, I will specifically focus on one that not only has little concern for the misfortune of faraway people, but also has little regard or compassion for those nearby.

We will not recall the conditions of entry into the academic milieu that Bourdieu analyzed in detail, except to mention that they remain, even today, the common denominator of all access to positions of power in companies

and administrations, as well as in higher education. We will not dwell on how such conditions are constitutive of the habitus shared by those who have this same heritage, whose gradual, progressive, unnoticed incorporation has ended up being second nature to them. What will be emphasized, however, is the way in which the resulting "scholarly disposition", the conditions of existence that define it, the appropriation of the codes that guarantee it, translate into a "withdrawal from the world".

Bourdieu's reflections are a quarter of a century old, and it is not clear that a new analysis of the conditions of existence and the so-called "security" of those who embark on the scholarly path should not, on the contrary, prompt us to measure how they have deteriorated considerably over the years. The situation of those who aspire to enter the scholarly world, who take the first step, has become noticeably precarious, and economic and social necessities have long since painfully caught up with them. The following quote would – thus – require some added nuance: "While the suspension of economic or social necessity is what allows the emergence of autonomous fields, 'orders' (in Pascal's sense) which know and recognize only their specific law, it is also what, in the absence of special vigilance, threatens to confine scholastic thought within the limits of ignored or repressed presuppositions, implied in the withdrawal from the world" (ibid.: 15).

This "suspension" does not mean that the scholarly world escapes economic hardship and remains immune to impoverishment, but that it is cut off from the "world of production", which is undoubtedly, as Bourdieu points out, "liberatory break and a disconnection", but contains at the same time "a potentially crippling separation" (ibid.: 15). Who would deny this today, when all over the world entire sectors of the economy are weakened by the succession of confinements imposed by the pandemic, thousands of businesses and shops threaten to close and hundreds of thousands of workers find themselves unemployed? At the same time, it must be admitted that even if the scholarly universes are affected in their operating conditions, in their credits and in their availability to future generations, they are not directly impacted with regards to the material conditions of existence of those who already belong to them.

Let us pause at this "withdrawal from the world" and at the "vigilance" it calls for! What is the point of being vigilant so as not to remain withdrawn from the world? I will argue that this withdrawal no longer allows us to pay due attention to the multiple forms of domination that structure and divide society (between classes, races, genders), or more generally to manifestations of violence, forms of social exclusion, deprivation, and frustration, which end up being part of a landscape that we presume to know, disregarding its complexity and diversity. Negligent, forgetful, if not indifferent, we no longer take the trouble to make visible and audible to ourselves the multiple sufferings such a withdrawal glosses over.

Let's go further! This habituation is essentially due to what I called elsewhere "the sedimentation of the unacceptable" (Crépon 2018), the insidious assimilation of ways of saying that justify ways of doing things. Ways of speaking

(about mass unemployment, precariousness, security, foreigners etc.) become second nature. Fashioned out of those false evidences and abusive oversimplifications, which Bourdieu always mistrusted and held responsible for our complacent blindness, these ways of speaking draw a screen between us and others; they become part of the world as a reason for tolerating human misfortune.

## IV

To take the implicit into account is above all to become aware of a privilege which, by definition, is very far from universal. It is also to track down the discourses and the ideology which have no other effect than to mask the profound inequalities (of access to language, of mastery of codes, of rhetorical skill) that such distinctions cover. The result should be a princely humility that Bourdieu recalls in these terms: "Awareness of this privilege forbids one to consign to inhumanity or 'barbarism' those who, because they do not have this advantage, are not able to fulfil all their human potentialities. It also forbids one to forget the limits that scholastic thought, owes to the very special conditions of its emergence, which one must methodically explore in order to try to free it from them" (ibid.: 15).

The Western philosophical tradition, as we know, is made up of the valorization of knowledge, contemplation, meditation, ideation and, more generally, all forms of thought. From Plato to Heidegger, the West had continuously hierarchized human activities, placing at the top of the scale that form of withdrawal from the world which is the *skhôlè*. Exemplary in this respect is the way in which Hannah Arendt, describing the human condition, detaches thought from work and labor, making it the highest form of this activity. Humility then commands us to remember that the possibility of such detachment is far from being universally shared. It never has been so. Immersion in the scholastic universe, which has always given access to positions of power in society, inasmuch as they require a normative appropriation of symbolic forms, has always presupposed "exceptional historical and social conditions".

These exceptional conditions are quite something! They have the effect of establishing, as the sociologist points out, "a magic boundary between the elect and the excluded while contriving to repress the differences of condition that are the condition of the difference that they produce and consecrate" (ibid.: 25). Here is the deception, the magical illusion! These conditions pertain to the will to act as if differences in condition did not exist or had to be explained differently, by nature or by merit, imagining that institutions, starting with schools, are sufficient to correct them, and that they give everyone the same chances to join the camp of the elected representatives. This repression, this sleight of hand which invisibilizes the conditions of exclusion, is no longer possible.

This is what has been unearthed by the rise of populism that is overwhelming Europe, Latin America, and the United States, but also by the great waves of popular protest that challenge the elites. As the *gilets jaunes* movement in France (2018-2019) reminded us, this wave carries the hopes of those who no

longer want to be the losers of a history that has forgotten (or pretends to forget) how much it has excluded them. The masses do not forgive the elected ones for having erased the way in which the historical and social conditions of their election have contributed to maintaining the masses' own invisibility and, more generally, their conditions of non-existence.

## V

Let us move further in the analysis and determination of these conditions of non-existence. They are characterized, as we have already mentioned, by the feeling of being invisible and inaudible — of not being heard, let alone listened to. How can this be understood? What determines listening and understanding in a society? In order to extend our reflections on consent to misery, I will argue that its strongest ally is the "economy of linguistic exchange", as Bourdieu suggests in *Ce que parler veut dire* (Bourdieu 1982). Every time we speak, the sociologist reminds us, two causal series come into play to determine our ability to speak and our chances of being heard. The first concerns our linguistic habitus, which is socially shaped by conditions of acquisition that make its disposition very unequal. This determines our capacity to formulate in given circumstances a differentiated discourse, whose singularity (that is to say, its own style, understood as what distinguishes it from others comparable to it) can only be perceived by those who have the appropriate schemes of appreciation. The second is the "system of sanctions and targeted censorship" that structures the "language market": schools, exams, competitions, diplomas, etc., in other words, the rituals to which one must submit if they want to have any chance for their words to carry value.

As a result, in social exchanges, exposed to this market, we never deal with language, but with discourses that are dependent on this double series. It is because of the variable disposition of the habitus and of the structure of the market that, within a differentiated society, not only do different groups not give the same meaning to the same words, but they do not even recognize the same value or pay equal attention to all the discourses that may circulate. In such a society, writes Bourdieu, "what are called 'common' nouns – work, family, mother, love, etc. – assume in reality different and even antagonistic meanings, because the members of the same 'linguistic community' use more or less the same language and not several different languages" (Bourdieu 1991: 39–40).

"There are no innocent words", he continues a little further on. "[...] Each word, each expression, threatens to take on two antagonistic senses, reflecting the way in which it is understood by the sender and the receiver" (ibid.: 40). Who will say that this is not the case with the words we invoke to justify our political choices: "liberty", "equality", "fraternity", "solidarity", "secularism" and even "democracy"? Is this the reason for the misunderstanding? Is it because the socially and economically dominant elites have long since failed to ask themselves what these words mean in the language of others that they have made themselves impermeable to their world? Is it because they have

not been able to hear those who do not have the same linguistic habitus that they have lost in return the faculty to be heard when they warn of the worst?

Whatever this misunderstanding may be, it follows from the above considerations that a language is anything but a "universal treasure" that all its speakers would share. To reason in these terms is to once again overlook both the economic and social conditions that make it possible to acquire what a given society recognizes as "legitimate linguistic competence", and the constitution of the linguistic market that organizes the division between a "legitimate" use of language and its "illegitimate" use. It also means implicitly subscribing to the different processes that allow the state to impose, through institutions, starting with schools, administration, etc., a system of norms regulating linguistic practices. It is to deprive oneself of seeing that, in each space, the "linguistic market" is unified and dominated by a state language, which becomes "the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured". No one, Bourdieu explains, is supposed to be unaware of the linguistic law, which "has its body of jurists – the grammarians – and its agents of regulation and imposition – the teachers – who are empowered universally to subject the linguistic performance of speaking subjects to examination and to the legal sanction of academic qualification" (ibid.: 45).

Clearly, we are doing nothing more than establishing a link between the relations of linguistic domination that determine the distinction between the audible and the inaudible, and the "consent to misery" that underlies the distinction of the visible and the invisible. The strength of populist leaders is to have reckoned with it. This allows them to pretend to have heeded the anxiety, distress, and legitimate resentment of those vanquished by history and forgotten by progress, in order to make people believe that the new elites will no longer make the misfortune of mankind "a mute remnant of politics". Thus, populist leaders pretend to know the culprits and causes of evil, as well as to know how to remedy them, using all the means afforded by power, without anything to stop them from venturing outside the limits of the law. The condition for sharing such a belief is a repeated *coup de force* against the linguistic habitus that usually governs the exchanges and debates that animate the political scene. It is to speak another language that does not prohibit insults and other vociferous expressions of anathema. In the populist mind, the virtue of truth carries little value whenever lies are more likely to mark a rupture, to have immediate effect or to assure destabilization.

So, are we left without hope? The defining feature of populism is to substitute one invisibility for another. It would be illusory, in fact, to think that its discourse and its action are based on a fine understanding of society and of its complexity, or of the tensions that run through it, and not on oversimplifications. To divide in order to reign, to multiply surrogate targets, presupposes an attention bias that compromises from the outset the possibility of being open to society's diversity. This is why populist leaders, anxious to stir up passions, do not give themselves the means to hear the invisible any more than the leaders they intend to replace. As we know, if they come to power, the living

conditions of the historically defeated will not be miraculously transformed. And yet the damage is done, and even when the time comes for disappointment (because it always does), it is still to their side that a large part of the eyes is turned. The air bubble of their false promises does not burst, the balloon of their blustering postures does not deflate either. So, it is an illusion to believe that their audience will eventually diminish of its own accord, as the traditional political formations that dream of a "return to normal" seem to think, with a disconcerting naivety and blindness.

## VI

What should we do? Let us start by hearing and listening, rather than reconstructing. Encourage people to speak up. Give them the attention and consideration they deserve. Bring them together. Confront them. More than a decade ago, and recently again, I have emphasized the need to rethink the way democracies should go about being more participatory (Crépon, Stiegler 2007). The injunctions I have just uttered constitute conditions for not paying lip service to "participation". They are certainly not sufficient, but they are a reminder that no one can claim the exorbitant privilege of carrying the voice of those who were never allowed to speak up. Our previous reflections are dominated by the belief that by ignoring the evils that fracture society (such as material difficulties and existential suffering) one weakens institutions and gets to a political impasse. From this impasse, populism presents itself as a disastrous exit that needs to be countered.

How can we free suffering, uneasiness and misfortune from the walls of silence in which they are locked? One last time, we will follow in Bourdieu's footsteps by re-reading *La misère du monde*. At the bottom of the back cover, readers were invited to understand that the book proposed "another way of doing politics". What was that about? Without filters, self-serving calculations or partisan instrumentalizations, the primary task was to learn, methodically, how to learn suffering from the mouths of those who live it. What was important was to understand, by listening to these voices, the conditions of production of social misery, of which the distant elites, trained in the technocratic language of the *grandes écoles*, had only an abstract perception primed by this very language.

As Hannah Arendt pointed out, politics exists because of human plurality. It was hopeless to expect that the professionals of politics could give justice to such plurality, as they did not have the means to comprehend it without preconceived judgments, with that form of attention and humility which is the last thing one learns in elite schools. It isn't enough to say that the lesson was not understood and that the gulfs of misunderstanding have continued to widen. What was urgent, Bourdieu said, was to produce two effects. "Firstly, simplistic and one-sided images (notably those found in the press) must be replaced by a complex and multilayered representation capable of articulating the same realities but in terms that are different and, sometimes, irreconcilable". Secondly,

"following the lead of novelists such as Faulkner, Joyce or Woolf, we must relinquish the single, central, dominant, in a word, quasi-divine, point of view that is all too easily adopted by observers – and by readers too, at least to the extent they do not feel personally involved. We must work instead with the multiple perspectives that correspond to the multiplicity of coexisting, and sometimes directly competing, points of view" (Bourdieu 1999: 3).

Such was the point of the essential configuration of the "space of points of view" that made up *La misère du monde*. By giving their due to the diversity of lifestyles and to the resulting social interactions, this wonderful book develops a fine and attentive intelligence of society, which is the first thing to be betrayed by the overly simplistic attempts of the elites to embody the political will and desires of the people.

In doing so, Bourdieu understood above all that it is dangerous and inconsequential to talk about misery in overly general terms. Sticking to the great "*misère de condition*" as the sole criterion for assessing, as an absolute, the suffering of all people, meant that one could not see the relative forms of small-scale misery – what Bourdieu calls "misère de position". The distinction between "great misery" and "petty miseries" (since the "misère de position" admits a plural) calls for two remarks. The first is that we consider the latter to be negligible in import, we do not want to see them, because they are relative, supposedly subjective, and we consider them to follow in the wake of inequalities that it would be vain to claim to be able to address. They are the ones that make people say, "Stop complaining!", "Think of all the advantages you enjoy, of what the State and society do for you!", "Think about those who are infinitely more unhappy than you are!". They constitute the background of the consent to misery on which our reflections have focused. The second is that nothing yields more favorable ground for the rise of populism than the abandonment of these little miseries to themselves, in indifference or contempt.

(Traduction: Micol Bez, PhD candidate, Northwestern University and Ecole Normale Supérieure de Paris.)

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## Važnost Pjera Burdijea danas. O pristanku na bedu

**Apstrakt**

Članak se fokusira na krizu političkog razuma u dobu procvata populističke retorike i predlaže odmak od pogrešne podvojenosti između „demokratskog razuma“ i „besnih strasti“, odnosno demofobije koja iz njih često proizlazi. Umjesto ove dihotomije, predlažemo da, sledeći Bourdijeov trag, pažnju treba usmeriti na oblike nepropusnosti koji lome naš savremeni politički i društveni život, uspostavljajući uslove mogućnosti razumnog i nerazumnog. Najpre, primećujemo da je ono što savremene političke strasti označava posebno opasnima jeste njihova nepropusnost za lekcije iz naše istorijske prošlosti, kao i za moralnu osudu političke instrumentalizacije različitosti i za sakralni karakter temeljnih načela. Taj hermeneutički jaz, međutim, kasnije objašnjavamo dubljom analizom problema savremene nepropusnosti, koja poništava dihotomiju između političkog razuma i strasti. To više nije biračko tijelo, zavedeno sirenama populizma, koje je nepropusno za glas političkog razuma; umjesto toga, upravo taj razum, koji utelovljuju elite koje tvrde da se prepoznaju u njegovim vrijednostima i načelima, postao je nepropustan za „uslove nepostojanja“ u kojima živi značajan dio stanovništva. Ako postoji problem savremene nepropusnosti ili smetnji, naša je hipoteza, to je problem političkog diskursa koji je izgubio dodir sa „svom bedom sveta“.

Ključne reči: Pjer Burdiju, pristanak, demokratski razum, savremena nepropusnost, populizam