

## Postscript

Mais attention. Ce que nous appelons désordre et ruine, d'autres, plus jeunes, le vivent comme naturel et peut-être vont-ils avec ingénuité le dominer justement parce qu'ils ne cherchent plus leurs références où nous les prenions. Dans le fracas des démolitions, bien des passions moroses, bien des hypocrisies ou des folies, bien des dilemmes faux disparaissent aussi. Qui l'aurait espéré il y a dix ans ? Peut-être sommes-nous à un de ces moments où l'histoire passe outre. Nous sommes assourdis par les événements français ou les épisodes bruyants de la diplomatie. Mais, au-dessous du bruit, un silence se fait, une attente. Pourquoi ne serait-ce pas un espoir ?

(Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1960, *Signes*, Paris, Gallimard, Préface, 41)

But we should be careful. What we call disorder and ruin, others who are younger live as the natural order of things; and perhaps with ingenuity they are going to master it precisely because they no longer seek their bearings where we took ours. In the din of demolitions, many sullen passions, many hypocrisies or follies, and many false dilemmas also disappear. Who would have hoped it ten years ago? Perhaps we are at one of those moments when history moves on. We are stunned by French affairs or diplomacy's clamorous episodes. But underneath the clamor a silence is growing, an expectation. Why could it not be a hope?

(Maurice Merleau-Ponty, trans. Richard C. McCleary, 1964, *Signs*, Northwestern University Press, Introduction, 23).

Only about six months after writing these sentences of cautious optimism, Merleau-Ponty died suddenly of a heart attack on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1961. Early in the same year, Pierre Bourdieu returned to Paris from Algeria to become secretary to Aron's research group. Just over 10 years earlier, in 1950, Merleau-Ponty, aged 42, had been a member of the jury selecting entrants to the Ecole Normale Supérieure which had admitted Bourdieu<sup>1</sup>, aged 20. We can place Bourdieu among those 'others who are younger' who might 'seek their

bearings' in new directions, and among those who offered Merleau-Ponty grounds for supposing that the 'many false dilemmas' which had troubled him throughout his career might 'disappear'.

Merleau-Ponty had realised late in life that the position which he was adopting, intellectually and professionally, was no longer tenable in terms of his own earlier arguments. One way of summarising my discussion of Bourdieu's work is to state that I believe that he relentlessly pursued the logic of the philosophical positions which Merleau-Ponty had balanced, pursuing them beyond the safe house of instituted philosophy into an active engagement with the real socio-political world effected by a sociological reflexivity which he refused to allow to be equated with a reflexive sociology. Did Bourdieu's work eliminate the 'false dilemmas' which had perplexed Merleau-Ponty? Did Bourdieu find 'new bearings' such that he provided the hope that Merleau-Ponty expected of the new generation? The answer to that question depends in part on the way in which his work is now used by the new next generation<sup>2</sup>.

Although Schutz and Gurwitsch were intellectually the products of continental gymnasium schooling, both initiated into the traditions of classical and post-Enlightenment humanist thought, they reacted differently in response to the different Austrian and German cultural situations. Schutz absorbed the work of Bergson and Husserl and others, but the attraction for him of phenomenology was that it methodologically legitimated his intention to subject inter-personal social relations to unprejudiced scrutiny, not that it supplied him with a valid 'philosophy'. This scrutiny involved understanding the agency of individual selves in constructing social reality. He did not conceive of these acting selves as themselves socially constituted and the constructed social reality was autonomously 'social' rather than comprehensively societal. Social scientists perform a role in society as particular agents and there are laws which regulate their activity but their role co-exists with other roles. There is no sense in which a prior consciousness inherent in communities establishes the grounds of possibility of all juxtaposed modes of action. Gurwitsch's endeavours were much more 'intellectual', grounded in doctoral and Habilitation theses which meticulously evaluated previous schools of thought in respect of philosophy and psychology. Paradoxically, however, Gurwitsch's intellectual project led him to reject any notion of a transcendent ego and to argue that intellectual 'fields' are constituted out of pre-rational community solidarity. Intellectual 'fields' have no transcendental priority or permanence. They are not 'idealist' but they function as objectivities which ensure, equally, that knowledge is never fully reducible to historically contingent subjective dispositions. The fact that he never felt integrated into a social context, either in Europe or in America, meant that he was never able to actualise his thinking. Instead, his theory of 'fields' became a theory within an intellectual discourse. Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu were formed in lycées and at the École Normale Supérieure in much the same intellectual tradition as Schutz and Gurwitsch. Merleau-Ponty

attempted to implement in political convictions the simultaneous rejection of idealism and existentialism which, in part, he absorbed theoretically from the work of Gurwitsch. In the immediate post World War II period in which French society sought to reconstitute itself, Merleau-Ponty turned away from dogmatic acceptance of Marxist ideology and advanced, instead, an approach to politics which was a form of applied phenomenology which, he hoped, would enable plural world-views to be reconciled through humanist inter-subjective encounter. This was the theoretical backdrop to Bourdieu's experience of the harsh clash of civilizations in Algeria. Bourdieu had already resented the social separation effected and consolidated by his privileged schooling and the conceptual dualisms, between mind and body, thought and experience, which seemed to be homologous with that separation. What he observed in Algeria showed him the consequences of the imposition of a colonial system on indigenous culture and provided him with a perspective on what he personally experienced within France. Nevertheless, Bourdieu was an 'oblate' who could never deny that it was his intellectual formation which had given him the language by which to understand the processes of social division about which he was passionately hostile.

I am an 'oblate'. Educated in the 1950s in a provincial English grammar school, analogous with the gymnasia or lycées attended by all the authors considered in this text, I was initiated into a scholarly tradition which was unfamiliar to my parents such that I gained admission to Cambridge University where my studies culminated in the completion of a doctoral thesis on the relationship between natural philosophy and literary fictions at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, concentrating on the relations between the philosophy of Joseph Priestley and the poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. I was on track to be an aspirant educator in the Humanities. Contingent events intervened and I became a lecturer in 1970 in the newly established North-East London Polytechnic, an institution which was in the vanguard of implementing policies for widening access to higher education and for developing a particular course which was designed to enable disadvantaged students to negotiate their curricula, a negotiation based upon an encounter between their dispositions and those of the staff who were professionally obligated to transmit the bodies of knowledge particular to their specialisms. I became a prime mover in the pedagogic innovation which led to the establishment of the School for Independent Study in 1974 which, with hindsight, could be said to have been attempting to institutionalise a negotiated knowledge construction by juxtaposing the habitus of students with the interests of staff as representatives of 'fields' of learning. The School lasted for 16 years during which time it had enabled students to build on their incorporated cultural capital to acquire objectivated capital which, in turn, became instituted through diploma and degree qualification. The School was disbanded in 1990 at the time when the institution felt obliged to safeguard the standardised acceptability of its

graduates as it sought to acquire a brand image for itself within the new market of post-binary higher education institutions. During those 16 years I had gradually found that Bourdieu's work of the 1960s provided me with a conceptual framework to analyse, justify and defend my pedagogic *practice*. The consequence of the abolition of the School for Independent Study was that I redefined the original intellectual interests which had been eclipsed by my involvement in innovation. My doctoral thesis had examined the competing truth claims of 'science' and 'literature'. I had no inclination to resurrect a career in the Humanities and found it possible to pursue my epistemological interests through an analysis of the development of the thinking of the person whose work had helped me interpret my practice. 1990 was a turning-point for Bourdieu as for myself. In late Thatcherite Britain I found that conditions were no longer propitious for the continuation of the practice with which I had been involved for almost two decades. As a substitute, I turned to the objective study of Bourdieu's work on the grounds that its representation would mentally keep alive possibilities which then appeared to be actually eliminated. At the same moment, Bourdieu's failure intellectually to prevail over the way in which American sociology was conceptualising the modern world and contributing to the imposition of that conceptualisation on the world, caused him to realise that he needed to transform the conditions of possibility for the future by direct action as well as by intellectual endeavour. He turned to self-presentation at the moment when I wrote my first objective account of his work<sup>3</sup>. This book continues that objectification, now including consideration of the development of Bourdieu's work from 1990 until his death. As such, the book comes under scrutiny as a mode of communication in relation to the vision which Bourdieu attempted to actualise in his last decade.

Bourdieu had a vision of the world, partly nostalgic and partly utopian, partly derived from his observations of the social organization in his native Béarn and in traditional Algeria and partly derived from his commitment to the ideals of the French Revolution. He was committed to an absolute egalitarianism, not 'equality of opportunity' nor 'social mobility' both of which were predicated on procedures of selection within a society in which hierarchical distinction remained unchallenged. He envisaged a society in which individuals might encounter each other socio-analytically, might recognize, that is, that differences can be understood and tolerated on the grounds that they are not absolute but are the consequences of differential social conditioning, thus removing the iniquities of 'symbolic violence'. He envisaged a society in which those in authority, whether politicians, judges, or businessmen, would recognize that they held that authority by consent, that their authority was functional rather than absolute and always amenable to analyses which should continuously disclose the ways in which it was socially constituted and, therefore, reversible. He envisaged a society which would be comprehensively socio-centric such that 'sociological' research would be only one way of seeing

the world operated by a minority of intellectuals whose perspective was subject to scrutiny in the context of a social ontology of all individuals. He envisaged a society which would not be beholden to ‘public intellectuals’ but would consist of an intellectual public.

As a result of my habitus and career trajectory I am disposed to be sympathetic to Bourdieu’s vision and to share his sense, as expressed in the 1990s, that the likelihood of its realisation is rapidly diminishing. The epigraphs which I have inserted at the beginning of the book indicate my orientation. In optimistic moments, I hope, like Tennyson’s *Ulysses* that ‘Some work of noble note, may yet be done’ to make Bourdieu’s vision even conceivable again. This means implementing an historicist, ontological orientation which enables everyone to recognize, as Schelling put it, endorsed by Heidegger, the origins of the ‘fundamental thought’ of each other. In “Classement, déclassement, reclassement” of 1978, Bourdieu argued that the young generation was ‘une génération abusée’ [an abused generation] (Bourdieu, 1978, 9) because it had been offered future prospects through education which were not actually available. This article was added as an Epilogue to the English translation of *Les héritiers* which was published in 1979. Colourfully and memorably, Richard Nice rendered Bourdieu’s phrase as ‘The Bamboozling of a Generation’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979, 83), accurately capturing the spirit of Bourdieu’s remark. Generations have been bamboozled for generations. The structural transformation of the public sphere needs to be re-transformed to accommodate mass democracy, or, as Thomas Mann’s character says more generally, ‘it is all up with conventions once considered prerequisite and compulsory’.

These are my mere opinions. There is, of course, the alternative view. As Aron said of the May Events of 1968, Bourdieu’s vision was of ‘une révolution introuvable’ [an unrealisable revolution]. Societies need to be managed by bureaucracies. ‘People’ are quite happy to watch football matches or athletics, to participate in royal pageantry, to follow the behaviour of celebrities, all presented to them by the media. In Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck*, written in 1884, one character, Gregers Werle regards it as his mission to cause another, Hjalmar Ekdal, to confront the reality of his situation, to cease self-bamboozlement. The consequences are disastrous. Another character, Dr, Remming, reprimands Gregers, commenting: ‘Take the saving lie from the average man and you take his happiness away, too’ (Ibsen, 1964, 244). Perhaps this is an absolute truth or perhaps it is indicative of the continuing potency of a late 19<sup>th</sup> Century bourgeois inclination to disparage average people.

There is, finally, a third possibility. The world is already very different from the one with which Bourdieu tried to deal in the 1990s. Facebook, for instance, was established in 2004, two years after his death. Social media have, perhaps, eclipsed ‘incorporated’ cultural capital such that social exchanges are becoming homogenised within a wholly ‘objectivated’ sphere. There are, perhaps, no more ‘oblates’ because the sense that education is an entitlement

has removed the experience of indebtedness. Universal connectedness can be seen as the actualisation of inter-subjectivity, especially if it becomes a vehicle for collective conversion rather than for the celebration of narcissistic subjectivity. In this view, Bourdieu's project and my discussion of it might both seem retrograde prolongations of the philosophical problematics which Merleau-Ponty hoped were in the process of being superseded.

Whatever the response of readers to my representation of Bourdieu's work in relation to some hypothetical antecedents, my intention has been to describe Bourdieu's intellectual trajectory in a way which will invite reflexive auto-analysis. It is fitting, therefore, to conclude with the sentence with which Bourdieu ends his own auto-analysis:

And nothing would make me happier than having made it possible for some of my readers to recognize their own experiences, difficulties, questionings, sufferings, and so on, in mine, and to draw from that realistic identification, which is quite the opposite of an exalted projection, some means of doing what they do, and living what they live, a little bit better. (Bourdieu, 2004, 142; 2007, 113)

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<sup>1</sup> See Bourdieu, 1989, 17.

<sup>2</sup> I am deliberately connoting here the book published by members of the Bourdieu Study Group of the British Sociological Association for which I wrote a Preface (Ingram et al., 2015).

<sup>3</sup> See Robbins, 1991.