

Vincenzo Mele

**Gabriella Paolucci (ed.), Bourdieu dopo Bourdieu.
Torino: Utet, 2010, 316 pp.**

(doi: 10.2383/33655)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 3, novembre-dicembre 2010

Ente di afferenza:

()

Copyright © by Società editrice il Mulino, Bologna. Tutti i diritti sono riservati.

Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it>

Licenza d'uso

Questo articolo è reso disponibile con licenza CC BY NC ND. Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it/>

Book reviews

Gabriella Paolucci (ed.), *Bourdieu dopo Bourdieu*. Torino: Utet, 2010, 316 pp.

doi: 10.2383/33655

The volume of collected essays, *Bourdieu After Bourdieu*, is one of the first significant discussions to appear in Italy on the work of this important French sociologist. This may appear strange to the international academic community, considering that Bourdieu died in 2002 and was, well before his death, one of the most often cited authors in the social sciences. The structure of the book partly reflects the peculiarly Italian reception of Bourdieu's work: most of the authors come from rather eccentric geographical and disciplinary areas. Some are not Italian; others possess a trans-disciplinary competence that transcends sociology (linguistics, literature, history); and, above all, none of them come from the mainstream of Italian academic sociology. However, none of this (of course) detracts from the validity of their contributions.

The book is organized in three sections. The first section is mainly dedicated to Bourdieu's epistemology. Here we find papers on "Beyond subjectivism and objectivism in Pierre Bourdieu" (Marco Pitzalis), "Bourdieu's sociology of sociological interests" (Grazia Scarfò Ghellab), and the relation between sociology and politics (David Swartz). The second section offers an analysis of Bourdieu's key concepts, which have become popular in contemporary social theory: habitus theory (Gisèle Sapiro), the field (Anna Boschetti), capital (Marco Santoro), and symbolic violence (Gabriella Paolucci). The section part is devoted to Bourdieu's social theory on education and social reproduction (Franca Bonichi), the sociology of science (Alessandro Mongili), and a detailed map of Bourdieu's influence on and relevance to Italian sociology from the 1970s to the present (Angelo Salento).

The delay with which Bourdieu's work spread throughout Italy can be explained by the peculiar structure of the field of Italian sociological, as well as the larger field of intellectual inquiry. Marco Santoro – who wrote a recent paper on "How 'Not' to become a Dominant French Sociologist: Bourdieu in Italy (1966-2009)" – tries to offer a Bourdesienne analysis of this unsuccessful reception. His explanation invokes a mix of various factors at work in Italy at the time: social structure, time and more strictly cultural aspects (epistemological and philosophical). Among the first, social structure, it is interesting to note the relatively marginal position of Bourdieu's first editors in Italy, where the academic nobility of Italian sociology – those who possess the necessary symbolic capital to decide who belongs to the legitimate sociological field – were rather hostile to Bourdieu's work. In fact, the structure of the Italian cultural and academic field is traditionally "allergic" to anything that "smells of determinism, holism, structuralism" [Santoro 2009, 61], since such a theoretical stance "can be suspected to limit the intellectual (and moral) celebration of (individual) agency as a relatively free instance of choice" [Santoro 2009]. To this first, highly visible, epistemological factor we should add a second less apparent one: the specific features of Italian sociological work and research. Some potential causes of Bourdieu's being neglected depended on the typically Italian weak integration between theory and research, which is a founding feature of Bourdieu's

work. In Italy, social (philosophical) theory usually advances counter to social (statistical) research: only rarely do the two merge. If we also consider the generalized overemphasis on theory and the relative weakness of empirical social research in Italy, we can get an idea of how reluctantly sociological work such as Bourdieu's, which is theoretical but heavily grounded in empirical data, would be received.

Last but not least, timing played an important role in Bourdieu's intellectual marginality in Italy: by the time his first works were introduced in the 1970s, Italian academic sociologists had already chosen their authors of reference (mainly North Americans such as Parsons, Merton, Lazarsfeld) and addressing Bourdieu's work was left to some non-academic social activists and intellectuals, who focused on an analysis of the education system, but overlooked his broader theoretical contributions. In the 1980s and 1990s, when Bourdieu's work had perhaps a greater chance for dissemination in Italy, a drastic change in the cultural and political conditions occurred: with the fall of the Berlin wall, Italian sociologists rapidly abandoned every form of critical sociology and anything that could be even remotely associated with Marxism. The ensuing paradox was that while some in the 1970s found Bourdieu to be not Marxist enough, in the 1980s and 1990s others deemed him too Marxist. As Salento observes in the present book's concluding essay, Bourdieu was a sort of "unhonored guest" until just few years before his death, when the resonance of his political positions made it impossible to avoid publication of his major works, though this came about without any substantial discussion or acceptance in the "legitimate" academic field of sociology.

In her detailed account of the uses and misuses of Bourdieu's notion of field, Anna Boschetti observes that Bourdieu's theoretical work – unlike Sartre's, Althusser's, Foucault's, or Habermas' – produced a collective international workshop. In this sense, Bourdieu's theory is a "progressive theory" (I. Lakatos), as opposed to "degenerative theory" – theories that tends to degenerate into dogmas – since it proposes a research program that asks to be falsified, proved, enriched. It can easily be inferred that adopting Bourdieu's modus operandi would require a great amount of time, as well as economic, and human resources. However, because of the traditionally fragmentary and individualistic landscape of Italian sociology, these are yet to be forthcoming.

Concepts such as habitus (analyzed by G. Sapiro), capital (M. Santoro), or symbolic violence (G. Paolucci) are highly refined conceptual constructs that Bourdieu elaborated through years of confrontation with his main intellectual references (Levi Strauss, the phenomenological tradition, Durkheim, G. Bachelard and G. Canguilhem for the epistemology). At the same time, Bourdieu applied these concepts on the empirical level, eschewing theoretical debates that he considered insignificant for practical research (such as the micro/macro debate in sociology, the distinction between sociology and anthropology, holism/individualism, etc.). These are products of what B. called the scholastic view (*scholè*): the point of view of people who have time to question the world, free from the preoccupations of everyday life. A kind of "reflexive" habitus that tends to view "real" social actors as behaving as if they were professional sociologists. Once, in an interview, Bourdieu borrowed an insightful quote from Virginia Woolf: "General ideas", said Virginia Woolf, "are always generals' ideas". Instead, the proper sociologist's job is to understand the blind, narrow, partial vision of the ordinary soldier lost in battle (like Fabrizio Dongo in *Le Rouge et le Noir*).

One decisive factor for Bourdieu's recent worldwide fame has been the strong political engagement that characterized the last part of his career, when he embraced the anti neo-liberalism movement (also called No Global in the media). Many observers, scholars, even friends found this late position of the French sociologist rather contradictory, as he had been for the most part absent from the French political arena until the 1990s, and had kept a certain distance from the French upheaval of '68 and the social movements of the 1960s and 70's, when it was considered nearly commonsensical for intellectuals to be *engagé*.

David Swartz's contribution to the volume analyzes in detail the evolution of Bourdieu's attitude toward politics and engagement. Even though all of Bourdieu's sociological writings could be considered political in the most modern sense, Schwartz notes that Bourdieu tried his entire life to establish a distinction between the two fields – political and sociological/scientific/intellectual. Only near the premature end of his intellectual career, when he felt that the boundaries were collapsing, did he use symbolic capital to enter the political field.

Since the beginning of his field research on Algeria, Bourdieu never shared Max Weber's "avalutativity" postulate (a kind of "pact of non-aggression with the established order") and instead considered a critique of domination as sociology's primary task. Authentic scientific research is always threatening to the established order, because it aims to unmask the hidden interests of power. The choice of research topics is clearly determined by moral and political principles. Bourdieu's writings on the Algerian underclasses document the destructiveness of French colonialism and the struggle for independence. However, at the same time, he never signed petitions or took part in demonstrations against the colonial war, in contrast to most French intellectuals of his time. His intention was to use social science to report on some aspects of Algeria that were not considered in the mainstream debate on the war.

In May 1968 the student protests and workers' strikes brought the French government to its knees, forcing president Charles De Gaulle to call for new elections. In this context Bourdieu assumed quite an ambivalent position: on the one hand, he was rather critical of the inequality and privileges to the few that characterized the French educational system (*Les héritiers. Les étudiants et la culture*, 1964), on the other, he was skeptical that the Utopian component of the student movement could actually bring about real, enduring political change. Unlike many of his colleagues, he kept his distance from the French model of the "engaged Intellectual", in its various formulations: Michel Foucault's "specific intellectual" and especially Jean Paul Sartre's "universal intellectual". To act like most of his colleagues, especially in 1968, and take a public position on everything (following Sartre) seemed to him an arbitrary use of symbolic capital in the public sphere. He believed that the sociologist (just as the academic intellectual) was fundamentally a "scientist", whose work should be judged according to the rules of the "scientific field." Only in this way could there be any real form of social and cultural progress. His final change of heart in this respect, which led to his involuntarily becoming a new "icon" of the public intellectual, was probably determined by the fact that he saw the power of neoliberals as stemming precisely from this transgression of borders between science and politics and in the misuse of science by the media (particularly television – see *Sur la Television*, 1996). Neoliberal governments justify and legitimate

their policies through the generously offered support of “doxosophists”: journalists, polls experts, economists and so forth create a form of mass-mediated ideology ostensibly based on the instruments of the social sciences. This ideology justifies drastic cuts in social welfare; it purports to be “scientific,” but in truth circumvents the rigid norms governing scientific inquiry, while simply aiming for visibility in the “politic-journalistic” field. Television is the favored media for disseminating this pseudo-scientific ideology. It was against this that B, towards the end of his life, decided to fill the vacant role of “public intellectual” once held by J. P. Sartre, bringing his reputation and competence to bear in the politic field. In order to defend the independence of the intellectual field from the logic of the marketplace and politics, he himself transgresses the borders of this autonomy, by giving interviews, appearing on television, joining social movements, and more. In doing so, he was probably acting on the conviction that the independence of the intellectual field can only be preserved by defeating the hegemony of neo-liberalist discourse.

Vincenzo Mele
Monmouth University, NJ

References

Santoro, M.

2009 “How ‘Not’ to become a Dominant French Sociologist: Bourdieu in Italy (1966-2009).” *Sociologica* 2-3. [doi:10.2383/31372](https://doi.org/10.2383/31372)