

## **Bourdieu, Epistemology and Ontology: Philosophy and Method**

### **An Interview with Michael Grenfell**

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**Fábio Ribeiro: Thank you for agreeing to talk to us. We are working on a special issue of *Temáticas* journal called “Distinction, Differences and Inequalities in the 21st century”. The world today is very different from the world Bourdieu knew. We would like to ask how useful do you believe Bourdieu’s approach is to help us understand the world of today? What would be the major theoretical and methodological adjustments to make in today’s context?**

Michael Grenfell: Well, you go in at the deep end, as we say, because this is one of the big questions. Already, one asks oneself “what would Bourdieu make of it?”, “how would he interpret what is going on now?” In fact, it’s a vastly different world – not only from the one Bourdieu left in the beginning of the 21st century but also from the one where he formed his views: the second half of the 20th century, including the 1960s, was itself a period of great evolution, and on so many fronts. He covered a lot of these elements in his work.

My conviction is that one has to trace back through Bourdieu’s work: the empirical studies and contexts, the methodology, the philosophy he was developing through these. In fact, we might ask whether the empirical studies are still relevant or not. For example, the study of French cultural tastes in the 1960s, which is *La Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984) – is it still relevant? On one level – no, because it is history. However, if we trace back a bit further to the concepts he used – like *habitus* and *field* – and all these other concepts – we might again ask if they are still relevant? Well, maybe, but they look very different today: some *fields* are very different and some *fields* are the same – I mean in form and operations. What is a *field* now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? But then, there is often the tendency with many researchers using Bourdieu to stop there; they

don't go back a little bit further. And that further level is the Theory of Practice, which underlies his method and philosophy. In my experience, very few people consider the theory of practice in any real terms; and those that do are trapped in their own discipline-based theories which skew what they can take from Bourdieu. These are major oversights in terms of what I believe is the value of Bourdieu's science – it is, to emphasise, a theory *of* practice: one needs to be involved equally in both to appreciate the value of this approach. I was speaking to one of my students who is doing a PhD on belly-dancing, and she was panicking because she had not put much about the theory of practice in her thesis. And then, she was confronting the question: “why use Bourdieu?” Is it just a nice idea or a necessity? Whenever anyone does a study of anything using Bourdieu, and I've had them on a fairly wide range of subjects, the implication is always that “his approach is better than somebody else's”, otherwise it's just a novelty – “why not use Bourdieu?”. There has to be something more than that. In our discussions, I was trying to explain, “if you want one word to justify using Bourdieu, it's ‘structure’ – it's his understanding of structure. Structure as structured and structuring, but equally at an intimate, personal level, equally at a socio-political level, and the interactions between the two. To begin to understand that, we need to read of the *Outline of the Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu 1977) and the whole epistemological breaks he was undertaking.

Once we have some understanding of all that, we need to go a little further, because there is then the whole synthesis of the philosophy he was drawing upon – this is outlined in the *Craft of Sociology* (Bourdieu *et al.* 1991) and the *Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu 1990), and beyond. And, then it becomes very exciting because we get to the work on Bachelard, Canguilhem, Koyré, Vuillemin, etc. And, beyond even this, there is the centrality of the works by modern philosophers such as Spinoza, Goethe, Wittgenstein. Then, we begin to realize that Bourdieu was constructing a completely different view. This is why I called my latest book *Bourdieu's Metanoia* (Grenfell 2023): he was constructing not only a different view of the world, but also a different view of science itself. And it's at that level that Bourdieu is the most profound and the most relevant to these days. So, we need to understand that and to develop this view in new practical contexts. He said to me at one point that he only did the work of his youth. His studies on law, religion, fashion and sport etc. are only really blueprints. Some topics became more developed – education, Flaubert for example. Also, there is

early and later work on people like Manet, now published in lecture format (Bourdieu 2017). But he never got around to further developing initial ideas on some other areas – although a little more has appeared in posthumous writings: *On the State* (Bourdieu 2014) for example, again as lecture transcripts. These studies are all really what he called a sociological history of the past now. But we have to ask how do we reinvent all that: how to construct a historic sociology of the present? How do we reuse all of that we know now to interpret the present? To respond to your original question then: first, we need to understand some of the philosophy underlying his concepts, and secondly, to develop the best methodological tools we have available to us. Many current computer systems were not available to Bourdieu. So, there is a lot of work to do (a) in *field* contexts, to take on board the philosophy appropriate to understanding their operations and (b) to develop the methodological tools that are available today – and in this way to further expand our understanding of social dynamics and politics.

That's why a lot of research work that uses Bourdieu is quite disappointing to me. It's people doing what I call "throwing these metaphors at data": "oh yes, that's *habitus*, and that's *field*, etc." But this doesn't take you very far, this is just "okay, *habitus* is agency, and *field* is context and *capital* is whatever is relevant in the *field*" ... It results in a weak form of constructivism. We have rather to construct a completely different way of seeing things. In fact, these days, I often ask my students just to "go and look at" what they are interested in studying. Aim to go again through the path that Bourdieu took – just look at it. What do you notice? Forget the theory, what do you notice? And it was this kind of intentional, intensive observation out of which Bourdieu began to see these things... because it interacted at a visceral level with both his own empirical *habitus* and the kind of philosophical training he had undergone. The worlds that he was comparing were very different – when he was developing his work he was comparing the traditional society in Algeria with modern society in France, and the traditional society of the Béarn with French society as a whole - so his worlds were very different. Yet, he saw similarities in terms of *symbolic power*: the way domination was proceeded by integration – not simply imposed in a top-down way – how systems celebrated as the universal resulted in monopolization. These were profound observations, and he then took them to his subsequent work on other institutions of the French republican state. But, behind all that there was still this very personal, visceral

response to what he experienced and observed – including emotions and psychological struggles at various levels.

**FR: So how can one develop this kind of approach in our own scientific practice?**

MG: I make a strong case in my *Metanoia* book that this way of thinking is not just deduction; rather it needs to be a very personal reaction and a very personal response – a way of seeing the world. The clue is in the contrast between seeing *the whole* rather than *the particular* – most researchers go from the latter to the former. Bourdieu does often begin with the particular – like the street sellers in Algeria or the bachelors in the Béarn – but his preoccupation is the conditions that created these individuals and, in these cases, their suffering – a theme that goes through his entire work and becomes explicitly manifest in *La misère du monde* (Bourdieu 1999). This dimension of the whole and the particular gets us into discussion drawing from Bachelard, Goethe and Wittgenstein. For example, Bachelard was trying in some ways to answer what it was to marry the aesthetic to the science, which we have become so used to separating. For him, a synthetic view is essential. Otherwise, the researcher substantializes everything, even Bourdieu’s concepts – and then theorizes everything on that basis – avoiding the relationship. If we look at the *Impérialismes* book (Bourdieu 2023) that has been published recently as a kind of collection of papers, Bourdieu never really developed this theme very explicitly. It is kind of implicit to some extent; even though he quotes all these people and more – Cassirer, for example. He spent three years discussing the State in his *Collège de France* lessons. But this looking at the *ethos* almost haunts the posthumous *Sur l’état* book: what is this *ethos*? What is changing in the *ethos*? How does it affect particular state conditions? But even here, he insists that we need to study not simply the conditions of its production, or even the production of the conditions of the production, but the conditions of the production of the conditions of production of those conditions. What is the force that is actually binding all of these together?

And once we have a flavour of that, we can see that what is happening these days is a logical development from where we were coming. It is a cliché to just talk about “late capitalism” and all that sort of stuff. It is being played out at a very particular way in all sorts of *fields*, but the force, the moral force behind it, the *ethos*, is the same. It’s capitalism, which implies particular relationships to time, space, objects and people

valued within them. What does it mean, for example, to say “late capitalism in the art *field*” – things like that? It means that the nature of *capital* itself is evolving. I wrote a paper called “Capital conversions in post-modernist economies” (Grenfell 2014b). I used the contemporary art *field* as a point-exemplar but really I was probing how the very nature of *capital* – its *modus operandi* and *opus operatum* – shared various post-modernist characteristics across *fields*: time, ruse, ambiguity, intensification, etc. My view was/is that the banking crisis of 2008 was symptomatic of the way *capital* was now operating in contemporary economies: the desperation of capitalism to keep creating value out of nothing. They even create anti-*capital* and you use that as *capital* to make profit bereft of production. And it’s still so intense in the present day: the crisis of capitalism that was predicted all those years ago by Marx is still there, but not actualized as he envisaged it. Clearly, it can’t sustain itself and humankind will destroy the world in its insatiable appetite for capital: burning the Brazilian rainforest, hyper consumption, social media in such intensity – but behind all of this there is still a particular relationship to time and objects and profit and value and the appetite of capitalism to stimulate it in people.

**FR: Can you say some more about such transformations and your studies in the artistic *field*?**

MG: In art it’s very interesting. There was this movement from “art” as “artisanal craft”, servicing religion and the king to its evolution as a semi-autonomous *field*: the artist as aesthetic visionary if we like – “art for art’s sake”. Its major developments in this direction occurred in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Bourdieu wrote about the Impressionists and how they broke with that kind of orthodox way of doing things – the *Ateliers*, master teachers and their relationship to the French state, etc.. Of course, they were part heroes and part opportunists – every artist is the same – but something fundamental did happen right about that time, about the “hero artist”, the avant-garde artist – changing relations, values, *symbolic capital*. If we project that into the contemporary future world, we get all sorts of strange, morbid forms of art: even art as “non-art”. It is a bit like Gramsci: when the tectonic plates shift and *fields* undergo rapid change, all sorts of decadent forms appear. Very Marxian. I did a lot of work on the Young British Artist Damien Hirst and came to the conclusion that at a certain point his art was not “in the art object itself”; in fact, his art resided in the relationship to the art

market itself – that was the point of his aesthetic challenge. So, the nature of the relationship between the subject and object had changed – both in production and consumption. But the economies – the financial pay-off – simply intensified. That is what he was playing with. He was actually saying “Look, you’re paying £11 million for a dead shark, man! I am playing with you”, the aesthetic is not in the object but your relationship to it – crypto-art does something similar. At least with the Impressionists, there was an object that was recognizably artistic, aesthetically artistic. But, once you have artists that don’t actually produce their own work – Damien Hirst founded a factory and got others to manufacture his work (which he then signed) – or even sell it – in the case of the diamond skull he formed a consortium to buy it himself – then the nature of artistic *capital* itself works from a different socio-economic genome. This was the logical conclusion of the art world Hirst encountered. For example, he tells the tale about how he was walking down a road in New York, he looked into a window of an art gallery and there was a vacuum cleaner, that’s all it was, and it was by Jeff Koons. So, he went into the gallery and asked, “How much is that?”, and the gallery owner said, “We don’t sell it to anybody who has to ask the price”. So, he bought six of them. Consequently, there is a kind of game going on in art, that we have going on in the banks now, which is a bit like musical chairs, or like the emperor’s new clothes: it works while the music plays or everyone believes in the game; that is, until someone blows the whistle on it and says, “hang on, this is crazy”; and everyone then says “oh we knew it’s crazy, we all knew it was all the time”. And then you have the same thing in politics: Trump, Johnson, Bolsonaro, Putin, Brexit, etc. That is why social media has become so important: it is not what is real that is important – as debated – but the creation of perceptions. All the great dictators and autocratic rulers in the world understand this and therefore control the media one way or another; either directly or indirectly, because if they can control the way people think – the language of their thinking – they can then control what people do – like vote for them, assuming at that stage there still are elections!

Those sorts of things were not as intense in the past. When I was a student in Paris, there was still a public debate: we could choose which newspapers we read, we could balance *Le Point* and *L’Express* with *Le Nouvel observateur*, we had a sense of the *field*. We don’t get that so much now with social media: it just comes at us intensely all the time. In a way, we have known about this phenomenon for a long time. Recently, I was

thinking about Georg Simmel when he wrote about the metropolis (Simmel 1971), the “blasé attitude” – it’s like rats, if you stimulate them all the time they become stressed and they can’t make decisions anymore. It creates this “blasé attitude”, which is exactly what’s happening with social media today when we cannot avoid it, it’s coming at us all the time – so much so that news evaporates very quickly also in a post-modernist way. And these political leaders – and their gangs – are masters at controlling the information. And behind them, of course, is money: the billionaire owners of media.

In fact, everything has moved up a level: the *field* of power is now international. It used to be in each individual country, playing against each other, but now the *field* of power is pan-international: Microsoft, Apple, Google, Amazon, News International, Meta – maybe some others. This is the *field of power*. Then, individual countries are individual *fields*. And the industries, commerce, etc. of countries – what used to be the *fields* – are the *habitus* – they are the micro-level. And people as individuals below that are nothing really – they have no place in it anymore, they are completely excluded. They exist in a kind of void: a black hole of media. The French economist Thomas Piketty reminds us and reasserts that capitalism is about concentration and accumulation; and that is exactly what is happening now. Except *capital*, of course, is not just money anymore – although ultimately it results in financial wealth. And that process of concentration and accumulation works as much with *symbolic capital* as it does with *economic capital*. So, going back to your original question, there is a lot in Bourdieu that we can still read into and through, and extend into the present day.

**FR: You have written extensively about the methodological procedures that distinguish Bourdieusian research from other approaches in sociology, and how this needs to be conceived in a reflexive way. Could you explain a bit what you mean by that?**

MG: Methodologically, I think there are a lot of interesting questions about reflexivity in Bourdieu and how it plays out in practice. Even at a level of technique, I’ve said, in a *méchant* sort of way, that people who understand Bourdieu cannot do Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA – a method to demonstrate multiple relations within a sample), and people who can do multiple correspondence analysis do not understand Bourdieu. Bourdieu could not “do” MCA either – he got other people to do it for him.

There are a lot of techniques that need to be used, because a lot of Bourdieu-type research is often very weak methodologically and becomes a sort of loose ethnography. We do need to be more rigorous with methods, and there are methods available – I’m not an expert on modelling by any means, but that side of things needs to be developed a lot. Even in MCA though, when you go back to it, its basis is usually a questionnaire, and as soon as a questionnaire is adopted, researchers are already constructing the research object in their own image so to speak. That was true for Bourdieu as well. Leroux, who worked with Bourdieu on an MCA of publishing houses, stated “oh it’s amazing, Bourdieu just drew the *field* for me and when we did all the analyses it was exactly what he drew!” But, of course, it would be, because he already built it into the questionnaire. The reflexivity inherent in his work is there to limit this or at least acknowledge it; it is all part of what he terms “radical doubt” – acknowledging the limits of the possible. Nevertheless, there is a further serious point here about the researcher drawing on his/her own *habitus* – relation to the object – in undertaking research. This is anathema for all those seeking “objective, neutral” science – the impartial investigator – whilst Bourdieu argues quite the contrary in his papers on participant objectivation.

Going back to the question of “why use Bourdieu?”, the “construction of the research object” – a kind of pre-reflexive reflexivity – is fundamental; and it is fundamental to all that philosophy I was talking about earlier. The norm in a lot of research in the social sciences is to aggregate on the basis of similarities; whilst for Bourdieu what he was looking for was differences, not similarities, within a set of relations. In Grounded Theory as well, and a lot of ethnographic research, the idea is that you aggregate and generalize based on common factors. Bourdieu did the exact opposite. This is a point where there is a lot of misunderstanding of the relationship between the method and the philosophy of Bourdieu. Many do not understand what he did and how he did it. It is quite interesting to see that for a variety of reasons, Bourdieu didn’t necessarily get it across, exactly what he was doing – how he was doing it. Maybe it was too simple, or at least it appeared too simple. So you get the attitude: “oh yes, *habitus*; oh yes, *field*; oh yes, *capital* – I understand that! – let’s apply these metaphors to our data”. So, the whole research process becomes linear and deductive with little room for reflexivity, except in a sense of general self-acknowledgement. A lot of this comes from a lack of



appreciation of where he was coming from and the formative experience he had in developing his approach; I mean the extensive work in Algeria and the Béarn.

For example, in England, Bourdieu became well known in the 70s as a sociologist of education – whilst I would argue that he wasn't really a sociologist of education – I'm not even that sure he was even a sociologist! And it's quite interesting if we go back – I never asked him, but why was his first book called *Sociologie de l'Algérie* (Bourdieu 1958)? Because when we read the book, it's not really a sociology, it's more of an ethnography of sorts, it's an anthropology of Algeria. And even in England, one of his books on method is *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), that's not the title in French – it's *Réponses. Pour une anthropologie réflexive* – and this was still quite late in his career (1992). This is fundamentally different and is partly why he's misunderstood and despised by sociologists: because he's not really doing what they're interested in. For example, and furthermore, he was not interested in social class from the point of view of a conventional sociologist. He is more interested in the mechanism of differentiation/ distinction, symbolic power, the relationship to the State and so on.

**FR: Given all that, can we return to our earlier discussion about *ethos*? In your recent book, *Bourdieu's Metanoia*, you put a special emphasis on this concept. Where does it fit in Bourdieu's theory of practice?**

MG: Going back to the *ethos*, Bourdieu states in one of those articles in the *Impérialismes* book – and I've done it myself – you look at most countries and say “wow, they have a president, a government, a parliament. Therefore, countries are basically the same”. But they're not, they're fundamentally different, and he does state that: “France is the perfect example of ‘revolution’”, and the United States is all about “democracy”, and England is all about “monarchy”. So, these each have a very different *ethos* – thus relationship to time, space, *capital*, etc. Each condition/character controls our relationships, the way we think, our knowledge and relationship to ourselves – everything, in fact. And yet, as a consequence, we end up with a sociology of the invisible, this *ethos* – of what is it that orientates us in the world, even in our most intimate feelings? And that's why Bourdieu often talks about how it is very difficult to undertake his approach to research: for example, the necessity to return again and again

to his Algerian studies, or in the Béarn, to re-objectify findings and, in so doing, uncover more. Again, the process is one that involves an intense engagement between the object of study and the subjective view – and then, of course, the objectification of the objectifying subject. But, what is it to do this? Findings are finally “won” – retrieved even – as part of a process of breaking with previous preconceptions/ classifications. This is why he talks about the “scientific *habitus*” tearing something away from the “empirical *habitus*”. This itself is very easy to say: to tear something out – the French word he uses is *arracher*. But it may take many years: at one point he stated that it took ten years to see the world through the eyes of an Algerian peasant, thirty years to understand what was going on in the Béarn. The latter case, of course, also involved all the sense of personal guilt, all the sense of betrayal of his family background he felt by having to break with classifications and ways of thinking – relations – endowed upon him from the parental home and community. Yet, turning against them enables us to see orthodox classifications as pernicious and ensnaring; both personally and in terms of our discipline-based work. I like a lot the passage from *La distinction* where he writes how “those who classify others, classify themselves for others’ classifications”, etc. To see that in oneself, to see it in its immanence, not in a kind of nice, cozy self-commentary, but to see our deepest aspects of personality and choice – with their *interest* laid bare - to see that held up as being a social production (and reproduction), even in our own science, even in our own academic work – such is not going to be popular among the academic *field*, which is all about orthodoxy, the positions of power etc.; this because the academic *field* is like every other *field*, it conforms to the same logics of the *field*.

So, this is why I end up in my book arguing that Bourdieu’s science requires and is indeed a *metanoia*: a seeing more than a doing, from another distinct scientific *ethos*. But even this is easy to misrecognize. I have read researchers who argue that their aim is “to see the world through *the lens* of Bourdieu” - end of story. It’s *habitus, field, capital* etc. etc. But I say, ‘no’! What is this “lens”? Where does it come from? What’s its effect? Researchers don’t go into that. That is why Bourdieu’s method is an epistemology that becomes an ontology. There is the potential to achieve a deep transformational effect with Bourdieu – but it is also corrosive, as all our dearest wishes and desires and knowledges are evaporated by it – it has the potential to be very dangerous.

If adopted, what is the nature of what results? It is what it is “to understand in the act of understanding”. It’s to understand *in that moment* and to let it go. This implies a whole new relationship to time as well as the object. What is it to describe this object? What is it to be in this thing? What is it that this science gives us? It is certainly not something that we simply just stick down in a paper and publish, and it goes into our CV and we get a job etc. It is something that needs to be appreciated as deeply spiritual – as it evolves from a very high level of attention. Bourdieu refers to it as “intellectual love”, an expression he derived from Spinoza. Spinoza was a deeply spiritual man, so what does that mean? It is why Bourdieu talks about this approach as a kind of revolution. As such, it places the researcher outside of both common sense and discipline orthodoxy since it is against the tide of the established logic of practice; both in its everyday sense and in the practice of any scientific *field*. Thus it may be quite a challenge to instantiate it in academic discourse. In some *fields*, Bourdieu is accepted, in a way – badly. For instance, in education, okay, he is accepted – somewhat erroneously – as “that *cultural capital* man”. In media, a little bit, as a kind of post-structuralist. But there are some *fields* where he is not recognized at all. For example, he upset the linguists with *Ce que parler veut dire* (*Language and Symbolic Power* [Bourdieu 1991]), so they pretend he doesn’t exist. Some *fields* are so protective of themselves, therefore, that they cannot stand Bourdieu because he challenges their orthodoxy. I sometimes describe those researchers who are attempting to articulate a Bourdieusian position within an academic sub-field as ‘praxeological agents’. Their job is to change the way we talk about an object of research. If we can change the way we talk about it, our relation to it changes, which must imply restructuring within the *field*.

**FR: Following on from that point, you have written several works on the relationship between Bourdieu, language, and linguistics. In one of these writings, you claim that “the world seems to be becoming increasingly precarious, and that language and its effects is a central cause for concern in explaining this precariousness” (Grenfell and Pahl 2019:178). How do you see Bourdieu’s sociology of language helping us to deal with this issue?**

MG: What is interesting about that issue is that philosophy of man in the 20<sup>th</sup> century became philosophy of language: going right back to Saussure and his fundamental observation on the separation of the *signifier* and the *signified*, which was a technical

observation, but became a basis of a lot of post-modern thought. Because what we get then is the arbitrary: any *signifier* can go with anything *signified*. That insight – as a reality – is still being played out in our post-modern world of communications, where everything is contested, nothing is real, nothing is substantial; “fake news”, for example. In a sense, though, the relationship between signifier and signified, form and content, meaning and structure is not arbitrary – it’s not that the signifier and the signified are arbitrary. Actually, as always with Bourdieu, what links the signifier and the signified is *interest*, this aspect of *ethos* that defines a particular relation: “it’s in my interest to take this meaning of the word and to impose it upon you”. And that is the struggle within the internet. But, of course, behind that we can go wrong in lots of different directions – like the whole Heideggerian approach. Language is prone to what Bourdieu calls a ‘transformation’ – a ‘transfiguration’ – within the context it finds itself. But this can also induce a kind of transcendence: a black hole of nihilistic reflexive aesthetics: the word becomes autologically flesh – sacred even. How dangerous that can be. Yet, in some ways, Bourdieu is quite close to Heidegger: the kind of *Homo sociologicus* that he is talking about, this *metanoia*, is really a *metanoia* of *Dasein*, it is a kind of grasping the reality of a single interpretative moment (*verstehen*) and what/how it is constituted – epistemologically speaking. So, there is the Heideggerian aspect of that. But of course what happens with Heidegger is a good example of how language can create an entire attitude, in this case to another race, the Jews, and that continues – whether it’s immigrants, or refugees – in a fatal direction. In England at the moment everything is reduced to three words: “Get Brexit done”. “Strong and stable”. Now we have a new one for immigrants: “Stop the boats”. An entire political ontology is expressed in such simple phrases! “Fake News” is a topic in itself now and yet a few years ago it was just a vague notion!!

Bourdieu refers to language as being like a Trojan horse. In that interview he did with Wacquant (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), the latter asks “well, what would be your advice a young researcher”. And I think the very first thing Bourdieu says is, “beware of language”, because language comes with a whole kind of pre-set group of notions, relationships, interests, etc. The danger for a researcher, of course, is that you want to be part of the academic community, you aim to speak the language of the group. So, if we want to do literary criticism, it follows that we speak “literary criticism” – we want to learn their language. But in so doing what we take onboard is again this whole

epistemological genome of a worldview – in this case to literature. However, if we come with a different view, the response is often “you’re not one of us”. Moreover, sometimes, even having the language is not enough. As the rock singer Peter Gabriel sings: “You may look like we do, talk like we do, but you know how it is – you’re not one of us.....”. By systems of convergence and divergence – at a socio-psychological level – we learn to divide and be divided – to distinguish and be distinguished.

This is why in the beginning of *The Rules of Art* Bourdieu (1996) says he can already hear the screams of horror when he takes a sociological scalpel to what is most precious to people: their love of art and what it represents. Often, people want to believe that something is beyond the social, whether it’s art or music (“oh, yes, but Mozart... he’s divine”), but behind that is the whole kind of *La distinction* thing: a practical or detached relationship to the world, where it originates and why. In its aesthetic sense, it is the Kantian view of pure art, the pure aesthetic – transcendental. Art for art’s sake: a position symptomatic of a middle-class *ethos* – a pervasive attitude these days – as defining someone as ahead of the game: “you, you are an individual, you are not constructed, yes you have your special world”, “you are unique”. However, it is a bit like the novel *1984*, where you think you have this special, private room where you can be yourself, and do what you want. But you are being watched – like the algorithms.

This kind of illusion is itself one of transcendence, and it is carried everywhere in language. Such is true in poetry, for example – the so-called “highest form of art” – but this is equally found in the scientific, academic, intellectual *fields*. At one point I have argued in the *Metanoia* book that there exists a pure aesthetic in the scientific *field* just as there is one in the art *field*. In this case, there is the call for a *pure science*, a transcendental Popperian objective knowledge, or “knowledge without a knowing subject”. There is in the physical sciences, therefore, this dream (illusion) of objectivity no less illusory than the divinity of art in cultural *fields*. Why? Because we as human beings find it unbearably painful to let go of our fantasies, and the relationships that form them. Accepting something intellectually (or historically) as arbitrary is not enough. One has to develop an alternative relationship. Bourdieu invites us to respond to the questions: What is the alternative ontology? What is it to know in a different way? What is it *to be* in a different way? What is it to conduct ourselves in a different way? What is it to share an associative language in a different way?

**FR: Most people are stumped when you put these questions to them...**

MG: In my experience, very few people can speak to these questions, to somehow get inside the epistemology to explore them. When it happens it's great, it's like you're playing a musical instrument and wherever one goes, one's co-musician is with you there as well – then we do not have to stop and explain because the philosophy is shared/understood *as a whole*. Here, even all the different concepts are understood as really expressions of the same thing. Normally, if one is using Bourdieu in an academic/intellectual context, the first thing to be done is to explain it and its significance, which invariably leads to many “ifs”, “buts” and “whys”. So immediately we are back to the problem of language and the various relations to it. Because we have these pre-set concepts that cannot be shifted. Rational arguments that result never resolve issues since what needs to be changed is the very relationship to objects/ideas and the language of its representations – the rationality that forms them. This can be exhausting since an entire worldview needs to change – even on the part of those sympathetic to Bourdieu. There is then a need to see not just the language but this relationship *between* the signifier and the signified, and the nature of that relationship. What is our understanding of that relationship? Again, we do not see it because we are looking at something that is invisible. There is then a tendency to focus on the object or the subject that objectifies rather than the constituting space in between.

So, language has become an open playing field because of this post-modern sort of development in the past hundred years or so. Language is now contested all the time, nothing is real in language – and the kind of logical rationality that it gives rise to; for example, if we have freedom of expression, I can say whatever I want. But this *ad hoc* reasoning – what Bourdieu might call “spontaneous sociology” – also leads to a kind of precariousness, or insecurity, that has consequences in terms of the “blasé attitude” mentioned earlier. Everything is relativised. Insights are treated as common sense: “oh yes we do that too” or “everybody does that”. Any view held becomes an entitlement: “well everyone is entitled to their own views” and of equal value/worth. In these situations, there may be no right and wrong – but we can say with Bourdieu that nevertheless “truth is at stake”. And it is a hard truth to follow. So, it is the nature of language itself that allows for this kind of illusions, deceptions; a sort of relativism where we all “think what we think is true”; even when we say “I know what I think isn't true”, we think that this statement/thought is true. Which is another illusion. Rational

discourse is the wrong place to look to resolve these issues. And so, with many arguments over Bourdieu – whether he is this, that or the other, are never ever going to be resolved through a rational discourse in language of a certain kind. A different relationship to language, a different relationship to the discourse, a way of operating outside of that kind of logic has to be found. Otherwise, we always end up with a Hegelian antithesis – whatever I say, someone will come back with an antithesis. The key point here is that there is an alternative, a Spinozan alternative, a Goethian alternative: it is holistic and spatialized, and we begin by seeing things like the room we are sitting in reading this as a whole, instead of seeing the room as a set of discrete objects, but we need to see it *as one*, as a set of relationships. That is a different way of seeing things, a different way of talking about things. It's not easy, but it's not *that* difficult, it's possible. With the *Metanoia* book, I was of course working within the confines of a commercial publisher. What I tried to do is leave a lot of clues in the text. I cannot get to the bottom of Wittgenstein and Goethe and Bourdieu in a single book, but I have left indicators – the pieces are there, the ideas are there – to be followed up on and developed.

**FR: In the *Bourdieu's Metanoia* book you offer both a detailed overview of Bourdieu's work and also make a strong statement of the need to see that work as proposing a new, reflexive way of looking at the social world which entails overcoming the distinction between subject and object. Could you explain some more what you mean by that?**

MG: In a curious way, much of what I have already said pertains to this issue of reflexivity – as the kind of groundwork for understanding *what* it is and, more importantly, *how* to do it. Oddly, even amongst Bourdieusians, reflexivity is almost the elephant in the living room. No-one really talks about it much as part of their research endeavours. The foundational issue is indeed still that of the relationship between the subject and the object. Bourdieu begins *Le Sens pratique* by describing the division between the subject and the object as the most “ruinous” in the social sciences. But how to unpack this statement?

A start is to (re-)discover the phenomenology in Bourdieu. I was sitting one day at the *École normale supérieure* in Paris listening to Bourdieu and it suddenly dawned on me

“hang on, this man is a phenomenologist”. And then I went to see him later and asked, “so did you read phenomenology?” and he said, “yes, all the time when I was a student: Husserl and Schütz and Merleau-Ponty...”. So, for Bourdieu, it's fundamental, it's more than a whiff. But, of course, whilst phenomenology is seen as a quest for human essence and human consciousness, for Bourdieu it's always social, the essence – what I called “the invisible” – is always social. Therefore, it's a very socialized kind of phenomenology. I was very struck by some of Merleau-Ponty's work, what he says about observation – and again, it's a cliché really – you look at something so much, and you get to know it so much, there comes a point where you realize that *it* is looking at *you*. The American playwright Arthur Miller also refers to this phenomenon at the end of his biography, *Timebends* (Miller 1988); about how every day he gets up and he looks at these two trees out there in his garden, and he realized one day that they were looking at him! But, even in that there is a separation – beyond. “You looking at them” and “they looking at you” it is actually one and the same apprehension. That is why I spoke earlier about “understanding in the act of understanding”. At that point, the subject and the object are indeed one. In a similar extension, it is not that we do sociology and then we come home and you stop doing sociology: everything is you, everything you observe is you. So, we have to work on this “you” and how it observes. This is the nature of the relationship between the observer and the observed. In the empirical state, the subject and the object, even if you separate them – they are still one. We cannot stop them being one product of an instantiated point in time. But we can change our relationship at that point. Of course, academically we tend to want to “remove the researcher from it” as a claim for objectivity, but this is impossible. At first, it is quite shocking when Bourdieu writes of “Participant *Objectivation*” (Bourdieu 2000) and all the related texts. Here, he states all the opposite to what is being said to research students at the university, “you have to be objective, do participant *observation* etc.” He argues that this latter is a contradiction in terms: the researcher should *use* their experience, not be the “objective outsider”. This is opposite to Anglo-Saxon social science. So, there is a whole philosophical argument about the relationship between the subject and the object, and they are, by definition, one. But, as I have argued, it is not only that they are one; there is the question: what is the nature of that oneness? Is it social in provenance? Or is it something beyond? These elements are the core of reflexivity – not as subject/object objectification but as subject/object being.



**FR: Sociologists generally aren't trained to engage in this kind of reflexivity – the commonsensical view of reflexivity in the *field* is rather mechanical and “narcissistic”, as Bourdieu himself said.**

MG: In the type of work that Bourdieu is talking about, it's not enough just to observe, for instance, I look at my house and say “oh yes, it's a middle-class house of a university professor” – this is not enough: that's what he calls the attempt to transcend thought by the power of thought itself! It is actually to see what is immanent in that interaction all the time; then, there is no separation. So, what is its nature? And most of the time, for most people, what is there is social in provenance. And, of course, it is social for me too, but there's a kind of relationship to the social which changes the social, if that makes sense. You have to accept, at the end of the day, “I'm an English man, I'm of a certain age etc.” I'm socially constructed, I'm not going to change that just by objectifying it, but I can see it in its immanence, I can see it in its implications, the *interests* it carries. And, just a little bit, this was the most important point for Bourdieu, ultimately you can begin to free yourself from it. Because you can see the point where *interest* enters with particular motives.

So, what is that *interest*? Is that *interest* in truth, or is it *interest* in what would profit us? And as soon as we are into the latter, we are into a capitalistic mode of relationship, with all that that implies in terms of relations to time and space and symbolic profit. We may have disguised it a lot, because we are intellectuals, but we are still capitalists, we are still thinking capitalistically, “yes, that would suit me, that would profit me”. But there is an alternative. There is a point where such an *interest* enters that relationship and we can say “no, I stand on the side of truth and not on the side of *interest* – I have an *interest* in truth”. Of course, we know we want a job somewhere, so we can use this understanding for our advantage, “it is actually to my benefit to pose as this sort of person”. We are playing a game. But, as I said previously, we can acknowledge all that, and still have the intention to act as praxeological agents, working undercover as it were – the resistance – we have to believe in the project. So, by going out into the world with this kind of epistemology we have an influence, small as it is. Gurdjieff talked about how if there are two hundred conscious people in the world, we could change it. But we don't have two hundred conscious people, maybe we have two or three. So, we do what we can do. We are not going to get there by launching a campaign; we are going to get

there through the people we work with and how we do it – passing that on. It was not just by some kind of indulgence that Bourdieu would meet with people. If you went to Bourdieu, he would give you time, he gave me time. Ironically, however, the more public he became, the more he lost control of how he was received. Fighting on several fronts eventually killed him, in my opinion. Even in France, it is terrible, the post-Bourdieu community, they are another *field*, they are struggling with each other. They are good people, but they are doing very well out of Bourdieu – commentaries, etc. – without the empirical studies or the political engagement. In this sense, he has become “commodified” – “capitalized” – himself. Of course, academics are consumed by the ferocity of the French intellectual *field*, and fighting for their own purposes. Well, up to a point we all have to do that – and Bourdieu did it as well, of course – but there has to be a limit. We have to know we are doing it. So, there has to be a willingness to operate at several levels. Bourdieu did this. He understood this: he was not going to change things directly by working for Mitterrand but the product of that work had a *symbolic power* that was useful in opposing orthodox voices. It is hard, but we do not have a choice.

**FR: Both in Brazil and England, Bourdieu was first known as a sociologist of education. In Brazil he was read as a theorist of reproduction for showing how the educational system contributes to the maintenance of inequalities; because of this, he was considered an opponent by many Marxist intellectuals who believed in the emancipatory school. Do you think that the school still contributes to the reproduction of inequality?**

MG: The short answer is “yes” – *contributes* being the apposite word. In fact, it has got worse in many ways. I think Bourdieu was one of the first, probably not the first, but one of the most prominent people who “blew the whistle” on schools. In England, if we go back 20 or 30 years before the sixties, most children were leaving school at 14. Comprehensive education in the UK and the expansion of education in France was seen as one of the great gains of the post-war period. In France, also, this whole thing from the 1930s, the Catholic intellectuals who were Marxists as well, which is very appreciated in South America, but certainly not understood in England, the idea of “*l’* *épanouissement de la personne*” (the blossoming of the individual person), and the belief that education could do this, the whole public culture, access to *Education*

*permanente* (Adult Education), the *Maison de la culture*, *Peuple et culture*, all of this idea of educating “the masses” was seen as one of the great conquests of the post-war period; as well of course as training people for the modern workforce. And so, Bourdieu was a bit of what you could call a “party-pooper” by saying “it’s not like that”: it is not enough to make the school equal, because the people going into school are already unequal in terms of their language, culture etc. When I realized that myself as a student it was incredibly depressing: it was like when one thinks there is a God and then one day “oh no, there is no God, it’s terrible” and we feel really depressed about it, disenchanted – it was like that for me. Because it was one of the fundamental things for me, I went to comprehensive school and it takes you a long time to get over that.

And that touches on one of the things that people often say about Bourdieu, “okay so what are you going to do about it?” There’s a kind of fatalism about Bourdieu’s approach: that whatever we do to counteract these inequalities, the dominant maintain their position through a whole set of *conversion strategies* sometimes spanning generations. Bourdieu would reply, “well, let’s recognize that it’s so to begin with – better to know than not know”. There is no easy answer but the insights he provides do begin to change ways of thinking and therefore relations to policies and how to formulate them, etc. There are of course things to say about resistance, there are things you can do, but in many ways his predictions have become even more accurate. We have people with doctorates now working in McDonald’s because of *qualification inflation*, etc. Education was the greatest *cultural capital* of the fifties and sixties, this is no longer the case, it is not enough now. Because it’s been devalued – everybody has it. So in England there has been a reassertion of the importance of *economic capital* – parents buy a good education and cultural accouterments. *Social capital* is important also where social networks “buy” entrée into prestigious groups. *Cultural capital* is no longer sufficient. Indeed, it is almost a kind of luxury to study for the sake of studying now, whereas before it was seen as a kind of requirement to gain profitable employment. And it is again in this kind of invisible way, this *misrecognition* as Bourdieu calls it, that the reproduction of the social hierarchy and its mediums is maintained. Of course, it is loose, individuals almost do not have to do anything, because the relationship – again, the nature of the relationship – is there, they just stand back and say, “well, it’s all equal” and go back to common sense language, “the mass of the population...”

everybody has the same chance...”, etc., etc. Even parents collude in this kind of failure of their children and things like that.

**FR: And this clashes with the traditional Marxist theory of education.**

MG: For Bourdieu, the Marxist position is too mechanical, especially with its rigid view of social class reproduction through “state ideological apparatuses” in the Althusserian approach, for example, In a way, schools are indeed “state ideological apparatuses”, of course, but not as a linear imposition of ideology, more in the very nature of their *ethos*: reproduction – not replication – is in fact their *raison d’être*. I wrote about this in the *Metanoia* book: how Bourdieu says about Marx that “one man can only do so much”, so Marx ended up overemphasizing the economic aspect. Classes are changing, the social hierarchy is changing. The reconversion strategies are being reanimated all the time in England. It is in that sense that “social class does not exist”; it is a multi-dimensional universe, but over time the tendency is for the reproduction of the elites – not entirely, some people make it, but for most people the dominated remain dominated – and *vice versa*. And what he said is that education *contributes* to that, this is one of the main points to make: he doesn’t say that education is the *only* reason for that, just that it contributes to that. So, it’s quite depressing, if you’re looking to education as a source of social emancipation you are going to be disappointed. Right up to his latest work, *La misère du monde* and things like that...

At the end of the day, this is the terrible thing about Bourdieu, the school was *created* for class reproduction – quite the opposite to what it’s sold as, “education as your means to get emancipation”, no! It is in this sense that he is not a sociologist of education, because education is only one of the institutions of the State he was interested in. He was interested in it early for a lot of reasons. It is *one* of the institutions of the State, that determines the State. As I have mentioned, it is very different in France as it is in England, but it is still a very significant institution in social class reproduction. Probably more significant in some countries than in others. But the outcome is that the elites, mostly, remain the elites. You can do a *field* analysis, the number of English ministers that come from Eton, and go “oh look, they are also in charge of the BBC etc.”, how they permeate and define governance – and they’ve all been to Oxford. The *field* analysis of the *field* of power is unmistakable. That is why parents in England pay a lot

of money to send their children to private schools and get them to Oxford, because they know that through it comes an *esprit de corps* and they are made, it's enough. So, there are technical and theoretical reasons to argue with the Marxists, but I think their view is a bit too *doctrinaire*. If you go to the average school here with that kind of Marxist view, as that Marxist relationship to the subject and the object, you are going to miss a lot. Because there's an entire anthropology going on, in England especially between different ethnic groups, etc. It's not just about social class, that is a fairly crude measure.

**FR: Now a couple of more personal questions to wrap it up: how did you come across Bourdieu's work? And how did you come to meet and work with him in the 1980s?**

MG: When I was a student, an undergraduate student – this was in the 70s, I did a French degree, it was French contemporary studies and we studied economics, geography, history, politics, and one of the subjects was sociology. To begin with, we just studied straight sociology, English sociology, Rae, Dahrendorf, Giddens etc. and then we considered some of the French sociology. Naturally all the undergraduate work was based around Durkheim, Marx and Weber – we had to do all of that. I did essays about control and direction, Marx versus Weber, etc. and Bourdieu was just one of the people we read. At the time, Alain Touraine was also big in French sociology. I also read Michel Crozier and Joffre Dumazedier. So, Bourdieu was in the air so to speak. We were constantly writing these essays and having these debates and things like that. And then the fundamental book I read was Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967). Why did that have such a big effect on me? Because unlike what we were obliged to do, they said that actually Marx, Weber and Durkheim are saying the same thing. "Wow, what does this mean?" And I saw it, like Bourdieu, the shock, I felt it, like a visceral thing – an epiphany. And that was my first sense of dialectical thinking. Because they talked about the "internalization of externality" and the "externalization of internality", and I could see that dynamic, "that's the way to go". All the essays I'd been writing were a load of rubbish and all the arguments I was being given, and most of the English sociology I was reading was terrible. It had to be dialectic.

Bourdieu had already used this type of language – although he downplayed it later in his career – but there’s an article where he talks about the “externalization of internality and the internalization of externality” – exactly the same words. So, we were travelling the same road. Bourdieu in the 60s was not that great a character in the UK at all and, even in France, he was quite distant, never appeared in the media, etc. I know somebody who said, “Oh yes, I remember him in the sixties at a conference, he was in the swimming pool and we never knew at the time that Bourdieu was going to become ‘Bourdieu’, he was just a guy”. Anyway, I started to read a little bit about and by Bourdieu. I was interested in Weber and religion actually. I did my undergraduate thesis on Catholic de-Christianization and the intellectual response to it. But, because of the religion I was already interested in the dialectic, how ideas create social structures and social structures create ideas, etc. But then I did teacher training, so I was plunged into the full foundational disciplines, sociology of education, psychology of education, history of education, philosophy of education – but I already came equipped with dialectical thinking and Bourdieu – and I used to negotiate my own essay titles with the lecturers, and it was always another step in the Bourdieu line.

It was at that time that I met Bourdieu, around 1980/1981. *La distinction* had just been published in France. I was living in London and he came to the French Institute to give a presentation about it. The French Institute in London is in South Kensington, a very bourgeois area where rich people live. At his talk, it was obvious they had no interest in what he was saying. After his talk there was a cocktail party upstairs and they were not interested in him. He just stood in the corner on his own. I knew who he was, I knew his work and I went over and spoke to him. I was very nervous to address him since I had a lot of respect for him – but it was like I already knew him, not just his work, but his spirit. It took me years to find out why I had that sense of affinity with him, and it was because we had the same *habitus*. His was French and mine was English but our backgrounds were the same – structurally speaking. Anyway, later he invited me to go as a visiting scholar to Paris. In the 1980s, it was like rock’n’roll in Paris, we thought we were going to change the world with these intellectual ideas – they were very exciting times. I became a schoolteacher, as there were no university jobs in England, it was the beginning of Thatcher. I was teaching French and German in London, and I did a Masters degree in Applied Linguistics as well. There was a professor there called Michel Blanc who was French and knew Bourdieu as well, and had done work with

Bourdieu, so he resonated straight away with me. So, that is how I came to do the work on Bourdieu and language. In those days the translations of his work were not there. I was translating it and using it, and it was exciting because I was able to bring the ideas into British academic culture. At Michel Blanc's department at the University of London, they held hundreds of tapes of a linguistic corpus, which they had collected with Bourdieu's help. It was carried out in Orléans just after 68 – it was 1969. These events of May 1968 – the *événements* – we were all very interested in them. And, I did a phonology, and phonetic and semantic analysis of the corpus within a Bourdieusian frame. And that is how I started working with Bourdieu because few were doing language studies from his perspectives. During that time, I went very often to Paris and I had three extended periods there. And, then again, by pure destiny, fate, by chance, I got a job at Southampton University. It was just to train teachers, so not a particularly high academic job. But I was onboard, I had a full-time job at a university and then I did my doctorate and I used Bourdieu in a kind of phenomenology of teacher experience, like a philosophy of education. So, all that time I was working with material and quite regularly visiting him – I would go to Paris to go and speak with him.

**FR: And he has remained your main inspiration throughout your academic career. How do you see this relationship?**

MG: Different times I tried to say, “no no no, I'm going to stop with this and do something else” but inevitably, like when I did the work on art, I'd say to myself “oh no I need to use Bourdieu”, because a lot of the stuff I read was so poor compared to his ideas. This work with art was very interesting, because we were concerned more with art production – the *field* of art production – than cultural consumption. Bourdieu had done a lot of work on cultural consumption – museums, taste, etc. which many others had taken up on. But we were interested in the cultural producers themselves. What is a Bourdieusian art? What about the cultural producer? This whole idea of “social art”? Is it possible? I have the transcript of a seminar he did with art students in Nîmes. Here, he attempts to suggest to these young artists that his theory of practice could be useful to them, but how? “Man, we're painters, how can sociology be useful?” and he tries to convince them how this might be so, and I was very interested in that. In this sense, it connected with my interests in Gurdjieff and the idea of “objective art”, an art that is not socially constructed – what is that? In fact, one of the speculations I have had is that

Gurdjieff was around in Paris for a long time, and this notion of reflexivity and observation has strong resonances between them – I don't know if this notion of reflexivity and objectivation came from Gurdjieff or not, but he was very influential in the intellectual *field* in Paris – everyone would read about it, or go to his apartment around the back of the Arc de Triomphe, etc. So, it was “in the air” in the 1930s and 40s – the period immediately coinciding with Bourdieu's education.

For Bourdieu, in the final part of my *Metanoia* book I talk about the last time I met him, and I saw the way he had become a phenomenon. When I was first working with him, he was just another sociologist and then he became this international intellectual celebrity. As I said, the first time I saw him he was on his own in the corner. But the last time was also at the French Institute in London and it was as if Paul McCartney was in the room. He was surrounded, and everyone wanted to speak to him. It was impossible to get anywhere near him. I'd spoken to him in Paris a few days before. I also saw that with his social engagement with *La misère du monde*, when that came out in 1993, he became much more of a public figure. As I say, he then seemed to be fighting on every front: fellow intellectuals, politicians, TV, journalists and his national and international critics. One described his philosophy as “terrorism”! I saw how all that exhausted him. When I first met him he was 50, at the height of his powers, having just published *La distinction*. But now it was almost 20 years on from that and he was fighting everybody and we could see this. In the “Afterword” of my book I write about going to visit him and I could see how he was just about *usé* (the French word meaning ‘worn out’) – he was totally exhausted by the whole thing. Nevertheless, the fact that his project represents both a public and a personal quest is important – it was for him and it is for anybody who wants to take up Bourdieu. This is why I have also written about *the levels* of using of Bourdieu in the book – how far does somebody want to take it? Are they Level 1 or Level 2 or Level 3 ... Level 8? I did that because I felt very often I was critical of people who were doing their best with basic concepts. But I would say, “yeah, that's not very good”. With the “levels”, the idea is to know and acknowledge the level of engagement and commitment to this work – how far one is willing to take it, and the cost. So, whatever level one is at is OK, as long as this is recognized, maybe with the possibility of taking it further.

**FR: And how do you move through these levels?**



MG: There is an entire project to consider about how anyone is going to use this material, why, and how far are they are going to go with it. And that's always an interesting question because it is a bit like the musician Robert Fripp's approach, where what one achieves depends on the "degree of suffering" we are willing to take on. If we want to just breeze through a few books – fast reading – get it done and go out and have fun and spend time with our family, it is okay, but there's another project available which is more profoundly involving at a social, intellectual *and* personal level. When discussing what was necessary to undertake the sort of projects I have referred to here – his and mine – Bourdieu never ceased to say, "*oh, c'est très couteux*". So, he understood how costly – personally – it is to do that kind of work. But, it is like when one plays a musical instrument, or speaks a foreign language, when someone speaks of Bourdieu it is easy to see what stage they are at with respect to his work – simply because I have been at that stage myself and recognize it. I might think, "maybe another five years and you will make a breakthrough, but maybe not, maybe five days, I don't know" – it takes time and depends on the individual ultimately. So, there are kinds of stages that we all go through to the total application. And in an odd sort of way, for me personally, it's not like you go "yes, that's what I want to be, that's what I want to do"... rather, it becomes *logically necessitated* (or at least dispositionally necessitated). Like even now with the last book: I know I am talking once more about Bourdieu but already my mind goes "but there is more – this to say and that etc..." It is something that has its own life, and in this way it also looks back at us and draws us on. It *calls* you by your name. The song by Leonard Cohen where he sings, "Love calls you by your name". It is the same thing with this work: this kind of journey calls us – the Foucauldian appellation is we are *interpolated* by it. But it is demanding. When people complained that his work was complicated, he would say "well yes, but life is complicated". And the work – the various books in particular – have now become canonic. That being said, a lot of Bourdieu's work, his books, are not linear; anyone can dip into them at any point – we do not need to read from page one to the end. This is because he is trying to describe this holistic thing. He is not doing it linearly. And I still find myself doing this: taking one of the books and opening it on any page and, for sure, there is always something like, "well, I never thought about that" – it is so rich.

**FR: This richness makes Bourdieu alluring for many students learning social sciences, but many others also feel intimidated by it.**

MG: That's why sometimes I say to people, I warn against trying to read too much, because it will kill you – think about what you are interested in, look up the relevant topics in the index, have a look outside, what it means to you, about your own views... If I ask somebody now to read Bourdieu, even the basic books, how long would it take to read them well? *Esquisse, Sens pratique, Distinction, Métier de sociologue*... two years? Three years? So, it is important to use it in a developmental way but it's also important not to be facile, "oh yeah I got it, *habitus field capital*, etc". The general thing I find is that one gets a lot of pseudo-biographical work – *habitus* – that people extrapolate from. There is very little *mapping of the field*. My effort with the three phases I set out, or three levels, was to bring some kind of consensus that there are important stages in approaching a research project from a Bourdieusian perspective: *Construction of the research object; Field analysis; and Participant objectivation*. And then three levels to *field* analysis: the *field*, the *field* and the *field* of power, and the *field* in terms of individual positions within it – *habitus*. It is rare for these stages and levels to be acknowledged in research. Often, researchers attempt some kind of broadly based ethnographical study at the *habitus* level, and there is no *mapping of the field*, even conceptually, and very little on the *field* of power. In terms of the three phases, they are often completely ignored: no thought about the *Construction of the research object*, no *Participant objectivation*, or at least none other than "I am a researcher, that's objectivation done". There's no real engagement with the theory of practice, either. Even page 3 of *Outline of the Theory of Practice*. I encourage researchers to read page 3; those sections where Bourdieu writes about the "ruptures", "breaks", etc. What's going on here? I have read that page so many times - what's going on in that page? Indeed, Bourdieu writes a lot about "breaking", "ruptures", "refusals"... what is that about? Where are we as individuals? Where am I "refusing" and "rupturing" and "breaking"? How ready are we to go through that process? It's challenging on several levels, and there are not very many people willing to confront these questions. Many academics writing about Bourdieu do not do the necessary empirical work – they almost forget about anything based on empirical work. They prefer theoretical speculation of what he meant or whether he was this or that: a kind of Bourdieusian archeology. What is more interesting are researchers attempting to use Bourdieu in a practical way:

struggling with what that means and how to do it. I used it a lot practically; in art, in education, in language, in music, in health and occupational studies, I did these as *field* studies – and one should remember that Bourdieu badged his own annual lectures at the *Collège de France* as “Explorations in Field Theory”. My own are not perfect, but they are an attempt to uncover the working of various *field* contexts – *microcosms* – and evaluate the outcomes – both theoretically and methodologically. Writers often find it easier to discuss whether Bourdieu was a Marxist, or a realist, or a Jacobin, or a ...whatever.

Then, there are studies attempting to prove whether Bourdieu was right or wrong. Like why spend millions of pounds on attempting to redo *La distinction* only to conclude that comparing the UK in the noughties with France in the 1960s, there are some differences and some similarities – when there are so many more interesting questions about cultural consumption and production to address. These sorts of things are not interesting. Others write a lot about higher education, but there are few attempts to approach national studies of the type offered in *Homo academicus* (Bourdieu 1988).

It is how useful Bourdieu’s philosophy and method are in practice that is most important; and, having carried out a Bourdieusian empirical study, what do we know now that we didn’t know before? I have one student, for example, in Chile researching urban architecture, and struggling a lot to convince his tutors that Bourdieu is useful to this academic *field*. How can it be useful in this context? How are you going to construct architecture in terms of Bourdieu? These are challenging questions, but for many it is easier to just write another semi-philosophical discussion about whether he was a republican or whatever. It is much easier to speculate than to actually try to see such questions in our own selves and in our own practical research objects.

That said, there is clearly an ever-expanding interest, energy and enthusiasm for Bourdieu’s work – and not just at an intellectual professional level but also personally in the way people’s lives are shaped and can be shaped. Both involve politics, of course. So, there is much left to do – theoretically and practically.

**FR: Thank you very much for your time.**

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