

Thinking
Blue

Marxism and the (Post)Human

Writing

Red

Stephen Tumino



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II.

Capital

The New Global Intellectual

Transnational capitalism has, as *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* says, ‘simplified’ the question of social inequality by dividing the world between a class of ‘haves’ whose material needs are met only because the majority ‘have not’ the means to do so as these means have been privatized.¹ This ruthless binary of class in global capitalism has produced a new wave of anti-capitalist struggles that has given renewed urgency to the question: what is the place of the intellectual in contemporary social relations? It is as one answer to this question that a new global intellectual has emerged, featured most prominently in the writings of Pierre Bourdieu. The global intellectual as found in Bourdieu’s texts seeks to go beyond the dominant notion of the ‘local intellectual’ required by an earlier, more regulated, phase of capital accumulation that traces itself in the writings of Foucault, Lyotard, and de Certeau, to name a few.

The local intellectual, according to Foucault, is not a ‘totalizing’ and ‘theorizing’ intellectual, someone who demystifies the mystique of commodity culture by speaking for truth and justice and providing the oppressed and exploited with emancipatory knowledges.² Rather, he is a ‘specific’ intellectual who, in the name of getting things done, separates and self-encloses the local from the global by focusing on the experiences of the oppressed as sites of spontaneous ‘resistances’ to ‘power’, which is itself considered primarily cultural by Foucault and unconnected to global class forces. The specific intellectual is an intellectual who is not really an intellectual because he uses the rhetoric

1 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, ‘Manifesto of the Communist Party’, *Karl Marx/ Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 6, pp. 477–519 (p. 485).

2 Michel Foucault, ‘Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation Between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze’, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 205–17.

of theory to merely re-describe the common sense and support a rather traditional empiricism. He is a post-al intellectual who uses anti-theory *theory* to obscure the division of labor by positing an ideal commonality across class lines for ethical and pragmatic reasons. The conclusion of such a cynical practice is the banality that, as Foucault put it, 'the masses no longer need [the intellectual] to gain knowledge: they know perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he' and can 'speak for themselves'.³ Foucault posits a merely semiotic freedom as the limit text of the political that, like all bourgeois freedoms, is empty because it occludes the class relations of production which in actuality divide the powerful from the powerless. This ideological occlusion of class relations is necessary to normalize the freedom to exploit labor-power at the center of capitalism, the freedom to work or starve for the majority in order to produce wealth for a few. Foucault's specific intellectual provides a familiar alibi for capital in making the freedom of speech more important than economic freedom in the regime of wage-labor by occluding the global division of labor. Yet it is this division of labor between capital owners and propertyless workers that actually determines why for the many the merely formal democracy of bourgeois society secures their exploitation by the few. In short, the local intellectual speaks for those who already have their material needs met who can afford to see politics in terms of what is possible within the existing institutions of capitalism and already have the power to project that interest as universal.

As I have suggested, in the current climate of a growing anti-capitalist movement which is seeking to address the actions of big business on a global scale, the merely semiotic democracy of the 'specific' intellectual appears too readily corporatized to be legitimate because it performs a reification of power that authorizes the volunteerist subjectivity required by the free market to normalize its rule as the social good. By fetishizing discursive 'resistance' in the cultural everyday where all appear equal in relation to speech, Foucault's discourse theory of the social underwrites the bourgeois fiction that wage-labor is a 'lifestyle choice'. As this pan-culturalism can no longer cover the contradictions of global capitalism, newer legitimations of wage-labor have emerged that take the form of

3 Ibid., p. 207.

a critique of the ludic cultural politics of postmodernism. Bourdieu's writings are central to this cultural shift in the ruling discourses.

Bourdieu has directly critiqued the dominant knowledges as complicit with social inequality by arguing, for instance, that the local intellectual's exclusive focus on the cultural has ignored 'the highest achievements of civilization [...] living and active in people's lives' that 'govern their everyday existence', such as 'the right to work, a health and welfare system'.⁴ He has opposed the local intellectual for presenting 'the defense of these entitlements' as 'a form of conservatism', thereby serving the reigning neoliberal orthodoxy by helping to create 'a climate favorable to the withdrawal of the state and, more broadly, its submission to the values of the economy' that are making 'the consumer [...] the commercial substitute for the citizen'.⁵ In the interests of speaking broadly to a growing international counter-hegemony, he has proposed a new 'collective intellectual' who is capable of recognizing that 'the state also exists in the minds of the workers' as an 'attachment to "established rights"' and who will reactivate this sense of justice so as to 'invent new forms of collective political work capable of taking note of necessities, especially economic ones'.⁶

And yet, Bourdieu's concept of a collective intellectual, while breaking rhetorically with Foucault's specific intellectual, returns in the end to the same reformist conclusions that alibi capitalism. On these reformist terms, the function of the intellectual, whether 'global' or 'specific', is to pluralize the social into localities and normalize a merely superstructural politics by occulting knowledge of the material base — the structure of conflicts over the rate of exploitation inscribed in what Marx calls the capitalist 'working day'.⁷ As for Foucault, Bourdieu's intellectual similarly remains a pragmatist who takes his performance of ignorance as a model for the social good: he is thus someone who will not 'provide answers to all questions about the social movement and its future' but an activist who can 'help to define the function of meetings'

4 Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*, trans. by Richard Nice (New York: The New Press, 1998), p. 61.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7, 25.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. vii, 26, 33.

7 Karl Marx, 'The Working Day', Chapter 10, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. I, *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983), 35, pp. 239–43.

under the ethical alibi of putting aside the privilege of his 'cultural capital' and letting others 'speak for themselves'.⁸ Leaving aside the immanent (logical, ethical) contradictions of an intellectual who makes the figure of the intellectual a populist who puts himself in the place of 'the people' as a zone of knowing without theory, the fact that this is not a disinterested but a partisan practice undertaken on the side of capital and directed against the workers is clear when the 'cultural capital' of the intellectual being singled out for erasure is 'Marxist theory' because of its commitment to 'provide answers to all questions about the social movement and its future'.⁹

Bourdieu makes the intellectual into a symbolic designation whose knowledges, her cultural capital, make her an 'elite' dominating over others whose knowledges have less status in the market and who can only unite with these others, therefore, by de-privileging her knowledges and becoming a pragmatic activist. Although Bourdieu takes the narrowing of intellectual horizons resulting from such a move — from discussing 'the social movement and its future' to 'defining the function of meetings' — as globally consequential and essential for a 'new collective intellectual' capable of inventing 'new collective forms of political work', a 'new division of labor' and a 'new internationalism', it is nothing of the kind.¹⁰ In actuality the intellectual as anti-theorist activist represents the global privatization of the intellectual as someone who refuses to become a traitor to the ruling class by raising themselves 'to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement [of class society] as a whole'.¹¹

It is only such a scientific knowledge of social totality as provided by classical Marxism that can produce an understanding not only of the effects, but also of the causes of inequality in capitalism and therefore of what needs to be done to change it. By merely contesting the political dominance of capital and its symbolic mystique through ethical performances of symbolic disinvestments in 'cultural capital' while failing to provide a scientific (i.e., materially causal) knowledge of the social, the figure of the new global intellectual in Bourdieu's writings

8 *Acts*, p. 56.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 56.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 41, 57.

11 Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto', p. 494.

merely reinscribes the ruling ideas that, as a totality, make cultural changes at the level of the superstructure more important than meeting the need for what Marx calls theory as a 'material force': 'theory [...] capable of seizing the masses' because it 'grasp[s] things by the root'.¹² The 'root' of social inequality is not 'knowledge' but 'labor'.

The differences in knowledges available in a society reflect differences in labor, especially the amount of time people have available after performing the socially necessary labor required for them to survive. For the majority, time is mostly spent in performing unpaid surplus-labor for the capitalist who realizes a profit from it. This class division of labor between the many who are wage-slaves for the few who own the means of production will not change with changes in lifestyle and knowledge, by the voluntary sacrifice of the cultural prestige that comes with performing intellectual labor for example. It will only change when 'the expropriators are expropriated' by the working class and form 'an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.¹³ Because of the high technical level of development of the productive forces, such a revolution presupposes workers who have already become class-conscious, i.e., 'raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement [of class society] as a whole'.¹⁴ In other words, the historical materialist theorization of class-consciousness in classical Marxism presupposes that 'the time [...] of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of masses lacking consciousness is past' as capitalism itself has already produced a proletarian vanguard; the 'most advanced and resolute section' of the 'proletariat [that] is already conscious of its historic task and is constantly working to develop that consciousness into complete clarity' in the social movements.¹⁵ What

12 Karl Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Law*. Introduction', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 3, pp. 175–87 (p. 182).

13 Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 750; 'Manifesto', p. 506.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 494.

15 Frederick Engels, 'Introduction to Karl Marx's *Civil War in France*', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1990), 27, pp. 506–524 (p. 520); Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto', p. 497; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 4, pp. 5–211 (p. 37).

is required of the intellectual due to these conditions is not to perform exemplary actions but to take sides in the ongoing class struggle at the level of theory where '[t]he only choice is — either bourgeois or socialist ideology [for] in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or an above class ideology'.¹⁶

Despite the call for reinvigorating the demands of class justice against a capitalist monolith, what is deployed as the social totality and a global alternative to inequality in Bourdieu's writings is merely opposition to the cultural domination of capital and not its basic class arrangements. Bourdieu's writings are so popular now not because they contain a radical critique of the knowledge industries of capitalism, such as postmodernism and globalization, but because, despite their critique of the dominant knowledges, they serve to contain the social contradictions and maintain capitalism by limiting the critique to reforming the culture of capitalism rather than contesting its basic class arrangements. Bourdieu reveals as much when he naively blurts out that in the end he is not so much against capitalism as a global regime of exploitation but only 'unfettered capitalism without any disguise' because of the 'total costs' to society incurred in terms of 'the logic of enlightened self-interest' itself, such as 'the insecurity of persons and property, the consequent policing costs, etc'.¹⁷ He protests, in short, undisguised capitalism for one with a better disguise. In other words, one with a government that directs the social wealth of workers more effectively in terms of reconciling them to their own exploitation by normalizing more efficient police forces so that capitalism as a whole is less vulnerable to the emerging social revolution. It is because of this basic acceptance of capitalism that Bourdieu does not contest the underlying exploitation of labor that makes capitalism — the extraction of surplus-value from propertyless wage-workers that must be central to any radical critique for social change — but instead what he calls 'flexploitation', 'a mode of domination of a new kind'.¹⁸ As Mas'ud Zavarzadeh has theorized of post-ality generally, 'flexploitation' too 'posits, a rupture, in capitalism:

16 V. I. Lenin, 'What Is To Be Done?: Burning Questions of Our Movement', *V. I. Lenin Collected Works*, 45 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 5, pp. 347–529 (p. 384).

17 *Acts*, pp. 35, 40.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

one that severs the past of capitalism from what is regard[ed] to be its radically different and 'new' present (which unlike its past is now free from exploitation).¹⁹

On this post-al logic, the object of the 'new' capitalism (flexploitation), Bourdieu argues, is more the disciplining of the workers in the fixed idea that 'economic forces cannot be resisted' and creating in them a 'sense of unworthiness' than their exploitation at the site of production.²⁰ The very 'economic necessity' Bourdieu uses to critique the merely cultural politics of postmodernism is, it turns out, itself merely cultural and more concerned with the 'worker's belief[s]' rather than, as Marx and Engels put it, in 'what the proletariat is in actuality and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do'.²¹

Furthermore, in taking what is a constant feature of capitalism in general — the alienation of the worker that comes from her separation from the means of production and lack of control over her own labor/life — and making this feature the basis for positing a new mode of domination (flexploitation) that posits a break in capitalism, Bourdieu returns social theory to an economism characteristic of bourgeois sociology and political economy generally which always locates the motive forces of history in individuals conceived as essentially free of the social relations of production. On this view, 'cause' and 'effect' are reversed and as a consequence Bourdieu is in effect arguing that if workers simply felt differently about themselves, the contradictions of the social, and in particular the inequalities produced by capitalist relations of exploitation, could be resolved. Such culturalism is in fact the *arche*-logic of economism despite the sentimentalism, because economism in essence denies that social inequalities are determined by the mode of production. Thus, it posits that all that is necessary in order to resolve the social contradictions of capitalism is to address the inequities as a self-enclosed issue of what Weber called 'life chances on the market', in other words, as matters of the distribution of resources rather than of the general conditions that shape the social. What else is this in practice

19 Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, 'Post-Ality: The (Dis)Simulations of Cybercapitalism', *Transformation 1: Marxist Boundary Work in Theory, Economics, Politics and Culture* (Montreal: Maisonneuve Press, 1995), pp. 1–75 (p. 1).

20 *Acts*, pp. 31, 99.

21 *Acts*, p. 87; 'Holy Family', p. 37.

but a call for an 'ethical' capitalist who is not so 'greedy' because he has been moved by the spectacle of an 'empowered' worker who has found self-esteem in her work? What such sentimentalism leaves out, of course, is that production for profit over meeting and cultivating social needs is structurally necessary within capitalism and not in actuality a free choice for capital or labor.

It is this fundamental idealism in Bourdieu's writings that has made him so popular. One of the tasks of this text is to show how this idealism surfaces in his major concepts and throughout his writings, from the more sociological to the more activist. Because some of these concepts, such as 'capital' and 'class', are appropriated from political economy in order to transform them into tropes whose only substance is ideological, Bourdieu must oppose the orthodox Marxist critique of these concepts as 'bad' epistemology, and thus I also place the texts of revolutionary Marxism in active contestation with Bourdieu's writings throughout this text. Not only does this reveal the class struggle being waged in contemporary theory in which the texts of revolutionary Marxism are totally suppressed by the dominant knowledges but it also advances Marxist theory so as to address the common sense objection that this theory is unable to explain the contemporary which is assumed to be post-exploitation and therefore post-revolutionary.

Take the concept of 'capital' for example. Capital, as only Orthodox Marxism explains, is precisely what divides the working class from the capitalist class and is specific to capitalism as a mode of production premised on the commodification of labor-power. Capital is the accumulated surplus-value extracted by the capitalists who, having monopolized the means of production, as happened in early modern England during the eighteenth century when the common lands of the peasants were privatized, have forced the majority of people to engage in unpaid surplus-labor in order to survive. According to Bourdieu, however, capital is anything capable of being culturally valued by people in general and whose possession establishes group distinctions and thus motivates competition and rivalry over the 'symbolic profits' accruing around accumulated and habitualized social status markers. In short, his is not a 'new' theory of 'capital' (and thus 'class') for 'new' times as is claimed, but a re-writing of the old Weberian theory of class as social status or stratification, in which concepts that have historically been

produced from within capitalism to criti(que)ally explain its mode of production are taken as having a transcendental validity for all and for all time. As in all forms of economism, capitalism is thereby naturalized by being de-historicized and universalized. On this logic, ending social inequality is impossible since all that can be done is to change the composition of classes. As is the case in all bourgeois ideology, the point is the same — don't even think of changing capitalism.

What makes Marxism *Marxism*, and what is contested by all the post- and neo- marxisms, is its theorization of what Marx and Engels call the 'actuality' of class.²² In Orthodox Marxism the actuality of class explains the movement of history. This actuality is the historical unity of the material interests of a class and its agency that must be secured in the context of nature and society at a particular stage of development. 'Class-consciousness' names the actuality of class in Orthodox Marxism and is what constitutes the other of 'false consciousness' or 'ideology', the 'selfish misconception' of the capitalists that 'induces [them] to transform into eternal laws of nature and of reason, the social forms springing from [their] present mode of production and form of property'.²³ As Marx and Engels explain, class-consciousness

is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment *regards* as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is visibly and irrevocably foreshadowed in its own life situation as well as in the whole organisation of bourgeois society today.²⁴

What is class in actuality? It is not a subjective identity or self-enclosed discourse but the social antagonism in production itself between 'the class of modern wage-labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour-power in order to live' to the capitalists, and 'the class of [...] owners of the means of production and employers of wage-labour' who make a profit off the unpaid surplus-labor of the majority.²⁵ What has made Bourdieu such

22 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'Alienation and Social Classes', *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 133–35 (p. 134).

23 'Manifesto', p. 501.

24 'Holy Family', p. 37.

25 'Manifesto', p. 482.

a popular figure is the symbolic displacement of the class antagonism at the base of capitalism in his writings: the fact that he makes ‘the symbolic order [...] the condition of the functioning of the economic order’ rather than the other way around and therefore expects that he is resisting class by opposing Marxism because on such an (ideo) logic, ‘class as it is observed is [...] the product of the theoretical effect of Marx’s work’.²⁶ So popular has Bourdieu become because of this displacement of class-consciousness that he was eulogized in a *New York Times* obituary as an ‘iconoclastic’ and ‘provocative’ thinker who has led the way for ‘all those fighting against perceived injustices wrought by unfettered capitalism’.²⁷ His popularity in short comes from the support he provides for the dominant ideology of cyber-capitalism that *The New York Times* represents, as can be seen in the writings of its columnists — not only the neoliberal Thomas Friedman, but the liberal democrat Paul Krugman, who concluded in a lead article about ‘class’ in its magazine that it was, echoing Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek,... merely cultural.²⁸ Bourdieu’s reduction of political economy to symbolic economy is central to the dominant ideology of global capitalism that posits ‘the source of wealth in post-al societies as “knowledge” rather than “labor”’.²⁹

The ideological function of symbolic economy is to immunize capitalism from critique by placing its wrongs on secondary and supposedly separate and contingent cultural features so as to normalize the daily exploitation in the base of existing society. As for Bourdieu being a ‘provocative’ and ‘iconoclastic’ figure who ‘fights against the injustices of capitalism’, *The New York Times* refers to Bourdieu in such terms at a time, of course, when capitalism has already had its legitimacy massively shaken around the world, not only in places like Indonesia and Argentina, which were supposed to have proven the superiority of the free market for ending the poverty of the global South but which clearly

26 *Acts*, p. 82; Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Toward A Reflexive Sociology*, trans. by Matthew Adamson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 18.

27 Alan Riding, ‘Pierre Bourdieu, 71, French Thinker and Globalization Critic’, *The New York Times*, 25 January 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/25/world/pierre-bourdieu-71-french-thinker-and-globalization-critic.html>.

28 Paul Krugman, ‘For Richer’, *The New York Times*, 20 October 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/20/magazine/for-richer.html>.

29 Zavarzadeh, ‘Post-Ality’, p. 10.

has rather exacerbated it, but also in the US itself as became evident to all after the bubble burst on the cyber-economy and revealed it to be a speculative fiction of growth maintained only by the massive loss of jobs and outright theft of workers' benefits, as the Enron scandal showed. Capitalism is experiencing a falling rate of profit, and it is showing itself capable of doing anything to counter it.³⁰ In fact, celebration in the elite publications of big business of loyal critics of capitalism like Bourdieu, who do not simply ignore its class contradictions but pluralize class and so diffuse it as lifestyle politics, goes hand in hand with advancing the new imperialist wars around the world that in practice help to 'simplify' the class antagonism.

What *The New York Times* failed to specify in its recognition of Bourdieu as a 'globalization critic' is that, according to Bourdieu, 'globalization is a myth' that has only come to seem obligatory to people through reiteration and which will change when people change their minds about economics.³¹ Global capitalism, in other words, is not a mode of production whose central law of motion is the pursuit of profit from the exploitation of labor, but a matter of the 'doxa' that 'economic forces cannot be resisted' and it is incorporation of this doxa in the minds of the workers, according to Bourdieu, that has deprived them of their agency to change the world — especially the orthodox Marxist 'doxa' of 'class'.³² In Bourdieu's social theory, history is a matter of 'habitus' — a 'social necessity turned into nature, converted into motor schemes and bodily automatisms'.³³ This reduction of history to the terms of the affective and experiential leads to the recurrence of a constant theme in his writings that would seem to call into question their usefulness as serious social theory and radical practice after discourse theory — the idea that 'social classes do not exist' and are as 'observed [...] the theoretical effect of Marx's work'.³⁴ The fact that despite the theoretical and political incoherence of his position — which

30 Michael Roberts, *The Long Depression: Marxism and the Global Crisis of Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

31 *Acts*, p. 29.

32 *Acts*, p. 31; Pierre Bourdieu, 'Doxa and Common Life. In Conversation: Pierre Bourdieu and Terry Eagleton', *New Left Review*, January/February 1992, pp. 111–21 (p. 114).

33 *Logic*, p. 68.

34 Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 12.; *Other Words*, p. 18.

critiques as merely cultural the politics of postmodernism, while at the same time makes 'globalization' and class matters of belief, argues for a passionate 'attachment to "established rights"' as a mode of 'resistance' to 'globalization' and says goodbye to the proletariat as a revolutionary critique of capitalism as a totality — his writings have come to occupy a privileged space in the knowledge industry as the text-acts of an engaged intellectual is directly related to the fact that Bourdieu's concept of 'class' is most of all directed against the orthodox Marxist theory of class as the social articulation of historical necessity.³⁵

Bourdieu makes 'class' an outcome of struggles over 'capital' in a plurality of 'fields' that exceed conceptual reduction. What Bourdieu's 'field' theory of class struggle does is segregate the social into autonomous zones lacking systemic determination by the social structure of private property so that everyone is considered to be equally in possession of 'capital'. Not only does this repeat the petty-bourgeois dream of the democratization of ownership through a discursive ruse, but it is also an argument that makes social(ist) revolution unnecessary and, in the end, serves the ruling class. What the reduction of 'class' and 'capital' to the self-evidency of different lifestyles cannot explain is the systemic primacy of the production of surplus-value in unpaid-labor, the basic condition of the global majority, which determines that their needs are not being met and which economically compels them into engaging in collective class struggles. According to Bourdieu, however, the global class struggle is an effect of Marxist theory: in other words, it is discursively rather than economically constituted, which then makes socio-historical change dependent on changing people's ideas and appealing to their morals as in conservative discourses.

Bourdieu opposes Marx's labor theory of value with a (Nietzschean) value theory of class that posits class as an after-effect of the past symbolic struggles of intellectuals over 'cultural capital'. His notion of class is therefore totally ahistorical: it can be applied to any stage of production in history regardless of the specific form of the production and consumption of social wealth. He claims that

35 *Acts*, p. 33.

Every state of the social world is [...] no more than a temporary equilibrium, a moment in the dynamics through which the adjustment between distributions and incorporated or institutionalized classifications is constantly broken and restored. The struggle which is the very principle of the distribution is inextricably a struggle to appropriate rare goods and a struggle to impose the legitimate way of perceiving the power-relations manifested by the distribution, a representation which, through its own efficacy, can help to perpetuate or subvert these power-relations.³⁶

On such a theory of the social, there can be no historical transformation of labor relations, only historical change of the performances of social actors who occupy fixed class positions relative to a given accumulation of goods (what Bourdieu anachronistically calls their 'economic capital'). Bourdieu's economic theory is the essence of economism and not a critique of it as he claims because it blurs the class antagonism in production that is historically specific to capitalism by positing a commonality of social agency in the market, in the continual accumulation and redistribution of what he calls (economic, cultural, symbolic, etc.) 'capital', thereby naturalizing bourgeois social relations across history. Bourdieu's theory of capital is, again, totally ahistorical because it is based on a distributionist theory of value rather than a labor theory of value which takes into account the historicity of the mode(s) of production: how men and women have organized their collective labor time under particular conditions of production. What has made Bourdieu so successful in the bourgeois media is that he has taken Marx's historical concepts of 'class' and 'capital', which lay bare the social totality, and turned them into floating 'categories' and self-reflexive cultural 'classifications' that can be formally applied to any social practice because these concepts have been cut off from their historical determination, their connection to the global relations of production, what Marx in his 'Theses on Feuerbach' calls 'the ensemble of the social relations'.³⁷

Class, as explained by Marx, is determined by the mode of production of material life as a totality and is not a reification of the productive forces from social and political forces, as Bourdieu claims causes him to reject

³⁶ *Logic*, p. 141.

³⁷ *Practical Reason*, pp. 10–11; Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 5, pp. 3–8 (p. 4).

Marxism as 'economism'.³⁸ He opposes orthodox Marxist theory on the grounds that it 'fetishiz[es...] the productive forces' and thus normalizes the neoliberal social policies of globalization by de-politicizing the social under an 'economic fatalism'.³⁹ Bourdieu conveniently forgets that not only was Marx the first criti(que)al theorist of 'globalization' but that Orthodox Marxism is a systematic critique of 'economism' that comes from Marx's critique of bourgeois political economy (among other places, in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*). It is only in the texts of Orthodox Marxism that the other of 'economism' is explained and not 'categorized' so as to pluralize the social into separate self-enclosed areas labeled 'the political', 'the social', etc., and subjectively 'valuing' one or another of these over and above 'the economic'. Such a positivist approach is the essence of economism, which always consists of analytically separating what in actuality is concretely united in a particular social formation so as to make the unity of these areas appear only a matter of ideological generality. Making the totality merely an instance of epistemic generality only assumes the social at root to be an expression of some ideal norm of humanity as constituted by the 'eternal laws of nature and of reason' that Marx and Engels find specific to the 'selfish misconception' of the bourgeoisie and its form of private property.⁴⁰ When Bourdieu totalizes what he otherwise analytically separates as 'social fields' under the general principle that 'the symbolic order [...] is the condition of the functioning of the economic order', his assumption reflects in such a way so as to naturalize what in actuality is the self-justifying norm of private property in bourgeois economics.⁴¹

What Bourdieu wants to throw away as useless economism is the orthodox Marxist critique of bourgeois ideology that alone has explained why differences in the social distribution and consumption of surplus-value — the differences in income, for example, which determine class position in bourgeois sociology and the dominant cultural studies whose position he shares — presuppose the material production of value

38 *Acts*, pp. 50–51.

39 Pierre Bourdieu, 'A Reasoned Utopia and Economic Fatalism', *New Left Review*, I/227, Jan/Feb (1998), pp. 126–54.

40 'Manifesto', p. 501.

41 *Acts*, p. 82.

through the expenditure of surplus-labor.⁴² Before there can be social inequality in consumption and political inequality in distribution, there must first be the economic exploitation of labor in production which generates the surplus-value. What the dominant ideology of capitalism is constitutively unable to explain and that marks its class interest is the production of social inequality through the extraction of surplus-labor central to capitalism: the fact that before having a position of social 'status' as an intellectual, a black, latino, queer, or trans subject, one is inserted into class relations as either a worker whose labor produces surplus-value for another, or a capitalist, whose ownership of the means of production allows one to exploit the labor of others. Without Marx's labor theory of value, it is impossible to critique capitalism at root and Bourdieu's rejection of it as economism reflects the interest of the ruling class in social theory to occult the source of wealth in capitalist society — the exploitation of labor.

Not only is Bourdieu's idea that 'class' is an effect of Marx's writings a reiteration of the central ludic dogma of poststructuralism which makes the social an effect of the free-play of discourse, but it is the dominant ideology of post-al capitalism in general, which can be seen turning to its more familiar everyday articulations. Calling 'class' a theory-effect of Marxism is like when the Republicans in the US accuse those who seek to politically address class inequality of engaging in 'class warfare' as if class warfare depends on a rhetoric of class for its existence and is not materially determined by the objective antagonism in production between labor and capital, between production for profit over production for meeting people's needs. Bourdieu participates in the same red-baiting practices, which is odd for someone who claims 'social classes do not exist' while at the same time claiming to speak for the economically oppressed. Bourdieu's argument against Orthodox Marxism is that it is essentially an economism because it posits the objectivity of classes and their historical struggle as existing independently of the consciousness and will of individuals and thereby causes people to believe in class as real and forget about the symbolic activity of their own values in doing so. For Bourdieu, like the conservatives, it is these values that are central

42 On class in the dominant social theory see, *Class and Its Others*, J. K. Gibson-Graham, Stephen A. Resnick, and Richard D. Wolff (eds), foreword by Amitava Kumar (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2000).

to the social and that are more important than economic necessity.

Bourdieu's theory of class proves to be very useful to the ruling class because without a materialist theory of class that uncovers the objective source of material antagonism in production, one cannot, as Marx says, explain what the working class 'will historically be compelled to do' as a result of its position in the economy — the actuality of class. Proof of this usefulness to big business is Bourdieu being featured as a 'new' economic thinker in the *Financial Times* of London.⁴³ It is through the troping and reversal of the question of inequality as symbolic that Bourdieu proposes as a precondition for a 'genuine democracy' not that class-consciousness (the knowledge of exploitation that explains why workers and owners are in a relation of irreconcilable antagonism) be developed, but that 'the logic of intellectual life, that of argument and refutation [be] extended to public life' so as to 'reconstruct a universe of realist ideals' that will lead toward greater 'social harmonization'.⁴⁴ Realist ideals, in short, are a code for pragmatic change, change which does not fundamentally change anything, but merely works to smooth the harsh contradictions of exploitation and which thus enables the global barbarism of capitalist exploitation to continue with a 'human face'. The coding is needed to oppose revolutionary knowledge of the social as 'utopian' and normalize capitalism as the end of history. But the rule of ignorance enshrined in the pragmatism of Bourdieu's intellectual as activist is most utopian because he does not see the impossibility of reforming capitalism: as Marx says, 'It is not the *radical* revolution, not the *general human* emancipation which is a utopian dream [...] but rather the partial, the *merely* political revolution, the revolution which leaves the pillars of the house standing' that is, because it fails to change the underlying social conditions which are bringing about explosive contradictions in transnational capitalism, especially the contradiction between the global socialization of wage-labor as the norm in production and the bourgeois form of consumption of the social wealth that excludes the majority from meeting their needs.⁴⁵ What else is behind the 'anti-

43 Michael Prowse, 'So you think you make your own choices?', *Financial Times*, 25 November 2000, p. 26.

44 *Acts*, pp. 8–9, 67.

45 Karl Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Law*. Introduction', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 3, pp. 175–87 (p. 184).

globalization' protests but precisely how a tiny handful of capitalists are able to command the wealth and control the lives of millions just to maintain profits for a few?

As Marx was the first to explain, because history is class struggle — i.e., about how changes in the mode of production determines 'the respective power of the combatants' and their ability to make history according to their needs — the dominant ideology through which class relations are maintained must change to keep up with the changing labor relations.⁴⁶ Today, the most effective way ideology mystifies class and maintains the bourgeois hegemony over the productive forces is to appear to be contesting class inequality. The interests of the dominant class, however, determine the mode of how class is contested, and so the class analysis focuses on differences of consumption (unequal distribution of social wealth) over production (unequal access to the means of production). The writings of Bourdieu are exemplary of today's containment of class to the limits set by the dominant ideology because of his reduction of class to the differential distribution of social wealth on the one hand, and, on the other, his defense of the discursive idealism which makes class an effect of incommensurable symbolic practices.

As do conservative discourses generally, Bourdieu's theory saves capitalism by positing the social as comprised of knowledge and not labor, thereby holding out the false hope that social change will come with a change in people's values. Thus, the role of the intellectual in the process of social change is not to uncover the *material* root of social inequality in the exploitation of wage-labor and produce awareness of what is to be done to change it for a new society where the needs of all are met, but the invention of 'new forms of symbolic action', a 'change of language', that does not really change anything.⁴⁷ What Bourdieu's new 'global' intellectual in the end proves is not what is needed to lead the emerging struggles to 'fight against the injustices of capitalism', but, rather, Lenin's theory of opportunism in the working class movement, especially his explanation of how 'when the working class movement has grown a little stronger, [the liberals] dare not

46 Karl Marx, 'Value, Price and Profit', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), 20, pp. 101–49 (p. 146).

47 *Acts*, p. 57.

deny the class struggle but attempt to narrow down, to curtail and emasculate the concept of class struggle'.⁴⁸ Bourdieu's version of the collective intellectual is precisely such a figure of opportunism who does not deny but curtails class struggle to what is possible within capitalism for the benefit of a few.

The Intellectual as Socialist Theorist

As Marx and Engels explain, the necessity of the intellectual in the process of social change is determined by the laws of motion of capitalism, specifically in terms of how the competition over surplus-value has as its effect the accumulation of greater concentrations of social wealth alongside a growing proletariat — 'a class of labourers, who live so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital'.⁴⁹ Because of the technical development of production and the concentration of capital required to set it in motion, it is inevitable that as capitalism grows 'entire sections of the ruling classes are [...] precipitated into the proletariat' because 'their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on' and they are 'swamped in the competition with the large capitalists'.⁵⁰ The proletariat is thus 'recruited from all classes of the population'.⁵¹ It is this process of 'simplification' of the class struggle that enabled Marx and Engels to critique the 'utopian socialism' of their day with their own 'scientific socialism' and prove that 'communism' is 'in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered by this or that would-be universal reformer' but rather is 'the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things'.⁵²

A precondition of this real movement is the way in which, as capitalism unfolds, it unites 'the man of science' — that 'portion of

48 V. I. Lenin, 'Liberal and Marxist Conceptions of the Class Struggle', *V. I. Lenin Collected Works*, 45 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 19, pp. 119–24 (p. 122).

49 'Manifesto', p. 490.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 492–93.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 492.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 498; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'The German Ideology', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 5, p. 49.

the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole' and whom capitalism has 'converted [...] into its paid wage-labourers' — and 'the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands' that is the 'special and essential product' of capitalism.⁵³ It is 'the bourgeoisie itself therefore [that] supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education' and brings to them the consciousness of their historic mission to form 'an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' from outside their merely political struggles to reform capitalism in its localities.⁵⁴ It is for this reason that Marx and Engels say that the historic mission of the proletariat they outline is not based on any 'sectarian principles [...] separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole', but rather comes from the conditions of its formation itself, especially as 'it becomes evident, that the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society, and to impose its conditions of existence upon society as an over-riding law'.⁵⁵ It is 'unfit to rule'

because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him. Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society.⁵⁶

The function of the opportunist intellectuals of the bourgeoisie is to place under erasure the historical materiality of the intellectual whereby she becomes transferred into the proletariat and a traitor to her class by joining the class whose interest lies in uniting the many in the fight for socialism. To be clear, Bourdieu meets this requirement by making the intellectual into a symbolic figure whose knowledge makes her an 'elite' who dominates others because of her knowledge and who can only unite with others by divesting herself of them by becoming a pragmatic activist. He thus occludes through an ethical ruse that 'the *only* choice is — either bourgeois or socialist ideology [for] in a society torn by class

53 'Manifesto', pp. 481, 487, 494.

54 Ibid, pp. 493, 506.

55 Ibid, pp. 495, 497.

56 Ibid., pp. 495–96.

antagonisms there can never be a non-class or an above class ideology'.⁵⁷

Because Bourdieu articulates his social theory as primarily a political critique of a hegemonic economic essentialism that deprives workers of agency and does not foresee the need for revolutionary theory to provide a guide for the emergent class struggles, his writings mark a return to a traditional social democratic reformism on the left after the bankruptcy of 'radical democracy' and the 'new social movements'. The problem with reformism is that it does not challenge the existing division of labor and thereby silently underwrites the agency of the bourgeoisie rather than fighting on the side of the working class that is 'alone', as Marx says, 'a really revolutionary class' because 'as the lowest stratum of our present society, [it] cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air' and 'along with these conditions [...] the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally'.⁵⁸ The preservation of classes is reflected in Bourdieu's writings in the way that the work of the intellectual is considered in a totally idealistic manner as a constitutive activity that creates the agents of the struggle themselves out of 'inventive' discursive practices conceived as 'symbolic' redistributions of 'cultural capital'. As in all reformism the aim is to install social policies to redistribute the wealth from the 'haves' to the 'have nots'. Redistribution of wealth, however, is neither radical nor transformative. 'Redistribution' does the work of containing social struggles by occulting the need to produce knowledge of the root of class inequality in production relations which is needed to end social inequality. In fact, the argument for addressing class inequality through an activist redistribution of resources under capitalism is a bourgeois politic because its practical effect is to accommodate bourgeois economism which always reduces politics to competition between 'special interests' over already-accumulated surplus-value. Dissolving class-consciousness in a spontaneous activism that takes the reified politics of capitalist civil society as a given only helps normalize the interests and policies of big business that are designed to stimulate demand by subsidizing consumption of its overproduced commodities. Redistribution policies are a means to bolster the falling rate of profit

57 Lenin, 'What Is To Be Done?', p. 384.

58 'Manifesto', pp. 494–95, 506.

and save monopoly capital rather than transform the class relations of production and inaugurate a society freed from need (socialism) — the first priority of which is to make the working class the ruling class. Bourdieu fails to seriously consider the failure of welfare state policies in helping to bring about the present need on the part of capital to transform the nation-state into a transnational neoliberal warfare state because he has abandoned the Marxist analysis of social production as reactionary ‘economism’ and put in its place a symbolically activist version of neo-Keynesian economics which reifies market distribution as separate from its basis in production.

What Bourdieu’s work shows is that without the orthodox Marxist theory of class as the economic determination of history, the focus invariably shifts to conceiving the role of intellectual work as that of ‘inventing’ formal models of the social that simply re-describe in a self-enclosed language the self-evidency of capitalist ideology rather than change the world. What this revisionary move does is dis-articulate the social into a voluntarism that naturalizes the status quo.

Contrary to the imaginary of the new global intellectual found in Bourdieu’s writings, I argue that the only effective theory of the intellectual in global capitalism is to be found in the writings of Orthodox Marxism, notably the writings of Lenin. This is because Lenin extends Marx’s theory of the self-negation of capitalism through its own laws of motion to explain the contemporary and thus provides the revolutionary critique of the opportunist politics of the new global intellectual represented by Bourdieu. It is Lenin who explains the basic ‘connection between imperialism and opportunism’ that is currently masquerading as a radical anti-capitalism and rethinking of Marxism for the present.⁵⁹ Opportunism, as Lenin explains, is the ‘defense of imperialism in a somewhat veiled form’ that ‘strive[s] to push specific and secondary details into the forefront [...] to distract attention from essentials by means of absolutely ridiculous schemes for “reform”’.⁶⁰ Central to opportunism is the reformist attempt to ‘contrast imperialism with free competition and democracy’ while failing to recognize ‘the

59 V. I. Lenin, ‘Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism. A Popular Outline’, *V. I. Lenin Collected Works*, 45 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 22, pp. 185–304 (p. 301).

60 *Ibid.*, p. 286.

inseverable bond between imperialism [...] and the foundations of capitalism'.⁶¹ Lenin's critique of the basic opportunism of reformism in global capitalism recognizes the tendency of imperialism 'to create privileged sectors also among the workers, and to detach them from the broad masses of the proletariat' by occulting the fact that capitalism has realized 'the partition of the world, the exploitation of countries [...] which means high monopoly profits for a handful of very rich countries' that 'makes it economically possible to bribe the upper strata of the proletariat'.⁶² At the same time, Lenin never loses sight of the fact that 'the distinctive feature of the present situation' is how the same global economic forces are increasing 'the irreconcilability between opportunism and the general and vital interests of the working class' which are not capable of being met by capitalism and can only be realized in a global socialist society.⁶³ His writings therefore provide an integrative approach to the social that engages in the ongoing ideological struggles with knowledge of their outside in labor arrangements — a global political economy based on the necessity of economic equality in a world divided by capital and wage-labor masked as a world where knowledge matters more than praxis for a new society. They provide, in short, a guide for workers to become what Lenin calls 'socialist theorists': persons in collectivity capable of providing *outside* knowledge of the global struggles on the terrain of wage-labor and capital that break with the ideas of the ruling class and explain what is needed to end exploitation and emancipate all from the regime of necessity imposed by the rule of profit.⁶⁴

61 Ibid., pp. 287–88.

62 Ibid., pp. 281, 283.

63 Ibid., p. 284.

64 Lenin, 'What Is To Be Done?', p. 384.