Reading Bourdieu with Adorno: The Limits of Critical Theory and Reflexive Sociology

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ABSTRACT
Scholarly activity presupposes a certain distance from the concerns of everyday life, which has both liberating and crippling effects. Bourdieu's reflexive sociology hopes to undo these crippling effects by making the scholar aware of the limits of his/her 'liberation'. Through his emphasis on the practical content of social life, Bourdieu provides a powerful alternative to theoretical critiques of contemporary society advanced by sociologists such as Adorno. At the same time, read against the background of Adorno's 'critical theory', this reflexive move itself appears as a limitation. Due to its emphasis on the conditions of sociological knowledge, reflexive sociology tends to subordinate 'theory' to 'epistemology' and, therefore, hinders the sociologist from imagining a different society. Read together, Bourdieu's and Adorno's works provide important insights about two potential dangers that remain on the path of the sociologist. Adorno's critique of 'scientism' implies that adhering to an epistemological principle may not be enough to escape the 'fallacious' representations of social reality, while Bourdieu's critique of 'theoreticism' implies that one cannot grasp social reality without 'touching' it.

KEY WORDS
Adorno / Bourdieu / critical theory / epistemology / methodology / reflexivity

> The sociology that each sociologist can perform of the social conditions of his sociological practice and his relation to sociology … is the precondition for his making his unconscious presuppositions explicit and for a more complete internalization of a more adequate epistemology.
>
> Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 72)

> True thoughts are those alone which do not understand themselves.
>
> Theodor W. Adorno (1974: 192)

'If there is a single feature that makes Bourdieu stand out in the landscape of contemporary social theory', wrote Loic J.D. Wacquant (1992: 36), 'it is his signature obsession with reflexivity.' For Bourdieu, reflexivity is an epistemological principle which advises sociologists, as 'objectifying subjects', to turn their objectifying gaze upon themselves and become aware of the hidden assumptions that structure their research. Without this reflexive move, sociology cannot escape the 'fallacies of scholasticism' and loses its chances to provide a truly scientific analysis of the social world. 'Reflexive sociology' involves the constitution of a sociological habitus through constant repetition of this epistemological principle. Thus, Bourdieu often urges his readers to read his works as 'exercise books' rather than as theories. Conversely, he incessantly reminds us that 'theory' should not be valued for its own sake.

In these respects, if there is a sociologist who forms a stark contrast with Bourdieu, while adhering to the same 'critical' tradition, that sociologist is no doubt Adorno. Although Adorno too values self-reflection, for him reflexivity is only a first step in the development of a critical perspective. The ultimate aim of critical thought is not so much to have a more 'scientific' view of social reality, but to view this reality from the 'standpoint of redemption' and 'reveal it to be … as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light' (Adorno, 1974: 247). Epistemological principles cannot be of much help here; this is the task of theory. Theory is never just an instrument; it is one of the major forms in which critical thought can have a life – even if this is a 'damaged life'. Just as Bourdieu disdains 'theoretical theory', Adorno constantly opposes the subordination of theory to epistemology.

Adorno's and Bourdieu's works, of course, are far too complex to be summarized in terms of a simple dichotomy. Nevertheless, the discrepancy between their approaches to reflexivity – which should be seen as aspects, rather than emblems of their works – is not a mere exaggeration. Indeed, one might even sense a potential hostility here. 'I felt a certain irritation when faced with the aristocratic demeanour of that totalizing critique', writes Bourdieu (1990a: 19), referring to the Frankfurt School. He even suggests that sociology has to define itself *against* Adorno's work (Bourdieu, 1991: 247–8). Had Adorno lived long enough to counter these criticisms, his reply might have been equally harsh. Bourdieu, he would most probably argue, heralds an age-old 'scientism' – which, for Adorno, implies a thought that is preoccupied with its own epistemological schemes – under the mask of a 'reflexive sociology'.

Although the issue of reflexivity has remained tied to a number of essential developments in contemporary sociology (Ashmore, 1989; Bonner, 2001; Platt, 1989), little attention has been paid to this potential debate so far. Yet the differing approaches of Bourdieu and Adorno might constitute a fruitful starting point to tackle a general problem concerning the role of reflexivity in social research. This problem can best be specified with respect to what Bourdieu (2000: 15) has called the '*fundamental ambiguity* of the scholastic universes'. Due to their distance from the social world, social scientists can see this world

in a different light, but they also risk losing their connection to its practical content. Scholastic activity entails 'both a liberating break and a disconnection, a potentially crippling separation' (Bourdieu, 2000: 15). Reflexivity allows social scientists to recognize the limits of their liberating break with the social. While Adorno too is highly critical of the false sense of redemption that might result from the scholastic break, he is much less hesitant about affirming its liberating powers: 'In the end hope, wrested from reality by negating it, is the only form in which truth appears' (Adorno, 1974: 98). However theoretical this 'negation' might be, it constitutes the very grounds on which one can imagine a different society. If reflexive sociology *primarily* aims to bring back into the picture *that which is repressed in/by scholastic thought,* critical theory *primarily* aims to reveal *that which is repressed in/by the social.*

My aim here is not to 'synthesize' these two tendencies which are emphasized in different proportions by Bourdieu and Adorno, but rather to highlight their interplay and limits. I try to show that Adorno's critique of 'scientism' brings in to focus some of the limitations of 'reflexive sociology' with respect to the project of a critical social science. Conversely, Bourdieu's critique of 'intellectualist bias' underlines the potential risks of a 'theoretical' critique as practiced by Adorno.

Bourdieu and Reflexive Sociology

Bourdieu's earliest work dealing with epistemological issues is *The Craft of Sociology* (Bourdieu et al., 1991; first published in French in 1968). The arguments of this book, which Bourdieu (1991) has later characterized as too 'theoreticist' and 'somewhat ridiculous', have been considerably modified in his later works. Nevertheless, *The Craft* provides the most systematic presentation of the epistemological underpinnings of Bourdieu's sociology.[1]

Bourdieu and his colleagues open this work by arguing that 'for the sociologist, familiarity with his social universe is the epistemological obstacle *par excellence*' (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 13). To be 'familiar' with a social world is to possess a 'spontaneous knowledge' of this world, as in the case of unconscious internalization of 'everyday notions'. In this early work, Bourdieu posits spontaneous knowledge as the very opposite of scientific knowledge. This polarization is partly based on the theories of French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1968) who influenced a generation of intellectuals in France in the 1960s, including Althusser and Foucault. What Bourdieu finds most interesting in Bachelard's work is his thesis that science begins and proceeds with a series of 'epistemological breaks'. An epistemological break, in essence, is a break with familiar conceptions of the world. Science is, above all, a *new* way of looking at things. A scientific sociology has to 'break the relationships that are most apparent because most familiar, in order to bring out the new system of relations among the elements' (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 14). This can be achieved

through the use of various techniques of objectification, which have the merit of dissecting 'concrete totalities that are presented to intuition and replacing them with the set of abstract criteria … [like] occupation, income, educational level, etc.' (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 14).

However, already in *The Craft*, Bourdieu notes that mere objectification of social relations is never enough. Everyday notions are 'tenacious' and the objectification process through which the sociologist constructs his/her categories can easily fall prey to these 'pre-notions': 'most … metaphorical schemes are common to naive utterances and erudite discourse, and indeed they derive their pseudo-explanatory force from this double life' (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 23). This is where Bourdieu's invitation to the 'sociology of sociology' – i.e. the 'sociology that each sociologist can perform of the social conditions of his sociological practice' (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 72) – comes into the picture. Since 'all scientific practice … involves theoretical presuppositions', he contends, a true epistemological break in sociology requires that the social researcher become conscious of the (latent) presuppositions on which s/he builds his/her theories (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 39).

At this early stage, Bourdieu posits 'sociology of sociology' as a necessary step towards an 'epistemological break'. This configuration goes through an important transformation in his later works. *The Craft* already involved a certain ambiguity as to whether the major task of 'sociology of sociology' is to clear sociological thought from the categories of spontaneous knowledge, or to warn social scientists against imposing their own categories upon their objects (as in the case of a child psychologist who uses 'adult' categories in his/her surveys). In his later works, Bourdieu begins to distinguish between these two problems in a more clear-cut manner and associates 'reflexive sociology' almost exclusively with the latter problem. At the same time, 'epistemological break' – which Bourdieu now begins to refer to as 'objectivist break' – ceases to be the ultimate aim of 'reflexive sociology'.

> The objectivist break with pre-notions, ideologies, spontaneous sociology, [etc.],

says Bourdieu, in a lecture delivered 18 years after the first publication of *The Craft*,

> is an inevitable, necessary moment of the scientific enterprise … [but] it is necessary to effect a *second and more difficult break with objectivism,* by reintroducing, in a second stage, what had to be excluded in order to construct objective reality. Sociology must include a sociology of the perception of the social world … (Bourdieu, 1990a: 129–30).

In his later works, Bourdieu repeatedly emphasizes the importance of this 'second break': 'the most effective reflection is the one that consists in objectifying the subject of objectification' (Bourdieu, 2000: 10; see also: 1977, 1990a, 1991). In *The Craft*, the main struggle was between 'spontaneous sociology' which remained too 'close' to 'the social', and 'scientific sociology', which was supposed to constantly break with this familiar world. In contrast, now he

characterizes 'epistemological break' as a 'social break' which blinds the scholar to the practical life of his/her subjects (Bourdieu, 2000: 189).

Despite all these important modifications, however, Bourdieu does *not* distance himself from *The Craft* in a radical way. Indeed, if his break with objectivism does not lead him to adopt a 'subjectivist' or 'relativist' position, this is because he never gives up the most essential project of *The Craft*, namely, the search for a 'more adequate epistemology' which will be the basis of a 'scientific sociology'. The unmistakable primacy he attributes to epistemology[2] remains intact even in his most recent works where he continues to characterize 'epistemological questioning' as being essential for the critical analysis of 'the very form and content of what we think' (Bourdieu, 2000: 49).

I believe it is this 'double gesture' – break with objectivism but not science and epistemology – which gives Bourdieu's reflexive sociology its distinctive characteristics. As Wacquant (1992: 36–47) notes, Bourdieu's approach differs from two current, i.e. the 'phenomenological' and 'postmodern', uses of reflexivity in sociology.[3] Bourdieu distances himself from phenomenology by not linking reflexivity directly to 'subjects', and from 'postmodernism' by not using reflexivity to attack the foundations of the social sciences as such. More generally, Bourdieu's work is often viewed as a meaningful alternative to the standard cognitive models and antinomies (e.g. objectivism-subjectivism; positivism-relativism) in the social sciences (Heilbron, 1999; Meisenhelder, 1997; Pels, 2000). However, when it comes to comparing Bourdieu to Adorno, who is also keenly aware of the problems associated with these models and antinomies, a whole new set of problems comes to the fore.

Adorno, Critical Theory and Reflexivity

Like Bourdieu, Adorno is highly critical of positivism as well as the sociological applications of phenomenology (Adorno, 2000; Adorno et al., 1976; Rose, 1978).[4] In fact, he would almost completely concur with Bourdieu about the nature of sociological knowledge: 'The given, the facts which, in accordance with its methods, [sociology] encounters as something final, are not themselves final but rather are conditioned' (Adorno et al., 1976: 84–5).

Furthermore, Adorno does stress that sociologists should be particularly self-reflective since the object of their inquiry – 'society' – is also potentially a subject and therefore different from the object of many other sciences:

> [I]f sociology simply takes over the self-sufficiency of the other science-types, without incorporating a manner of reflecting both on itself and on its relationship to its subject matter, it will really suffer from deformation phenomena of the kind which Habermas referred to as 'restricted experience'. (Adorno, 2000: 128)

As with the awareness of the historicity[5] of sociological categories, a reflexive approach allows the critical sociologist to avoid the illusion of treating a social fact 'as something natural, and therefore as something which in principle … is

unalterable' (Adorno, 2000: 149). To understand that social reality is alterable entails the possibility of imagining a different society and therein lies the significance of a reflexive approach.

However, according to Adorno, reflexivity is not a major epistemological principle in moving from a 'prescientific' to a 'scientific' sociology. He vehemently opposes such a distinction and maintains that '[u]nless prescientific interests or extra-scientific concepts are imported into every scientific sociological investigation, then scientific interests and concepts are entirely lacking as well' (Adorno, 2000: 125–6). In fact, Adorno sometimes goes as far as to argue that the absence of reflexivity – a certain naivety – can be an asset. A thought does not necessarily become more 'true' because its 'author' understands it better. In Kafka, as well as in Weber, some of the most valuable ideas are those that remain opaque to their 'creators' (Adorno, 1981b, 2000: 121).

Gillian Rose (1978) has paid much attention to Adorno's relation to 'reflexive sociology' in general. For Adorno, she points out, what characterizes reflexive sociology is 'an epistemological concern with the ground of its own activity arising from a critical awareness of the way in which conventional sociology "constitutes" its object in its theorizing' (Rose, 1978: 143). In this respect, Adorno does not see any *essential* difference between positivist and reflexive sociology. Reflexive sociology 'repeats more or less explicitly what positivism does implicitly, namely bases truth or reality on the analysis of consciousness, and thereby reduces social reality to a demonstrably constricted consciousness of it' (Rose, 1978: 143). Positivist sociology is no less preoccupied with eliminating 'bias' from the cognitive processes involved in research than reflexive sociology – even if this is not realized through a 'sociology of sociology' but through alleged perfection of methodological tools. On many occasions Adorno refers to such an endeavour as 'scientism' (or 'scientifism') which implies an epistemology preoccupied with its own schemes (Adorno, 2000: 19–26 and 127–8; Adorno et al., 1976). Just as positivist sociology is implicitly reflexive, reflexive sociology is implicitly scientistic.

However, Adorno's critique of reflexive sociology, especially as Gillian Rose reconstructs it, is mostly based on his critique of phenomenology. In extending this critique to Bourdieu's work, we need to pay attention to the unique aspects of his use of reflexivity. In this context, perhaps the best way to understand the main difference between Adorno and Bourdieu is to compare their respective critiques of positivism.

Adorno, like Bourdieu, is dissatisfied with positivist sociology's conception of 'society' as a mere 'object' (Adorno, 1969/70; Adorno, 2000: 136–44; Adorno et al., 1976). At the same time, however, he insists that when positivist sociologists treat 'society' exclusively as an object, they are not wrong as such. For especially, though not exclusively, under the reign of capitalism society turns into an opaque structure which conceals its potential subjectivity. What positivists fail to recognize is the historical basis of their conception of society (Adorno et al., 1976: 75–6). Gillian Rose describes Adorno's views on the relationship between positivist sociology and social reality by a *chiasmus*: 'science

misrepresents society as static and invariant; society has produced the static and invariant features which science describes' (Rose, 1978: 13). It should be noted that there is a double critique: a critique of positivist sociology as a misrepresentation of society but also a critique of social relations as the origin of this misrepresentation (see Adorno, 1969/70; Adorno et al., 1976: 108). This means that one cannot carry out a critique of the social sciences without a critique of social relations; the 'theory of sociological knowledge' cannot be detached from the 'theory of society'.

In contrast, Bourdieu not only draws a sharp distinction between 'theory' and 'epistemology' but he also subordinates the former to the latter. The choice of the sociologist, according to him, lies between 'the untenable demand for a general, universal theory of social formations or the ineluctable demand for a theory of sociological knowledge' (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 30). Such a sharp distinction, of course, is quite perplexing in the work of a sociologist who at the same time maintains that 'error is inseparable from the social conditions which make it possible and sometimes inevitable' (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 69). In fact, Bourdieu himself alludes to the necessity of a general theory of society for his critique of spontaneous sociology when he writes that '[s]pontaneous opinions have such strength … because the functions they fulfill themselves constitute a system' (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 93). Yet, Bourdieu's refusal to give 'theory' a central place in his sociology is neither an oversight, nor is it unique to his earlier works. This refusal is so constant and so strong that it stops him from writing the second volume of *The Craft* since, if written, this volume 'would have been a general theory' (Bourdieu, 1991: 254).

If Bourdieu refuses to propose a general theory of society, this is mainly because he sees something even more hazardous in such an attempt than the paradoxical consequences of separating 'theory' from 'epistemology' – namely, the tendency of such a theory to disregard empirical research and to 'terrorize' sociology with its speculations.[6] In this respect, Bourdieu's 'choice' is diametrically opposed to Adorno's claim that in order to perform a critical function, sociology should necessarily 'negate' the empirically given: 'only the person who can conceptualize a different society from the existing one can experience it as a problem' (Adorno et al., 1976: 120). What, for example, capitalist society represses – or, includes as a potentiality – cannot simply be observed.[7] It has to be imagined or desired; a social theory that disregards this can only serve the *status quo* (Adorno, 2000: 66–8).

Thus, Adorno insists on preserving the non-empirical notion of (social) 'totality' which encompasses both what a society is in its actuality and in its potentiality (Adorno, 1969/70, 1999; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1997). This insistence, as Jameson (1990: 38) points out, implies that '[i]n practice, … Adorno's sociological theorization will always be meta-critical', treating the 'concepts' of sociology themselves as 'data'. In this respect, there is not much difference between Adorno and Bourdieu. However, as Jameson (1990: 38) further observes, Adorno's meta-critique 'is not a matter of the sociology of sociologists exactly, … rather, even at their most intellectually

energetic, the concepts of sociology cannot but be flawed and fractured'. The 'flaws' in sociological knowledge exist because contemporary society, the object as well as the condition of sociology, is itself animated by contradiction.

The difference between Adorno and Bourdieu becomes all the more visible when we look at their respective approaches to what might be considered as the most general 'flaw' of sociology, namely, its 'antinomies'. Referring to one such 'antinomy' (i.e. objectivist versus subjectivist sociology), Bourdieu (1990a: 125) writes that 'the most steadfast (and, in my eyes, the most important) intention guiding my work has been to overcome it'. While Bourdieu also maintains that 'one would have to have a naive faith in the virtues of epistemological preaching if one neglected to consider the social conditions' (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 69), he nevertheless believes that reflexive sociology *can* 'transcend the artificial opposition' between 'substantialist' and 'relationalist' modes of thinking (Bourdieu, 1990a: 125). For Adorno, in contrast, these oppositions are not 'artificial', but historical. Like the contradictions of idealism (Adorno, 1999), or of 'Enlightenment' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1997), sociological antinomies emanate from real contradictions in the social structure (Adorno, 1969–70). Thus, unlike Bourdieu (2000: 50) who wants to 'surpass', through a reflexive strategy, the division between 'low' and 'high' culture, Horkheimer and Adorno (1997: 135) bluntly state that this 'division itself is the truth' – i.e. the 'truth' of contemporary society. If, for Bourdieu, a theoretical critique which disregards empirical research is as untenable as 'blind empiricism', for Adorno to suggest that the flaws of sociological knowledge can be remedied by 'epistemological vigilance' is to propose a 'scientistic' sociology which is largely emptied of its critical powers.

We should nevertheless refrain from reaching to a hasty conclusion like 'Bourdieu thinks antinomies can be overcome and Adorno does not'. Adorno, for example, emphasizes that, although the antinomies of sociology are not 'artificial', they are neither universal, nor inevitable. The task of 'negative dialectics' is neither to overcome, nor to accept, but to reveal and agitate, to induce 'hope' (Adorno, 1974, 1999). Conversely, Bourdieu (1990a: 125) does not think that the flaws of sociology can be remedied at one stroke. Already in *The Craft*, he maintains that the struggle between spontaneous and scientific sociology is a continuous one. In his later works he refers to reflexivity as a 'constant effort' (Bourdieu, 2000: 52). The recognition of the ever 'incomplete' nature of reflexivity – also noted by Pels (2000) – entails that reflexive sociology should be seen as a practice.

And this is perhaps the most important difference between the two sociologists: there is *more* room for 'practice', but *less* space for 'imagination' in Bourdieu's reflexive sociology than in Adorno's work. Two questions, then, come to the fore: what are the limits of Bourdieu's 'practice', and what are the limits of Adorno's 'imagination'?

Theoretical Critique and the Limits of Reflexive Sociology

Bourdieu's reflexive sociology is full of practical suggestions like 'epistemological vigilance', a 'system of cross-checks', 'one should not be afraid to encourage a systematic prejudice against all fashionable ideas', etc. (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 74–7). More importantly, Bourdieu unceasingly emphasizes the practical content of social life. This orientation towards 'practice' might even be seen as resulting from Bourdieu's struggle against scientistic inclinations in his own work. In *The Craft*, it should be noted, Bourdieu could still affirm Alexandre Koyré's statement that 'direct experience has played no part, other than as an obstacle, in the birth of classical sciences' (p. 37); two decades later, he will attack the Althusserians rather harshly for producing 'a grand theory without agents' without ever seeing 'a worker, or a peasant, or anything' (Bourdieu 1991: 252).

Paradoxically enough, the more reflexivity turns into a 'constant effort', and the more Bourdieu attacks scholasticism through his emphasis on practice, the more reflexive sociology becomes entangled in the scholastic field. In effect, most of Bourdieu's 'practical' suggestions are essentially *methodological and epistemological* suggestions. 'I blame most of my readers', he writes, 'for having considered as theoretical treatises … works that, like gymnastics handbooks, were intended for exercise, or even better, for being put into practice' (Bourdieu, 1993: 271). This is not only a protest against an abstract interpretation of his works; what Bourdieu really wants his readers to 'put into practice' is a method which will eventually turn into a habitus as a result of repetition (Bourdieu, 1993; Brubaker, 1993).

All this entails that reflexive sociology concerns itself *primarily* with the *practice of the sociologist*. Most of its powers become invested in the project of building 'a system of dispositions necessary to the constitution of the craft of the sociologist in its universality' (Bourdieu, 1993: 271). As such, Bourdieu's proposal that the sociological 'self' – even when this is considered to be a collective self – should constantly be reconstituted through 'sociology of sociology' comes very close to repeating what Gillian Rose (1978: 143) has called 'the paradox of sociological reflexivity: because a reference to self is judged logically prior to a reference to society, society and history are lost in an infinite regress of self-constitution'.

Although it would be absurd to accuse Bourdieu of not paying attention to society, Rose's comments are not completely irrelevant. To understand the complex form in which the 'paradox of reflexivity' operates in Bourdieu's work, we need to focus on the close link he draws between sociological theory and social conditions. Especially in his later works, Bourdieu defines one of the major tasks of reflexivity as forcing scholastic thought to 'the point where it would encounter the social' (Bourdieu, 2000: 50). Only such an encounter can act as an antidote against the tendency of scholastic thought to forget its own conditions of existence.

Bourdieu (1991) himself has tried to explain the changes in his sociological trajectory by referring to the historical context of his work, particularly the rise of structuralism which he found too theoreticist. We might, however, trace back Bourdieu's emphasis on 'the social' also to a certain difficulty in his earlier works, namely, the embarrassing similarity between 'scientific' sociology and what he identifies as the aesthetic/scholastic gaze. In *Distinction*, as it is well known, Bourdieu shows how the 'pure aesthetic gaze', which has been presented as a universal point of view since Kant, is the perspective of a particular class. This 'gaze' is the product of 'a life of ease – that tends to induce an active distance from necessity' (Bourdieu, 1984: 5). Thanks to this distance, members of upper classes can move from the 'primary stratum' of a cultural product to the 'stratum of secondary meanings', to forms and relationships. This move from 'practical' to 'theoretical', of course, is also a characteristic of the scholastic gaze.

What is striking here is the clear parallel between the way in which the aesthetic/scholastic 'gaze' distances itself from the immediately given and the way in which what Bourdieu in *The Craft* refers to as 'scientific' sociology is supposed to distance itself from common sense (Geldof, 1997; Østerberg, 1988: 180). In his most recent works, Bourdieu has openly acknowledged these similarities. The growing emphasis in his work on the social conditions of scholastic thought can be seen as an attempt to use this affinity in a 'subversive' manner. Reflexive sociology, by 'objectifying the subject of objectification', uses the aesthetic/scholastic gaze against itself. Reflexive thought, Bourdieu admits, is 'itself scholastic' but it provides 'the only means … of fighting scholastic inclinations' (Bourdieu, 2000: 52): by forcing scholastic thought to encounter the social, it both avoids *and* fights the fallacies of scholasticism.

So far, so good. However, remembering Rose's comments about the 'paradox of reflexivity', we need to ask: what about 'the social'? To put it more crudely, what good does it do to 'the social' that sociology liberates itself from scholastic fallacies? Can we assume that by freeing sociology from scholasticism, one also liberates the social world – which, as Bourdieu is keenly aware, involves so much suffering? True, reflexive sociology can counter the symbolic violence committed by scholarly discourses, but beyond this resistance, it has very little to offer, especially when it comes to the issue of going beyond the existing conditions. If anything, it deliberately forbids such a move. With respect to the 'fundamental ambiguity' of scholastic activity, Bourdieu seems to prefer to liberate the scholastic thought from its fallacies, rather than making full – and therefore risky – use of its liberating break (see: Bourdieu, 2000: 7).

All this is not to say that reflexive sociology is 'conservative', but it is to say that it lacks a 'vision'. This point can best be clarified in the light of Bourdieu's discussion of 'symbolic power' and social change. 'To change the world', Bourdieu (1990a: 137) argues, 'one has to change the ways of world making, that is, the vision of the world and the practical operations by which groups are produced and reproduced.' Symbolic power is the power of imposing a certain vision of the world upon the world. Seen from this perspective social theory

itself appears as a domain of struggle for 'symbolic power', since it involves different visions of society. How does this struggle work? Here Bourdieu points out that theory should be seen as *both* subordinate to the given *and* capable of transcending it. On the one hand, 'symbolic efficacy depends on the degree to which the vision proposed is founded in reality'; on the other, this very reality 'begins to exist only when it is selected and designated as such' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 138).

The problem is that although Bourdieu recognizes the potential of theory to go beyond the given, in his own sociology, he denies such a role to theory. Reflexive sociology reveals how symbolic struggles can shape social reality, but it often falls short of 'struggling' except in the name of science. If Bourdieu's attempt to break with scientism in his later works is imbued with friction (Robbins, 1991), this is precisely because the symbolic power of Bourdieu's sociology primarily rests on its claim to 'scientificity'.

This is not to undermine Bourdieu's life-long 'interest' in articulating reflexive sociology with his fight against social injustice. This latter struggle, however, is *not* intrinsic to reflexive sociology. When Pinto (2000: 88) describes Bourdieu as 'a renowned sociologist who has put his scientific capital at the service of ethical and political principles', he reveals in a most profound way, although perhaps not intentionally, the *extrinsic* nature of the relationship between reflexive sociology and Bourdieu's political involvement. Bourdieu himself makes it clear that his political interventions stem from 'rage' or from 'something like a sense of duty' (Bourdieu, 1998a: vii) which clearly require little 'reflexivity'.

Bourdieu uses his 'scientific capital' not only with great care but also for the benefit of disadvantaged groups. But there is no guarantee that 'reflexive sociology' will always be performed this way. When he writes, 'I was providing instruments that could be turned against me' (Bourdieu, 2000: 4), he also seems to recognize this risk. We need to appreciate the strategic importance of Bourdieu's attempt to put the tools of scholarly practice at the service of social critique. At the same time, following Adorno's critique of scientism, we also need to pay attention to the danger of fetishizing[8] 'reflexivity' as a magic tool that can render theoretical reflection redundant.

Theoreticism and 'Intellectualist Bias'

That Bourdieu's systematic refusal to allow 'theoretical logic' to take precedence in reflexive sociology has problematic consequences does not mean that his critique of 'theoreticism' and 'intellectualism' is without any significant value. In turning his gaze back on the practice of sociologists, Bourdieu identifies a number of biases which can cripple sociological research. The most obvious sources of bias include the social position of the researcher, notably class and gender, and the hidden interests of individual academics as well as of research institutions (Bourdieu, 1977, 1988, 1990a; Wacquant, 1992: 39). But these are not the most difficult types of bias to tackle since 'they are unlikely to

escape the self-interested criticism of those who are driven by other prejudices or convictions' (Bourdieu, 2000: 10). The most profound type of bias that permeates the scholastic field is what Bourdieu calls 'intellectualist' (or 'scholastic') bias. Intellectualist bias arises when the researcher is not conscious of or not sufficiently critical of the 'presuppositions inscribed in the act of thinking the world, of retiring from the world and from action in the world in order to think that action' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 39). The result is the inability to grasp the 'logic of practice' (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990a, 1990b).

At times, Bourdieu stretches the meaning of intellectualist bias a bit too far: 'To be able to see and describe the world as it is, you have to be ready to be always dealing with things that are complicated, confused, impure, uncertain, *all of which runs counter to the usual idea of intellectual rigour*' (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 259 [my emphasis]). It is rather questionable that the aim of sociology, especially of a critical kind, can simply be defined as 'to describe the world as it is'. It is also doubtful that 'intellectual rigour' is always opposed to complexity. Adorno's (1999) 'negative dialectics' which aim to underline the irreducibility of the 'object' to its 'concept' would be a case in point (see also Adorno et al., 1976: 77).

I believe the notion of 'intellectualist bias' might be much more helpful understood in a narrower sense – particularly in the sense Bourdieu uses it in his earlier ethnographic research[9] where he shows that intellectualist bias operates by taking abstract rules or classifications in a society too literally, believing that people 'follow' them blindly in practice. By assuming that one can understand social life by simply 'discovering' its rules and systems of classification, the 'intellectualist' perspective ignores the logic of practice, i.e. the ways in which abstract structures are negotiated or outright violated. Furthermore, it also becomes a source of 'symbolic violence' against the subjects studied, by denying or depreciating their active participation in the social world (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990b; Taylor, 1993). As such, Bourdieu's critique might even allow us to recognize the 'intellectualist bias' at work in Adorno's thought.

The most vivid examples of Adorno's 'intellectualism' can be observed in his works on popular music and mass culture (Adorno, 1981a; Adorno and Simpson, 1949; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1997).[10] For it is especially here, I believe, both his 'theoreticism' and the most disturbing aspect of his thought, i.e. his 'mandarin cultural conservatism' (Jay, 1984), come to the fore. Adorno's distaste for popular music is well known (1981a). The problem here is not so much with his critical views on 'culture industry'[11] but with his attempt to analyze popular music products with analytic categories derived from 'art music'. This analytic choice is not insignificant. As some of his critics have pointed out, in privileging the tonal and rhythmic structure of musical products, as is customary in analyzing art music, Adorno ignores the social context in which pop music is experienced and tied with various social movements (Gendron, 1986). What might be considered as the most essential aspects of pop music in its experiential context ('sound', 'style', etc.) appear to Adorno as mere 'auxiliary' parts. His highly speculative assump-

tion that a simple musical structure can only lead to a 'regressive' social experience is a blatant example of the subordination of the concrete to the abstract. As Bourdieu would say, Adorno reads the logic of theory into the logic of practice.

Much of the same disregard for 'practice' can also be seen in Adorno's attacks on mass culture in general (Jarvis, 1998: 79–80). The absence of 'people' in some of Adorno's critical essays is so conspicuous that one might question whether the people matter at all. We only need to compare his essays on television to Bourdieu's (1998b) research on the same topic, to notice Adorno's 'presumptuousness': 'Presumably television makes them [i.e. viewers] once again into what they already are, only more so' (Adorno, 1998a: 50). In these respects, there is nothing in Adorno that even remotely resembles Bourdieu's resistance to elitism. Even when Adorno (1981c) attacks the 'elite' culture critic, he does so mainly because the critic flirts too much with the 'masses'. This leaves one wondering whether Adorno would be able to perceive the 'irrational' tendencies and 'self-despair' among the underclasses and minorities of our world today in their full complexity as Bourdieu (1998a) and his collaborators (Bourdieu et al., 1999) do – especially if one remembers his humiliating comments about some of his informants in *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al., 1969: 612).

The fact that Adorno's theoreticism can so easily fall prey to cultural conservatism, especially with respect to mass culture, justifies Bourdieu's observation that the 'effects of scholastic distortion are all the more significant and scientifically disastrous when the people that science takes as its object are more remote from academic universes in their conditions' (Bourdieu, 2000: 50). Furthermore, Adorno's disregard for 'practice', combined with his bleak portrayal of contemporary society as one in which the exchange principle has penetrated *almost* all spheres of social life (Adorno, 1974; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1997), has serious implications for 'politics of mass culture' (Jarvis, 1998: 77–80). This rather totalizing conception leads him to develop a strong scepticism towards all attempts of 'innovation' in modern culture – the source of his well-known disagreement with Benjamin, Brecht and Hanns Eisler.[12]

And this is perhaps where we should take Bourdieu's warnings against the crippling effects of 'theoreticism' most seriously. Indeed, those rare moments when Adorno tends to give up his uncompromising approach towards mass culture are also the moments when he seems to adopt a reflexive strategy. For example, in a semi-autobiographical essay where he considers his experience in America in retrospect, Adorno (1998b) provides a much less 'ethnocentric' interpretation of American culture than in his earlier writings, admitting that part of his reaction in those works was due to a kind of 'culture-shock'. This essay indicates that Adorno's self-reflexive attitude allows him to partly appreciate certain potentials of 'mass culture' that he had previously denied.

Conclusion

In concluding this article, I should note that there is also much congruence between the works of the two sociologists – a point which I have not been able to stress so far.[13] There are, for example, striking parallels between Adorno's (1999) critique of 'identity thinking' and Bourdieu's (2000: 50) critique of 'scholastic fallacy'. It might even be argued that, in these critiques, both sociologists try to resist the subordination of the 'particular' to the 'universal'. They do so, of course, in quite distinct ways: one by emphasizing the 'logic of practice', and the other by evoking a non-empirical notion of 'totality'. But even then, it is not impossible to sense a certain affinity here. When Bourdieu (2000: 55) refers to logic of practice as 'so hard to think', he is not using the term in a very different way than Adorno (1999) uses 'totality'. More generally, I believe Jameson's (1990: 29) characterization of 'totality' as 'an indispensable name for the infrastructural dimension of reason and abstract thought today' can very well be applied to 'logic of practice'.

A further affinity between Bourdieu and Adorno concerns the primacy they attribute to 'society'. No doubt, there is a certain discrepancy in the way they approach this 'object'. While Adorno's exploration *mainly* targets that which is hidden in society, Bourdieu is *mostly* interested in exposing the ways in which the social is 'forgotten'. But once again, as both sociologists would agree, these two types of 'repression' are not entirely unrelated as 'social repression' is inseparable from the 'repression of the social'. In fact, both Adorno and, in his recent works, Bourdieu make use of psychoanalytic categories in tackling the issue of 'repression'. If 'social repression' is the taming of libidinal energy by social forces (Adorno et al., 1969; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1997), 'repression of the social' is the 'illusio' through which socially constituted desires appear as 'natural' desires (Bourdieu, 2000: 164–7). Both sociologists recognize this mutual interplay between desire and society, and both seem to believe that sociology can play a 'therapeutic' role against 'repression' – either by imagining the 'unimaginable', or by disturbing seemingly natural distinctions and 'tastes'.

The contrasts I have drawn between Bourdieu and Adorno should therefore be seen as two different ways of tackling a similar problem. At the price of simplification, we might state that Bourdieu's social critique is launched from the standpoint of practice: its limits are the limits of practice. Adorno's critique is launched from the standpoint of redemption: its limits are the limits of imagination.

In any case, we do not have to think of these contrasting approaches in terms of an either/or logic. The question is not so much whether theory is a tool or an aim. What we need to recognize perhaps is that theory is a tool which can also have a 'transgressive' use, especially when, as Deleuze and Foucault (1977) put it, 'practice' seems to hit a wall. To affirm the potential of theory to go beyond the given is not necessarily to privilege theory over practice. Similarly, it is somewhat futile to ask whether reflexivity is a means or an end. What we

need to take seriously is that a theoretical analysis devoid of a sense of reflexivity is prone to what Bourdieu has called 'intellectualist bias'.

More generally, to the extent that bringing social reality and its representations under critical scrutiny constitutes one of the major aims of sociological practice, scientism and theoreticism are likely to remain two potential dangers on the path of the sociologist. For 'scientism' involves the idea that one can escape the 'fallacious' representations of social reality by simply adhering to an epistemological principle, and 'theoreticism' implies that one can grasp social reality without 'touching' it. Reading Bourdieu and Adorno together might, at the very least, give us a glimpse of the struggles of two sociologists on this 'fundamentally ambiguous' path.

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Notes

1 See, for example, Robbins, 1991: 67–84. In addition to the sources cited in the text, some of the critical discussions of Bourdieu's works include: Calhoun et al., 1993; Fowler, 2000; Harker et al., 1990; Schusterman, 1999. For general introductions, see: Jenkins, 1992; Lane, 2000.

2 'The theory of sociological knowledge, understood as a system of rules governing the production of all possible sociological acts and discourses … is the generative principle of the various partial theories of the social … and as such it is the unifying principle of specifically sociological discourse' (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 30).

3 See also Ashmore (1989) and Platt (1989).

4 Unlike Bourdieu, however, Adorno was a participant in a larger tradition (i.e. 'Frankfurt School').

5 For Bourdieu too, one major dimension of reflexivity is 'to put perspective into historical perspective' (Bourdieu, 2000: 22).

6 '[W]arnings against the theoretic abdication of empiricism can never legitimate the terroristic admonitions of the theoreticians' (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 30).

7 Adorno's work, of course, does not completely lack an empirical dimension. For an account of his complicated and yet positive relationship to empirical research, see: Rose (1978: 95–108).

8 Adorno often discusses 'scientism' in the context of what he calls 'the fetishization of science': 'I understand fetishism in science to mean that science, with its specific form of argumentation and its immanent methods, becomes an end in itself, without any relation to its subject matter' (Adorno, 2000: 128).

9 See for example, Barnard, 1990.

10 For a critical survey of recent responses to Adorno's work, see Hohendahl (1995: 3–20); see also Gibson and Rubin (2002). In addition to the sources cited in the text, some of the major, sociologically oriented discussions of Adorno's works include Brunkhorst (1999), O'Neill (1976), and Wiggershaus (1995).
11 See for example, Cook (1996) and Jarvis (1998: 72–89).
12 See for example, Jay (1984: 40, 111–60). See also: Benjamin (1973, 1991) and Bloch et al. (1977).
13 For Bourdieu's acknowledgement of this point, see Bourdieu (1990a: 19).

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