

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

David L. Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals: The Political Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013, 292 pp., \$27.50 (978-0-2269-2501-1).

David Swartz's *Symbolic Power, Politics and Intellectuals* begins and ends with a discussion of power as it relates to Bourdieu's sociological project. As Swartz rightly asserts, all social acts for Bourdieu — whether conscious or unconscious — are products and carriers of power; power pervades all human action. While Bourdieu was a cultural theorist and neither a governance theorist nor a policy scholar, his sociological approach posits culture as central to the study of politics. Bourdieu endeavoured to document the subtle ways that cultural power and domination — in the form of (1) material resources; (2) the symbolic and distributive dimensions of Bourdieusian 'fields,' and (3) the process of legitimation vis-à-vis symbolic power — play out across different societies (p. 34). Swartz's discussion of power is fitting given that the key thrust of this book is on the utility of Bourdieu's work for understanding the political field and the role of intellectuals within it.

The book reads like a history of Bourdieu's work in relation to political philosophers, governance theorists, and sociologists interested in political discourse. The author's perspective reflects a broad scholarly interest in employing Bourdieu's thinking tools of habitus, field, capital, and practice to understand politics in terms of civic action and everyday life. Swartz's contribution highlights how Bourdieu's theoretical apparatus offers a strong role for the social sciences in explaining micro and macro political processes by debunking popular political discourses through a reflexive public sociology that is conscious of its own effects on the political sphere. Thus, Schwartz forces readers to reflect on the politics of daily life and question the impact of intellectuals on the political field.

The book's strength lies in Swartz's historical examination of Bourdieu's conceptualization of power in relation to other sociologists (Max Weber, Michel Foucault, Karl Marx, and Michael Mann) and governance theorists interested in the role of intellectual elites and the state in society. Equally impressive is the relative ease with which Swartz describes the complexity of Bourdieu's key concepts while applying

them to the political field in a form that is engaging and accessible. For example, Schwartz theorizes that political capital is a unique form of social capital representing the capacity to mobilize collective resources. Collective resources can be activated or delegated by political elites in a way that legitimates particular forms of action (pp. 65–68). However, Schwartz argues that such processes happen in all facets of life, and that any social act or practice is inscribed with power and politics.

The eight chapters are organized to review concepts germane to Bourdieu's political sociology, and demonstrate the sheer proliferation of Bourdieu's ideas throughout contemporary political thought. The book begins with a brief overview of Bourdieu's early career (chapter 1) before moving into descriptions of power, capital, fields, and the state (chapters 2–5). The book ends by documenting Bourdieu's expanding body of work and how it propelled him into the position of a public intellectual (chapters 6–7), ultimately ending with a commentary on how Bourdieu's sociology might be further applied to democratic politics (chapter 8).

Swartz's ability to navigate Bourdieu's complex theoretical apparatus is to be applauded. One limitation, however, is the lack of practical examples to ground the theoretical claims made by the author. While Swartz draws heavily from Bourdieu's own examples (chapter 7) including his work on Algerian class structures, French class politics and education, opinion polling, and the rise of neoliberalism, Swartz does not introduce contemporary examples that either fit neatly with or diverge completely from Bourdieu's theoretical conceptualization of power and politics. For example, current trends in the governance of western democratic states include: an increasing sense of apathy or even distrust towards statist governments; the increasing influence of citizen science (which Swartz only briefly mentions in relation to the effect of television and radio media); the rise of participatory democracy through social media (e.g., Iceland "crowd-sourcing" their constitution following the 2008 banking crisis); and the growing power of international intergovernmental organizations and their relationship to big business and state economies (e.g., the impacts of IMF austerity measures on the Greek debt crisis).

Thus, while Swartz does capture the role of political power at the level of individuals through class politics — and to a lesser degree party politics — less attention is given to the role of collective action through diversified and decentralized forms of leadership found in social movements such as Occupy Wall Street or Idle No More. Swartz is the first to challenge Bourdieu's conceptualization (or lack thereof) of social and political change, and the book is full of excellent critiques and extensions

of Bourdieu's thinking. However, the inclusion of tangible examples and counterfactuals that are attentive to contemporary issues and the political legitimacy of collective action would strengthen the analysis present in the book and help to contextualize Bourdieu's theory in practice.

Overall, the book is illuminating in its exploration of Bourdieu's life, politics, and sociological writings. For sociologists looking to wade into the political realm, Swartz deftly theorizes the role of intellectuals and the reproduction of social status through the unpacking of the symbolic dimensions of power. I anticipate that the highly descriptive nature of Swartz's overview of Bourdieu's theoretical deployment of "power" will be familiar to seasoned Bourdieusian scholars. Nonetheless, the sheer comprehensiveness of this book promotes a deep engagement with Bourdieu's work that should provide a worthwhile read for anyone interested in his career. Moreover, select chapters of the book would likely prove useful background reading for advanced undergraduate courses on contemporary social theory or graduate level sociology courses. The book will undoubtedly be enlightening for those with broader interests in social theory, power, and politics.

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