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Review of *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals: The Political Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, by David L. Swartz

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*Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals: The Political Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, by **David L. Swartz**. London and Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013. 292 pp. \$27.50 £19.50 paper. ISBN: 978-0-226-92501-1

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David Swartz, one of the world's most important Bourdieu interpreters, has followed his excellent *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* with an outstanding exposition of Bourdieu's political sociology. Although Swartz might have reasonably focused only on Bourdieu's interest in and analysis of power, he goes well beyond this in demonstrating how Bourdieu's work engages the entire field of political sociology, including analysis of the state, social movements, the conditions for and constraints on democratic participation, and the role of sociology -- and sociologists! - in political change.

Swartz's main contention in *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals: The Political Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* is that, despite the fact that Bourdieu's *oeuvre* is primarily focused on power, he has not been recognized for his role as a political sociologist. Swartz begins by carrying out a clever Bourdieusian field analysis of the field of political sociology in order to locate where Bourdieu's ideas have, but especially have not, been incorporated. He then explicates Bourdieu's main ideas about power and their relation to issues in political sociology. Here, he compares Bourdieu's ideas to others who have undertaken to think deeply about power: Gramsci, Weber, Mills, and Lukes are explicitly addressed. Three chapters of the book are devoted to showing how Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus - specifically, types of capital, fields, and symbolic power - can be used to understand how power operates in society. In addition to elaborating how these concepts fit together, Swartz uses engaging examples to demonstrate how they can be applied in given situations. He then explains how Bourdieu understands the state and contrasts Bourdieu's views with both neo-Marxists and state-centric theorists such as

Skocpol. Swartz then elaborates Bourdieu's normative views about how sociology should engage the world and what role sociologists should play in political life. Swartz deftly compares Bourdieu's ideas about political engagement with those of Michael Burawoy, who argues for a public sociology, but also with Foucault, Sartre, and other public intellectuals. Swartz concludes with an analysis of how Bourdieu's sociology and his vision of the scientific field has within it a model of a more open, democratic politics.

Perhaps the most important point that Swartz makes – and it cannot be made too often – is how fundamentally Bourdieu's sociology is about how power simultaneously naturalizes and disguises the power-laden nature of the most basic, everyday understandings and practices. This particular form of power is symbolic power. Symbolic power is the means by which power relations are legitimated. Swartz makes clear that symbolic power is about the power to name, to classify. Struggles over classification – or struggles over symbolic capital -- are fundamentally about individual and group identity. When we act as members of these groups, we don't recognize the contested and constructed nature of our identities, say, as men and women or as members of ethnic groups. Bourdieu makes clear that these identities are the results of the effects of symbolic violence. Swartz explains how symbolic capital and symbolic power produce the symbolic violence – the common sense, in Gramsci's terms -- that shape our identities and guide our actions in daily life

Does such a perspective lead to stasis? In his discussion of symbolic power, Swartz raises the important question: if symbolic power and symbolic violence are so successful that they produce misrecognition and a natural acceptance of the status quo, then how do we ever contest these taken-for-granted aspects of daily life? Can Bourdieu's theory account for social change or does the common criticism that he is too focused on the mechanisms of reproduction ring true? Swartz, both in this book and his previous one, deals directly with this issue. He acknowledges that Bourdieu doesn't pay sufficient attention to the kind of resistance that, for example, someone like James Scott highlights. But

at the same time, Swartz shows how social change may result from the critical sociology (or “socioanalysis”) that Bourdieu calls for and practices. Specifically, he argues that a critical sociology that exposes the power conditions that previously had been disguised can play a crucial role *in the context of a given crisis*. Finally, Swartz suggests, with symbolic power/violence challenged, exposed, and disseminated by a Bourdieusian “socioanalysis,” there would need to be a change in the habitus of the dominated in order for adequate mobilization to take place. He suggests that Bourdieu did not deal sufficiently with a “politics of the habitus.” My reading of Bourdieu’s notion of habitus suggests that a crisis might be exactly the situation in which the habitus of a group can change, given a potential reshaping of the opportunity structure (as would be suggested by a resource mobilization / political opportunity perspective on social movements). Understanding these dynamics should be an important next step in developing Bourdieu’s understanding of social change.

In addition to the contributions noted above, there are three other remarkable things about this book. First, without changes in pitch or tone, Swartz is able to use three distinct “voices” to: 1. convey Bourdieu’s ideas; 2. Explain how they changed over time; and 3. Discuss what is problematic in them. Second, Swartz channels C. Wright Mill’s “intersection of biography and history” as he uses his sociological imagination to produce a sociology of Bourdieu’s sociology: through a biographically-based account of Bourdieu’s academic and political concerns, Swartz shows how Bourdieu’s own habitus intersected with particular fields and affected his political positions, engagement, and, ultimately, his role as an engaged intellectual. Finally, Swartz is able to explain how Bourdieu shows, in a sophisticated way, how struggles over resources, group formation, and identity politics are connected.

There is one issue that Swartz might have dealt with in greater depth. Although he does an excellent job laying out how Bourdieu’s sociology of power deals with the question of legitimacy (or symbolic power/violence), he might have pushed Bourdieu a bit more on the nature and dynamics of the legitimation that is needed and for whom. At one point, Swartz seems to imply that as long as there

is a kind of “pragmatic acceptance” of the social order, then power relations are relatively safe and stable. But does this mean that everyone must pragmatically accept? A majority? The state bureaucracy? The army? Understanding better Bourdieu’s ideas about the dynamics and extent of legitimacy would have been an important addition to the book.

With this book, Swartz further solidifies his status as a major interpreter of the work of Bourdieu. He also establishes himself as an important political sociologist and historian of social theory.