

## 2. THE RELEVANCE OF *LA MISÈRE DU MONDE* THIRTY YEARS LATER

*University of Pisa, April 17, 2024*

Officina Bourdieu's Seminar Group

On April 17, to mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *La Misère du monde*, the Italian Bourdieu Research Group organized a dedicated seminar at the University of Pisa. The event, held at the Department of Political Sciences, aimed to explore the relevance and significance of this seminal collective work edited by Pierre Bourdieu, from multiple perspectives. Three distinguished scholars were invited to participate

Rita Bichi from the Università di Milano – Cattolica discussed Bourdieu's methodology, drawing a comparison between the article "L'illusion biographique" and the final chapter of *La Misère du monde*, titled "Comprendre". According to Bichi, in his earlier work, Bourdieu rejected the *récits de vie* approach, emphasizing

the challenges of reconstructing the evolving dynamics of the field solely through personal life stories. However, Bichi also pointed out that in the later methodological essay, Bourdieu advocates for a more flexible approach, suggesting a reevaluation of interviews as a means to comprehend individuals' social and personal worlds. The essence of this approach, she argued, lies in extracting key elements from interviewees' words, rooted in their social context, which helps in better understanding their contingent agency. Thus, the informant's discursive status gains legitimacy through the interview process, fostering researchers' reflexivity and mitigating symbolic violence, all while respecting the interviewee.

Bichi's presentation was followed by Mirella Giannini's from the Università di Napoli – Federico II. Giannini embraced the idea of bridging the gap between micro and macro dimensions through Bourdieu's methodology. She further argued that this approach also necessitates overcoming the divide between research activities and political engagement. While Bourdieu maintained a critical distance from political activism as a sociological duty, he adjusted his position in response to the emerging neoliberal order of the early 1990s. Giannini highlighted how the authors of *La Misère du monde* examined, first, the manifestations of precariousness among interviewees, whose struggles differ

based on their habitus and local positions. Second, they revealed the uncertain and often miserable lives of individuals who cope with inequalities through self-blame and a denial of aspirations, often unaware of the structural roots of their precarity within neoliberalism.

Finally, Antonello Petrillo from the Università di Napoli – Suor Orsola Benincasa, who edited the Italian translation of Bourdieu's volume, offered insights into the book's contents and its editorial legacy, reflecting on the conditions of contemporary research. He stated that confronting and challenging misery, now standardized under neoliberalism, is essential for social researchers, particularly within the increasingly weakened public university and social spheres. Additionally, by moving away from axiological neutrality toward a more interactive relationship with interviewees, the sociological practice put forth by Bourdieu rejects fixed, "epistemocratic" solutions. Petrillo argued that sociology, as the art of questioning the social world in collaboration with interviewees, aligns with a bottom-up practice that transforms personal troubles into public issues. This principle embodies Bourdieu's intellectual legacy: research as the practice of breaking with fate, connecting the individual to broader history, and offering new prospects

based on a deep understanding of lived realities.

Following these discussions, *The Lab's Quarterly* will host a symposium to present these reflections and further contributions, building upon the valuable insights of Pierre Bourdieu, and encouraging new theoretical and methodological debates and research directions.