

The Politics of (Political) Representation

Perspectives from Pierre Bourdieu*

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Introduction: 'The People'

If there is a much (ab)used word during elections, it is one that refers to 'the people' (*bayan, tao, masa*). Campaign posters are replete with phrases like "*Bayan ang Bida*" (Priority to People), "*Bayan Ipaglaban*" (Fight for the People), "*Sinta ng Bayan*" (Beloved of the People), "*Kabayan, Ang Boses ng Bayan*" (The Voice of the People), "*Mata ng Bayan sa Senado*" (The Eye of the People in the Senate), "*Pwersa ng Masa*" (The Force of the Masses), etc. We do not only refer to the so-called *trapos* (Spanish for 'rags,' derisively appropriated to refer to Filipino traditional politicians/politicos) but also to cause-oriented groups, as party-list candidates also carry the names "*Bayan Muna*" (People First) or "*Akbayan*" (short for *Aksyon ng Bayan*, Action of/for the People). What is seen is a passionate, sometimes violent, contest to win the right to speak *about, in behalf of and for* 'the people', that is, to be its representative.

The same discourse is found in religious-ecclesiastical fields (as in 'popular religiosity', 'church of the people', folk religion, ecclesiology from the 'base', religion of the masses). It is also prevalent in artistic fields (as in 'popular art' or 'pop music'). Thus, the analysis which I advance here also gives some hints to the use of the term in these fields. But it is most intense in the political field where one can rhetorically play on all the ambiguities of the word for purposes of legitimizing one's political position and programs. The whole political spectrum – from right to left – employs the term in endless variety of forms and shades of signification. Abraham Lincoln's now famous slogan for a "government of the people, by the people and for the people" in his Gettysburg Address signals both the ideals and ambivalence of American democratic discourse. Yet it is also this same term – 'people' – found in Hitler's exaltation of the German *Volk* in *Mein Kampf* that proved crucial to the silent complicity of many to the gas chamber project. At the most radical end of the political spectrum, we also read of Chairman Mao's trust in the 'people', in the rural 'masses' who, despite their creative enthusiasm, are also 'blank and malleable'. If there is any common denominator to all these divergent uses, it is the ambivalence of the term, thus, its consequent vulnerability to

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endless manipulation. The political field is replete with these shifting and self-serving interpretations.

This paper intends to trace the political logic behind this ambivalent discourse which, in my view, stems from the nature of representation itself. It is my contention that Pierre Bourdieu's attempts to theorize the political field can shed some light to our problematic. Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002)¹ of the Collège de France is a sociologist by profession but a philosopher by education and training. He locates himself within the French epistemological school – a tradition which he shares with Bachelard, Althusser and Foucault, to mention the more prominent ones. One can see in Bourdieu's *oeuvre* a critical interaction between the sociological and philosophical tradition – a salutary blend of empirical data and theoretical vision – one that is most appropriate for the issue at hand.

We will proceed in three steps: (1) we will explore Bourdieu's theory of 'fields' and from there, explain the dynamics of the political field in particular; (2) we will trace his notion of 'symbolic capital' and how it works within the dynamics of political representation; and, (3) we will attempt to understand the uses of 'the people' in the representative's attempt at position-takings within the political field.

Theorizing the Political Field

The Metaphor of the 'Game': Bourdieu's Conceptual Triad

To bring out his concept of practice or human action, Bourdieu employs the metaphor of the game. The first element is the player's 'feel for the game' or what Bourdieu calls 'habitus'.² Invoking the traditional scholastic notion of habit, the 'feel for the game' refers to the embodied capacities of agents which serve as a reservoir of 'regulated improvisations' from where one can draw upon during the 'heat of the action'. Think of a tennis or basketball player, for instance, and the

1. Pierre Bourdieu finished philosophy at the *École Normale Supérieure* (ENS) under famous philosophers such as Gaston Bachelard, Georges Canguilhem, Éric Weil, Alexander Koyré, among others. His dissertation was on Leibniz's *Animadversiones* written under the supervision of Henri Gouhier. Upon returning to Paris from the Algerian war (1960) where he was at the same time initiated into ethnography, he attended the lectures of Lévi-Strauss and acted as assistant to Raymond Aron in the Sorbonne. He was then subsequently appointed Director to the *Centre de Sociologie Européenne* and was elected to the Chair of Sociology of the Collège de France from 1981 to his death in January 23, 2002.

2. For the treatment of *habitus*, see the following works of P. Bourdieu: *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); "Le mort saisit le vif. Les relations entre l'histoire incorporée et l'histoire reifée," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 32/33 (1980): 3-14; *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA : Stanford University Press, 1990); "The Genesis of the Concepts of Habitus and Field," *Sociocriticism* 2 (1985): 11-24.

infinite creative moves s/he can do at the height of the game. No coach can plan these steps; only the player ‘born into the game itself’ can generate such moves in the moments of urgency. S/he is a ‘game incarnate’ – one who “does at every moment what the game requires.”³ In the tradition of Heidegger’s ‘being-in-the-world’, Bourdieu declares that we are so ‘disposed because we are exposed’⁴ to the game called life. Following Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘embodied knowledge’,⁵ habitus refers to the durable dispositions written in our bodies acting like ‘memory pads.’ These are social *values* ‘made flesh’ which, like our ‘second nature’, are expressed in our ways of standing, walking or speaking. Call it skill, knack or competence, habitus is our way of being which engenders in us the ‘practical sense’ (*le sens pratique*) on how to go about our social world with ease and dexterity.

Second, the moves available to a player are both free and constrained at the same time. In actual physical games, the game-field (e.g., the boundary lines, agreed-upon rules, oaths of sportsmanship, etc.) limits the players’ moves. In tennis, for instance, the ball seems to be in command of the player for one goes to where it is expected to drop. Yet his perfect anticipation of the ball’s moves also makes him so relaxed and free, appearing to be in perfect command of the game. “Nothing is simultaneously freer and more constrained than the action of the player.”⁶ In social games too, the agent’s moves are limited by the objective conditions one is historically embedded in. Yet due to being born into that game, one is in fact a master of its moves. The ramifications and consequences of this assertion are elaborated in Bourdieu’s notion of ‘*field*’.

Third, there are also ‘stakes’ (*enjeux*) which players invest themselves in.⁷ Players of the social game then concur in the ‘belief’ that the game is worth playing and the stakes are worth pursuing. This is what Bourdieu calls ‘*capital*’ which, like trump cards, acts as one’s weapon and stake in the struggle. The possession of

3. P. Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (London: Polity Press, 1990), 63.

4. P. Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (London: Polity Press, 2000), 140. “The relation to the world is a relation of presence in the world, of being in the world, in the sense of belonging to the world, being possessed by it, in which neither the agent nor the object is posited as such.” (p. 141). See also H. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary of Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), 17-19.

5. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1962). See also I. Marcoulatos, “Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu on Embodied Significance,” *Journal of the Theory of Social Behavior* 31 (March 2001): 1-27.

6. P. Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, 63.

7. P. Bourdieu and L. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 98-100.

capital also defines one's position within a given field.⁸ Bourdieu points out that while players play in order to increase their capital, (thus, to reproduce the game according to its established rules), one "can also get in it to transform, partially and completely, the immanent rules of the game."⁹ Though Bourdieu mentions some limitations in using the metaphor of the game, he finds in it a useful heuristic device to bring out his concepts of *habitus*, *capital* and *field* (or what is also called as Bourdieu's conceptual triad), thus, also clarifying what human historical practice is actually about. For the purposes of this paper, let me focus on the last two elements: field and capital.

'Fields': Towards a Relational View of Social Spaces

Habitus ('feel for the game) and *capital* (stakes) can only exist and function in relation to the '*field*'. In other words, the mastery of the game and the investment one puts into it only happen in one's belonging to a specific field of power. To put it more graphically, each card-player, for instance, by the mere fact of playing the card-game, is convinced that the game is worth playing – a conviction present only among the players of one specific game-field. The stakes, therefore, are only effective within the same field. Though there are also cards which are valid across fields, the actual value of the card is very much dependent on the kind of game that is being played. While economic capital commands obviously high stakes among capitalists and business people, it is almost a taboo among art critics or the religious. The notion of capital and field is, therefore, intrinsically interconnected: as the field defines the type of capital (stakes) active in its game, the relations of forces (capital) also specify the limits of the field. Fields are "relatively autonomous social microcosms"¹⁰ within contemporary societies whose structures serve as the con-

8. Bourdieu graphically puts it thus: "We can picture each player as having in front of her a pile of tokens of different colors, each color corresponding to a given species of capital she holds, so that her relative force in the game, her position in the space of play, and also her strategic orientation toward the game, what we call in French, her 'game', the moves that she makes, more or less risky or cautious, subversive or conservative, depend both on the total number of tokens and on the composition of the piles of tokens she retains, that is, on the volume and structure of her capital." This means that the strategy of the game of an individual player is not only dependent on one's amount and volume of capital during the time of the game but also on how the field has valued such type of capital over time. P. Bourdieu and L. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 99.

9. P. Bourdieu and L. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 99.

10. Bourdieu defines field as "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.)." P. Bourdieu and L. Wacquant, *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 97.

straining mechanism in the games their occupants play. To give examples of field, we can mention the economic field, literary field, artistic field, bureaucratic field, religious field, political field, etc. Bourdieu has devoted voluminous works to analyzing these fields.¹¹

What characterizes the field is its being relational: “To think in terms of field is to think relationally.”¹² In polemics with substantialist thinking which privileges ‘substances’ or the things we can touch or see, Bourdieu wagers on the relational significance of social realities. Paraphrasing Hegel, Bourdieu argues that “the real is relational”¹³ – an assertion which he also traces to Marx, Cassirer, Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss.¹⁴ “[W]hat exist in the social world,” remarks Bourdieu, “are relations – not interactions between agents or intersubjective ties between individuals, but objective relations which exist ‘independently of individual consciousness and will,’ as Marx said.”¹⁵ It is in the concept of ‘field’ – the positions of agents therein and the objective relations they have with one another – that relational thinking is functioning at its best within Bourdieu’s framework. The notion of ‘field’ is a challenge to break away from realist representation of social realities, for instance, the fixation on the ‘individual’ (as the *‘ens realissimum’*), the group as an identifiable body or the intersubjective relations of individuals and groups. “[J]ust as the Newtonian theory of gravitation could only be constructed against Cartesian realism which wanted to recognize no mode of physical action other than collision and direct contact, likewise the notion of field presupposes a break from the realist representation that leads us to reduce the effect of the *milieu* to the effect of direct action as actualized during the interaction.”¹⁶ In other words, the individuals exist not as autonomous ‘subjects’ but as ‘agents’ whose actions and options are understandable only within the context of the field. It is only with the knowledge of

11. See, for instance, the following works of P. Bourdieu: *Homo Academicus* (London: Polity Press, 1988); *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (London: Polity Press, 1996); *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); “The Force of Law: Toward a Sociology of the Juridical Field,” *Hastings Journal of Law* 38 (1987): 209-48; “The Field of Cultural Production, or The Economic World Reversed,” *Poetics* 12 (1983): 311-56; “The Specificity of the Scientific Field and the Social Conditions of the Progress of Reason,” *Social Science Information* 14 (1975): 19-47.

12. P. Bourdieu and L. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 96, 228.

13. *Ibid.*, 97.

14. In the *Grundrisse*, for instance, Marx states: “Society does not consist of individuals; it expresses the sum of connections and relationships in which individuals find themselves.” K. Marx, *Die Grundrisse*, ed. D. McLelland (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 77. Bourdieu directly acknowledges his debt to Cassirer’s *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* (1910). See E. Cassirer, *Substance and Function and Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*, trans. W. C. Swabey and M.C. Swabey (Chicago: Open Court, 1923).

15. P. Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), 4.

16. P. Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, 192.

the field itself and the engagement of forces therein (capital) that one can comprehend someone's specific position or point of view.

There are two relevant consequences to this way of looking at the social world in the context of politics: (1) the relativization of 'racist' imputations on certain classes of people, and (2) the rethinking of the notion of 'class' itself. First, Bourdieu charges substantialist mode of thought as 'racist' by attributing certain collective attributes, preferences and activities to specific groups "as if they are substantial properties, inscribed once and for all in a sort of biological or cultural *essence*."¹⁷ I am thinking here, for instance, of the proverbial 'indolence of the Filipinos' imputed to us by the colonizers. Viewing these attributes in relation to their positions in history and within the different competing forces of their social contexts, Bourdieu's emphasis on 'relational thinking' in sociological analysis helps in the relativization and de-legitimization of these oppressive, essentialist and universalizing claims.

Second, substantialist thinking can also be discerned in the dominant theories on 'class'. Both the Marxist analysis of 'the dominant class' and the liberal-functional theories of 'the governing élite'¹⁸ privileges 'populations', e.g., actual numbers, divisions, boundaries, over structures of relations. Without forgetting actual agents, Bourdieu argues that the proper object of analysis is the *space of positions* or the field of forces where agents and institutions occupy relative positions.¹⁹ In other words, the 'dominant class' or the 'élite' is neither a monolithic group of persons nor a set of analyzable institutions but mainly a complex space of forces whose dynamics, boundaries and interactions are constantly constructed, contested and defended.

Consequently, the concept of field also signals a break with the Marxist general concept of the 'working class'. Bourdieu breaks away from the realist interpretation of 'class' which holds that there are really defined groups actually identifiable in the real world down to the last digit of the sociological survey.²⁰ He also eschews the equally substantialist claim in the opposite direction: that class is only

17. P. Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, 4.

18. For the 'dominant ideology' thesis, see N. Abernethy, S. Hill and B. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980). For a discussion on the so-called 'élite', see R. A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in the American City* (New Haven: Yale University, 1965).

19. P. Bourdieu, "Espace social et genèse des classes," *Actes de le recherché en sciences sociales* 52-53 (June 1984): 3-12, translated as "Social Space and Genesis of Groups," in idem, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 229-51.

20. "This definitional way of thinking gives you the impression that you know whether there are two classes or more than two and leads you to think you know how many *petits bourgeois* there are. Just recently, a count was made – on allegedly Marxist grounds – of how many *petits bourgeois* there are in France – they gave a figure to the nearest digit without even rounding the figures up!" P. Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, 50.

a construct of the scientist with no foundation whatsoever in reality. Today more than ever, there are many sociologists who want to assert that social differences no longer exist or that they are withering away – a presupposition present in the ‘embourgeoisement thesis’ and some postmodern theories.²¹ Against these claims, Bourdieu ushers in a ‘genuine culturalist twist’²² to the theory of class. What we call ‘classes’, therefore, are not found ready-made in reality but are “always a product of complex historical work of construction”.²³ They are born out of symbolic construction by agents and groups in the pursuit of some specific interests. Through an imposition of symbolic violence which has the power to transform words into reality, a ‘class on paper’ can metamorphose itself into a ‘class-in-reality’. Thus, party leaders, trade union heads, movement organizers, state or church officials, social scientists and intellectuals – all ‘professionals’ who are said to represent ‘the people’ (i.e., their own groups) – find themselves in constant struggle to construct and legitimize such class representation since its existence solely depends on its own recognition, or more properly, on its misrecognition.

Let us see how Bourdieu’s view of social space and the work of social construction are exemplified in the functioning of the political field.

The Political Field: A Game of ‘Professionals’

How is the political field constituted? In the Philippine context, political participation only reaches its height and polarization during elections. For the rest, ordinary people leave it to the ‘politicos’. ‘Vigilance’ is a word most often associated with ballots, not with programs, funds or performance. Why the apathy? What makes politically passive and politically active agents?

Some substantialist theories lay the blame on the incapacity of ‘human nature’ itself or some segments of it like the ‘perennial incompetence of the masses’, the apathy of the people, the masses’ need for leadership, among others. It is this that

21. P. Bourdieu, “What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups,” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32 (1987), 1-17. For a discussion on ‘embourgeoisement thesis,’ see C. Critchen, “Sociology, Cultural Studies and Post-War Working Class,” in *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory*, ed. J. Clarke (London: Hutchinson, 1979), 13-40.

22. Klaus Eder, *The New Politics of Class: Social Movement and Cultural Dynamics in Advanced Societies* (London: SAGE, 1993), 63. “My work consists in saying that people are located in the social space, that they aren’t just anywhere, in other words, interchangeable, as those people claim who deny the existence of ‘social classes’, and that according to the position they occupy in this highly complex space, you can understand the logic of their practices and determine, *inter alia*, how they will classify themselves and others and, should the case arise, think of themselves as members of a ‘class’.” P. Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, 50.

23. P. Bourdieu, “What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups,” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32 (1987): 8. See also E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963).

occasions the need for active direction and control, in short, patronizing leadership.²⁴ At the other extreme is some form of ‘indulgent populism’ which attributes to the common people an innate competence for politics. This equally essentialist perspective forgets the fact that political competence is not an automatic universal attribute evenly distributed to all humanity. This view is a residue of the rationalist belief that the faculty of ‘judging well’ (as in Descartes) or of ‘aesthetic judgment’ (as in Kant) are ‘universal aptitudes of universal application’. For Bourdieu, competence is a capacity which very much depends on the possibility of exercising it. Political indifference is in fact an expression of imposed ‘impotence’: “only those who ought to have it can really acquire it and only those who are authorized to have it feel called upon to acquire it.”²⁵ What is unmasked in both cases is not the durability and inevitability of this political powerlessness but the social and historical conditions which make it possible. Political competence is in fact dependent on the volume of one’s economic, social and cultural capital. For instance, as early as the first cries of Philippine independence, politics was already in the hands of the *ilustrados*, the educated elite of 19th century Philippines, who saw themselves as “the legitimate leaders and spokesmen of their people.”²⁶ Thus, the conclusion of the most recent book on the present Philippine Legislature is sad but not new: that our legislators belong to the select few of our society: “They are the richer, older, better educated, and better connected than the rest of us... A congress of well-connected and well-born multimillionaires sets the rules for a poor nation.”²⁷

The more political capital is concentrated on a small number of people, the more ordinary citizens feel stripped of the material and cultural means for political participation. We are thus left with few political ‘producers’ and a mass of political ‘consumers’ – categories which do not substantially belong to subjects but have to be constantly constructed and defended against the mutinous attempts of the ‘consumers’ to sabotage the political production process as in times of social upheavals. In Bourdieu’s relational perspective, the political field is understood as

24. See, for instance, R. Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1916): “The apathy of the masses and their need for guidance has as its counterpart in the leaders a natural greed for power. Thus the development of the democratic oligarchy is accelerated by the general characteristics of human nature.” (p. 217).

25. P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 410.

26. Michael Cullinane, *Ilustrado Politics: Filipino Elite Responses to American Rule, 1898-1908* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003), 34. Even Rizal considered the educated and the wealthy as “the rightful leaders of the Filipino social and political life” – a conviction which he shares with many *ilustrados*. *Ibid.*, 364 n63.

27. Sheila Coronel, Yvonne Chua, Luz Ribman and Booma Cruz, eds., *The Rulemakers: How the Wealthy and the Well-born Dominate Congress* (Quezon City: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2004), viii.

a site of struggle and competition for the power to constitute the field itself. As in economic universes, the political field can be understood in terms of supply and demand: “the political field is the site in which, through the competition between the agents involved in it, political products, issues, programmes, analyses, commentaries, concepts and events are created – products between which ordinary citizens, reduced to the status of ‘consumers’, have to choose.”²⁸

Politics thus becomes a game monopolized by ‘professional politicians’.²⁹ The professionalization of politics is made possible by the stringent criteria for admission into the field. Those who intend to join the political production process should possess the necessary competence in terms of specific knowledge, mastery of a certain type of rhetoric, material resources and a profession of faith to the values, hierarchies and rules of the political world. In advanced democracies, only those who undergo training in elite schools of government gain easy access to political practice as these train them to the ins and outs of the political field.³⁰ In the absence of these schools, the legal profession appears to be the dominant passage to the legislature, as the Philippine experience has consistently shown. “The advantages of a legal education are obvious: legal training helps in preparing bills, taking part in debates, and in understanding the workings of government. Over time, lawyers also develop a clientele among the influentials in a community and among local folks seeking legal advice. These are networks that can be tapped in pursuit of a political career.”³¹

Beyond educational training, however, other factors exercise significant impact: wealth, family origin and social status – factors which exercise predominant

28. P. Bourdieu, “Political Representation: Elements for a Theory of the Political Field,” in idem, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 172.

29. Benedict Anderson observes that ‘electoralism’ (i.e., the right to vote in elections) is Janus-faced. It could be seen as the highest “emblem of full citizenship in the modern age” but it is also an act of “confining active and regular political participation to specialists – professional politicians – who not only have a strong interest in their institutionalized oligopoly, but who are largely drawn from particular social strata, most often the middle and upper-middle classes.” Benedict Anderson, *Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2004), 266.

30. Bourdieu laments that graduates of *Institut des sciences politiques* (‘Sciences Po’) and *École nationale d’administration* dominate the French political arena. These schools select and train future politicians as they also *codify* the rules of the political game by prescribing what types of knowledge and skills the aspiring ‘professionals’ need to learn and imbibe. This work of rationalization of political capital is at the same time a work of legitimization through the appearance of scientificity it tries so much to project. These schools do not lack counterparts in other parts of the world (e.g., John F. Kennedy School of Government on London School of Economics, etc.).

31. See “Lawyers in the Legislature” and “What Representatives Study,” S. Coronel et al., *The Rulemakers*, 11-13. See also Alfred W. McCoy, “An Anarchy of Families: The Historiography of State and Family in the Philippines,” in *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 1994), 25.

influence in the Philippine context.³² Though the new phenomenon of ‘celebritification’ of politics (‘non-professional’ politicians and media personalities joining politics) fractures a bit this entrenched monopoly, *trapos* (or what Simbulan calls the ‘modern *principalia*’)³³ present themselves as the established ‘political caste’ that still dominates the field up to the present. For even famous film and television celebrities (or the *guapos*) still need the backing of the wealthy *trapos* in order to succeed.

Political debates over ‘technicalities’ become the extreme expression of the esoteric culture which characterizes this monopoly – hair-splitting distinctions or ‘Byzantine power struggles’ which all appear as irrelevant to the uninitiated. What we have, therefore, are mere ‘palace wars’ where positions of political parties are comprehensible only vis-à-vis their competitors. It would then be useless to define the nature of political parties as they are, outside the positions of other players in the whole political arena.³⁴ Political positions swing. Compromise is the name of the game. Hard-line stance on certain issues is a rare species in politics. Parties take positions vis-à-vis the movement of other forces within the field. For instance, Bourdieu observes that in the 1930s, it was the radical left that espoused the belief in science, rationalism and progress while the nationalist-conservative right stuck to some sort of irrationalism and cult of nature. In contemporary times, however, it is the capitalist right that venerates progress and technical knowledge while the left reverts to the ecological cult of nature, some sense of regionalism, the denunciation of the myth of absolute progress or the defense of ‘persons’.³⁵ We lament that Philippine political parties have not developed their own consistent ideologies comparable to their Western counterparts.³⁶ But there is nothing new, in fact, about the blatant phenomena of fly-by-night political party formations, endless party

32. See, among others, Alfred W. McCoy, ed., *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 1994); Eric Gutierrez, “A House for the Elite,” in *Betrayals of Public Trust* (Quezon City: PCIJ,), 103-114; idem, *The Ties that Bind: A Guide to Family Business and Other Interests in the 9th House of Representatives* (Quezon City: PCIJ and IPD, 1994), CD-ROM: PCIJ expanded version; Sheila Coronel, et al., *The Rulemakers: How the Wealthy and the Well-born Dominate Congress*. (Quezon City: PCIJ, 2004).

33. The *principalia* was composed of the wealthy, land-owning and educated elite of Philippine society who also hold municipal offices during the Spanish era. The modern *principalia*, no different from its predecessor, also has the monopoly of economic and political power. Dante Simbulan, “A Study of the Socio-Economic Élite in Philippine Politics and Government, 1946-1963”, Unpublished Dissertation, Australian National University, 1965.

34. “The field as a whole is defined as a system of deviations on different levels and nothing, either in the institutions or in the agents, the acts of the discourses they produce, has meaning except relationally, by virtue of the interplay of oppositions and distinctions.” P. Bourdieu, “Political Representation,” 185.

35. P. Bourdieu, “Political Representation,” 185.

36. Randolph S. David, *Reflections on Sociology and Philippine Society* (Diliman, Quezon City: UP Press, 2001), 170-178.

coalitions, shameless party hopping or ‘turncoatism’ that characterize Philippine politics. It is but an extreme expression of the endless position-taking (*prise de position*), compromises and relational existence that characterize all political parties in the first place. Bourdieu’s ‘field-perspective’ sensitizes us to this fact.

Political ‘Truth’ in the Context of a Double-Game

The professional monopoly in politics is not a creation of the ‘producers’ alone. It happens only with the complicity of ‘consumers’ themselves who entrust the work of politics to the professionals, if not to the visions and programs of political parties (as in advanced democracies), then to the person one votes for and the image s/he represents. It is this comprehensive delegation of power to the party or candidate of their choice, acting like ‘blank check’ as it were, that gives free reign to the mechanisms that divest the same people of any control over the political apparatus they have helped set in place.³⁷ Winning the people is thus crucial to the political game.

Politicians and political parties in effect are engaged in a ‘double-game’. They have to win both the ‘palace wars’ and the battle ‘outside the walls’; both the competition among professionals and the struggle to win those whom they represent.³⁸ There is, in fact, a homology between the struggle of the representatives and the struggles of those that they represent. The more such congruence is made visible, the more advantageous it is to the representative. In other words, while politicians purport to advance the agenda of their constituents, they are in fact also pursuing the fulfillment of their own interests, most often without admitting it. An illustrative example is the pork barrel fund allotted to each lawmaker. The rationale of the fund technically known as Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) or the Countryside Development Fund (CDF) is in fact to direct resources to districts too remote to get the attention of the national power centers. A fund is readily available to the district’s representative who is most intimately in touch with the local situation and thus the best person to act. But the truth is “the benefits officials get out of it far outweigh those gained by the public.”³⁹

The seasoned ‘politico’ is one who can skillfully transform one’s own interests to the language of the concerns of those they represent, thus, also concealing real self-interest. Such duplicity is also seen in the discrepancy between two images congressmen project in the Congress hall and among their constituents. Despite

37. P. Bourdieu, “Political Representation,” 174.

38. “Political parties must, on the one hand, develop and impose a representation of the social world capable of obtaining the support of the greatest number of citizens, and on the other hand, win positions (whether of power or not) capable of ensuring that they can wield power over those who grant power to them.” P. Bourdieu, “Political Representation,” 181

39. S. Coronel et al., *The Rulemakers*, 175.

poor performance in bill-sponsorship and lawmaking, some manage to get re-elected to Congress by their constituents as they have projected themselves as the 'human face' of the law through immediate assistance, resource allocation and service provision such as job referrals, community projects, "sponsorships in weddings, baptisms, guesting in fiestas, coronations, graduations, anniversaries, foundation ceremonies, conventions, seminars, beauty contests, funerals and other services".⁴⁰ In order to triumph in the 'palace wars', parties need to mobilize forces from 'outside the walls' of their own professional circles for purposes of their own legitimization. For "just as the church takes on as its mission the diffusion of its institutional grace to all the faithful, be they just or unjust, and the submission of sinners without distinction to the discipline of God's commands, the party aims at winning over to its cause the greatest number of those who resist it."⁴¹

Political parties can thus easily compromise party lines and positions if only to get a broader support and clientele. This is necessary if the party wants to dominate the political race. Avant-garde groups (e.g., party list representatives) can pursue the 'purist' line because they neither have base nor real power. Even as their positions are necessary to advance political conscience, they also know very well that the political agenda is dominated by 'trapos' whom they need to compromise with, if they want to exercise some influence within the race. Party-list groups are in fact always vulnerable to 'trapoization' to which some have already succumbed.⁴²

Truth in the intellectual fields is measured by its scientific value. On the other hand, truth in the field of politics is gauged by its power to mobilize people, i.e., the capacity to rally the represented to recognize a certain position even by their mere silence, the absence of dissent, ticking a box in plebiscites or elections or simply being physically present in rallies and demonstrations. "In politics, 'to say is to do', that is, to get people to believe that you can do what you say and, in particular, to

40. Renato Velasco, "Does the Philippine Congress Promote Democracy?", *Democratization: Philippine Perspectives* (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1997), 281-302. See also *The Rulemakers*, ed. S. Coronel et al., 120-141 (See "Making Laws as a Sideline" and "Dividing the Spoils"). The political discourses of these representatives in fact are always "doubly determined, and affected by a duplicity which is not in the least intentional since it results from the duality of fields of reference and from the necessity of striving at one and the same time the esoteric aims of internal struggles and the exoteric aims of external struggles." P. Bourdieu, "Political Representation," 183.

41. P. Bourdieu, "Political Representation," 189.

42. "The 'TRAPOIZATION' of the party-list system – and of some of the party-list representatives – was not entirely unexpected. Politics is a game of compromise, and as early as the election campaign, even some of the party-list organizations struck deals with traditional politicians in order to win more votes." S. Coronel et al., *The Rulemakers*, 240 (see "Reform or Capitulation?", 238-246). See also Agustin Martin Rodriguez and Djourina Velasco, *Democracy Rising?: The Trials and Triumphs of the 1998 Party-List Elections* (Quezon City: Institute of Politics and Governance & F. Ebert Stiftung, 1998); Jeremiah Opiniano, "Party List Groups: Struggling to Represent the Marginalized," *Intersect* (December 2003): 20-24.

get them to know and recognize the principles of di-vision of the social world, the *slogans*, which produce their own verification by producing groups and, thereby, a social order.”⁴³ This leads us to the notion of ‘symbolic capital’ and ‘symbolic violence’ involved in political representation.

‘Symbolic Capital’ and Political Representation

The Notion of ‘Symbolic Capital’

The notion of *capital* in Bourdieu can best be understood in the context of ‘interest’. All social games – even the most ‘disinterested’ ones in the intellectual or religious fields – have stakes which arouse some interest in each of those who join them. Bourdieu loves to refer to a sculpture in the Auch cathedral near Toulouse, France which depicts two monks fighting over the prior’s staff to point out that even “[i]n a world which, like the religious universe, and above all the monastic universe, is the site par excellence of *Ausserweltlich*, of the extrawordly, of disinterestedness in the naïve sense of the term, one finds people who struggle over a staff, whose value exists only for those who are in the game, caught up in the game.”⁴⁴ No action thus is ‘interest-free’. Each practice is motivated. In whichever form – material or symbolic – interests are there to act as the ‘principle of sufficient reason’ for human action.⁴⁵ Bourdieu’s project, therefore, is to extend the scope of Marx’s notion of ‘naked self-interest’ to the concept of ‘symbolic’ interests which philosophical thinking generally considers to be “a ‘sacred’ island miraculously spared by the ‘icy water of egotistical calculation’ and left as a sanctuary for the priceless or worthless things it cannot assess.”⁴⁶

Bourdieu distinguishes three main types of capital: economic, cultural and social.⁴⁷ Economic capital – one which can be directly expressed in monetary forms and institutionalized in property rights, stocks and shares - is the capital which is most characteristic of capitalism and its most effective form. Though economic capital is crucial and determining, it needs to be symbolically mediated to be widely effective. The other two kinds – cultural and social capitals – can be employed in this work of mediation and misrecognition, thus, in its consequent legitimization. Cultural capital refers to knowledge, skills and other attributes which, in their in-

43. P. Bourdieu, “Political Representation,” 190. This makes media crucial to electoral politics. For examples in Philippine context, see Sheila Coronel, ed., *From Loren to Marimar: The Philippine Media in the 1990s* (Quezon City: PCIJ, 1999).

44. P. Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, 78.

45. P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 290 n10.

46. P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 178.

47. P. Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241-58.

stitutionalized forms, appear as educational qualifications, technical skills or degrees. While cultural capital refers to ‘what you know’, social capital tells about ‘whom you know’. It points to one’s social connections within society which can also take institutionalized forms as in the appeal to a common ‘name’ (e.g., family name, abode, school, club, political party). Like cultural capital, belonging to a social network also means endless endeavor to maintain these lasting useful relationships so as to secure material profits. Thus, economic capital can only function most effectively when it is concealed and misrecognized through its cultural and social forms.

It is when these forms of capital are misrecognized as such, thus, concealing their actual dynamic as capital yet still accumulating profits for their owners, that they can be called ‘symbolic capital’. This disguised and taken-for-granted forms of capital exert, what Bourdieu calls, ‘symbolic power’ or ‘symbolic violence’. “Symbolic capital, a transformed and thereby disguised form of physical ‘economic’ capital, produces its proper effect inasmuch as, and only inasmuch, as it conceals the fact that it originates in ‘material’ forms of capital which are also, in the last analysis, the source of its effects.”⁴⁸ Symbolic capital consists of one’s ordinary properties – physical strength, wealth and other social skills – which, because they are misrecognized, exert a power on others, thus, instilling in them some symbolic effect beyond what these attributes actually represent. Cultural, intellectual and religious fields are replete with examples. A work of art has to be assessed as ‘beyond price’; scientific research should be viewed as a field where only the force of arguments matter; the church’s mission is solely for ‘the greater glory of God’, etc. Yet it is an undeniable fact that these ‘priceless objects’, scientific enterprise or religious endeavors – all different forms of capital – are not devoid of material interests and economic intents. This process of *misrecognition* is necessary in order for such specific discourses to exert their symbolic power over other discourses, thus, to be socially *recognized* and legitimized as such. Political capital is better understood in this context.

Political Capital: Credit and Credence

Political capital is a “form of symbolic capital, *credit* founded on *credence* or belief and *recognition* or, more precisely, on the innumerable operations of credit by which agents confer on a person (or on an object) the very powers that they recognize in him (or it).”⁴⁹ Let me unpack this dense assertion. Political capital is, first of all, founded on belief or recognition. In its original context, the Latin *fides*,

48. P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 183.

49. P. Bourdieu, “Political Representation,” 192.

according to Emile Benveniste, is first of all a *credit* – a sort of guarantee or security which I entrust to someone and to which I can have recourse, maybe in times of distress.⁵⁰ Thus, when I say, “I place my *fides* (i.e., trust, confidence) in somebody”, the latter owes me protection in exchange for my submission. This explains why *fides* came to be associated with credence or belief when appropriated into the Christian milieu. *Credo* literally means “to place one’s *kred*, that is, ‘magical powers’, in a person from whom one expects protection, thanks to ‘believing’ in him.”⁵¹ *Kred* is an old Vedic term which refers to some kind of ‘stake’, something both material and emotional, some sort of ‘magical power’ in humans which can be entrusted to the gods. In the battle between mythic clans, the divine-human champion needs the people to believe in him, that is, to place their *kred* (i.e., magical powers) in him to ensure victory, always in exchange for the benefits which he owes them.

Thus, like the champion in Benveniste, the politician only obtains his political capital – that magical power of representation – from the ‘belief’ (i.e., *fides*, *kred*) that the group places on him/her. And since this capital is of ‘pure fiduciary value’, the politician is also susceptible to malicious insinuations, doubts, rumors of scandals – anything that can erode this belief and which can undermine the ground of such representation. Thus, like all symbolic capital, there is a need for so much time, effort and resources ‘to accumulate credit and avoid discredit’. One can understand the care which public officials invest in the crafting of their speeches and planning their TV appearances, their exposés and silences, their revelations and disguises – all in order to project a public image worthy of such trust.⁵² Like all symbolic capital, political capital is only maintained through this unceasing work of

50. “[In the phrase *fides est mihi apud aliquem*], the term *fides* is bound up with the construction *est mihi*, the proper expression of possession; and this ‘possession’ is determined by the preposition *apud* ‘chez’, indicating the partner. The ‘possessor’ of the *fides* thus holds a security which he deposits ‘with’ (*apud*) somebody: this shows that *fides* is really the ‘credit’ which one enjoys with one’s partner... [I]t will be seen that the partners in ‘trust’ are not in the same situation, the one who holds the *fides* placed in him by a man has this man at his mercy. That is why *fides* becomes almost synonymous with *dicio* or *potestas*. In their primitive form, these relations involved a certain reciprocity, placing one’s *fides* in somebody secured in return his guarantee and his support. But this very fact underlines the inequality of the conditions. It is authority which is exercised at the same time as protection for somebody who submits to it, in exchange for, and to the extent of, his submission. This relationship implies the power of constraint on one side and obedience on the other.” E. Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 96-98.

51. E. Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, 99.

52. “Visits to wet markets are a GMA favorite but the president also excels in the other photographic rituals preferred by politicians, such as planting rice with farmers, sharing a meal with schoolchildren, and donning a mask with performers.” Tony Velasquez, “Picture Imperfect,” *i: The Investigative Reporting Magazine* (October-December 2002): 20-23.

‘euphemization’⁵³ or the incessant endeavor to conceal the otherwise asymmetrical relationship between the representative and the represented and the discrepancy between the former’s interests and the latter’s.

Yet those who play the political game, both the represented and representative, grant their tacit agreement to this process of euphemization. For as the represented hand over their *fides* to the representative, they also profess to the uneven relationship that proceeds from such a transaction. To quote Bourdieu, “[T]he language of authority never governs without the collaboration of those it governs, without the help of the social mechanism capable of producing this complicity, based on misrecognition, which is the basis of all authority.”⁵⁴ What is ironic is that through this complicity, the original owners of the *kred* have been divested of it and the representative is transformed into a political *fetish* and has acquired a life of its own, now wielding power over its own creator.

Delegated Capital: ‘Skeptron’ and Representation

Political capital is in effect a *delegated* capital. The right to speak for or in behalf of the people always comes from outside. “The power of words is nothing other than the *delegated power* of the spokesperson and his speech – the substance of his discourse and, inseparably, his way of speaking – is not more than a testimony, and one among others, of the *guarantee of delegation* which is vested in him.”⁵⁵ In other words, one possesses the right to speak only after having been consecrated, as it were, through some *rites of institution* in religious liturgies also acting as rites of legitimization. Party proclamations, the raising of hands, the swearing in through the bible, the distinct robes, the thousand microphones and television cameras are contemporary expressions of the *skeptron* which, in Homer, is always handed to the orator who is about to speak in order to give a semblance of authority. The *skeptron* was originally a simple traveler’s or beggar’s staff now transformed into a symbol of authority in the hands of a royal person. “The scepter and the crown are royalty in themselves. It is not the king who reigns but the crown

53. In the language of Bourdieu, ‘euphemism’ refers to the ‘imposition of form’. Symbolic power consists in imposing ‘formalities’ in homage to the social order. Society in fact credits those who pretend to honor its order. “What is required is not that one does everything as one should, but rather that one at least gives indications of trying to do so. Social agents are not expected to be perfectly in order, but rather to observe order, to give visible signs that, if they can, they will respect the rules (that is how I understand the formula: ‘hypocrisy is a homage that vice renders to virtue’). Practical euphemisms are a kind of homage rendered to the social order and to the values the social order exalts, all the while knowing that they are doomed to be violated.” P. Bourdieu, “Economy of Symbolic Goods,” in idem, *Practical Reason*, 98.

54. P. Bourdieu, “Authorized Language: The Social Conditions for the Effectiveness of Ritual Discourse,” in idem, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 113.

55. P. Bourdieu, “Authorized Language,” 107.

because it makes the king.”⁵⁶ The *skeptron* and the crown now become the mystic credentials of the representative’s divine mission. Yet it also serves as an act of ‘euphemization,’ mainly through authorized language, of what is otherwise a process of political dispossession and a consequent imposition of symbolic violence which through it has now become legitimate.

Bourdieu wants us to be sensitive, therefore, to the social conditions of language use – in this case, the ‘language of authority’ – a dimension which is missing from many language theories from Saussure, Chomsky to Austin. Though Chomsky’s distinction between *competence* and *performance* is much more dynamic than Saussure’s *langue* and *parole*,⁵⁷ both collude in the view that language is an ‘autonomous and homogeneous object’ open to a purely semiotic analysis, that is, to the examination of the internal constitution of the texts alone. What is missing in these ‘internalist’ approaches is the attention due to the socio-historical conditions of the production-reception of a text or language. Chomsky, for instance, argues for the competence of an ‘ideal speaker’ of a language to produce unlimited sets of grammatically correct sentences. For Bourdieu, however, this competence is not an abstract capacity of all ‘ideal speakers’ valid for all times and situations. It can only be understood as ‘practical competence’ – the speaker’s ‘practical sense’ – to produce specific utterances *appropriate to context*, one which is sensitive not only to the constraints and possibilities of social conventions present in a specific occasion but also to the power relations between actual speakers and hearers. The said capacity is not so much to generate grammatically excellent sentences but the ability to make itself heard, believed or followed, in short, to speak with authority.⁵⁸

Though ‘speech acts’ theorists like J. L. Austin are sensitive to the social conditions of linguistic exchanges, Bourdieu thinks that they have not explored the total repercussions of this direction. In *How to Do Things with Words*,⁵⁹ Austin alerts us to ‘performatives’ or words which fulfill themselves in the act of saying them, e.g., “I do” (in marriage), “I declare the games open!” (in the Olympics) or “This is my body” (in the Mass). Central to this analysis are the conventional procedures (e.g., the right person, proper place and circumstance, appropriate formula, etc.) which should be present or followed in order for the words to take effect. For Bourdieu, what Austin overlooks is the fact that these ‘conventions’ are also imbedded in real *social* relations characterized by asymmetric power dynamics. Not everyone can cut the ribbon, name a highway and declare it open to the public; for

56. E. Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, 324.

57. Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965); Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).

58. John Thompson, “Editor’s Introduction,” in P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 3-10.

sure, not the ordinary construction worker. S/he must be an ‘official’ representative vested with authority. Like the Homeric *skeptron*, the authority is not his/her own but handed to him/her by the social-political institution, together with all its vision and division, hierarchies and prejudices, silences and exclusions – stakes to which all the participants in fact adhere and do not at all question.⁶⁰ Bourdieu’s project, therefore, is a relentless criticism of the social conditions of possibility of the political field from the act of divesting the people of their own political capital to the symbolic violence exercised by ‘professionals’ and representatives in order to maintain this state of dispossession. What is crucial is the assertion that these uneven social conditions are not eternal but *historical*, thus, also open to change and transformation.

‘The People’: Terrains of an Ambivalent Discourse

Taking into account the theoretical frame which Bourdieu furnishes us above, we can then understand the uses of this politically elastic word – ‘the people’ – as it is extended or restricted at will to suit the struggles for the maximization of one’s symbolic capital within a specific field of production. The position which a social agent takes vis-à-vis ‘the people’ depends in large part to the type of capital a specific field values and the location the agent occupies within that field.

In artistic fields, for instance, references to the ‘people’ or the ‘popular’ (as in ‘pop art’ and ‘pop music’) redound to something ‘vulgar’ or ‘commonplace’ when seen from a specific position in these fields of production, i.e., the location of professional artists, critics and specialists who claim monopoly over the production of ‘goods’ within those fields. The word ‘popular’ is, at worst, an expression of contempt or at best of condescension since these aesthetic endeavors ‘from below’ denies their professional status “by doing without [their] services”⁶¹ just as, in the religious fields, clerics censure as ‘magical’ or ‘superstitious’ anything outside the

59. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard university Press, 1962).

60. “The specificity of the discourse of authority (e.g., a lecture, sermon, etc.) consists in the fact that it is not enough for it to be *understood* (in certain cases it may even fail to be understood without losing its power), and that it exercises its specific effect only when it is *recognized* as such.... What one might call the *liturgical* conditions, namely, the set of prescriptions which governs the *form* of the public manifestation of authority, like ceremonial etiquette, the code of gestures and officially prescribed rites, are clearly only an element, albeit the most visible one, in a system of conditions of which the most important and indispensable are those which produce the disposition towards recognition in the sense of misrecognition and belief, that is, the delegation of authority which confers its authority on authorized discourse.” P. Bourdieu, “Authorized Language,” 112-13.

61. P. Bourdieu, “The Uses of People,” in idem, *In Other Words*, 151.

sanctioned liturgical practice. High aesthetics, by virtue of the location it occupies in the social space, needs to constantly struggle to maintain its hegemony through the project of universalizing its own particular ‘taste’ while relativizing the rest. The Kantian assertion that disinterested aesthetic sensibility is transcendental overlooks the fact that the *habitus* of the ‘pure gaze’ depends ultimately on the educational and training opportunities (i.e., cultural and social capital) which a specific social location affords some but which are also effectively denied to others.⁶² To universalize it also amounts to a legitimization and naturalization of these social inequalities.

A more positive view of the ‘popular’, however, emerges from artistic practitioners coming from the dominated regions of the social space (e.g., the exaltation of popular aesthetics). This work of aesthetic re-appreciation and rehabilitation is also part of a strategic move to maximize one’s capital within such field. These cultural producers in dominated spaces (e.g., local artists, emerging performers, subaltern arts, etc.) capitalize on their “supposed proximity to the people”, proudly flaunting their “humble origins” and their direct contact with “the feelings of the people”, thus, turning the stigma into an ideal and gaining recognition for such a move. But this move, it must be said, also disguises and not directly confronts the actual effects of domination as consequences of their being located in subaltern spaces.

While the dominant section of the artistic field can disregard ‘the people’ in its discourse, it is not so in the political field. Politicians know that it is only in winning ‘the people’ to their cause that they succeed in the political ‘palace wars’. The use of the ‘people’ and the ‘popular’ thus becomes not only necessary but also profitable. ‘The people’ is vastly employed both by the discourse of the popular right and the radical left. Hitler’s *volkish* discourse, Chairman Mao’s *masses*, French *Poujadism*, Argentina’s *Peronism* and their contemporary heirs – Jean-Marie Le Pen of France, Silvio Berlusconi of Italy, Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar or Joseph Estrada and Fernando Poe of the Philippines – quite vary in their political convictions on crucial issues of the day – positions which range from outright racism of the conservative right to popular ‘workerism’ in its populist or leftist varieties. What unites them all is their projected closeness to the sentiments of ‘the people’. Such populist discourses caught the people’s imagination in their own times and contexts. These movements were in fact ‘revolutionary’ as they presented themselves to be a rebellion against the monopoly of professional politics or dominant elite dynasties. But they could also be ‘conservative’ since the so-called ‘people’ only served as a ‘discourse’ ending up in the same elitist politics they were opposed to in the first place. These populist moves betray the double-game Bourdieu

62. See P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

attributes to the political field. On the one hand, it is an attempt at position-taking against their dominant competitors in the field by appealing to their imagined proximity with ‘the people’. On the other hand, it is an effort to enlist ‘the people’ in the legitimization of the politicians’ location by playing on the latter’s anti-intellectualism and anti-elitism – a move which does not at all confront but only disguises the real consequences of domination.⁶³ In reality, this appeal to ‘the people’ conceals a double break: first, from other professional politicians from whom these populist representatives distinguish themselves (as they claim to come from ‘the ranks of the people’ while the rest are elites); second, from ‘the people’ themselves as these populists assume the role of spokespersons who also divest the represented of their political capital and competence.

Parallel analysis can be given to the use of the term ‘masses’, e.g., the ‘man of the masses’, *pwera ng masa* (force of the masses) and *maka-masa* (pro-masses). The conservative and traditional right, for instance, deplors the havoc brought about by ‘mass culture’, ‘mass production’, ‘mass society’ and ‘mass civilization’. Yet among the radical left, we also hear of Mao Tse-Tung’s rural ‘masses’ who are ironically held to be the best agents of the communist revolutionary project as they are condescendingly viewed to be ‘blank and malleable’. But are there really ‘masses’? Who are the ‘masses’? According to Raymond Williams, ‘masses’ is in fact ‘other people’, those whom we do not know and we cannot know. We will never call our relatives, family and friends ‘masses’ even if they are located in the lowest level of the socio-economic ladder. “There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses.”⁶⁴ ‘Masses’, therefore, serves a ready tool for ideological manipulation by both positions as they in fact collude in recognizing the need for an elite minority (e.g., elite cultural educators or vanguard party, etc.) to educate or lead the ‘mass’ majority.

From the perspective of Bourdieu, therefore, the so-called ‘people’ or ‘masses’ (like ‘class’) are not substantial social realities that can be counted to the last digit but a product of complex work of symbolic construction, thus, can be summoned to

63. “[B]y striving to show that the ‘people’ has nothing to envy the ‘bourgeois’ when it comes to culture and distinction, it forgets that its cosmetic or aesthetic innovations are disqualified in advance as excessive, misplaced or out-of-place, in a game in which the dominant determines at every moment the rule of the game by their very existence, measuring innovation by the rule of discretion and simplicity by the norm of refinement.” P. Bourdieu, “The Uses of the People,” 153.

64. “What we see neutrally, is other people, many others, people unknown to us. In practice, we mass them, interpret them, according to some convenient formula. Within its terms, the formula will hold. Yet it is the formula, not the mass, which is our real business to examine. It may help us to do this if we remember that we ourselves are being massed by others. To the degree that we find the formula inadequate for ourselves, we can wish to extend to others the courtesy of acknowledging the unknown.” R. Williams, *Culture and Society: From Coleridge to Orwell* (London: Hogarth Press, 1982), 300.

exist or vanish, extended or restricted, depending on the ‘use’ they have to the process of legitimizing the act of representation. Thus, as politicians succeed in the exercise of symbolic power in order to legitimize their ‘political capital’ (which, as we have seen, is also grounded on the economic, social and cultural capital) and arrogate unto themselves the role of ‘political producers’, they also consequently relegate the majority to the status of political ‘consumers’ permanently dispossessed of political competence. In the process, the ‘masses’ found only in the politicians’ discourse now ultimately transforms itself into ‘masses-in-reality’.

The modest contribution of this paper is to alert us to the fact that what is often fervently proclaimed as contemporary political alternatives to ‘trapoized’ politics – like ‘political empowerment’, ‘local governance’, ‘citizens’ participation’, ‘political decentralization and autonomy’ – are not realities that automatically come about after the granting of ‘democratic space’, as our post-EDSA as well as all post-colonial experiences consistently remind us. Political competence is, in fact, grounded on some concrete historical socio-economic conditions of its possibility. Unless these conditions are more or less adequately met, responsible political participation will continue to be a desirable horizon, not a practicable reality.

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