

PIERRE BOURDIEU AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY

Spring 2008

Tu/Thu, 12-1:20PM, SS 107

Office hours: Thu, 1:30-3:30 and by apt @ Classics Café

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SOCI 28036

Over the past twenty years, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has imposed himself as one of the major contemporary theorists in the social science. Although he confessed that he did not expect his theoretical system – which was produced in a specific intellectual and empirical context – to attain a large audience outside of France, a growing number of social scientists are currently engaging with his work. Because of its ambition and scope, Bourdieu’s intellectual project has triggered a massive amount of discussions, interpretations and criticisms. For this reason, starting from Bourdieu’s sociology is an interesting locus from which to explore key debates in the social sciences, from classical but still pertinent questions to contemporary issues.

This course aims at presenting Bourdieu’s work, alongside some of the main reactions and developments it generated. It will begin with a thorough introduction of his key concepts (among them: *habitus*, *illusio*, capital, and field). Since Bourdieu himself addresses key strands of classical social theory, we will explore his *sociology of domination* in relation to: the French school of sociology (Durkheim, Mauss), Structuralism (mainly Lévi-Strauss), Marxism and Phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty). Inasmuch as it is possible the concepts and the theory will never be studied for themselves but always **in action**, that is they will not be studied for the sake of a mere intellectual discussion but, following Weber, to provide the tools of a “concrete science of empirical reality”.

The main goal of this course is to **put Bourdieu to work**: in addition to an outline of his theory, an emphasis will be placed on empirical cases in order to provide tools for conducting social research. From the initial presentation of the theory, we will then move on to tackling general questions (ie. shall sociologists – still – pay attention the social properties of the people they study?). We will examine some of Bourdieu’s analyses, and assess their contemporary relevance (consumption). We will investigate new fields of research (globalization, gender) and read in depth some works that resort to some of his concepts (urban marginality). This second part, longer than the first one, will be systematically based on extensive readings of Bourdieu’s critics, colleagues, and more or less distant proponents of his theories. This will include texts by L. Boltanski, Ph. Bourgois, R. Brubaker, Y. Dezalay, J. Karabel, B. Latour, M. Pattillo-McCoy, L. Wacquant, among others.

Course organization, objectives, and grading policy

This class meets bi-weekly. Each session will be divided between a) class discussion – to actively engage with the texts and b) lectures. For certain sessions, the reading load might seem light at first glance. However, since most of the texts we will go through are dense and challenging, don't expect them to be easy. This class is an intense one, and the schedule has been designed to allot more time when there are pieces that require a close, careful reading.

Final grade will be determined from two types of required exercises, and an optional one:

1. **Participation (10%):** Since one of the primary objectives of the class is to equip you with concepts to account for the social world we live in and study, **active participation** is expected.

2. **Take Home Papers (70%):** You will also have to write two short take home papers These will be argumentative pieces answering a precise topic (either one among those proposed by the instructor or one you suggest and get approved by the instructor – Sociology majors are encouraged to write on their B.A. topic), not just a restatement of thesis. It is imperative that they be composed of an introduction that includes a presentation of the question, a quick discussion of it, and a main thesis. Each ensuing paragraph, logically tied to the previous one, will include both an argument and an example to sustain your claim. A conclusion will recapitulate the main stages of the demonstration, provide precise answers to the questions and, if any, provide new queries from the new standpoint you reached.

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| i. Mid term paper | 30% | 5-7 pages | April, 29th |
| ii. Final paper | 40% | 10-12 pages | June, 9th |

3. **Response papers (20%):** Starting week 2, you will have to write a total of 3 short response papers, answering questions posted on the Chalk website for the class. You can write them whenever you want and/or can (up to a paper a week). These response papers, between 200 and 300 words each, are aimed at helping you to prepare the class discussion by reformulating the main questions we will tackle. For your response paper to be graded, you have to turn it in before the beginning of the class it is due.

Course materials

- A website has been created for the course, with extra-resources, useful links. Check it out from time to time, at <http://jourdan.ens.fr/~eollion/PB08.html>
- Most of the material is available either on the dedicated website for the class, or on e-reserve (* = e-reserve; web = website).
- The books and articles necessary for the course have been placed on reserve at the Joseph Regenstein library: ask for them at the 1st floor reserve desk.
- The following books have been ordered for you at the Seminary Coop bookstore:
 - ✓ Bourdieu (1990, [1980]), *The Logic of Practice*, Stanford, Stanford University Press.
 - ✓ Bourdieu (1984, [1979]), *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
 - ✓ Bourdieu (1998 [1994]), *Practical Reasons. On the Theory of Action*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
 - Bourdieu and L. Wacquant (1992), *An Invitation to a Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (Not necessary, but useful).

1. Introduction: Locating Bourdieu

The first week aims at providing a broad outline of Bourdieu's work and theoretical background. After a short presentation of his position in contemporary social sciences and a first glance at his intellectual project, we will investigate the theories he relied on to build his own frame of work. This will lead to a quick presentation of his epistemology (a theory of social knowledge drawing on Durkheim, and a practice of social science based on G. Bachelard and G. Canguilhem's *historical rationalism*), before we move on to study his debt toward structuralism.

(i) *Introducing Bourdieu: an overview*

(ii) *The structuralist origins of Pierre Bourdieu*

- J. Culler, "Structuralism", in *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, edited by L. Kritzman, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 110-117 (*).
- C. Lévi-Strauss, "Structural Analysis in Linguistics and in Anthropology", *Structural Anthropology I*, New York, Basic Books, pp. 31-54 (*).
- "Structuralism and the Theory of Social Knowledge", in *Social Research*, 35 (4), 1968, pp. 681-706 (*).

For further reading

- Jeffrey J. Sallaz, Jane Zavisca, "Bourdieu in American Sociology, 1980- 2004", in *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2007, 33 (21), pp. 21-41 (web).
- L. Wacquant, "Pierre Bourdieu", in Rob Stone (ed.) *Key Sociological Thinkers*, 2006, London: MacMillan, pp. 261-277 (web).
- C. Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, Routledge, 1987 [1950], entire.

2. Toward a General Theory of Practice: Introducing *habitus*

In these sessions, we will see how Bourdieu, refusing what he termed the "objectivism" of structuralism, conceived of and introduced his notion of *habitus*. In order to account for the experience of the individuals and then explain their actual practices, we will look at how (i) he criticized structural anthropology for looking at the rules rather than at the way individuals deal with these rules; and (ii) how he introduced Merleau-Ponty's notion of "lived body" in an attempt to sidestep the opposition between conscious and non-conscious actions (*practical sense*). This idea of 'incorporated dispositions' will be exemplified with M. Desmond's ethnography of a firefighter team in Arizona.

(i) *A Criticism of Structuralism*

- "From Rules to Strategies", *In Other Words*, p. 59-75 (*).
- "Objectification objectified", "Belief and the Body", in *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 30-42 and 66-80.
- "The Peasant and his Body", *Ethnography*, 5 (4), 2004, pp. 579-599 (web).

(ii) *Practical sense and the theory of action*

- “Structure, *habitus*, practices”, “The Logic of Practice”, in *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 52-98.
- M. Desmond, “Becoming a Firefighter”, *Ethnography*, 7 (4), 387-421.

For further reading

- “The Imaginary Anthropology of Subjectivism”, in *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 42-52.
- “Bodily Knowledge”, *Pascalian Meditations*, pp. 128-163 (*).
- M. Desmond, *On the Fireline*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007 (esp. “Introduction” and “Learning and Burning”).

3. Pluralizing Capital: is Bourdieu a Marxist?

Against the dominant vision (esp. in the US) of Bourdieu as a Marxist, his analysis of capital tends to show his distance from Marx. He nonetheless retains several key traits of the Marxist analysis: an agonistic conception of the social world, and the role of capitals in determining practices (i) Pluralizing capitals (at first with cultural capital) helped him to capture the *reproduction of the social structure* he was perceiving in the rapidly changing French society of the 1960’s and 1970’s. (ii) Far from being limited to a period and a case, the concepts he built have been used elsewhere, as we will see with some studies on the American school system. Displacing the concept to another society can prove useful to assess the strength of the notion.

(i) *Reassessing Value*

- “The forms of capital”, in J.G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 241-258 (*).
- “The New Capital”, *Practical Reason*, pp. 19-31.
- “Social Space and its Transformations”, *Distinction*, pp. 99-167.

(ii) *Classes, Classification, Reproduction*

- J. Karabel, “The Battle over Merit”, in *The Chosen. History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale and Princeton*, 2005, pp. 536-557 (*).
- R. Cookson and C. Persell “Chartering and bartering: Elite Education and Social Reproduction”, *Social Problems*, 33 (2), 1985, pp. 114-129 (web).
- “Classes and classification”, *Distinction*, pp. 466-484 (esp. 479-484).

For further reading

- L. Wacquant, “Notes on Bourdieu’s capital”, *Foreword to the State Nobility* (1997 [1989]).

4. Marx Meets Weber: the Logic of Fields

The notion of field is key to Bourdieu's theory. Pointing to a rather autonomous space in which individuals and institutions are competing for the mastery of a certain form of capital, it completes the theory of action set forth in the course on *habitus* by taking into account a second dimension: the position of the subject in the social world. The notion of field is probably the most complex in Bourdieu's work. It brings together the relational character of the social facts (structuralism), a power dimension (by showing the correspondences between the dominants in a field and their position in the field of power), and the roles played by agents endowed with a different volume of capital (the weberian skills). (ii) The concept of *field* also introduces Bourdieu's general economy of practice. Against the reduction of action to economic determinants, his model insists on the differentiated values that are present in the social world, and provides a way to bridge the long-held distinction between material and symbolic.

(i) Some properties of the fields

- "Some Properties of the Fields", *Sociology in Questions*, Sage, 1994 ([1984]), pp. 72-77 (*).
- "Haute Couture, Haute Culture", *Sociology in Questions*, Sage, 1994 ([1984]), pp. 132-138 (*).
- "The Logic of Fields", in *An invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 94-114 (*).
- G. Sapiro, "Forms of Politicization in the French Literary Field", *Theory and Society*, 32 (5/6), 2003, pp. 633-652 (web).

(ii) Material and Symbolic: Toward a General Economy of Practices

- "The Field of cultural production, or the Economic World Reversed", *The Field of Cultural Production*, pp. 29-73 (*).
- "The Economy of Symbolic Goods", *Practical Reasons*, pp. 92-127.

For further reading

- "Genesis and structure of the religious field", *Comparative Social Research*, Vol. 13, 1991, pp. 1-44 (web).
- R. Benson and E. Neveu, "Field Theory as a work in Progress", *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, Polity, 2004, pp. 1-27.
- "The Political Field, the Social Science Field, and the Journalistic Field" in R. Benson and E. Neveu, *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, Polity, 2004, pp. 29-47.

5. On the Theory of Power

Bourdieu's work was often called a sociology of power (or a sociology of domination), especially outside of France. A consequence of the central importance granted to the permanent struggles taking place in the social world (*cf.* fields), he built a theory of power, an invitation to capture the role played by *symbolic violence*. This week will aim at presenting the main arguments of Bourdieu's analysis on this topic, which we will illustrate by different examples.

Since the mid-term paper is due by the middle of the week, the first class of the week will be "reading free". Instead, those who want can join for a screening of a documentary made on Bourdieu a few years before he died: *Sociology is a Martial Art*, by Pierre Carles.

(i) Screening: Sociology is a Martial Art (*Pierre Carles, France, 2001*). Room TBA.

First paper due by Tuesday, April 29th @ 4PM, in my mailbox (Social Science 306)

(ii) *Symbolic Power and Struggles*

- “On Symbolic Power”, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 1999, pp. 163-170 (*).
- « Symbolic Violence and Political Struggles », in *Pascalian Meditations*, 2000 ([1997]), pp. 164-205 (*).

6. Distinction and its Discontents: on Culture and Tastes

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu undertook the heavy task of explaining the formation and transformation of people’s tastes. Consistent with his previous analyses, he attempted to explain what appeared as necessarily individual by linking it to the position of the agent in the social space, and to his trajectory. Probably Bourdieu’s most famous book (for what this is worth, it was ranked 6th book of the century by the International Sociological Association), it is also the most controversial. This week aims at presenting precisely *Distinction*’s main thesis. We will then study some of the most frequent critics that were made to the book, and try to assess both the theses and its critics.

(i) *A Social Explanation of Tastes (from modern art to everyday cooking)*

- “Introduction” and “A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste”. In *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984 [1979]), pp. 1-97.

(ii) *Snobs, Omnivores, ...*

- R.A. Peterson and A. Simkus, “How Musical Tastes Mark Occupational Status Group”, in M. Lamont and M. Fournier, *Cultivating Differences. Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 152-186 (*).
- Jon Elster, “Snobs: a review of ‘Distinction’”, in the *London Review of Books*, 3 (20), 1980, pp. 10-12 (web).
- B. Lahire, “The Individual and the Mixing of Genres: Cultural Dissonance and Self Distinction”, forthcoming in *Poetics*, February 2008 (web).

For further reading

- B. Lahire, “From the habitus to an individual heritage of dispositions. Toward a Sociology at the level of the Individuals”, *Poetics*, 31, 2003, pp. 329-355 (web).
- Ph. Coulangeon and Y. Lemel, “Is ‘Distinction’ Really Outdated? Questioning the meaning of omnivorization of musical taste in contemporary France”, *Poetics*, 35, 2007, pp. 93-111 (web).

7. Sociology: with or without groups?

In the line of the criticisms made to Bourdieu's main categories of analysis, we will continue this week to investigate these debates. (i) We will first consider two alternative systems, both partly elaborated against Bourdieu's theories: Latour's just as Boltanski's "pragmatic sociologies" (look out, they are nonetheless different!) depart from Bourdieu in their attempts to depict society without the oft-used "social properties" and group-belonging. The readings of the second week will try to clarify this impassionate debate by approaching in details Bourdieu's approach to groups (how they are constituted, how they solidify, and how they disappear), and his constant call and method for identifying (rather than postulating) entities.

(i) *Doing Sociology without (pre-existing) groups*

- L. Boltanski and L. Thévenot, "Preface: How we wrote this Book", *On Justification*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 1-12 (*).
- L. Boltanski and L. Thévenot, "The Sociology of Critical Capacity", *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2 (3), 1999, pp. 359-377 (web).
- B. Latour, "First source of uncertainty: no Group, Only Group Formation", in *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 27-42 (*).

(ii) *Identifying groups and their fabrication*

- "'Youth' is just a word", *Sociology in Questions*, pp. 94-102 (*).
- R. Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups", *Ethnicity without Groups*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 7-27 (*).
- "Social Space and the theory of 'classes'", *Theory and Society*, 14 (1985 [1984]), pp. 229-251 (*).

For Further Reading

- L. Boltanski and L. Thévenot, "Preface: How we wrote this Book", *On Justification*, entire.
- Terry Nichols Clark and Ronald Inglehart, "The New Political Culture: Changing Dynamics of Support for the Welfare State and Other Policies in Postindustrial Societies", in T.N. Clark and V. Hoffman-Martinot (eds), *The New Political Culture*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998, p. 9-72 (*).

8. In the Streets with Bourdieu: Probing Urban Marginality

Urban ethnography is one of the areas in which Bourdieu's direct legacy is vivid. Through a close reading of excerpts from Ph. Bourgois' study of El Barrio in New York and from L. Wacquant's latest book, we will delve into detailed empirical descriptions of the American inner cities. From then, we will pay attention to their account of the production (i) of a street culture, and of these relegated territories. (ii) We will then turn to an analysis the American ghettos (comparison to French *banlieues* will be made).

(i) *Analyzing the Production of the Street Culture*

- Ph. Bourgois, "Introduction" and "Violating Apartheid in the United States" in *In search of respect*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 1-47 (*).

- L. Wacquant, “Ghettos, Favelas et caetera: Tools for Rethinking Urban Marginality” and “The Cost of Racial and Class Exclusion in Bronzeville” in *Urban Outcast*, Polity Press, 2008, pp. 1-12 and 92-118 (*).

(ii) *Transformations of the Ghettos in the General Economy of the Cities*

- Ph. Bourgois, “A Street life of El Barrio” in *In search of respect*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 48-76 (*).
- L. Wacquant, “The State and Fate of the Dark Ghetto at the Century’s Close” in *Urban Outcast*, Polity Press, 2008, pp. 43-91 (*).

For further reading

- Mary Patillo-McCoy, *Black on the block. The Politics of Race and Class in the City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

9. Globalization revisited

Among the different subfields of the social sciences in which Bourdieu’s legacy can be noticed, globalization is an interesting site to assess the strength of concepts conceived in other empirical contexts. The notion of field has indeed been mobilized to give a precise account of some transnational, massive processes. By focusing in the same time on the agents that undertook the dissemination of ideas and policies, and on the various contexts in which they tried to implement them, it gives a grounded, detailed account of their global diffusion. These analyses pave way for a broader, materialist explanation of the circulation of ideas. [Note that the amount of reading is sharply decreasing as of this week...it’s time to think about your final paper!]

(i) *Scrutinizing the transnationalization of ideas*

- D. Bigo, “Globalized in-security: the Field and the Ban-Opticon”, in *Translation, Philosophy and the Colonial Difference*, (ed. J. Solomon and N. Sakai), 2005, pp. 5-49 (*).

(ii) *Local interpretations of transnational ideas*

- “The social condition of the international circulation of ideas”, in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader* (R. Shusterman ed.), Oxford, Blackwell, 1999, pp. 220-229 (web).
- Michèle Lamont, “How to become a dominant French Philosopher: the Case of Jacques Derrida”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 93 (3), pp. 584-622 (web).

For further reading

- B. Garth and Y. Dezalay, *The Internationalization of Palace Wars*, University of Chicago Press, 2002. [On how economics was instrumental in the struggle for domestic power in four South American countries]
- M. Fourcade, “The Construction of a Global Profession: the Transnationalization of Economics”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 112 (1), 2006, pp. 145-194 (web). [A long but compelling account of the rise of economics as a dominant academic and expert discipline over the last fifty years, M. Fourcade’s article ties Bourdieu’s field analysis with Abbott’s competition over jurisdiction].

10. (Re)-Engendering Bourdieu

Due to reading period, the class will only meet once this week. We will try to recapitulate some of the main thesis and ideas we read about during the quarter. Through a brief investigation of the questions of gender, we will try to engage actively and critically with his theory through the prism of this issue.

(i) *Doing and undoing gender*

- “A Magnified Image” in *Masculine Domination*, Stanford University Press, 2001 ([1998]), pp. 5-52 (web).
- Toril Moi, “Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu’s Sociology of Culture », in *New Literary History*, 22 (4), 1991, pp. 1017-1049 (*).

OR

- Leslie McCall, “Does Gender Fit? Bourdieu, Feminism, and the Conceptions of Social Order”, *Theory and Society*, 21 (6), 1992, pp. 837-867 (*).

(ii) *Reading Period: no class.*

For further reading

- *Masculine Domination*, entire.
- Terri Lovell, “Thinking Feminism with and against Bourdieu”, *Feminist Theory*, 1 (1), 2000, pp. 11-32 (web).
- C. West and D. Zimmerman, “Doing Gender”, *Gender and Society*, 1 (2) 1987, pp. 125-151 (web).

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| Final paper due by Monday, June 9th @ 11 AM, in my mailbox (SS 306) |
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