

Review: On Pierre Bourdieu

Reviewed Work(s): *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. by Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Passeron and *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. by Pierre Bourdieu and Richard Nice

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Review Essay: On Pierre Bourdieu¹

Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture. By Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron. Translated by Richard Nice. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1977. Pp. xx+254. \$15.00 (cloth); \$6.95 (paper).

Outline of a Theory of Practice. By Pierre Bourdieu. Translated by Richard Nice. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977. Pp. viii+248. \$18.95 (cloth); \$5.95 (paper).

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The encyclopedic efforts of Pierre Bourdieu, the prolific *directeur d'études* at L'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, are beginning to reach readers in the Anglo-Saxon world. Two of Bourdieu's most important works—*Outline of a Theory of Practice* (hereafter, *Outline*) and *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (hereafter, *Reproduction*)—have recently been translated into English; an early work, *The Algerians*, was published in the 1960s; and a fourth volume, *The Inheritors* (Bourdieu 1979), is due out soon. Add to this the availability in translation of at least 15 of his articles as well as references to his writing in a growing number of British and American works, and it is clear that American sociologists now have access to a prodigious and promising theoretical and empirical enterprise.

Bourdieu is best known in this country for his work, with Jean-Claude Passeron and others, on French education, particularly higher education, and its role in the reproduction of class relations. Their argument bears a strong, if superficial, resemblance to the one that Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis have advanced about education in the United States (Bowles 1971; Bowles and Gintis 1972–73, 1976). Bourdieu's writing on education, however, is but one thrust of a larger effort—beginning with his study of the transition to modernity of Algerian peasant communities in the 1950s (Bourdieu 1962)—to delineate the mechanisms of symbolic domination and control by which the existing social order is maintained in both preindustrial and modern social systems. He has further aimed to construct a generally applicable sociological practice which unmasks the legitimations, misrecognitions of power, and “symbolic violence” inherent, so he believes, in the functioning of any social system. In so doing, he has outlined an elegantly systematic, if not entirely satisfactory, revisionist approach to the

¹ I am indebted for careful reading and helpful criticism to Steven Brint, Paul Hirsch, Jerome Karabel, Richard A. Peterson, Theda Skocpol, David Swartz, and Michael Useem. In addition, I am grateful to Karabel and Swartz for making me aware of, and in some cases providing, several important articles to which I would not otherwise have been exposed. Needless to say, any errors, misinterpretations, or judgments are my own.

Durkheimian problem of order—an effort, in some respects brilliant, to mate Durkheim and Marx. Bourdieu has applied his approach to the study of education, art, science, language, religion, and, at the base of all these concerns, to the intimate relationships among culture, power, and stratification.²

Bourdieu identifies these relationships as basic to all social organization:

Different classes and class fractions are engaged in a specifically symbolic struggle to impose the definition of the social world most in conformity with their interests. The field of ideological positions reproduces in transfigured form the field of social positions. They may carry on this struggle either directly in the symbolic conflicts of everyday life or indirectly through the struggle waged by the specialists in symbolic production (full time producers), in which the object at stake is the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence—that is to say, the power to impose (and even indeed to inculcate) instruments of knowledge and expression of social reality (taxonomies), which are arbitrary (but unrecognized as such). The field of symbolic production is a microcosm of the struggle between the classes. It is by serving their own interests in the struggle internal to the field of production (and to this extent alone) that these producers serve the interests of groups external to their field of production. [1977*d*, p. 115]

As this passage indicates, Bourdieu takes as his subject precisely those attitudes, dispositions, and ways of perceiving reality that are taken for granted by members of a social class or a society. These unquestioned “cultural arbitrariness” are the underpinnings of any system of domination, of the hierarchies that characterize relations both among individuals and among social classes in society.

Despite this emphasis on meaning systems, however, Bourdieu is by no means a subjectivist. Much of *Outline*, as well as the epistemological excursions that pervade his other writing, can be read as a polemic against, on the one hand, phenomenological or subjectivist approaches—for example, social psychology or ethnomethodology—and, on the other, strict structuralism, such as that of Claude Lévi-Strauss or Louis Althusser. Since Bourdieu takes as the fundamental problem of sociology the means by which systems of domination persist and reproduce themselves without conscious recognition by a society’s members, it follows that any social science based on the subjective perceptions of participants, or on commonsense classifications of social groups or social problems, can only reinforce and confirm the very domination he regards as problematic. Yet explanations of social phenomena that posit the existence of unseen structures are by themselves merely *models* of reality and little more than attractive metaphors, unless one can explain how purposeful, reasoning, self-interested actors contribute,

² He has been aided in his efforts by a large and productive ongoing research team at his Centre de Sociologie Européenne. For a description of work at the Centre through 1971, see Centre de Sociologie Européenne (1972). For an interesting example, in English, of other work coming out of the Centre, see Chamboredon (1975). In recent years, many of the products of Bourdieu’s research program have been published in Bourdieu’s own journal, *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*. Unless otherwise indicated, all references in the text are to Bourdieu’s works.

in pursuing their own subjective ends, to the maintenance of these structures.

Such a perspective is hardly unique. Yet if most sociologists would accept the point, few practice it with Bourdieu's diligence. His account in *Outline* of kinship systems in the Algerian peasant communities in which he did his early fieldwork is exemplary. "Rules" governing cross-cousin marriage, Bourdieu observed, were binding only in the eyes of anthropologist observers. Where marriage partners were often related both paternally and maternally, a family's choice of kinship term by which to designate a match was a matter less of rule than of micropolitical strategy.

By setting as his goal the acquisition of "praxeological knowledge" (1973*b*)—knowledge about the interaction of individual actors and objective structures—Bourdieu attempts to avoid the pitfalls of a "philosophy without subject" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1967), structural explanation resting on little more than the interpretative skill of its purveyor. This effort, as we shall see, leads Bourdieu into certain traps; yet it also enables him to build a theoretical system that may be the most comprehensive and elegant since Talcott Parsons's.³

Bourdieu's social system is one in which both society and the relatively autonomous fields that it includes are founded on hierarchies which obey similar laws. Hierarchies depend on the social arrangements that sustain and reproduce them. The persistence of these arrangements, says Bourdieu, itself depends on the systematic misrecognition of their oppressive nature by both dominators and dominated. This misrecognition is inculcated, in advanced societies, by differential socialization of children of different social classes; by the rationalizations advanced by institutions and fields about their own processes; and by a continuing work of "euphemization," of unconscious self-censorship of communication to render it legitimate according to the structure of the field within which it is to be received (1977*a*, 1977*b*). The logic of symbolic domination is similar, whether it takes place in a society as a whole or in the relatively autonomous fields of education, science, religion, or the arts.

"Field" is a critical metaphor in Bourdieu's work. Inspired, at least in part, by the vector psychology of Kurt Lewin (Bourdieu 1971*a*), field re-

³ Because his work is so systematic and because no single publication sets forth the entire theory, it is difficult to gain a quick purchase on Bourdieu's thought. I would not recommend that the prospective reader begin with either *Reproduction* or *Outline*. The first half of the former is an elegant but elliptical attempt to set out the general theory of symbolic violence and domination in the most abstract terms. The second half consists of a series of essays on French higher education that, while well worth reading, are not his best on the topic. The latter volume, while in many ways the most rewarding of his works, is also perhaps the most difficult. It is concerned directly with methodology and epistemology and, in the absence of some familiarity with Bourdieu's other writing, may be rather inaccessible. I would recommend that the reader begin instead with two of Bourdieu's essays on education and social structure (1974*c*, 1973*a*), a brief essay on symbolic power (1977*d*), and his "Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception" (1968*a*); move from there to book 2 of *Reproduction* and to *Outline* (particularly chaps. 1, 2, and 4). By then he or she will be well equipped to read profitably any of the remainder of the corpus.

fers to both the totality of actors and organizations involved in an arena of social or cultural production and the dynamic relationships among them. For example,

The intellectual field, which cannot be reduced to a simple aggregate of isolated agents or to the sum of elements merely juxtaposed is, like a magnetic field, made up of a system of power lines. In other words, the constituting agents or system of agents may be described as so many forces which, by their existence, opposition or combination, determine its specific structure at a given moment in time. In return, each of these is defined by its particular position within this field from which it derives *positional properties* which cannot be assimilated to intrinsic properties. [1971a, p. 161]

The field concept is a useful one in Bourdieu's hands. It suggests that hierarchy and conflict are at the base of even ostensibly neutral cultural enterprises and permits provocative comparisons among such fields as art, science, and religion.

Every field, for Bourdieu, is an arena of conflict; social life itself is a constant struggle for position, as actors seek (consciously and unconsciously) to weave around the formidable constraints that social structure sets against them. The objective of human activity is the accumulation and monopolization of different kinds of capital. Bourdieu diverges critically from conventional economics in his recognition that capital need not be strictly economic. Capital, defined implicitly as attributes, possessions, or qualities of a person or a position exchangeable for goods, services, or esteem, exists in many forms—symbolic, cultural, social, or linguistic, as well as economic.⁴ Throughout his writing, Bourdieu tries to develop an economics of symbolic exchange and of the transformations of the different kinds of capital into one another.

In contemporary societies, the locus of much of this activity is the educational system.⁵ Bourdieu was among the first sociologists to identify the stratified system of mass higher education as a fundamental institution in the reproduction of class inequality from generation to generation.⁶ Schools, he argues, reproduce and legitimate the class structure by transforming social distinctions into educational distinctions, seen as distinctions of merit. Children from different class backgrounds enter the school with varying degrees of "linguistic and cultural capital"—competencies passed on in primary socialization; modes of use of and relationship to language (here the influence of Basil Bernstein [1971] is evident); relationship to and affinity

⁴ In this respect, he appears to have been influenced by the work, which he cites, of Gary Becker on human capital (1964).

⁵ For more comprehensive treatments of Bourdieu's analysis of schooling, see Swartz (1977) and Kennett (1973).

⁶ While Bourdieu writes of the French educational system, which is more intricately stratified than that of the United States, his theoretical statements suggest that his conclusions may apply more generally. The absence of any explicit comparison between France and either the United States or the socialist countries is a source of ambiguity in his work.

for the dominant aesthetic culture (1968*a*; 1974*b*); styles of interaction; and varying dispositions toward schooling itself.⁷ For the “inheritors,” the children of those classes and class fractions rich in cultural capital, school socialization is a simple extension of primary socialization. For the children of the middle classes, the school is a difficult but highly valued arena, the only one in which they can seek to preserve or better their class positions. For working-class children, school is alien and not intrinsically prized.

Bourdieu goes on to contend that the school itself exacerbates and multiplies these initial inequalities. Transmitting knowledge in codes accessible only to those who, upon entering, already possess the linguistic and cultural capital required to appropriate it, school communication consigns the poor to failure and ensures the success of the well to do. A differentiated system of higher and secondary education channels children of different classes into different positions in the economy. School examinations, particularly in higher education, reward the ability to parry questions with ease and style inculcated outside the school. Both the “ideology of the gift” (talent), whereby acquired capacities are transformed into intrinsic virtues, and the controlled mobility of a few working-class and lower-class children in each generation, legitimate the symbolic violence of schooling (the imposition of a “cultural arbitrary”) by engendering the systematic misrecognition of the school’s role in social and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1964; *Reproduction*; 1974*c*; Bourdieu and Saint Martin 1974).

To explain why such an arbitrary and, in fact, discriminatory system makes sense to those who suffer at its hands, Bourdieu invokes the notion of *habitus*: “A system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems” (1971*a*, p. 83). The *habitus* is a kind of theoretical *deus ex machina* by means of which Bourdieu relates objective structure and individual activity. Central to all Bourdieu’s work as the link that mediates structure and individual practice, it is similar, but not reducible, to class subculture. A product of early childhood experience, particularly of unconscious family socialization, it is continually modified by the individual’s encounters with the world. To the extent that members of different social classes differ in the nature of their primary socialization—and Bourdieu believes that they do—each class has its own characteristic *habitus*, with individual variations. The *habitus*, then, “brings about a unique integration, dominated by the earliest experiences statistically common to the members of the same class” (*Outline*, p. 79). In a

⁷ Cultural capital always refers to the “instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth *socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed*” (1973, p. 73, italics added). The system of evaluation is always arbitrary and subject to contention. It should be noted, however, that Bourdieu, in a discussion of France that could doubtless be generalized to other advanced capitalist societies, denies the existence of an autonomous working-class culture, contending that there are only different relationships to the dominant culture (Bourdieu and Saint Martin 1976).

situation of conflict or competition—and Bourdieu sees almost all situations as conflict-laden or competitive—the individual tends to adjust his or her aspirations to the objective probability that those aspirations will be satisfied. The tendency for working-class children to drop out of school, to have low educational aspirations, is seen as the product, not the cause, of the low statistical probability of their academic success.

This dynamic, “the causality of the probable” (1974*a*), is not unique to the school. The *habitus*, for example, governs the use of language in everyday interactions, “defining for a determinate agent the linguistic strategy that is adapted to his particular chances of profit, given his specific competence and his authority” (1977*b*, p. 655). By the same token, within the scientific field, a scientist’s choice of problems and strategies—whether to build incrementally upon the work of others or to essay bold and risky investigations—is determined by calculations, conscious and unconscious, of the likely symbolic profit (1975, pp. 27–28). The unconscious calculation of objective probabilities, says Bourdieu, often leads members of dominated classes to opt out of educational or cultural competition. Its result is the “triadic structure” of mastery of schooling, language, and taste: “virtuosity and ease” for the elite; “simple dispossession” for the lower classes; and for the lower-middle class, which acquires the linguistic and aesthetic norms of the dominant culture through schooling alone, a tense, doggedly pursued, “subtly imperfect mastery . . . which is always marked by the conditions in which it was formed” (1977*b*, p. 659; *Reproduction*, pp. 116–20).

Bourdieu is concerned with class struggle. But the struggles that concern him most are not battles between workers and capitalists but conflicts within the dominant class—between sectors rich in, respectively, economic and cultural capital. Within the French ruling class, different fractions are ranked on the basis of two opposite and symmetrical hierarchies (1973*a*). Heads of industry and commerce hold the most economic power, followed by professionals, managers, engineers, civil servants, and teachers. But in the realm of cultural capital, measured on the basis of responses to surveys about consumption of high culture (see Bourdieu and Darbel 1969; Bourdieu and Saint Martin 1976), this order is reversed. The reason, says Bourdieu, is that the dominant culture is defined by the school as the institution that unifies the cultural market. Members of the less wealthy fractions of the dominant class are dependent on the school and on mastery of academically consecrated culture—in short, on their cultural capital—for their own (and their children’s) success. In contrast, the upper sectors of the dominant class can depend on economic wealth to ensure their reproduction, even if they fail in school (1973*a*, p. 96).

Increasingly, however, the children of the upper classes—managers and captains of industry—are also forced to rely on the school for the “credentialled cultural capital” which, supplemented by their social capital of networks and connections, can be reconverted into a high class position. Bourdieu attributes this development to the managerial revolution (which got underway much later in France than in the United States). Changes in

laws of inheritance and, more important, increase in the scale and interconnectedness of business enterprise, have required the business elite to look beyond its own class to fill managerial positions. This process has entailed the transformation of the basis of class solidarity from mechanical to organic and of the basis of authority from personal to positional. In the course of these developments, the children of the patrons themselves have become subject, with important advantages, to the bureaucratized, rationalized modes of recruitment and selection. Thus, no longer able to transmit their economic wealth directly, members of the economic elite are forced increasingly to convert a portion of their economic capital into cultural capital by sending their children to the proper universities and business schools. These inheritors, in turn, reconvert their cultural and social capital into economic dominance. Because, according to Bourdieu, remuneration is increasingly provided through salaries rather than profits, this transformation has not only reproduced the previous structure of class relations but fortified it as well, by transforming its basis from inheritance of wealth to possession of cultural and social capital, misrecognized as talent or accomplishment (Bourdieu, Boltanski, and Saint Martin 1973). *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

Some Criticisms of Bourdieu

Few bodies of work are so systematic, so comprehensive, so creative, or so fertile as Bourdieu's. Few theorists glide so adroitly between levels and styles of analysis, and few reach so keenly to the heart of so many analytic issues. Nonetheless, Bourdieu's work is in many respects inchoate—to paraphrase Merton, a collection of new departures and too few arrivals.

Part of the difficulty is a matter of exposition. Bourdieu is at once a superb and an obstinately difficult stylist. His sentences are Parsonian in length and abstraction. Phrases are embedded in one another, commas and semicolons abound, periods are infrequent. The use of paradox, negation, polemic, and plays on words makes his work no less inaccessible to readers unfamiliar with his terminology and style of argument. The excellence of Richard Nice's translations of the two recent volumes and his fidelity to Bourdieu's style make them no less forbidding. In the original, Bourdieu presents an almost insurmountable challenge even to readers who find French empirical work relatively easy going.

In part, this is a consequence of the complexity of Bourdieu's thought and the self-consciousness with which he uses words and concepts. (At one point, he suggests that every sociological proposition should begin with the phrase, "it is as if . . .," and many of his do.) In part, it is a consequence of the French literary tradition and of the fact that Bourdieu, like other French sociologists of his generation, is a product of the philosophical training that engenders what (in another context) he refers to as "an almost obsessional preoccupation with epistemological problems" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1967, pp. 197–98). In part, the problem is Bourdieu's own responsibility, a product of a perhaps excessive concern with differentiating

his own positions from those closest to them, of his repeated polemical sallies against his opponents, and of a penchant for opacity that seems, at times, deliberate.

Bourdieu's prose is rich in paradox, as when he refers to the apparently subversive "ritual sacrileges" of avant-garde painters which, "because they apply to the act of creation a derisive intent already annexed by Duchamp to the artistic tradition . . . are immediately converted into artistic actions, registered as such, and consecrated as instances of celebration" (1977*c*, p. 8, my trans.). It is replete with turns of phrase, as when he speaks of "the social alchemy" by which the schools transform a cultural inheritance into a natural gift or, after Weber, of the "sociodicy" of social science justifications of elite privilege. And it is full of vivid insights into the social and cultural misadventures of everyday life, as when, in discussing the linguistic insecurity of the lower-middle class, he speaks of "the solecisms of over-correctness one hears in the speeches delivered at agricultural shows and fireman's galas" (1977*b*, p. 658). Once mastered, Bourdieu's style is perhaps as rewarding as it is difficult. Nonetheless, it is likely to prove a serious obstacle to the reception of his work outside France.

A second problem has to do with Bourdieu's approach to explanation. In an ongoing polemic against empiricism's insensitivity to the systemic nature of objective social structure, Bourdieu rejects correlational analysis in favor of explanations that are thoroughly systematic. For these he posits a twofold test: that they be consistent with empirical findings; and that they be coherent, circular, inclusive, and, in effect, overdetermined (Bourdieu 1968*b*). Such a satisfactory system of proofs, he confesses, "inevitably appears as a vicious circle, inspired by the spirit of the system, to a positivist epistemology" (1968*b*, p. 687).

Although his attacks on empiricism are often telling, his alternative does not inspire confidence. As French critics have pointed out, Bourdieu's treatment of survey data is rather off-hand, at least by conventional standards (Bisseret 1974; Eicher and Mingat 1975). His use of statistical data and empirical investigation is courageous in the antipositivist climate of French critical sociology, but his theoretical stance is sufficiently ambiguous to excuse almost any inconsistency. Most readers will find his method more useful in generating hypotheses than in confirming them.

A final and related difficulty lies in the ambiguity of much of Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus. Terms are used inconsistently; satisfactory definitions are rarely provided. If one accepts Bourdieu's view of verification, this is perhaps acceptable. If one does not, it is likely to frustrate.

Take, for example, the notion of *habitus*. Bourdieu asserts that it is inculcated primarily by early childhood experience and that differences in *habitus* are based, in societies like France, primarily on social class. Yet the *habitus* is also transformed by subsequent experience and is influenced by all aspects of the family setting. We are told that the initial *habitus* is durable but, since it is also transformable, we are never sure just what difference this durability makes, or under what circumstances it makes a difference for what phenomena. This question, that of the stability and

plasticity of personality, is one about which Bourdieu has little concrete to say. Similarly, the connection between class position and *habitus* remains uncertain. Bourdieu suggests the myriad ways in which socialization can, in general, form deep structures of personality and perception. But since he does not establish empirically the relationship between social class and early childhood experience, it seems premature to allege that the *habitus* of different social classes are *fundamentally* different. This will raise particular problems for students in the United States, where class differences are less extreme and ethnic differences more salient than in France.⁸

If the concept of *habitus* is promising but underdeveloped, Bourdieu's notion of "the causality of the probable" is even more problematic. At times, Bourdieu seems to posit an almost exact correlation between individual intention and aspiration and the statistical probability for the group of which the individual is a member (Bourdieu 1974c; *Reproduction*). At other points, he acknowledges that an actor's expectations are never synchronized precisely to objective probabilities. Elsewhere he suggests that a class's view of its future is subject to struggle and manipulation (Bourdieu, Boltanski, and Saint Martin 1973). If the concept is to be of much use, it would seem important to specify the conditions under which subjective aspirations are more or less perfectly aligned with objective probabilities. Consider, for example, the case of the high educational and occupational aspirations of working-class black students in the United States (Hout and Morgan 1975).

There is a similar problem with Bourdieu's idea of "relative autonomy" of institutions (e.g., the school) or of fields (e.g., art or science). The insight itself—that institutions or fields are structured by their own histories, internal logic, and patterns of recruitment and reward as well as by external demands—is an important, if not a novel one. But the analysis of the determinants of the degree of "relative autonomy" of a field and the limits to that autonomy, which Bourdieu carries out in a comparison of the social contexts of the social and physical sciences (1975), needs to be extended to other realms. Such a specification, indeed, is crucial for any kind of Marxist or functionalist theory.

The vital notion of "capital" is also ambiguous. In the final chapter of *Outline*, Bourdieu criticizes the narrowly economic view of interest and calls for a "*general science of the economy of practices*, capable of treating all practices, including those purporting to be disinterested or gratuitous, and hence non-economic, as economic practices directed towards the maximizing of material or symbolic profit" (p. 183). What is more, he illustrates how this might be accomplished with a masterful analysis of symbolic and material exchange in Algerian Kabyle society. Yet in much of his other work, capital becomes less a potent and precise analytic tool than a weak figure of speech. Capitals proliferate: in addition to economic, cultural, and symbolic capital, we have linguistic capital, social capital, academic capital, scholastic capital, credentialed cultural capital, capitals of

⁸ For discussions of robust ethnic differences at the level of what Bourdieu would call *habitus*, see Erickson (1975) and Phillips (1972).

authority and of consecration, university, scientific, and artistic capital. No doubt there are others. The meanings of some—for example, social, cultural, and symbolic—seem to vary with their use. The status of others, whether they are subtypes of some other kind of capital or instead form markets of their own, is indeterminate. As the number of capitals increases, the metaphorical currency undergoes inflation and its value declines accordingly.⁹

Conflict and Order

Bourdieu's discussions of the production and reproduction of capital and his frequent references to class suggest the influence of Marxism on his theory. It may be instructive to consider his relationship to Marxism, both to locate him in the intellectual field and because his vocabulary may lead some readers to "misrecognize" him as a Marxist thinker and, in so doing, to perceive his arguments through a distorted lens.

Clearly, Bourdieu draws on Marx, as he draws on Durkheim, Weber, Freud, Heidegger, Bernstein, Goffman, and others, for inspiration. Often Bourdieu sounds very Marxist indeed, as when he speaks, as he often does, of class struggle; or when he writes, in the course of a discussion of the proletarianization of cultural workers, of the "increase in the quantity of cultural capital that is objectified in machines, implements, or instruments . . . and hence the quantity of embodied cultural capital necessary to reproduce this objectified capital and to make it productive" (Bourdieu, Boltanski, and Saint Martin 1973, my trans.). Despite his preoccupation with culture, distinctions of infrastructure and superstructure can be discerned. In his discussions of French society, Bourdieu refers to the owners of capital as the "dominant fraction of the dominant class"; pursuit of cultural capital is seen as a means to economic ends. Although he is imprecise in his causal language, he seems to locate the cause of transformations in class reconversion strategies (and the consequent expansion of schooling) in the economic sector (*ibid.*). Even in his analysis of the Kabyle, where he argues against a vulgar notion of *homo economicus*, the *raison d'être* of the peasant's pursuit of symbolic capital (honor, prestige, respect) is its convertability into material assistance at plowing and harvest time. Thus, while Bourdieu confirms the reality of nonmaterial interests, the engine of change is in the material sphere (see *Outline*, pp. 182–83).

Yet if Bourdieu is ultimately a materialist, his is a non-Marxian materialism. This can be seen most clearly in his discussions of class and class conflict. Class, for Bourdieu, is only roughly based on relationship to the means of production. The conflicts in which he is most interested are not between classes at all but between fractions of the dominant class. The basis of these fractions is somewhat obscure but seems to lie in the divi-

⁹ Substantively, there is a danger that too easy an analogy between economic markets, on the one hand, and "cultural markets," on the other, may obscure the fundamental difference between factor and commodity markets and status systems as modes of social organization (see Weber 1968).

sion of labor. Class, for Bourdieu, is both a Durkheimian category of groups sharing experiences and collective representations, and a Weberian notion of sets of actors attempting to monopolize markets for different goods and services. Marx's influence appears more in the argument's style than in its substance.

Take, for example, Bourdieu's version of class struggle. There are no classes-for-themselves in his writings. Classes do not seize power. In fact, there is no theory of the state. Instead we have aggregates of optimizers, united by *habitus*, pursuing parallel strategies toward similar, but not collective, ends. Class conflict occurs within fields and organizations or in the misrecognized confrontations and battles of everyday life. The members of Bourdieu's classes are strategists, not strugglers, engaging in practices, not praxis; families, not classes, are the agents of conflict.

Bourdieu's approach to action and interest is, compared with Marx's, a gloomy one. Men and women may be neither economic nor consciously rational, but they are inveterate optimizers. Constrained by *habitus* and objective reality, individuals are consigned to dart in and out between the cracks of social structure, never questioning the rules, seeking only to manipulate them: "Only a virtuoso with a perfect command of his 'art of living' can play on all the resources inherent in the ambiguities and uncertainties of behavior and situation in order to produce the actions appropriate in each case, to do that of which people will say 'There was nothing else to be done,' and do it the right way" (*Outline*, p. 8). Despite the political tensions that pervade his work, Bourdieu's is a world not of revolutions or even of social change, but of endless transformations. Symbolic violence and domination persist; only their disguises are altered.

Bourdieu's is the world, and the problematic, of an anthropologist, not a revolutionary; of a Durkheimian, not a Marxist. All cultures are largely "arbitrary" in the sense that their members could adhere to a variety of different beliefs and practices and get on very well. All societies are characterized by domination, if one defines domination as the means by which dominant groups maintain their position. When Bourdieu speaks of the "arbitrariness" of the dominant culture, he refers not to false consciousness but to the essential conditions of social order.¹⁰

¹⁰ In fact, Bourdieu has been criticized by French Marxists for his insensitivity to class struggle within education (e.g., Baudelot and Establet 1971). Asked by an interviewer to respond to the accusation, in *Les Temps Modernes*, that his position on May 1968 was reactionary, Bourdieu answered: "Should a sociologist always speak the truth? I think so. . . . The sociologist demystifies and in so doing intervenes in the relations of force between groups or classes and is thus able to contribute to modifying those relations" (1970, p. 8, my trans.). He goes on, however, to qualify this by noting that the effect of a demystifying discourse depends itself on the system of class relations and that even if education were totally demystified, the bourgeoisie would most likely find some equally efficacious way of transmitting their cultural capital. Although he is a man of the left, the implications of his sociology, to which he remains completely faithful, will not please political radicals. While he belabors empiricists and conservatives at far greater length, Bourdieu, it is clear, has no use for doctrinaire Marxism, referring to radical ideology as "a thinly euphemized expression of the interests of those dominated in the scientific field" (1975, p. 40). Elsewhere in the interview quoted above, he

Bourdieu and American Sociology

Bourdieu's problematic is an important one and it has generated a rich and sometimes brilliant body of work. Yet few American sociologists are likely to accept as their own his philosophical premises or methodology. Nonetheless, I suspect that he has much to offer his American readers.

On one level, Bourdieu has value as an artist: his sensitivity to system, to the interplay of levels of analysis, to interaction, to relationships among organizations and among actors within a field, to the reality of symbols and of culture can be a source of inspiration. At another level, his work has specific relevance to a number of areas of empirical inquiry, of which I shall mention only a few.

American students of the relationship between the systems of education and stratification have already produced parallels to much of Bourdieu's French research. No one, however, has performed the kind of systematic studies of classroom interaction required to refine Bourdieu's theory of class *habitus*, some version of which is vital to most class analyses. More generally, the theory of cultural capital calls attention to the importance of studying the role of noncognitive traits in school experience. Bourdieu's writings suggest that those ethnomethodologists or "constituent ethnographers" who are seeking to relate their observations to a theory of social structure have much to offer students of class culture and intergroup relations in schools (Mehan 1978). By the same token, Bourdieu's choice of the family, rather than the individual, as the appropriate unit for analysis in mobility studies deserves elaboration in the American context, particularly in studies of the upper class. Similarly, his observations on the French university suggest the importance of a comparative study of tracking in the formally more open American system of higher education (Karabel 1972). Randall Collins has already demonstrated the utility of some of Bourdieu's ideas in the context of the comparative historical study of educational systems (Collins 1977).

Bourdieu's work should direct sociologists of art and culture to inspect the relationship between social structure and symbolic production as mediated by the creative fields. The field notion calls attention to the need to base any sociological interpretation of a text on the social relations of its production, distribution, and appropriation (1971a; 1971b). As Bourdieu's work on photography (Bourdieu, Boltanski, Castel, and Passeron 1969) and, in this country, Howard S. Becker's work on crafts (1978) illustrate, conflicts within genres can often be analyzed as struggles over the institutional (and to some extent class) identities and contexts within which

observes that, "The tradition of political discussion, which is without doubt most strong in France, above all in the intellectual field, constitutes one of sociology's most insidious obstacles," (1970, p. 4) and speaks scornfully of "the irredentists of the failed revolution and the purist theoreticians [who] often have nothing but condemnations to oppose to the findings of empirical studies, about the techniques of which they are supremely ignorant . . ." (p. 6, my trans.).

participants are to operate. Bourdieu's field theory has affinities with the perspective of cultural-organization analysts in this country (see Peterson 1976, 1979; DiMaggio and Hirsch 1976) and suggests the possibility of a more comprehensive treatment than has yet been offered. His work on the sociology of audiences (Bourdieu and Darbel 1969; Bourdieu and Saint Martin 1976) provides a theoretical framework for explaining class-related differences in taste. Methodologically, it suggests the importance of refined occupational categories and finer distinctions among aesthetic genres than those used thus far (see DiMaggio and Useem 1978*b*). Furthermore, Bourdieu's emphasis on the political nature of aesthetic conflict has profound implications for the American debate between "populism" and "elitism" in the arts, which can profitably be seen as a conflict over the monopolization of certain kinds of cultural capital (DiMaggio and Useem 1978*a*; DiMaggio 1978; Gans 1974).

Over a decade ago, Bourdieu expressed his hope that, just as the technical rigor of American sociology proved a corrective to the tendency toward philosophical dilettantism of much French sociology, French sociology might become the "philosophical bad conscience" of American positivism (Bourdieu and Passeron 1967, p. 212). Bourdieu's epistemological and methodological writings will excite the imaginations of readers of an anti-empiricist bent; he will probably attract American disciples, if not a cult. In the long run, however, his ideas are likely to be transformed (as his own theory would predict) by their entry into American sociology, taken selectively as hypotheses or orienting propositions according to the process of assimilation and productive misreading that Robert Escarpit has called "creative treason" (1971). Used in that manner, they promise to provide a potent source of insight and stimulation, the influence of which is only now beginning to be felt.

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