

HOMAGE TO PIERRE BOURDIEU

Editorial Note: Pierre Bourdieu was a distinguished member of the International Board of Editors of the *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies*, a venture he supported ever since the first issue was launched in 1996. Two scholars associated with the journal have offered their homage to this great intellectual.

Sociology as a Means of Intellectual vigilance: Homage to Pierre Bourdieu: 1.8.1930-23.1.2002

M'HAMMED SABOUR

Pierre Bourdieu died in Paris on 23 January 2002. Though his health had been deteriorating for a number of years, the seriousness of his illness and sudden demise came as a complete surprise. He retired last summer and prepared to move with his group from the Collège de France to new offices provided by the Ministry of Education for the continuation of his research work. When we met a month and a half before his death he still spoke about projects to be carried out after he left the hospital. In talking about his biography, many of his colleagues thought him too young to write his memoirs. Fate proved them wrong.

Born to a very modest family in a small village (Denguin) in southwestern France, Pierre Bourdieu did not in principle possess the economic, social or cultural capital necessary to overcome the circumstances he had inherited. But due to his success at school he was awarded scholarships which allowed him to continue his studies at the comprehensive school Lycée de Pau (the capital of his home region), as well as at the Lycée Louis le Grand, the university, and the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris.

He felt ill at ease while studying in Paris, an outsider due to his social and provincial background. His Parisian classmates were for the most part members of the French bourgeoisie. He became conscious of the disadvantages and vulnerability of his habitus and nature. Furthermore, at a young age, because of his school success, he was forced into a life in dormitories far from his family, which certainly had a deep effect on him. The latter in part explains his hatred and critique of controlling and coercive structures as well as all kinds of symbolic power structures. His experience obviously affected his interest in the problem of dominance in school and society.

Bourdieu was trained in philosophy and anthropology. He completed his military service in the late 1950s in Algeria and at the same time did ethnological and sociological research into Algerian society. His works about Algeria

represented a major turning point in his academic and scientific career. As a student and follower of the great post-war tradition (e.g., Kant, Marx, Cassirer, Levi-Strauss) he was also inspired, for example, by Westernmarck's studies of Morocco. His observations and field work helped him to develop his theories. Without totally rejecting American or overemphasizing French sociology, he achieved a critical distance from both and developed his own unique brand of sociology. This is evident in his forty books and hundreds of articles.

Though sociology is not given the respect accorded philosophy or history (at least in France), Bourdieu defended it and established its importance as a critical discipline which irritated the establishment and decision-makers. He always said that sociology is a social calling; it must study, evaluate and criticize society, its institutions and actors, and then bring about change and progress. But he also demanded a theoretical and methodological strictness of it. Such inflexibility made him enemies and the target of mockery.

Although Bourdieu became world-famous, he was always opposed and criticized in French sociological and intellectual circles, sometimes in a prejudicial manner. The criticism offended him and forced him to make stinging and contentious pronouncements. In addition to researchers and the intelligentsia, he was also the target of the media. And in France the press is extremely influential. For many years the media heaped abuse on Bourdieu.

According to Bourdieu, while Sartre was the most attacked intellectual in French history, he was also one of its greatest ('intellectuel total') since he provoked the prevailing system and questioned matters thought to be unquestionable. He did not believe that he was treated as badly as Sartre. Sartre was, however, for Bourdieu, a model of the exemplary intellectual devoted to his cause, which he consciously or unconsciously sought to emulate. In the 1990s Bourdieu began to utilize the scientific and academic prestige he had achieved in social struggles: for example, he defended the rights of the working class, immigrants, homosexuals and Algerian intellectuals and opposed the dominance of neo-liberalism. In the process, he became in the eyes of many a messiah and the hero of the opponents of globalization as well as the champion of the oppressed and the marginalized. To others, he was a dominating and autocratic intellectual and sociologist who was unable to tolerate differing opinions.

He himself stated that the value of his ideas and actions would be recognized only after his death. In the same context he noted that the intellectual field is reminiscent of the world depicted by Marcel Proust, where every individual seeks to avoid recognizing the value of another, fearing the loss of his own value. It appears that he was correct since immediately after receiving the news of Bourdieu's death, one of his main opponents, the sociologist Alain Touraine,

declared on French television that Pierre Bourdieu was one of the greatest sociologists of our time and his ideas significantly influenced the 20th century. This recognition came late, but is undeniable.

Pierre Bourdieu left an intellectual legacy which has revolutionized and enriched sociology. His ideas will indisputably inspire coming generations to greater achievements.

M'hammed Sabour is Professor in the Department of Sociology of the University of Joensuu, Finland. His e-mail address is: Mhammed.Sabour@joensuu.fi

A Tribute to Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002)

MARVIN FORMOSA

January 2002 witnessed the death of Pierre Bourdieu whose sociology has been labelled, perhaps with only a little exaggeration, as 'not only the best, but...the only game in town' (Lash, 1993, p.193). Over the past decade Pierre Bourdieu¹ has increasingly been portrayed by the French media as the new intellectual star, taking the mantle from Michel Foucault and having the edge over his contemporary Jacques Derrida. Bourdieu's recent denouncements of neoliberal doctrine propelled him, in Niilo Kaupi's (2000, p.7) words, to 'a Sartrean intellectual in the full sense of the term'. His public denouncement of budget cuts in gerontological welfare and higher education, early retirement schemes, and anti-immigration legislation in the name of free markets and international competition were instant national news, making his name a constant feature of the French press, and thus projecting his persona from the academic to the popular sphere.

Bourdieu's political practice was supplemented by political publications which did not mince words regarding the threats posed by contemporary 'neoliberalism'. For instance, *On Television* (1998a) attacked media presenters for delivering 'cultural fast food', and *Acts of Resistance* (1998b) stressed the duty of the intellectual in confronting the oppressive features of globalisation. In addition, Bourdieu joined other intellectuals such as Hans Haacke (1995) and Gunther Grass (2002) to criticise policy-units for their 'American' piecemeal approach to social policy. Recently, Bourdieu's intellectual persona was also considered fitting to feature as the focus of a documentary film. The film, titled *Sociology is a Combat Sport* (2001), premiered in French cinemas and became an instant hit in both downtown Paris and international university campuses.²

It was thus no surprise that his death triggered many a public homage that placed supporters of Verdés-Leroux's (1998) denouncement of Bourdieu as a 'sociological terrorist' in an awkward position. Indeed, no nation esteems intellectuals more than does France, and in none are intellectual celebrities of comparable magnitude. However, unlike preceding French public intellectuals, it was not attractions of image or character that gained Bourdieu cult status but his rigorous scholarship (Wacquant, 2002a). Bourdieu's was also a prolific writer, being the author of some 45 books and 500 articles, many of which have been translated in various languages ranging from Hungarian and Arabic, to Japanese.³ Moreover, his 'thinking tools' - as Bourdieu (1989a) preferred to term his metatheoretical approach - have been applied across many diverse disciplines such as linguistics, feminism, gerontology, gay and lesbian studies, colonialism, literacy, consumption, organisational relations, and of course, education.

Bourdieu's *oeuvre* simply resists an elementary ordering of a priority of concepts or themes. In fact, Bourdieu has been authoritatively placed in all major theoretical traditions. This difficulty to pigeonhole Bourdieu is largely due to his - at least by current Western standards - unconventional career formation. Primarily, Bourdieu's position in the French *acedeme* has always been marked by an 'outsider' status due to his southern geographical location and peasant familial background - factors that never enabled him to feel like 'a fish in water'. Another unconventional factor consisted in the wide range of philosophical sources that influenced his sociological underpinnings, but especially Bachelard's (1968) vision of knowledge as being an open-ended process in which prior errors were to be dialectically overcome. At the same time, Bourdieu's concepts of public intellectual (e.g. 1987b, 1989b), theory of symbolic power (e.g. 1984, 1990b), and rationalist perspective of knowledge (e.g. 1991, 1998c) are all highly indebted to Marx, Weber and Durkheim respectively. Finally, there is no doubt that Bourdieu's (1962) confrontation with the Algerian war left a searing personal mark, shaping his intellectual orientation and commitment towards the principle that research must incorporate both a critical and emancipatory edge.

All of Bourdieu's (1977, 2000a) sociology can be thought of a 'steadfast' effort to side-step the absurd antinomy between objectivism and subjectivism - in the attempt to construct a science of dialectical relations between objective structures and the subjective dispositions within which these structures are found. In developing his transcendental ontology, an ideological break was made with both objectivism and subjectivism, leading to a focus on *practice* as the outcome of the structure-agency relationship. Hence, rules were rejected in favour of 'strategies', schemes that were fundamentally associated with the maximising of material and symbolic profit. To effect this synthesis of objectivism and

subjectivism, social physics and social phenomenology, Bourdieu forged an original conceptual arsenal anchored by the notions of *habitus*, *field*, and *capital*.

The notion of habitus is for Bourdieu (1977) the main ‘thinking tool’ that makes it possible to surpass the opposition between ‘ontological individualism’ and ‘constituted practice’. The habitus, most concisely, is ‘an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted’ (ibid., 95). Bourdieu (1993) saw the social context where the habitus operated as a multidimensional space differentiated into distinct fields, networks of objective positions occupied by agents through their possession of different forms of capital. A field is thus a structured system of social relations at micro-macro levels where individuals, institutions and groups exist in a structural relation to each other.⁴ In Bourdieu’s (1986a, 1987c, 1992) schema, capital is not granted a solely economic meaning, but essentially a resource which yields power. Thus, in addition to economic capital he pointed other immaterial forms of capital – cultural, social and symbolic. Whilst cultural capital referred to a wide range of ‘informational’ resources such as language, cultural awareness, and education credentials, social capital designated the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of persons. On the other hand, symbolic capital is *worldmaking power*, involving the capacity to impose the legitimate vision of the social world and of its divisions.

Bourdieu did not simply develop an abstract theoretical system but strove to embed his ‘thinking tools’ to a series of empirical concerns. For instance, in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984) Bourdieu applied such notions to the arena of class analysis. Much of *Distinction* examined the way in which intellectual middle-class culture is defined in relation to popular culture, and considered how it has articulated an aesthetic of distance and abstraction as a means of distinguishing itself from the sensuous, the immediate and the popular. After indicating how aesthetic judgement is an eminently social faculty, resulting from class upbringing and education, Bourdieu constructed a theory of social space organised by two cross-cutting principles of differentiation: economic capital, and cultural capital. Yet, Bourdieu’s social space is three-dimensional. The first vertical division pits agents holding large volumes of either economic or cultural capital against those deprived of both. The second, horizontal, pits those who possess much economic capital but few cultural assets, and those whose capital is pre-eminently cultural. The final and transverse dimension referred to how the trajectory of volume and composition of capital for groups and individuals change over time.

Having mapped out the structure of social space, Bourdieu demonstrated how the hierarchy of life styles is the misrecognised retranslation of the hierarchy of classes. For each major social position – bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, and working

class – corresponded a class habitus undergirding three kinds of tastes. The bourgeoisie were statistically by far the most likely to adopt the attitude of *distinction*, a disinterested contemplation demanded by legitimate aesthetics. Working-class people, on the other hand, held a class ethos based on the *choice of necessity*, determined by the collective experience of material necessity and expressed itself in a realistic aesthetic form. Caught between these two visions of the world lay the petty bourgeoisie whose class ethos was determined by cultural goodwill that signals an ‘undifferentiated reverence’ towards high culture. Amongst the more traditional fractions of the petty bourgeoisie, shopkeepers, artisans and the like, this would manifest itself in a rigorous work ethic and a rejection of the ‘frivolity’ of the bourgeois culture and the ‘vulgarity’ of the working class.⁵

Distinction portrayed French society as one which is characterised by classes and class fractions continually striving to maintain or improve their position in the social space by pursuing strategies of reconversion whereby they transmute or exchange one species of capital into another. With respect to such capital reconversions, Bourdieu (1986b, 1996) believed that in modern societies the principal mode of domination has shifted from overt coercion to symbolic manipulation:

‘what is at stake in the struggles about the meaning of the social world is power over the classificatory schemes and systems which are the basis of the representation of groups and therefore of their mobilisation and demobilisation.’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p.479)

Amongst such classificatory systems, the field of education, more than the family, church or the business ethic, has become the primary institutional setting for the production, transmission and accumulation of the various forms of culture capital. Bourdieu (1984) in fact envisaged education as a part of a larger macrocosm of symbolic institutions that reproduce existing power relations subtly through the engendering and distribution of a culture that is consistent with the dominant classes’ interests.

Bourdieu’s (1967, and Passeron, 1977, 1979) sociology of education is largely built upon two notions: ‘cultural arbitrariness’ and ‘symbolic violence’. Certain aspects of culture cannot be accounted for by logical analysis nor do they develop out of the nature of human beings and, therefore, are ‘arbitrary’. Like all systems, the educational system also has its own cultural arbitrariness, which are, as Bourdieu suggested, variants of the dominant classes. By symbolic violence, Bourdieu meant a soft sort of violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity. The educators perform symbolic violence by imposing meanings as ‘legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force’ and at the same time communicating a logic of disinterest (Bourdieu and Passeron,

1977, p.4). Therefore, when education goes about educating, it is essentially trying to impose 'culturally arbitrary' conditions by an arbitrary power under the guise of legitimate order. The consequences, which are beneficial to the middle classes, are threefold. First, learners coming from the dominant classes find education intelligible and show flair and excellence. Secondly, the culture of the dominant classes is shown to be the most superior. And finally, an act of 'symbolic violence' is perpetuated on learners coming from non-dominant classes by forcing them to support an alien culture.

Another central feature of Bourdieu's sociology was his emphasis on reflexivity as a necessary exercise for valid and reliable social science. By reflexivity, Bourdieu meant the continual need to turn the instrument of social science back upon the sociologists in an effort to control the distortions introduced in the construction of the object. This emphasis was based upon Bourdieu's (1988, 1989c) belief that the most insidious bias that a sociologist can make is to assume a scholastic stance that causes him/her to misconstrue the social world as an interpretative puzzle to be resolved, rather than a mesh of practical tasks to be accomplished in real time and space. This 'scholastic fallacy' eventually leads to disfiguring the situational, adaptive, 'fuzzy logic' of practice by confounding it with the abstract logic of intellectual ratiocination. The sociology of sociology was seen as indispensable because it increases 'our awareness of the socially based effects of domination...by promoting struggles aimed at controlling these effects and mechanisms that produce them' (ibid., 385).

In retrospect, it is evident that Bourdieu's sociology is one of the most comprehensive that is presently available. Bourdieu's major originality is to be found in his development of a micro theory of social power that aimed at an anti-essentialism that would reveal all the sources of domination, but especially that symbolic or genteel violence used by the dominant to legitimate their power. Such an approach enabling the sociologist to analyse cultural relations in society without imbuing the reader with the anti-humanist melancholy so prevalent in post-modern academics (Fowler, 1997, 2000). Of course, Bourdieu's work was not immune from criticisms, of which the most consistent was the accusation of deterministic and structural biases. However, in addition to the fact that Bourdieu was already clear about the imaginative role of the habitus in both *Outline* and his reply to critics in *Other Words*, such critics oversee Bourdieu's three recently translated books. The latter – *Practical Reason* (1998c), *The Weight of the World* (1999), and *Pascalian Meditations* (2000b) – contain a reappraisal of the power of human agency vis-à-vis the objective structures.

On a concluding note, it is commendable to note that despite his terminal illness, Bourdieu remained highly prolific to the very end. Recently, *The Science of Science and Reflexivity* – a very rigorous critique of the whole field of 'science

studies' – was published in France. In June, two more books are expected to be published; namely, *Interventions 1961-2001*, a bibliography of his work that includes more than 45 books and 500 articles, and the work that Bourdieu just finished before falling ill, *The Ball of the Bachelors*, a set of ethnological essays about his home village. The English speaking community can be sure about the publication of three more books, *Counterfire* (June, 2002), *Backfire: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (August, 2002), and *The Economic Field* (August, 2003). At the same time, there also lies an unfinished manuscript on Manet's revolution in the artistic world (Wacquant, 2002). There is no doubt that Bourdieu will continue to affect the sociological world long after his death.

Notes

1. Little biographical information has been published on Bourdieu's own personal and career formation. Bourdieu (1987a) himself resisted public self-disclosure, was highly protective of his private life, and treated 'biographical writing' as a form of self-absorption that celebrates individual existence but devoid of genuine sociological rigour. The best pieces of literature which do offer some information on his career and personal formative influences include Bourdieu's 'Sociology and philosophy in France since 1945' (and Passeron, 1967), *In Other Words* (1990a, pp. 3-33), *The Logic of Practice* (1990b, pp. 1-29), and the interview he granted Honneth, Koçyba, and Schwibs (1986).
2. Here I would like to share with you an episode from the film which I had the opportunity to watch in Athens last February, and which I believe captures adequately Bourdieu's intellectual persona. The episode occurs which during an academic debate a fiery critic denounces the 'psychiatrists of the suburbs' who diagnose society's ailments, and states that 'It's not God, it's Bourdieu. You must not confuse them'. Immediately he rushes out of the University's amphitheatre to a long and enthusiastic applause. However, Bourdieu remained unperturbed, and once order has been resumed, replied in a serious, but unoffended, tone that 'Truth is not measured by hand-clapping!'
3. To-date the most comprehensive bibliography of Bourdieu's writings is *HyperBourdieu* (Barnard, 2002). The site also contains links to tens of tributes and homages following his death, as well as list of doctoral dissertations that are based on Bourdieu's sociology.
4. The conception of field is often erroneously compared to Goffman's (1974) 'frame analysis'. However, such a comparison overlooks that whilst the social and economic conditions are embedded in the heart of Bourdieu's argument, they are merely implied at the periphery of Goffman's theory.
5. Less conventionally moralistic, Bourdieu (1984) argued, were the newer petty bourgeoisie fractions, the upwardly mobile who had benefited from the expansion in higher education and were taking white-collar posts in the growing tertiary sector. Their aspirations manifested themselves in their *cultural goodwill*, that enthusiasm for a culture too recently acquired, a culture which still bore the visible marks of the efforts in its acquisition and could not, therefore, compete with the casual self-assurance of the 'natural' aesthetic.