

## INTRODUCING PIERRE BOURDIEU

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) is the most influential sociologist of our time, influential not only within sociology but in other disciplines too, not just within the social sciences but also in the humanities, not just within the academy but beyond the academy, not just in France but in Europe, the Western world and increasingly in the East and the South. Only time will tell whether his star will remain so lofty and his works become part of the sociological canon. For now his presence is ubiquitous whether as a theory of symbolic domination, as an example of public engagement, or as an advocate of reflexive sociology. Barring Marx, Weber and Durkheim, no sociologist has ever produced such a lexicon of concepts that includes “field,” social, cultural, political “capital,” “habitus,” “distinction,” “homo ludens,” “illusio,” “doxosophers,”— many having entered everyday parlance.

He was a rugby player, so tackling Bourdieu is difficult. His writings span so many different subjects, from art to science, from politics to sport, from family to education, from economy to literature, from colonialism to neoliberalism. He was as at home with photography as he was with statistical analysis. He could shift easily back and forth between philosophy and empirical research, offering meditations on social theory in between. His writings were great in scope and enormous in volume. In English alone he authored more than 35 books. To the uninitiated, and even to the initiated, his writing is often arcane and inaccessible, for he was never shy in displaying his cultural capital, his distinction. He was, after all, an adept player in the French academic field. So, his winding and self-qualifying sentences, which easily become paragraphs, are often difficult-to-comprehend riddles. His books are frustratingly incomplete, and replete with multiple digressions. In the last two decades of his life, after he was elected to the chair of sociology in the Collège de France in 1981, he used his prestigious office to enter the public arena with writings that became more overtly political, more transparent, more angry and more mundane, but nonetheless ever more influential. Consumed by a political passion hostile to neoliberalism, the degradation of culture, and the inhumanity of states, his writing took a public turn.

### *Conversations with Bourdieu*

How do we mere mortals grapple with a writer of such grandeur, erudition and scope? Bourdieu himself would tell us to place any writer in his or her field of production and reception. In the case of Bourdieu that would, indeed, be a momentous task as it would involve multiple fields of scholarly production and reception. We will adopt a more limited approach, which will involve putting him into conversation with the theorists we studied in Sociology 101 and 102: Marx, Weber and Durkheim but also Lenin, Gramsci, Fanon, Foucault and Beauvoir. Although, paradoxically, Bourdieu pays little attention to other writers, conceiving himself as the point of renaissance of sociology, we will learn a great deal from creating our own imaginary conversations between him and the theorists we have already studied.

No less interesting is the conversation of Bourdieu with Bourdieu, the paradoxes created by his own writings, and the gap between his theory and his practice. Bourdieu was committed to turning sociology into a science, accessible only to the anointed who had the leisure (*skholé*) to pursue it, yet he was also committed to a public sociology, accessible to all. How to reconcile an inaccessible science and public engagement? His central theory of cultural domination denies the dominated the capacity to understand the conditions of their subjugation, that being the privilege of the sociologist, so what was he doing haranguing the public about the dangers of neoliberalism? He believed that intellectuals should be reflexive, understanding the production of their works in terms of the broader context, he called the field, but when it came to his own work he was largely unreflexive, seeing it as spontaneously sprouting from his own head. More often than not, reflexivity turned out to be a technique for reducing other people's work to the context of its production, and thereby discrediting it.

We shall pursue a third set of imaginary conversations, conversations with the world. We shall try to put Bourdieu's ideas to work and see how they can illuminate the world around us. Bourdieu was very committed to empirical research just like the canonical figures of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. We will do the same, trying to make empirical sense of his theory of cultural domination as the performance of distinction, cultural capital as a vehicle for reproducing class differences through education, production of art as participation in a field, the idea of habitus as the internalization of social structure. And so on.

### ***Organization of Seminar***

It is difficult to decide which readings to assign, but there are clear classics in Bourdieu's opus which have to be included such as *Reproduction*, *Distinction*, *Rules of Art*, and *Pascalian Mediations*. It is difficult to group his writings thematically since they are all so interconnected, so I've decided to treat his work chronologically, starting with his writings on Algeria and ending with his overtly political writings against neoliberalism. Since this is an experimental seminar that I have not taught before it is quite possible that I will change the readings around as the course and our conversations unfold.

The seminar will meet for three hours each week. In order to grapple with Bourdieu's work I'm going to limit the amount of reading to 100 pages a week. As a result we will only cover a small fraction of his voluminous opus, but we will construct his theory from these limited texts. It's going to be difficult, 100 pages is already a lot so you have to treat this as intensive fieldwork where the "field" is defined as the writings of Bourdieu. You should enter the field every day, reading carefully some 20 pages. You must be writing field notes every day as you read and after you read. These field notes will be summaries, reflections, and questions – a conversation between yourself and Bourdieu.

From these copious notes I will ask you each week to prepare a commentary of 250 words that you will post on bcourse. I will give direction to these commentaries with specific questions – although as the semester progresses you may want to pose and answer your own questions. These commentaries will follow one of three types: putting Bourdieu's ideas to work in the real world; comparing Bourdieu with theorists we read last year; making a comparison with other writings of Bourdieu. Each week either Shelly Steward or I will comment on your commentaries so you will be having a conversation with us too. At the end we will ask you to

write a 3,000 word essay on Bourdieu but you should come and talk to me about it beforehand. This course is for addicts of social theory. If you complete all the work in a satisfactory manner with no late submissions, and attend all the seminars, you will receive an A or A- for the course.

I have office hours on Mondays and Wednesdays from 4-6p.m. in Barrows 454. The texts will all be available on bcourse. You can decide yourself whether you want to buy any of the books.

\*\*\*\*\*

## SCHEDULE AND SYLLABUS

### 9/2: INTRODUCTION

Conversations with Bourdieu. From the life of a sociologist to the sociologist of a life. Working with Bourdieu against Bourdieu. Summary of Sociology 101-102.

### 9/9: THREE DIMENSIONS OF BOURDIEU'S WRITING

- Theory of Symbolic Domination ("Structures, *Habitus*, Practices," pp.52-65 in *The Logic of Practice* [1980])
- Reflexivity ("A Science that Makes Trouble," pp.8-19 in *Sociology in Question* [1980])
- Public Sociology ("Outcasts on the Inside," with Patrick Champagne, pp.421-26 in *The Weight of the World* [1993])

These three readings give you a little sense of these three dimensions. Of whom do these writings most remind you: Marx, Weber or Durkheim? Why?

### 9/16: BOURDIEU IN ALGERIA – MODERNIZATION THEORY

"The disenchantment of the world," (pp.1-94 in *Algeria 1960* [1963])

Here is Bourdieu's distinction between traditional society of the Kabyle and the modern urban society of Algiers. How does his analysis compare with Weber's analysis of tradition and modernity in *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*? Or with Durkheim's account of the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity? How does he conceive of the class structure of the colonized? How does this compare with Fanon's account in *The Wretched of the Earth*?

### 9/23: BOURDIEU IN ALGERIA – COLONIAL REVOLUTION

"Revolution in the Revolution" (pp.145-192 in *The Algerians* [1961]) and "Uprooted Peasants" (pp.117-145 in *Bourdieu Algerian Sketches* [1964]).

Bourdieu was doing research and teaching at the University of Algiers during the liberation struggle. These are essays he wrote about the anti-colonial struggle after he left Algeria in 1960. How do they compare with Fanon's account of the anti-colonial revolution?

### 9/30: PEASANT SOCIETY IN FRANCE

"Introduction," "The peasant and his body," [1962] and "Reproduction Forbidden" [1989] (pp.1-5; 81-93; 165-200 in *The Bachelors' Ball*); "Participant Objectivation" (*Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, pp.281-94 [2003])

Bourdieu grew up in the rural world of the Béarn, located in the mountains of the French Pyrenees. He returns there regularly and makes its society an object of analysis – a story of the decline and degradation of rural life that he tells three times in different registers. How does this account compare with that of the Algerian peasantry? The essay on participant objectivation is Bourdieu’s reflection on the link between his two studies.

### **10/7: SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE**

**“Foundations of a Theory of Symbolic Violence” (pp.xviii-xxi, 1-69 in *Reproduction in education, Society and Culture* [1970])**

This is Bourdieu’s (with Passeron) first attempt at a theory of symbolic domination – domination not understood as such – through the study of education which secures the participation of the dominated classes in a system that obscures the source and even the existence of their subjugation. Who does this remind you of most – Weber, Marx or Durkheim? Does this make sense from your own experience of education?

### **10/14: THE MAKING OF CLASS**

**“The social space and its transformations” (pp.xi-xiv, pp.1-8, and pp.97-168 in *Distinction* [1979])**

*Distinction* is a monster that we could spend reading the entire semester. It describes and analyzes how the dominant class deploys its cultural resources (capital) to present itself as something other than it is, namely as distinction or natural superiority that hides its class origins. In this first selection Bourdieu presents his theory of class as being the product of social conditions and the inculcation of habitus; the three dimensions of class (economic capital, cultural capital and volume of capital); and the trajectories of classes over time and the conversion of capital as a strategy of mobility and inheritance. How does this compare with Marx, Weber or Durkheim? How does this compare with your understanding or experience of class?

### **10/21: THE RELATIONS AMONG CLASSES**

**“Class tastes and life-styles” (pp.257-396 in *Distinction* [1979])**

Here Bourdieu examines the distinctive features and internal composition of three classes – dominant class, petite bourgeoisie and working class – showing how each marks itself off from or identifies with the others. How does this compare with Gramsci’s understanding of cultural domination? Does Bourdieu make sense in the US context?

### **10/28: SYMBOLIC POWER AND THE POLITICAL FIELD**

**“On Symbolic Power” [1977], “Political Representation: Elements for a Theory of the political Field” [1981] “Delegation and Political Fetishism” [1984], “Social Space and the Genesis of ‘Classes’” [1984] (pp.163-170, 171 -202, 203-219, 229-251 in *Language and Symbolic Power*)**

In these essays Bourdieu develops his ideas about politics and representation, a double game in which elites maneuver for power within a political field, deploying the symbolic power they exercise over the governed. He criticizes Marx for not understanding the symbolic power of class as classification in which his own theory played a crucial role in constituting class as a political

actor. How does this compare with Weber's or Gramsci's or even Foucault's conception of politics?

#### **11/4: THE MUTUAL PRODUCTION OF ARTIST AND FIELD**

**“Flaubert, Analyst of Flaubert: *A Reading of Sentimental Education*,” “For a Corporatism of the Universal” (pp.xv-xx, pp.1-34; 337-349 in *Rules of Art* [1992])**

This is Bourdieu's second monster. If the first monster was about symbolic power as patterns of consumption in a social space, the second monster is his best attempt as the analysis of fields as the locus of production, in this case of art. He disenchants the artist who thinks of art as the out-growth of individual talent. Bourdieu shows how artists are the product of the field in which they are located, a field of agonistic relations to other artists. He sees Flaubert, much as he sees himself in relation to sociology, as being able to create the literary field by recognizing its embryonic existence. In the appendix he draws out the implication of field analysis for intellectual engagement. How does this analysis compare with Gramsci's view of intellectuals?

#### **11/11: (HOLIDAY) GENESIS AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE ARTISTIC FIELD**

**“The Conquest of Autonomy: The Critical Phase in the Emergence of the Field,” “The Emergence of a Dualistic Structure” (pp.47-112, 113-40 in *Rules of Art* [1992])**

Here Bourdieu describes the genesis of the distinctive features of a field: the break with bourgeois art toward social art, the break with both bourgeois and social art for an art for art's sake, and then the development of an avant-garde that challenges the consecrated art. Here one might compare Bourdieu's conception of field with Marx's conception of the capitalist economy.

#### **11/18 MASCULINE DOMINATION**

***Masculine Domination* (pp.1-124 [1998])**

This book based on his research among the Kabyle but extended to the contemporary world as a whole. It seeks to show how masculine domination is the prototype of symbolic domination. There's no sign of operating in a field of such studies though there is recognition of second wave feminism, in the US, but noticeably no reference to the French founder of second wave feminism – Simon de Beauvoir. How does his writing compare with her theory of masculine domination as laid out in *The Second Sex*.

#### **11/25: THEORY AND PRACTICE**

**“The Historicity of Reason,” “Bodily Knowledge” (pp.93-163 in *Pascalian Meditations* [1997])**

This book is Bourdieu's culminating theoretical treatise, revisiting and transcending the early works, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972) and *Logic of Practice* (1980). In these two chapters he first defends the universality of scholastic reason, emerging from competition in the scientific field, itself dependent on skholé and then examines how this is at odds with practical reason that arises from the interaction of habitus and field. How does this compare with Marx and Engels, especially *The German Ideology*.

#### **12/2: SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE – FINAL ASSESSMENT**

**“Symbolic Violence and Political Struggles,” “Social Being, Time and the Sense of Existence” (pp.164-245 in *Pascalian Meditations* [1997])**

Working from the distinction between scholastic reason and practical reason, Bourdieu elaborates the idea of symbolic violence for the last time, and how it can incorporate social change and gives meaning to human existence. Can you see Durkheim here?

### **12/9: POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT**

**“Journalism and Politics” [1996], “On Television”[1996], “Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market” [2001] (pp.3-10, 11-61, 171-244 in *Sociology is a Martial Art*)**

Beginning in 1981, when he ascends to the prestige chair in Collège de France, Bourdieu becomes ever more engaged in the field of politics as a public intellectual. These writings are his attack on the degradation of the media and the destructiveness of the market. How do these political tracts compare with his more academic writing and align with his theory of symbolic violence?