

## THE CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF ADVANCED INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

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Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society*, translated by Richard Nice, London and Beverly Hills, Sage Publications 1977, introduction by Tom Bottomore, pp. xx + 248.

Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice, Cambridge University Press, 1978, pp. viii + 248.

Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1980, pp. 670.

Pierre Bourdieu's work — there are fourteen books written alone or in collaboration with others — add up to the most sophisticated attempt anywhere to provide a sociological analysis of contemporary culture in practice and as boundary, demonstrating an intellectual scope and a sense of *l'homme sensuel* which is unparalleled.

Bourdieu's task is not simply to provide a map of cultural manifestations (in a way that all too often seems the provenance of much structuralist and semiological writing), nor the slightly more ambitious exercise of defining cultural acts against what might otherwise be considered social ones (the ultimate *raison d'être* of much Marxian interpretation of culture) but nothing less than to develop an integrated theory of creativity as *practice*. He thus integrates approaches developed by cultural anthropologists, Durkheimian sociologists, educational theorists and historians of ideas, as well as by those whose domain is loosely bounded by communications theory, cultural studies and the various sociologies of the arts. In so doing, Bourdieu is careful not to be trapped into accounting for the contextual significance of 'great' writers, artists or musicians (as, for example Lucien Goldmann or Adorno did<sup>1</sup>) nor into evaluating the long-term socio-political importance of artists according to their use of form (a risky business as writers as diverse as Lukacs, Raymond Williams or John Berger<sup>2</sup> have demonstrated). Still less is he seduced by the psychological (and largely Freudian) temptation to account for creativity in terms of individual life forces and contrasting energies, an exercise which has aided the wide-ranging critiques of Arthur Koestler and Anton Ehrenzweig.<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu would view these exercises as tangential to the concerns of sociology, and thus outside his purview. Equally he would dismiss

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hermeneutical or some phenomenological sociologies as essentially avoiding the central issue, even though much of what he writes owes something to phenomenology, albeit an anthropenomenology. The central issue is stated succinctly in an early essay: "the sociology of intellectual and artistic creation must take as its object the creative project as a meeting point and an adjustment between determinism and a determination."<sup>4</sup> In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu, using largely anthropological material, attempts a general theory which tries to tease out the interconnecting cultural determinisms from which a determination is possible. The book is the most comprehensive attempt by Bourdieu at establishing the grounds for his entire writing on culture and creativity, though the reader who is new to Bourdieu's work may be puzzled by it as an introduction to concerns which are, after all, apparently to do with painting, photography, pedagogy, the Academie Française, and "audience research" in cultural behaviour. Although Bourdieu's primary task is the study of creativity, his ultimate goal is nothing less than the cultural anthropology of advanced industrial society. The *Outline of a Theory of Practice* establishes his anthropological credentials for the wider task; his studies on education and culture in France provide forays into those themes which will make that wider cultural anthropology possible.

Bourdieu's early studies of Algerians<sup>5</sup> led into studies of the symbolic codes established by the French to control themselves and others. The tension between the *habitus* of the colonizer and the *habitant* of the colonized is evident throughout his work, and the language of control which Fanon read as requiring a response both violent and symbolic, is seen by Bourdieu as involving a control system necessarily both symbolic and violent. The so-called "French Cultural" writings by Bourdieu are explorations in the *violence symbolique* and the possible strategies of liberation, or rather the strategies by which people seek to liberate themselves. Bourdieu, like most Algerians, is no romantic. Strategies are based on realistic appraisals of past experiences. Culture is no easy release from the constrictions of the everyday; it contains the discordant voices of the still imprisoned. After all, Camus was both Algerian and French, and Ben Bella, only recently released when of little use to anyone, was once a liberator. "The colonized come to *wreak* violence on the colonizer," seems to paraphrase Sartre's introduction to *The Wretched of the Earth*<sup>6</sup>. Pierre Bourdieu is that colonial, at a site of forceful intellectual vitality, who wreaks symbolic violence on France and all of us. To take the Creative as one's point of departure is to ask "at what point does the field that established the boundaries for my release still bind me to that world which will appropriate me yet?" Bourdieu is probably right not to take language as a metaphor for this exercise (after all, language begs the question of meaning which is ultimately transcendental) but to take ritual and symbol. His starting point is pre-structuralist or, possibly, pre-surrealist. The theoretical and

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temporal world that he inhabits is not Magritte or Breton, but Delville and Redon, not the abolition of institutions and forms but their internalization and hence their symbolization. In our everyday lives we do not worry about art or 'writing-degree-zero', but rather more about the everyday sense of this institution or that belief-system and its meaning to us. Structuralism apparently took this transvaluation away from us and made the *codification* of our myths more significant; surrealism made our efforts wholly insignificant because time had passed us by. Bourdieu situates these and other intellectual fashions in the now. They become simply part of the symbolic capital upon which we draw evidence of ideas derived from our situated and hence economic realities. But how do we situate them? Significantly, Bourdieu's case hangs on the act of situation.

The analysis in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* rests on the concept *habitus* which is both the reproduction of "regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of [particular practices] generative principles" and also an adjustment "to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation". In other words *habitus* produces practices which reflect not only other peoples' productions over which we have little control (because they are the artifacts of an inherited situation), but also our own productions of meaning in confronting the situation itself. It thus encompasses both the taken-for-granted boundaries of action, "a commonsense world endowed with the objectivity secured by consensus on the meaning of practices and the world;"<sup>8</sup> a "history turned into nature,"<sup>9</sup> and also the necessary inventiveness of our own particular conditions.

The ultimate issue rests on two problems: the interconnecting symbolic orders which impose reality — through *habitus* — on specific situations, and the extent to which, within their commonsensical daily strategies, agents are aware of this essentially political order, either as arbitrary or "as a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore unquestioned." The clue to understanding symbolic control systems lies in the recognition that they can be either covert or overt: "symbolic violence is the gentle, hidden form which violence takes when overt violence is impossible."<sup>10</sup> *Habitus* represents our inheritance of a taken-for-granted symbolic order which establishes the normative rules of our daily practice. If, in the inventiveness of our own situation, we question those universals the asymmetrical distinctions which are embedded in the symbolic orders become manifest. Bourdieu puts it:

'Goods are for giving. The rich man is rich so as to be able to give to the poor,' say the Kabyles. This is an exemplary disclaimer: because giving is also a way of possessing (a gift which is not matched by a counter-gift creates a lasting bond, restricting the debtor's freedom and forcing

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him to adopt a peaceful, cooperative, prudent attitude) . . . The endless reconversion of economic capital into symbolic capital, at the cost of wastage of social energy which is the condition for the permanence of domination, cannot succeed without the complicity of the whole group: the work of denial which is the source of social alchemy is, like magic, a collective undertaking. As Mauss puts it, the whole society pays itself in the false coin of its dream.

The point at which we reject this dream leads to a conflict between symbolic violence and the practical, inventive alternatives.

*Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, presents the issue of symbolic violence as central. The theme is the system of higher education in France. The topic is the extent to which the system imposes its values through structures which in turn are internalized by the participants of the system. As we know from Bourdieu's earlier work,<sup>12</sup> the social institutions provide a framework which destroys the innate (i.e., socially conditioned) intelligence of the student in order to replace it with another space which he is obliged to live through in order to make sense of himself. Thus we have the diachronic self brought to bear on the synchrony of now. *Reproduction* is an illustration of how that process works as part of a wider system which not only legitimises the *status quo*, but imposes a thought process which comes to be seen by those who acquire it as normal and universalistic. And the importance of the claim to universality is that it rests on a power system which is not naked, but concealed. Thus the student who is introduced to philosophy comes to accept a process of reasoning as normal because he knows no other; the pedagogical structure taught him to think in a particular way which in turn became his own thought processes. In this respect, as in many others, the educational system is merely an extension of the political and economic. The trick of politics is not manifest, open violence, but the insidious sense that what is routine is commonsensical, that what is commonsensical is, in fact, true. Politics, like education, can demonstrate that those who fail were not worthy, that the natural "home" of a particular group is in this or that place; that intellectual competence is the preserve of those who have been initiated into the correct symbol systems.

The privileged instrument of the bourgeois sociodicy which confers on the privileged the supreme privilege of not seeing themselves as privileged, manages the more easily to convince the disinherited that they owe their scholastic and social destiny to their lack of gifts or

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merits, because in matters of culture absolute dis-possession excludes awareness of being dispossessed.<sup>13</sup>

In an important respect Bourdieu's work is an elaboration of Gramsci's theory of Hegemony: the ruling values of the power elite are not simply 'ideological' (conjuring up the idea of manifestos and coherently worked out programmes) but the institutional patterning of values and ideas into the normative structures of society. It is thus absurd to study ideas or literature or myths as if they were self-contained documents. Both hermeneutics and structuralism fall into this trap. Such an exercise is bound to ignore culture as practice or what Marx in the "Thesis on Feuerbach" termed "sensuous human activity."<sup>14</sup> The document or art-object becomes a mirror through which the world is viewed; it becomes a substitute for studying process, practice and social interconnections. The product of social action becomes the determinant of that action. In structuralist terms the significant dominates the signifier. Bourdieu's critique of structuralism — and hence of Marxist-structuralism — is that it presents a lazy, simplistic shorthand for studying codes, myths, ideologies which say little about the social processes in which they are embodied. By claiming universalism, structuralism ultimately abdicates moral criteria and represents the new treason of the intellectual. The pretence at creating a *science* of codes and mythologies not only distorts our perception of society, it also distances the intellectual from society, preserving the academism of his practice. Nothing that he says challenges us, but rather confirms *our* isolation because he validates himself in a non-dialectical methodology.

Bourdieu focuses on the intellectual as he inhabits his institutions, performs his routine functions and practices cultural dominance. Because the intellectual is a product of a social process, Bourdieu analyses that process. Because culture is wider than him, Bourdieu studies that too, all of it. *La Distinction* is the product of ongoing research (most of which appears serially in *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*) into the different layers of critical judgement in French society — eating, holidays, films, music, travel, painting, housing, clothing, hairdressing, museums, reading. It is an in-depth account of a society *doing* culture. Because culture is essentially the product of institutional distinctions, Bourdieu traces the means by which taste is manufactured and transformed. Before we can begin to understand the creative and the transcendental we have to understand how the entire cultural apparatus is structured through the practices of its members. The basic theme of "Intellectual Field and Creative Project" or the general propositions of *Outline of a Theory of Practice* are here worked out in a bold confrontation with a people in the act of making sense of themselves, of a people being made sense of through the institutional practice of others.

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Bourdieu commences with a social aesthetic outlining a theory of the inheritance of cultural capital and its use. This theory, of course, is of the bourgeoisie and the ways that it establishes its cultural dominance by laying claim both to the titles and the real estate of culture. By appropriating culture in the manner of hierarchical distinctions of differential significations, the bourgeoisie is able to claim for itself a cultural heritage even if it was in no way responsible for generating it. By claiming culture as capital and real estate, it is able to deny culture as production and process. It transforms experience and practical acts into a symbolic capital which enhances its own self-image. Thus to understand culture we have to understand it both as a system of classification but also of social class (or the condition of existence) and its reinterpretation involves both its superimposition on us as an imposed judgement but at the same time as the actively constituted interpretation of a way of life. From a book replete with examples, perhaps one will suffice as illustration.

The body is something we inherit, but also something that we spend much time, energy and money in transforming. In one sense we could see the body as the product of social conditioning — we dress according to the influences brought to bear on us. But this perception would only be partly true; the body as biology, as mirror of our inner selves in a sense betrays us to others. But even this “true” self is a social product — of childrearing practices, eating habits, social class, sex, race and so on. Thus the visible camouflaging of the body and the inherent (apparently natural) proper ties, are products of different social processes, which in turn must be placed in a wider context of power and cultural distribution. My location in any social system involves both appropriating symbols of appearance from it, but also projecting my self in terms of my perception of my place in it, so that my bodily relations express not only my self as a product of interlocking social forces, but also of my consciously willed sense of my self in that system. Thin/fat; short/tall; male/female; black/white, become so-called ‘natural’ dichotomies which force us to confront the consequence of heredity and the fact of social position. The culture of the body therefore relates to the ways that we play out these polarities as necessary features of class and power distinctions.<sup>15</sup>

*La Distinction's* strength lies in the force of methodology by which Bourdieu teases out the broad lines of his conceptual approach, which involves seeing social issues both in the widest possible terms and in the minutest of details. And its value is in pitting the consequences of collecting the *minutiae* against the validity of the conceptual structure. General theories should not be a master plan into which we slot our empirical data, but rather a heuristic device which enables the data to reveal itself. This data reveals itself to us through the photograph, the interview, the advertisement, the fashion show, the painting and so on. But the interpretation must involve a continual

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interaction with the conceptual apparatus. Bourdieu dispenses with the long-established dichotomy between 'theory and research', just as he dispenses with dichotomies such as 'culture' and 'mass culture' or 'ideas' and 'practice'. Both as a problem of research and as a methodology he presents us with culture-as-practice.

At the same time Bourdieu leaves us with one epistemological problem which has exercised other writers on culture. If culture is about control and power, the distinction between determinism and determining, does Bourdieu suggest that all questions of value are ultimately reduced to class position? In a curious way, although he argues against "art" because it is a negation of the social world, ("an imaginary anthropology obtained by denial of all the negations really brought about by the economy"<sup>16</sup>) the relativity of creative making sense becomes the only absolute that is visible. In a concluding chapter on "elements of a 'vulgar' critique of 'purer' critiques", he makes a plausible case for a social relativity of evaluation, but it seems to this reviewer at least that the issue is by no means resolved. Class and power may be useful tools for demonstrating the relativity of apparently absolutist values, but is the consequence that there are no absolutes at all? Bourdieu's contribution is surely to provide the most comprehensive groundwork by which that question can be sensibly addressed.

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### Notes

1. See Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965; T.W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, New York: Seabury Press, 1973.
2. See G. Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, London: Penguin, 1962; Raymond Williams, *Drama From Ibsen to Brecht*, London: Chatto, 1971; John Berger, *The Success and Failure of Picasso*, London: Penguin, 1968.
3. Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, London: Hutchinson, 1964 and Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967.
4. Pierre Bourdieu "Intellectual Field and Creative Project", in Michael F.D. Young (ed) *Knowledge and Control*, London: Collier Macmillan, 1971, p. 185.
5. His study of the Algerians, written at about the same time as Frantz Fanon was putting together *Les Damnés de la Terre* (Trs. *The Wretched of the Earth*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965) was published as *The Algerians*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1962.
5. J.P. Sartre, "Introduction", F. Fanon, *op cit.*
7. *Outline, op cit.* p. 78.
8. *Ibid*, p. 80.
9. *Ibid*, p. 78.
10. *Ibid*, p. 196.

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11. *Ibid.*, p. 195.
  12. Bourdieu, "Intellectual Field" and "Systems of Education and Systems of Thought", in Young, pp. 189-207. The detailed studies on which these observations rest are: *Les étudiants et leurs études* (with J.C. Passeron), Paris: Ed. Mouton, 1964, and *Les Héritiers* (with J.C. Passeron), Paris: Ed. de Minuit, 1964.
  13. *Reproduction*, p. 210. Sociodicy: justification of society, formed by analogy with theodicy. (Translators' note, p. 176)
  14. Karl Marx: "Thesis on Feuerbach", in Saul K. Padover (ed) *The Essential Marx*, New American Library, 1978, pp. 304-306.
  15. Much of the discussion of the culture of the body appears on pp. 189-248.
  16. *Outline*, p. 197.
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