

Drawing inspiration from Bourdieu's sociology of symbolic power

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Paying homage to a great sociologist comes in many forms, that of disciple on the one hand and critic on the other. Disciples carry and propagate the faith, transmitting it to new generations. Whereas some offer valuable insights into the practices and thoughts of the great social scientist, there can be costs to discipleship. Defense of conceptual and methodological orthodoxy can stifle further intellectual development and lead to sectarian allegiance.

By contrast, the critic brings assessment and evaluation, identifying those rough edges and slippery slopes where the disciple fears to tread. Criticism, properly conducted, identifies the strengths as well as the limits of any novel theoretical perspective. The polemical critic, however, not so much evaluates as dismisses the work for failing to meet the standards of some opposing theoretical persuasion. With a theoretical axe to grind, the polemicist anxiously wishes to score points of intellectual distinction rather than offer insights of genuine evaluation.

This special issue devoted to the recognition of the importance of Pierre Bourdieu assiduously avoids both extremes: devotion to or profanation of a "sacred" work. Rather, it charts a course that will undoubtedly frustrate disciples and polemicists alike. It offers ample testimony to the importance of how Bourdieu's work has inspired further sociological research; yet, it advances some criticism that suggest gaps in or ways to elaborate portions of Bourdieu's work in different areas. Several of these articles also enrich our understanding of contextual aspects of Bourdieu's work.

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) was a prolific thinker and social scientific researcher. He published numerous books and articles (many translated into over five languages), directed a research center (Center for

European Sociology), founded and guided a journal (*Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*), and edited a collection of books (*Édition de Minuit*). His most widely known work, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), has been ranked as the sixth most important social scientific work of the twentieth century.¹ His influence in the social sciences has been substantial, interdisciplinary, and international, extending from many who worked closely with Bourdieu, such as Frédéric Lebaron and Gisèle Sapiro, to those who knew him only through portions of his total oeuvre, such as Nick Couldry and Gunnar Lind Haase and Gert Tinggaard Svendsen, to mention just those whose articles appear in this volume. We have not included an overall presentation or assessment of Bourdieu's oeuvre as numerous other works already do that.² Nor do we offer an obituary as that has already appeared in a previous issue.³ The articles included here simply testify to the broad range of theoretical and empirical concerns that animated Bourdieu's work and have inspired numerous social scientists in their own intellectual quests.

The impetus for this collection stems from a conference on Bourdieu at Boston University organized by David Swartz with the collaboration of Vera Zolberg in October 2002. Five of the articles (Dianteuil, Kauppi, Lareau and Weinger, Lebaron, and Sapiro) were originally presented at that conference. The remaining articles came as unsolicited submissions to *Theory and Society*. Pierre Bourdieu is no stranger to this journal. He joined Alvin Gouldner and Randall Collins as an Editor in 1974–1975. The journal published two of Bourdieu's widely cited articles: "The social space and the genesis of groups" (volume 14, 1985) and "Vive la crise! For heterodoxy in social science" (volume 17, 1988, p. 773–787). In addition, the journal has carried several critical evaluations of his work, notably articles by Rodney Benson, Rodgers Brubaker, and Nick Crossley.⁴ Bourdieu's influential work has clearly been felt across the pages of this journal as it has in many others.

The articles

Bourdieu devoted relatively little attention to the study of religion, but drew substantially from the classical tradition in the sociology of religion in developing some of his basic concepts. Here presented for the first time in revised English translation is Erwan Dianteuil's article

"Pierre Bourdieu and the sociology of religion: A central and peripheral concern."⁵ This explores what other scholars have frequently noted: namely, Bourdieu's frequent use of religious terminology, such as sacred/profane, ritual, prophets, and charisma, in his analysis of culture. Bourdieu wrote that the "sociology of culture is the sociology of religion of our day."⁶ In Bourdieu's view, dominant culture, particularly that legitimated by the school system, took on forms of sacredness and ritual that could be analyzed by analogy to the classical sociological analyses of religion. Classical texts on religion by Durkheim, Mauss, and Weber in particular informed Bourdieu's approach to culture.

By contrast, Bourdieu did not devote much scientific attention to religion per se. Dianteuil attributes that neglect in large part to Bourdieu's personal dispositions. Bourdieu himself was not religious; indeed, as Dianteuil points out, Bourdieu shared the strongly anti-clerical attitudes typical of French Enlightenment thinkers. Dianteuil insightfully suggests that Bourdieu's anti-clericalism and view that religion is a "declining institution" in modern societies may have limited his view of the continuing relevance of religious phenomena for sociological investigation; and his concept of field, while applicable to the centralizing authority of Roman Catholicism, seems limited in situations of religious pluralism, such as North America, with a wide variety of religious expressions and movements.

A second article that offers insights into Bourdieu's early conceptual development is Frédéric Lebaron's "Pierre Bourdieu: Economic models against economism," which provides a corrective to considerable misunderstanding of Bourdieu's relationship to neo-classical economics. Lebaron addresses the frequent charge that Bourdieu's theory of action harbors a materialist economic reductionism, similar in general orientation to the human capital view of Gary Becker. Bourdieu sharply denied the charge, yet it persists. Lebaron traces the origins of Bourdieu's critical dialogue and collaboration with French economists during the 1958–1966 period when Bourdieu first outlined his "general economy of practices."

Bourdieu is critical from the beginning of applying the neo-classical economic model of human action in all the social sciences. Moreover, even in economics, culture and symbolic power need to be introduced into the equations. Furthermore, Bourdieu breaks early with a rational action model by positing in his concept of habitus that most human

action occurs tacitly without conscious calculation. Yet, Bourdieu does employ economic language in his sociology of culture as a way of demystifying arenas of human activity (high culture in particular) that are commonly thought to be without vested interest. Lebaron argues that this “double” conceptual move – culture is interested and economics is cultural – needs to be kept in mind in order to understand Bourdieu’s general economy of practices as both “economic” and yet not “economistic.”

Lebaron also notes that the concept of cultural capital originates out of the empirical observation in the 1958–1966 period of Bourdieu’s work that educational achievement and cultural practices were more highly correlated with education than with income. This empirical observation motivated Bourdieu’s application of the term “capital” to ostensibly non-economic power sources, a conceptual strategy that Bourdieu elaborated considerably in subsequent work.

Annette Lareau and Elliot Weininger, in “Cultural capital in educational research: A critical assessment,” take stock of the influence of cultural capital in English language published educational research. Without doubt, of all Bourdieu’s concepts, cultural capital has generated the most empirical research and has had the most impact on particular subfields, such as culture and education, in North American sociology.

The Lareau and Weininger article raises the important sociology of knowledge issue of what happens to sociological concepts when they are imported from one national context to another. In the case of cultural capital, its importation into North American academic culture changed its meaning in two ways foreign to Bourdieu’s original conceptualization. Cultural capital became associated with “highbrow” aesthetic culture and became analytically and causally distinguished from technical forms of knowledge or competence. The authors review Bourdieu’s educational writings to find that neither of these two meanings are essential to Bourdieu’s understanding of the concept. They find, instead, a definition of cultural capital that stresses dominant group capacity to impose advantageous standards of evaluation, whatever their form, to be more fruitful in exploring the intersection of institutionalized evaluative standards of schools and the educational practices of families belonging to different social classes. They review a growing number of recent studies, including their own, that employ this more Bourdieusian view of cultural as a form of capital.

If cultural capital has been widely recognized as an important sociological concept, Bourdieu’s view of social capital has not found the same success. Yet as Alejandro Portes points out,⁷ Bourdieu’s formulation of social resources as a form of capital is theoretically more compelling than the more popular versions proffered by James Coleman and Robert Putnam. The article “On the wealth of nations: Bourdieueconomics and social capital” by Gert Tinggaard Svendsen and Gunnar Lind Haase Svendsen draws on Bourdieu’s concept.

The Svendsens recognize that, as Lebaron points out, Bourdieu’s understanding of capital does not reduce to material forms. Indeed, as economists, the Svendsens wish to broaden the institutional approach to political economic analysis to include non-material power resources such as social networks and membership. They in fact coin the term “Bourdieueconomics” to do that and they draw upon Bourdieu’s understanding of social capital as a form of power that facilitates trust and informal human exchange in ways to reduce transaction costs and thereby enhance economic growth. The Svendsens propose to integrate social capital as a factor of production into the analysis of economic growth and income differences. They offer preliminary results of their own cross-national research among Western and Eastern European countries that suggest that countries (e.g., Denmark) with high social capital tend to have high per capita income.

In 1997, Swartz⁸ observed that, compared to all the attention accorded cultural capital and habitus, Bourdieu’s concept of field had been neglected. This is no longer the case and the articles by Sapiro, Couldry, and Kauppi illustrate the considerable amount of research today drawing inspiration from Bourdieu’s field perspective. In “Forms of politicization in the French literary field,” Gisele Sapiro employs the concept of field to understand forms of politicization found among twentieth-century French writers. Like Dianteill, Sapiro notes Bourdieu’s recourse to Max Weber’s sociology of religion to describe the prophetic and charismatic style employed by French literary figures in their politics. And it is position within the literary field rather than political party membership or social class location that distinguishes the various types of political expression among French writers (“notabilities,” “esthetes,” “avant-garde,” and “writer-journalists”). Sapiro is able to correlate the writer’s field position with his conception of literary work and form of politicization – demonstrating the usefulness of Bourdieu’s concept of field for political as well as cultural analysis.

A long-time and careful observer of Bourdieu's work, Nicholas Garnham,⁹ observed a striking paradox in Bourdieu's extensive analysis of fields of cultural production yet neglect of television and the mass media. Likewise Bourdieu had very little to say about the state – an object of considerable theorizing and research in political sociology – until his later years. It was relatively late in his career that Bourdieu began devoting much attention to these two important substantive areas in modern societies. His explosive, polemical, and widely read indictment of media journalism in 1996 clearly marked his interest in the mass media.¹⁰ As Rodney Benson in an earlier article published in this journal shows,¹¹ some close research associates of Bourdieu, particularly Patrick Champagne,¹² had in fact developed a vigorous and empirically informed critique of the media in France. The concept of field proved to be key in shaping what might be called the distinctively Bourdieusian approach to media sociology.

In “Media meta-capital: Extending the range of Bourdieu's field theory,” Nick Couldry examines this field-based school of research. He finds that, although strong in providing detailed explanations of the internal workings of the media field, this approach falls short of explaining the apparent importance and influence of the media in society more generally. To address this shortcoming, Couldry proposes drawing on two other conceptual moves in Bourdieu: his early formulation of symbolic power and his late view of the state as the ultimate arbiter of the legitimate means of symbolic violence and hence the source of a kind of metacapital to adjudicate the competing claims of all other forms of capital. Couldry suggests, therefore, an elaboration of portions of Bourdieu's thought to outline a research program for identifying the role of the state and the mass media and their interrelations in the categorization and classification of the social world.

Richard Widick in “Flesh and the free market: On taking Bourdieu to the stock exchange” brings Bourdieu's view of practices as embodied knowledge to bear upon a new substantive area for empirical research: the highly competitive, gaming world of traders in the stock exchange. Widick draws on habitus and Bourdieu's view of action as practice to describe traders' talk, their cultural production, and their bodily and gendered performances. He finds evidence of a gendered, trader habitus in this virtually exclusive world of male competition. But he objects to Bourdieu's frequent recourse to cognitivist metaphors in describing bodily knowledge and proposes to supplement this view of the logic of practice with the logic of identification found in Freud.

Traders not only think like traders; they also identify with charismatic supertrader heroes. Widick sees in several of Bourdieu's later theoretical statements, particularly in *Pascalian Meditations*,¹³ a conceptual move towards greater openness to some psychoanalytical interpretation. Although beyond the scope of this collection of articles, the relationship between Bourdieu's socioanalysis and psychoanalysis with respect to human action merits fuller exploration.

A consistent theme in Bourdieu is the effort to transcend traditional dualisms long debated in the social sciences. One of these persistent antinomies in the history of the social sciences is the materialism/idealism opposition. Bourdieu rejected that opposition as a false dichotomy motivated more by politics than by scientific rigor. He conceptually extended culture to the realm of interest and simultaneously extended interest to the realm of culture, as already noted in Lebaron's article. For Bourdieu, interest and culture stand not in fundamental opposition but are relationally linked; the pursuit of material interest is inseparable from a cultural understanding of just what that interest might be and culture, even in its most abstract expression, is never devoid of interest. One particularly vivid discussion of this idea comes in the concluding chapter of *Distinction* where Bourdieu identifies classes as classification struggles. Chad Goldberg, in “Haunted by the specter of Communism: Collective identity and resource mobilization in the demise of the Workers Alliance of America,” builds on this Bourdieusian argument in offering a historical case study of the demise of the Workers Alliance of America, a powerful, nation-wide movement of the unemployed formed in 1935 and dissolved in 1941.

Although Bourdieu is not known as a social movement theorist, Goldberg deftly applies Bourdieu's classification struggles to build a bridge between two traditions of social movement research, resource mobilization/political process theories and new social movements theoretical emphasis on collective identity. Bourdieu's stress on the importance of symbolic power in classification struggles provides an important corrective to each. Goldberg's study illustrates that political mobilization does not presuppose an already established political identity. Nor does political identity require a clear objective base in order to form. Both identity and mobilization can form simultaneously or dialectically out of struggle itself.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. The ranking comes from an International Sociological Association survey. Bourdieu's *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990) was ranked fortieth and *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage, 1977) (co-authored with Jean-Claude Passeron) forty-eighth.
2. Some notable books in English on Bourdieu's work include Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J.D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), Bridget Fowler, *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory: Critical Investigations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), Niilo Kauppi, *The Politics of Embodiment: Habits, Power, and Pierre Bourdieu's Theory* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2000), Jeremy F. Lane, *Pierre Bourdieu: A Critical Introduction* (London and Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2000), Derek Robbins, *The Work of Pierre Bourdieu: Recognizing Society* (Boulder and San Francisco: Westview Press, 1991), Derek Robbins, *Bourdieu and Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), and Jennifer Webb, Tony Schirato, and Geoff Danaher, *Understanding Bourdieu* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2002).
3. See David Swartz, "In Memoriam: Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002)," *Theory and Society* 31/4 (2002).
4. Rodney Benson, "Field Theory in Comparative Context: A New Paradigm for Media Studies," *Theory and Society* 28/3 (1999), Rogers Brubaker, "Rethinking Classical Sociology: The Sociological Vision of Pierre Bourdieu," *Theory and Society* 14/6 (1985), and Nick Crossley, "The phenomenological habitus and its construction," *Theory and Society* 30/1 (2001).
5. See Erwan Dianteill, "Pierre Bourdieu et la religion. Synthèse critique d'une synthèse critique," *Archives de Sciences sociales des Religions* 118 (2002).
6. Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, trans. Richard Nice (Thousand Oaks, CA and London: Sage Publications, 1993).
7. See A. Portes, "Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998).
8. See Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*.
9. See Nicholas Garnham and Raymond Williams, "Pierre Bourdieu and the Sociology of Culture," *Media, Culture, and Society* 2/3 (1980), and Nicholas Garnham, "Bourdieu, the Cultural Arbitrary, and Television," in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Edward LjPuma, and Moishe Postone (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
10. See Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television* (New York: New Press, 1998 [1996]).
11. See Rodney Benson, "Field Theory in Comparative Context: A New Paradigm for Media Studies," *Theory and Society* 28/3 (1999).

Two articles take up the relationship of Bourdieu to politics, a dimension of Bourdieu's life and work that thus far has been largely neglected by scholars. The first article "Bourdieu's political sociology and the politics of European integration" by Niilo Kauppi identifies key features of Bourdieu's political sociology that Kauppi conceptualizes as a structural constructivist theory of politics. Kauppi finds that Bourdieu's structural constructivism provides important theoretical tools for a critical analysis of European integration.

Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of political capital and political field, Kauppi presents some key studies illustrating how aspects of Bourdieu's sociology of politics are being used to generate useful research of European integration. The European Union is currently a transnational political field in formation. Kauppi observes that at this stage of its development this new political entity is taking on some of the functions of the nation-state but is slow to develop a European civil society and effective democracy.

As Kauppi points out, Bourdieu never studied the European Union but sharply condemned the neoliberal form it has been taking in recent years. Indeed, by the late 1990s, Bourdieu had become the leading public intellectual of social scientific stature at the head of the anti-globalization movement in France and in other Western European countries.

A second article on Bourdieu and politics, by Swartz, examines Bourdieu's political activism as a committed social scientist. "From critical sociology to public intellectual: Pierre Bourdieu and politics" situates Bourdieu's political activism in his last years relative to his professional career and the changing character of the French intellectual field in relationship to politics and the mass media. It argues that Bourdieu's movement from a peripheral position to a central location in the French intellectual field, the transformation of the field itself by the growing influence of the mass media, the failures of the French Socialists in power, and the emergence of globalization as a unifying national issue all combined to open for Bourdieu a public intellectual role to play that had not been possible in his earlier years.

These ten articles offer but a glimpse of the many ways Bourdieu's work has inspired new research and critical reflection. Their publication here should further that inspiration.

12. Patrick Champagne, *Faire l'opinion: le nouveau jeu politique* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1990).
13. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

