Bourdieu, The Master

Tony Bennett, Mike Savage, Elizabeth Silva, Alan Warde, Modesto Gayo-Cal, and **David Wright,** *Culture, Class, Distinction*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009, 311 pp. $US 55.95 paperback (978-0-415-56077-1), $US 153.00, hardcover (978-0-415-42242-0)

Elizabeth Silva and **Alan Warde,** editors, *Cultural Analysis and Bourdieu's Legacy: Settling Accounts and Developing Alternatives*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010, 182 pp. $US 42.95, paperback (978-0-415-53414-7), $US 138.00, hardcover (978-0-415-49535-6)

Simon Susen and **Bryan S. Turner,** *The Legacy of Pierre Bourdieu: Critical Essays*, London: Anthem Press, 2011, xxix + 439 pp. $US 130, hardcover (9780857287687)

These volumes are ample evidence — 41 authors, writing over 900 pages — of the continuing influence of Pierre Bourdieu a decade after his death in 2002. I believe Bourdieu is as great a sociologist as ever lived. His biographical situation positioned him to produce what is arguably the most compelling culmination of the social science tradition that begins with Marx. But Bourdieu's work may endure mostly because his limitations create openings: the gaps, assumptions, and even biases in his writing incite controversy, attempts at revision, on-going searches for updated empirical application reflecting local contingencies, and as the title of Elizabeth Silva and Alan Warde's volume puts it, alternatives. The final section of Michele Lamont's chapter in Silva and Warde poses the question: "Bourdieu, good to think with?" (p. 138). The affirmative response is evident in the consistent fascination and remarkable variation of these books' engagements with Bourdieu.

The Case for Bourdieu

Let me count six ways in which Bourdieu seized the possibilities of his temporal and spatial place in the social scientific tradition; specifically, his place in the field of sociology. Bourdieu was not what he would have called an inheritor of academic capital, but he was distinctly positioned to be able to generate capital, and he utilized his position, or positionings, to maximum advantage.

First, Bourdieu did not think in terms of "convergence" that Talcott Parsons sets as the goal of theory in his classic *The Structure of Social Action* (1937). Yet Bourdieu's writing is always a dialogue with Marx, Durkheim, and Weber especially, and as the chapters in Simon Susen and Bryan Turner's collection show, many other theorists as well. Bourdieu's never-completed graduate studies were in philosophy. He was self-taught as an ethnographer, and as far as I can determine from the text he insisted is not an autobiography — *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* (published posthumously in 2007) — he learned sociological theory primarily by teaching it. In the volumes being reviewed, the sole moment when Bourdieu speaks for himself other than in short quotations is in Susen's translation of a 1999 interview originally published in German. Here Bourdieu recalls when he first taught Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. His writing never ceased to juxtapose and adapt their ideas.

Second, Bourdieu's theoretical dialogue proceeds in relation to a sequence of research projects that have their apex in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, published in English in 1984. *Distinction* represented an ambitious attempt to survey the relationship between cultural taste and class position in France. It provides the model for the equally ambitious research of Tony Bennett and his colleagues to determine how well Bourdieu's findings apply, decades later, in the United Kingdom, and more about that below. What matters here is that Bourdieu's career balance between theory and research is — always arguably — unmatched, and the books under review reflect that balance, situating Bourdieu's concepts in relation to other theories and collecting new data to test his research questions.

Third, as Bourdieu himself emphasized, he entered the academic field at a particular time, in a particular place. I believe he was lucky to be French, in at least two respects. First and negatively, he avoided becoming caught up in debates over Parsonian functionalism. As particularly Jeffrey Alexander (1987) has shown in his discussion of later mid-century American sociology, Parsons was good to think around and against, but I would add, too much thought became bogged down in Parsons. Bourdieu could draw upon the best work written in reaction to Par-

sons, especially Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, without excessive diversion into the politics of the American academic field. Second and positively, Bourdieu came to maturity when French academic life was dominated by the tension between Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralism and Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist phenomenology. What he did inherit was a problem that would require his most creative thinking, accountable to and supported by his endless research. If Bourdieu seeks any convergence, it is between structuralist objectivity and phenomenological subjectivity.

Fourth, Bourdieu's work is enlivened by his own dispositions, well described by Andrew Sayer, in Silva and Warde, as: "his Hobbesian, interest- and power-based model of social life, and his adoption of a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that is reluctant to acknowledge disinterested action" (p. 95). Yves Sintomer, in Susen and Turner, makes the same point: "Bourdieu recognized that not taking into account non-agonistic relations might constitute a real problem, but he relativized their place within social reality. For him, these relations are exceptional … Bourdieu adds that non-distorted communication, in the Habermasian sense, can only be attained in altogether extraordinary circumstances" (p. 340). That view of the world is particular. Great sociology, I argue, depends on the systematic development of a worldview so particular that it hangs on the perilous edge of being eccentric; Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel are obvious examples, but so are theorists as diverse as Stuart Hall and Talcott Parsons. Great theory disciplines the personal particularity of what Bourdieu liked to call *vision and division* (see Susen and Turner, p. 36): what the theoretical vision foregrounds and how what is seen is put into categories of relative importance.

Fifth, Bourdieu developed a finite set of concepts — primarily habitus, field, and capital, and secondarily terms like *illusio* — that he endlessly revised. The proliferation of redefinitions is at the core why, in response to Lamont's question, Bourdieu is good to think with. None of Bourdieu's concepts prescribes a way of understanding; nothing is ever settled by these concepts. Instead, each represents an open dialogue that Bourdieu has with himself, with his immediate circle of collaborators and colleagues, and finally with us, his readers. Bourdieu's concepts *invite* revised understandings, and as I will show below, the books under review are filled with responses to that invitation.

Bourdieu could not have been more emphatic that his research, and what we can call his theories, came out of particular times and places: the end of colonialism in Algeria, the demise of isolated agricultural communities in southern France, the dominance of philosophy in the French academic field during the 1950s and at the end of Bourdieu's life,

globalization and the ascendency of neoliberalism. He invites his readers to use his responses to these specific moments and craft their own responses to their own moment. The genius of Bourdieu's concepts is to provide a vocabulary that directs the researcher's gaze but remains open to new specification — even requires new specification — reflecting local circumstances.

Finally, Bourdieu is constantly panning back the camera, enlarging the frame of what research and theory need to consider. No other sociologist required such sustained attention to how the assumptions of academic life affect scholarly claims about how people live. Sociologists not only study the habitus; their observations and careers reflect their own habitus. Sociology is another game that players either have or lack the feel for.[1]

Bourdieu was hardly the first to write about "reflexive sociology," but he may have done so most consistently and convincingly. Here is my final reason for loving Bourdieu: no other sociologist, even Goffman, teaches me as much about my own life: how my position in different fields gave me possibilities to accrue capital and which games I could not take seriously (Frank 2012). That is not to say that Bourdieu's ideas are all I need; I agree with Sayer's and Sintomer's complementary critiques of Bourdieu's neglect of altruistic, ethical relationships.

But I would turn that limitation of Bourdieu into praise. In one of the most usefully intelligent lines in these volumes, Michael Grenfell, who has written a fine intellectual biography of Bourdieu (Grenfell 2004), writes that "there is much that Bourdieu did not do." Nevertheless, Grenfell refuses "the sort of discussion" that "aims to show what Bourdieu 'fails,' 'avoids,' 'ignores,' 'sidesteps,' 'overlooks' to do." Demonstrating a commitment to reflexive analysis, Grenfell notes that: "Bourdieu's ideas are themselves now part of an academic struggle, which inherently carries the *interests* of those expressing them" (Silva and Warde, p. 14). When I think with Bourdieu, personally and professionally, I am brought up against my own interests, often uncomfortably. He requires that of me. Many sociologists inform me; Bourdieu is one of the few who de-

1. Keijo Rahkonen, in his chapter in Susen and Turner, supports this understanding, quoting Bourdieu's reply to those who asked about his own taste in art or music: "I reply, quite seriously: those [tastes] that correspond to my place in the classification" (125; cf. 131). Yet Bourdieu's stance on sociology seems more complicated: "Bourdieu appears to believe in the possibility of a disinterested sociology, situated neither beyond good and evil nor beyond truth and untruth" (132). Rahkonen's source for the latter statement is personal communication from Bourdieu and the statement is consistent with claims Bourdieu made for science. An issue discussed throughout both anthologies is Bourdieu's need to claim provisional autonomy for both art and science as disinterested fields.

mands of me. More than being good to think with, I find him good to live with.

Rethinking Bourdieu

Having addressed why Bourdieu is worth the labour of writing and reading these three books, here is a sketch of what each volume contributes, reflecting my own principles of vision and division. Both Bennett et al. and Silva and Warde are published in Routledge's "Culture, economy, and the social" series, with funding from the ERSC Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change. Bennett et al. report the major research project of the ERSC grant. The Silva and Warde chapters (at least most of them) were presented at a final symposium partially funded by the same grant, but only a couple of authors make reference to the research project of Bennett et al. Susen and Turner's collection acknowledges no funding and seems to have been purely the editors' labour of academic affection, made more affectionate by some lovely portrait photos of Bourdieu. The perfunctory review comment about the books' prices making them inaccessible to most individuals unfortunately applies. Many readers, limited by library loan periods, will read only selected chapters, which is unfortunate. Reading these books as a whole is an extraordinary voyage into Anglo-European social theory and research.

The distinctive contribution of Susen and Turner's collection is that half of its chapters discuss Bourdieu in relation to another theorist: two chapters are on Bourdieu and Marx (Bridget Fowler and Bruno Karsenti), and other chapters consider his relation to Durkheim (Loïc Wacquant), Weber (the interview with Bourdieu, mentioned earlier), Nietzsche (Keijo Rahkonen), Norbert Elias (Bowen Paulle, Bart van Heerikhuizen, and Mustafa Emirbayer — my favorite chapter in the book because this connection is so crucial and often minimized), T.W. Adorno (Susen), and the sole contemporary, Axel Honneth (Mauro Basaure). This core of eight chapters is well introduced by Hans Jonas and Wolfgang Knöbl's extraordinarily complete and lucid overview of Bourdieu's theory. The remaining six chapters are diffuse: Turner considers implications of Bourdieu's ideas for sociology of religion; Bruno Frère and Hans-Herbert Kögler consider habitus from phenomenological and linguistic perspectives, respectively; Derek Robbins places Bourdieu in his intellectual milieu, especially his relationships with Raymond Aron and Jean-Claude Passeron; Sintomer uses Bourdieu's ideas to develop what he calls a "*Realpolitik of reason*"; and finally, Lisa Adkins explores how Bourdieu can help to understand economic crisis, emphasizing his

fascination with the temporality of action, an interest going back to the dissertation Bourdieu planned but never wrote on Husserl's phenomenology of time consciousness.

The title of Silva and Warde's collection, *Cultural Analysis*, reflects one of several meanings signified by *culture* in Bourdieu's writing. *The Field of Cultural Production* and *The Rules of Art* receive only two index entries each (one of which is a shared mention in the editors' introduction; for discussion of culture as analyzed in these books, see the chapters by Joas and Knöbl, Fowler, and Wacquant in Susan and Turner). *The Weight of the World* has seven entries and *Distinction* has eleven, some for several pages, plus a separate index entry for "social distinction." Silva and Warde's rambling, inclusive subtitle suggests the book's lack of any distinctive theme. But the absence of a unifying project is hardly a criticism of this excellent collection. The chapters are filled with new understandings and perspectives, each reflecting the author's particular interests. To sample the book's diversity: Rick Fantasia writes the best, short empirical demonstration of the utility of Bourdieu's concept of field that I have read, using French gastronomy as an example. David Swartz reviews Bourdieu's political sociology, rendering cohesive his diverse writing on power and unpacking his complex understanding of science and its relation to political intervention. And in yet another direction, Andrew Sayer writes about Bourdieu's apparent neglect of people's ethical and emotional values. Again, these examples only indicate the diversity of interests among the authors.

Unable as I am to offer any cohesive summary of the 28 chapters in the two anthologies, let me highlight a few quotations that support my earlier claim that Bourdieu's concepts invite restatements that lead us to observe differently. Habitus, field, and capital have been defined multiple times already and will be again, but consider how the following restatements redirect each concept:

On *habitus*: "Bourdieu puts power at the heart of the functioning and the structure of habitus, since habitus involves an unconscious calculation of what is possible, impossible, and probable for people in their specific locations in the stratified social order" (Swartz in Silva and Warde, p. 48). "From [Bourdieu's] early concept of Quixotism [from Don Quixote] … he retains a more general type: that of a *fractured habitus (habitus clivé)*. It is this fractured or cleft habitus that leads its bearers to become subversive, capable of artistic and intellectual, or even social, revolutions. Hence, the significance of the fact that Manet, for example, had a subversive habitus, in which his dispositions were in 'dynamic friction' with his position in the field that he had entered" (Fowler in Susan and Turner, p. 47; original emphases).

On *field*: "A field may represent a market for whatever forms of capital social agents in that field happen to possess or bring to it, or otherwise be in a position to benefit from. Cultural fields exert a force upon those who enter them, and represent sites of contestation between those with a stake in preserving the existing arrangements [of which forms of capital have what markets value] and those predisposed to transform them" (Fantasia in Silva and Warde, p. 42). "As [Scott] Lash puts it, Bourdieu's 'fields' are not filled with structures, agents, discourses, subjects, or objects, but rather comprise habits, unconscious and bodily practices, and 'categories of the unthought'" (Rahkonen in Susen and Turner, p. 130).

On *capital*: "This concept of capital owes its existence to the following problem. Bourdieu must explain which goods the actors in the various fields struggle over, that is, what they are trying to achieve in deploying their various action strategies.… *His concern is to bring out how social struggles are about more than just financial utility and economic capital"* (Joas and Knöbl in Susan and Turner, p. 15; original emphases). Contrasted with: "If we are to understand lay normativity and lay ethical being, we therefore need to get beyond the overwhelmingly self-interested and strategic model of action that is implicit in Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capitals. The concept of capitals reduces the use-value of things or the internal goods of practices to their exchange-value or external goods" (Sayer in Silva and Warde, p. 96). I agree with Sayer as to Bourdieu's predominant emphasis on struggle, a word emphasized by Joas and Knöbl. But I also understand the concept of capital, as presented by Joas and Knöbl, to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate at least some, if not all, of Sayer's criticism — Bourdieu did not go that far, but he leaves it open. Humans do compete for capital and, often in the same activity, they work to achieve mutual understandings and excellence in particular practices for their inherent value. Normativity, as Sayer calls, it, can be fully understood only against the background of struggle, and vice versa.[2]

Bourdieusian Research

In contrast to the two anthologies' emphasis on Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus, Tony Bennett and his colleagues undertook a sustained re-

2. Bioethics provides a useful example. Attempts to mediate disputes defined as "ethics" problems would do well to consider, more than bioethicists generally do, that medicine is a field marked by distinctive forms of capital and struggles for distinction, and patients' families also are fields with their capital and struggles for position. Success in achieving mutual understanding — doing clinical ethics as a practice — depends on recognizing how these struggles generated what count as cases in the first place (see Frank 2002).

search project modeled on *Distinction*. Through interviews and focus groups, they studied the distribution of cultural tastes in the United Kingdom. Their research questions begin with the obvious: "Do the connections that Bourdieu found between class and culture in 1960s' France pertain here? Does cultural competence confer power in the same way in Britain?" Eventually, their investigation opens the larger question of what the concept of class means today: "As the vocabularies of class have lost much of their purchase in both public and political life, have other types of social division — gender, ethnicity, age — assumed greater significance in relation to differences in cultural tastes and practices?" (p. 1)

The authors follow Bourdieu's emphasis on the relational nature of ascribed cultural value: "his contention that cultural practices derive their meaning and significance not from their intrinsic qualities but from the ways in which they are related to one another within different fields and the relationships that they have to different social positions within and across those fields" (p. 3). They differ from Bourdieu, and in my view usefully update his work, first by rejecting the idea that habitus is unified within classes, or even, I would add, that habitus defines what a class is: shared dispositions that are more or less effective for accruing capital in different fields. Bennett et al. understand habitus more expansively as: "more typically written across in complex and sometimes contradictory ways, depending on how class, gender, age and ethnicity interact in the processes of person formation" (p. 3). Second, they update the understanding of cultural capital, disaggregating it: "breaking it up into several different kinds of cultural assets, revealing the varied ways in which cultural resources are organized and mobilised across different kinds of social relations" (p. 3).

To grasp the research agenda of *Class, Culture, and Distinction* (CCD), it is useful to know that the chapter in the Silva and Warde collection co-authored by three of the CCD co-authors (Savage, Silva, and Warde) concerns what they calls "dis-identification" from social class. If that issue seems particularly British, it's fair to say that CCD is if anything less local a book today than *Distinction* was and remains. Many of the preference patterns that the authors identify — for example, that age matters significantly in cultural taste, and especially so in music (pp. 171–72) — would most likely be replicated in North America. Moreover, their concluding emphasis on the globalization of culture is a distinctly post-Bourdieusian contribution; national boundaries are no longer self-evident parameters for research, as habitus is less national for many people.

CCD's findings are organized in two sections. The first is by venue of taste: music, reading, visual art, mass media, and somewhat differently, the body (participation in sport, "adornment and care" [p. 160], "eating and cuisine" ([p. 164]). The other section addresses issues specific to the middle class, the working class, gender, and the boundary-crossing category of "nation, ethnicity, and globalisation." Specific findings are too numerous to review, so I pick what struck me most forcefully. Among those categorized as "working class," "the participation variables are negative: never visited museums, stately homes or art galleries; never going to the cinema; not playing sport; never attending the theatre or concerts; and not having read a book in the last year.… Positive preferences are few…" including mostly television watching. Finally, "The working class expresses more dislikes for the items we asked about than the other classes" (199). These findings replicate a crucial interview statement quoted from *Distinction*: "That's not for the likes of us" (p. 197).

CCD's findings, on my reading, support a primarily negative understanding of the role of cultural taste in class reproduction; that is, the "working class" exclude themselves through nonparticipation. That line of analysis has a potential for victim blaming, in which sociology itself becomes a source of symbolic violence, but the point is to demystify the sources of people's nonparticipation: what creates and reproduces a habitus of nonparticipation. That project is beyond the scope of CCD, and the complete picture is perhaps more complex than any book can represent. Yet if Bourdieu believed that his work could liberate people who were oppressed by a tyranny of taste,[3] I find it less clear how Bennett and his collaborators imagine their research demystifying and liberating. They may be more skeptical, based on realistic observation of how liberating Bourdieu's work has actually been in the decades since its publication.

To grasp the issues at stake in CCD's research, my recommendation is to begin by reading the book's concluding chapter (pp. 251–259). Here, the authors' theoretical sophistication is most evident, but it also underscores the limitation of the research methodology. In Bourdieu's writing, cultural capital is more than relational. Capital does its work

3. Sintomer opens his chapter: "In the French edition of *The Weight of the World*, Bourdieu contends that the goal of his critical sociology is to 'open up possibilities for rational action to unmake or remake what history has made'" (in Susen and Turner, p. 329). What history has made includes canons of taste, which are never more than relational and always are part of power games within fields. See also Swartz's acute observation: "But Bourdieu is banking on … [the possibility] that when prevailing power mechanisms are exposed, they will lose their efficacy to the benefit of those subordinate individuals and groups who have access to and are able to use this knowledge" (in Silva and Warde, p. 51).

— it comes into play — in interactions. Capital and habitus — intimately related as they are — create terms of recognition between persons. Those recognitions morph into subtle and sometimes not so subtle preferences for particular others and sponsorships of their careers, and the corresponding capacity to accept sponsorship and see the value of the relationship.

Capital always requires *conversion*, and as Bennett et al. write: "Conversion requires a public performance in front of others who will accord value, and subsequently personal reputation, on the basis of the display" (p. 256). CCD's research finds that performances of cultural value are governed by rules that "operate more as negatives.… Do not fail to modulate performances in the light of specific audiences.… Do not specialise too much or become enthralled by subcultural capital. Do not assume that the same cultural forms will retain their value for ever" (p. 256).

These rules — much as they sound like Polonius in an updated *Hamlet* — show the considerable distance between the world of *Distinction* and contemporary Britain. In 1960s France as depicted in *Distinction,* cultural value was relational, but there was also a hierarchy of value backed by considerable institutional consensus, as the education system reinforced and was reinforced by museums, literary criticism, and prizes, who performed what music in which halls, and so forth. In CCD's contemporary Britain, personal recognition as being cultured depends less on displaying familiarity with any specific content; a recurring theme is being a "cultural omnivore" (16 index entries). Instead, as the authors summarize it so very well: "The performance of distinction is complex theatre" (p. 256), a statement that deserves to be the epigraph of another study. Multiple forms of cultural competence and taste can be mobilized as capital; again, only cultural nonparticipation is inherently limiting.

Bennett et al.'s observation of distinction as "complex theatre" marks an inherent limitation of CCD as research. The data are from interviews and focus groups, neither of which provides much opportunity to observe the interactional work of performing distinction. With actual performances of the "complex theatre" left unobserved, the authors have to infer more than they can actually show. As they acknowledge: "A more elaborate and better specified analysis of capitals, or assets, is required to account for the diverse ways that cultural practice delivers profits to individuals and groups" (p. 259). That is the research that CCD leaves the reader dreaming of.

More research is always desirable, but any limitations of *Culture, Class, and Distinction* only mirror the limitations of Bourdeiusian

thought.[4] What makes Bourdieu's writing so valuable is his imagination of the world's complexity. Imagining complexity militates against isolating variables and generating predictive propositions, although this seems to be the kind of social science Bourdieu wants, at least when he is drawing diagrams showing how forms of capital are distributed in social space. I note there are fewer diagrams as his work matures.

Ironic Characters and their Objects

The volume of scholarship contained in these three books, and the greater corpus of Bourdieu's writing that these books draw upon and presuppose, cannot be summarized or concluded. But to provide the sense of an ending, and suggest my own bias for how best to value Bourdieu, here is perhaps my favorite longer quotation from these books, taken from Antoine Hennion's chapter in Silva and Warde:

> Pierre Bourdieu's characters are resolutely tragic heroes. Prisoners of destiny in the form of perpetual chiasmus, they reproduce and distinguish between themselves because they do not recognize that they reproduce and distinguish between themselves. The rhetorical aspect of Bourdieu's theses has often been alluded to, as well as the immobility in which his model freezes people and society. This second remark is perhaps less accurate than the image of perpetual motion, which forbids stopping on objects. These are continually re-appropriated and redistributed by the social work of reproduction in distinction. (p. 123)

I question whether Bourdieu's heroes are tragic or if they are ironic; I believe it's the latter, especially when we remember, crucially, that Bourdieu's characters are capable of studying sociology. But I appreciate Hennion catching both the importance of Bourdieu's rhetoric (balancing his claims about scientific research) and, with more originality, focusing on "the image of perpetual motion" that Bourdieusian thinking incites.

Bourdieu's sociology is all about objects, whether bodies, museums, school uniforms and certificates, or Impressionist paintings: the objects of attachment or aversion through which habitus is expressed, objects that express taste and provide occasions for cultural judgment. Yet these objects are always slipping away, as Hennion says, reappropriated and redistributed in the unceasing work of seeking forms of distinction. Objects will not be tomorrow what they are today, and each already contains

4. The sociologist who shows the "complex theatre" of social life in its actual performances is Goffman, who expressed singular admiration for Bourdieu (personal communication). The research I would most like to see is a dramaturgical analysis of how capital, field, and habitus play out in interaction rituals.

an imagination of its possible futures, if we knew how to see that. Bourdieu himself is perpetually slipping away, as what he says here is always open to reinterpretation based on what he says there, and each observation asks to be updated by future research. Like all masters, Bourdieu leaves us wondering not only what else he might have meant, but what else he might mean to us.

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