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Bourdieu, Pierre (1930-2002)

His work was always concerned with the relationship between the ordinary behaviour of people in **everyday life** and the discourses constructed by social scientists to explain that behaviour. He made important contributions to the **philosophy of the social sciences** but he insisted that these were meant to be practically useful rather than abstract. Methodologically, he argued for a dialectic between theory and practice, claiming that too often **social theory** was divorced from social enquiry and, equally, that too much empirical research proceeded as if it were possible to operate a-theoretically. The titles of some of his texts are indicative of this orientation: *The Craft of Sociology* (with J.-C. Passeron & J.-C. Chamboredon, 1968 [1991]); *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972 [1977]); *The Logic of Practice*, (1980 [1990]); and *Practical Reason. On the Theory of Action*, (1994 [1998]).

Born in South-West of France, Bourdieu studied, 1950-4, at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris. His early social trajectory embodied a tension between the indigenous cultural influences of his family (what he was to call **habitus**) and the culture which he needed to acquire (what he was to call cultural capital, allied to **social capital**) in order to communicate successfully in the **field** of Parisian intellectual exchange. As a student, he was influenced by **Phenomenology**, historians and philosophers of science, and **Maurice Merleau-Ponty**. He served as a conscript in the French Army in Algeria in the early years of the Algerian War of Independence (1956-8) before gaining a post as an assistant at the University of Algiers. He wrote three books in which he presented the findings of research carried out in Algeria. These showed evidence of the influence of **Claude Lévi-Strauss** but, on returning to France in 1961, he became secretary to the research group that had been established by **Raymond Aron**. He ceased to present himself as a social anthropologist and became initiated as a 'sociologist' in the 1960s, but he always retained the sense that scientific explanation, offered in whichever discourses, ran the risk of being conceptually colonialist in a way which was analogous with the French presence in North Africa. During the 1960s, he carried out research in relation to student life, their studies and culture. Working with J.-C. Passeron, this led to the publication of *The Inheritors* (1964 [1979]) and *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1970 [1977]). In the same decade, he also carried out research on cultural production and reception, leading to the publication of *Photography. A Middle-Brow Art* (1965 [1990]) and *The Love of Art. European Art Museums and their Public* (1966 [1990]). As a result of the translations into English of his educational research, he was at first primarily associated with the sociology of **education**, but the analyses of photography and art museums were the prelude to work on **aesthetics** and **taste** which was most clearly presented in his *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979 [1986]).

It was in the early 1970s that Bourdieu began to define his intellectual position most clearly. He revisited his Algerian fieldwork and reinterpreted it in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972 [1977]) The original French text offered a critique of the **structuralism** of his earliest articles whilst the English 'translation' modified the original in order to point towards the benefits of **poststructuralism**. Bourdieu outlined a working **epistemology** by suggesting that there should be three forms of theoretical knowledge. The primary form corresponds with the knowledge of their situations held unreflectingly by social agents. It could be said to be pre-logical or pre-predicative knowledge. This category is explicable in terms of the **ontology** of Martin Heidegger as well as of the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. It is the kind of taken-for-granted knowledge which **ethnomethodology** endeavoured to elicit. Following the historical epistemology of Gaston Bachelard, Bourdieu argued that scientific knowledge has to be deliberately differentiated from such primary knowledge. If primary knowledge is subjective, scientific knowledge is a form of constructed objectivism. It operates in accordance with rules

of explanation which are socially and historically contingent. So that contingent explanations should not be taken to be absolutely true, Bourdieu contended that there had to be a second 'epistemological break' whereby the conditions of production of objectivist structuralism should be subjected to a second-level sociological analysis. This was the origin of Bourdieu's commitment to 'reflexive sociology', outlined in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1992 [1992]). For Bourdieu, poststructuralism was not anti-structuralism. Poststructuralism was able systematically to derive benefit from the insights of both ethnomethodology and structuralism.

Bourdieu did not advocate an armchair reflexivity. By encouraging everyone to reflect on their own situations and to analyse the provenance of the conceptual framework within which they undertake that reflection, Bourdieu believed that he was encouraging a form of 'socio-analytic encounter' which would enable people to become equal, participating members of social democracies. After publishing his *Homo Academicus* (1984 [1988]) in which he analysed the social conditions of production of the field of Parisian higher education and of his own work within that field, Bourdieu began to deploy his accumulated 'cultural capital' within the political sphere. Responding tacitly to the work of **Louis Althusser**, Bourdieu analysed sociologically the construction of a 'state apparatus' in his *The State Nobility* (1989 [1996]) so as to encourage, in contrast, the emergence of new sources of political **power**, located in **social movements**. From the mid-1990s until his death, Bourdieu was an influential public figure in France and his disposition to favour the cause of the underprivileged gained for him a following in an international political context as well as in the field of international social science. His socio-analytical method and his political engagement were both demonstrated in the project which he directed that was published as *The Weight of the World. Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*. (1993 [1999]). To these last years belong engaged texts such as *Acts of Resistance* (1998 [1998]), but it was his last course of lectures as professor at the Collège de France, *Science de la science et réflexivité* (2003), which best represents the balance of his intellectual and social project. His work has been influential across a variety of sociological subjects irrespective of the canonical status of areas of research enquiry. His *Pascalian Meditations* (1997 [2000]), for example, contributed importantly to the sociology of the **body**.

1051 words.

Derek Robbins.