

MN4267 Seminar Two

What is the conceptual framework that Bourdieu offers? What are the main concepts that he proposes? How do they function?

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Bourdieu's conceptual framework:

- Four types of Capital, which is defined as those assets that are considered by a society as rare and worthy of being sought after. All four seem heavily power-based ie; in terms of what gives whom power.
 1. **Economic**
The traditional, monetary or physical kind.
 2. **Social**
That which enables a person to achieve via contacts, membership, relationships with others with power.
 3. **Cultural**
The education, skill, knowledge, breeding and attitudes of a person. Subtypes: Embodied (the inherited or acquired properties of a person), Objectified (physical representation invoking cultural meaning), Institutionalised (what some authoritative body has awarded you the title & grade thereof eg; a degree).
 4. **Symbolic**
That which enables a person or group to have authority through perceived honourability or prestige.
- **Habitus**
Technical name for those routine habits of a person which make that person distinct from others in terms of the culture or society in which they reside. Supposedly subjective.
- **Field**
A social arena in which people compete for access to or control of valuable resources. Seen as a hierarchical series of power relationships between social positions. Resources are mostly seen as forms of capital listed above. The field is constructed by the relational differences between its actors and ends where the power exerted by the field stops. Supposedly objective.
- **Symbolic violence**
When a holder of symbolic capital tries uses that power to influence others with less of that symbolic capital. It is the imposition of ways of thinking and understanding on others who, perceiving themselves as weaker, accept that it is just (or that there is no better way).

Supposedly, Bourdieu's framework is meant to be useful for analysing how & why culture is produced and consumed. I am afraid I don't get it – it seems to me highly counterproductive to its stated aims with its constant terming of absolutely everything in conflict and power – a highly neo-Darwinian & Neo-Classical Economic approach¹ which is clearly at the core of most, if not all, of our recent social & environmental ills. What's the point of that? That sort of mentality leads to wars, Communism and Fascism and utterly misses the whole role of creativity, God and Nature within our society. I certainly see absolutely no use of it whatsoever for gaining any kind of useful insight into any kind of industry, and I personally find its mentality unpleasant to let into my head.

¹ I am well aware that critics of Bourdieu have made this same point. They have over him, however, the benefit of hindsight.

The one useful thing I did observe is that the whole framework is itself an example of symbolic violence – here we are having this shoved down our throats as “education” in the nature of creative industries because the University, supposedly full of world class educators, have decided that it is so. Yet they are probably the most deluded of all those chained to the University – the students clearly recognise that they are here primarily for the **degree** (an example of “symbolic capital”) and secondarily for the contacts & networking (an example of “social capital”). The “education” (the “cultural capital”) is seen mostly as irrelevant, mainly because it **is** irrelevant – the vast majority of courses taught here are decades out of date, their lecturers utterly out of touch with reality, and most of the top students cynically jump through the University’s hoops like good little students, freely manipulating anyone they think will aide their path through lies, sedition and most especially getting their lecturers to think they are highly respected and wonderful academics, and true sources of inspiration to all. Some even cynically do this as they laugh at the academics’ gullibility and self-servingness with their friends down the pub, together all entirely on the same page. And **woe betide** anyone who mentions any of this publicly – it is neither in the interests of the lecturers, nor the students, for anyone to shine too bright a spotlight on this sham:- for deep down, both *want* this to be a degree factory, and we students *want* to parts on a fixed speed production line, happily being spoon fed our coursework².

I mention all of this because it seems to me that Bourdieu’s framework is far more useful as a source for a meta-framework which might actually go somewhere into understanding culture & creativity. Academia likes to hold non-academia at arm’s length, and in the “objective” analysis then quote one another approvingly in mutual mental masturbation as each vies with the other to output as many publications as possible annually with the least possible amount of new material. Academia most certainly *dislikes* penetrating analyses of itself because the ivory tower no longer seems so high nor so solid, and besides it exposes academia for the corrupt, self-serving, and in the most part parasitic, arrogance that it is. Bourdieu himself understood this – it was only due to his brilliance that he was not intellectually stoned for his treason, and for Anglo-American academia it particularly helped that he was French and therefore was automatically arm’s length by definition.

Bourdieu’s framework “functions” far, far better as an illustrative of pretention & arrogance in its commentators than its literal meaning. The copious academic papers taking the framework as meant literally, and criticising it in its own terms rather than calling the Emperor as naked, is a self-referential proof of the same framework – just as Machiavelli did in his *Il Principe*. I wonder if Bourdieu found that immensely funny – one has no other choice when proving one’s point by enticing people to make fools of themselves with sparkly baubles, and being both horrified and amazed that they so eagerly do.

“The most successful ideological effects are those which have no need for words, and ask no more than complicitous silence. It follows...that any analysis of ideologies, in the narrow sense of 'legitimizing discourses', which fails to include an analysis of the corresponding institutional mechanisms, is liable to be no more than a contribution to the efficacy of those ideologies.” – Pierre Bourdieu (Outline of a Theory of Practice p. 188)

Bibliography

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The Field of Cultural Production*. Polity Press.

Hesmondhalgh, D. (2006). 'Bourdieu, the media and cultural production'. *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 28, pp. 211-231.

² Witness the recent furore in this very module over the lack of provision of printed handouts containing the readings. This said, I personally have major issue that the main texts for this seminar & the essay questions are not digitally available – I do not have the spare time to be traipsing into the anachronism of a printed paper library to compete against everyone else for printed material when we live in a digital age which enables zero-cost dissemination of the same.