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Book Review “Focus On Pierre Bourdieu”

Elizabeth Silva and Alan Warde (eds.), *Cultural Analysis and Bourdieu’s Legacy. Settling Accounts and Developing Alternatives*. London: Routledge, 2010, 208 pp.

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Whereas Bourdieu published his first books at the end of the 1950s, his work had limited impact internationally (at least in the Anglo-Saxon world) until the 1990s. Over the last 25 years, his influence has greatly increased and a growing number of papers and books have discussed his theory and his findings. *Cultural Analysis and Bourdieu’s Legacy* bears witness to this growing interest for Bourdieu. This collection of essays is devoted to the French sociologist’s legacy, especially in the field of sociology of culture. It was edited by Elisabeth Silva and Alan Warde who begin their introduction by pointing out that “Pierre Bourdieu was probably the most eminent sociologist of the final quarter of the twentieth century in the world [but] also probably the most controversial.” It is worth noticing that the book is part of an ambitious British research project questioning the relevance of the framework used by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction*, particularly about the role played by cultural capital in social differentiation, to Great Britain in the 2000s. Alongside numerous articles, a collective book, *Culture, Class, Distinction* [Routledge 2009] has been the result of this research. In the same vein, *Cultural Analysis and Bourdieu’s Legacy* aims to show not only the fecundity of Bourdieu’s concepts and findings, but also some of its limits. Several contributors, including the editors, participated in the British research project on the relationship between cultural practices and social stratification. The other contributors are British, American or French sociologists. They were chosen to illustrate different approaches to cultural analysis using Bourdieu’s framework. Elisabeth Silva and Alan Warde distinguish four positions taken by the contributors: a defense of Bourdieu’s legacy, a partial appropriation, a plea for critical revisions and “repudiation.” The core of the book consists in nine chapters that are ordered according to the extent of disagreement concerning Bourdieu’s analysis and sociology.

The first three chapters are certainly the ones which most highlight the fruitfulness of Bourdieu’s tools. They were written by English-speaking sociologists who studied in France while Bourdieu was alive, some in Bourdieu’s research center (*Centre de Sociologie Européenne*). Distancing himself from any “orthodoxy,” Michael Grenfell highlights some aspects of Bourdieu’s sociology that seem very important to him, such as the relational approach, and responds to some criticism often raised by Bourdieu’s works. He also denounces some “misuses” of Bourdieu and sketches a typology of the “critical strategies” often employed by social researchers against Bourdieu, for instance the strategy which consists in laying “false accusations.” Rick Fantasia defends Bourdieu’s legacy in a different way: he presents the main findings of his empirical research on gastronomy to show by way of example how Bourdieu’s concepts and methods can be applied to a new object. Using Bourdieu’s field theory, he explains the conquest of autonomy by French gastronomy at the end of the nineteenth century, then the contemporary erosion of this autonomy. David Swartz, who wrote and edited several books on Bourdieu, notices that, outside France, political sociology and political science miss the wealth of

Bourdieu's analyses. Yet, Bourdieu's sociology encompasses a rich and seminal study of power. More generally, David Swartz suggests "a reading of Bourdieu as a political sociologist who offers both a sociology of politics and a politics of sociology." He evokes the political engagements of Bourdieu (and its different forms at different stages of his life) and shows the relationship between his political sociology and his political engagements.

The next four chapters are more critical towards some concepts of Bourdieu. In their article, Mike Savage, Elisabeth Silva and Alan Warde explain that Bourdieu developed subtle tools to study social stratification but that, perhaps because he was eager to break with sociological orthodoxy, he never recognized class-identity as a relevant problem. This issue turns out to be strategic today in Great Britain, as in other countries: inequalities between classes remain fundamental, but class consciousness and awareness seem to decrease. The criticism is supported by the survey that replicated *Distinction* in the United Kingdom, but also by researches (as those by Beverley Skeggs) that claim to pay more attention than Bourdieu to the means by which people talk (in focus groups and interviews) about social classes. Diane Reay, another British sociologist, discusses the concept of habitus by studying situations characterized by the disjuncture between habitus and field. She compares middle-class children who are in mixed-race schools and working-class students who study in elite universities. She shows that the former cope with the difficulty of their situation by reinforcing their white middle-class habitus, whereas the latter refashion their dispositions and sometimes appreciate their experience. She concludes that the notion of habitus is more useful to understand middle-class students than working-class students. The essay by Andrew Sayer is also focused on the concept of habitus, but in a more theoretical way. Andrew Sayer considers that *Distinction* provides many resources for understanding aesthetic valuations but does not take seriously enough some issues: ethical dispositions, individual reflexivity, emotions and human vulnerability, disinterested actions. He calls for a more Aristotelian approach to habitus. Tony Bennett, in his turn, contrasts Bourdieu with Foucault with respect to the relations between culture and society. He draws parallels between the two thinkers and their concepts: distinction and governance, "space of possibles" and "field of strategic possibilities." He thinks that the two frameworks can be mobilized in a complementary fashion but he tends to consider that Foucault's concepts are more powerful and he sketches a Foucauldian analysis of the concept of cultural capital: "cultural capital theory can be situated historically in the space of a specific form of cultural governmentality."

Two chapters are even more critical. First, a French sociologist, Antoine Hennion, focuses on the "rhetorical component of Bourdieu's works." For him, science cannot be pure and implies "theoretical theatricality." He compares Bourdieu to a producer of popular music or to a director who "reveals" the social structures, before being applauded by an audience. Second, Michèle Lamont sketches an autobiographical evocation of her "complex relationship" with Bourdieu. She studied sociology in France where she personally met Bourdieu, but preferred to work in the United States. She evokes other sociologists that have also influenced her, and her later works, including *Money, Morals and Manners* which discusses *Distinction*.

The three final chapters tend to comment on the first nine contributions. Frederic Lebaron, a French scholar who was trained in Bourdieu's research group, praises Rick

Fantasia but expresses some reservations about the articles by the other English and American contributors. According to him, the latter sometimes misunderstand Bourdieu because they tend to develop interpretations of Bourdieu which are only relevant to the British (or North-American) contemporary context, that is quite different from the one in which Bourdieu wrote. He also notices that the contributors often revive the classical philosophical dualisms (freedom/determinism, subjectivism/objectivism) that Bourdieu, very precisely, wanted to avoid. According to him, implementing the tools of Bourdieu in new empirical fieldworks is more fruitful and useful than theoretical discussions. By contrast, Fiona Devine explains that she is not “a Bourdieu scholar.” While considering that the significance of Bourdieu’s work is beyond question, she thinks it is important to critically engage with Bourdieu’s theory and to refine his main concepts. In fact, she shares several arguments that are developed by the other British sociologists contributing to the book, especially with regard to the concept of habitus. The last essay is an “epilogue” that was written by the editors of the volume. Elizabeth Silva and Alan Warde consider that Bourdieu provides a very fruitful point of departure from which to undertake empirical analyses, but that his framework needs to be more or less widely modified, in order to take into account social changes, new issues and also topics that Bourdieu ignored or little-studied. They call for a debate that would be based upon empirical researches and they recall very aptly that Bourdieu himself never considered his sociological framework as “dogmatic.” On the contrary, he wished his work to be discussed and knew perfectly well that his theory, as any scientific work, was bound to be overcome in the future.

This collection of essays, which illustrates a wide range of opinion concerning Bourdieu’s work, is very interesting. The editors stress that until recently this work was mainly discussed in France, where Bourdieu was also a media personality, a fact which interfered with the scientific discussion of his work. They also highlight that, outside France, Bourdieu is now better-known and that he is also taken more seriously than he used to. Their book shows very concretely and convincingly that a more international and a more strictly scientific discussion is now possible. Nevertheless, the editors may underestimate slightly the pitfalls that are to be overcome. Given the wide array of positions about Bourdieu expressed in the book, all readers will be able to find very stimulating ideas. But the contributions are also rather contradictory. As Frédéric Lebaron points out, some contributions seem to use the “critical” (and questionable) strategies that Michael Grenfell denounces and to develop arguments that Bourdieu could not accept because they misunderstood his work. The contributors who plead for a reassessment of Bourdieu’s tools often highlight new issues and social changes. But they run the risk of overestimating the significance of the changes and, conversely, of underestimating the “plasticity” of Bourdieu’s tools. For instance, Bourdieu’s framework provides more means than Andrew Sayer gives him credit for in order to take into account emotions.

Bourdieu has written a great number of books and papers. His theory is highly elaborated and based upon a wide knowledge of the social sciences, epistemology and philosophy. For these reasons, it is difficult to master his work and to raise issues that he did not anticipate. Some essays in this book therefore appear to be superficially critical. Although it has the merit of acknowledging the significance of Bourdieu’s work, it may only be a first step towards a truly scientific discussion. Judging by some expressions that they use (“a devotee of Pierre Bourdieu,” for instance), the contributors show that the

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discussion sometimes still obeys a religious or a political (rather than a strictly scientific) logic.

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