

The Study of Leisure in Britain: Theory and Methods in Bourdieu and Bennett

Dr David Harris

Emeritus Professor University SS Mark and John

<http://www.arasite.org/>

Abstract

A recent study of modern leisure patterns in Britain (Bennett et al. 2008) set out to test the relevance of Bourdieu's seminal work on leisure, taste and social reproduction (especially Bourdieu, 1986). The substantive findings show that each of the main stratifying variables (class, gender, ethnicity and age) affect different areas of leisure in distinctive and separate ways, and critical implications follow for Bourdieu's key concepts: field, habitus, symbolic capital, distanciation.

However, Bennett et al. have also raised some methodological controversies. For example, they followed Bourdieu in using multiple correspondence analysis instead of the more usual multivariate analysis to map relations by searching for statistical dependence. However, conclusions from their research are not used systematically to test some important theoretical models as Bourdieu does. Bennett et al. avoid or reject rather than testing notions of symbolic violence and social reproduction, for example, possibly from a (theoretical) commitment to complexity.

Bennett et al. also used conventional ethnographic approaches (and focus groups) in gathering subjective data. This is also a departure from Bourdieu who has offered a number of methodological and political objections to conventional ethnography (and other kinds of subjectivist research). He sees ethnography as offering symbolic violence to the accounts of participants, and recommends a new approach – 'understanding'. Again, this is to be informed by social theory not just 'the data' as they allegedly emerge.

Implications of this discussion for understanding leisure and its sociological dimensions are discussed. A particular dimension, central to Bourdieu's work, is the role of the education system acting as a 'relay' between leisure pursuits and social stratification and this particularly needs to be restored to the Bennett study.

Keywords: higher education, sociology of leisure, symbolic violence, social reproduction

Introduction

Bourdieu is one of the few major social theorists who have also undertaken some extensive empirical work, covering anthropology, sociology of education, the sociology of leisure, and the sociology of everyday life, with occasional essays on literature and religion (see Nice's *Translator's Note* in Bourdieu and Passeron 1990 for a comprehensive list). The substantive work has been extensively discussed, but methodological issues have not usually been highlighted, probably because they are so tightly linked to theoretical considerations. The data are often derived from

official surveys and questionnaires, from specially commissioned surveys and questionnaires, and from ethnographic studies.

Methodological discussions are common throughout Bourdieu's work as he discusses concepts such as *habitus* (a system of classifications and predispositions that are acquired in early childhood); cultural capital (a stock of cultural goods and knowhow that can be used in economic activity); or symbolic violence (a common form of cultural and political domination which insists that one arbitrary system of classifications must prevail). Thus, for example, he discusses ethnomethodological and functionalist approaches to the construction of orderly ways of communicating, but then insists that they lack a necessary political dimension (for example Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, or Bourdieu 2000a). In some of the work on education, Bourdieu himself (Bourdieu 1988), and one of his associates (Baudelot, in Bourdieu et al. 1994) have analysed written materials as well, including student essays and the comments made upon them by lecturers.

Empirical data can actually play a substantial part in demonstrating and testing the arguments in question and thus avoid a total dependence on theory, then common in accounts of contemporaries such as Althusser, as Bourdieu argues explicitly (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). In the major book on leisure (Bourdieu, 1986), there is a substantial survey of cultural likes and dislikes among the French population, and those data support the view that there are two primary sets of 'aesthetics', related to social class.

Quantitative work

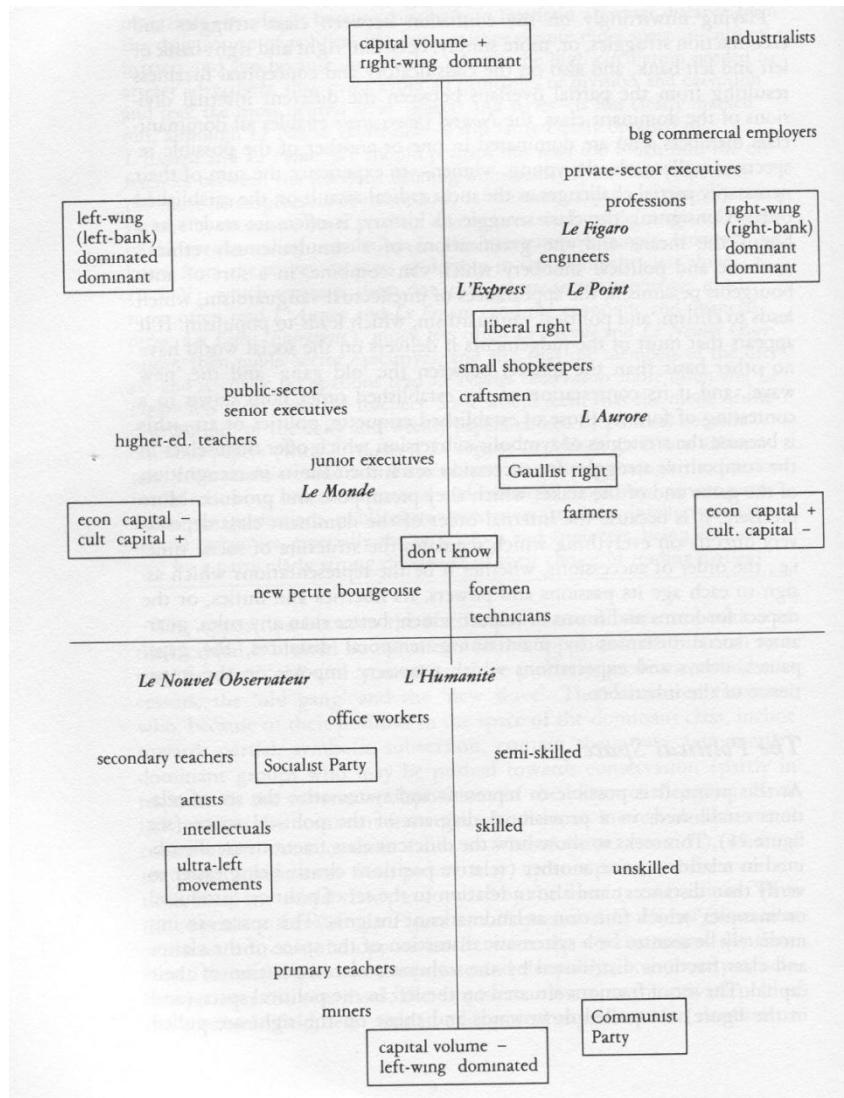
In a recent attempt to replicate Bourdieu's 1986 work on tastes, and also apply it to modern Britain, Bennett et al. (2008) followed Bourdieu's particular approach to the quantitative analysis of survey and other data. This is multiple correspondence analysis, further outlined in Bourdieu (1988: 69–72) and elsewhere, and it is used to produce the variety of graphs and displays , including the striking maps and diagrams for which Bourdieu's work is famous. Briefly, the technique assumes the random distribution of responses and then plots deviations. These are represented visually in 'factorial planes', which represent the weight of correspondences according to their distance from chi-square values (relations between observed and expected, random, scores). Positive deviations show more frequent relations between categories than expected, negative ones show an inverse relation, and there are zero deviations as well.

The visual maps show positive deviations as 'conjunctions of the points', that is clustering. In some cases, such as the position of individuals in a field, the conjunction can be total so that two empirical

individuals can be represented as one abstract one. The associations are stronger if these points are close to the axes of the graphs and far from the centre point. Negative deviations translate as spatial oppositions and distance, and are important especially if they are located away from both axes and the centre. Random distributions are shown as at a 'right angle', equidistant from the axes and the centre. Points displayed in the centre of the diagram are not strongly associated.

Bourdieu (1988: 71) tells us that the diagrams are the equivalent to tables of approximations. The first axis is the best possible approximation to the data and the way it is patterned , the second one the best correction to the first approximation. In sociological terms, the first axis represents the stronger structure, and then progressively weaker ones are added until we are left with 'uninterpretable irregularities' (1988: 71).

One of the simplest examples shows the 'political space' (Bourdieu 1984: 452). More complex diagrams overlap different distributions, showing their interrelations and the overall complexity of the cultural space:



Bennett et al (2008) followed this approach initially to demonstrate multiple correspondences between sets of data on tastes and preferences in body maintenance, music, sport, reading material, and choices of television watching. Sociodemographic variables (social class, age, gender and ethnicity) were then correlated with these patterns of leisure activity. Bennett et al. remind us of the novelty of the approach in modern conventional British work. Usually, variables are first identified as either dependent or independent, and the analysis proceeds to demonstrate connections between them, often invoking a causal approach.

Bennett et al. (2008) claim particular advantages of analysing data in this way. The clustering can indicate both how particular tastes occur together, and how particular individuals can be located in the clusters. The mapping exercise between variables can then be supplemented by qualitative data gathered from interviews with individuals, offering an interesting combination of statistical and

subjective analysis. The subjective data can be used to test the social relevance of the correspondences in actual social life.

The relative advantages of pursuing these different approaches to statistical analysis have been widely discussed, and are grounded in criticisms of conventional approaches. Bourdieu et al. (1994) argue that the usual attempts to isolate variables often represent an inadequate and misleading generalisation of social relations. There is a relationship between gender and university attendance, for example, but this is not a simple relation expressing some essential female qualities. Instead we should investigate a number of constraints bearing on women before entering university and this process needs to be fully explained. Women also face additional pressures to enter particular academic subject areas, which affects their subsequent careers.

In a discussion of particular relevance to analyses that see statistical relations as involving simple empirical events, Bourdieu and Boltanski (1977) point out that the social meaning of an occupational position often changes over time, as it moves up and down scales of economic rewards and social prestige. Some occupations become professionalised, for example, while others get deskilled. Simple measures of movement and social mobility, between parental class and class of destination, based on occupation, often assume that class memberships mean the same thing between generations. The same sort of analysis is found in the discussion of aristocratic culture in Bourdieu (1986). The terms in the complex distinctions and differences, between learned and apparently simply acquired knowhow, for example, are themselves relational, gaining their importance from the oppositions set up between them in the social processes of claiming distinction. They are not simple empirical indicators of position. This notion will form an important difference between Bourdieu and Bennett as we shall see below.

Conventional multivariate analysis never manages to explain all the variance, simply because the conventional categories do not capture the relational complexities of social reality. Gayo-Cal's (2006) analysis for example, based on the early returns for the larger 2008 study, runs a regression analysis on the separate items used to measure leisure participation, and finds three latent factors that explain 54% of overall participation (which seems quite satisfactory for such work, she argues). While two factors make sense in Bourdieusian terms (as linked to social class in his sense), the third one causes a problem for any theoretical account : '... it is not at all obvious what factor 3 might represent, even though the clustering differentiates quite well between two sets' Gayo-Cal (2006:181). Factor 3 seems to be relatively independent of all the socio-demographic variables as

well. This is the methodological dilemma in a nutshell – whether to rely on statistical regularity even if it produces unexplained patterns. In this case, Gayo-Cal just uses the unexpected clustering ‘negatively’, to suggest that Bourdieu’s account which relies on social class (with a tight link to cultural capital) needs amendment, without attempting to develop a theoretical alternative. The latter option is Bourdieu’s approach.

In Bourdieusian work on social class and education we find the approach pursued thoroughly. A straightforward correlation between parental social class and educational attainment was apparently not large enough to support the idea of simple class determinism, since some working-class students were found at elite universities. Bourdieu et al. (in Sociology Research Group 1980) tried to explain the presence of these students by searching for another variable, and found it by looking at the effects of surviving selection processes over a whole career. Those working class students had survived extensive educational selection and had somehow got themselves on to a career path that would end in university success. Sometimes they had managed to enrol in places that taught classical languages, for example. In effect they had maximised their cultural capital. Conversely, it was possible to find some upper class offspring who had squandered theirs. The missing variable was the exploitation rate of cultural capital. It was possible to see that only if we examine a whole educational career, a set of complex relations, rather than looking for separate relations between discrete variables. Incidentally, this work also helps refute the common view that Bourdieu says the originally-acquired *habitus* simply determines everything in a subsequent career leaving no room for individual action, a point developed at greater length in Bourdieu (2000a).

Bourdieu also connects ‘academic’ or ‘scholastic’ criteria to tastes via a discussion of the conversion of one kind of capital into another, as we shall see. By contrast, Gayo –Cal (2006) and Bennett et al. (2008: 161) refer to educational qualifications more as a background discrete variable without discussing conversion, and measure educational participation without investigating educational tastes. The result is a collection of isolated ‘factual’ descriptions of particular tastes, as in ‘Tattoos appeal to younger men and to routine manual workers, while those with university degrees and from minority ethnic groups avoid them’.

Social class

Bennett et al. argue that one result of multiple correspondence analysis of the recent British data is to deny any underlying structuring role for social class as the major kind of social stratification. The empirical data suggest that gender, ethnicity and age have important structuring effects on leisure

patterns in their own right: gender is a major factor in the patterns of body maintenance and watching television, for example, ethnicity in the consumption patterns for music, and age in patterns for reading. There is another development which has been much discussed as well – the sharing of tastes in popular culture between the social classes, part of the growth of ‘cultural omnivorousness’. Finally, Bennett et al. find little evidence of the underlying class division in ‘aesthetics’, between, say, tastes founded on a liking for form over content on the one hand (the ‘high aesthetic’), and the pleasures of immediate involvement and enjoyment, often driven by a logic of necessary enjoyment of what is available, on the other (the ‘popular aesthetic’).

It is interesting to compare this finding with the work undertaken by Turner and Edmonds (2002) on the Australian post-war elite. Acknowledging that elites are not the same as dominant classes, the overall findings look rather similar to that of Bennett et al. However, Turner and Edmonds insist that the greater cultural tolerance of the current elite is a generational phenomenon and possibly rather a calculating one. The Australian post-war generation is unusual in that it grew up with a process of unprecedented cosmopolitanism with the relaxation of the ‘whites only’ immigration policy, and it also experienced the populism and cultural experimentation of the 1960s. There are also the Australian legacy of larrikinism, and a more recent highly developed ironic self-deprecating stance. Together, these have produced an unusual level of cultural omnivorousness and detachment of culture from class. However, beneath this apparent classlessness lies a coping strategy, for Turner and Edmonds (2002: 237) , ‘a cultural strategy that we have called the distaste of taste’.

This leaves open the possibility that although the specifics might contradict Bourdieu’s findings, the underlying argument is defensible – that culture is still deeply implicated in social distanciation, this time for a generationally-specific elite. This general argument is well illustrated in Bourdieu (1988), discussing the crisis in legitimization in the French university system represented by the events of May 1968. The old criteria for promotion were seriously questioned by the increase in student numbers and there was some destabilising complexity and diversity introduced as a result. Yet the professoriat rapidly innovated and responded with new criteria, not, Bourdieu argues, as a conspiracy nor as some openly rational recalculation of interest, but as a product of their *habitus* and its largely implicit role : a collective reproduction of the organisation ‘without realizing it’(1988: 144); a ‘spontaneously orchestrated ensemble of actions inspired by solidarity with an “elite”’, an affinity of *habitus*, a ‘diffuse and ungraspable complicity’ which then became active and institutionalised (1988: 150). Of course, critics, including Rancière (2004), might see this as a particularly evasive kind of sociologism.

Modalities

Turner and Edmonds also raise the issue of modality -- how exactly leisure pursuits are addressed. Bourdieu and Bennett share a rather technical definition of modality as involving various combinations of tastes and levels of participation, but it is possible to extend the definition to include more subjective orientations to practice. Turner and Edmonds talk of ironic omnivorousness, for example. Bennett et al. briefly discuss the idea that their upper class respondents might be insincere in their apparent tolerance of popular culture, but rapidly dismiss the possibility (again without testing it, it could be argued). They also note that lecturers in Media or Cultural Studies, operate with a professional orientation or modality, and classify cultural pursuits by form, in technical ways if not exactly in moral or political ways. This implies a relation to leisure pursuits which is quite different from those of the ordinary participant or fan, a 'scholastic' orientation as Bourdieu (2000a: 19) describes it: a 'purely theoretical and abstract activity, increasingly reduced to a discourse, articulated in a technical language reserved for specialists'. This might be understood more as the colonising activities of a scholastic field rather than genuine omnivorousness in the sense of taking equal sorts of pleasure in different activities. Pleasures can also drive scholasticism as 'specialized play' (Kjølsrød 2003) but they require a good deal of cultural capital to realize.

Modality for Bourdieu is a crucial part of the general processes of distinction, however. Bourdieu (1986) states that, for example, an autodidact will be unable to convey that necessary effortlessness and 'distance' in their display of cultural knowledge, compared to those who have acquired theirs through an *habitus* which they have inherited. These qualities lacking in the autodidact arise from an early leisured stance towards the world in conditions of economic and social security – *skholè* (Bourdieu 2000a: 1) , 'that allows a free and liberating relation to those urgencies and to the world'. The work on education also discusses modality as a crucial element in distinction, clearly affecting academic judgments and assessments, especially in oral examinations, and including qualities such as bodily *hexis* , for example, being at ease with one's body, not appearing to try too hard or to have practised communication strategies, acting instead so as to indicate that students are having imaginary dialogues with equals, and a whole range of other matters concerning manners and etiquette.

Modality is a crucial dimension, as important as the usual dimensions of participation and preferences, but it is acknowledged to be difficult to study. Bourdieu (1986) says questionnaires are likely to miss it altogether. One partial solution is to intersperse the text itself with extracts from

actual speech or from popular cultural materials, a technique that Bourdieu (1986) uses. In the studies in education, Bourdieu and his colleagues were able to use much more qualitative methods including observations and interviews, and to inspect marking criteria and written comments as well. In Bourdieu et al. (2000b), modality becomes an important part of the short sociological essays that precede the actual interviews, a necessary intervention, the team argue, because it is otherwise impossible to grasp the importance of matters such as pauses or paralinguistic behaviour displayed in the interviews. None of these devices are used in the Bennett study, however.

Education as a ‘relay’

The notion of a ‘relay’ is important in explaining the connections between different sorts of capitals, and thus between the activities that help accumulate them. One example of a relay is discussed in both Bourdieu (1986) and Bennett et al. – how leisure can be used to accumulate economic capital in the case of workers in the leisure and culture industries. Bourdieu (1986) adds the growing number of craftsmen and petty bourgeois who make a living by offering connoisseur commodities and services, using cultural capital often acquired through leisure. It is worth pointing out that in both cases, a university credential is also often required.

Leisure and cultural pursuits can also develop social stratification through the relay of social capital. Leisure pursuits like going to the opera help develop networking, both Bourdieu and Bennett et al. tell us. Surprisingly, given the importance to them of the omnivore, Bennett et al. do not explore (or perhaps did not find any evidence for) more popular leisure pursuits having the same function. An example of the possibilities here is shown by Stempel (2006) who suggests that knowledge of and participation in popular sports can help secure employment through social bonding with interviewers and bosses in a range of US industries, especially for males. Shilling (2004: 478) summarises more research on how participation in sporting activities enable the elite especially to convert their ‘physical capital’ into social and economic variants: ‘The prominence of elite sporting venues focused around such activities as equestrianism and polo in England is, perhaps, an important factor in the high incidence of intra-class marriages among the dominant class.’

There is a close correspondence in Bourdieu’s work between tastes in leisure informed by the ‘high’ aesthetic in leisure activities and the implicit codes and classifications of academic work. This correspondence is not accidental but deeply implicated in an (uneven and contested) reproduction of a class system. This is argued concretely: university personnel have done much to develop the education system to monopolise the right to legitimate knowledge, much as the State and its

professional agents come to monopolise legitimate violence. University specialists have then struggled to arrange a unified hierarchy of knowledge with university-awarded general credentials at the top acting as the yardstick to measure the worth of all the others. In return, dominant classes use university credentials to legitimise their elite position and gain an advantage for their offspring.

Although other social divisions exist (and gender is the one best discussed), Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that class is not just another dimension of stratification but the one that necessarily shapes all the others, and that education plays the most systematic role in its reproduction. Bennett et al. (2008) might well have considered the deeper structuring effects of social class on the other apparently independent dimensions of gender, ethnicity and age. There is no space to revisit the extensive theoretical discussion on this issue.¹ Bennett et al. certainly notice that in leisure there are no signs of a drive to acquire a monopoly on what counts as legitimate culture or leisure, for example. It would have been possible to find such a drive in former periods, when a definite 'high culture', based on a 'high aesthetic' requiring a great deal of leisure to cultivate, helped the British aristocracy close off access to the newly-rich manufacturing class (Williams, 1976), but the rise of the cultural omnivore, and the general tolerance of popular culture, seems to suggest otherwise in modern Britain. One of the Bennett team, Warde (2005: 136) argues that even 'Bourdieu, I would contend, had he pursued the injunctions of [his own later work] *The Logic of Practice*... would not have arrived at the account of taste he offered in *Distinction* ... being more concerned [in the latter] with the relationship between habitus and capital.'²

Social class still seems to haunt Bennett et al. however, and we find them occasionally insisting that social class is still important: 'Despite only limited evidence for a self conscious middle class, a pervasive and powerful middle class cultural dominance exists' (2008: 179); members of the middle class groups talk of their own hybridity or mobility, but still 'require and reproduce the classifications and idioms of class' (2008 : 193); overall there are still 'subtle boundaries', despite 'reflexive appropriation' (2008 : 194)

In the 2008 volume, Bennett et al. seem to believe that the increased occupational value of educational qualifications means that leisure can cease to become an arena for practising class closure, and that the British middle classes can relax, enjoy popular cultural pastimes and display that 'openness' and lack of snobbishness with which they feel socially comfortable. This proposes a static view of social class, as opposed to the dynamic one offered by Bourdieu outlines above. For Bourdieu, there is a constant struggle over the meaning and value of educational credentials. His

study noted an increase in the number of graduates leading to struggle to maintain the value of older credentials gained in times of scarcity, to quietly devalue the newer ones, and the emergence of a number of strategies to deploy social and cultural capital in various combinations. In this way, capitals could be converted into each other, with no defining role for educational capital alone. Certainly, it is impossible to uncover these relationships by investigating cultural capital alone.

Moreover, for Bourdieu it is in leisure that children of the elite learn the all-important academic code required for educational success. An elite cultural background works indirectly, casually and informally, seemingly acquired by 'osmosis', to provide a deep knowledge of culture and leisure, 'acquired without intention or effort' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979: 20). Entering school is an easy transition for the elite child, since secondary school uses a number of secondary significations which take for granted 'the whole treasury of first degree experiences'—books, entertainment, holidays as 'cultural pilgrimages', and 'allusive conversations' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979:22). At the same time, the education system classifies and legitimates particular kinds of taste, most obviously, perhaps in the efforts of academic literary studies to establish and defend a canon, but also in the very activities of scholasticism itself. For Bourdieu, scholasticism reinforces the calm and detached aesthetic indifference to content and immediate relevance.

At the other end of the class spectrum, Bennett et al. (2008: 252) report that working class people in Britain do not feel excluded from legitimate culture, but merely 'not engaged with high culture', and that there is no distinctive working class culture (there are strong echoes of the classic work on 'affluent workers' here – see Goldthorpe et al. 1969)). However, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) suggest instead that these findings would be the result precisely of a highly successful form of symbolic violence, expressed in education, which renders cultural arbitraries as natural and socially neutral and which persuades the excluded to acquiesce in their exclusion. Bourdieu (1986: 419) argues that the 'implicit schemes of thought and action of a class *habitus*...[develop] a class unconsciousness rather than a class consciousness'.

Ethnography

Bourdieu began his academic career as a philosopher, but pursued ethnographic work in Algeria. Some of this involved a rather critical kind of ethnography, pointing to the effects of modernization, for example, on the world views of traditional Algerian inhabitants (Bourdieu, 2000b). However, a methodological commentary also runs through the work, and anthropological examples are often used to demonstrate theoretical arguments.

In Bourdieu (1977), for example, Kabylian (usually now seen as Algerian) understandings of the seasons are used to indicate the effects of socialization into an unconscious *habitus*. The Kabylian example shows how this *habitus* is grounded in practice rather than having any theoretically explicit codified format. One result of this is that the Kabylian calendar has presented particular problems for western anthropologists trying to decode it and reconstruct it as a logical system. Bourdieu argues that this raises a typical methodological problem with a 'scholastic' approach to practice, in trying to understand a particular *habitus* as if it were capable of generating the same logical distinctions and classifications as the western academic *habitus*. Very often, the only way in which this can even be approximated is to find a Kabylian who is capable of performing this translation between the two systems. Even then, the respondent is providing not raw data but translating data, so that western anthropologists can understand it.

However, De Certeau (1984) suggests that Bourdieu still insists on the *habitus* as having a deep structuring role for practice, and thus qualitative data is still being interpreted by reference to a suspect theory. Bourdieu simply omits the issue of how social and mental structures lead to practices. Bourdieu manages to deny both sociological determinism and the idea of a calculating rational subject, so he has to revert to mechanisms in his sociology of education to explain how structures actually work -- through knowledge acquisition, the interiorisation of structures, and then the exteriorisation of the results of learning in the *habitus*. None of this is investigated in much detail, De Certeau argues. Bourdieu is torn between acknowledging complexity and adhering to his sociology, and has to resort to practical tactics himself, including the very common one of 'affirming... the contrary of what he knows' (De Certeau, 1984: 60). Instead of telling us about the Kabylia en route to the concept of *habitus*, he might have told us about his own scientific dogmatism instead!

All ethnography faces this sort of problem. So does all social theory, and it now becomes possible to see a confirmation of the point made by Warde (2005) in the section above about the different emphases in Bourdieu's work, although De Certeau's 'practices' would be even more radically ungraspable by any general social theory than Warde's. Certainly, there is agreement that theoretical categories can never simply be grounded in ethnographic data, generated from them, or tested by them. There will always be residues, so to speak which have remained untranslated, quite often simply because they have never been made conscious in the minds of the respondents, even though they guide practice.

Bourdieu's (2000a) discussion replies to De Certeau's critiques (largely involving denial of his own culpability, and addressing especially the problems of sociological determinism). Of course, ethnographers can make data fit their categories, using a form of symbolic violence. Methodological roles and procedures, including those of 'grounded theory', are forms of symbolic violence in this sense. The problems are often avoided and denied, or misrecognised, either by deploying some dubious notion of spontaneity, where understanding just suddenly arises between two people from quite different cultures, or by a researcher claiming some gift of empathy.

This critique is rarely found in British ethnographic studies, although the technique itself is popular in both leisure and education.³ Bourdieu's own attempt to overcome these problems and dependencies can be seen in the large collection of short studies of mundane suffering in modern France (Bourdieu et al. 1999). A methodological appendix describes the major problems faced by social scientists attempting to genuinely understand the position of others. A number of temptingly easy solutions are outlined and rejected – faithfully following a standard procedure recommended by a 'methods' text is one. This simply reduces subjective data to a series of objects, which not only misses their significance by producing the very data it claims to study, but represents a form of symbolic violence already present in any academic discourse. If people see their views being treated simply as data, they are likely to withdraw cooperation in various ways, including giving answers that seem socially appropriate. No sociologist could fail to see as well that symbolic violence of this kind reproduces all sorts of class or status divisions between researcher and researched. The tendency to offer symbolic violence of this kind is ever-present in the design of research instruments, in coding and in transcription, and must be countered by an unusual level of alert reflexivity.

It can help if researcher and researched are in similar social situations, and the example here is the form of solidarity that can exist between women of all social classes. However, the temptation to claim some immediate understanding via a 'mystic union' must also be resisted. Apart from the obvious problems of checking that this is not just another form of symbolic violence masquerading as empathy, the task of the sociologist is not simply to reconstruct the subjective worlds of the respondent but to understand it sociologically. An individual's subjective story should be seen as the result of complex, multiple social determinations, and these and their effects must be grasped in such a way as to understand what has been divulged. The test should be whether a researcher can grasp that s/he would see the world in exactly the same way if s/he had been subject to the same social forces.

Even so, the Appendix promises no guaranteed truths, and admits that this sort of understanding comes only from a sociological reflection upon the detail of what has been said, avoiding any tendency to simply subsume the data under some category or code, and a commitment to openness in understanding. The reflection process involves something like a conversion experience, Bourdieu suggests, being able to see the world from another point of view⁴.

Theory and methods

Bourdieu's work features discussion of the central problems facing discussions of methodology, amidst substantive arguments about education, leisure, the arts and social class, and theoretical debates about class closure, social reproduction and symbolic violence. Critics like Bennett et al. have tried to retain the thrust of the methods while rejecting the theory, advocating instead a necessary complexity, associated with genuine freedoms and choices. A drive towards complexity of this kind still faces methodological issues, however.

One problem is that there is no acceptable level of complexity at which to stop in order to avoid reductionism: ultimately it would end with a full descriptive account of individual lives. It is at this point that other important goals and purposes of academic theory are quietly introduced to stave off reduction to absurdity. De Certeau, for example, wants to show that there is an even more fundamental power struggle or form of resistance at the heart of social relations, that even the officially powerless have a source of strength in the radical unmanageability of everyday life. It might be possible to see this as the *leitmotif* in Bourdieu et al (1999), although the highly specific (and largely ungeneralisable) stories are also grouped under sociological headings. What the *leitmotif* in Bennett et al. (2008) might be is far less clear: it might just be the old favourite, 'a dialogue with the ghost of Karl Marx'.

In general, no Bourdieusian would find the mere 'discovery' of complexity as puzzling in any way. 'Complexity' is simply a familiar term in the binaries of academic life, the marker of a position, usually in opposition to another marker -- 'structure'-- a way of mapping the overall field of social science for insiders, and a means of acquiring symbolic profits within it. This is the reflexive turn , possibly based on post-structuralist tendencies according to Robbins (2004) which is discussed best in Bourdieu's later works referring to education. Bourdieu argues that sociological analysis itself should not be immune to sociological analysis, that the categories of social science are not neutral or

objective but have become objectified using the same familiar processes of symbolic violence to impose an arbitrary, and in the interests of symbolic profit

In practice, it is the relative value of two kinds of complexity that is at stake, each with its distinctive value depending on the merits of theoretical versus empirical analysis . Any reader of *Distinction* could not fail to be impressed by the depth and detail of the analysis of the cultural practices under investigation. However, the detail is produced by complex combinations of underlying variables, notably the different combinations of types of capital – cultural, economic and educational – and the dynamic processes of drawing social distinctions and pursuing symbolic profits in cultural markets which alter the values and relations between the capitals. There is also the effect of the relative autonomy of various fields. This sort of complexity is explicable by theory, at least in principle : 'If one sufficiently refined the analysis of the species of capital...it would be possible to find all the cases empirically observed, in all their complexity but also in their quasi-infinite multiplicity' (Bourdieu 1986: 82) . For critics, this 'combinatory' approach will seem 'overtheorised'.

Bennett et al. seem to be offering a description of a residual kind of complexity, left after theoretical analysis has been exhausted, and serving to challenge any attempts to theorise it. The factors in operation here appear to be a dynamic leisure market and the irrational but powerful choices and practices of consumers. Bennett et al. want to stop before attempting any sort of further theoretical explanation of either market forces or consumer choices, and thus their work is 'undertheorised'. The same kind of differing evaluation of theory lies behind the dispute between Bourdieu and De Certeau outlined above.

Arguments for complexity have an important role in political analysis. A number of Bourdieu's other critics want to suggest that complexity should be celebrated as a kind of implicit opposition to the political pessimism of the central discussions on the *habitus* and its role in social reproductions (see Mills 2008, Rancière 2004). There is an argument that social relations must involve struggle, which was once popular in educational and cultural radicalism (Harris 1992). Bourdieu was always very sceptical about such 'struggles' -- those based on popular culture as a form of opposition to dominant culture seldom achieve a clean break with dominant culture but 'oscillate between the aim of recovering the cultural heritage bequeathed by the dominant classes...and the aim of rehabilitating the survivals of the dominated culture' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990: 24). In other cases, protests and struggles merely help to exaggerate the autonomy of the dominant institutions:

'Alienated by the system and protesting against it, university students [even in France in the 1960s] yet remained dominated by the ends it pursues and the values it reveres' (Bourdieu et al. 1994:110).

There is only a brief acknowledgement of the possibilities of this notion of reproduction which goes on underneath the illusion of autonomy and individual expression in Bennett et al. (2009), at the end of the section discussing the field of sport and PE and referring to gender: 'Body practices construct distinctions of gender, making us first and foremost into men and women, even if, thereafter, they permit secondary challenges to stereotypes by way of different versions of masculinity and femininity' (169). It is not explained why this might affect gendered identities but not those based on social class, age or ethnicity, although gender is a more acceptable dimension of stratification these days than is class. Even here, Bennett et al. want to modify the possibilities almost as soon as they have stated them by adding that female participation should not be seen as arising from some kind of exclusion but more from simple 'dislike' and 'their different views of the purpose of exercise' (169).

Discussion: the myth of methodological disinterestedness

It seems necessary to organise empirical observations somehow – either by theory or by statistical patterning. Statistical patterning often leads to a cautious causality, sometimes trading on the ambiguity of the word 'significant', or by a belief that eventually theoretical explanations will be available. Sometimes theory is simply denied, often by critiquing a theoretical alternative – specifically, Bourdieu's alleged sociologism is countered, at least in thought, by Warde's insistence on complexity. Warde's position is also a theoretical one though, based on an account of greater cultural autonomy in modernity. That account also carries theoretical baggage in arguing for new kinds of sociological theory, or a replacement of sociological theory with the famous 'scepticism towards metanarratives' (Lyotard 1986). Such scepticism in turn has been criticised as expressing an irrational total 'aversion against the universal' (Honneth 1985)

The inclusion of an overwhelming amount of empirical material in Bennett et al. (2008) can be criticised in the same terms that De Certeau (1984) uses against Bourdieu and Foucault. Empirical detail acts as a smokescreen, protecting the general arguments from detailed criticism because it is so unmanageable and so inaccessible to the critical reader. Many an exhausted reader will gratefully turn to the overall generalisations at the end of each section as authoritative.

Bennett et al. clearly break with one of Bourdieu's major methodological points in trying to isolate social relations associated with leisure from those associated with education. Bourdieu and his associates have always argued that the education system plays a major role in organising and legitimising all sorts of apparently isolated and unconnected social phenomena, including social origins and apparently freely chosen careers, pedagogical relations and class relations, credentialism, and occupational entry requirements and class privilege, and that education specialists do all this constantly and opportunistically while appearing to enshrine tradition and educational autonomy. Only when you see leisure activity as linked to educational systems can the apparently chaotic complexity of leisure practices be understood. This argument might need to be tested anew, but it cannot be ignored, especially not by simply declaring that leisure is an autonomous object for study with no major links to any other social relations.

There is an institutional dimension too. Bourdieu has no illusions about the autonomy and disinterestedness of the university, and he has analysed academic politics and the role of academic specialists in some detail (Bourdieu 1988). This analysis is mostly focused on professorial teaching, however, with a relative lack of attention to the production of useful academic knowledge in the form of research and publication, especially in the development of a research programme. This more 'positive' use of academic power is clearly implicated in the development of a research programme of the kind Bourdieu himself established, and that Bennett et al. are in the process of establishing. Such programmes attract funding partly from appealing to various specialists in theory and methodology and exploiting their possible links and connections, of course. However, there are political agendas to address as well. Bennett and Savage (2004), for example, suggest a clear link to politically-supported policies of social exclusion. Even the later work, in Bennett et al. (2008), does not abandon the policy agenda, and, like many intellectuals in social science, including 'post' ones (Harris 2003), seem to want to supplement findings of complexity with general comments on policy relevance: an unkind critic might well accuse them too of affirming ... 'the contrary of what [they know]'.

Despite their varying emphases on the importance of concrete practice and demystifying academic practice, none of the authors discussed here have provided anything approaching a full account of the interplay between theoretical, methodological and political determinants in producing their actual work, although Bourdieu gets closest. What we would need is something like the account of the development and extent of an 'actor-network', as in Latour (1987), linking universities, departments and their specialists; informal groups of academics in several institutions; professional

bodies, funding bodies, publishers, and all the validating and regulating bodies that these institutions imply (reviewers, referees, marketing departments, auditors); and relations with competing and collaborating research programmes in the field and in other fields.

Notes

1. The interconnections have been widely discussed elsewhere, for example with ethnicity in Scatamburlo-D'Annibale and McLaren (2003: 155). In general, the case is that different class identity is still 'central to the exploitative production/reproduction dialectic of capital', unlike any of the other forms of stratification; that systematic racism is only explicable with the development of capitalism; that there is a considerable overlap between ethnic categories and class membership; and the class struggle has sharpened and become politically dominant in global capitalism. The case for seeing gender relations in this way has also been much discussed, although usually with a completely different conclusion (for example Kuhn and Wolpe 1978). For obvious reasons, the issue has been debated within several marxist traditions. CCCS (1982) argues for the specificity of ethnic identity, and The Women's Study Group (1978) do so for gender.
2. There are non-marxist approaches available too, however. To take some more specific examples, Stempel (2006) suggests that the real value of having participated in school sports is misrecognised, for example, as acting inculcating certain useful skills and character traits. In another study, St Louis (2004: 32) argues that competitive sport offers another classic site of misrecognition in that the prevalence of successful black athletes in elite sport is mistakenly taken as evidence of 'racial' difference: watching elite sport leads to an 'uncomplicated realism and objectivism... [suggesting]... a biological basis for racial athleticism'. Sport is also a major location for ideological notions of 'giftedness', identified as an important component of misrecognition in the education system for Bourdieu and Passeron (1979). Finally, Rossiter (2007) says that the experience of encountering 'Nature' as some sort of agent in itself, quite common in rock climbing apparently, is a misrecognition of the emergent effects of a combination of the potentials of climbing gear and climber skill.
3. There have been recognitions of the power relationships involved, as in Young's (1971) use of the term 'zoo keeping' to describe as the tendency of ethnographers to regard their subjects as fascinating exotics. Clifford's (1993) work on ethnography has also noticed the important role of translators between two cultures, including his acknowledgement of the extraordinary good fortune the Pilgrim Fathers had on arriving in America to meet a native American who was fluent in English ('Squanto'). Mead's pioneering work among Samoan

adolescents was probably greatly facilitated by having a number of unusually cosmopolitan Samoans to translate local customs for her (probably inaccurately, some critics have claimed).

4. ‘Conversion’ is a term implying a sudden and unpredictable shift of perspective. It seems more promising to pursue connections here with other approaches toward understanding in social theory. Adorno (1975:5) argues in a famous phrase that ‘objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder’, and he advocates a similar openness to the object (negative dialectics) which produces far more understanding than can be grasped by any standard methodological procedure. Hermeneutic understanding, in Gadamer’s work, (Gadamer 2006 for example) involves the same circling process between immersion in the data and theoretical reflection, between understandings and pre-understandings, designed to recover subjective meaning, although it is intellectual and cultural traditions which are the classic object of hermeneutic reflection, not the subjective aspects of individuals. Another kind of circling aimed at understanding is described by Peirce as ‘abduction’, a creative form exceeding the limited understandings of either induction or deduction. Here, the analyst attempts to understand a single case by imagining what would follow if it conformed to a general category. The example cited in Richardson and Kramer (2006:501), citing Shank, takes a classic example of drawing beans from a bag as the starting point:

Result. – [We have the experience that] The beans are white [but this experience lacks any real meaning for us].

Rule. – [The claim that] All the beans from this bag are white [is meaningful in this setting].

Case – [Therefore, it is both plausible and meaningful to hypothesize that] These beans are from this bag.

References

- NB Hyperlinks lead to DH’s ‘Reading Guides’ to the original texts
- Adorno, T. (1973) [*Negative Dialectics*](#), London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Bennett, T. & Savage, M. (2004) ‘Introduction: Cultural Capital and Cultural Policy’, in *Cultural Trends* 13(2): 7–14
- Bennett, T., Savage, M., Silva, E., Warde, A., Gayo-Cal, M., & Wright, D. (2008) [*Culture, Class, Distinction*](#), London: Routledge
- Bourdieu, P (1977) [*Outline of a Theory of Practice*](#), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Bourdieu, P (1986) *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Bourdieu, P. (1988) *Homo Academicus*, Oxford: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000a) *Pascalian Meditations*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000b) 'Making the economic habitus. Algerian workers revisited', *Ethnography*, 1(1): 17–41.
- Bourdieu, P and Boltanski, L. (1977) 'Formal Qualifications and Occupational Hierarchies: The Relationship Between The Production System and The Reproduction System', in Keen, E. (Ed) *Reorganising Education: Management and Participation for Change*, 60-71, London: Sage.
- Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J.C. (1979) *The Inheritors: French students and their relation to culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J – C (1990) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, 2nd edition, London: Sage Publications.
- Bourdieu, P, Passeron, J – C, & Saint Martin, M. (1994) *Academic Discourse*, Cambridge: Polity
- Bourdieu, P. and Accardo. A., Balazs, G., Beaud, S., Bonvin, F, Bourdieu, E., Bourgois, P., Broccolichi, S., Champagne, P., Christin, R., Faguer, J-P., Garcia, S., Lenoir, R., Françoise, CE., Pialoux, M., Pinto, L., Podalydès, D., Sayard, A., Soulié, C. &, Wacquant, L., (1999) *The Weight of the World: social suffering in contemporary society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- CCCS (1982) *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 1970s Britain*, London: Hutchinson.
- Clifford, J. 'On Collecting Art and Culture', in During, S. (ed) (1993) *The Cultural Studies Reader*, London: Routledge.
- De Certeau, M. (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press: Berkeley.
- Gadamer, H-G. (2006) 'Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics', in *Theory, Culture and Society*, 23 (1): 29—56
- Gayo-Cal, M. (2006) Leisure and Participation in Britain, in *Cultural Trends*, 15(2/3): 175–192.
- Goldthorpe, J., Lockwood, D., Bechhofer, F. and Platt, J. (1969) *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harris, D. (1992) *From Class Struggle to the Politics of Pleasure*, London: Routledge.
- Honneth, A. (1985) 'An Aversion Against the Universal: A Commentary on Lyotard's Post-modern Condition', in *Theory Culture and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 3: 147 – 56.
- Kjølsrød, L. (2003) 'Adventure Revisited: On Structure and Metaphor in Specialized Play', in *Sociology*, Vol. 37, No. 3: 459—76
- Kuhn, A. and Wolpe, A-M. (eds) (1978). *Feminism and Materialism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

- Latour, B. (1987) [*Science in Action*](#), Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Lyotard, J - F (1986) [*The Post - Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*](#), Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Mills, C. (2008) 'Reproduction and transformation of inequalities in schooling: the transformative potential of the theoretical constructs of Bourdieu', in *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 29 (1): 79–89
- Rancière, J. (2004) *The Philosopher and His Poor*, London: Duke University.
- Richardson, R. & Kramer, E. (2006) 'Abduction as the type of inference that characterizes the development of grounded theory', in *Qualitative Research* 2006; 6(4): 497—513.
- Rossiter, P. (2007) '[*Rock Climbing: On Humans, Nature, and Other Nonhumans*](#)', in *Space and Culture*, 10 (2): 292 - 305.
- Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, V. & McLaren, P. (2003) '[*The Strategic Centrality of Class in the Politics of "Race" and "Difference"*](#)', in *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 3(2): 148-175.
- Sociology Research Group in Cultural and Education Studies (eds) (1980) [*Melbourne Working Papers 1980*](#), University of Melbourne
- St Louis, B. (2004) '[*Sport and common sense racial science*](#)', in *Leisure Studies*, 23 (1): 31 - 46
- Stempel, C. (2006) '[*Gender, Social Class, and the Sporting Capital-Economic Capital Nexus*](#)', in *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 23: 273 – 292.
- Turner, B. and Edmonds, J. (2002) '[*The Distaste of Taste: Bourdieu, cultural capital, and the Australian postwar elite*](#)', *Journal of Consumer Culture* 2(2): 219-40.
- Warde, A. (2005) 'Consumption and Theories of Practice', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol 5(2): 131–153.
- Williams, R. (1976) *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*, London: Fontana.
- Women's Study Group (1978) [*Women Take Issue*](#). London: Hutchinson.
- Young, J. (1971) *The Drugtakers: The Social Meaning of Drug Abuse*. McGibbon and Kee.