

The University of Chicago

ANTH 21411

Introduction to Pierre Bourdieu

Fall 2004



Instructor: Sébastien Chauvin, Ecole Normale Supérieure.
Format : Mon-Wed 12-1:20pm, Haskell Hall.

This course is an introductory seminar to the thought and work of Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002). Undergraduate students are recommended to complete their social science core before taking this class. It has been designed for anthropology students but is of course open to students of sociology, history, political science and philosophy, or all those interested in French contemporary culture and theory.

“No one would describe Bourdieu’s writings as ‘easily accessible’, yet few social scientists in our era have had a stronger and broader impact in the academic world as well as on modern culture and society” (*Thesis Eleven*, n°70, 2002). Nine weeks is of course too short to grasp in its entirety a complex work simultaneously inserted in multiple scientific and intellectual subfields. Our main

purpose is to put together pieces of Bourdieu usually studied separately in the United States (Bourdieu as a sociologist, an anthropologist, a philosopher etc.). Indeed one fundamental aspect of Bourdieu's scientific life is the attempt to and the relative success at dissolving the boundary between anthropology and sociology, and more generally at promoting the idea of an epistemological unity of social science (claiming for example that sociology is a "social history of the present" and history an "historical sociology of the past").

Privileging mature writings as they happen to be both more articulate, clearer and more simply written (with an apex certainly reached in *Pascalian Meditations*), we will show how Bourdieu, meshing the French Durkheimian (Mauss, Simiand, Halbwachs...) and structuralist schools of social science with Marxian critical theory, German Weberian scientific tradition (up to Norbert Elias), Merleau-Ponty's and Husserl's breeds of phenomenology, and the French current of "rationalist historicism" in epistemology (Koyré, Bachelard, Canguilhem), in a work deeply entrenched in empirical research, proposes a workable toolkit as well as a general theoretical framework to break the dualisms commonly sterilizing what Bourdieu calls "scholastic thought", including: materialism and idealism, objectivism and subjectivism, the individual and society, structure and agency, interests and passions, freedom and determinism, theory and ethnography, thought and action, power and resistance, universality and relativism, science and critique. We will stress Bourdieu's insistence on the imperative of epistemic *reflexivity* for empirical work to avoid replicating common sense under scientific rhetorics.

A recommendation to the students: to read Bourdieu, you do not want to be in a rush. Start reading **slowly** and **cautiously** (for the first 5 pages of an article or chapter, you should not spend less than 2 minutes per page) so as to get acquainted with his particular, nay peculiar, style of writing. Only at this condition will we be collectively able to penetrate deep into a powerful thought and avoid various misunderstandings or dangerous simplifications.

Requirements:

- 1) Close reading and active, aware participation in class discussion. (15% grade)
- 2) In addition, before each class meeting (starting week 2) you will have to post on the Chalk discussion board a one-paragraph question raising a theoretical or empirical point concerning the session's readings or, even better, a one-paragraph *objection* to the ideas and analyses put forward in the readings. Arguments should be articulate and must be sent before 10am on the day of class. In the course of the quarter, you will be allowed to skip this requirement no more than 3 times. All students are encouraged to browse through each other's comments before the class, but this will not be a formal requirement. (15% grade)

- 3) A 4-6 pages midterm paper due Tuesday, November 3rd (Week 6). Midterm paper should be a short analytical report on a major concept proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. It should dissect and critique the selected concept, outlining its genesis, meanings, uses, merits and limitations. (30% grade).
- 4) A 10 to 12-pages final paper due Wednesday, December 8th. The paper can clarify or analyze a conceptual dilemma arising out of Bourdieu's work, confront and contrast his theories with relevant rival views, extend or challenge his analyses on a given empirical terrain with new or other materials. (40% grade)

The following books have been placed on reserve for you at Regenstein library and ordered at the Seminary Co-op bookstore:

- Pierre Bourdieu 1990 [1980], *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Pierre Bourdieu 2000 [1997], *Pascalian Meditations*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant 1992, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago : The University of Chicago Press.
- Pierre Bourdieu 1984 [1979], *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Pierre Bourdieu 1998 [1994], *Practical Reason*, Stanford : Stanford University Press.
- Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words* (1990, updated reprint in 1994), Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Pierre Bourdieu 1995 [1989], *The State Nobility*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Schedule of Class Sessions

- final version -

Week 1 : Introduction

1a (September 28th) – Preliminary lecture – A way beyond dualisms: thinking power, knowledge and practice together

This preliminary session will insist on some of the main aspects of Bourdieu's contribution to social theory and social-scientific practice:

- the embeddedness of cognitive, practical and political logics (social metaphysics, practice and domination);
- the epistemological arbitrariness (and historical causes) of the division between sociology and anthropology;
- his "empirical refutation" of a whole series of scholastic dualisms;
- his criticism of the autonomization of "theory" from actual empirical work.

1b (September 30th)– A "sociological life"

- Loïc Wacquant, "Pierre Bourdieu", in Rob Stones (ed.), *Key Contemporary Thinkers* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1998), p.215-229.
- Pierre Bourdieu, "Impersonal Confessions" in *Pascalian Meditations*, p.33-42 and "How to read an author", p.85-92.
- "The Personal is Social", in *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p.202-215.

To go further:

- Roger Brubaker, "Rethinking Classical Theory: The Sociological Vision of Pierre Bourdieu," *Theory and Society* 14 (1985): 723-744.

Week 2: Bourdieu within the French philosophical tradition of "applied rationalism" / "rationalist materialism"

The second introductory week is meant to clarify Bourdieu's theoretical impulses by tracing them back to an intellectual itinerary mostly made of both rupture and inheritance with the classic philosophical tradition.

2a (October 5th) – From philosophy to social science

- "Algerian Landing", 13p. Text hitherto unpublished in English (extracted from Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline for a Self-analysis*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005) - to be distributed by instructor.
- "Fieldwork in Philosophy," in *In Other words*, p.3-33.
- "Landmarks", in *In Other Words*, p.34-55.
- "Preface" in *The Logic of Practice*, p.1-21.

2b (October 7th) – Epistemological heritage: *The Craft of Sociology*

This session will deal with a difficult but classic book of French social epistemology, written in common by the founders of the contemporary school of French neo-Durkheimian social science: Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Passeron and Jean-Claude Chamboredon. We will read illustrative texts from 20th century currents of thought and social science that all converge and merge in Bourdieu: from the French Durkheimian and post-Durkheimian school (Durkheim, Simiand, Mauss, Lévi-Strauss) to German sociology and critical theory (Weber, Marx), to the important French tradition of history of science and the rationalist historicism that infuses it (Gaston Bachelard, Georges Canguilhem, Alexandre Koyré...).

- Postface to *The Craft of Sociology*, p.247-259
- Illustrative texts (extracts all reprinted in the appendix of *The Craft of Sociology*):
 - 1) George Canguilhem, “An Epistemology of Composition” p.81-86
 - 3) Abraham Kaplan, “Epistemology and Reconstructed Logic”, p.91-92
 - 4) Emile Durkheim, “Prenotions as an Ideological Obstacle”, p.93-96
 - 5) Marcel Mauss, “Provisional Definitions as a Means of Escaping from Prenotions”, p.97-99
 - 8) Emile Durkheim, “Methodic Ignorance”, p.111-113
 - 12) Emile Durkheim, “Nature as a Psychological Invariant and the Fallacy of Inverting Effect and Cause”, p.123-125
 - 16) Max Weber, “The Prophetism of the Professor and the Intellectual”, p.139-140
 - 18) Gaston Bachelard, “Architectonic Reason and Polemical Reason”, p.144-145
 - 19) Karl Marx, “The Method of Political Economy”, p.147-149
 - 21) Emile Durkheim, “Treat Social Facts as Things”, p.154-156
 - 34) George Canguilhem, “Theory and Experimentation”, p.201-206
 - 37) Edgar Wind, “Some Points of Contact between History and Natural Science”, p.214-217.
 - 41) Gaston Bachelard, “Les Mondanités de la Science” (« Science and its Worldly Public ») p.233-239

To go further:

- *The Craft of Sociology*, Part I,II and III, p.1-77.

Week 3: Scholastic bias and reflexive sociology

This week will be showing (a) how Bourdieu’s critique of scholastic reason is directed to a broad range of philosophical and social-scientific currents (from existentialism to structuralism to neo-classical economics to game theory) and (b) how *epistemic reflexivity* is a necessary path for

controlling the biases linked to the scholastic condition inscribed in the practice of science in general and of social science in particular.

3a (October 12th) – A Critique of “Scholastic Reason”

- *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Part I, p.1-59.
- “Introduction” and Ch.1, “Critique of Scholastic Reason” in *Pascalian Meditations*, p.1-33.

3b (October 14th) – Sociology as Socioanalysis

- “The Three Forms of Scholastic Fallacy”, Ch.2 in *Pascalian Meditations*, p.49-85.
- *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p.62-94.

Week 4: Habitus, domination and “bodily knowledge”

This week presents the theory of habitus as a scientific tool for overcoming the opposition between objectivism and subjectivism, insisting on the embeddedness of practice, knowledge and power, and thus avoiding to isolate “bodily” logics from the broader diverse phenomena their incarnate.

4a (October 19th) – Inside the Logic of Practice

- “Bodily Knowledge”, chapter 4 in *Pascalian Meditations*, p.128-163
- *The Logic of Practice*, Book 1, “Critique of Theoretical Reason”, p.23-97

To go further:

- Pierre Bourdieu, “The Sentiment of Honour in Kabyle Society”, in J. Peristiany (ed.), *Honour and Shame*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1966.

4b (October 21st) – From Rules to Strategies

- *The Logic of Practice*, p.98-142
- “From Rules to Strategies”, in *In Other Words*, p.59-75.
- “Appendix: The Berber House or the World Reversed,” in *The Logic of Practice*, p.271-283.

Week 5: Theory of practice and practice of ethnography

This week's readings aim at showing both what a new theory of practice allows to uncover empirically, and how reflexive anthropology leads to breaking the epistemological divide between sociology, anthropology and history. It goes on with Bourdieu's guidelines for the practice of ethnographic interviews, a theory of "understanding" that avoids both the objectivist epistemological de-authorization of the natives and the unreflexive "epistemological populism" that has recently polluted some (though not all) trends in cultural studies.

5a (October 26th) – From Algeria to French Bearn: an Ethnologist of "exotic" as well as "national" Terrains

- The Logic of practice, Book II, "Practical Logics", p.143-199.
- "The Peasant and his Body", 12p (text hitherto unpublished in English, extracted from *The Ball of the Bachelors*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 - to be distributed by instructor)

To go further:

- "Marriage Strategies as Strategies of Social Reproduction", in Robert Forster und Orest Ranum (eds.), *Family and Society*, Baltimore/Md. & London 1976: The John Hopkins University Press, p.117-144

5b (October 28th) – Understanding the Meaning of "understanding": Guidelines for Ethnographic Fieldwork and Interview

- Pierre Bourdieu, "Understanding", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 13-2 (May 1996): 13-37 (also in Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999)
- Stéphane Beaud and Michel Pialoux, "Between 'Mate' and 'Scab': The Contradictory Inheritance of French Workers in the Postfordist Factory", *Ethnography* 2:3, 2001, p.323-356.
- Pierre Bourdieu, "Making the Economic Habitus. Algerian Workers Revisited", *Ethnography*, 1, 2000, p.17-41.

To go further:

- "Colonialism and Ethnography. Foreword to Pierre Bourdieu's *Travail et Travailleurs en Algérie*", *Anthropology Today*, vol.19, N.2, April 2003, p.13-18.

Week 6: Symbolic Power as a Social Power to Make the Social

This week purports (a) to show that objective social spaces and mental categories entertain a dialectical relationship (with the example of "state thought" and "academic forms of classification") and (b) to uncover the performative power of the symbolic while measuring on the one hand the *objective social conditions* (and limitations) of performativity and on the other hand the *agonistic* functioning of the symbolic arena, its effects and implications.

6a (November 1st) – Cognitive Categories as Objective Categories Incorporated, Objective Categories as Cognitive Categories Realized: the Dialectic of Social and Mental Structures.

- “Social Structures and Mental Structures”, Prologue in *The State Nobility*, p.1-6
- “Academic Forms of Classification”, Part I in *The State Nobility*, p.7-53,
- “Rites of Institution”, in *Language and Symbolic Power*, p.117-126
- “The Ordination”, Part II in *The State Nobility*, p.71-127.

To go further:

- “The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language”, Ch.1 in *Language and Symbolic power*, p.43-65.

6b (November 3rd): The Social Conditions of Performativity – The Agonistic Thirst for Recognition as Primary Engine of Social Life

- “Identity and Representation. Elements for a Critical Reflection on the Idea of Region”, in *Language and Symbolic Power*, p.220-228.
- “On the Family as a Realized Category”, *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 1996, p.9-26 (reprint as “Family Spirit” in *Practical Reason* p.64-74).
- *Pascalian Meditations* ch.5, p.164-205, “Symbolic Violence and Political Struggles” and chapter 6, “Social being, Time and the Sense of Existence”, p.206-245.

To go further:

- “Political Representation. Elements for a Theory of the Political Field”, in *Language and Symbolic Power*, p.171-202.

***Friday, November 5th – Midterm Paper due by 4pm ***

Week 7: The Logic of Fields and the Autonomization of Social Spaces in Differentiated Societies

Exploring the main theoretical benefits of the concept of “field”, we will show how *inter alia* it contributes to overcoming the scholarly opposition between materialism and idealism by grasping dynamically an “economy of symbolic goods” which extends to social spaces as “anti-economic” as art or religion. Bourdieu’s ambition is thus to construct a theory of the “sense of existence” refuting “vulgar” materialism while trying to avoid a regressive return to idealistic determinism. We will then study more in depth, and as an outstanding example, the peculiar properties of the “field of power”.

7a (November 8th) – A generalized Political Economy of Symbolic Goods

- *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p.94-140
- “Is a Disinterested Act Possible?”, in *Practical Reasons*, p.75-92.
- “The Field of Cultural Production or the Economic World Reversed”, *Poetics*, 12, November 1983, p.311-356 (reprinted as Ch.1 of *The Field of Cultural Production*, 1995).

To go further:

- “Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field”, *Comparative Social Research*, n.13, 1991, p.1-44
- “The Economy of Symbolic Goods”, in *Practical Reason*, p.92-126.

7b (November 10th) – The Field of Power and the State Concentration of Symbolic Violence

- “Reading Bourdieu’s Capital”, Foreword to *The State Nobility*, p.ix-xxii.
- *The State Nobility*, Part IV, “The Field of Power and its Transformations” p.261-339, and part V, “State Power and Power over the State”, p.371-389.

To go further

- “Rethinking the State: On the Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field”, in *Practical Reason*, p.35-74.

Week 8: Scrutinizing Social Tastes and Historicizing Transcendental Categories

The coming week and a half may be the most intense because of both the amount of readings and the analytical skills required to grasp them. We will focus on Bourdieu’s twofold intention: achieving the structuralist ambition of grasping society as a total system of meaningful relations (a theory of generalized social relativity, if you will, transcending common relativism) while succeeding in implementing the Durkheimian injunction to sociologize and historicize Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*.

8a (November 15th) – Distinction I

- “Social Space and Symbolic Space”, in *Practical Reason*, p.1-14.
- *Distinction*, Introduction and Part I, “A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste”, p.9-96.

8b (November 17th) - Distinction II

- Distinction, part II, “The Economy of Practices”, p.97-255.

To go further:

- “Programme for a Sociology of Sport”, in *In Other Words*, p.156-167.

Week 9: Towards a Socio-Historical Anthropology

9a (November 22nd) – Class tastes and Lifestyles: Dissecting Distinction.

- *Distinction*, Part III, “Class Tastes and lifestyles”:
 - Ch.5, “The Sense of Distinction”, p.257-317
 - Ch.6, “Cultural Goodwill”, p.318-371
 - Ch.7, “The Choice of the Necessary”, p.372-396
- *Distinction*, Conclusion, “Classes and Classifications”, p.466-484 and Postscript, “Towards a ‘vulgar’ Critique of ‘pure’ Critiques”, p.485-502.

9b (November 24th) – An outstanding example of Bourdieu’s ethnological legacy Abdelmalek Sayad

The last-but-one session presents an instance of the scientific legacy of Bourdieu’s attempt to build a total social science. Among the scholars who worked with him, both using his key theoretical insights and strongly contributing to the building of a scientific edifice through their own original work, Sayad may be the most interesting and no doubt the most suited to students of classical anthropology.

- Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, “The Organic Ethnologist of Algerian Migration”, *Ethnography*, 2000, vol 1(2): 173-182.
- Abdelmalek Sayad, Ch.2 “The Three Ages of Emigration” and ch.9, “Illness, Suffering and the Body” in *The suffering of the immigrant*, Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA : Polity Press, 2004, p.28-62, 177-215.

Week 10a (November 29th): The social role of public intellectuals and the conditions for the progress of “the universal”

In addition to recapitulating some of the core ideas developed during the quarter, this last session aims at relating Bourdieu’s socio-historical critique of scholastic reason to the political role he assigns to modern public intellectuals.

- “The Historicity of Reason”, Ch.3 in *Pascalian Meditations*, p.93-127.
- “For a *Realpolitik* of Reason”, in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, p.174-202.

- “Description and Prescription. The Conditions of Possibility and the Limits of Political Effectiveness”, chapter 5 in *Language and Symbolic Power*, p.127-136.
- “The Corporatism of the Universal: The Role of Intellectuals in the Modern World.” *Telos* 81 (Fall 1989): 99-110.

To go further:

- “The Uses of ‘the People’, in *In Other words*, p.150-155.

🚩 **Evening:** Screening of documentary by **Pierre Carles**, “**Sociology is a Martial Art**” (France, 2000).

[martial art, i.e., a sport of defense that should not be used to attack your adversaries, only to disarm certain symbolic aspects of social domination].

*** Wednesday, December 8th – Final Paper due by 4pm ***