

Remembering Pierre Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu died as this issue went to press. He was the most distinguished European sociologist since Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, and made major contributions to a range of other fields. No one would describe Bourdieu's writings as easily accessible, yet few social scientists in our era have had broader influence. Indeed, Bourdieu exemplified intellectual commitments at the heart of the mission of the SSRC: collaboration across disciplinary lines, internationalism and bringing social science to bear on public issues. He approached these as we also hope to do in a spirit of scientific rigor, with insistence on both quality and creativity.

After Bourdieu died on January 23, *Le Monde* delayed publication by several hours so the front page could carry the announcement. It was the lead story on TV news, and ran with expressions of grief and loss from France's president, prime minister, trade union leaders and a host of other dignitaries and scholars. These continued to flow for weeks, though after a few days they were complemented by attacks from old enemies and pretentious would-be heirs. The media low point came when a *Nouvelle Observateur* journalist refused admission to the hospital nonetheless published a first-person account of the supposed deathbed scene.

In all of this we see something of the French intellectual field that Bourdieu himself famously analyzed. We see the intellectual as celebrity, the desire of politicians to appear as men of ideas and the debasement of intellectual life that journalism can effect even while it ostensibly exalts it. We see also the workings of a scientific field in which scholars struggle for distinction—some by associating themselves with a great man and others by claiming to be important enough that their differences from him actually matter. But not least we see a reflection, however distorted, of an extraordinary intellectual career and the intellectual resources that made it possible.

Born in 1930, Bourdieu was the son of a peasant farmer turned postman in a remote village in the Pyrénées Atlantiques. He was at the top of his class at the Lycée de Pau, the Lycée Louis-le-Grand à Paris and eventually the École Normale Supérieure, breeding ground of France's intellectual elite. Never allowed the unselfconscious belonging of those with wealth and cultivated accents, he also never confused success with proof of meritocracy. He knew it had been a struggle. His very bodily sense of insertion into an intensely competitive social world was one of the inspirations for his enormously fruitful resuscitation of the Aristotelian idea of *habitus*. His awareness of what his classmates and teachers did not see because it felt natural to them informed his accounts of *doxa* and misrecognition and his grasp of the need to struggle with everyday consciousness in order to "win" social facts. Indeed, Bourdieu's estrangement

from the institutions within which he excelled propelled his critical analyses of French academic life, and indeed of the state and capitalism more generally.

Bourdieu's sense of distance from the dominant culture of the École Normale was shared with his contemporaries Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Though the specifics varied, a certain horror at the social environment of the École informed each in a struggle to see what conventional consciousness obscured. Indeed, as Bourdieu often reminded listeners, Foucault attempted suicide as a student. Bourdieu's response, however, was to embrace science, and in opposition to the elitist world of philosophy, specifically social science.

This commitment was crystallized by national service in Algeria during that French colony's horrific struggle for independence. Scarred but also toughened, Bourdieu stayed on as a teacher and became a self-taught ethnographer, proving himself an extraordinarily keen observer of the interpenetration of large-scale social change and the struggles and solidarities of daily life. He conducted research in the Kabyle region and with Berber-speaking labor migrants, addressing themes from the introduction of money into marriage negotiations to cosmology and the agricultural calendar. His first three books, *Sociologie d'Algérie* (1958), *Travail et travailleurs en Algérie* (1963, with Alain Darbel), *Le Déracinement* (1964, with Abdelmalek Sayad) were signal empirical contributions to the study of Algeria, colonialism, economic change and the crisis of traditional agriculture. Working with Darbel and Sayad (an exceptional scholar who remained a close friend until his own death in 1998) helped to inaugurate a pattern of collaboration that characterized Bourdieu's entire career. In a branch of science that has been slow to institutionalize collaboration (compared, for example, to the biomedical sciences), and in a French intellectual field heavily focused on the ideal of the heroic individual genius, Bourdieu developed long-term relationships and a support system for shared intellectual labor. He founded the journal *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* and later the European review of books, *Liber*, as well as two research centers. The combination of feudalism and pursuit of celebrity that characterize French academia were in tension with this, of course, even while they helped Bourdieu procure resources. In order to achieve personal autonomy, several of Bourdieu's students and collaborators felt it necessary to go through painful rebellions. A few could not restrain themselves from expressing emotions from their old quasi-Oedipal struggles in newspaper commentary after Bourdieu's death.

Some of the postmortem attacks reflected the *ressentiment* of the lesser for the greater that Nietzsche appropriated the French word to designate. In Bourdieu's case this was compounded by the extraordinary amount of intellectual terrain he covered and thus of space he occupied and shadow he

cast. Perhaps most of all, though, there was anger over the extent to which Bourdieu challenged the very system in which he prospered and his unwillingness to turn his own success into an endorsement of that system and thus of all those honored by it. On the contrary, Bourdieu was relentlessly critical of the consecration function performed by educational institutions. Knowing the antagonism this would arouse, he called the first chapter in *Homo Academicus* (1984) "A 'Book for Burning'?"

Bourdieu's studies of universities and intellectual production were partly an extension of his inquiries into education and social inequality (including *The Inheritors* in 1964, *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society* in 1970 and *The State Nobility* in 1989). Equally, though, they were central to his pursuit of a reflexive grounding for social science. One could not understand the stances intellectuals took without understanding both the positions they held within their microcosm or the place of that intellectual field in the web of symbolic and material exchanges involving holders of different kinds of power and resources. This was no simple determinism, but a demand that social scientists pay attention to the conditions of their own work—starting with the very unequal social distribution of leisure to devote to intellectual projects—and objectify their own efforts to produce objective knowledge of the social world. He challenged, in other words, the common tendency to propound objective explanations of the lives of others while claiming the right of subjective interpretation for one's own.

Struggling to grasp the subjective and objective together was a leitmotif of Bourdieu's work. He railed against false antinomies and the kinds of oppositions that serve less to advance knowledge than to advance careers of those who write endless theses arguing one side or the other. The point was not simply to choose Weber over Marx or Lévi-Strauss over Sartre but to escape from imposed categories. "Objective analysis," he wrote in *Homo Academicus*, "obliges us to realize that the two approaches, structuralist and constructivist ... are two complementary stages of the same procedure." Bourdieu applied the lesson equally in studies of museums and artistic fields and of science itself. He offered no simple "solution" to the riddle of structure and agency. He insisted, rather, that the interaction be worked out in analysis of concrete empirical cases. Only in this way could social scientists do the necessary, if hard, labor of "conquering and constructing social facts"—that is, of distinguishing what was really going on from the received understandings of previous academic knowledge, culture in general and everyday preconceptions.

In a review of Bourdieu's great study of the origin of the modern literary field, *The Rules of Art* (1992), Harrison White suggested that masquerading behind the appearance



Pierre Bourdieu, 1930-2002

of a Parisian intellectual, Bourdieu was in fact a hard empirical scientist. Indeed, Bourdieu had little patience for the rejection of science recently fashionable among self-declared critical thinkers. He thought the "French theory" that claimed indebtedness to Derrida and Foucault (though it seldom reached their standards) had "much to answer for." While he shared the view that simple empiricism was liable to reproduce ideologically conventional results, he argued that the necessary response was not to abandon empirical research but to carry out a struggle over the classifications by which knowledge was produced—including by state actors whose classifications pigeon-holed human beings for purposes of their own even as they provided social scientists with apparently neutral data.

Accordingly, Bourdieu wrote few purely theoretical treatises. He devoted himself, rather, to substantive analyses (and occasionally to sharp polemics). Only relatively late, in *Pascalian Meditations* (1997), did he offer a general discussion of his approach to social knowledge; why it must be related to the conditions of intellectual work, the dispositions of agents and particular locations in collective and individual histories; and why this reflexivity did not mandate relativism.

Bourdieu's most famous "theoretical" studies are actually analyses deeply rooted in his field data from Algeria. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972) and later *The Logic of Practice* (1980) are among the most influential works to try to overcome the simple opposition between subjective and objective, agency and structure. They join with Foucault's work of the same period in moving beyond structuralism's avoidance of embodied subjectivity and with Derrida's effort to recover epistemology by breaking with the notion that it must be grounded in the Cartesian perspective of the individual knowing subject. But they also lay the basis for an empirical science that would address the practices of knowledge at the same time as it produced knowledge of social practice.

Bourdieu approached social science itself as a practical activity; it was no accident that he titled his book of epistemological and methodological preliminaries *The Craft of Sociology* (1968, with Jean-Claude Chamboredon and Jean-Claude Passeron). The craft worker is always a lover of knowledge, the craft itself being precisely a store of knowledge, and yet craft knowledge is never fully discursive; masters teach their skills, but know-how can never be reduced to instructions and never escapes its situated and embodied character. "The rules of art," for example, is (like *habitus*) a phrase that signifies practical knowledge, like the knowledge of cooking embodied in a grandmother's hands-on guidance rather than a cookbook. Art could never be reduced to following rules and yet to say it is without strategy or intention or not based on knowledge would be to misunderstand it utterly. Neither is science simply the value-free expression of truth. It is a project, but one organized—ideally—in a social field that rewards the production of truth—including new truths and new approaches to understanding—and not merely performance according to the rules. It is a project that depends crucially on reason—as an institutionally embedded practice—and therefore refuses equally the rationalistic reduction of reason to rules, simple determinism's unreasoned acceptance of the status quo, and the expressive appeal to insight supposedly transcending history and not corrigible by reason.

It was as a scientist that Bourdieu in the last years of his life turned to analyze some of the impacts of neoliberal globalization. He was concerned above all that the social institutions that supported reason—by providing cultural producers with some autonomy—were under attack. Reduction to the market threatened to undermine science; reduction to the logic of television entertainment threatened to undermine

public discourse. The problem was not internationalization as such—Bourdieu himself called forcefully for a new internationalism and saw science as an international endeavor. The problem was the presentation of a particular model of globalization as a force of necessity to which there was no alternative but adaptation. He usually called this the American model, annoying Americans who wished to distance themselves from government and corporate policies. Whatever the label, he meant the view that institutions developed out of more than a century of struggle should be scrapped if they couldn't meet a test of market viability. Many of these, including universities, were state institutions. They were far from perfect—as his own work showed—but collective struggles had grudgingly and partially opened them to workers, women and others. These were social achievements, and to sacrifice them was to step backwards whether it was masked by a deterministic analysis of the market or a simple assertion of self-interest by the wealthy and powerful. In his own life, Bourdieu recognized, it was not merely talent and effort that propelled his extraordinary ascent from rural Béarn to the Collège de France, but also state funding.

Bourdieu's polemical writings brought him a wide readership in and beyond the universities but also considerable derision from some academics. The sociologist who had refused the French notion of the philosopher as "omnicompetent intellectual" and criticized Sartre seemed to be taking on a Sartrean mantle. Indeed,

Bourdieu became remarkably famous, especially after the movie about him, "Sociology Is a Martial Art," was a surprise commercial success in 2000-2001. Theater groups staged performances based on his ethnographic exploration of social suffering, *The Weight of the World* (written with 22 collaborators). Women approached him on the street and told him—to his evident embarrassment—that their lives were changed by his book *Masculine Domination* (which is a surprisingly abstract text for that, and not even one of his best books—though after Bourdieu had left, one of these women told me how "hot" it had made her just to be next to him). As his theory predicted, the media made him all the more a celebrity when he attacked the celebrity-making machine in *On Television* (1996).

Nonetheless, Bourdieu's public interventions were firmly rooted in his sociological analyses. It was precisely his theory of social fields—honed in studies of the religious field, the legal field and the field of cultural production—that informed his defense of the autonomy (always only relative)

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of the scientific field from the market. His theory of the multiple forms of capital—cultural and social as well as economic—suggested that these were indirectly convertible, but if they were reduced to simple equivalence, cultural and social capital lost their specificity and efficacy. His early studies in Algeria showed the corrosive impact of unbridled extension of market forces.

In his struggles "against the tyranny of the market" as in his earlier more academic work, Bourdieu worked tirelessly for the international solidarity of scholars. He edited a book series that played a major role in making international social science—from Erving Goffman to Joseph Schumpeter—available in French translation. *Liber* and *Actes* were published in a dozen languages. He joined forces with Gunter Grass, Eric Hobsbawm, Toni Morrison and Edward Said, not just to support particular public causes but to help develop a new "Internationale" of intellectuals, partially institutionalized in the World Parliament of Writers.

Bourdieu is best known in the United States for his book *Distinction* (1979), an analysis of how culture figures in social inequality and the pursuit of distinction figures in social practice. In his death, it is at once fitting and ironic that Bourdieu was accorded great distinction and that struggle should ensue among those seeking to enhance their own distinction by positioning themselves in relation to Bourdieu. But it is worth recalling that *Distinction* was also a response to Kant's third critique. As Durkheim had sought to challenge individualistic explanation of social facts in *Suicide*, so Bourdieu sought in *Distinction* to demonstrate the social organization of judgment and taste.

Bourdieu was accorded the honor of burial in Père Lachaise Cemetery. This famed site in the northeastern corner of Paris is the resting place of a remarkable range of French and international public figures from the Abbé Sieyès to Gertrude Stein. Among its oldest tombs are those of the famed medieval lovers Abelard and Héloïse. Bourdieu is buried between Saint-Simon and Brillat-Savarin, a founder of social science and a founder of gastronomy. Père Lachaise also holds the remains of Bourdieu's great forebears Auguste Comte and Maurice Merleau-Ponty—the latter an under-recognized influence—and of the great historians Jules Michelet and Fernand Braudel. As Bourdieu was engaged with literature and the arts throughout his life, one is pleased to see that the graves of Balzac, Bizet, Chopin, Delacroix, Max Ernst, Modigliani, Molière, Seurat, Oscar Wilde and

Richard Wright are nearby (and one is glad to see Frenchness and internationalism intertwined). Greatness of more "middlebrow" sorts is celebrated as well, with Edith Piaf, Stéphane Grapelli and of course Jim Morrison. Maria Callas was buried in Père Lachaise but after trouble with grave-robbers her body was cremated and her ashes scattered over the Aegean (and but for the cancer that took him, Bourdieu would have delivered the keynote to an SSRC conference on opera in Florence this May).

On February 3, more than 2000 people gathered at the Théâtre Nationale de la Colline in Paris to honor the life and work of Pierre Bourdieu. Speakers came from as far as Japan. They included professors, trade union leaders, artists and political activists. As I said then, it was a privilege to know Pierre Bourdieu, and an honor to speak in homage to

him. I also noted, however, that Bourdieu didn't concern himself much with ceremonies. He had a passion to know and understand, not to receive tributes and honors. Indeed, this is a source of some of the resentment toward him. He gained huge recognition without the formal recognitions so important to others. His very transcendence insulted them. In this regard, academics too often participate in a kind of mutual reassurance scheme. Cite me and I'll cite you; praise me and I'll praise you. Be clever and facile but don't be too

demanding because most of your colleagues want new understanding less than they want the reassurance that they already know everything worth knowing.

Bourdieu never confused social facts with the preferences of colleagues or the public. He knew the political importance of science, but also that this importance would be vitiated by reducing science to politics. In *Pantagruel*, Rabelais famously said, "Science without conscience is nothing but the ruin of the soul." It is a better line in French, where "conscience" also means consciousness. It is not the sort of line Bourdieu would quote, though, because public appeals to conscience are too commonly justifications for a jargon of authenticity rather than the application of reason. But Bourdieu demonstrated that conscience is not simply an interior state of individuals. It is a social achievement, in both its senses. As such, it is always at risk. Pierre was a scholar and researcher of great rigor and also a man and a citizen with a conscience attuned to inequality and domination. Would there were more. ■

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Craig Calhoun