

☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

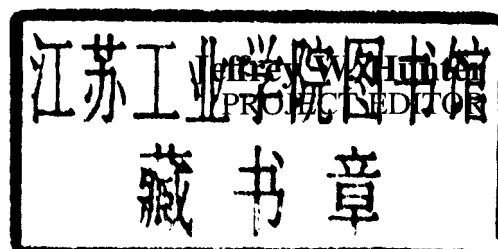
CLC

198

Volume 198

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers



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Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 198

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132

ISBN 0-7876-7968-2
ISSN 0091-3421

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface

Named “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today’s reader.

Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete biographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

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A *CLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *CLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *CLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces an annual cumulative title index that alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in *CLC* and is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Roof Books, 1990. 73-82. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Janet Witley. Vol. 169. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 3-8.

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Pierre Bourdieu

1930-2002

French sociologist, nonfiction writer, and essayist.

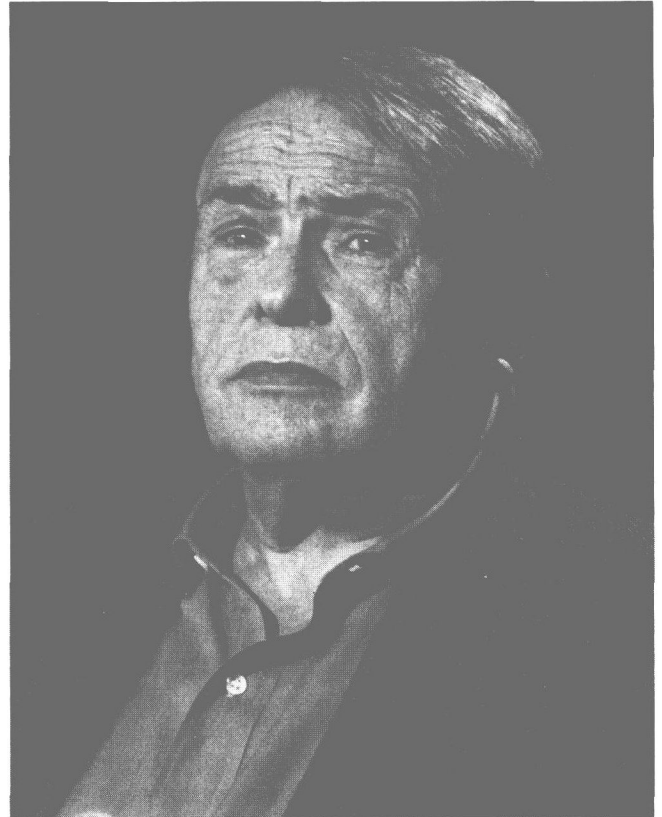
The following entry provides an overview of Bourdieu's career through 2002.

INTRODUCTION

Widely recognized for his work in the fields of sociology and cultural anthropology, Bourdieu's central focus was social class and the established cultural and social institutions that can reinforce the constraints of social class. Bourdieu approached the study of culture and sociology from a Marxist perspective and often used Marx's works to expound on theories regarding the role of education, media, and the intellectual in society. Although Bourdieu was a well-known and controversial figure in French intellectual circles for many decades, his work was almost unknown in the United States until the early 1980s. He garnered attention in American intellectual circles upon the publication, in 1984, of the English translation of his most famous work, *La Distinction* (1979; *Distinction*), an analysis of the significance of personal taste and its relationship with social status. Since then, a number of his works have been translated into English and he is often cited as one of the most important sociological theorists of the twentieth century.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Bourdieu was born August 1, 1930, in Denguin, a small village in southwestern France, to Albert, a postmaster, and Noemie Bourdieu. Bourdieu attended the École normale supérieure in Paris, where most of his fellow students were financially and culturally elite. He graduated at the top of his class in 1954 with a degree in philosophy, and began teaching at a high school in Moulins in 1955. Bourdieu then accepted a teaching position in colonial Algeria at the University of Algiers, remaining there for almost two years. He returned to France in 1960 and began working as a professor of sociology at the University of Paris and then at the University of Lille. In 1964, Bourdieu became director of the Centre de Sociologie Européenne. His first major publication, *Le Reproduction* (*Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*) appeared in 1970. In this work, Bourdieu presented what would become a com-



mon theme in all of his works. Focusing on the field of education, he argued that the French educational system perpetuated existing social and cultural divisions. He developed this and other ideas regarding art, society, and culture in a number of books and essays over the years, often collaborating with colleagues. His thoughts on power and social status in France were influenced by both his rural background and his experiences in Algeria. In addition to his books and research, Bourdieu also launched the journal *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* in 1975. The goal of this publication was to dismantle mechanisms to which Bourdieu attributed the preservation of the status quo in social and economic power. Bourdieu remained a part of the French academic network for most of his career, and beginning in the 1990s, became a high-profile political activist, asserting that "the sociologist must intervene" when politics shift toward a direction he or she finds worrisome. He continued to research and write until his death from cancer, on January 23, 2002.

MAJOR WORKS

Bourdieu was a prolific writer, publishing over twenty-five books and over three hundred essays and articles during his career. Besides *Distinction and Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*, his best-known works include *Esquisse d'une theorie de la pratique* (1972; *Outline of a Theory of Practice*), *Homo Academicus* (1984), *Règles de l'art* (1992; *The Rules of Art*), *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), and *Domination masculine* (1998; *Masculine Domination*). In these works, he examined ideas regarding individuals and institutions, theorizing that all human action takes place within a preset social and economic order. According to Bourdieu, existing social and cultural systems of hierarchy determine how people or individuals can acquire "capital." From an economic perspective, money and material ownership determine one's position and power in society; from a cultural perspective, one's "capital" is determined by social position, which, in the case of rich and educated people, affords them a power and status not easily gained by those at a lower level in society. Thus, according to Bourdieu, culture and intellectual expertise can also serve as means of domination. He presented these assertions first in *Distinction*, in which he demonstrated the role of social class in shaping cultural preferences. Also contained in this work are a number of terms made famous by Bourdieu, including such descriptors as "cultural capital" and "habitus." Although he was a sociologist by training, Bourdieu's books cover a wide variety of subjects, and his social activism during the 1980s and political activities during the 1990s brought him much attention in France beyond his field of expertise.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

While he has been well known in French intellectual circles since the 1960s, Bourdieu's work has only recently begun to garner critical and scholarly attention outside of France. He has been compared with such French philosophers as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, Jean-Paul Sartre, and others whose radical theories have resulted in the furthering of social causes. Indeed, according to critic Richard Shusterman, "After the death of [Michel] Foucault, in 1984, Pierre Bourdieu became the last great exemplar of this tradition." Bourdieu's detractors have characterized his theories as overly pessimistic and deterministic, due to their focus on the pervasiveness of competition, dominance/subjugation, and the unconscious willingness of the subjugated to cede power to the dominant. Katha Pollitt is among numerous critics who have responded to this allegation; in her words, "[Bourdieu] retained, in the face of a

great deal of contrary evidence, including much gathered by himself, a faith in people's capacities for transformation." Critic Anne Friederike Müller similarly stated, "To counter the frequent reproach of determinism, Bourdieu would answer that he advocated liberation through knowledge." Bourdieu's later writings were subject to much controversy which critics have suggested had less to do with the theories he expounded than with discomfort over his markedly high-profile involvement, as a sociologist, in political activity. Pollitt, evaluating Bourdieu's oeuvre, stated that his writings were "probably the most brilliant and fruitful renovation and application of Marxian concepts in our era."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Sociologie d'Algérie* [*The Algerians*] (nonfiction) 1958
Travail et Travailleurs en Algérie (nonfiction) 1963
Les Héritiers, les étudiants et la culture [with Jean-Claude Passeron; *The Inheritors: French Students and Their Relation to Culture*] (nonfiction) 1964
Un art moyen: essais sur les usages sociaux de la photographie (nonfiction) 1965
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Choses dites [*In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*] (essays) 1987
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CRITICISM

Toril Moi (essay date autumn 1991)

SOURCE: Moi, Toril. "Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture." *New Literary History* 22, no. 4 (autumn 1991): 1017-49.

[In the following essay, Moi analyzes Bourdieu's social theory in the context of feminist critical thinking.]

FEMINISM AS CRITIQUE

Feminist theory is critical theory; feminist critique is therefore necessarily political. In making this claim I draw on the Marxist concept of "critique," succinctly summarized by Kate Soper as a theoretical exercise which, by "explaining the source in reality of the cognitive shortcomings of the theory under attack, call[s] for changes in the reality itself" (93). In this sense, Soper writes, feminist critique comes to echo critical theory as developed by the Frankfurt School with its emphasis on "argued justification for concrete, emancipatory practice" (93).¹ This is clearly an ambitious aim, which would require me to situate Pierre Bourdieu's social theory in relation to the specific French social formation which produced it. Such analysis would require substantial empirical research: there is no space for such an undertaking in this context.

I have therefore called this paper "Appropriating Bourdieu." By "appropriation" I understand a critical assessment of a given theory formation with a view to taking it over and using it for feminist purposes.² Appropriation, then, is theoretically somewhat more modest than a full-scale critique and has a relatively well-defined concrete purpose. Neither "appropriation" nor "critique" rely on the idea of a transcendental vantage point from which to scrutinize the theory formation in question. Unlike the Enlightenment concept of "criticism," the concept of "critique" as used here is immanent and dialectical. My proposal of "appropriation" and "critique" as key feminist activities is intended to contest the idea that feminists are doomed to be victimized by what is sometimes called "male" theory. If I prefer to use terms such as "patriarchal" and "feminist" rather than "male" and "female," it is precisely because I believe that as feminists we struggle to *transform* the cultural traditions of which we are the contradictory products.

WHY BOURDIEU?

Since the 1960s the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, professor of sociology at the Collège de France and directeur d'études at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, has published over twenty books on anthropology, cultural sociology, language and literature. Only recently, however, has he found an audience outside the social sciences in the English-speaking world. One of the reasons for such relatively belated interdisciplinary interest is surely the fact that his resolutely sociological and historical thought, which owes far more to classical French sociology, structuralism, and even Marxism than to any later intellectual movements,³ could find little resonance in a theoretical space dominated, in the humanities at least, by post-structuralism and postmodernism. Today, however, there is a renewed interest in the social and historical determinants of cultural production. The fact that Bourdieu has always devoted much space to problems pertaining to literature, language and aesthetics makes his work particularly promising terrain for literary critics.⁴

In a recent paper, the British cultural sociologist Janet Wolff puts the case for a more sociological approach to feminist criticism: "[I]t is only with a systematic analysis of sexual divisions in society, of the social relations of cultural production, and of the relationship between textuality, gender and social structure," she writes, "that feminist literary criticism will really be adequate to its object."⁵ I agree with Wolff that feminist criticism would do well to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the social aspects of cultural production.⁶ Bourdieu's sociology of culture, I would argue, is promising terrain for feminists precisely because it allows us to produce highly concrete and specific analyses of the social determinants of the literary *énonciation*. This is not to say that such determinants are the only

ones that we need to consider, nor that feminist critics should not concern themselves with the *énoncé*, or the actual statement itself.⁷ Again I agree with Janet Wolff who holds that feminist criticism fails in its political and literary task if it does not study literature both at the level of texts and at the level of institutions and social processes. I should perhaps add that just as it is absurd to try to reduce the *énoncé* to the *énonciation* (for instance by claiming that every statement can be fully explained by one's so-called "speaking position"), it is equally absurd to treat texts as if they were not the complex products of a historically and socially situated act of utterance, the *énonciation*.

If I am interested in Bourdieu, then, it is not because I believe that his theory of the social construction of conceptual categories, including that of "woman," somehow makes all other theory formations superfluous. There can be no question of abandoning Freud for Bourdieu, for instance. Nor can we afford to neglect textual theories in favor of sociology of psychology. I do not wish, either, to reduce the work of the French sociologist to a simple tool for literary critics. For Bourdieu also has considerable theoretical relevance for feminism. In this paper, for instance, I hope to show that a Bourdieuan approach enables us to reconceptualize gender as a social category in a way which undercuts the traditional essentialist/nonessentialist divide.

Bourdieu's *general* theories of the reproduction of cultural and social power are not per se radically new and original. Many of his most cherished themes have also been studied by others. To some, his general theory of power may seem less original than that of a Marx or a Foucault; his account of the way in which individual subjects come to internalize and identify with dominant social institutions or structures may read like an echo of Gramsci's theory of hegemony; and his theory of social power and its ideological effects may seem less challenging than those of the Frankfurt School.⁸ For me, on the other hand, Bourdieu's originality is to be found in his development of what one might call a *microtheory* of social power.⁹ Where Gramsci will give us a general theory of the imposition of hegemony, Bourdieu will show exactly *how* one can analyse teachers' comments on student papers, rules for examinations and students' choices of different subjects in order to trace the specific and practical construction and implementation of a hegemonic ideology. Many feminists claim that gender is socially constructed. It is not difficult to make such a sweeping statement. The problem is to determine what kind of specific consequences such a claim may have. It is at this point that I find Bourdieu's sociological theories particularly useful. For a feminist, another great advantage of Bourdieu's microtheoretical approach is that it allows us to incorporate the most mundane details of everyday life in our analyses, or in other words: Bourdieu makes sociological theory out of *everything*.

Refusing to accept the distinction between "high" or "significant" and "low" or "insignificant" matters, Bourdieu will analyse various ways of chewing one's food, different forms of dressing, musical tastes ranging from a predilection for "Home on the Range" to a liking for John Cage, home decoration, the kind of friends one has and the films one likes to see, and the way a student may feel when talking to her professor. In one sense, then, some of my interest in Bourdieu is grounded in my basic conviction that much of what patriarchal minds like to trivialize as *gossip*, and as women's gossip at that, is in fact socially significant. But it is one thing to make such a claim, quite another to make a convincing case for the claim. After reading Bourdieu I now feel confident that it is possible to link the humdrum details of everyday life to a more general social analysis of power. This in itself ought to make his approach attractive for feminists looking for a mode of social analysis which seeks to undo or overcome the traditional individual/social or private/public divide. Again it may be necessary to stress that I am not arguing that Bourdieu is the only thinker to take a theoretical interest in everyday life. What I am arguing, however, is that I know of no other theory formation which allows me to make highly complex, yet quite concrete and specific links between, say, my fascination with Simone de Beauvoir, my tendency to eat fish in restaurants, and my specific position in a given social field.

It nevertheless remains true that until very recently Bourdieu himself has not had much to say about women.¹⁰ This means that the place of gender in his thought is somewhat undertheorized. A feminist approaching Bourdieu must necessarily ask whether his major concepts can simply be applied to gender or whether they require rethinking and restructuring in order to become usable for her purposes. She will also have to raise the question of social change. Are Bourdieu's theories, with their insistence on the way in which social agents internalize dominant social values, capable of theorizing change? Is Bourdieu implying that social power structures *always* win out? That *amor fati*—love your destiny—is an appropriate motto for every socially determined act? Crucial for feminists and socialists alike, these questions will be considered below.

FIELD, HABITUS, LEGITIMACY, SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

At this point it is necessary to introduce some of Bourdieu's key concepts. Two of his most fundamental terms, *field* [*champ*] and *habitus*, are deeply interdependent. A field may be defined as a competitive system of social relations which functions according to its own specific logic or rules. "A field," Bourdieu writes, "is a space in which a game takes place [*espace de jeu*], a field of objective relations between individuals or

institutions who are competing for the same stake" (*Questions de sociologie*, 197). In principle, a field is simply any social system which can be shown to function according to such a logic.

But if the field is a competitive structure, or perhaps more accurately a site of struggle or a battlefield, what is at stake? Generally speaking, any agent in the field may be assumed to seek maximum power and dominance within it. The aim is to *rule* the field, to become the instance which has the power to confer or withdraw *legitimacy* from other participants in the game. Bourdieu defines *legitimacy* as follows: "An institution, action or usage which is dominant, but not recognized as such [*méconnu comme tel*], that is to say, which is tacitly accepted, is legitimate" (*Questions de sociologie*, 110). Such a position of dominance is achieved by amassing the maximum amount of the specific kind of symbolic capital current in the field. In his pioneering article of 1966, "Champ intellectuel et projet créateur," Bourdieu presents a striking analysis of the interrelations between the writer's project and the structures of the intellectual field. The intellectual field, he argues, is relatively autonomous in relation to the whole social field and generates its own type of legitimacy. This is not to say that the social field is not present within the intellectual field, but rather that it is present only as a *representation* of itself, a representation, moreover, which is not imported from outside, but produced from within the intellectual field itself.

The intellectual and educational fields, like any other such, have their own specific mechanisms of selection and consecration. Intellectual legitimacy as a symbolic value is produced by the field itself and may be defined as that which is *recognized*—or in Bourdieu's term, *consecrated*—by the field at any given time. In order to achieve legitimacy, the agents in the field have recourse to many and varied strategies. These strategies, however, are rarely if ever perceived as such by the agents themselves. Instead, each field generates its own specific *habitus*, which Bourdieu defines as "a system of dispositions adjusted to the game [of the field]" (*Questions de sociologie*, 34). "For a field to work," he writes, "there must be stakes, and people ready to play the game, equipped with the habitus which enables them to know and recognize the immanent laws of the game, the stakes and so on" (110). *Habitus*, then, may be seen as the totality of general *dispositions* acquired through practical experience in the field. At one level, then, habitus is practical sense (*le sens pratique*). In some ways, habitus may be compared to what educationalists have called the "silent curriculum": those norms and values that are inculcated through the very forms of classroom interaction, rather than through any explicit teaching project. For Bourdieu, however, habitus is an active, generative set of unformulated dispositions, not a store of passive knowledge.

As the internalized set of tacit rules governing strategies and practices in the field, the habitus of a field is destined to remain unarticulated. Insofar as the field cannot function without its specific habitus, any field is necessarily structured by a series of *unspoken* and *unspeakable* rules for what can legitimately be said—or perceived—within the field. In this sense, Bourdieu writes, the whole field functions as a form of *censorship* (see *Questions de sociologie*, 138-42). Within the field, every discourse is *euphemistic* in the sense that it has to observe the correct *forms*, legislated by the field, or risk exclusion as nonsense (in the case of the intellectual field, excluded discourses would tend to be cast as *stupid* or *naïve*).

If the field as a whole, however, functions as a form of censorship, every discourse within the field becomes at once an enactment and an effect of *symbolic violence*. This is so because a field is a particular structure of distribution of a specific kind of capital. The right to speak, *legitimacy*, is invested in those agents recognized by the field as powerful possessors of capital. Such individuals become spokespersons for the *doxa* and struggle to relegate challengers to their position as *heterodox*, as lacking in capital, as individuals whom one cannot *credit* with the right to speak. The powerful possessors of symbolic capital become the wielders of symbolic power, and thus of symbolic violence. But given the fact that all agents in the field to some extent share the same habitus, such richly endowed agents' right to power is implicitly *recognized* by all, and not least by those who aspire one day to oust them from their thrones. That different factions within the (battle)field fight to the bitter end over politics, aesthetics, or theory does not mean that they do not to some extent share the same habitus: in the very act of engaging in battle, they mutually and silently demonstrate their recognition of the rules of the game. It does not follow, as far as I can see, that they will all play the game *in the same way*. The different positions of different players in the field will require different strategies. To the extent that different agents have different social backgrounds (they may come from different geographical regions, be of different class, gender or race and so on), their habitus cannot be *identical*.

The same thing goes for legitimacy as for "distinction" (distinction, after all, is nothing but *legitimate taste*). The whole point of the process of imposing legitimacy is to reach a point where the categories of power and distinction merge. Legitimacy (or distinction) is only truly achieved when it is no longer possible to tell whether dominance has been achieved *as a result of* distinction or whether in fact the dominant agent simply appears to be distinguished *because* he (more rarely she) is dominant (see *Distinction*, 92).

In *Le sens pratique*, Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as "soft" violence, or as "censored and euphemized

violence, which is to say that it is unrecognizable and acknowledged [*méconnaissable et reconnue*]” (216-17). One has recourse to symbolic violence when open or direct violence (such as economic violence, for instance) is impossible. It is important to realize that symbolic violence is *legitimate* and therefore literally unrecognizable as violence. If explicit ideological or material struggle between groups or classes develops, such as class conflict or the feminist struggle, symbolic violence may be unmasked and recognized for what it is. In the very moment it is recognized, however, it can no longer function as *symbolic* violence (see *Le sens pratique*, 230, n. 27). Insofar as they tend to deny the importance of economic structures, precapitalist societies, Bourdieu argues, make widespread use of symbolic violence. In late capitalist societies, on the other hand, symbolic violence flourishes most perniciously in the domains of art and culture, perceived as sacred refuges for disinterested values in a hostile, sordid world dominated by economic production (see *Le sens pratique*, 231).

EDUCATION AND THE REPRODUCTION OF POWER

For Bourdieu, the educational system is one of the principal agents of symbolic violence in modern democracies.¹¹ It is also a pivotal factor in the construction of each individual's *habitus*. In *La Noblesse d'état* he studies the way in which the imposition of social power in the educational system is linked to the transmission or reproduction of power in other social spheres.¹² The function of the educational system, Bourdieu argues, is above all to produce the necessary social *belief* in the *legitimacy* of currently dominant power structures, or in other words: to make us believe that our rulers are ruling us by virtue of their qualifications and achievements rather than by virtue of their noble birth or connections. The coveted diploma or exam paper becomes a token of *social magic*, the emblem of a transformational exercise which truly changes the essence of the chosen elite.¹³ To claim that something is an effect of social magic, Bourdieu reminds us, is not of course to say that it is illusory or unreal: “One must be noble in order to behave nobly; but one would cease being noble if one did not behave as a noble. In other words, social magic has very real effects. To assign somebody to a group with a superior essence (nobles as opposed to commoners, men as opposed to women, cultured people as opposed to uneducated people and so on) operates an objective transformation determining a learning process which in its turn facilitates a real transformation apt to bring that person closer to the definition that has been bestowed on him” (*Noblesse*, 157, my translation). The fact that distinguished products of the educational system are distinguished as a result of the social *belief* in their distinction, then, does not mean that they do not in fact also possess some objective competence (the ability to read Greek, solve complex equations, or whatever). Such competence, however, has very little to do with

the nature of the tasks they will be called upon to perform as, say, managing directors of important companies or members of politically powerful commissions. The fact that the educational system necessarily produces some competence without for that matter ceasing to exercise social magic is a phenomenon Bourdieu labels the “ambiguity of competence.” This ambiguity, then, is precisely what enables the educational system to make such an efficient or *convincing* contribution to the legitimization and naturalization of power.

The reproduction of power, however, is not merely an effect of education. On the contrary, the evidence produced by Bourdieu would seem to indicate that whereas the educational system has an indispensable role to play as one of the most important agents of legitimate symbolic violence, social agents rich in political and economic power know how to overcome the educational hurdle if they have to. If persons from disadvantaged social groups require all the educational capital they can obtain if they are to advance in society, members of more favoured classes can get further on less educational capital, simply because they have access to large amounts of other kinds of capital.

Bourdieu convincingly shows how the educational system favours the bourgeoisie even in its most intrinsically academic exercises. The consequences are ominous: students lacking in cultural capital (for instance those of modest social origins) tend to fare badly at a very early stage in their educational careers. According to Bourdieu there is an almost perfect homology between the class position of the individual pupils and their teachers' intellectual judgments of them. Defined as failures, these students *become* failures in precisely the same way as the distinguished students *become* distinguished.

When it comes to measuring social success in later life, however, Bourdieu chillingly demonstrates how a certain lack of educational capital can be compensated for by the possession of other forms of capital. Money and political power (that is, economic and political capital in Bourdieu's terms) are obviously important here. But in *La Noblesse d'état* he also places much emphasis on a new concept, that of *social capital*. Social capital is defined as “relational power,” that is to say the number of culturally, economically, or politically useful relations accumulated by a given person. In France it would seem that the “great” bourgeois families maintain or reproduce their social standing by relying on extensive networks of family members with large amounts of capital in different fields. Thus one family may comprise outstanding medical doctors, powerful bankers, influential politicians, and perhaps an important artist, writer or professor. In this way the family as an extended group can be said to have heavy symbolic investments safely spread across the whole social field.

This was also true for the great noble families under the *ancien régime*, and, as Bourdieu drily remarks, this is why even a revolution tends to have little impact on the fortunes of such family networks. Persons from this kind of background can be shown regularly to achieve higher positions of power in relation to their educational capital than members of less favored social groups. Or in other words: a star pupil at the École Polytechnique who is also the son of a prominent politician is far more likely to become the president of an important bank than an equally successful student at the École Polytechnique whose father happens to be a mere worker, schoolteacher, or engineer.

And if the son or daughter of the prominent banker somehow fails to get into Polytechnique, there are other, less prestigious but “classy” educational establishments, such as the new breed of private schools focusing on business and management, which compensate for their lack of intellectual prestige by their upmarket, “modern” image. For the offspring of the privileged, such “little” schools (as opposed to the “great,” intellectually highly prestigious state schools such as the École Normale, the Polytechnique, and so on) produce an educational cachet which allows them to aspire, after all, to positions of a certain economic or political power. For the sons and daughters of the less favoured classes, however, such schools hold little promise. Again, the social logic at work is the same: if capital is what it takes to produce more capital, an agent lacking in social capital at the outset will not benefit greatly from a relatively non-prestigious (“low-capital”) education.

The ideological role of the education system, then, is to make it *appear* as if positions of leadership and power are distributed according to merit. The existence in every educational institution of a tiny percentage of what Bourdieu likes to call “miraculous exceptions” (*des miraculés*—educationally highly successful members of disadvantaged groups) is precisely what allows us to believe that the system is egalitarian and meritocratic after all.¹⁴ For Bourdieu, then, the widespread democratic belief in education as a passport to freedom and success is no more than a myth: the myth of the *école libératrice* is the new “opium of the people.”

DOXA, ORTHODOXY, HETERODOXY, AND CHANGE

Taste or *judgment* are the heavy artillery of symbolic violence. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu denounces the “terrorism [of] the peremptory verdicts which, in the name of taste, condemn to ridicule, indignity, shame, silence . . . men and women who simply fall short, in the eyes of their judges, of the right way of being and doing” (511): “[There is terrorism] in the symbolic violence through which the dominant group endeavour to impose

their own life-style, and which abounds in the glossy weekly magazines: ‘Conforama is the Guy Lux of furniture,’ says *Le Nouvel Observateur*, which will never tell you that the *Nouvel Obs* is the Club Méditerranée of culture.¹⁵ There is terrorism in all such remarks, flashes of self-interested lucidity sparked off by class hatred or contempt” (511).

These are not the comments of a man who believes in the inevitability of the status quo: *Distinction* is nothing if not a work of *critique*, a theoretical intervention which assumes that the very fact of exposing the foundations of bourgeois esthetics will contribute to its transformation.¹⁶ In order to discover how Bourdieu would argue this case, it is necessary to turn to an earlier work, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. For Bourdieu, “every established order tends to produce . . . the naturalization of its own arbitrariness” (164). In a highly traditional, relatively stable and undifferentiated society, this process is so successful as to make the “natural and social world appear as self-evident” (164). Such self-evidence is what Bourdieu calls *doxa*. *Doxa* is to be distinguished from *orthodoxy* (the effort to defend the *doxa*), as well as from *heterodoxy* (the effort to challenge the *doxa*) insofar as these two positions more or less explicitly recognize the possibility of different arrangements. To defend the “natural” is necessarily to admit that it is no longer self-evident.

A “doxic” society is one in which the “established cosmological and political order is perceived not as arbitrary, i.e., as one possible order among others, but as a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned” (166). Or to put it differently, this is a society in which everybody has a perfect *sense of limits* (see 164). In such a society there is no place for opinion in the liberal sense of the word, or as Bourdieu puts it: “what is essential *goes without saying because it comes without saying*: the tradition is silent, not least about itself as tradition” (167). In such a society, then, there is no space for change or transformation. Entirely doxic, social power rules without opposition: this is a universe in which the very question of legitimacy does not even arise.

What, then, does it take for critique—and thus for change—to enter the social space? On this point Bourdieu is recognizably *marxisant*: the condition of possibility for a critical discourse which would “bring the undiscussed into discussion,” he writes, is an “objective crisis, which, in breaking the immediate fit between the subjective structures and the objective structures, destroys self-evidence practically” (168-69). “The would-be most radical critique always has the limits that are assigned to it by the objective conditions,” he continues: “Crisis is a necessary condition for a questioning of *doxa* but is not in itself a sufficient condition for the production of a critical discourse” (169).