

WEEK 4 Distinction

Key thinkers: Pierre Bourdieu & Robert Putnam

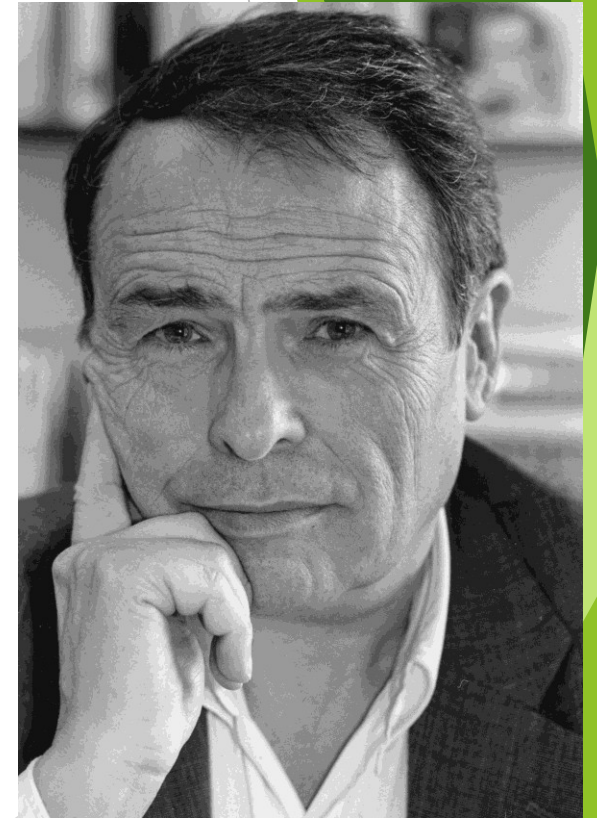
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Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002)

- ▶ *Distinction: A Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979)
- ▶ Distinction - double meaning: to distinguish & taste (to differentiate and appreciate)
- ▶ Choices which we tend to attribute to individual taste (e.g., what to wear) originate in society and depend on our training, (length of) our education and our social environment
- ▶ There is a link between different tastes/preferences (e.g., between music and food preferences)



3 types of taste

- ▶ (corresponding to educational levels and social classes)
- ▶ 1) Legitimate taste - increases with educational level and is highest in those fractions of the dominant class that are richest in educational capital
- ▶ 2) Middle-brow taste - more common in the middle classes
- ▶ 3) Popular taste - most frequent among the working classes and varies in inverse ratio to education capital

Capital

- ▶ Social inequality is organized in class inequality
 - ▶ Class divisions are based on the different conditions of existence - endowments of capital and social conditioning, i.e., sets of dispositions (habitus)
- ▶ Capital - resources enabling people to profit from participating in different fields
- ▶ 4 main types of capital
 - ▶ Economic (financial wealth, assets, material goods)
 - ▶ Cultural (cultural skills, knowledge, titles, qualifications)
 - ▶ Social (useful social connections)
 - ▶ Symbolic (social legitimation, honour, respect) - legitimated form of other capitals
- ▶ Social positions of individuals depend on the overall volume and composition of their capital
 - ▶ Volume and composition of capital can vary over time; they mark the trajectory of one's social biography

Cultural capital

- ▶ Determines collective identity (people with similar cultural capital are likely to associate with each other)
- ▶ 3 forms:
 - ▶ Embodied - inherited and acquired, usually through family socialization(e.g., language/dialect)
 - ▶ Objectified - material objects/artifacts
 - ▶ Institutionalized - institutional recognition of cultural capital

Habitus

- ▶ Set of durable, transposable dispositions that shape our practices (perceptions, judgement, how we act and make sense of the world)
- ▶ Culture of a social group embodied in the individual - "society written into the body, into the biological individual" (*In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, 1990: 63)
- ▶ Habitus ≠ habit
- ▶ Class-specific; durable (historically conditioned and internalized); transposable (operates across different settings - political, social, religious etc.)
- ▶ Judgements of taste are part of social identity, as they express class-based habitus (i.e., our tastes affirm our class)
- ▶ Structured and structuring - it is the product of our social class and reaffirms our social class by shaping our practices

Field

- ▶ Society is divided into different spheres, i.e., fields (economy, art, politics, science, religion, etc.)
- ▶ Semi-autonomous - each field has its own sets of rules, structures, forms of authority
- ▶ Arenas of struggle - competitive 'market' in which individuals employ relevant types of capital to fulfill their interests (preserving or changing the distribution of capital in that field)

Robert Putnam (1941-)

- ▶ *"Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital"* in *Journal of Democracy* (1995)
- ▶ *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000)
- ▶ Decline in community involvement in the U.S. in the last 50 years
- ▶ Social capital - the social connections/networks we create have values
 - ▶ Trust is at the core of social capital - networks assume mutual obligations
 - ▶ Social capital has individual and collective aspect



- ▶ Social capital can be used for both in benevolent and malevolent purposes
 - ▶ Promoting mutual support, cooperation, trust, institutional effectiveness
 - ▶ OR sectarianism, ethnocentrism, corruption
- ▶ **Bonding (exclusive) vs bridging (inclusive) social capital**
 - ▶ Not exclusive categories
 - ▶ Bonding - reinforcing exclusive identities and homogeneous groups (e.g., fraternal organizations, church-based women's reading groups)
 - ▶ Creates in-group loyalty, but also out-group antagonism
 - ▶ Bridging - outward looking, encompassing people across diverse social groups (civil rights movement, youth service groups, ecumenical religious organizations)

Practical dimensions of social capital

- ▶ Groups and Networks
- ▶ Trust and Solidarity
- ▶ Collective Action and Cooperation
- ▶ Social Cohesion and Inclusion
- ▶ Information and Communication

- ▶ Generalized reciprocity - similar to “paying it forward”