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Article Title: After the Ball is Over: Bourdieu and the Crisis of Peasant society

Year of publication: 2009

Citation: Robbins, D. (2009) 'After the Ball is Over: Bourdieu and the Crisis of Peasant society' Theory, Culture and Society 26 (5) 141-150

Link to published version: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0263276409106355>

DOI: 10.1177/0263276409106355

After the ball is over.

Review of Pierre Bourdieu (translated Richard Nice): *The Bachelors' Ball*, Oxford, Polity, 2008.

In the autumn of 2004 I took a flight with Ryanair from Stansted to Pau. Most of the passengers had made the connection from an Aer Lingus flight from Dublin. They were en route to Lourdes. I was on a pilgrimage of a different kind. For years I had argued how important it was to understand Bourdieu's rural and provincial upbringing and, at last, I wanted to see that context for myself. In Pau I took tea in the very English 19th century esplanade with its panoramic view south towards the Pyrenees and I looked over the castle of the very protestant Henri IV of Navarre. I looked for the lycée building in which Bourdieu had been a boarder – so painfully recollected in *Esquisse pour une autoanalyse* (Bourdieu, 2004, 2008)– but it was no longer standing. The following day I took a taxi for the 18 km drive south of Pau to Lasseube – the real name of the village called 'Lesquire' in *The Bachelors' Ball*. I had coffee in the one main street, opposite the post office where Bourdieu's father had been postmaster. I wandered around, placing myself in the spots from which the photographs reproduced in the book must have been taken. In black-and-white images the structures looked the same, but the village was 'fleurie' – dressed neatly with colourful flower arrangements – rather than gaunt and bleak. Under the trees near the church were a few tables displaying fruit and vegetables, and well-dressed women carrying wicker shopping baskets browsed the produce. The houses fronting on to the street had smart doors or gates, an appearance redolent of second-home ownership. At the end of the street opposite the cemetery was a courtyard belonging to a gîte, and the sounds of British tourists.

Having spent the early years of the 1950s in education in Paris, then two years teaching in Moulins in the Bourbonnais, and then almost four years in Algeria, first on military service and then as an assistant at the University of Algiers, Bourdieu spent time in Lasseube in 1962 to carry out the kind of ethnographic research on the community of his childhood that he had undertaken in North Africa. The intention was quite specifically to explore the relations between subjective engagement and objective social science – to test in rural France the methodological orientation which he believed had enabled him in his analyses of Algerian people neither to suppress the implications of his colonial detachment nor deny the self-determinations of the objects of his studies. The findings of the research were communicated in two ways in 1962 – firstly in a scientific manner in a number of a journal, *Etudes rurales*, which had only been established in 1960, and secondly, more popularly and in abbreviated form, in *Les Temps Modernes*, still edited by Sartre. The first text was entitled "Célibat et condition paysanne" [bachelorhood and the peasant condition] and the second "Les relations entre les sexes dans la société paysanne" [Relations between the sexes in peasant society] (Bourdieu, 1962a and Bourdieu 1962b). Bourdieu had only recently been appointed secretary of the research group – the Centre de Sociologie Européenne – which Aron had established in 1960. With Jean-Claude Passeron, whom Aron had appointed as his research assistant at about the same time, Bourdieu had embarked on the enquiries about students and their studies which would lead to the co-authored *Les Héritiers* [The Inheritors] (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964, 1979) and *La Reproduction* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, 1977). Tacitly, the projects of the 1960s explored the impact of technology on traditional education and culture, whether in relation to the deployment of educational technology or in relation to the effect of photographic interventions on interpersonal relations, memory and identity. Bourdieu and Passeron inherited a research problematic which was implicit in Aron's inaugural course of lectures at the Sorbonne in 1955/6, published in 1962 as *Dix-huit leçons sur la société industrielle* [18 lectures on industrial society] (Aron, 1962, 1967). Just as Bourdieu and Passeron were to collaborate in writing a

critique of contemporary enthusiasm about the possible effects of a developing ‘mass culture’ in their “Sociologues des mythologies et mythologies de sociologues” [sociologists of mythologies and mythologies of sociologists] (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1963), so Bourdieu’s “Célibat et condition paysanne” can be seen as an intervention in the contemporary debate about the future development of French agriculture and its likely social consequences. In particular, Bourdieu’s article offered an analysis of the structure of social relations in the Béarn which was independent of the kind of research in rural sociology which was to enable Henri Mendras to publish his *La Fin des Paysans* [the end of the peasants] in 1961 (Mendras, 1961), following his *Les Paysans et la modernisation de l’agriculture* [peasants and the modernisation of agriculture] of 1958 (Mendras, 1958). The stakes in this debate were high, extending well beyond the plight of agriculture. As Mendras put it in the Introduction to *La Fin des Paysans*:

“The eternal ‘peasant soul’ is dying before our eyes at the same time as the familial and patriarchal estate based on food-producing mixed farming. This is the last struggle of industrial society against the last bastion of traditional civilisation. The study which we are undertaking is not simply that of a new agricultural revolution, but that of the death of traditional peasant civilisation, the fundamental constitutive element of western civilisation and christianity, and its replacement by the new technological civilisation which will take in the countryside sometimes different forms from the one which it currently assumes in the town.” (Mendras, 1961, 22)

Whereas Mendras seems to have been convinced that he was observing an autonomous and determinist logic of economic progress, Bourdieu’s study, by contrast, was designed to restore to participants the meanings of their actions. As he concluded, echoing a comment of Durkheim in his preface to the first edition of *De la division du travail social*,

“Sociology would not be worth an hour of effort if its sole aim were to discover the strings that move the actors it observes, if it were to forget that it is dealing with people, even when those very people, like puppets, play a game of which they do not know the rules, in short, if it did not assign itself the task of restoring to those people the meaning of their actions.” (Bourdieu, 1962a, 109; 2002, 128; 2008a, 95).

As he admits (Bourdieu, 2008a, 167), Bourdieu was fond of “Célibat et condition paysanne”. He returned to its theme in two subsequent articles, the first of which was published in *Annales* in 1972 as “Les stratégies matrimoniales dans le système de reproduction” [matrimonial strategies in the system of reproduction strategies] (Bourdieu, 1972) and the second of which was published in *Etudes rurales* in 1989 as “Reproduction interdite . La dimension symbolique de la domination économique” [reproduction forbidden: the symbolic dimension of economic domination](Bourdieu, 1989). During the years spanned by these publications (and beyond) Bourdieu routinely spent his summers back in Lasseube. He would have witnessed and experienced changes in Béarn society. In 1951, for instance, a large natural gas reservoir was discovered under Lacq, just a short way west along the Autoroute des Pyrénées from Bourdieu’s birthplace in Denguin. The industrial complex that originally sprang up around natural gas later diversified into chemical manufacturing. For the last 30 years, Total has been involved in a joint venture – Chemparc – with all of the regional stakeholders, generating new businesses and jobs and supporting the development of a new town. One of the stakeholders is the university of Pau which was founded in 1972 and now has 8,000 students. Meanwhile the invasion of foreign property-owners in the area increases and the life-style of the expatriot British has been depicted, in Peter Mayle style, for the Béarn by Celia Brayfield in her *Deep France* (Brayfield, 2004), with accompanying gastronomic recommendations and recipes.

Why, then, did Bourdieu, late in life, choose to assemble his articles for publication? They appeared in March, 2002, after his death, published in paperback by Editions du Seuil, as *Le bal des célibataires. Crise de la société paysanne en Béarn*. (Bourdieu, 2002). The book under review is the English translation of one which Bourdieu chose to publish – not at all a posthumous collection of articles assembled for an English readership. Bourdieu's position was ambivalent. He was sentimentally attached to the disappearing world which he describes here in the same way as he was attracted to the traditional ways of life of the Algerian tribes represented in his North African studies. In both cases, he knew that his work offered accounts of social behaviour in particular places at particular times. In 1966 he had written "Condition de classe et position de classe" (Bourdieu, 1966) specifically to argue against Lévi-Strauss that anthropologists should not impose universalist interpretations on local phenomena, insisting precisely that 'peasantry' does not label a single condition with universal characteristics but rather one which has multiple forms depending on variable socio-economic factors. Nevertheless, by the 1990s he had come to see the choice confronting peasants in French society in the 1960s as the choice confronting the world in the new century. The challenge in France which Mendras was to describe as the 'second French Revolution' was the challenge before China or India in the present in reconciling socio-economic development with the legacy of traditional human values. Although Bourdieu's sub-title insists that the book is an account of the crisis of peasant society (no longer, notice, of the peasant 'condition'), that sub-title does nothing to historicise the crisis. Bourdieu was tempted to offer his written account of the Béarn as an instructive myth just as, at about the same time, he was tempted to offer his historical photographs of Algerian society as temporally transcendent 'images of Algeria'. (Bourdieu, 2004).

This myth-making tendency, however, was offset by the overriding intention in issuing the book which Bourdieu articulated in the short new introduction. Just as he had insisted in his Preface to the English translation of *Homo Academicus* in 1988 (Bourdieu, 1984, 1988) that it was a book which was not *about* 'homo academicus gallicus' so much as an exemplification of how readers should attempt to analyse their own local academicisms, so Bourdieu deliberately reiterated this position by adding to the collection a short essay ("Une classe objet" [a class as object]) which he had written in 1977, complementing the methodological manifesto which he had written for the first number of his *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* – "Méthode scientifique et hiérarchie sociale des objets" [scientific method and the social hierarchy of objects of research] (Bourdieu, 1975). The objective representations of social reality provided by social scientists are functions of the perceptual and attitudinal dispositions of the scientists which, in turn, are functions of their social situations. This is not to deny that these representations achieve objective status and, as such, become influential in shaping future representations as if they were true, but it is to deny that they were or are true if that is taken to mean correspondence with static reality. The attraction for Bourdieu of assembling these articles for publication in 2002 was that the collection historicises his conceptualisations, offering analyses produced at roughly ten-year intervals, culminating, dare one say it, in almost Hegelian fashion, in the synthesizing self-appropriation of this final format.

The Bachelors' Ball, therefore, is best read as Bourdieu's celebration of the development through his career of his methodology in respect of one research object. The methodology deployed in 'Bachelorhood and the peasant condition' has affinities with the research procedures developed by Bourdieu in alliance with statisticians in producing *Travail et travailleurs en algérie* (Bourdieu, Darbel, Rivet & Seibel, 1963) which Bourdieu justified

theoretically in an introduction to Part I called “Statistiques et Sociologie”¹. Bourdieu puts into practice his commitment to procedures which juxtapose statistical data reflecting ‘objective’ generalities and related ethnographic case-studies, sometimes represented by the ‘spontaneous sociology’ of participants in the situations objectified statistically. He sets up a counterpoint whereby the categories used in data collection are constantly cross-checked against the self-categorisation of social agents and whereby statistical information is comparably used to test the validity of generalised findings deduced from individual cases. Bourdieu’s research was Durkheimian in the sense that he used statistics to explore the social construction of anomic celibacy, but the Durkheimianism was supplemented ethnomethodologically in a way which was not possible for Durkheim in his equivalent study of suicide. ‘Bachelorhood and the peasant condition’ offers a structuralist analysis of an essentially Durkheimian problematic – the nature of the relationship between individual and collective consciousness.

“Matrimonial strategies in the system of reproduction strategies”, first published in 1972 (Bourdieu, 1972b), announces in its title and in the opening sentence that it is offering a ‘post-structuralist’ reading of the findings of the original research. In the same year, Bourdieu had published *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique, précédé de trois études d’ethnologie kabyle* (Bourdieu, 1972a) which represented three of his structuralist analyses of Kabyle society before subjecting them to criticism. By the time of the English ‘translation’ of this text in 1977 as *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu had incorporated these self-criticisms into the text so as to present a positive methodology which absorbed structuralism so as to supercede it. Whereas, in 1962, Bourdieu had included a sentence to the effect that ‘individuals play within the limits of the rules’ to mitigate the apparent determinism of his explanatory, structuralist model (Bourdieu, 1962, 47; 2002, 39, 2008, 26), the opening sentence of the 1972 article introduces confidently the new emphasis on the self-determination of individuals, insisting on a Leibnizian distinction between reasons of fact and reasons of logic:

“The fact that the practices through which the peasants of Béarn tended to ensure the reproduction of their lineage and the reproduction of its rights over the means of production present clear *regularities* does not entitle one to see them as the product of obedience to *rules*. One has to break away from the legalistic kind of thinking which, to this day, haunts the entire anthropological tradition and tends to treat every practice as an act of *execution* ...” (Bourdieu, 1972, 1105; 2002, 169; 2008, 133)

The secondary literature on Bourdieu has tended to emphasize what seems to be implied in the above remark – that the argument against structuralism was made within the field of anthropological research. However, in the early 1970s, Bourdieu was also articulating his methodology in opposition to that of Weber. Bourdieu’s two articles of 1971 (Bourdieu 1971a and 1971b) on Weber indicate that he regarded Weber’s construction of ‘ideal-types’ as an interpretative imposition which was as insensitive to the immanent motivations of agents as was structuralist analysis. It was, perhaps, the influence of Weber, however, which led Bourdieu to apply his developing methodology more specifically to economic behaviour. Whereas the influence of Weber on Bourdieu’s *Sociologie de l’Algérie* (Bourdieu, 1958) seems to have derived from the ‘early’ Weber of ‘The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism’, Bourdieu’s transition of the 1970s seems to have mirrored the development in Weber’s writing from the ‘social economics’ of the early to the ‘economic sociology’ of the late works. Bourdieu’s new emphasis on agency led to the exploration of the social construction of markets. This was evident in the analysis of the social construction of educational and occupational markets and their inter-relationships in “Les stratégies de reconversion” (Bourdieu, Boltanski

¹ See my commentary on this text in Robbins, 2006, 119-125.

and Saint Martin, 1973) and “Le titre et le poste” (Bourdieu & Boltanski, 1975), and it was also evident in the way in which Bourdieu re-visited his Algerian work in the context of the economics of development in *Algérie 60* in 1977 (Bourdieu, 1977, 1979). The third contribution to *The Bachelors’ Ball* confirms this orientation. *Etudes rurales* invited Bourdieu to write a commentary on the article of 1962 and the sub-title of this 1989 article emphasizes the economic orientation: ‘the symbolic dimension of economic domination’. This provides a sophisticated discussion not just of the ways in which economic behaviour is affected by social and cultural factors but, more importantly, of the ways in which the peasants of the Béarn attitudinally acquiesced in the replacement of a traditional economy by a neo-liberal market economy and hence ensured that the mechanisms of social and cultural reproduction analysed by Bourdieu and Passeron in the 1960s had now become non-viable or ‘forbidden’. Bourdieu’s commentary correlates with what he was writing at the time on the housing market in articles in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 81-2, which were subsequently assembled in *Les structures sociales de l’économie* (Bourdieu, 2000) and it also provides the intellectual rationale behind some of his more strident attacks on global capitalism of the 1990s. Bourdieu borrows from Karl Polanyi a distinction between ‘isolated markets’ and the ‘market economy’ or, more precisely, between ‘regulated markets’ and the ‘self-regulating market’ (Bourdieu, 2008, 181, fn. 3). What is clear is that Bourdieu is intent on defending the capacity of social agents collectively to construct markets which are fit for their purposes without capitulating to the imposition of an uniformly individualised economic model. The existence of a market need not constitute a market economy, he argues, ‘so long as the group retains control of the mechanisms of exchange’. (Bourdieu, 2008, 181, fn. 3).

The Bachelors’ Ball, therefore, provides an invaluable mode of access to the whole of Bourdieu’s work. As a collection of past articles, it is, of course, itself situated as a product of Bourdieu’s late turn to auto-analytic reflexivity which was an additional logical corollary of his espousal of Bachelard’s concept of ‘epistemological rupture’. Aspects of Bourdieu’s short Introduction are reminiscent of moments of the *Esquisse pour une autoanalyse* (Bourdieu, 2004, 2008). We are made aware of Bourdieu’s nostalgia for his origins, of his emotional attachment to his father, and of his concern to respect and preserve the privacy of those contemporaries whom he had interviewed in 1962. However, this raises questions which cannot be avoided. There is a real sense in which all of Bourdieu’s work was the product of his Béarnais *habitus*. To put the point in this way is to make it: Bourdieu constructed the conceptual apparatus which enables us to interpret his work socio-centrally as the softly-determined expression of the social conditions of its production. Bourdieu’s *habitus* was the *habitus* of the Béarnais peasants whom he analyses. Bourdieu’s socio-centric analyses of the peasant ‘crisis’ were historically elements of the symbolic representation of economic determination considered in ‘Forbidden reproduction’. There is, therefore, a lingering feeling that *The Bachelors’ Ball* offers an entrée into the autonomous logic of Bourdieu’s conceptual development, a closed system of thought which was attempting to adopt an ideological position without confronting new features of a changing objective reality, such as the technological and industrial changes which followed from the exploitation of physical resources, such as natural gas. *The Bachelors’ Ball* gives access to an intellectual trajectory, but, as Bourdieu knew very well, it was a trajectory which was an illustrative case-study of the transition from traditional to modern, country to town, as much as were those case-studies offered in his texts. His scientific methodology was a product of his origins and functioned to reaffirm those origins. *The Bachelors’ Ball* is not ‘maieutic’ in the way in which Bourdieu intended that the transcripts of *La misère du monde* (Bourdieu, 1993) would be – encouraging collaboration between observers and observed in the construction of a different collective social reality. To sustain Bourdieu’s social purpose we need ourselves now to construct a maieutic engagement with his historic work, one which incorporates a systematic awareness of his subjective presence within his objective artifacts and exposes that presence for

scrutiny in comparison with the subjectivities which we bring to bear when reading his products. In this way we shall be able to assess better his humanistic, social critique of economism. What *The Bachelors' Ball* shows is that this assessment will be an evaluation – a question of values rather than of science.

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