

University of East London Institutional Repository: <http://roar.uel.ac.uk>

This paper is made available online in accordance with publisher policies. Please scroll down to view the document itself. Please refer to the repository record for this item and our policy information available from the repository home page for further information.

To see the final version of this paper please visit the publisher's website. Access to the published version may require a subscription.

**Author(s):** Robbins, Derek.

**Article title:** The origins, early development and status of Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital'

**Year of publication:** 2005

**Citation:** Robbins, D. (2005) 'The origins, early development and status of Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital'', The British Journal of Sociology 56 (1) 13-30

**Link to published version:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2005.00044.x>

**DOI:** 10.1111/j.1468-4446.2005.00044.x

**The origins, early development and status of Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital'.**

Derek Robbins,

Professor of International Social theory,

School of Social Sciences, Media and Cultural Studies,

University of East London,

Docklands campus,

4, University Way,

London E16 2RD.

[d.m.robbins@uel.ac.uk](mailto:d.m.robbins@uel.ac.uk)

word length: 7955

date of re-submission: 3.1.05.

Abstract:

The paper examines the context of the first introduction of the concept of ‘cultural capital’ in the sociology of education analyses undertaken in the early 1960s and published by Bourdieu in collaboration with Jean-Claude Passeron in ‘Les étudiants et leurs études’ (1964) and *Les Héritiers* (1964). It first considers the cultural contexts within which Bourdieu’s thinking about culture originated – both in relation to his social origins and in relation to his intellectual training. It then examines the extent to which Bourdieu’s early anthropological research in Algeria was influenced by his knowledge of American acculturation theory. It concludes that Bourdieu sought to use acculturation theory in a distinctive way – one which he articulated more confidently as he explored the relationship between agency and structural explanation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The specific educational researches which stimulated the articulation of the concept of ‘linguistic’ or ‘cultural’ capital belonged to the period in which Bourdieu was only just beginning to refine his post-structuralist philosophy of social scientific explanation. To use these concepts now involves deploying them reflexively in accordance with Bourdieu’s later thinking rather than at face value as they were first developed during the period in which he and Passeron were ‘apprentice’ researchers.

## **The origins, development and status of Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital'.**

### **The cultural contexts for the development of Bourdieu's concept of culture.**

To explore Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital', I need to go back to his beginnings. His *post hoc* representation of his upbringing was that he had been raised in divided worlds. There are passages in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* in which Bourdieu reflected on the way in which, like Flaubert, he had acquired the capacity to think objectively about his personal experience as a result of being sent at an early age to a boarding school (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 205). Equally, in *Language and Symbolic Power*, Bourdieu drew upon his childhood experience of a linguistic division between the Béarn dialect of the home and the French of his schooling (Bourdieu, 1992, 68-9). Whether or not this was *post hoc* theorising about his youth, whether, in other words, there had been an experiential division which had generated a dualistic conceptualisation or whether the conceptualisation was read back into his experience, is not certain, but the fact remains that Bourdieu's thinking was always characterised by a duality between what one might call natural, familial, domestic, or traditional culture on the one hand and artificial, acquired, constructed or public culture on the other. This duality was reinforced institutionally. It was a duality between regional, provincial, or indigenous culture and metropolitan, central-

state, or colonialist culture, or, more generally and philosophically, between the ‘life-world’ and the ‘system-world’. It was a duality which Bourdieu was to seek to transform into a dialectic.

The character of Bourdieu’s social and intellectual trajectory is well known. From being a clever pupil in his local lycée in Pau in the Pyrenees in South-West France, Bourdieu moved to one of the prestigious *classes préparatoires* on the Left Bank in Paris before gaining admission to the Ecole Normale Supérieure. His achievement in respect of acquired culture consolidated the physical detachment of the acquired from the natural. Philosophical training was the common curriculum of the Ecole, but, from what he said retrospectively in “Fieldwork in Philosophy” published in *Choses Dites* in 1987 (Bourdieu, 1987), he was particularly influenced both by the historians and philosophers of science of the French tradition (Vuillemin, Weill, Bachelard, Canguilhem, Duhem) and by aspects of phenomenology, ontology and existentialism. He admitted to having read Sartre without being an existentialist, and to having read Heidegger and Husserl. Internal evidence suggests that he was greatly influenced by the work of Merleau-Ponty. Although Bourdieu only mentioned his reading of early Husserl, again internal evidence suggests that he was familiar with some key texts of Husserl which were published posthumously – *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Husserl, 1970) and *Experience and Judgement* (Husserl, 1973). Bourdieu was simultaneously interested in the philosophy of science and neo-Kantian epistemology and in the phenomenological project which subjected objectivist science to criticism. Bourdieu became interested in Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms as versions of Kantian categories which implied that he was interested in competing, socially constructed forms or explanatory discourses rather

than in *a priori*, transcendental categories. He seems to have been influenced more by phenomenological method than by the claims of transcendental phenomenology which means that he took method from the early Husserl but was more sympathetic to Husserl's late attempt to accommodate historical and social contingency. In all of this, Bourdieu's philosophical orientation was functional or instrumentalist. He had no interest in speculative philosophy. His philosophical reading provided him with a language with which he could talk objectively about the dualities of his experience. The form of Bourdieu's studies reinforced a separation of the intellect from primary experience, whilst the content of those studies provided him with a philosophical discourse in which to articulate this dual experience. To put this in Husserlian terms, Bourdieu was interested both in the competing discourses of objective sciences and in the pre-predicative intentionality upon which all scientific discourses are dependent. Bourdieu had acquired the artificial culture of philosophical discourse but he used that discourse to articulate the differences between the ontological and the epistemological, natural being and socially acquired knowing.

Another point to make about Bourdieu's beginnings is that he was intellectually formed in a tradition which paid little attention to the analysis of culture. There was no tradition that corresponded with the *Kulturgeschichte* or *Geisteswissenschaft* of the German tradition. Comte made no separate space for cultural analysis. Cultural phenomena were objects to be understood positivistically and possessed no distinctive truth claims. As we know from Bourdieu and Passeron's "Sociology and Philosophy in France since 1945" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1967), the problem for them was that Comte had been attached to a realist philosophy of science. Applying Einstein to the social sciences involved the recognition of functional relations rather than substantive

entities. The theory of relativity had ousted Durkheim's Comtist commitment to the analysis of 'social facts as things', but relational analysis gave no more privileged status to cultural phenomena than had realist positivism. Methodologically, in fact, there was some distinct affinity between phenomenology, positivism and logical positivism and Bourdieu was predictably unsympathetic to Dilthey, to Rickert, to Weber's theory of charisma, to intuitionism or to hermeneutics. His reference to Gadamer at the beginning of *The Rules of Art* (Bourdieu, 1996, xiv) is a late example of this hostility. It was not part of Bourdieu's training to isolate the study of autonomous culture. In so far as 'culture' was an issue, Bourdieu would have been more interested in the legacy of Bergsonian vitalism and in Merleau-Ponty's attempt, notably in *The Structure of Behaviour* (Merleau-Ponty, 1965), to engineer an encounter between the pre-logical and processes of biological adaptation. In short, Bourdieu was interested in the encounters between the cultures of persons rather than in cultures for themselves. He described how his initial purpose in his Algerian researches was to explore philosophical positions empirically and, in particular, to carry out a 'phenomenology of affective life' (Bourdieu, 1987, 16; 1990, 6-7). He was always fascinated by the implications of Goethe's use of the idea of 'elective affinity' and this was made most explicit in the title adopted for the posthumous publication of his interview with Franz Schultheis about his early Algerian photographs: *Images d'Algérie. Une affinité élective* (Bourdieu, 2003). Bourdieu was interested in understanding how far cultural tastes are biologically determined or how far individuals inherit a natural culture which circumscribes their choices of artificial cultural products or symbols. Bourdieu was interested in objective culture so as to understand how it is deployed by individuals to manage their cultural adaptations. The use of the word 'understand' is also significant because,

methodologically, Bourdieu's research was conducted in pursuit of comprehension rather than explanation. I think he would have agreed with Lyotard's statement in his first book – *La phénoménologie* (1954) – that:

“To explain in the human sciences in truth is to render comprehensible”

(Lyotard, 1991, 76)

### **Proximate origins of an approach to cultural analysis.**

Bourdieu's work in Algeria was exploratory. He recognised that French colonial intervention had forced rural and nomadic tribespeople to modify their attitudes and behaviour in order to adjust to living in Algiers. He wanted to investigate this process of enforced cultural adaptation. His first book – *Sociologie de l'Algérie* (Bourdieu, 1958) – was an attempt to describe the *status quo ante*. Bourdieu offered accounts of the different social organisations of four tribes. These were descriptions which were to be the base-line for his subsequent interviews in Algiers with people from these tribes whose behaviour had changed in response to a new set of modern, urban conditions. Without interposing any orientation towards causal explanation, Bourdieu tried to set up a framework within which behavioural phenomena before and after might be compared. He deployed social science to give his accounts of tribal organisation, using, for instance, Weber's analysis of protestantism to generate an account of the function of Islamic fundamentalism in the Moabite tribe. He also gained experience for the first time in working with statisticians to produce, in *Travail et travailleurs en Algérie* (Bourdieu, 1963), a text in which statistical data and qualitative ethnographic information were juxtaposed and in which he wrote a short

introductory statement outlining the complementary function of statistics and case-studies in constituting a description of a social whole. He was exploring ways of describing social phenomena and of extrapolating from juxtaposed phenomena some account of culturally adaptive processes. He was, in other words, examining the validity of different kinds of social science explanation within a framework in which he was dominantly interested in the non-causally linked juxtaposition of observed phenomena. The bibliography of *Sociologie de l'Algérie* indicates that Bourdieu had read, in preparation for his Algerian work, several American acculturation theorists of the 1940s and 1950s. Notably, he cited Melville Herskovits and Margaret Mead. The particular text of Herskovits cited by Bourdieu was his *Acculturation. The study of culture contact*. (Herskovits, 1938). This was an important book which provided an elaborated response to an *Outline on Acculturation* published shortly before by the Sub-Committee of the American Social Science Research Council. The sub-committee had sought to define acculturation in order to regulate work which was politically sensitive in respect of race relations research with regard to both Blacks and American Indians. Herskovits had been a member of the sub-committee (with Ralph Linton and Robert Redfield) but he chose to present his own views independently and in more detail. His book provided useful category distinctions between acculturation, assimilation, and diffusion, and it vigorously argued for the necessity of adopting a historical methodology so as to identify changes which were the consequence of culture contact. It also argued that acculturation analysis entailed the analysis of the attitudes and behaviour of people as carriers of culture rather than of objectified 'cultures'. These emphases would have attracted Bourdieu. The following discussion of the appropriate methodology to be adopted in acculturation

studies, for instance, characterises precisely Bourdieu's procedure in his Algerian fieldwork, spanning the period from 1958 to 1961. Herskovits wrote:

“Though the discussion of the necessity for obtaining reconstructions of the earlier life of a people has here followed that of the need for the description of their life as it is lived at present, there are cases where the wisest practice in the actual study of acculturation would seem to be to derive the base-line from which the changes developed first, and then, once equipped with the insight into past conditions, to obtain relevant data concerning the contemporary manner of living. Where such a course is followed, the evaluation of changes that have occurred as a result of contact will be surer, and an understanding of the effect had by the forces operative in the situation of change more clear, than if the present-day culture is first studied without reference to the past.”  
(Herskovits, 1938, 25)

However, Herskovits's underlying assumption became apparent in his attack on 'applied anthropology'. He criticised the tendency of some anthropologists to become partisan in their analyses of, especially, culture contacts occurring in the context of colonialism. Herskovits singled out Richard Thurnwald's *Black and White in East Africa* (1935), quoting Thurnwald's assertion on the first page of his book that

“At no time in the history of mankind has a clash of nations, peoples, races, and their cultures, traditional prejudices, interests and abilities taken place like today.” (Thurnwald, 1935, 1, quoted in Herskovits, 1938,31)

Herskovits's contention was that 'contacts of the sort now occurring between nationals of colonizing governments and native peoples are of no different order than those that have certainly occurred since recorded history began – and perhaps since mankind has inhabited the earth - ...' (Herskovits, 1938, 30-1). In focusing on the particular, applied anthropologists ran the risk that they failed to analyse the universal dimension of the phenomena they were studying and, consequently, failed to generate 'science'. Herskovits was provoked by his dislike of applied anthropology to define the proper nature of anthropological science in the following way:

“A basic justification of ethnological research is that it gives a broad background against which to judge our own rules of behaviour, and a more inclusive view of human cultures than can be attained by any other social discipline. This is because it alone offers data against which we can project customs peculiar to ourselves and, in the manner of scientific research, test generalizations arising out of the study of the patterns of our culture by seeing whether or not these generalizations have validity when applied to peoples whose customs have no historical connection with our own.” (Herskovits, 1938, 31)

### **Bourdieu's distinctive adaptation of acculturation analysis.**

I don't want unduly to labour these references to Herskovits, but the extent to which Bourdieu differed from Herskovits in respect of the status and function to be assigned to social science, or differed radically from Herskovits in relation to the philosophy of

social science, is important for my argument about the origin, development and status of Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital'. Herskovits can be seen as a proto-structuralist, deploying empirical, inductivist procedures to generate universal laws of culture contact. This was the function of science and to be successful it was essential that the scientist should be *hors de combat* – conceptually and institutionally objective and detached. Although Bourdieu had not fully articulated his position at the time of his Algerian fieldwork, nevertheless he was explicit in his first book that the stimulus for his study was the 'clash of civilizations' which he was observing and experiencing during his military service in Algeria. Unlike Herskovits, Bourdieu was not interested in extrapolating scientific truths from his observations but, importantly, this does not mean that his analyses were partisan. He strove to produce a functional objectification. It was functional on two levels. *Sociologie de l'Algérie* was an objective account of traditional social organization which served as a base-line to guide the practices of indigenous researchers who constituted the team of assistants working on the two subsequent empirical analyses of 'modern' Algerian society. It was designed therefore to be immanently functional in helping Algerians to introduce the strengths of their cultures into the process of constituting the identity of a post-colonial, independent Algeria state. It was also designed to be cross-culturally functional. Bourdieu's *Sociologie de l'Algérie* was published in 1958 in the *Que Sais-je* series of small, introductory texts produced by the *Presses Universitaires de France*. This was the same year that Camus re-issued some of his earlier journalistic coverage of poverty and suffering in Kabylia as *Chroniques algériennes*. (Camus, 1958). It was not simply that Bourdieu's account of Algeria was a topical piece of reporting with the same character as Camus' book. I think the intention was much more philosophical. Whatever Bourdieu's reservations about Sartre's work may have

been at that date – and they were certainly highly developed reservations later in the period after the publication of Sartre’s *Critique de la raison dialectique* in 1963 (Sartre, 1963)<sup>1</sup> – nevertheless the text had a significance in a relationship between author and reader not unlike that described by Sartre in relation to novels in *Qu’est-ce que c’est la littérature?* (Sartre, 1948). Bourdieu’s text was seeking to function cross-culturally in a manner which is similar to that proposed by Sartre in respect of intersubjectivity in *L’Être et le Néant* (Sartre, 1943). As T.J. Owens has summarised Sartre’s position on this point:

“The ‘stare’ of the other engenders in me this new ontological structure which was not there before and which could arrive only by the agency of the other.”  
(Owens, 1970, 34)

Bourdieu interposed his text between two cultures. He saw himself in part as a conceptual go-between, hoping to modify the identities of his French readership by offering Algerian society as a constituting other – hoping to engineer irenically an attitudinal convergence.<sup>2</sup>

In short, I believe that social science discourse was always only of limited interest to Bourdieu as supposed social *explanation*. It was always a mode of description, a language game, which was potentially of instrumental value in bringing about attitudinal and ethical or socio-political harmonisation. He had no sympathy for the mystery of Durkheim’s *conscience collective* but he was sufficiently a product of the Durkheimian legacy to want to deploy a form of what he was later to call ‘socio-

---

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of Bourdieu’s early response to Sartrean ethics in reflecting upon the responsibility of the ethnographer in a colonial situation, see Robbins, 2003b.

<sup>2</sup> I have discussed this in more detail (with reference to Jacques Bouveresse’s consideration of the philosophical status of social texts in his discussion of the Sokal & Bricmont hoax in his *Prodiges et vertiges de l’analogie*, 1999) in an article due to appear in *Theory, Culture and Society* in 2005, entitled: “Texts, contexts, pretexts and science”.

analytic encounter’ to encourage a vision of a society which is committed to the internal and continuous process of deconstructing and reconstructing consciousnesses which competitively aspire to secure collective authority<sup>3</sup>. He had little sympathy for the Kantian transcendental *a priori*, but he sought to introduce a process which differently might lead to universal peace<sup>4</sup>. Bourdieu was certainly aware of Husserl’s rejection of the extravagant knowledge claims of empiricism<sup>5</sup>, admitting, as Lyotard put it, that ‘empiricism cannot be understood empirically’. By varying imaginatively the ways in which we perceive objects, we are able to grasp the essence of the object – not a pre-existent Platonic idea of the object but the practically immanent characteristics which establish that something is not something else. Paraphrasing Husserl’s *Ideen I*, Lyotard writes:

“The process of imaginary variation gives us the essence itself, the being of the object. The object (*Objekt*) is ‘something whatever’, for example the number two, the note *do*, the circle, any proposition, a sensible datum. We can vary it arbitrarily, ... The essence or eidos of the object is constituted by the invariant which remains identical across the variations.” (Lyotard, 1999, 12)

To summarise very briefly, I am saying that Bourdieu regarded the discourses of the sciences as contrived language games which were alienated from natural culture.

This did not cause him to be reductive or sceptical but it did cause him to deploy these discourses, varying them imaginatively, so as to isolate essences which are

---

<sup>3</sup> For an elaboration of my interpretation of the relationship of Bourdieu’s thinking to the classical sociological tradition and to phenomenological philosophy, see Robbins, 2003a and Robbins 2003c.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of this point, see Robbins, 2005a (forthcoming)

<sup>5</sup> For further consideration of the significance of Husserl’s influence on Bourdieu’s work, see Robbins 2005b (forthcoming)

contingently changeable socially, geographically and historically – pragmatic essences, perhaps – rather than essences which are uniformly or universally transcendental. Cross-cultural harmony could be achievable at the level of encounter between contingently different essences rather than at the level of objectivist homogenisation. This is the rationale for Bourdieu’s strategic movement between intellectual discourses in seeking to understand social phenomena, sometimes insisting, for instance in his changing attitude towards the work of Flaubert, that the transformation of social observation into ‘art’ diminishes the capacity of the observation to generate social change, whilst sometimes insisting that artistic activity provides the possibility of liberation from the system-controlled, self-fulfilling practices of social scientists operating in accordance with routinized procedures and moribund concepts<sup>6</sup>. At the micro-level, within discipline discourses, this is also the rationale for Bourdieu’s linguistic improvisations, deploying the terminology of anthropology (‘inheritors’) to explore the operation of the French higher education system or, more importantly for this current discussion, deploying the language of economics (‘capital’) to explore cultural exchange. Early in his career, Bourdieu articulated this methodology and the associated philosophy of social science in his “Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge” (Bourdieu, 1968), referring, in collaboration with others in *Le métier de sociologue* (Bourdieu, Chamboredon & Passeron, 1968, 1991) to the need to see social research as involving a continuously creative *ars inveniendi* (art of invention).

---

<sup>6</sup> see Robbins, 2000, chapter 4: “Flaubert and the social ambivalence of literary invention”.

**The practical cultural analyses undertaken by Bourdieu and Passeron and the emergence of ‘cultural capital’ as a conceptual tool for understanding social differentiation.**

This has been a necessary preamble to the consideration which now follows of the development of Bourdieu’s concept of ‘cultural capital’. I want to explore first the terminology of ‘culture’ and ‘capital’ as used by Bourdieu in the research report which he wrote with Jean-Claude Passeron as *Les étudiants et leur études* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964a) for the Centre de sociologie européenne and which formed the basis of the book which they were to publish the same year as *Les Héritiers, les étudiants et la culture* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964b). The report presented the results of two surveys which were conducted in the academic years 1961-2 and 1962-3, mainly of Sociology and Philosophy students and mainly at the University of Lille. I want to spend some time on the two questionnaires because, obviously, the nature of the questions asked is indicative of the conceptual framework which was being deployed.

The first questionnaire had 52 questions. The anonymous respondents were first asked to specify nationality; civil status – single, married, or divorced; sex, date of birth; Faculty; University; date of entry to the Faculty. These elicited basic personal details with a concentration on the respondents’ institutional locations. There followed one question in which respondents were asked to give the profession, the highest qualification and the place of residence in 1962 of father, mother and paternal grand-father. Questions 9 and 10 asked about religious affiliation and degree of

religious activity. Questions 11 and 12 asked about the financial circumstances of the students and whether they had regular work alongside their studies. Questions 13 and 14 asked where they had received their secondary education – in which town and in what kind of institution. Questions 15 to 24 asked the respondents to report on their previous educational performance and to give their personal evaluation of that performance. Questions 25 to 28 asked about their choices of subject and university. Questions 29 to 38 asked about the views of the respondents about the nature and purpose of sociology (or philosophy). Questions 39 to 46 asked what kinds of study techniques or learning methods the respondents had developed. Question 47 asked what newspapers and periodicals were read regularly. Questions 48 to 52 asked respondents to characterise their political and trade union affiliations and the degree of their involvement.

The second questionnaire had 41 questions. The first 14 questions asked for the same kinds of personal details as had the first questionnaire. Question 15 asked whether the respondents had read classical texts other than those prescribed by teachers – never, occasionally, often. Question 16 asked if the respondents read cultural reviews related to the cinema, jazz, music, painting, or the theatre. Question 18 offered 18 dramatists and respondents were asked to indicate whether they knew the works of these authors and, if so, whether this was the result of reading or of knowing productions, either from stage performances or radio or television. Respondents were also asked whether they subscribed to a theatre and whether they had been involved in amateur dramatics. Question 21 similarly offered a list of 26 films with similar supplementary questions. Again, question 25 offered a list of 10 classical composers and respondents were asked whether they knew the work of the composers and how.

Again, Question 26 offered a list of 11 jazz musicians. Question 27 offered a list of 12 jazz pieces and respondents were asked to date them approximately as before 1935, 1935 to 1945 and after 1945. There followed some questions about whether the respondents played a musical instrument and how much they watched television or listened to the radio. Question 34 offered 12 painters and respondents were asked whether they knew the work of the painters and how they had seen the paintings. They were also asked what reproductions of whose works they would choose to hang on their walls and several other questions about art appreciation and artistic capacity. Question 40 asked respondents what had been the particularly striking events of their intellectual or artistic lives and Question 41 invited them to specify what new courses they would like to see created in the university.

We can deduce from these questions and with the benefit of hindsight in relation to the future development of Bourdieu's work that the tension underlying these questionnaires is between sociology, sociology of culture, and, perhaps, cultural analysis. We have to remember that Bourdieu had only recently come back to mainland France at the beginning of these two survey enquiries. He had been invited by Raymond Aron to be the secretary to the Centre de sociologie européenne, but he was also attending the research seminars of Claude Lévi-Strauss. The second edition of *Sociologie de l'Algérie* was published in 1961 (Bourdieu, 1961) and it showed the influence of Lévi-Strauss in its mode of presentation. The English translation was published in the States in 1962 as *The Algerians* (Bourdieu, 1962) with a preface by Aron. *Travail et travailleurs en Algérie* – Bourdieu's second Algerian book – was not published until 1963 whilst his third Algerian book – *Le déracinement, la crise de l'agriculture traditionnelle en Algérie* – was not published until 1964 (Bourdieu,

1964). In relation to what I have argued in my introduction, Bourdieu was experimenting with various discourses to represent acculturation processes. He was having to choose how to define himself intellectually. He was opting for self-presentation in terms of social and cultural anthropology or sociology so as to present himself as a scientist rather than a speculative philosopher, but his specific orientation was to use scientific discourse to disclose what might be happening in social encounters understood phenomenologically.

The general introduction to *Les étudiants et leurs études* acknowledges some of the limitations of the methodology employed or discusses the general validity of the findings. In defending findings derived from questionnaires completed by students who attended their classes (because the questionnaires were completed in class), Bourdieu and Passeron remarked in conclusion that

“A collection of researches which had as its first object to grasp attitudes towards the School and scholastic culture was therefore able legitimately to restrict itself to the active student population.” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964a, 10)

The first object of the research, in other words, was to analyse the variety of attitudes amongst students towards academic values and institutions. It was only in the last paragraph of the general introduction that Bourdieu and Passeron admit that their differentiation of attitudes related primarily to differentiation on the basis of social origin. Their sociology of culture sat unhappily on a sociology of social origin which was stripped of objective class differentiation. I want to continue to explore this tension between social and cultural analysis because it seems to me that it is at the

heart of what should be our contemporary discussion about the relationship between cultural capital and social exclusion. In the last paragraph, Bourdieu and Passeron wrote:

“Given that the social origin of students seemed to us to be the principal factor of differentiation, we wanted to grasp its action in different domains by moving from the most obvious like living conditions to the most hidden like cultural practice and attitudes towards scholastic and non-scholastic culture. The specialists are agreed in accepting the influence of social origin on the behaviour, attitudes and opinions of students without always being capable of bringing to light the collection of mechanisms, particularly the most sly and subtle ones, by which it is exercised.” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964a, 10)

What is methodologically grasped as social differentiation is viewed in its various manifestations to such an extent that Bourdieu and Passeron are actually analysing the ways in which cultural differences consolidate or even constitute those social differences. The research was not designed to establish that cultural differences were the consequences of different social origins, reflecting a prior social reality. Instead, it was designed to show that social and cultural differences are inseparable and that, through time, the social which is synonymous with natural or indigenous culture, is modified by degrees of initiation into artificial, acquired culture. *Les étudiants et leurs études* anticipates *La Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1979, 1984) in recognizing a continuous dialectic between two types of culture. In highlighting educational processes as instruments of cultural differentiation, Bourdieu and Passeron were already indicating that the social situation is not intrinsically social - if by that is

meant 'socio-economically class determined' - but instead a context of constant accultural affectivity, constant oscillation between natural and acquired cultures, within generations and inter-generationally, whereby one person's natural culture encounters another's acquired culture and vice versa.

The important achievement of *Les étudiants et leurs études* was that it showed that social exclusion (to use this term anachronistically) is a continuous process. There is no one Culture with a capital C to be acquired by the socially deprived which will remedy their supposed deficiencies. Cultural capital does not possess absolute value which is quantifiable. It only possesses value in exchange and the exchange is a social struggle as much as a struggle of cultural value judgement. These views are implicitly contained in the introduction to the first part of *Les étudiants et leurs études*. Bourdieu and Passeron began:

“The simple statistics of gaining entry to higher education in relation to categories of social origin shows clearly that the scholastic system continually eliminates a high proportion of children originating from the most disadvantaged classes. Does this mean to say that those who have escaped elimination have completely escaped, once and for all, the effects of disadvantaging factors? To prejudge nothing we must test the extent and the effectiveness of the action of different factors of differentiation, from the most obvious and accepted like religious affiliation or gender, to the most concealed and denied.

To evaluate accurately the force of these factors of differentiation, we must bear in mind that they do not act in the same conditions. It is in the student

milieu that the differences which adhere to social origin have the most chance of being neutralised since students have, by definition, suffered, over a long period of years, the homogenising action of scholastic discipline. That is why the student milieu offers a privileged field of study since the differences that can be grasped there, especially the most subtle ones, demonstrate *a fortiori* the influence exercised by the milieu of social origin as a factor of cultural inequality.” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964a, 13)

In other words, Bourdieu and Passeron were most interested in examining the phenomena of social differentiation and they acknowledged that to study students as a sub-group was to take an element of the population where the effects of differentiation by reference to acquired culture would conceal the indigenous differences within the whole population. It is clear that their orientation was to analyse differentiation.

### **Implications for following Bourdieu's practice.**

I want to finish by trying to bring together the two parts of my article. Bourdieu and Passeron became assimilated to the discourse of sociology in the 1960s.

Predominantly, they collaborated on projects which were at the interface between the sociology of education and the sociology of culture. Again, they collaborated in producing *Le métier de sociologue* in 1968. This was a text in which Bourdieu and his collaborators discussed the epistemological preliminaries for sociological enquiry, but I think that Bourdieu still retained his underlying interest in the phenomenology of affective encounter and still retained insights derived from his Algerian fieldwork.

Part of the problem became the difficulty of trying to analyse culture changes within the discourse of sociology or from a vantage point which was that of the socially and institutionally detached academic. It was Bourdieu exclusively who shifted away from the objectivist analysis of social and cultural encounters towards the attempt to manifest the behaviour of immanent social agents who were dynamically constructing their strategies for achieving social distinction. The article entitled “Condition de classe et position de classe” (Bourdieu, 1966) is an important milestone in the recognition that sociological labelling is a social practice which is immanent within the observed society rather than extraneous. The further reflection on his Algerian research led to *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (Bourdieu, 1972) which was a significant break with objectivist, structuralist explanation in favour of an attempt to acknowledge that structural distinctions are the construction of social agents who are struggling to reconcile their indigenous cultures (their *habitus*) with those objectified cultures which carry value and power. The tensions between the thinking of Bourdieu and Passeron at this period – which caused them to cease collaborating from the early 1970s onwards – have more general significance in assessing the relations between the separate analyses of culture and society and the analysis of culture and society (to borrow the title of Williams’s book of 1958 (Williams, 1958), and are in need of closer scrutiny. Questions relating to the trans-national cross-fertilization between intellectual traditions are also at stake here. The effect of Passeron’s preface to his translation of Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (Hoggart, 1957), published in 1970 as *La culture du pauvre* (Passeron, 1970) was to attempt to transform an English proto-‘cultural study’ – written, as was Williams’s book, in the tradition of English literary criticism - into a work of socio-anthropological analysis. Conversely, the parallel development of the work of Bernstein and Bourdieu/Passeron pushed the analysis of

educational processes away from a concentration on culture and away from a social anthropological perspective towards the adoption of socio-linguistic explanatory models. It is significant that the French text of *Les Héritiers* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964) refers only to ‘capital linguistique’ (linguistic capital) in its analysis, which was replaced with ‘cultural capital’ in the 1979 translation (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979), and also significant that the apparent domination of an orientation to cultural analysis only appeared in the title of the English translation of *La Reproduction* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970) as *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).<sup>7</sup> Passeron did not associate himself with the two research projects of the 1960s in which Bourdieu, with other colleagues, explored sociologically the reception of consecrated culture - *L’amour de l’art, les musées d’art et leur public* (Bourdieu, Darbel & Schnapper, 1966, 1990) – and the process of aesthetically consecrating the everyday practice of photography - *Un art moyen* (Bourdieu, Boltanski, Castel, & Chamboredon, 1965, 1990). It could be said that these were projects (and texts) which anticipated Bourdieu’s attempt of the 1970s to develop a procedure for understanding the reciprocal dynamics of cultural grass-roots agency and institutionalised cultural conservation and that these attempts were, finally, at odds with a more conventionally static structural analysis as recommended by Passeron, whether in terms of socio-linguistic or social anthropological science. It was the research project on ‘Le Patronat’ in the early 1970s which generated three important articles: “Les stratégies de reconversion. Les classes sociales et le système de l’enseignement” (Bourdieu, Boltanski & de Saint Martin, 1973); “Le titre et le

---

<sup>7</sup> The original French sub-title was *Eléments pour une théorie du système d’enseignement*, but the English title was probably justified by reference to the paper which Bourdieu gave at the Durham conference of the British Sociological Association in 1970 – “Reproduction culturelle et reproduction sociale” which was subsequently first published in English as “Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction” in Brown, ed., 1973.

poste. Rappports entre le système de production et le système de reproduction” (Bourdieu & Boltanski, 1975); and the single-authored “Avenir de classe et causalité du probable” (Bourdieu, 1974). These articles consolidated Bourdieu’s relationalism, his intention to show how the variables isolated for analysis by social scientists are elements of the game of position-taking. This work was pursued in *La distinction* (Bourdieu, 1979), *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu, 1984) and *La noblesse d’état* (Bourdieu, 1989). It is this understanding of the immanent dynamics of society which is lacking in some of the attempts which have been made to use Bourdieu’s concepts socio-metrically. Detached observation was, for Bourdieu, one perspective to be adopted in social relations. “Avenir de classe et causalité du probable” was an article which pursued further Bourdieu’s early consideration in the context of his Algerian research of the revolutionary potential of the sub-proletariat, but, more generally, it raised the question of the relationship between statistical projections generated by objective social scientists and the immanent life-chance projections of those social agents who are the mathematised objects of statistical analysis. It continued the exploration that had been undertaken in the same terms in “La fin d’un malthusianisme?” (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1966) in relation to the tension between the rational analysis of fertility rates offered in population studies statistics and the socially determined differential capacity of real people to exercise rational calculation in birth control. It ran in parallel with the discussion in “L’opinion publique n’existe pas” (Bourdieu, 1971) of the relationship between the characterisation of political opinions offered by political scientists by extrapolating from opinion polls and the socially differentiated profile of political attitudes distributed within populations. People are situated at points on a spectrum extending from, at one extreme, possession of a-political, ethical, natural or indigenous dispositions, to, at the other

extreme, acquiescence in pre-digested positions advanced by party political machinery. As the title of “Avenir de classe et causalité du probable” suggests, Bourdieu discussed in detail the relationship between ‘mechanism’ which supposes that actions are the manifestations of prior conditions, and ‘finalism’ which supposes that actions are directed by future-oriented projection. To register this tension had always been the significance of Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ which sought to provide a conceptual tool for comprehending that the capacity to project forwards which people really possess is understandable as a function of their prior social condition rather than in terms of abstract mathematical models. Some social conditions lead to the generation of abstract models but the explanatory value of these models is not universal but simply a function of the particular conditions of their generation which have to be weighted alongside the future projections emerging from alternative conditions. It is significant that Bourdieu’s reflection on the relationship between natural and artificial cultures is mirrored by his reflection on the relationship between subjective meaning and objective reality. In both cases, Bourdieu’s thinking was informed by his reading of Husserl on time. As he puts his position in “Avenir de classe et causalité du probable”:

“Economic competence is not then a universally and uniformly extended aptitude. The art of estimating and seizing chances, of seeing the future ‘appresented’ (as Husserl puts it to distinguish this from the imaginary future of a project) in the present configuration, the capacity to introduce the future by a kind of practical induction or even to play the possible off against the probable by a calculated risk, these are all dispositions which can only be

acquired under certain conditions, that is to say in certain social conditions.”

(Bourdieu, 1974, 11)

The essence of Bourdieu’s ‘reflexivity’ which only gradually became fully articulated after the completion of the research which led to the conceptualisation of ‘cultural capital’ was that detached observation had to be situated in order to liberate an encounter between cultures possessing varying degrees of naturalness and artificiality . As Bourdieu recognized in “The Genesis of the Concepts of Habitus and Field” (Bourdieu, 1985), we have to recognize the socio-historical contingency of concepts which functioned effectively at one moment but may not necessarily function similarly at a future moment – even when the past conceptualisation has in part constituted the present situation. In following Bourdieu’s work in the present, we have to be careful that social inclusion arises from the articulation of difference and is not itself a mechanism of exclusion, a euphemisation of the social and cultural dominance of the already dominant. We have to be careful to ensure that, as social scientists, we are sensitive to the changing market of culture in which we participate and do not deploy the concept of ‘cultural capital’ statically – as an instrument of consecrated social science - in a way which might consolidate the social inequalities which it originally exposed.

Bibliography.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1958 *Sociologie de l'Algérie*, Paris, PUF. – translated as Bourdieu, 1962.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1961 *Sociologie de l'Algérie*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Paris, PUF.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1962 *The Algerians*, Boston, Beacon Press.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1963 *Travail et travailleurs en Algérie*, Paris-La Haye, Mouton.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1964 *Le déracinement, la crise de l'agriculture traditionnelle en Algérie*, Paris, Ed. de Minuit.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1966 "Condition de classe et position de classe", *Archives européennes de sociologie*, VII, 2, 201-223.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1968 "Structuralism and Theory of Sociological Knowledge", *Social Research*, XXXV, 4.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1971 "L'opinion publique n'existe pas", *Norait*, 155.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1972 *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*, Geneva, Droz. – translated as Bourdieu, 1977.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1974 “Avenir de classe et causalité du probable”, *Revue française de sociologie*, XV, 1, 3-42.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1977 *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1979 *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*, Paris, Ed de Minuit. – translated as Bourdieu, 1986.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1984 *Homo Academicus*, Paris, Ed de Minuit. - translated as Bourdieu, 1988.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1986 *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London & New York, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1987 *Choses dites*, Paris, Ed. de Minuit. – translated as Bourdieu, 1990

**Bourdieu, P.** 1988 *Homo Academicus*, Oxford, Polity Press.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1989 *La noblesse d'état. Grandes écoles et esprit de corps*, Paris, Ed. de Minuit. – translated as Bourdieu, 1996.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1990 *In Other Words*, Oxford, Polity Press.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1991 *Language & Symbolic Power*, Oxford, Polity Press.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1993 *La misère du monde*, Paris, Ed. du Seuil.

**Bourdieu, P.** 1996 *The rules of art*, Oxford, Polity Press.

**Bourdieu, P.** 2003 *Images d'Algérie. Une affinité élective*, Actes Sud, Graz.

**Bourdieu, P., with Boltanski, L.**, 1975 “Le titre et le poste. Rappports entre le système de production et le système de reproduction”, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 2, 95-107. – translated in Lemert, C., ed., 1981.

**Bourdieu, P., with Boltanski, L., Castel, R., & Chamboredon, J.-C.**, 1965 *Un art moyen, essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie*, Paris, Ed. de Minuit. – translated as Bourdieu, Boltanski, Castel, Chamboredon, 1990.

**Bourdieu, P., with Boltanski, L., Castel, R., & Chamboredon, J.-C.**, 1990 *Photography. A Middle-Brow Art*, Oxford, Polity Press.

**Bourdieu, P., with Boltanski, L & de Saint Martin, M.**, 1973 “Les strategies de reconversion. Les classes sociales et le système d’enseignement”, *Information sur les sciences sociales*, XII, 5, 61-113 – translated in Giner, S. & Scotford-Archer, M., 1977

**Bourdieu, P., with Chamboredon, J.-C. and Passeron, J.-C., 1968** *Le métier de sociologue*, Paris, Mouton-Bordas. – translated as Bourdieu, Chamboredon, & Passeron, 1991.

**Bourdieu, P., with Chamboredon, J.-C. and Passeron, J.-C., 1991** *The Craft of Sociology*, New York, Walter de Gruyter.

**Bourdieu, P., with Darbel, A., 1966** “La fin d’un malthusianisme?” in Darras, *Le partage des benefices, expansion et inégalités en France*, Paris, Ed. de Minuit

**Bourdieu, P., with Darbel, A. and Schnapper, D., 1966** *L’amour de l’art*, Paris, Ed de Minuit. – translated as Bourdieu, Darbel & Schnapper, 1990.

**Bourdieu, P., with Darbel, A. and Schnapper, D., 1990** *The Love of Art*, Oxford, Polity Press.

**Bourdieu, P., with Passeron, J.-C., 1964a** *Les étudiants et leurs études*, Paris-La Haye, Mouton.

**Bourdieu, P., with Passeron, J.-C., 1964b** *Les héritiers, les étudiants et la culture*, Paris, Ed de Minuit. – translated as Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979

**Bourdieu, P.**, with **Passeron, J.-C.**, 1967 “Sociology and Philosophy in France since 1945: Death and Resurrection of a Philosophy without a subject”, **Social Research**, XXXIV, 1, 162-212.

**Bourdieu, P.**, with **Passeron, J.-C.**, 1970 *La Reproduction. Eléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement*, Paris, Ed de Minuit. – translated as Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977.

**Bourdieu, P.**, with **Passeron, J.-C.**, 1977 *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, London-Beverly Hills, Sage Publications.

**Bourdieu, P.**, with **Passeron, J.-C.**, 1979 *The Inheritors, French Students and Their Relation to Culture*, Chicago-London, University of Chicago Press.

**Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L.** 1992 *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Oxford, Polity Press.

**Bouveresse, J.** 1999 *Prodiges et vertiges de l'analogie*, Paris, Raisons d'agir.

**Brown, R., ed.** 1973 *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change*, London, Tavistock

**Camus, A.**, 1958 *Chroniques algériennes, 1939-1958*, Paris, Gallimard.

**Giner, S. & Scotford-Archer, M.**, eds, 1977 *Contemporary Europe. Social structures and Cultural Patterns*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

**Herskovits, M.**, 1938 *Acculturation. The study of culture contact*, New York, J.J. Augustin.

**Hoggart, R.**, 1957 *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books.

**Hoggart, R.**, 1970 *La Culture du pauvre*, Paris, Ed. de Minuit.

**Husserl, E.**, 1970 *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press. [originally first published in German The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1954]

**Husserl, E.**, 1973 *Experience and Judgment. Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul. [originally first published in German Claassen & Goverts, Hamburg, 1948]

**Lemert, C.**, ed. 1981 *French Sociology, Rupture and Renewal since 1968*, New York, Columbia University Press.

**Lyotard, J.-F.** 1991, *Phenomenology*. Translation of 10<sup>th</sup> edition of *La Phénoménologie* by Brian Beakley., Albany, State University of New York Press. [first published in French Paris, PUF, 1954]

**Merleau-Ponty, M.** 1942 *La structure du comportement*, Paris, PUF. – translated as Merleau-Ponty, 1965.

**Merleau-Ponty, M** (1965) *The Structure of Behaviour*, London, Methuen.

**Owens, T.J.**, 1970 *Phenomenology and Intersubjectivity. Contemporary interpretations of the interpersonal situation*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff.

**Robbins, D.** 2000 *Bourdieu and Culture*, London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi, Sage Publications.

**Robbins, D.**, 2003a “Sociology and Philosophy in the Work of Pierre Bourdieu, 1965-1975”, *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 2, 3, 299-328.

**Robbins, D.** 2003b “The responsibility of the ethnographer”, *Anthropology Today*, 19, 2, 12-19.

**Robbins, D.**, 2003c “Durkheim through the eyes of Bourdieu”, *Durkheim Studies*, 9 (n.s.), 23-29

**Robbins, D.**, 2005a (forthcoming) “Kant, Cassirer et Bourdieu” in J. Ferrari, M. Ruffing, R. Theis, & M. Vollet, eds., *Kant et la France – Kant und Frankreich*, collection “Europaea Memoria”, G. Olms-Verlag.

**Robbins, D.**, 2005b (forthcoming) *Bourdieu, Education and Society*, Bardwell Press, Oxford.

**Robbins, D.**, 2005c (forthcoming) “Texts, contexts, pretexts and science” in *Theory, Culture and Society*, Bourdieu special number.

**Sartre, J.-P.** 1948 *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* Paris, Gallimard. – translated as Sartre, 1967.

**Sartre, J.-P.**, 1963 *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Paris, Gallimard.

**Sartre, J.-P.**, (1967) *What is Literature?*, London, Methuen.

**Sartre, J.-P.**, 1972 *Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, London, Routledge. [first published in French Paris, Gallimard, 1943]

**Williams, R.**, 1958 *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books