

## The Three Phases of Bourdieu's U.S. Reception: Comment on Lamont

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*This essay responds to Lamont's (2011) article "How Has Bourdieu Been Good to Think With? The Case of the United States," which appears in this issue.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Michèle Lamont's timely analysis of the rise of Bourdieu as a major figure in U.S. sociology is certainly a good piece to think with (and against). I was lucky enough to listen to the keynote address in person at the Paris conference, and reading it on "paper" certainly allows for a better appreciation of the depth of insight of Lamont's "insider-outsider" account of what is without a doubt a unique development in the intellectual history of U.S. sociology.

Having come of intellectual age at a point in which Bourdieu's presence in U.S. sociology was well on its way to acquiring "establishment" status, I have joined this conversation rather late, not as an "active participant" in the very process of "diffusing Bourdieu" but more as an active *exploiter* of the very fact of Bourdieu having achieved the intellectual status of a (modern) classic. This makes my own stance and reflections necessarily different in emphasis from Lamont's (from a Bourdieusian viewpoint our different positioning means that we have qualitatively different *interests* as to what is "at stake" here).

In this comment I would like to simply add my own reflections on what I believe is the developmental arch and the *current* state of reception of Bourdieu's work. I have very little to add to the five points that Lamont raises in her essay, the arguments embedded in which I consider to be valid. However, I believe that by circumscribing herself to these five points, Lamont leaves herself open to three main lines of criticism: (1) a portrayal of the scope of the influence of Bourdieu's work on the U.S. scene that is overly narrow and restrictive, (2)

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an overemphasis on the importance of the omnivorousness studies, and (3) a lack of historical sense of the evolution of Bourdieu reception in the United States (an admittedly unfair criticism since that was not Lamont's intent).

My own tack will be to highlight what I consider to be "three phases" in the reception of Bourdieu's work in the United States. By layering themselves on top of one another chronologically, the theoretical themes and areas of research animated by these phases have produced the current (synchronic) situation—richly illustrated in Lamont's paper—of Bourdieu as the most "multivocal" of contemporary theorists. However, the basic themes that have been central in this reception process have changed in consequential ways, so that the "Bourdieu" that people were drawing from and exploiting in the 1980s and 1990s is certainly not the same Bourdieu that is serving as food for thought for many people in the contemporary context.

The key question that young scholars face is not *whether* Bourdieu is good to think with (the answer as Lamont demonstrates is undoubtedly yes), but *which* Bourdieu will you be thinking with today?

## THE FIRST PHASE: REPRODUCTION, TASTE, AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

The first phase of reception of Bourdieu's work is certainly associated with the studies of the French educational system co-authored by Jean Claude Passeron and the early reception of *Distinction*. For a U.S. perspective, we may call this the "Princeton/Vanderbilt" phase. The key texts are Paul DiMaggio's seminal review essay in *AJS* (DiMaggio, 1979)—written while the author was still at Harvard—and Rogers Brubaker's still masterful survey in *Theory and Society* of Bourdieu's theoretical debt to the classics (Brubaker, 1985). The first connected Bourdieu's work on education and cultural reproduction to classic themes on stratification and status attainment relevant in U.S. sociology, capturing the *substantive relevance* of Bourdieu's work; the second made clear for a U.S. audience the obvious lines of connection between Bourdieu's and the "canon" of accepted classical theorists in the U.S. establishment (Marx, Weber, and Durkheim), capturing the *theoretical relevance* of Bourdieu's contribution.

It is unlikely that you can claim to be a major figure in U.S. sociology without connecting to the classics and Brubaker's article left no doubt that Bourdieu had the relevant credentials. In the very same way, DiMaggio's review essay and subsequent work left no doubt that Bourdieu was not your standard French theorist, since his work actually had empirical implications—relevant for classic themes in Wisconsin-style status-attainment research—capable of being stated in the form of hypotheses and testable using the standard methodological toolkit. It is obvious that it was this work, and the subsequent small cottage industry that grew around the concept of "cultural capital" (Lamont and Lareau, 1988), that first made Bourdieu a

household name in the United States. To this day, one can find the predictable paper at RC28 that includes the “Bourdieu-variable” (usually some arts participation measure) in a status-attainment regression.

In this last respect, I would consider the later adaptation of Bourdieu’s work to the problematic of omnivorousness as well as the association of this line of research with quantitative survey analysis to actually belong to a *late* manifestation (the “Vandy” period) of this most basic first phase of reception of Bourdieu’s work. After all, the first high-powered quantitative research article drawing heavily on Bourdieu’s work to be published in the United States was DiMaggio’s (1982) and it was clearly molded after the arguments in *Reproduction*. However, it was evident early on that Bourdieu’s work on class and taste would become another point of entry into mainstream U.S. sociology. In this respect, it is important to not underestimate the (to this day unique) Dutch-U.S. collaboration around the journal *Poetics* (which published some early work of Bourdieu on fields of cultural production), which had DiMaggio as associate editor (with the indefatigable Kees van Rees at the other end) and Princeton as a high-prestige institutional collaborator in the United States.

This was happening, as Lamont notes, precisely around the time that U.S. cultural sociology was beginning to take off; thus *Poetics* was uniquely positioned to lay the groundwork for the development of a truly transnational scholarly community (which continues to be vibrant to this day) centered around issues of the connection between class, taste, arts participation, and cultural capital. As evidenced by the fact that the majority of the papers at the Paris conference revolved around this theme, it is clear that this is probably the most enduring institutional and intellectual legacy of this first phase of Bourdieu’s reception in the United States.

Following this, *Poetics* acquired the (informal) mantle as the unofficial journal of cultural sociology in the United States and its unique identity as a Dutch-U.S. collaboration continues to this day in its co-editorial arrangement (Tim Dowd and Suzanne Jansen). This has allowed the journal to “branch out” of its initial association to studies of cultural taste narrowly conceived to its current status as a journal where all kinds of work associated with cultural sociology can find a home (as evidenced by the recurrent special issues on a wide range of topics). It is unlikely, however, that the journal could have achieved this insider-elite status without first taking advantage of the torrent of interest generated by the (now classic) arguments laid out in *Distinction* and the institutional support provided by scholars making use of those arguments in the United States.

## THE SECOND PHASE: FIELD THEORY

I would consider the second phase of Bourdieu’s reception to begin when Bourdieu himself (as pointed out by Lamont) becomes an active participant

and manager in his own transatlantic diffusion process in the late 1980s and early 1990s. From a U.S. perspective I would call this the “Berkeley” phase, mostly because this becomes the institutional home from which Loïc Wacquant becomes an active co-manager in the creative project. As noted by Lamont, the key event is the Chicago “workshop” on which *Invitation to a Reflexive Sociology* (published in 1992) is based. But other events around the time are of equal importance, including Bourdieu’s visit to Chicago and associated lecture (Bourdieu, 1987), as well as the translation and publication of his UC San Diego lecture on “Social Space and Symbolic Power” (Bourdieu, 1989) in *Sociological Theory* and an early version of the 1987 Chicago workshop on which *Invitation* would be based. Another important set of publications at this stage are the edited volumes by Craig Calhoun (another high-status facilitator and sponsor of Bourdieu’s work at this stage), Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone, and the Bourdieu/Coleman edited collection (*Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives* and *Social Theory for a Changing Society*, respectively) for which Bourdieu and Wacquant (respectively) contributed self-reflexive, sociology of knowledge-inspired articles about the perils of the transatlantic exportation of intellectual works (once again actively managing the reception process).

However, I would argue that the key event in this phase is the translation and publication of Bourdieu’s main writings on “fields” in *The Field of Cultural Production* (Bourdieu, 1993). This provided U.S. readers with a relatively accessible entry point to Bourdieusian field theory. This phase culminates with Rodney Benson’s (1999)—a graduate from Berkeley sociology—influential essay on field theory and media studies in *Theory and Society*, followed by a special issue on a similar subject in the same journal (see, e.g., Couldry, 2003), which did a lot to domesticate the institutional and macro-sociological aspects of Bourdieu’s work. This second phase of Bourdieu reception has in fact recovered the strong connection between Bourdieu’s approach and that advanced in U.S.-style institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991).

The introduction of Bourdieusian field theory was happening at about the same time as another intellectual movement was taking place in U.S. sociology: the emergence of “third-generation” historical sociology and the flowering of new institutionalism in organizational analysis, which cross-fertilized with the now established “cultural turn.” The growing familiarity with Bourdieu’s more institutional and historical writings (including the criminally underappreciated *Rules of Art* translated in 1996), did a lot to quell some anxieties that Bourdieu’s work had a structuralist, static, or antihistorical bias (a question posed masterfully and the answer to which was left strategically open by Calhoun [1993]).

It is no wonder that the field-theoretic insights of Bourdieu’s work are now being fully exploited by third-generation historical sociologists—such as George Steinmetz (2008) and Marion Fourcade (2009)—and those interested in institutions and social change (e.g., Evans and Kay, 2008). Very significant in this last respect have been theoretical statements by Neil Fligstein (e.g., Fligstein, 2001; Fligstein and McAdam, 2011) and Emirbayer and Johnson

(2008), this last publication reinforcing the status of Wisconsin as the other high-status institutional site for the diffusion of Bourdieu's work in this phase. As is obvious by this set of examples, this second phase of Bourdieu's reception is in full swing and probably reaching its apogee right now, being spearheaded by institutional actors located in the most prestigious departments.

### THE (COMING) THIRD PHASE: EMBODIMENT, COGNITION, AND ACTION

If the first phase of Bourdieu's U.S. reception revolved around *Reproduction* and *Distinction* and the second phase was centered on the essays collected in *The Field of Cultural Production*, the third phase is beginning to take shape by revisiting what is quite likely Bourdieu's most difficult work: the revision of *Outline of a Theory of Practice* that became *The Logic of Practice*. By returning to this text, contemporary scholars at the intersection of cultural and cognitive sociology are rethinking the classical theoretical foundations of the theory of action. This phase is distinctive because it has no clear institutional home (although Karen Cerulo's "Culture and Cognition Research Network" serves as an invisible college of sorts for scholars interested in cognitive sociology broadly conceived) and no leading intellectual entrepreneurs as it is happening in a context in which Bourdieu is an established "classic" (and probably does not need any of those).

If the first phase was centered on quantitative methods, and the second phase brought out those interested in case-based approaches appropriate for macro-sociological and institutional work (with Lamont's own comparative and interview-based work serving as a bridge between the two), younger scholars in the third phase who draw on Bourdieu's "practice theory" emphasize experiential, ethnographic methodologies inspired by Loïc Wacquant's call—and demonstration of the productivity of doing (e.g., Wacquant, 2004)—to "take Bourdieu into the field" (Wacquant, 2002). This is evident in the recent work of Matt Desmond (2006), Matthew Mahler (2007), and Daniel Winchester (2008). Another strand of work focused on approaches to the analysis of language and situated conceptualization that can recover the embodied roots of meaning making (Ignatow, 2009). In addition, an entire line theorizing about the relationship between culture, cognition, and action (to which I have contributed [Lizardo, 2004, 2007; Lizardo and Strand, 2010]), one that has reopened some fundamental issues in the sociology of culture—see, for instance, Vaisey (2008, 2009, 2010)—and the sociology of morality—(e.g., Ignatow, 2008)—has been inspired by this (re)appropriation of Bourdieu's work.

A predictable roadblock likely to be encountered in this phase concerns the fact that here we face a Bourdieu who is not just a "sociologist" but who has already (via *Logic of Practice*) influenced work in cognate disciplines including cognitive and cultural anthropology as well as linguistics and even

cognitive science and psychology (Bloch, 1986; Ingold, 2000; Strauss and Quinn, 1997; Toren, 1999). Because of this, third-phase considerations of Bourdieu's relevance are inevitably accompanied by issues of cross-disciplinary borrowing, disciplinary identity, and even whether this entire undertaking respects the proper boundaries of what is considered "sociological" in the first place; it could be that here the obvious transdisciplinary appeal (and intent) of Bourdieu's work on practice theory may hit the limit of the (self-imposed) content-based strictures of the U.S. sociological establishment.

In spite of the fact that this aspect of Bourdieu's work has certainly captured the imagination of a critical mass of younger scholars, it is too early to tell whether this third phase of reception of Bourdieu's work will bear the intellectual fruits that have been undoubtedly borne by the first two phases (especially since neither of the first two phases is necessarily over with, although it is fairly clear that we have entered an era of diminishing returns vis-à-vis the first phase).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

As we have seen, the reception of Bourdieu's work has been uneven and multilayered, synchronizing itself with various intellectual movements specific to U.S. sociology (e.g., cultural and historical sociology and the recent revival of interest in morality, cognition, and embodiment and the unconscious). Today, an exciting array of work across a wide variety of fields and methodological stances can claim direct or indirect inspiration from Bourdieu's work. Cross-fertilization across these different lines of thinking remains somewhat limited, so that it is more accurate to speak of the diffusion and importation of different "Bourdieu" (both chronologically and synchronically) than to speak of the reception of Bourdieu in the singular, an issue that poses conceptual and interpretative challenges (Lizardo, 2011). And yes, some of these Bourdieus may be much better to think with than others.

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