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FRENCH SOCIOLOGY SEEN FROM BRITAIN. ABOUT TWO RECENT BOOKS BY PIERRE BOURDIEU AND ALAIN TOURAINE

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It was Claude Lévi-Strauss, writing in exile in America at the end of the Second World War, who claimed that modern sociology was born for the purpose of rebuilding French society after the destruction wrought by the French Revolution of 1789 and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. Comte gave the subject its name and ambitious prospectus in the aftermath of the Revolution and Durkheim gave it academic respectability and influence through the system of education of the Third Republic. However, just as the British economy is said to have suffered from being the first to industrialize, so too French sociology was reckoned to have paid the price for its early birth. As Lévi-Strauss said, it suffered from the gap which existed at the time of its birth, between the boldness of its theoretical premonitions and the lack of concrete data. Durkheim and his immediate followers did something to close that gap and the influence of Durkheimian sociology spread from Paris to the provinces and abroad. It received a set-back as a result of losses in the First World War and recovery did not take place until after the Second World War. Since then French sociology has produced some brilliant theoreticians, but its achievements as a whole have sometimes seemed to not quite match up to the quality of those parts. Its development appears much less continuous and cumulative than might be expected in view of the unrivalled quality of its successive intellectual leaders over several decades.

Some possible reasons for this uneven development of French sociology have been offered by outside observers, such as the American sociologists Terry N. Clark and Charles C. Lemert. Clark's controversial thesis in *Prophets and Patrons* (1973) was that, ever since Durkheim's time, the dominant institutional form of French sociology had been that of a rigid patron system in which a few prominent figures in stable and prestigious positions each maintained a kind of "closed shop", composed of a cluster of dependent followers, with little interchange or mutual respect between the patron/cluster groupings. With the end of the formal Durkheimian hegemony in 1955, when the last of the Durkheimians, Georges Davy, retired from the Sorbonne, the vacuum was filled by five newcomers to the central teaching positions (Gurvitch, Aron, Lévi-Strauss, Friedmann and Stoetzel). An apparent vindication of Clark's

thesis can be found in the case of Gurvitch and the collapse of his school of sociology immediately after his death. Gurvitch, a successor to Durkheim's chair at the Sorbonne, co-edited the book *Twentieth Century Sociology* (1946), in which Lévi-Strauss described the French origins of sociology. According to Sorokin, in *Sociological Theories of Today* (1966), Gurvitch had developed "one of the most original and significant sociological systems of our time". His last major work, *Les cadres sociaux de la connaissance* (1966), laid down a framework for the sociology of knowledge and culture, including hypotheses about the cognitive systems of different social classes, with a preliminary report on research covering various occupational groups, ranging from car workers to theatre actors. It is a range of subjects with some similarities to that covered by Bourdieu, but Gurvitch is never mentioned by Bourdieu. Similarly, although Gurvitch sought to combine a range of classical sociological ideas in a way that finds echoes in Touraine's project, with an emphasis on reflexivity and creative action of groups, Touraine makes no reference to his works. Bourdieu and Touraine might legitimately reply that they do not need to refer to all their predecessors. But nor do they refer to each other, although it can be argued that as contemporaries they share many similar concerns. They are both concerned with certain dilemmas of structural constraint and actors' strategies, particularly as these are manifested in power struggles, including struggles over cultural resources such as those involving intellectuals and social representations. Of course, they operate with different sets of concepts, and that is one of the problems standing in the way of establishing a dialogue. Bourdieu has developed his own concepts, such as *habitus* (the structured dispositions which inform practical strategies), with the aim of describing an actor whose practices are indebted to the objective relations of society as they operate in specific historical contexts. Whilst Touraine's favoured concepts, such as *historicité,* attempt to open a space for social actions determined neither by economic structures nor abstract cultural values, and the focus is on social actors struggling against the established order for control, particularly the struggle against dehumanizing forces which constitute one form of modernity. The distance between the two theorists also seemed wide in the past because they appeared to be working in different substantive areas – Bourdieu was mistakenly thought of in Britain and America as mainly a sociologist of education and Touraine was regarded as a sociologist of social movements. But Bourdieu has gradually become more appreciated for his general sociology and his contribution to the field of cultural studies, and Touraine's latest work also takes account of social images and the role of intellectuals in the construction and reconstruction of modernity.

However, whilst there may be some theoretical elements in common that derive from the particular history and circumstances of sociology within French intellectual life, it has to be admitted that Bourdieu and Touraine are very

different in style and approach. Lemert's essay on "Reading French Sociology" in his edited collection, *French Sociology: Rupture and Renewal Since 1968* (1981) explained some of these differences in terms of the role of style and individuality, the organization of sociological productivity, and the special problems of publishing, which characterised the *champ* (field of forces) within which French sociology was situated. Within this context he suggested that Touraine and Bourdieu had adopted somewhat different strategies to manage the rival pressures coming from two fields of action: that of the literary *tout Paris,* and that of a more narrowly defined field of sociology. At the end of the 1970s it seemed that Touraine was turning more and more toward *tout Paris* as a natural consequence of his fluent literary style, excellent television presence, and his focus on new social movements. Bourdieu, by contrast, was said to have resisted the temptations to public writing and to have confined his attention to developing sociology on his own terms. To some extent, these contrasts are still valid, but the latest works of the two authors reveal that there have been shifts.

Touraine's *Critique de la modernité* still ranges widely in its coverage of topical social concerns, as in Part 2, "Modernity in Crisis", which covers topics such as fragmentation, the destruction of the self, changes in the main actors of modernisation (nation, enterprise, consumer), intellectual attacks on modernity, ethnic separatism, and cultural post-modernisms. Part 3, "Birth of the Subject", also ranges widely in seeking social and political solutions to the crisis of modernity, retracing the liberating forces of modernity as well as the contradictory modern trends that have deprived people of real liberty and democracy. However, this is not just a work of general social commentary and political analysis, it is also a sociological *tour de force* that engages with the best of the recent sociological analyses of modernity, such as those of Habermas, Beck and Giddens. In Part 1, "Modernity Triumphant", there is a perceptive scholarly account of the origins of modernity and its different tendencies, which makes clear why Touraine believes that in order to reconstruct modernity we must first reconsider its origins.

The style of Bourdieu's study, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire,* gives the impression that he is continuing to work within the confines of his own particular, and somewhat densely complex, conceptual framework, rather than following the example of Touraine and addressing a broader audience. (Indeed, he warns of the dangers resulting from intellectuals succumbing to the temptation to become media stars). However, this would be less than the whole story. Bourdieu is quite clear about the importance of sociologists bringing their specialist knowledge into the public arena and he has recently gained widespread attention by editing a collection of studies of

the sorts of contemporary social problems that Touraine suggests are central to the crisis of modernity. And even *Les règles de l'art,* which engages in debates about one of the icons of French culture – Flaubert and his novels – thus following in the footsteps of the most celebrated of the intellectuals to have appealed to *tout Paris,* Sartre, concludes with a postscript about the importance of intellectuals maintaining a balance between autonomy and social engagement. But the main task which Bourdieu sets himself is different from that of Sartre. He points out that, whilst Sartre may have taken on the project of specifying the mediations through which society determined Flaubert – social class as refracted through a family structure – he neglected to analyze the genesis and structure of the specific social space in which Flaubert's creative project was formed. In other words, Bourdieu, following the sociological precepts spelled out in his previous works, insists that it is necessary to map out the full range of fields of forces that are in play. This method centres on three levels of social reality in this case: first, analysis of the position occupied by the artistic or literary field within the political field (*champ du pouvoir)* and the evolution of that position over time; second, the structure of the literary field, that is, the structure of the objective relations between the positions occupied by actors or groups competing for literary legitimacy at a given point in time; third, the genesis of the different producers' *habitus* (system of dispositions that give rise to strategy-generating principles, which enable actors to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations).

Bourdieu takes Flaubert's *L'éducation sentimentale* as his main example because he maintains that it illustrates some of the tensions in Flaubert's own position in the fields of power and literature as well as demonstrating the choice of artistic strategies. In order to take account of the particular affinity that tied artists with a background like Flaubert's to a position of political neutrality and the notion of pure art, Bourdieu points to the contradictory pressures of their social position, neither sufficiently rich to be properly bourgeois artists nor so poor as to be a literary proletariat. The consequent artistic strategy followed by Flaubert with regard to situating himself within the space of possibilities offered by the field, was to leave indeterminate the narrator's relationship to the facts or characters in the narrative. Flaubert abandoned the unifying perspective, taken from a fixed, central point of view, which he replaced with a space made up of juxtaposed pieces without a preferred point of view. Hence the early criticism that *L'éducation sentimentale* was a poorly organized or unstructured novel. Bourdieu concludes that, as a bourgeois who was vehemently antibourgeois and completely devoid of any illusions about the "people", Flaubert preserved in his absolute disenchantment an absolute conviction, which was that the writer should not give the reader the deceptive satisfactions offered by the false Philistine humanism of the sellers of illusion.

The analysis presented by Bourdieu is a vindication of the fecundity of his painstakingly assembled conceptual framework and methodology. In passing, he also argues convincingly that it is more sociologically complete than some of the alternative approaches, such as that of Foucault or other structuralists. It is not enough to consider the cultural order as a system totally independent of the actors and institutions that put it into practice and bring it into existence, if only because there is then no way of accounting for changes in this arbitrarily isolated and dehistoricized universe. If there is one extra dimension that might make Bourdieu's approach even more comprehensive, it is that of factors relating to gender differences, as developed in feminist theories and as demonstrated in the analyses of Flaubert's *L'éducation sentimentale* by a female scholar such as Mary Orr (cf. Orr, 1992).

Reading these two works by distinguished French sociologists side by side, one is impressed by their different virtues. Touraine presents a magisterial survey of a wide range of contemporary and historical issues and trends, with commendable coverage of sociological works in other languages and diverse fields. Bourdieu impresses with his originality and single-mindedness. The *champ* of French sociology may not fit easily into the tidy, scientific universe envisaged by Terry Clark, but on this evidence it still manages to nurture or provoke works that are intellectually stimulating in a variety of ways.

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Zwischen Konflikt und Konkordanz

Analyse von Medienereignissen in der Schweiz der Vor- und Zwischenkriegszeit

Die in diesem Band vorgelegten Arbeiten zielen auf eine historisch soziologische Analyse der Geschichte der Schweiz der Vor- und Zwischenkriegszeit. In diesem Zeitraum durchläuft die Schweiz eine Entwicklung, die vom brüchigen Burgfrieden 1914 über die klassenantagonistische Krise ausgangs des Ersten Weltkrieges in die 'Hochzeit' des Bürgerblocks der 20er Jahre führt und schliesslich über die Krise der 30er Jahre – konkordanzpolitisch befriedet – in das sozialmarktwirtschaftliche Zeitalter einmündet. Dem Zweiten Weltkrieg stellt sich im Gegensatz zum Ersten eine weitgehend geeinte Schweiz entgegen.

Diesen spannungsreichen, von Konflikt wie Konkordanz geprägten sozialen Wandel nachzuzeichnen und zu periodisieren, ist Thema der Arbeiten. Die einzelnen Beiträge, deren gemeinsames Erkenntnisinteresse sich in den Begriffen «diskontinuierlicher sozialer Wandel» und «Öffentlichkeit» konkretisiert, nehmen sich diesem Thema auf besondere Weise an: Allesamt nähern sie sich der Vor- und Zwischenkriegszeit über eine Rekonstruktion des öffentlichen Diskurses – die Zeit wird über Zeitungen erschlossen, um die Einschätzung vergangener Gegenwarten und Zukünfte, die Eigen- und Fremdbilder, ihre Brüche und Kontinuitäten im öffentlichen politischen Raisonnement zu erfassen.

Der vorliegende Band ist der erste der Reihe «Krise und sozialer Wandel». Dementsprechend befasst sich ein Beitrag mit den theoretischen und methodischen Grundlagen dieser Reihe, die sich mit dem öffentlichen Diskurs auseinandersetzt.

Der nächste Band beschäftigt sich mit der Nachkriegszeit und der Periode des Kalten Krieges, der dritte Band mit den 60er und 70er Jahren.

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