

Jessica Nowlin
Week 6

Bourdieu: Fundamental shift in archaeology or a passing fad?

If you look through the most recent and theoretically informed pieces of archaeological work of the past decade or so, agency theory, habitus, Bourdieu and Giddens are often cited and used as the basis for pushing archaeological work into new and productive territory. After all of the debates between processual and postprocessual archaeologists as to what the focus and end product of archaeological work should be, many archaeologists have either taken a side or become completely fed up with the debate. Whereas processualists tended to look for the over-arching structure as a means to explain human action, post-processualists tend to emphasize the role of the individual, whose own personal agency may not necessarily conform to the grand structure. Having to choose between such approaches does not serve to further our understanding of the entire picture of life in past societies. The dichotomy between the individual and social present in these approaches is not fruitful, and archaeology is not alone in this realization. This is the very issue that Pierre Bourdieu sought to address in his sociological work, and which he explored specifically in the 1977 book, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Through the concepts of habitus, field, capital and doxa, Bourdieu frames the world in a way which allows individual agency to exist within the social, with some underlying “rules” which help to set the mood of the game, but do not actually govern and dictate action. For us as archaeologists, this work, once actually digested and understood (if that is at all possible) presents an exciting new way in which to approach past peoples and their material culture.

Not only does archaeology have a lot to gain by employing Bourdieu's theory of practice, but archaeology can contribute to the theory as well. This is primarily due to the fact that both habitus and field are constantly changing and never fixed. Taking a snapshot of behavior in a group for one particular time would not be useful for exploring such a dynamic relationship, but the diachronic nature of archaeology is uniquely suited for just such an approach. Archaeology does, however, have problems with gathering the amount of detail needed to construct notions of practice, habitus and doxa for a past society. Many uses of Bourdieu's work consequently, such as Dietler and Herbich's article, employ ethnoarchaeology extensively to gain enough information to say something interesting about Bourdieu's theoretical concepts.

With such a promising theoretical package of comprehensive theoretical terms presented to archaeology, it is surprising that Bourdieu's work has been dissected and pulled apart by archaeologists who tend to focus on either practice or habitus. In many of the readings for today and in other archaeological works that incorporate Bourdieu's work, the issues of doxa, field, orthodoxy and heterodoxy are rarely addressed. Within Dietler and Herbich's own article, a subheading of a section labeled "Habitus and Techniques" discussed how these concepts of Bourdieu's work can be used archaeologically, but Bourdieu's other concepts receive no such highlighting. For Bourdieu, such a focus would defeat the entire purpose of these terms in the first place. Each of his concepts are fundamentally relational, with practice being the "relations between one's disposition (habitus) and one's position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social

arena (field)".¹ The important point here is the equation, not the variables within the equation. Each variable cannot stand and be understood on its own.

Overarching all of these concepts, and one which is frequently missed by archaeologists, is that of doxa. Doxa, as a pre-reflexive, intuitive knowledge that often remains unquestioned, acts as a mediating factor in fields by providing the "rules of the game". Besides just being a part of each field, there is also an overarching doxa which plays into all fields. As such an important factor in how fields are conceived and how fields then relate to each other, it is surprising that doxa is rarely addressed by archaeologists. If we seek to not just understand what one person, or one group of people did in the past, but what underlies these actions, doxa is the fundamental element we should be striving to understand. In my opinion, if archaeology is to have a metaphorical "end point" in its research design, an understanding of the doxa of a past society or of fields within that society should be that "end point". Reaching this, however, requires a thorough understand of all of the other concepts that Bourdieu uses. Each is relational, and cannot be understood without doxa, and doxa cannot be understood without habitus, field, capital and practice.

Another set of terms which archaeologists have not fully exploited is orthodoxy and heterodoxy. This is particularly surprising for heterodoxy, since this is the means by which doxa changes can happen. Archaeology's interest in social change makes this concept of heterodoxy seem like the natural focal point of Bourdieu's work. In many readings, however, this subject is not addressed as

¹ Maton p.51

thoroughly as habitus or practice. For my own interests in colonialism, a meeting of two groups with different doxa would naturally result in this state of heterodoxy. In the case of production, such a state of heterodoxy may occur when a new technology is introduced. How the new technology is then integrated into the society would be governed by the habitus of the crafts people and those who were associated with introducing the new technology. Determining how the heterodoxy resolves itself into orthodoxy is important for understanding the nature of the production in that society and how it changes over time. For archaeologists in general, this has much broader implications which should not be left aside solely to focus on only one or two aspects of Bourdieu's work.