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Bourdieu, the media and cultural production

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Bourdieu's theory of cultural production

The work of Pierre Bourdieu has been received with some ambivalence in Anglo-American media studies.[1] After an initial cautious welcome, (Garnham and Williams, 1980), some began to wonder by the 1990s why Bourdieu had failed to incorporate the media into his theory of culture (e.g. Garnham, 1993). The publication of Bourdieu's work on television and journalism (Bourdieu, 1998/1996)[2] was greeted by many Anglo-American media researchers with profound disappointment. Yet in the neighbouring fields of cultural studies and the sociology of culture, Bourdieu's reputation has continued to grow, and media scholars have increasingly turned to Bourdieu in recent years. Couldry (2003), for example, adapts and adjusts Bourdieu's theories of field and of the state to aid in the development of a theory of media power, while Hallin and Mancini (2004) use his 'field theory' as a basis for comparison between national media systems. My aim here is somewhat narrower, though it is still relevant to an assessment of the usefulness of Bourdieu's work for the study of the media. It is to evaluate Bourdieu's analysis of cultural production in terms of its effectiveness for understanding contemporary media production.

Bourdieu's most significant work on cultural production is available in English in two books: *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), which is a collection of translations of various essays originally published between 1968 and 1983; and *The Rules of Art* (1996, published in France as *Les Règles de l'art,* 1992). There is considerable overlap between the collections, and *The Rules of Art* clearly represents a consolidation by Bourdieu of his earlier, more dispersed work on the production of culture. So it is only fair in an assessment such as this to focus primarily on the latter,

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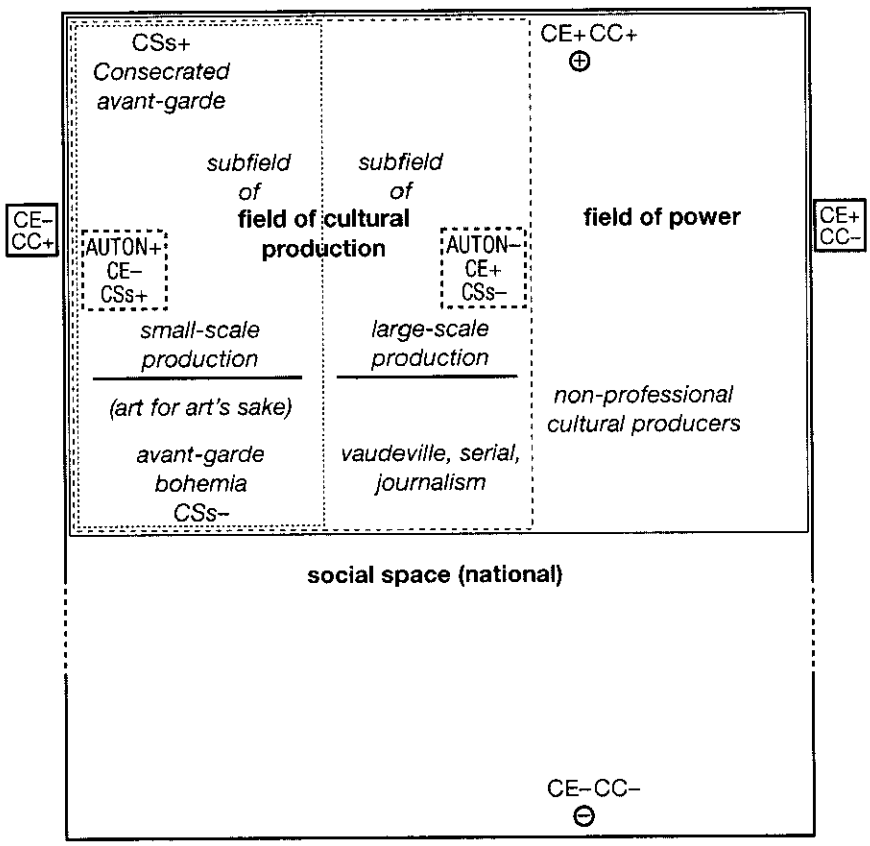
while looking where necessary to the earlier essays, and to occasional comments in other work, for clarification and amplification. His much shorter, less detailed and more polemical work on the production of journalism can be seen as an adjunct to this main corpus, but is clearly relevant to an assessment of Bourdieu's theory for understanding media production. I will refer to this at various points, and to important work by various associates of Bourdieu (especially Patrick Champagne), which builds on this work.

It is perhaps worth clarifying from the outset that by 'cultural production' Bourdieu intends a very broad understanding of culture, in line with the tradition of classical sociology, including science (which in turn includes social science), law and religion, as well as expressive-aesthetic activities such as art, literature and music. However, his work on cultural production focuses overwhelmingly on two types of field or sub-field of cultural production that are primarily expressive-aesthetic: literature and art. Towards the end of his life, he also published more briefly and polemically on journalism.

For Bourdieu, 'the principal obstacle to a rigorous science of the production of the value of cultural goods' is the 'charismatic ideology of "creation" ' to be found in studies of art, literature and other cultural fields. This charismatic ideology, in his view, 'directs the gaze towards the apparent producer – painter, composer, writer – and prevents us from asking who has created this "creator" and the magic power of transubstantiation with which the "creator" is endowed' (Bourdieu, 1996/1992: 167). This does not merely mean going beyond the individual creator to a wider network of agents involved in cultural production, which is the method taken by interactionist sociologists of art and culture, most notably Howard Becker. Nor does it mean reducing the work of art to a reflection of social 'context', as in some Marxian treatments and some conventional social histories of art. Bourdieu offers instead a theory of cultural production based on his own characteristic theoretical vocabulary of habitus, capital and field. Field and capital are particularly crucial in this context and their relation is usefully outlined by Thompson (1991: 14) in his definition of field: 'a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or "capital"'. By identifying key fields within a particular social space, Bourdieu is able to theorize interconnections between different areas of endeavour, and the degree to which they are *autonomous* of each other. The major fields Bourdieu tends to write about are the economic and political fields, and a composite of the two, which he calls 'the field of power'; the educational field; the intellectual field; and various cultural fields, including the literary field, the artistic field, the scientific field and the religious field.[3] The clearest way to introduce Bourdieu's conception of fields of cultural production is via a diagram that

appears in *The Rules of Art* (Figure 1, from Bourdieu, 1996/1992: 124). As this shows, Bourdieu sees the field of power as characterized by high levels of economic capital and low levels of cultural capital (indicated by CE+ and CC– at the top right of the figure). The field of cultural production, meanwhile, is constituted by low levels of economic capital and high levels

FIGURE 1
The field of cultural production in the field of power and in social space



Key

—— Social space
—— Field of power
- - - - Field of cultural production]
····· Subfield of small-scale production

CE Capital – economic
CC Capital – cultural
CSs Capital – symbolic, specific
AUTON+ High degree of autonomy
AUTON– Low degree of autonomy

Source: Bourdieu (1996/1992), used with permission of Polity Press, Stanford Universuty Press.

of cultural capital (indicated by CE– and CC+ at the top left of the diagram). This inversion is a typical Bourdieusian device and will be familiar to anyone who has encountered Bourdieu's work on cultural consumption, most notably *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984/1979), which is still considerably better known in media and cultural studies than his work on cultural production. In Bourdieu's theory of cultural consumption, certain goods tend to be favoured by the dominant fraction of the dominant class, and others by the dominated fraction of this class. The former class fraction, according to Bourdieu's explanation, have high levels of economic capital, but lower levels of cultural capital. The latter, dominated class fraction have lower levels of economic capital, but make up for this by accumulating cultural capital, which can be converted to other forms of capital, including economic and social capital (in Bourdieu's sense) at a later date. So it is clear that fields of cultural production are very much associated with the dominated fraction of the dominant class, and Bourdieu shows this by locating both the field of power and the field of production at the top end of the diagram. The diagram as a whole represents a national 'social space', with those at the top imbued with relatively high levels of both economic and cultural capital and those at the bottom with very small amounts of both.

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu makes some reference to divisions within the dominated fraction of the dominant class. But in his work on cultural production, such further subdivisions are fundamental. Bourdieu is clear that the field is more or less constituted by the relationship between two sub-fields (see, again, Figure 1): the sub-field of small-scale production (or 'restricted production') and the sub-field of large-scale production (*grande production*, perhaps better translated as mass production). These are primarily distinguished from each other by the degree to which they are *autonomous* of the field of power. Small-scale or restricted production is described as having a relatively high degree of autonomy, but never full autonomy; mass production is 'heteronomous' – subject to outside rule – but never fully so. Bourdieu often writes of small-scale production as oriented towards the production of 'pure' artistic products, and mass production as oriented towards the making of 'commercial' cultural goods. He is also inclined to talk of the field of small-scale production as 'production for producers': in rejecting the market, he implies with this phrase, cultural producers in the restricted sub-field are left pretty much to talk to each other.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the idea of autonomy from the field of power in Bourdieu's sociology of cultural production. It is central to Bourdieu's account of the development of modern culture-making. He aims to show that the autonomy of art and literature is not a transcendent and universal condition, but was actively produced in the 19th century. If Kant is Bourdieu's main adversary in *Distinction*, in *The Rules*

of Art it appears to be those, such as Proust and his many lesser followers, who advocate the necessary autonomy of literature. While Bourdieu wants to historicize such autonomy, and to point to the strangeness of the worlds it creates, it is clear that at the same time he considers such autonomization to be a considerable achievement, with potentially positive results. In Benson's useful gloss, 'A field's autonomy is to be valued because it provides the pre-conditions for the full creative process proper to each field and ultimately resistance to the "symbolic violence" exerted by the dominant system of hierarchization' (Benson, 1999: 465). Bourdieu's 'Postscript' to *The Rules of Art* advocates the mobilization and creation of an 'Internationale of intellectuals committed to defending the autonomy of the universes of cultural production' (1996/1992: 344), and this was a project to which he was to devote considerable energy in the last decade of his life.

The sub-field of small-scale production, meanwhile, involves *very* low levels of economic capital, and *very* high levels of field-specific symbolic capital. Conversely, the sub-field of mass cultural production involves, through higher sales, levels of economic capital which are relatively high, and nearer to the levels characteristic of those occupying 'the field of power', i.e. the most powerful positions within the social space. However, the price to be paid for this economic capital by agents and institutions in the sub-field of mass cultural production is a much lower level of 'symbolic profit' (Bourdieu, 1996/1992: 142). It should be noted that the relevant capital here is symbolic capital, which, in Bourdieu's schema, represents 'accumulated prestige or honour' (Thompson, 1991: 14) rather than cultural capital ('knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions' [1991: 14]). The distribution of autonomy and capitals I have described is indicated in Figure 1 by the squares in broken lines at each end of the field of cultural production.

The field of small-scale production is divided still further, into two poles. Within this sub-field characterized by *very* high levels of symbolic capital, a consecrated avant-garde have *especially* high levels of symbolic capital, in the shape of various forms of recognition, honour and acclaim (prizes, membership of academies). Meanwhile, an aspirant, bohemian avant-garde claims to shun even symbolic capital (remember that the whole sub-field of small-scale cultural production claims to shun economic capital). And mass production appears to be divided too, between mass production for the bourgeoisie and 'popular' mass production, though this is not clear from Bourdieu's diagram (Figure 1). But as I shall discuss in due course, the structure of the field of mass or large-scale production is an issue that Bourdieu scarcely addresses, at some cost to his theory.

Fields of cultural production (literary, artistic, etc.) are also structured by sets of possible positions within them. In fact, fields are, to a large extent, according to Bourdieu's scheme, constituted precisely by struggles over

these positions, which often take the form of a battle between established producers, institutions and styles, and heretical newcomers. These *position-takings* by newcomers restructure and recreate the relevant sub-field and field. Bourdieu develops the concept of *the space of possibles* to talk about the factors which constrain and facilitate such position-takings. The concept is clearly intended to counter naïve notions of creative freedom and innovation. Instead, Bourdieu emphasizes the way that possible positions define the thinkable and the unthinkable, the do-able and the impossible for agents in the field, depending on the way that 'the categories of perception constitutive of a certain habitus' (1996/1992: 235) allow them to see possible courses of action and intervention. Bourdieu, then, is sceptical about revolutionary transformations in culture, in that such revolutionary moments are always for him dependent on the possibilities present in the positions inscribed in the field. But he does not rule them out.

Bourdieu's achievement: autonomy and power

The Rules of Art provides a relentless and often repetitive critique of the notion of the individual creator, and of the idea of art as transcendent and as therefore impermeable to understanding and interpretation. The title is significant: Bourdieu is drawing attention to the structured nature of making symbolic goods, and the way that the social making-up of the rules surrounding such activities, is hidden from view, or misrecognized. In this respect, of course, his sociology of cultural production is in a relationship of homology (to use one of Bourdieu's favourite words) with his sociology of cultural consumption. Both aim to reveal the way that taken-for-granted social practices tend ultimately to serve the interests of the dominant class. While such a strategy of demystification may be familiar, for example in the way that Becker's sociology of art shows creativity to be essentially social, or in the various Marxian and sociological attempts to emphasize the social nature of the production of art (Wolff, 1993 provides the classic overview), no one has taken on ideologies of art so effectively on their own terms, and as part of a comprehensive theory of power and society as a whole.

The great effectiveness of Bourdieu's sociology of cultural production stems from the balance achieved between, on the one hand, the emphasis on the drive for autonomy characteristic of the field of cultural production from the early 19th century onwards, and, on the other, his stress on the interconnectedness of the field of cultural production with other fields, especially the economic and political fields constituting the 'field of power', but also the educational and intellectual fields. This emphasis on interconnectedness and power makes Bourdieu's sociology of cultural

production superior to the huge corpus of pluralist sociology of culture, represented at its best by 'the production of culture' perspective (see Peterson and Anand, 2004). This latter tradition is alert to the many influences possible in any situation of cultural production, but can offer no systematic theory of interconnectedness. We are simply asked to choose from a menu of possible determinants, whereas Bourdieu theorizes structure and action in cultural production as part of a comprehensive social theory. Meanwhile, the emphasis on autonomy makes Bourdieu's theory potentially superior to the mainstream tradition of Marxian political economy of culture in the USA, associated with Herbert Schiller, Robert McChesney and others, which, in spite of its considerable achievements in criticizing the US media, insufficiently recognizes differentiation within the field of cultural production, and which sometimes overstates the degree to which cultural production serves as propaganda for capital and the capitalist state.

What is more, Bourdieu's model of the two sub-fields, mass and restricted production, offers the potential to make sense of a whole series of everyday actions and discourses in the making of symbolic goods. I first read Bourdieu's work on cultural production when researching the music industry for my doctoral thesis (see Hesmondhalgh, 1996, 1999) and, while there are clearly important differences between the production of popular music and that of art and literature, I was constantly struck by the familiarity of the worlds he described, not only from my interviews with record company entrepreneurs, but also from an adult lifetime of reading and hearing discourse about 'alternative' music. Indeed, the very word 'alternative' seemed to me to be a vernacular term, within the field of popular musical production and consumption, for what Bourdieu calls small-scale or restricted production. This sub-field of small-scale popular music production constantly defined itself against a pop 'mainstream', a vernacular term for mass or large-scale production.[4] Within it, new entrants would vigorously attack the consecrated forms of the alternative – and in terms which echoed those reported by Bourdieu (1993) in his work on the literary fields of the 1970s and the 19th century.

Like the cultural industries never happened

For all its strengths, however, Bourdieu's sociology of cultural production has important limitations when it comes to analysing contemporary cultural production. It is simply astonishing how little Bourdieu has to say about large-scale, 'heteronomous' commercial cultural production, given not only its enormous social and cultural importance in the contemporary world, but also its significance in determining conditions in the sub-field in which he is clearly much more interested, restricted production. The result is that

Bourdieu offers no account of how the most widely consumed cultural products – those disseminated by the media – are produced. While Bourdieu's work on cultural consumption is remarkably comprehensive, covering everything from rugby to *Rocco and His Brothers*, from Pernod to Petula Clark, his coverage of cultural production is highly selective, and very much focused on restricted production.

There is an apparent exception to this, in that Bourdieu and sociologists influenced and inspired by him, most notably Patrick Champagne, have carried out a number of studies of the production of journalism. In *On Television and Journalism* (1998/1996), Bourdieu provides a compelling polemic about the threat posed by journalism, and by television journalism in particular, to the autonomy of cultural producers in a large number of neighbouring fields. Patrick Champagne has written about the relations between politics, journalism and public opinion (with Dominique Marchetti, 1994) on coverage of the French 'blood scandals', on coverage of social malaises and urban riots (Champagne, 2000) and of various other issues. These and a number of other studies, notably in two special issues of the journal founded by Bourdieu, *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* (in 1994 and 2000) have important and interesting things to say about journalism, especially its production, and they form a critical response to the privatization and commercialization of French broadcasting in the 1980s and 1990s.[5] Collectively, as with Bourdieu's work on cultural production in general, they provide an alternative to liberal pluralism and to reductionist critical accounts, built on a model of the interconnectedness of fields and the relationship of fields to questions of power. While Bourdieu is engaged in polemical generalizations, his associates have provided detailed case studies. However, the primary interest in these various field studies, both by Bourdieu and by those who follow his theoretical lead, is in the effects on the relatively autonomous prestigious institutions of French journalism of such changes (*Le Monde* features very heavily, for example) not in the complexities that might be involved in those sections of the market aimed at larger audiences. Even in Britain's notorious popular press, for example, alongside some extremely dubious and often jingoistic journalism, there has been a long history of critical intervention, such as, to take one instance more or less at random, the *Daily Mirror*'s attacks on the 'brassbuttoned boneheads' of the British officer class during the highly restrictive publishing climate of the Second World War (see Curran and Seaton, 2003: 59).

So the heteronomous end of cultural production is left largely unexamined in 'field theory', even in the studies of journalism. In *The Rules of Art*, the neglect of popular or large-scale cultural production is even more marked. It is hard to believe that such neglect can be justified on the grounds of national specificity: that large-scale production in France is somehow without contradictions and complexities, whereas British popular

culture is variegated. Nor, I think, can this lack of interest be justified on the grounds that Bourdieu and his associates are involved in a strategic battle to influence their intellectual peers, and that they therefore concentrate on the prestigious home territory of the intellectual elite. While this would be a perfectly valid strategy over a particular study, the lack of attention to popular or large-scale culture appears to be systemic.

Bourdieu's lack of interest in large-scale production leads on to problems in his model of the history of cultural production, which has further negative consequences for his theory. In Part I of *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu lays out with great rigour and at considerable length, 'three states of the field', from a transitional state in the mid 19th century in which cultural production achieved a new relative autonomy from the field of power, to the 'emergence of a dualist structure' in the 1880s, based on the opposition of two principles of hierarchization, the autonomous and the heteronomous, to the formation of a 'market for symbolic goods', which is effectively a fully fledged version of this dualist structure, and which forms the model of the field of cultural production outlined above. Based on his work in the 1970s on literary publishers, the implications of Bourdieu's huge chapter on this market in *The Rules of Art* are that its conditions were established in the late 19th century, and that these conditions persist. But this ignores profound transformations in the field of cultural production in the 20th century, in particular the growth and expansion of the cultural industries – central to which are the media industries.

In my view, Raymond Williams offers a superior understanding of the historical development of cultural production in his book *Culture* (1981), when he writes of four stages or phases in the social relations of creators with the institutions of cultural production and with wider society: the artisanal, the post-artisanal (including patronage), the market professional, which is akin to the 19th-century states of the field much more fully described by Bourdieu, and finally, from the early 20th century onwards, but enormously intensifying in the second half of that century, the corporate professional stage. In this most recent stage, 'social relations typical of the integrated professional market' persist, but, Williams notes, in the context of book publishing, the important emergence of an increasingly capitalized corporate sector, where for many writers the 'most available social relations are those of employment . . . with the ideas for books coming from new professional intermediaries (publishers' editors) within the market structure, and authors being employed to execute them' (1981: 52). (Many authors would like to execute their editors, and vice versa, but Williams means that authors are employed to execute the ideas of their editors.) Williams also points to the rise of a whole set of new media, most notably the cinema, radio and television, where salaried professional work became predominant, and to the development of 'more

complex and specialized means of production and distribution' across cultural production as a whole. Williams in fact may understate the persistence of market professional terms in these sectors, a persistence reinforced by 'post-Fordism' and casualization in the cultural industries in the 1980s and 1990s. But the point should be clear: Bourdieu misses the importance of the rise of the cultural industries for understanding the changing social relations of cultural producers.

A related problem in *The Rules of Art* is that Bourdieu has nothing to say about the domination of cultural production by multinational entertainment corporations across all cultural industries (I will come to how he talks about concentration and conglomeration in the work on journalism shortly). He does write about the differences between large and small firms in discussing late 20th-century publishing, but, in terms of his historical model, the large firms seem to have arrived from nowhere, or rather, they seem to be big versions of the small, entrepreneurial firms established in the 19th century, and still very much present in Parisian book publishing in the 1970s. These corporations have arrived since the emergence of the dualist structure (of autonomy and heteronomy, and large-scale/small-scale production) in the late 19th century, and potentially affect the structure of the whole field. They are not so new that they could be safely ignored in an account of the development of cultural production that runs up until the 1970s, as does *The Rules of Art*. The process of corporatization began in the 1920s, with the rise of large enterprises straddling entertainment 'hardware' and content production, such as NBC, RCA, EMI, CBS and the Hollywood studios; it intensified in the 1950s and 1960s, as these cultural businesses were incorporated into even bigger multinational enterprises; and arguably it has intensified still further in the last two decades, as the cultural industries have come to be seen, in an era of telecommunications and broadcasting deregulation, as a cutting-edge sector of international business. Nicholas Garnham has argued that this change poses a serious challenge for Bourdieu's theory of culture more generally, for the following reason:

> [T]he dominant fraction [of the dominant class] cannot safely leave the cultural field to be shaped by the interstatus group competition between subsets of the dominated fraction, since the reproduction of their economic capital now depends directly upon both the costs of production and the size of the markets for symbolic goods. (1993: 189)

Moreover, with the rise of advertising, 'cultural taste publics are increasingly also market segments not just for symbolic goods but for an associated range of material goods' (1993: 189) and this means that members of the dominated fraction of the dominant class can no longer be left to their autonomous production to quite the same degree. Now Bourdieu recognizes a related problem in his 'Postscript' to *The Rules of*

Art, where he says that threats to autonomy result from 'the increasingly greater interpenetration between the world of art and the world of money'. Even here, though, he seems to be thinking of the worlds of literature and art, rather than the media and cultural industries, for he refers to 'new forms of sponsorship . . . and new alliances between certain economic enterprises . . . and cultural producers' (1996/1992: 344). And in some ways Garnham's Bourdieusian analysis is consistent with aspects of Bourdieu's polemical account in *On Television and Journalism*, which recognizes the heteronomizing forces at work in modern journalism (a point I'll return to). But it is disappointing that neither Bourdieu nor any of his associates seem to have addressed the question of what has happened to cultural production since the middle of the 20th century. This, I think, is another factor that helps to explain the disappointment felt in Anglo-American media studies when Bourdieu's study of television turned out, on publication in English, to be almost entirely a study of television journalism and its relationship to other journalism, and to other fields of cultural production. What – many of us wanted to ask – about the rest of television, outside journalism, across its many genres, including documentary, drama, comedy, 'light entertainment', reality television? What about its contradictions and hybrid forms, its extraordinary strangeness?

In fact, Bourdieusian analysis has much to offer the study of contemporary television, although this is not yet apparent from field theory's existing work on the subject. Here, as elsewhere, it is very important that field theory does not operate in isolation from the formidable body of media research on the subject (there are very few references in French field theory to such work). But the application of Bourdieusian analysis to television and other media can also help to reveal some of its limitations. Large-scale production might be more differentiated than Bourdieu's work suggests, and the relations of heteronomy and autonomy might sometimes be more fluid and complex than he implies. Take the example of the US television industry. Todd Gitlin's classic study of the production of prime-time television analysed the role of the three distribution networks of the early 1980s (CBS, NBC, ABC) in the creative process; and argued that the overwhelming imperative for these networks was to make programmes which were 'safe', unlikely to disturb advertisers, lobbyists and domestic audiences, envisaged by TV executives as undisturbable. But Gitlin also analysed the emergence of the cop show, *Hill Street Blues*, which he describes as embodying 'the energy of American liberal-middle-class ideology turned in on itself' (Gitlin, 1994: 307). The show registered the difficulty, if not impossibility, of implementing the ideals of the 1960s in a society presented as riddled by social deprivation, inequality and selfish hedonism. How did *Hill Street Blues* emerge and survive, given its low ratings in its first series? Gitlin's analysis suggests that it was necessary for the distribution networks to give autonomy to creative producers to make at

least some shows that would gain prestige among the wealthier and more educated demographic groups. The show was not unprecedented: Feuer et al. (1984) showed how the emergence of MTM Television (the makers of *Hill Street Blues*) in the late 1960s and early 1970s was predicated on the making of 'quality television', such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Lou Grant* for this market niche, as advertisers became more interested in addressing specific market segments through television, rather than an undifferentiated prime-time mass market. In effect, then, *Hill Street Blues* and other 'quality' television programmes were television for the dominated fraction of the dominant class, but because of the nature of its distribution medium, they were available for a mass audience (multi-channel television in the USA increasingly assigns such quality TV to specialist channels, most notably HBO, with series such as *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under*).[6] It is also possible to extend such analysis to other popular media, where prestige and popularity are not necessarily so much in contradiction as in Bourdieu's schema. The most canonized acts in rock history (the Beatles, the Beach Boys, Dylan) were immensely popular in their time, and have been since; the most canonized rock act of the 1990s (Radiohead) sold millions of albums.

The example of 'quality television' also suggests that Bourdieu took no account of the ability of large-scale production to disseminate consecrated culture – assuming that we expand the term 'consecrated' to include new institutions of consecration, such as industry awards, the responses of other producers (here, Bourdieu's phrase, 'production for producers', which I mentioned earlier, remains resonant, even in a context where the product is consumed by many millions who aren't producers), and the views of television critics of 'quality' newspapers. This production of consecrated culture in the media is achieved through the creation, purchase or co-option of partially autonomous subdivisions: major film studios and television channels sign production deals with independent production companies, major record companies sign distribution, licensing and/or financing deals with 'independent' record companies (see Hesmondhalgh, 1996). This has been a feature of large-scale production for many years, and this suggests that Bourdieu presents an overly polarized picture of autonomy versus heteronomy. The division between large-scale and restricted production continues to makes sense as at least an initial organizing principle for thinking about the making of culture, but in many fields, such as popular music, we are seeing a proliferation of sub-fields of restricted production, alongside the growth of large-scale production, as the field of cultural production as a whole grows larger and more complex. One way of putting this is that there is now a huge amount of cultural production taking place on the boundaries between sub-fields of mass and restricted production; or, perhaps better still, that restricted production has become introduced *into* the field of mass production.

One of the very few places I have found where a field theorist acknowledges such complexity within large-scale production is in an essay by Patrick Champagne, published in 1995 in French, but recently translated into English (Champagne, 2005). Champagne says that the fundamental structure 'opposing symbolic goods produced according to internal intellectual imperatives to symbolic goods produced to respond to external demand' (2005: 55), can be found within the mass market (sub-) field, as well as in restricted production. He likens the repetition of this structure across different (sub-) fields to a series of Russian dolls. Not all media outlets, he says, are 'equally subject to this desperate search for the largest possible public' (2005: 56). But the specific dynamics of this opposition in large-scale production remain under-explored here, as in other field theory. And in this passage, Champagne uses a characterization of large-scale production that appears frequently in Bourdieu's work, that 'the mass media produce standardized products on a large scale, designed to respond to pre-existing, external demand – which can now be measured in a very sophisticated way by marketing techniques' (2005: 55–6). It is Bourdieu's (and Bourdieusian) characterizations of the relation between production and consumption that I now want to consider.

Production and consumption

Bourdieu's main thoughts on the relations between production and consumption in *The Rules of Art* appear towards the end of his chapter on 'The Market for Symbolic Goods'. Bourdieu observes that

> . . . the opposition between art and money . . . is the generative principle of most of the judgements that . . . claim to establish the frontier between what is art and what is not, between 'bourgeois' art and 'intellectual' art, between 'traditional' art and 'avant-garde' art. (1996/1992: 162)[7]

But the distinction between art and money, between creativity and commerce, is used by Bourdieu almost exclusively to explain homologies (or influences) between production and consumption at the restricted production end of any field of cultural production. Large-scale production is, as I pointed out above, left largely unexamined. Bourdieu's main discussion of heteronomous production is to be found at the beginning of the same chapter, where he contrasts the two economic logics of the subfields of large-scale and restricted production. Here, large-scale production is actually characterized largely through a description of the relations between supply and demand: Bourdieu has very little to say about large-scale production beyond the idea that it responds to 'a *pre-existing demand*, and *in pre-established forms*' (1996: 142, italics in the original; like many

of us, Bourdieu often resorts to italics when he wants to sound very definite about something he isn't completely sure about) and that it has a relatively short production cycle. Bourdieu has very little to say in *The Rules of Art* about such market research activities, and how they mediate between production and consumption, even though they appear to be fundamental to his characterization of one of the two main sub-fields of his topic.

Audience research does feature heavily however in Bourdieu's *On Television and Journalism*. Bourdieu makes a compelling polemical case that the system of audience ratings provides the same kinds of restrictions on the autonomy of cultural producers as 'poll-based demagogy does on politics' (1998/1996: 66–7; his analysis here and elsewhere is indebted to Champagne, 1990, an account which in turn has its roots in earlier remarks by Bourdieu on public opinion). Audience ratings play a very important role in Bourdieu's discussion of the pressures towards increasing heteronomy in journalism. And in fact the main way in which Bourdieu, in *On Television and Journalism*, addresses changes in cultural production over the years since the 1970s (the final period covered in detail by *The Rules of Art*) is via a discussion of such audience research in what I think is one of the most significant passages of *On Television and Journalism*:

> Even in the most independent sectors of journalism, ratings have become the journalist's Last Judgement. . .. In editorial rooms, publishing houses, and similar venues, a 'rating mindset' reigns. Wherever you look, people are thinking in terms of market success. Only thirty years ago, and since the middle of the nineteenth century – since Baudelaire and Flaubert and others in avant-garde milieux of writers' writers . . . immediate market success was suspect. It was taken as a sign of compromise with the times, with money. . .. Today, on the contrary, the market is accepted more and more as a legitimate means of legitimation. . .. Audience ratings impose the sales model on cultural products. But it is important to know that, historically, all of the cultural productions that I consider (and I'm not alone here, at least I hope not) the highest human products – math, poetry, literature, philosophy – were all produced against market imperatives. (1998/1996: 27)

Bourdieu's main concern in discussing changes in cultural production, including those in journalism, but also in literature and art, is marketization, and he sees audience research as fundamental to this process. It is clear on the basis of this section of *On Television and Journalism* that to read Bourdieu as an aesthetic relativist, on the basis of *Distinction*'s analysis of taste, is utterly misplaced. Such talk of 'the highest human products' has been deeply unfashionable in Anglo-American media and cultural studies; indeed, British cultural studies was partly built upon a critique of a 'culture and civilization' tradition where such judgements

were central. No doubt such writing has contributed to the frosty reception of Bourdieu's work on television in many quarters of media studies. What precisely it means to oppose great literature to the imperatives of the market might also be debated. (To take just one example, commercial magazine serialization was an important means of support and dissemination for Dickens, Balzac, Conrad and many others). But the problems of making such judgements about high (and low) human products, or indeed the problems of pretending not to make them at all, as do many writers committed to opposing such judgements, is not my main concern here. Rather it is the way in which Bourdieu talks about audience research. For he seems to grant it, and the media producers that use it, very strong powers to bring about the marketization that concerns him. Just before this passage, he writes that 'it is now possible to pinpoint the audience by the quarter hour and even – a new development – by social group. So we know very precisely who's watching what, and who not' (1998/1996: 27). This can be compared with the quotation from Patrick Champagne, above, on how 'pre-existing' external demand can be measured very precisely.

But it isn't at all clear that we can talk securely in this way about the demand for goods existing before goods are made. The very high rates of failure for records and films (see Caves, 2000, from mainstream economics, and numerous non-reductionist political economy accounts, for discussion) attest to this. Because of this uncertainty, cultural industry companies engage in increasingly complex activities to try to construct a sense of what this demand is. Without falling into the error of seeing such activities as indicating a vulnerability on the part of media businesses, we can still see it as an attempt to control a high level of risk in the cultural industries. A number of perspectives see such market research as a perennially failing attempt to impose order on a chaotic market. This is one of a number of places where it is hard not to think that 'field theory' would significantly benefit from greater dialogue with Anglo-American media theory. For there has been significant research into such audience research (see Toynbee, 2006, for a useful survey). Some of this research, even though it hails from interactionist and empiricist sociology of a kind that Bourdieu often rightly criticizes, seems to me to get much closer to the reality of life in production organizations than any vision of a perfect fit between surveillance of the audience and the needs of large-scale producers. Recent developments in scientific measurement have led to greater claims for the accuracy of market research, and such *claims* can indeed have important effects on the autonomy of producers; the problem is that Bourdieu and Champagne seem to take producers' claims about such research at face value, and this fails to grasp the distinctive nature of production in the cultural industries (see Hesmondhalgh, 2002, for an extended discussion of these distinctive conditions).

'Cultural intermediaries'

Recent debates about 'cultural intermediaries' represent an attempt to address relationships between production and consumption. Ironically, much of the recent interest in this term seems to have been generated by misreadings of Bourdieu's use of it. For Bourdieu, at the core of the 'new petite bourgeoisie', a new social class with distinctive tastes and cultural practices, are 'all the occupations involving presentation and representation (sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration and so forth) and in all the institutions providing symbolic goods and services' (Bourdieu, 1984/1979: 359).[8] Bourdieu seems to have intended the term 'new cultural intermediaries' to refer to a particular type of new petit-bourgeois profession, associated with cultural commentary in the mass media, 'the most typical of whom are the producers of cultural programmes on TV and radio or the critics of "quality" newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalist-writers' (1984/1979: 325). Presumably, the 'old' cultural intermediaries were those who acted as critics and as experts on serious, legitimate culture in the pre-mass media age. Both new and old cultural intermediaries, we must assume, are thus named because they 'mediate' between producers and consumers. But Mike Featherstone (1991) seems to have misunderstood the term. In the context of an interesting discussion of the new petite bourgeoisie as generators of a new consumer culture, one based on a general interest in style, he says that 'Bourdieu analyses the new petite bourgeoisie, the cultural intermediaries, who provide symbolic goods and services' (1991: 89). So Featherstone equates the new petite bourgeoisie with a small sub-set of that social class, the (new) cultural intermediaries. Keith Negus (1992) and Sean Nixon (1997) appear to have inherited the confusion about the term. Negus (1992: 46), citing Featherstone, says that he will analyse recording industry personnel as cultural intermediaries. His intention is to argue that recording industry personnel contribute to the 'words, sounds and images of pop' and he seems to be using the term 'intermediary' to refer to this added contribution, which takes place between musician and audience. But in Bourdieu's sense of the term, it is *critics* that act as cultural intermediaries in the recording industry.

Nixon, meanwhile, makes an interesting point about advertising practitioners as members of the new petite bourgeoisie, marked by 'the ambition to establish authority over particular areas of symbolic production' (1997: 216). But, like Featherstone, Nixon conflates cultural intermediaries with the new petite bourgeoisie as a whole: for example, he presents the famous passage from Bourdieu, quoted above, about the new petite bourgeoisie being concerned with representation and symbolic goods, as if it were an analysis of the 'social make-up of cultural intermediaries' (1997: 211). In fact, Nixon seems to see all advertising practitioners as cultural inter-

mediaries (1997: 216). By this point in its history, the term is being used to refer very generally to those involved in the production of symbols. And Justin O'Connor (2004: 40) points to other uses too: cultural facilitators and entrepreneurs from Diaghilev to Brian Epstein, and consultants who mediate between the interests of cultural producers and the world of cultural policy.

In spite of this melange (or is it a dog's dinner?) of uses, Negus (2002) has recently argued for the term 'cultural intermediaries' on the grounds that it directs our attention to questions of how production and consumption are mediated. He even suggests that we should include further categories of workers, who are important in such mediation, but who have been relatively neglected, such as accountants. But my view is that the confusing array of uses to which the term has been put makes it a very poor starting point for an enquiry into the relationships between media and cultural production and consumption. We need a better specification of the division of labour involved in mediating production and consumption in culture-making organizations than that offered by Bourdieu and by those who have adopted the term 'cultural intermediaries' from him in these many different ways. The basis for such a specification is provided, in my view, by work at the meeting point of organizational sociology, historical sociology of culture and the critical political economy of media, by Bill Ryan (1992). Ryan highlights the fact that in what he calls, following Raymond Williams, the corporate form of cultural production, the creative stage of bringing cultural goods to market is carried out by a project team, involving a number of different roles performed sometimes by different people, sometimes by the same people (see Hesmondhalgh, 2002, for a fuller account). These include primary creative personnel such as musicians, screenwriters and directors; technical craft workers such as sound engineers, camera operators, copy editors, and so on; owners and executives; marketing and publicity personnel; and, crucially, creative managers, who act as brokers or mediators between, on the one hand, the interests of owners and executives, and those of creative personnel. Examples of such creative managers include A&R staff in the recording industry, commissioning editors in the book industry, magazine editors and film producers.

Bourdieu does pay some attention to publishers (commissioning editors) and dealers in the literary and artistic fields of cultural production. Many of his observations are extremely interesting – for example, his discussion of how such figures allow creative personnel such as painters and writers – to avoid contact with the market and to maintain an 'inspired and "disinterested" picture of himself [sic]' (Bourdieu, 1996/1992: 168). But Bourdieu shows no interest in the much more complex divisions of labour characteristic of modern, commercial media production.

Conclusions

Earlier in this article, I indicated some of the ways in which Bourdieu's theory of cultural production is superior to two main alternatives when it comes to the analysis of media production: interactionist, empirical sociology of culture, and a strand of political economy work associated with Herbert Schiller and other writers. However, I've also indicated some major problems with the work of Bourdieu and his fellow field theorists, problems that, in my view, place real limitations on the value of field theory, as practised so far, for understanding contemporary media production. What final conclusions can we draw about the potential utility of this approach for understanding contemporary media production? I want to close by briefly considering this question via a comparison of field theory with a major strand of Anglo-American work on media production.

Benson (1999: 479ff) has compared 'field theory' favourably with other approaches to journalism and the media. He says it combines the empirical detail of organizational studies with a concern with broader institutional and societal environments, and offers a good complement to hegemony and new institutionalist theory, one especially promising when it comes to comparative work. In a balanced account, Benson also makes useful criticisms of field theory (such as its conflation of economic and political power). Surprisingly, though, there is no consideration of non-reductive versions of political economy in Benson's survey (it also seems to be absent from the introduction to Benson and Neveu, 2005) and Benson fails to take into account the long-running dialogue between such work and what he characterizes separately as 'hegemony' and 'organizational' approaches. Much of the key critical research on media production in Anglo-American media studies has tended to be based on a mixture of such approaches, combining political economy theory with organizational studies, much of it largely compatible with hegemony theory. The work of Nicholas Garnham, Peter Golding, Graham Murdock and the later work of Raymond Williams are just some examples. Of course there are theoretical tensions within and between such work; there has been no master synthesis, and there is no dominant figure towering over the area of enquiry, as Bourdieu does in field theory. But there is an important body of work on media production institutions which theorizes such organizations in relation to power in society more generally. This body of work from critical Anglo-American media studies, in dialogue with its sibling discipline of cultural studies (as with so many siblings, there have sometimes been very bad squabbles between the two), has been considerably more successful in researching large-scale media and cultural production than has field theory, to judge from the work cited by Benson and others. Critical media studies has had important things to say about autonomy and control in media organizations too (see, for just one

example, Schlesinger, 1987). And, in my view, it offers a better analysis of the relations between production and consumption than does field theory, for reasons I have explained above.

Nevertheless, interaction between Bourdieusian field theory and such critical media studies of production could be very fruitful. Bourdieu, like Raymond Williams in his later work (e.g. Williams, 1981), shows the value of historicizing media production as part of a consideration of cultural production more generally. If Bourdieu and his associates have cared little for large-scale production, restricted production has been neglected by Anglo-American media and cultural studies. These two torn halves need to be put together – though not of course with any fantasy that they could make a unified whole, as Bourdieu so effectively demonstrates. What's more, Bourdieu offers a way of thinking about the relations between the different fields (restricted and mass), which might be tested in empirical work, including the kind of comparative research that Benson rightly advocates. Perhaps the greatest potential of all lies in enquiries that would build on Bourdieu's compelling but sometimes sweeping vision of the importance of autonomy in cultural production historically. Organizational studies informed by political economy might investigate what forms autonomies take in modern media organizations, across both mass and restricted production, and might examine how autonomy is being affected by the commercialization and marketization Bourdieu criticizes. This would not mean taking Bourdieu's notion of autonomy at face value: that ideal needs to be probed and problematized at every turn. But such problematization might pay dividends in understanding contemporary media production.

Notes

1. This article is based on a paper given in January 2004 at the 'Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion' symposium, organized by the Pavis Centre for Social and Cultural Research at the Open University, and held at St Hugh's College, Oxford. My thanks to Tony Bennett and Mike Savage for inviting me to contribute. Thanks also to participants in the symposium, and in a later seminar organized by Kieran Kelly at University of West England, for their comments.

2. Dates of original publication in French are indicated as the second date in brackets.

3. Bourdieu suggested, towards the end of his life, that his work on cultural production was the place where the theory of fields was most systematically laid out (Bourdieu, 2000/1999: 96).

4. Thornton (1995) provided an intelligent and influential, but flawed, interpretation of the way that the term 'mainstream' is sometimes used by young people to achieve distinctions (in something like Bourdieu's sense) within popular culture.

5. A number of these studies, and intriguing responses to them by US and French journalism researchers, are contained in a book that became available as I was making final amendments to this article (Benson and Neveu, 2005).

6. The prestige of *Hill Street* diminished somewhat as its ratings rose – a very Bourdieusian process – and many fans of the first two series, including Gitlin, would argue that its quality did too. Which raises the question, unanswerable in this context: were the producers lowering their goals, or were the critics just caught in the game of distinction?

7. It seems too, from a nearby passage that Bourdieu regards production as forming taste, more than the other way round; or at least he discusses, in that context, only influence in the direction from production to consumption: to quote one part of this passage, 'The movement through which the field of production is temporalized also helps to define the temporality of tastes' (Bourdieu, 1996/1992: 160).

8. This and the next paragraph draw on remarks made in Hesmondhalgh (2002).

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