

Review of Bourdieu and Affect

Bourdieu's theoretical framework is often used in research on education and youth to draw out analyses of the symbolic dimensions of living and feeling class (e.g. Skeggs 1997; Reay 2005), and the real impacts of the denigration of working-class groups within structures such as the education system. In my own work I have called this 'the class feeling' (Ingram 2018), a difficult thing to see, name, measure and expose, but something that working-class people experience through everyday micro-aggressions. Threadgold's book, *Bourdieu and Affect*, is a welcome addition to this scholarship on understanding the connections between the material conditions of class structures and the role of symbolic violence in supporting the maintenance of class stratification. Threadgold does this through bringing Bourdieu's canon into conversation with theory of affect, which he argues is 'in need of a theory of practice' (p.8). Affect is defined in the book as 'embodied visceral experience' (p.1) and Threadgold argues that 'Bourdieu is useful for analysing the sociocultural distribution of affects' (p.3). The book provides a detailed consideration of 'affect' through a Bourdieusian lens, using some of Bourdieu's key concepts as a framing mechanism for the its structure. Each chapter provides a theoretical discussion, with an 'affective' twist, to provide original and insightful ways of thinking about concepts such as habitus, field, capital, symbolic violence, *illusio* and reflexivity. The overall book works towards making 'real', and developing a language for naming, the felt but unseen (and even denied) aspects of class injury (Sennett and Cobb 1993). It draws on the author's body of empirical research, years of reflective engagement with Bourdieusian scholarship, and descriptive hypothetical scenarios to develop a Bourdieusian conversation with affect theory.

While I enjoyed every chapter in this book for different reasons and would encourage readers to view the book as a whole rather than a set of discrete chapters, I found the discussion of field and 'structures of feeling' (Williams 1963) in chapter 3 particularly compelling. The author provides a useful discussion of field as a 'collection of affects' (p.67), highlighting the non-physical (or metaphysical) aspects.

"Fields are structures, histories, norms, traditions and so on, but those aspects mean that a field is also a collection of affects. Imagining them in this way emphasizes that fields are ontological spaces that transcend physical space, with doxic norms an ever-present ambient affective background, an absent presence" (p.67).

In emphasising field as an ontological rather than methodological concept, Threadgold draws attention to the way that a field generates its own rules and expected ways of being. The description of doxic norms (the rules of the game that orient players' actions) as 'an ever-present ambient affective background' (p.67) beautifully conjures the metaphysical or atmospheric structures that delineate social action and interaction. The use of both Anderson's (2014) 'affective atmospheres' and William's (1963) 'structures of feeling' to develop a discussion of affect and field is effective in exposing field as a concept where both the material and the symbolic are implicated in one another. In other words, considering the symbolic dimensions of class does not preclude the consideration of the material, in fact it entails it.

This is also the case for thinking about symbolic violence as a 'real' violence, which Threadgold explores in chapter 5. The concept of symbolic violence resonates strongly with me as a Bourdieusian scholar from a working-class background, not least of all because it was the first concept I was introduced to when I was thinking about the valuable and misrecognised aspects of being working-class before I decided to embark on postgraduate study. The concept of symbolic violence gave words to the painful attacks I had felt throughout my life but could not name, attacks that had once made me feel shame but had since made me feel anger at the injustice. Threadgold provides a helpful and thoughtful exegesis of symbolic violence, using affect as a framing device. His argument (in chapter 5) that 'symbolic violence is an affective violence' (p.103) succinctly and powerfully points towards the potency of the violent experience, and the significance of the actual emotional harm done by this so-called symbolic form of aggression. In further developing the discussion, the author highlights the importance of habitus homologues and shared forms of cultural capital in the production and maintenance of 'affective affinities' which can operate as a form of boundary drawing and exclusion.

"Relations that are symbolically violent are affective relations where some individual or groups of individuals can express the conative aspects of their habitus, their ability to make the world in their own image, even if these practices are not meant to deliberately denigrate or exclude but are just expressions of their own affinities" (p. 108).

One of the strengths of this book is the author's eye on Bourdieu's overall theory of practice as he talks through and around the central idea of affect and its connection with key concepts. In the aforementioned chapter on symbolic violence, for example, the argument connects back to previous discussions of habitus, social magic, field and capital. I can't imagine this was an easy book to write as it is difficult to know where to start and end with Bourdieu in order to clearly capture the complexity of his theoretical oeuvre without reducing his work to a series of discrete concepts. Threadgold has managed to arrange his thoughts coherently in order to take the reader on a fascinating non-linear Bourdieusian thought journey into affect. The book is accessible for those with little knowledge of Bourdieu but perhaps offers a more enriching experience for those who already think with the theorist. Threadgold writes with a clear, authentic and authoritative voice, combining rich theoretical thinking with everyday illustrative examples of theory in action (what he calls 'sociological hypotheticals'). In doing so it almost feels like a book with a habitus clivé, voicing a traditional 'academic' and a more down-to-earth voice at different points. For me, the presentation of the different voices of the author through different styles of writing was an added bonus, but perhaps this is because of my own affective affinity with diverse forms of academic voice.

Anderson, B. (2014) *Affective Atmospheres, Emotion, Space and Society*, 2: 77-81.

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