

BOOK REVIEWS

P. Bourdieu: Outline of a Theory of Practice. Trans. R. Nice.
1977 Cambridge : Cambridge University Press viii. 248pp. £9.

The peculiar style of Bourdieu's study betrays its unmistakably French origin. Although it is perhaps verbose in parts, its elegance and unity make it rewarding reading. It is a significant contribution to a critique of contemporary anthropological practice. In general terms, it might be said to be an intervention of the same order as Leach's Political Systems of Highland Burma. Bourdieu uses his own extensive and detailed ethnographic material on Kabylia (Algeria) in order to demonstrate problems in anthropological interpretation. What Leach's exposition achieved in the refinement of the discipline in the 'fifties and 'sixties, Bourdieu's may well achieve in the 'seventies.

Bourdieu's central problem is the relationship between the mode of production of knowledge and the circumstances from which it arises. Phenomenological knowledge and objectivist knowledge (structuralist hermenentics) are said to be limited by the social and theoretical possibilities necessary in, and for, their generation. We thus need a 'theory of practice' and a 'theory of theory' which through reflexive evaluation and self-criticism will be capable of transcending the ideological relations inherent in objectivist knowledge, and placing that knowledge firmly on its feet again.

Bourdieu's critique of much contemporary anthropology is founded on an evaluation of Saussurean linguistics. By positing the priority of speech over language only as a chronological relation, and by inverting the equation on entering the domain of the 'logical conditions of deciphering', Saussurean linguistics is seen to produce an intellectualist theory which only emphasises the relations between signs and reduces their practical function to that of communication or knowledge. Questioning the Saussurean assumption which sees the senders and receivers of messages as indifferent, while emphasising the abstraction based on the structure of the message itself, Bourdieu writes:

...reception depends to a large degree on the objective structure of the relations between the interacting agents' objective position in the social structure (e.g. relations of competition or objective antagonism, or relations of power and authority, etc.), which govern the form and content of the interactions observed in a particular conjuncture (25).

From the position taken by structuralism, where the 'rule' substitutes for the study of strategy, a distortion arises involving kinship, myth, ritual and calendrical systems. In eliciting a genealogy, the anthropologist abstracts the domain of kinship from the total social and economic configuration, and sets it aside as a closed system. Bourdieu suggests that this often leads the anthropologist of 'intellectualist' persuasion to reproduce ideological relations from the particular standpoint of the representative of a particular lineage group who acts as informer. What Bourdieu calls for is a widening of the contextual field to include extra-kinship relations which fashion specific expressions of kinship ideology in terms of particular interests and of

relations within, and between, lineage groups.

Objectivism constitutes the social world as a spectacle presented to an observer who takes up a point of view on the action, who stands back so as to observe it and, transferring into the object the principles of his relations to the object, conceives of it as a totality intended for cognition alone, in which all interactions are reduced to symbolic exchanges (96).

Not only are kinship relations divorced from their contextual reality, but a similar fate befalls classificatory systems and taxonomies treated from the standpoint of a structural or cognitive anthropology of the imagination. In the derivation of the agrarian calendar of a people, the anthropologist constructs a 'synoptic calendar' in which he attempts to correlate coherently the maximum amount of information derived from his informants and from his own observations. Establishing a coherent system of thought, he ignores contradiction in favour of ideal abstraction. Again the fault stems from the particular methodological assumptions inherent in Saussurean objectivism.

Symbolic systems owe their practical coherence, that is, their regularities, and also their irregularities and even incoherencies (both equally necessary because inscribed in the logic of their genesis and functioning) to the fact that they are the product of practices which cannot perform their practical functions except insofar as they bring into play, in their practical state, principles which are not only coherent - i.e. capable of engendering coherent practices compatible with the objective conditions - but also practical in the sense of convenient, i.e. immediately mastered and manageable because obeying a poor and economical logic (109).

Whilst posing as a critique of Saussurean structuralism, cognitive anthropology and phenomenology, and advocating a 'purified' and self-critical empiricism, the book nevertheless fails to free itself from structuralist jargon. It is possible, to a large degree, to sympathise with Bourdieu's challenging critique of Saussurean objectivism and the limitations he poses generally on the validity of human knowledge. However, the sweeping generalisations which are at its foundations, and the fact that he has tended to give us a picture, not of the practice of anthropology, but of an abstracted theory of practice, leaves us with some reservations.

Moreover, one central concept is unclear: through the use of 'habitus' we are led to expect a radically new view or revelation of the human condition. It would appear, at least on a first reading, that the notion of habitus is only a means of filling the gap left after the expulsion of 'structuralist hermenentics' with a category which merely re-draws the boundary of closed-system analysis, and which continues to threaten with obscurity the relations between ethnic groups and the metropolitan structure - a shortcoming of much of Bourdieu's previous ethnographic work on Kabylia. Finally, the concept of habitus appears to limit the bounds of human freedom itself to the extent that we derive an almost static

and self-regulating system without any potential for change.

These misgivings do not detract from the importance of this work. Bourdieu has a rare aptitude for grasping and bringing to notice the relations and operations which lie just under the surface of 'stark reality', and which often evade our attention.

Anthony Shelton

John W. Connor. Tradition and Change in Three Generations of Japanese Americans 1977, Chicago: Nelson-Hall, xiv, 356pp. \$18.

The Japanese Americans would seem to lend themselves (perhaps more than other ethnic groups in America) to the kind of ordered analysis exemplified by John Connor's study. Their own tidy classifications into first, second and third generations (the fourth are now being born) is a convenient preliminary to a comparative study of change, and Connor has made full use of it. The specific community under observation is that resident in Sacramento, California, and the author's stated aim is 'to determine the degree to which the various generations have retained certain characteristics which are distinctively Japanese or have replaced them with those which are distinctively American'.

To this purpose he compiles from appropriate literature lists of Japanese and American characteristics --- the former, as 'a base line', those which the first generation are supposed to have brought with them-- and orders them so that they clearly and distinctly contrast with each other'. He then applies a variety of 'research instruments' to each generation in order to assess their expression of these characteristics, 'psychological and behavioral', and thereby discover their 'degree of acculturation'. These instruments are of two types, designed to illustrate both overt and covert forms of acculturation: the first through biographical details, the second through four psychological tests.

Sometimes these tests are also administered to Caucasian 'control' groups, but the validity of the control, and indeed of the characteristics themselves, are brought into question by apparent evidence in the results from one group of anthropology students at Sacramento State College of a 'merging of the two value systems'. The Caucasian students, who appear to show a greater consideration of others and interest in collectivity than anticipated, have 'moved more toward some of the Japanese characteristics' while the Japanese are adopting American ones such as self-assertion and individualism. However, even the third generation Japanese, particularly the women, apparently remain quite traditionally Japanese in several respects, not least significant of which must be their methods of child care which apparently encourage a continuation of dependency needs. This and their propensity for intermarriage -- records for the decade preceding the work show over 70% endogamy -- would tend, as Connor points out, to preserve a Japanese identity for several generations to come.

A possible drawback of using the Japanese generation categories is the probable elimination of those Japanese who marry out and become too acculturated to remain within this classification, but this point is not raised. Certainly the sample was not random, nor intended to be. Interviews and tests were made only with 'those who expressed a willingness to cooperate'. Even where one test -- The Ethnic Identity Questionnaire -- was mailed to a

random sample of Japanese names in the area no attempt was made to follow up those which were not returned. The results would therefore seem biased in favour of those motivated to complete questionnaires -- possibly a Japanese characteristic in its own right. Similarly, a professed reliance throughout on the goodwill of the participants -- 'the guiding criterion...was one of simple availability'-- must have preselected a sample inclined to cooperate, and ethnographers in Japan have observed this trait in their subjects.

The whole investigation is shot through with personal overtones. The author's wife is Japanese, and the first participants were acquaintances of the family, who subsequently drew in their own acquaintances, where willing. To save time, and increase the size of the sample, a class of interested third generation students was enlisted to make further investigations. Another control group used was a working class sample in Western Pennsylvania 'accomplished by mailing copies of the test to our relatives, who in turn distributed them to friends in the region'. Control over this group must have been minimal.

The book appears at first sight to be written in the true spirit of the pseudo-scientific approach currently in vogue in American studies of society, and with limitations such as those mentioned above, it does nothing to convert the sceptic to this cause. However, if it fails to provide a convincing scientific exposition of an anyway elusive 'degree of acculturation', it nevertheless provides a good deal of solid and sympathetic information about the way the Japanese Americans are adapting to the society of their adoption.

Joy Hendry.

J. Kuper (ed.) The Anthropologists' Cookbook. 1977. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 230pp. £4.75.

In many ways Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's aphorism from La Physiologie du goût, published in 1825, 'Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are', is applicable to The Anthropologists' Cookbook. The values by which people order their lives take into account the way they view food, the manner in which they cook, and, of course, what they choose to eat.

The Anthropologists' Cookbook offers us insights into the varied culinary attitudes of selected societies around the world, as well as explaining different techniques used in these societies for procuring and preparing food.

Contributors include Claude Levi-Strauss and Mary Douglas, who wrote the introduction, and the accent is very heavily on anthropological material. About forty of the contributors are anthropologists and the rest includes a variety of writers of other persuasions, including a diplomat and a student of literature. Several articles in The Anthropologists' Cookbook are written in the style of the traditional popular cookery book, focussing on particular aspects of cookery (e.g. bread), particular countries or regions, or particular philosophies of cuisine. The contribution by Lorna J. Sass, an accomplished cookery book writer, is written very much to this order. Her 'Serve it Forth: Food and Feasting in Medieval England,' gives to the reader the flavour of a Medieval banquet, and supplies the historical background to Medieval feasting.

Strangely, in a cookbook, some of the contributors do not actually include a recipe, maintaining that there are no substitutes available for the ingredients used in the dishes of the societies they discuss.

While a chef respects their reasons on culinary grounds, it would be pleasant to be able to get some idea of the taste of the cuisine they describe. Some contributions are of help in understanding European cuisines - our food habits are too often taken for granted. In his article, 'On Strata in the Kitchen, or the Archaeology of Tasting' Joseph Rykwert shows that an understanding of the current fashions in eating 'natural foods' and the popular plastic haute cuisine can come only from an understanding of the social development of French and Italian cuisine.

As an example of the interest of anthropologists in the technology of simpler societies, the cookery-book gives us instructions for building an earth oven in which to roast a stray dog and other ethnic foodstuffs for a suburban garden party. The illustrations in The Anthropologists' Cookbook are by Joan Koester. They are attractive, informative line-drawings about the culinary subjects they depict, such as butchering a sow, milking ewes, or catching a puffin.

Nations tend to be conservative in their gastronomical habits. 'What is patriotism,' asked Lin Yutang, 'but the love of the good things we ate in our childhood?' This book is for the less conservative, those prepared to try some unusual cooking. At the same time, such a celebration of the joys of the table epitomises, in an unusually apt way, the great divide between the subsistence economies from which many of the recipes are drawn, and the society of those likely to buy the book and attempt its recipes.

Scott Ewing

Books Received

- Ardener, S. (ed.) Perceiving Women. Dent paperback 1977, 190 pp. £2.95.
- Gregor, T. Mehinaku : The Drama of Daily Life in a Brazilian Indian Village University of Chicago Press 1977, 397 pp. £16.80.
- Hecht, M.K., Goody, P.C., Hecht, B.M. (eds.) Major Patterns in Vertebrate Evolution. Plenum Press 1977, 908 pp. \$77.40.
- Jones, J.O. & Rogers, P. (eds.) Human Ecology and the Development of Settlements. Plenum Press 1976, 146 pp.
- Mair, L. African Kingdoms. Clarendon paperback. 1977. 151pp. £1.95.
- Population Problems in the Victorian Age. 2 vols. Debates from 19th Century Critical Journals, with introductions by Joseph J. Spengler. Gregg International publishers Ltd. 1973. £4.00 each.
- Riesman, P. Freedom in Fulani Social Life. (trans. Fuller M.). University of Chicago Press 1977, 308pp. £17.50.
- Steward, J.H. Evolution and Ecology : essays on social transformation (eds.) J.C. Steward & R.F. Murphy, University of Illinois Press, 1977, 406pp. \$12.95