



Homo Academicus

Pierre Bourdieu

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In this highly original work, Pierre Bourdieu turns his attention to the academic world of which he is part and offers a brilliant analysis of modern intellectual culture. The academy is shown to be not just a realm of dialogue and debate, but also a sphere of power in which reputations and careers are made, defended and destroyed.

Employing the distinctive methods for which he has become well known, Bourdieu examines the social background and practical activities of his fellow academics—from Foucault, Derrida, and Lacan to figures who are lesser known but not necessarily less influential. Bourdieu analyzes their social origins and current positions, how much they publish and where they publish it, their institutional connections, media appearances, political involvements and so on.

This enables Bourdieu to construct a map of the intellectual field in France and to analyze the forms of capital and power, the lines of conflict and the patterns of change, which characterize the system of higher education in France today.

Homo Academicus paints a vivid and dynamic picture of French intellectual life today and develops a general approach to the study of modern culture and education. It will be of great interest to students of sociology, education and politics as well as to anyone concerned with the role of intellectuals and higher education today.

Homo Academicus Details

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From Reader Review Homo Academicus for online ebook

David says

Obstruse, tough reading and less payoff than Distinction or The Rules of Art.

Patrick Cook says

I had forgotten quite how difficult Bourdieu can be to read! Nevertheless, it's always worth it, and Homo Academicus is no exception.

Mary says

Yeah, file this under "depressing bits to read when you're on the academic market." General takeaway is that there are plodding, corporate academics (lower- and middle-class) and then there are these super stars (funded externally with cultural capital to spare) who get to go to the jungle of Brazil like Levi-Strauss and become like Levi-Strauss. I mean, specific to 1970s French intellectual scene but also, sigh...

Notes:

Division between work-a-day academics (often lower- middle-class and children of school teachers) and those who can, like Levi-Strauss, afford to have "a switchback academic career whose most striking characteristics was no doubt that it was accomplished outside the university system properly speaking" (Levi Strauss qtd 108).

"The margin of autonomy which ultimately devolves to the specifically political sources of the production of opinions then varies according to the degree to which the interests directly associated with their position in the academic field are directly concerned or, in the case of the dominant agents, threatened" (xviii.).

"More or less totally deprived of, or liberated from, the powers and privileges but also the tasks and responsibilities of the ordinary professor (examining the entrance examinations, supervising theses, etc.) they have strong connections with the intellectual world... Michel Foucault is no doubt the most representative of this position since until the end of his life... he remained almost entirely bereft of specifically academic and even scientific powers, and therefore of the clientele which these powers afford, even if because of his fame he wielded considerable power over the press and, through it, over the whole field of cultural production" (xix)

"Academics... have always been able to afford to be at once infinitely more satisfied (especially with themselves) than we would expect from an analysis of their position in their specific field and in the field of power, and infinitely more dissatisfied (especially with the social world) than we would expect from their relatively privileged position" (114)

"cases of perfect inversion like this, where one person's pedigree can become another's mark of infamy,

one's coat of arms another's insult, and vice versa, are there to remind us that the university field is, like any other field, a locus of a struggle to determine the conditions and the criteria of legitimate membership and legitimate hierarchy" (11)

"the constructed individual, on the contrary, is defined by a finite set of explicitly defined properties which differ through a series of identifiable differences from the set of properties, constructed according to the same explicit criteria, which characterize other individuals" (22).

networks where like hobbes reputation of power is power(91) (like long tail of citation practices)

"we know, having often observed its effects, the law which requires that the propensity to take risks--in all kinds of investments--is a function of objective security and the confidence which that encourages" (109) (cf also minorities, women)

"this man of order finds in the humility which earns him the gratitude of his professional body the motive for an extraordinary self-assurance: conscious that he is expressing the ultimate values, which it would be better not to have to publish, of a whole community of belief- 'objectivity', 'good taste,' 'clarity,' 'common sense'- he finds it scandalous that anyone should question those certitudes which constitute the academic order which has produced him, and he feels the right and the duty to denounce and condemn what appears to him to be the result of impudent imposture and unseemly excess" (116)

"these consenting victims of academic success ... now see their unlucky rivals who, at first were relegated to unglamorous positions, promoted because of the transformation of the relation between the canonical disciplines and the new disciplines, in the vanguard of 'research' often with another other qualification than their membership of a fashionable group and with no other virtues int their eyes than the 'cheek' often associated with higher social orders, which enabled them to take the risk of investment in marginal institutions" (127)

"this haitus is never greater than when it affects children who come from the dominant class and who have not managed to reconvert their inherited cultural capital into academic capital; and even then their social future does not depend entirely on their academic capital, for the economic or social capital at the disposal of their families allows them to obtain the maximum return for their academic diplomas on the labour market and thus to compensate for their (relative) failure by choosing alternative careers" (163)

"...the devaluation of academic diplomas and the students' relative or absolute downclassing, and in the case of teh subordinate teachers appointed accord to the new criteria, the de facto inaccessibility of careers apparently promised to the holders of their positions. And if the work (of mourning) indispensable for them to adjust their expectations to the effects of the morphological evolution is necessarily very long, it is because the agents only perceive a very limited fraction of social space... and because they are led by this fact to interpret their own experience, and that of the agents who belong tot heir world of mutual acquaintance, in an individual rather than a categorical perspective" (167)

"the exercise of academic power presupposes the aptitude and propensity, themselves socially acquired, to exploit the opportunities offered by the field", to have students whose careers you have control in (88).

"Academic neutrality is indeed no more than this extraordinary collective negation which, for instance, allows the professor, in the name of the authority delegated to her/him by the academic institution, to condemn as 'academic' those productions and expression which are merely what the academic institution requires" (205)

"the transmutation of social truth into academic truth ... is not a simple game of writing of no consequence

but an operation of social alchemy which confers on words their symbolic efficiency, their power to have a lasting effect on practice” (208).

“But the dispositions constitutive of the *academica mediocritas*, this cult of the virtues of moderation and even-handedness in things intellectual which implies the refusal of all kinds of excess, even in questions of intelligence and originality, are no doubt inherent in the intermediate position, of double negation, which the academic holds between the artist and the bourgeois” (224)

Pierre-Jean says

Indigeste à la lecture.

Yang says

Basically it continues Bourdieu's thesis that power structures (field) requires reproduction to maintain itself (the order of succession) and individuals who fill the position for that maintenance are either already-disposed for that position or must do self-work to cater for the niche (*habitus* = process of adjusting expectations). Specifically, it considers the university as a field of power and situated in broader social field of power relations and examines two poles contrasting each other within the university field: the one closer and more intimately associated with political and economic capital (the law, medicine, and business), and the pole arguing for intellectual autonomy - those who invest their stake at pure academic excellence. A chapter devoted to the uprising in May, 1968 tries to apply the thesis to an actual historical moment and figure out the indeterminacy of transforming power relation. Not interesting enough.

Hootnanny says

Still sad but true...

"The tragically ludicrous? The ludicrously tragic?"

“Oh yeah, like when a clown dies.”

“Well, sort of.”
