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BOOK REVIEWS

ATKINSON, WILL. *Beyond Bourdieu. From Genetic Structuralism to Relational Phenomenology*. Polity, Cambridge [etc.] 2016. vi, 175 pp. £64.95. (Paper: £22.95.)

As anyone who has tried to conduct sociological or historical research using Pierre Bourdieu's analytical toolbox knows, while the theory of habitus/capital/field (aka "genetic structuralism") has proven quite successful and influential at the level of macrostructural descriptions and explanations (that is, at the level of fields and the distribution of forms of capital), discussions of the shortcomings of habitus for interpreting interactional situations, individual decisions, or group behaviour at a more "micro" level are legion. On the one hand, theorists have underlined the over-integrated and ultimately deterministic conception of the habitus that emerges from Bourdieu's works whenever field analysis is unable to explain individual trajectories; on the other hand, empirical researchers have noticed how a narrow understanding of the habitus – which, rephrasing a dictum by the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, can be summarized as "one field, one class, one habitus" – hinders a full understanding of the subtleties of concrete, "lived" social life. In fact, as shown by the best examples of Bourdieu-inspired research – besides Wacquant's pioneering work on boxing, I am thinking of Philpotts's research on editors of literary magazines, Meylaerts's studies on translators in Belgium, Watkins's research on the "scholarly habitus", Gross's sociological biography of Richard Rorty, and the studies on classical ballet dancers by Wainwright, Williams, and Turner – the basic idea of habitus has already been manipulated, stretched, and modified in order to implicitly or explicitly accommodate and operationalize some of the most convincing critiques raised from an analytical point of view.

Will Atkinson's *Beyond Bourdieu: From Genetic Structuralism to Relational Phenomenology* tries to tackle these problems by complementing and reworking some aspects of Bourdieu's analytical toolbox by way of a host of concepts taken, not surprisingly, from phenomenology and developmental psychology. The echo of Atkinson's previous theoretical and empirical work on the twin subjects of social class and the nexus between dispositions and experiences is everywhere in the book, which nevertheless has a strong, and almost exclusive, theoretical bent. In the Introduction, the author explains his goal as solving "two troublesome limitations in Bourdieu's *oeuvre*: its inadequacy for making sense of the fullness of mundane, every-day, lived experience (*Erlebnis*) and its insufficiency for making sense of how we each come to be who we are as a whole (*Erfahrung*)" (p. 6). It is no wonder, then, that the long, and detailed chapter titled "The Lifeworld" introduces three crucial "elements of the everyday": the multiplicity of fields, situations, and interactive venues where individuals conduct their lives, and which contribute to shaping their complex and multidimensional habitus; the time-space dimension which, according to Atkinson's phenomenology, is much more than a mere stage for human actions and interactions; and social networks, conceptualized as concrete situations where the habitus is made and remade, and which exert a real influence on it (as opposed to a common structuralist view where interactions are but an epiphenomenon of structures, fields, or distributions). The peak of this first part is Atkinson's extension of an idea found in its germinal form in Bourdieu's writings, that of "intermeshing circuits of symbolic power" (p. 33), which

accounts for the emergence, distribution, and circulation of social products, classifications, and forms of capital.

The following three chapters are dedicated to the family as a field, individual development and growth, and gender as a social phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a specific field or a kind of capital. Atkinson's strategy is carefully deployed in each chapter: he first eliminates all too facile analogies or conceptualizations, and then he proposes a less flashy, but often more convincing or useful, interpretation of the same subject from the perspective of his relational phenomenology; examples include Atkinson's "digression on emotional capital" (pp. 59–61), his critique of Tony Coles's theory of gender as a field (p. 115), and his rebuttal of major interpretations of "gender capital" (pp. 117ff.). In fact, this focus on the family, child development, and gender can be seen from two different points of view. On the one hand, it might be read as a neo-Bourdieuian assessment of some general or elemental subjects of study that the French sociologist has undertheorized in his work and that his epigones have failed to assess properly. From this point of view, some of Atkinson's ideas function as correctives to the "Bourdieuian extremism" that is often found in more pretentious theoretical or empirical works. On the other hand, and more importantly, it can be read as a series of suggestions about crucial variables to take into account when studying the trajectories of individual social actors or types of actor – the two being, obviously enough, two quite different endeavours. In this second sense, *Beyond Bourdieu* can be seen as a repertoire of sensitizing concepts, which may be helpful for reconstructing the individual and typified trajectories needed to complement serious field analysis.

Almost everything we read in *Beyond Bourdieu* sounds quite convincing and sometimes even commonsensical – I use this last adjective in a positive sense – especially if we have struggled with Bourdieu's toolkit in trying to interpret the facts and the events of individual lives. This effect is attained using three rhetorical/argumentative strategies: avoiding complex confrontations with other authors; presenting a neat, polished version of phenomenology; and keeping the argument at a mostly conceptual, analytical level. These are, at the same time, the strength *and* the flaw of the book. On the one hand, it seems undoubtedly positive that Atkinson does not engage in prolonged theoretical/analytical quarrels with the many theoreticians who have sought to accomplish the same goal – filling some (very serious) gaps in Bourdieu's toolkit and thus rendering it useful for empirical research – over the years. Other authors and positions are duly noted and rapidly dismissed: instead of engaging in lengthy wordplay, Atkinson prefers to absorb the soundest arguments of Bourdieu's critics – among whom Boltanski, Crossley, Giddens, and Lahire seem to be the most relevant – and to elaborate his own version of a phenomenological reworking of Bourdieu's toolbox.

On the other hand, the book suffers from the generality that plagues all almost-exclusively theoretical discussions. This, in a sense, deeply differentiates Atkinson's work from Bourdieu's. The greatness, and often the exhilarating quality, of the French sociologist's analytical work is that it almost invariably comes from the attempt to tackle empirical research dilemmas. Bourdieusian concepts emerged from empirical questions and practical puzzles and then were theoretically moulded and justified. This explains why genetic structuralism is changing all the time and why "regular" analytical work, as well as any attempt at "scholasticizing" Bourdieu by working only on abstract concepts, is doomed to fail (or to generate a huge amount of boredom); Wacquant's *Body and Soul* is a near-perfect example of what can be done theoretically by focusing almost solely on empirical situations and problems (and experimenting with literary styles). In this sense, Lahire follows much more in Bourdieu's footsteps and thus his work proves to be more interesting, for the

transformation of old concepts, or the creation of new ones, directly spring from empirical enigmas (to use Andrew Abbott's expression) and not from analytical or logical musings. To be true to his critique, however, the reviewer should stop and suggest that readers *use* Atkinson's book in their own sociological or historical research without paying too much attention to the subtleties of analytical reasoning or "internal" quarrels among phenomenologists. That is, *use* should dictate the success or the failure of the book.

In sum, Will Atkinson's relational phenomenology can be dubbed a "phenomenologically augmented Bourdieusian reality", that is, a Bourdieusian world with some kind of phenomenological magic goggles on. This said, only a small doubt remains, about the title, *Beyond Bourdieu*, which suggests a greater distance from Bourdieu's work than is the case. But this is a minor (and fully understandable, from the point of view of a Bourdieusian understanding of the field of the social sciences) flaw in a fine, solid book that could be particularly useful for social scientists and humanists alike in pursuing their empirical and theoretical research.

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GERSTENBERGER, HEIDE. Markt und Gewalt. Die Funktionsweise des historischen Kapitalismus. [Theorie und Geschichte der Bürgerlichen Gesellschaft, Bd. 25.] Westfälisches Dampfboot, Münster 2017. 739 pp. € 39.90.

The main thrust of this massive volume is to unsettle the still widely held concept of capitalism as an essentially market-driven arrangement that, by definition, does not systematically rely on direct violence. To counter such received wisdom, Heide Gerstenberger, Emeritus Professor of Social Science at the University of Bremen, has undertaken another monumental feat, after her much acclaimed *Die subjektlose Gewalt* (1990/2006), now in its third edition. She strongly contests any inherent "development trend" in capitalism, which might "drive towards objectifying and depersonalizing (*Versachlichung*) economic relations" (p. 11). Rather, Gerstenberger's main contention is the pervasive presence and potential of "direct violence" in capitalism.

For "capitalist societies", Gerstenberger identifies as the "decisive functional mechanism [...] competition", from which flow the well-known material constraints that constitute "the organization of work as relations of domination" (p. 16). However, Gerstenberger objects to the idea that economic rationality inherent in such relationships precludes the use of "direct violence [...] that is, practices which theoreticians of capitalism consider as unnecessary or even detrimental, at least for developed capitalist societies". On the contrary, she undertakes to show that such violence, in particular under the forms of "exploitation devoid of limits (*entgrenzt*)" and also of land alienation, has been a feature of capitalism throughout its existence, even though such forms "contradict norms established in capitalist societies" and need to be "contested" (p. 17).