



## The Three Phases of Bourdieu's U.S. Reception: Comment on Lamont

Omar Lizardo<sup>1</sup>

---

*This essay responds to Lamont's (2011) article "How Has Bourdieu Been Good to Think With? The Case of the United States," which appears in this issue.*

---

**KEY WORDS:** Bourdieu; cognition; cultural capital; embodiment; field theory.

### INTRODUCTION

Michèle Lamont's timely analysis of the rise of Bourdieu as a major figure in U.S. sociology is certainly a good piece to think with (and against). I was lucky enough to listen to the keynote address in person at the Paris conference, and reading it on "paper" certainly allows for a better appreciation of the depth of insight of Lamont's "insider-outsider" account of what is without a doubt a unique development in the intellectual history of U.S. sociology.

Having come of intellectual age at a point in which Bourdieu's presence in U.S. sociology was well on its way to acquiring "establishment" status, I have joined this conversation rather late, not as an "active participant" in the very process of "diffusing Bourdieu" but more as an active *exploiter* of the very fact of Bourdieu having achieved the intellectual status of a (modern) classic. This makes my own stance and reflections necessarily different in emphasis from Lamont's (from a Bourdieusian viewpoint our different positioning means that we have qualitatively different *interests* as to what is "at stake" here).

In this comment I would like to simply add my own reflections on what I believe is the developmental arch and the *current* state of reception of Bourdieu's work. I have very little to add to the five points that Lamont raises in her essay, the arguments embedded in which I consider to be valid. However, I believe that by circumscribing herself to these five points, Lamont leaves herself open to three main lines of criticism: (1) a portrayal of the scope of the influence of Bourdieu's work on the U.S. scene that is overly narrow and restrictive, (2)

<sup>1</sup> Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame, 810 Flanner Hall, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556; e-mail: olizardo@nd.edu.

1 an overemphasis on the importance of the omnivorousness studies, and (3) a  
 2 lack of historical sense of the evolution of Bourdieu reception in the United  
 3 States (an admittedly unfair criticism since that was not Lamont's intent).

4 My own tack will be to highlight what I consider to be "three phases" in  
 5 the reception of Bourdieu's work in the United States. By layering themselves  
 6 on top of one another chronologically, the theoretical themes and areas of  
 7 research animated by these phases have produced the current (synchronic)  
 8 situation—richly illustrated in Lamont's paper—of Bourdieu as the most  
 9 "multivocal" of contemporary theorists. However, the basic themes that have  
 10 been central in this reception process have changed in consequential ways, so  
 11 that the "Bourdieu" that people were drawing from and exploiting in the  
 12 1980s and 1990s is certainly not the same Bourdieu that is serving as food for  
 13 thought for many people in the contemporary context.

14 The key question that young scholars face is not *whether* Bourdieu is  
 15 good to think with (the answer as Lamont demonstrates is undoubtedly yes),  
 16 but *which* Bourdieu will you be thinking with today?

## 17 18 19 **THE FIRST PHASE: REPRODUCTION, TASTE, AND CULTURAL** 20 **CAPITAL**

21  
22 The first phase of reception of Bourdieu's work is certainly associated  
 23 with the studies of the French educational system co-authored by Jean Claude  
 24 Passeron and the early reception of *Distinction*. For a U.S. perspective, we  
 25 may call this the "Princeton/Vanderbilt" phase. The key texts are Paul  
 26 DiMaggio's seminal review essay in *AJS* (DiMaggio, 1979)—written while the  
 27 author was still at Harvard—and Rogers Brubaker's still masterful survey in  
 28 *Theory and Society* of Bourdieu's theoretical debt to the classics (Brubaker,  
 29 1985). The first connected Bourdieu's work on education and cultural repro-  
 30 duction to classic themes on stratification and status attainment relevant in  
 31 U.S. sociology, capturing the *substantive relevance* of Bourdieu's work; the sec-  
 32 ond made clear for a U.S. audience the obvious lines of connection between  
 33 Bourdieu's and the "canon" of accepted classical theorists in the U.S. estab-  
 34 lishment (Marx, Weber, and Durkheim), capturing the *theoretical relevance* of  
 35 Bourdieu's contribution.

36 It is unlikely that you can claim to be a major figure in U.S. sociology  
 37 without connecting to the classics and Brubaker's article left no doubt that  
 38 Bourdieu had the relevant credentials. In the very same way, DiMaggio's  
 39 review essay and subsequent work left no doubt that Bourdieu was not your  
 40 standard French theorist, since his work actually had empirical implica-  
 41 tions—relevant for classic themes in Wisconsin-style status-attainment  
 42 research—capable of being stated in the form of hypotheses and testable using  
 43 the standard methodological toolkit. It is obvious that it was this work, and  
 44 the subsequent small cottage industry that grew around the concept of  
 45 "cultural capital" (Lamont and Lareau, 1988), that first made Bourdieu a

1 household name in the United States. To this day, one can find the predictable  
2 paper at RC28 that includes the “Bourdieu-variable” (usually some arts  
3 participation measure) in a status-attainment regression.

4 In this last respect, I would consider the later adaptation of Bourdieu’s  
5 work to the problematic of omnivorousness as well as the association of this  
6 line of research with quantitative survey analysis to actually belong to a *late*  
7 manifestation (the “Vandy” period) of this most basic first phase of reception  
8 of Bourdieu’s work. After all, the first high-powered quantitative research arti-  
9 cle drawing heavily on Bourdieu’s work to be published in the United States  
10 was DiMaggio’s (1982) and it was clearly molded after the arguments in  
11 *Reproduction*. However, it was evident early on that Bourdieu’s work on class  
12 and taste would become another point of entry into mainstream U.S. sociol-  
13 ogy. In this respect, it is important to not underestimate the (to this day  
14 unique) Dutch-U.S. collaboration around the journal *Poetics* (which published  
15 some early work of Bourdieu on fields of cultural production), which had  
16 DiMaggio as associate editor (with the indefatigable Kees van Rees at the  
17 other end) and Princeton as a high-prestige institutional collaborator in the  
18 United States.

19 This was happening, as Lamont notes, precisely around the time that  
20 U.S. cultural sociology was beginning to take off; thus *Poetics* was uniquely  
21 positioned to lay the groundwork for the development of a truly transnational  
22 scholarly community (which continues to be vibrant to this day) centered  
23 around issues of the connection between class, taste, arts participation, and  
24 cultural capital. As evidenced by the fact that the majority of the papers at  
25 the Paris conference revolved around this theme, it is clear that this is proba-  
26 bly the most enduring institutional and intellectual legacy of this first phase of  
27 Bourdieu’s reception in the United States.

28 Following this, *Poetics* acquired the (informal) mantle as the unofficial  
29 journal of cultural sociology in the United States and its unique identity as a  
30 Dutch-U.S. collaboration continues to this day in its co-editorial arrangement  
31 (Tim Dowd and Suzanne Jansen). This has allowed the journal to “branch  
32 out” of its initial association to studies of cultural taste narrowly conceived to  
33 its current status as a journal where all kinds of work associated with cultural  
34 sociology can find a home (as evidenced by the recurrent special issues on a  
35 wide range of topics). It is unlikely, however, that the journal could have  
36 achieved this insider-elite status without first taking advantage of the torrent  
37 of interest generated by the (now classic) arguments laid out in *Distinction* and  
38 the institutional support provided by scholars making use of those arguments  
39 in the United States.

40

41

## 42 THE SECOND PHASE: FIELD THEORY

43

44 I would consider the second phase of Bourdieu’s reception to begin when  
45 Bourdieu himself (as pointed out by Lamont) becomes an active participant

1 and manager in his own transatlantic diffusion process in the late 1980s and  
2 early 1990s. From a U.S. perspective I would call this the “Berkeley” phase,  
3 mostly because this becomes the institutional home from which Loïc Wacquant  
4 becomes an active co-manager in the creative project. As noted by Lamont, the  
5 key event is the Chicago “workshop” on which *Invitation to a Reflexive Sociol-*  
6 *ogy* (published in 1992) is based. But other events around the time are of  
7 equal importance, including Bourdieu’s visit to Berkeley and associated lecture  
8 (Bourdieu, 1987), as well as the translation and publication of his UC San  
9 Diego lecture on “Social Space and Symbolic Power” (Bourdieu, 1989) in  
10 *Sociological Theory* and an early version of the 1987 Chicago workshop on  
11 which *Invitation* would be based. Another important set of publications at this  
12 stage are the edited volumes by Craig Calhoun (another high-status facilitator  
13 and sponsor of Bourdieu’s work at this stage), Edward LiPuma, and Moishe  
14 Postone, and the Bourdieu/Coleman edited collection (*Bourdieu: Critical*  
15 *Perspectives* and *Social Theory for a Changing Society*, respectively) for which  
16 Bourdieu and Wacquant (respectively) contributed self-reflexive, sociology of  
17 knowledge-inspired articles about the perils of the transatlantic exportation of  
18 intellectual works (once again actively managing the reception process).

19 However, I would argue that the key event in this phase is the translation  
20 and publication of Bourdieu’s main writings on “fields” in *The Field of Cul-*  
21 *tural Production* (Bourdieu, 1993). This provided U.S. readers with a relatively  
22 accessible entry point to Bourdieusian field theory. This phase culminates with  
23 Rodney Benson’s (1999)—a graduate from Berkeley sociology—influential  
24 essay on field theory and media studies in *Theory and Society*, followed by a  
25 special issue on a similar subject in the same journal (see, e.g., Couldry, 2003),  
26 which did a lot to domesticate the institutional and macro-sociological aspects  
27 of Bourdieu’s work. This second phase of Bourdieu reception has in fact  
28 recovered the strong connection between Bourdieu’s approach and that  
29 advanced in U.S.-style institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991).

30 The introduction of Bourdieusian field theory was happening at about  
31 the same time as another intellectual movement was taking place in U.S.  
32 sociology: the emergence of “third-generation” historical sociology and the  
33 flowering of new institutionalism in organizational analysis, which cross-  
34 fertilized with the now established “cultural turn.” The growing familiarity  
35 with Bourdieu’s more institutional and historical writings (including the  
36 criminally underappreciated *Rules of Art* translated in 1996), did a lot to  
37 quell some anxieties that Bourdieu’s work had a structuralist, static, or  
38 antihistorical bias (a question posed masterfully and the answer to which was  
39 left strategically open by Calhoun [1993]).

40 It is no wonder that the field-theoretic insights of Bourdieu’s work are  
41 now being fully exploited by third-generation historical sociologists—such as  
42 George Steinmetz (2008) and Marion Fourcade (2009)—and those interested  
43 in institutions and social change (e.g., Evans and Kay, 2008). Very significant  
44 in this last respect have been theoretical statements by Neil Fligstein (e.g.,  
45 Fligstein, 2001; Fligstein and McAdam, 2011) and Emirbayer and Johnson

1 (2008), this last publication reinforcing the status of Wisconsin as the other  
 2 high-status institutional site for the diffusion of Bourdieu's work in this phase.  
 3 As is obvious by this set of examples, this second phase of Bourdieu's reception  
 4 is in full swing and probably reaching its apogee right now, being spearheaded  
 5 by institutional actors located in the most prestigious departments.

6

7

## 8 **THE (COMING) THIRD PHASE: EMBODIMENT, COGNITION, AND** 9 **ACTION**

10

11 If the first phase of Bourdieu's U.S. reception revolved around *Reproduc-*  
 12 *tion* and *Distinction* and the second phase was centered on the essays collected  
 13 in *The Field of Cultural Production*, the third phase is beginning to take shape  
 14 by revisiting what is quite likely Bourdieu's most difficult work: the revision of  
 15 *Outline of a Theory of Practice* that became *The Logic of Practice*. By return-  
 16 ing to this text, contemporary scholars at the intersection of cultural and cog-  
 17 nitive sociology are rethinking the classical theoretical foundations of the  
 18 theory of action. This phase is distinctive because it has no clear institutional  
 19 home (although Karen Cerulo's "Culture and Cognition Research Network"  
 20 serves as an invisible college of sorts for scholars interested in cognitive  
 21 sociology broadly conceived) and no leading intellectual entrepreneurs as it is  
 22 happening in a context in which Bourdieu is an established "classic" (and  
 23 probably does not need any of those).

24 If the first phase was centered on quantitative methods, and the second  
 25 phase brought out those interested in case-based approaches appropriate for  
 26 macro-sociological and institutional work (with Lamont's own comparative  
 27 and interview-based work serving as a bridge between the two), younger  
 28 scholars in the third phase who draw on Bourdieu's "practice theory"  
 29 emphasize experiential, ethnographic methodologies inspired by Loïc  
 30 Wacquant's call—and demonstration of the productivity of doing (e.g.,  
 31 Wacquant, 2004)—to "take Bourdieu to the field" (Wacquant, 2002). This is  
 32 evident in the recent work of Matt Desmond (2006), Matthew Mahler (2007),  
 33 and Daniel Winchester (2008). Another strand of work focused on approaches  
 34 to the analysis of language and situated conceptualization that can recover the  
 35 embodied roots of meaning making (Ignatow, 2009). In addition, an entire line  
 36 theorizing about the relationship between culture, cognition, and action (to  
 37 which I have contributed [Lizardo, 2004, 2007; Lizardo and Strand, 2010]),  
 38 one that has reopened some fundamental issues in the sociology of  
 39 culture—see, for instance, Vaisey (2008, 2009, 2010)—and the sociology of  
 40 morality—(e.g., Ignatow, 2008)—has been inspired by this (re)appropriation  
 41 of Bourdieu's work.

42 A predictable roadblock likely to be encountered in this phase concerns  
 43 the fact that here we face a Bourdieu who is not just a "sociologist" but who  
 44 has already (via *Logic of Practice*) influenced work in cognate disciplines  
 45 including cognitive and cultural anthropology as well as linguistics and even

1 cognitive science and psychology (Bloch, 1986; Ingold, 2000; Strauss and  
 2 Quinn, 1997; Toren, 1999). Because of this, third-phase considerations of  
 3 Bourdieu's relevance are inevitably accompanied by issues of cross-disciplinary  
 4 borrowing, disciplinary identity, and even whether this entire undertaking  
 5 respects the proper boundaries of what is considered "sociological" in the first  
 6 place; it could be that here the obvious transdisciplinary appeal (and intent) of  
 7 Bourdieu's work on practice theory may hit the limit of the (self-imposed)  
 8 content-based strictures of the U.S. sociological establishment.

9 In spite of the fact that this aspect of Bourdieu's work has certainly captured  
 10 the imagination of a critical mass of younger scholars, it is too early to  
 11 tell whether this third phase of reception of Bourdieu's work will bear the  
 12 intellectual fruits that have been undoubtedly borne by the first two phases  
 13 (especially since neither of the first two phases is necessarily over with,  
 14 although it is fairly clear that we have entered an era of diminishing returns  
 15 vis a vis the first phase).

## 16 17 18 CONCLUDING REMARKS

19  
20 As we have seen, the reception of Bourdieu's work has been uneven and  
 21 multilayered, synchronizing itself with various intellectual movements unique  
 22 to U.S. sociology (e.g., cultural and historical sociology and the recent revival  
 23 of interest in morality, cognition, and embodiment and the unconscious).  
 24 Today, an exciting array of work across a wide variety of fields and methodo-  
 25 logical stances can claim direct or indirect inspiration from Bourdieu's work.  
 26 Cross-fertilization across these different lines of thinking remains somewhat  
 27 limited, so that it is more accurate to speak of the diffusion and importation  
 28 of different "Bourdieu" (both chronologically and synchronically) than to  
 29 speak of the reception of Bourdieu in the singular, an issue that poses concep-  
 30 tual and interpretative challenges (Lizardo, 2011). And yes, some of these  
 31 Bourdieus may be much better to think with than others.

## 32 33 REFERENCES

- 34  
35 Benson, Rodney. 1999. "Field Theory in Comparative Context: A New Paradigm for Media  
 36 Studies," *Theory and Society* 28: 463–498.  
 37 Bloch, Maurice. 1986. "From Cognition to Ideology," in R. Fardon (ed.), *Knowledge and Power: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches*: pp. 21–48. Edinburgh: Scottish University Press.  
 38 Bourdieu, Pierre. 1987. "What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence  
 39 of Groups," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32: 1–17.  
 40 Bourdieu, Pierre. 1989. "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7: 14–25.  
 41 Bourdieu, Pierre. 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia University Press.  
 42 Brubaker, Rogers. 1985. "Rethinking Classical Theory: The Sociological Vision of Pierre  
 43 Bourdieu," *Theory and Society* 14: 745–775.  
 44 Calhoun, Craig. 1993. "Habitus, Field and Capital: The Question of Historical Specificity," in Craig  
 45 Calhoun, Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone (eds.), *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*: pp. 61–88. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- 1 Couldry, Nick. 2003. "Media Meta-Capital: Extending the Range of Bourdieu's Field Theory," *Theory and Society* 32: 653–677.
- 2 Desmond, M. 2006. "Becoming a Firefighter," *Ethnography* 7: 387.
- 3 DiMaggio, Paul. 1979. "Review Essay: On Pierre Bourdieu," *American Journal of Sociology* 84: 1460–1474.
- 4 DiMaggio, Paul. 1982. "Cultural Capital and School Success: The Impact of Status Culture Participation on the Grades of U.S. High School Students," *American Sociological Review* 47: 189–201.
- 5 DiMaggio, Paul, and Walter W. Powell. 1991. "Introduction," in P. J. DiMaggio and W. Powell (eds.), *The New Institutionalism and Organizational Analysis*: pp. 1–38. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- 6 Emirbayer, M., and V. Johnson. 2008. "Bourdieu and Organizational Analysis," *Theory and Society* 37: 1–44.
- 7 Evans, Rhonda, and Tamara Kay. 2008. "How Environmentalists Greened Trade Policy: Strategic Action and the Architecture of Field Overlap," *American Sociological Review* 73: 970–991.
- 8 Fliigstein, N. 2001. "Social Skill and the Theory of Fields," *Sociological Theory* 19: 105–125.
- 9 Fliigstein, N., and D. McAdam. 2011. "Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields," *Sociological Theory* 29: 1–26.
- 10 Fourcade, Marion. 2009. *Economists and Societies: Discipline and Profession in the United States, Britain, and France, 1890s to 1990s*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- 11 Ignatow, G. 2008. "Why the Sociology of Morality Needs Bourdieu's Habitus," *Sociological Inquiry* 79: 98–114.
- 12 Ignatow, G. 2009. "Culture and Embodied Cognition: Moral Discourses in Internet Support Groups for Overeaters," *Social Forces* 88: 643–669.
- 13 Ingold, Tim. 2000. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. Routledge.
- 14 Lamont, Michèle. 2011. "How Has Bourdieu Been Good to Think With? The Case of the United States," *Sociological Forum* 27(1): ?????–?????.
- 15 Lamont, Michèle, and Annette Lareau. 1988. "Cultural Capital: Allusions, Gaps and Glissandos in Recent Theoretical Developments," *Sociological Theory* 6: 153–168.
- 16 Lizardo, O. 2004. "The Cognitive Origins of Bourdieu's Habitus," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 34: 375–401.
- 17 Lizardo, O. 2007. "'Mirror Neurons,' Collective Objects and the Problem of Transmission: Reconsidering Stephen Turner's Critique of Practice Theory," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 37: 319–350.
- 18 Lizardo, O. 2011. "Pierre Bourdieu as a Post-Cultural Theorist," *Cultural Sociology* 5: 25–44.
- 19 Lizardo, O., and Michael Strand. 2010. "Skills, Toolkits, Contexts and Institutions: Clarifying the Relationship Between Different Approaches to Cognition in Cultural Sociology," *Poetics* 38: 205–228.
- 20 Mahler, M. 2007. "Politics as a Vocation: Notes Toward a Sensualist Understanding of Political Engagement," *New Perspectives in Political Ethnography* ?????: 224–246.
- 21 Steinmetz, George. 2008. "The Colonial State as a Social Field: Ethnographic Capital and Native Policy in the German Overseas Empire before 1914," *American Sociological Review* 73: 589–612.
- 22 Strauss, C., and N. Quinn. 1997. *A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 23 Toren, Christina. 1999. *Mind, Materiality and History: Explorations in Fijian Historiography*. London: Routledge.
- 24 Vaisey, Stephen. 2008. "Socrates, Skinner, and Aristotle: Three Ways of Thinking About Culture in Action," *Sociological Forum* 23: 603–613.
- 25 Vaisey, Stephen. 2009. "Motivation and Justification: Toward a Dual-Process Theory of Culture in Action," *American Journal of Sociology* 114: 1675–1715.
- 26 Vaisey, Stephen. 2010. "From Contradiction to Coherence: Theory Building in the Sociology of Culture," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Atlanta, GA, MONTH.
- 27 Wacquant, Loïc J.-D. 2002. "Scrutinizing the Street: Poverty, Morality, and the Pitfalls of Urban Ethnography," *American Journal of Sociology* 107: 1468–1532.
- 28 Wacquant, Loïc J.-D. 2004. *Body and Soul: Notes of an Apprentice Boxer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 29 Winchester, D. 2008. "Embodying the Faith: Religious Practice and the Making of a Muslim Moral Habitus," *Social Forces* 86: 1753–1780.

# Author Query Form

Journal: SOCF

Article: 1310

Dear Author,

During the copy-editing of your paper, the following queries arose. Please respond to these by marking up your proofs with the necessary changes/additions. Please write your answers on the query sheet if there is insufficient space on the page proofs. Please write clearly and follow the conventions shown on the attached corrections sheet. If returning the proof by fax do not write too close to the paper's edge. Please remember that illegible mark-ups may delay publication.

Many thanks for your assistance.

Query reference	Query	Remarks
1	<b>AUTHOR: Unless Desmond 2006 is a one-page article, please provide entire page-number range for it.</b>	
2	<b>AUTHOR: Where was Ingold 2000 published?</b>	
3	<b>AUTHOR: Please add page numbers; article is in this issue.</b>	
4	<b>AUTHOR: Is there a volume number for Mahler 2007?</b>	
5	<b>AUTHOR: In what month did Vaisey 2010 occur?</b>	

# Proof Correction Marks

Please correct and return your proofs using the proof correction marks below. For a more detailed look at using these marks please reference the most recent edition of The Chicago Manual of Style and visit them on the Web at: <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

<i>Instruction to typesetter</i>	<i>Textual mark</i>	<i>Marginal mark</i>
Leave unchanged	... under matter to remain	<i>stet</i>
Insert in text the matter indicated in the margin	^	^ followed by new matter
Delete	Ʒ through single character, rule or underline or Ʒ through all characters to be deleted	Ʒ
Substitute character or substitute part of one or more word(s)	Ƶ through letter or  —  through characters	new character Ƶ or new characters Ƶ
Change to italics	— under matter to be changed	<i>ital</i>
Change to capitals	≡ under matter to be changed	<i>Caps</i>
Change to small capitals	≡ under matter to be changed	<i>sc</i>
Change to bold type	~ under matter to be changed	<i>bf</i>
Change to bold italic	~ under matter to be changed	<i>bf+ital</i>
Change to lower case	Ɔ	<i>lc</i>
Insert superscript	√	√ under character e.g. √
Insert subscript	^	^ over character e.g. ^
Insert full stop	⊙	⊙
Insert comma	↵	↵
Insert single quotation marks	↵ ↵	↵ ↵
Insert double quotation marks	↵ ↵	↵ ↵
Insert hyphen	=	=
Start new paragraph	¶	¶
Transpose	┌┐	┌┐
Close up	linking ○ characters	○
Insert or substitute space between characters or words	#	#
Reduce space between characters or words	⌒	⌒