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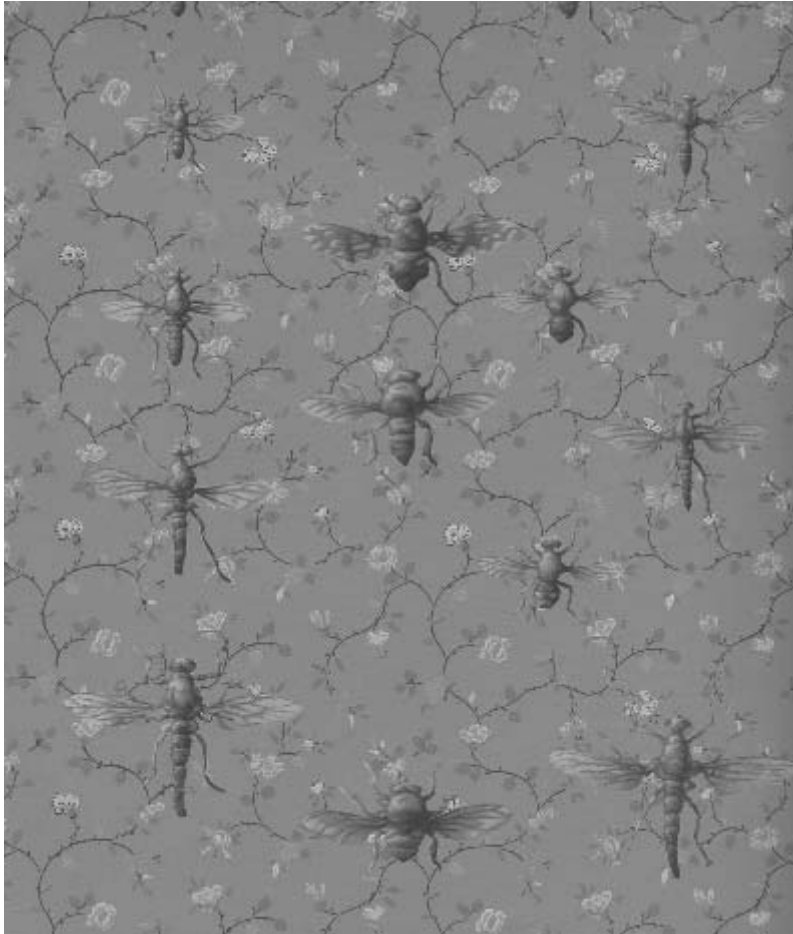
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Wallflowers series, courtesy of Darren Jenkins

# At the Wall of Darkness

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Pierre Bourdieu, 1930-2002

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Despite the crowd of television crews and academics on sabbatical packed into the air-less amphitheatre of the Collège de France to hear Pierre Bourdieu read out his last book, some of the most interesting sociology students in Paris are still at the old Sorbonne where, under a blackened painting depicting a forgotten epic scene in the Salle Durkheim, Michel Maffesoli's *séminaire de doctorat* on *L'Ethique de l'esthétique* unfolds.

—Shields (1991, p. 1)

Pierre Bourdieu had the ability to communicate to audiences beyond the walls of the academy. This facility, perhaps frustrating to a young doctoral student wishing away the cameras, might be understood in retrospect as part of his intellectual practice or, rather, his practice of the intellectual. Economic capital was “always at the root in the last analysis” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 33), but this root was for Bourdieu a point of elaboration rather than the basis of a cheerless Marxian fundamentalism. His celebratory antipolitics was reviled by his “enemies on the left,” the French Socialist party, who spoke of *la gauche bourdieusienne* (Johnson, 2002). It is difficult to conceive of a greater compliment. His delight in the study of television, the study of fashion, and beyond these, the study of study itself guaranteed popular attention for work whose relevance was manifest to academic and nonacademic alike. Bourdieu was prominent in French public life even when numbered among his illustrious peers Lacan, Foucault, Lévi-Strauss, Derrida, or his own mentor, Louis Althusser. His was a prominence manifest in death in the form of front page notices in *Le Monde*, *Libération*, *L'human-*

*ité*, and a lengthy obituary by Jacques Chirac. The French president had learned from Bourdieu that “the time of culture cannot be subjected to the time of the economy” (Hage, 2002).

A journalist is said to have asked Chinese premier Zhou En-lai his opinion of the French revolution. “It’s too early to tell,” was Zhou’s reply. This response is sometimes credited to taking a long view in a Chinese perspective of history. It was more likely a consequence of Zhou’s Marxian, rather than Chinese, outlook. Aftershocks of the bourgeois revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries are with us still. We can conclude, even with Zhou’s caution in mind, the engine of the dialectic moved inexorably forward in the events of 2001 and 2002, rendering judgements of the “end of history” precipitous. If the outcomes of these great tumults remain open to speculation, how much more so the effect of the passing of a single person.

What, then, can we say of the life and work of Pierre Bourdieu a short year after his death?

We might appeal to biography saying he was born August 1, 1930, in Denguin, France and attended the Lycée de Pau and the Lycée Louis-le-Grand in Paris, moving on to the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, and his study under Althusser, in his early 20s. We could trace his career from a teaching position at the Lycée de Moulins in the mid-1950s to a formative time as a member of the Faculty of Arts of Algiers in the late 1950s. We could follow him through a series of posts with the École Normale Supérieure and Princeton University, culminating with his 20-year position as professor of the Chair of Sociology with the Collège de France from 1982 to his death. We might cite with reverence his contributions to sociology, anthropology, and philosophy, taking special care to mention his work on pedagogy and communication, social spacialization, and antiglobalization.

We have chosen instead to speak with, rather than about, Pierre Bourdieu. The articles collected in this volume continue the work of social theory both joyous and resolute while refusing any decontaminating distance or purely obscurantist relativism:

My entire scientific enterprise is based on the belief that the deepest logic of the social world can be grasped, providing that one plunges into the particularity of an empirical reality, historically located and dated, but in order to build it up as a “special case of what is possible,” as Bachelard puts it, that is, as an exemplary case in a world of finite possible configurations. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 628)

Here, then, are reflections on the world in its intelligibility, possible configurations in the overlapping and contested fields of social relations in which we find ourselves a year after Bourdieu’s death. The contributors to this volume speak to the breadth of Bourdieu’s work. SETHA LOW’S “Embodied Space(s): Anthropological Theories of Body, Space, and Culture” takes on Bourdieu’s conception of the body and the spatial, arguing Bourdieu’s rhetorical use of the body was more metaphorical than embodied. BRIAN ROURKE’S “Cultural Capital Accumulation on a World Scale” and KARL MATON’S “Reflexivity, Relationism, and Research” consider differing, even contradictory, uses of key concepts in the Bourdieusian inventory. Finally, MICHAEL GRENFELL and CHERYL HARDY’S “Field Manoeuvres: Bourdieu and the Young British Artists” and ROGER COOK’S “Andy Warhol, Capitalism, Culture, and Camp” represent a direct continuation of Bourdieu’s research interest in art at the time of his death.

Each article carries on the creation of “ongoing improvisational negotiations of our positions which, while not denying power, allow us a measure of movement within

which to constitute our own habitus” (Packwood, 2001, p. 331). These authors dispute, elaborate, and extend Bourdieu’s work. There could be no better memorial for a scholar who helped us define *doxa* and *habitus* as those aspects of our ideals and practice generally left unquestioned—still more so for an activist whose practice insisted these definitions realize justice as a revelation and an actuality.

These articles make a special contribution not only to the ongoing work of *la gauche bourdieusienne* but to the concerns of *Space and Culture*. Bourdieu’s interest in social space extended beyond the metaphors of “habitus” and “the field,” as foundational as these are to a theory of practice. His later work on the politics of housing in France called into question the notion of rational actors in housing markets. Instead, Bourdieu inferred a cultural logic which both underpinned and undermined market logic as “the house” has a social and symbolic importance extending well beyond its value as an investment or a machine in which to live:

It is difficult not to see, especially in connection with the purchase of a product as charged with significance as the house, that the “subject” of economic action has nothing of the pure conscience without past of orthodox theory and that, very deeply rooted in the individual and collective past, through the dispositions which are responsible for this, economic strategies are generally integrated in a complex system of reproductive strategy, therefore pregnant with all the history of what they aim to perpetuate, i.e. the domestic unit, itself the result of a work of collective construction, once again ascribable, for an essential part, to the State and that, correlatively, the economic decision is not that of an insulated economic agent, but that of a collective, group, family or enterprise, functioning like a field. (Bourdieu, 2000)<sup>1</sup>

Bourdieu turns the specific case of economically and aesthetically disadvantaged actors in French housing markets into a general case against the operation of a sense-making invisible hand. Inequality is not only demonstrated by but reproduced in housing and represents a use of space that, to Bourdieu, is more than an economic metaphor and a lesson for Adam Smith’s metaphysics.

Turning to his early work in Algeria, we find a contribution to the study of architecture, ethnography, and social space as embodied in the “Kabyle house.” Bourdieu (1979) was not the first to examine Algerian domestic architecture but claimed in his earlier works, “for all their meticulousness, contain systematic lacunae, particularly as regards the location and orientation of things and activities, because they never look upon objects and actions as parts of a symbolic system” (p. 135). Here we find a paradigm for Bourdieu’s later studies in habitus and in a footnote an assertion of “the field” as a means of exposing the criticality of relationships. Here the traditional metaphor of anthropological fieldwork exploded into a general understanding of social relations.

The Kabyle house is a living machine “organized in accordance with a set of homologous oppositions” (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 140). One part of the house is for the people and another for the animals. One part of the house is for fire and another for water. One for high and one for low. One for light and one for dark. An entrance to the Kabyle house faces east so that the sun might shine through to the “weaving wall,” thereby lighting domestic activities from the break of day. This entrance door is placed in “the wall of darkness” or “the wall of sleep,” a disturbing association in contrast with the life and light of the interior. It is important to understand this is not a simple opposition of light and darkness or of life and death. The wall of darkness is a product of a system of social, spatial, and architectural relationships. So too must the loss of

Bourdieu be set against our continuation of his intellectual, scientific, and political projects. Yes, the wall of sleep is placed in darkness, but only in contrast with the light of day streaming in through an east-facing door.

## Note

1. Translation by Steven D. Williams, Department of Sociology, University of Southern Indiana.

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