

Book Review: Locating Bourdieu

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Frangie, S. (2006). Book Review: Locating Bourdieu. [Review of the book *Locating Bourdieu*, by D. Reed-Danahay]. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9(4), 517-519. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549406066084>

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Book reviews

Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Locating Bourdieu*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005. xii + 208 pp. ISBN 0–253–34508–1 (hbk) \$55.00; ISBN 0–253–21732–6 (pbk) \$21.95
DOI: 10.1177/13675494060666084

In his later works, Bourdieu became more explicit about his biography and its connection to his writings, culminating in the publication of his posthumous *Esquisse pour une auto-analyse* in 2004. However, the relation between Bourdieu's work and life has been relatively ignored in the literature. This was partly because Bourdieu disliked biographies and discouraged a number of biographers from writing his (Bourdieu, 2004), but mostly because Bourdieu was perceived as a scientific 'system builder' theorist, making his social origins and trajectory irrelevant for an understanding of his work. Such a perception of Bourdieu's work largely overlooked the intimate connections between, on one hand, Bourdieu's social origins and trajectory, and on the other, his writings. It is this gap in the literature that Reed-Danahay's *Locating Bourdieu* addresses.

Reed-Danahay's central thesis is that

Bourdieu's work was . . . to a large extent a form of autoethnography in the double sense of being self-referential . . . and of constituting a description and analysis of his own sociocultural milieu in France and its former colony in Algeria. This book is not itself a biography of Bourdieu . . . rather, it locates Bourdieu's own uses of his biography within his work. (p. 4)

Locating Bourdieu reveals the centrality of the ideas of rupture and estrangement in Bourdieu's writings. Torn between his rural origins and academic trajectory, his sociological career and the supremacy of the discipline of philosophy, his attachment to science and truth and the dominant 'relativist' dogma, Bourdieu saw himself as a marginal, an outsider in familiar environments. These ruptures haunted his writings and influenced his theories.

The idea of rupture appears clearly in the first three chapters of *Locating Bourdieu*. Chapter 1 presents some of Bourdieu's autobiographical comments, focusing mostly on his school years. Chapter 2 covers his writings on education, while his work in Béarn and Algeria are introduced in Chapter 3. These chapters argue that Bourdieu's upbringing in Béarn,



school years, university experience and stay in Algeria were the main impetus and materials behind Bourdieu's writings. His schooling and the 'experiences of being the "other" at school' were central to the elaboration of his theory about reflexivity (p. 29). His stay in Algeria was also crucial for the elaboration of his reflexive position by refining his analysis of the interplay between insider and outsider points of view. The rupture involved in Bourdieu's passage from rural France to higher education and his gradual disappointment with the French educational system 'prompted much of his own research, provoking questions about French education that, he believed, were those of an "outsider" to the system' (p. 38), questions which were addressed in *The State Nobility* (1996) and *Homo Academicus* (1984). In this respect, Reed-Danahay writes that the '*The State Nobility* constitutes a sort of autoethnography . . . for Bourdieu, as it is set in a context with which he was familiar from both his own student days and his career as an academic' (p. 50). Chapter 4 analyses the role of emotions in Bourdieu's framework, especially in relation to his writings on taste, honour, love and marriage strategies. The final chapter builds on the ethnography and interviews conducted by Bourdieu to present the concept of situated subjectivities. According to Reed-Danahay's thesis, Bourdieu's autobiographical comments not only reflect his motivations for writing, but also played a specific role in his argumentation, in legitimizing his ethnography and validating his theoretical claims.

The systematic collection of Bourdieu's autobiographical comments is one of the strong points of Reed-Danahay's book. Bourdieu's biography has been one of the badly-kept secrets in the literature. It was used by many of his critics to delegitimize his work by considering it

the sublimated expression of the humiliations and social suffering he had to endure in his childhood and youth, an expression which cannot be criticized but which cannot also be judged from the point of view of its truth-content or objective plausibility. (Bouveresse, 2003: 20–1)

Locating Bourdieu succeeds in treating these biographical aspects as part of Bourdieu's overall project while avoiding using them as either an apology for his political position or a criticism of his theoretical stances. But Reed-Danahay's presentation is slightly confusing, especially with the long digressions on issues which are of little relevance to the main argument, such as the subparts on Elias and Foucault or on Bourdieu's relation to the field of Mediterranean studies. Moreover, the importance she gives to certain aspects of her narrative, such as the historical roots of Bourdieu's theory on education in Chapter 2 or the development of the field of French anthropology in Chapter 3, make the reader lose the track of the main argument.

Reed-Danahay draws clearly the relation between Bourdieu's biography and his methodology, finding in the former the roots of 'the ideal informant . . . who can adopt both the objective and subjective perspective that is not available to all people' (p. 150). But apart from the autoethnographic



nature of his writings, Bourdieu's research also had a therapeutic aspect, an aspect Reed-Danahay hints at without integrating it into the main argument. Bourdieu's work could be read as a way to reconcile himself with the series of ruptures that he considered central to his life. Bourdieu was explicit about this therapeutic twist in his writings, describing sociology as the organization of the return of the repressed (Bourdieu, 2004). As Bouveresse writes, there are two aspects in Bourdieu's process of socio-analysis: 'to reconcile with oneself and with one's social property through a "liberating anamnesis" and to have a precious instrument . . . for the study of the social world' (Bouveresse, 2003: 174; author's translation). These two processes are inseparable for Bourdieu. *Locating Bourdieu* allows us to see the parallels between Bourdieu's life and work, but does not take its conclusion far enough.

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Glenn Jordan, 'Down the Bay': Picture Post, *Humanist Photography and Images of 1950s Cardiff*. Cardiff: Butetown History and Arts Centre, 2001. 76 pp. ISBN 1-8983-1708-9

Glenn Jordan (ed.), *Tramp Steamers, Seamen and Sailor Town: Jack Sullivan's Paintings of Old Cardiff Docklands*. Cardiff: Butetown History and Arts Centre, 2002. 76 pp. ISBN 1-8983-1710-0
 DOI: 10.1177/1367549406069117

Published to coincide with exhibitions at the same venue and in consecutive years, these two volumes suggest an intensely reflexive experience: people are asked to look at pictures of their predecessors in the locality and to measure the meaning of the differences that they perceive. This is the stuff of many a community history project, and Jordan's role as go-between in the engagement with theory is played to excellent effect in the expository and critical essays that interrogate the images, their creators and the contemporary commentary with which they are spliced.

In the strip of land known as Butetown, just one mile long and a quarter of a mile wide, lived some 5000 people: no fewer than 45 nations were measured among this population in the 1940s, the children offspring of