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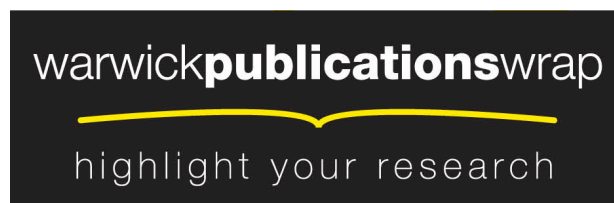
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Fields and Fragments: Bourdieu, Pascal and the Teachings of Literature

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Abstract:

Literary pedagogy occupied a privileged place in Bourdieu's early work on education insofar as he saw it as exemplifying in unconscious mode socially segregational dynamics. Bourdieu's expressly 'reductionist' critique was uncannily mirrored, however, by the spread of more economically instrumental approaches to education. Bourdieu's engagement with these led him to develop a fuller apprehension of literature. Yet while the conceptual apparatus he developed can allow the genesis of a literary work in its socio-historical complexity to be grasped more fully, its framing poses significant problems of its own. In particular, its 'hypercontextualizing' injunctions risk stifling ordinary reading practices and the practical pedagogy of canon-formation. Bourdieu's actual practice with literary materials is not bound by these injunctions. His transepochal 'collaboration' with Blaise Pascal, for example, takes place through the insinuation of decontextualised shards of thought into his own writing. The teachings of literature exceed in various ways their scientific framing.

Keywords: Pierre Bourdieu, Blaise Pascal, literature, sociology, education, field theory, fragments

The links between teaching and literatures were a recurrent focus of Bourdieu's thought from the 1960s. Indeed, for much of his writing that nexus appears as a target. Literatures are understood within these domains of his thought in a composite manner, both in the sense of pedagogical corpuses serving class- and nation-based cultural strategies, and as the products of strategies of 'distinction' within increasingly self-conscious and relatively autonomous fractions of an artistic 'field' (the relations between these two dimensions are also explored by Bourdieu). The posture Bourdieu adopts in this

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regard is external or ‘objectifying’: he is the ‘scientist’ of a society’s serious ‘games’ whose invisible mechanisms need ‘explicating’. But Bourdieu is himself implicated in a rather different kind of relation to a ‘literature’ derived from the processes evoked above but apprehended in a different mode. This relation is largely unthematized as such in his work, but is a constant feature of his thinking practice. Literature here signifies something like a precipitation of dislocated textual fragments whose current status is uncertain (not scientific, not documentary, not immediately instrumental), but which condition and enable certain kinds of perception. Bourdieu, the product of a certain kind of education and self-education, carries them around with him: they are ingrained into his disposition (his *habitus*). They draw out (educt) his understanding in particular ways.

Literature and Social Reproduction

Bourdieu’s early critique of literary education (notably in *The Inheritors and Reproduction*) can at one level be viewed as a development of Durkheim’s classic history of French pedagogy.¹ Durkheim traces how French educational practices, from the Renaissance through the Jesuit colleges and into the nineteenth-century State secondary school apparatus, assigned exorbitant value to the ‘literary’, or purely verbal, prowess derived from the intensive frequentation of suitably excerpted classical texts. This catered to a stable demand from social elites for the segregative polishing of their offspring, but in Durkheim’s view unduly displaced a medieval preoccupation with the things of logic (dialectics) and inhibited an engagement, from the eighteenth century, with the logic of things (natural science). While Durkheim’s own notional framework for the purposes of secondary education comprised a nuanced synthesis of these streams, including an important space for the ‘literary’, his critique of the kind of disposition produced by exclusively literary preoccupations is a powerful leitmotif in his overall account.

Bourdieu’s sociological accounts of literary education in the universities of 1960s France echo some of Durkheim’s themes. Those teachers and students who invest most intensely in their literary studies tend to apprehend ‘reality only indirectly and symbolically, that is, through the veil of rhetorical illusion’ (*I*, 50). Certainly, Bourdieu is working through here, as a sociologist, his part in a certain ‘conflict of the faculties’ (exacerbated perhaps by sociology’s ‘dominated’ location

in French universities' faculties of *lettres* prior to 1968).² But it is striking that literary pedagogy as such assumes a strategically privileged position in Bourdieu's overall analysis of educational systems. This foreshadows, but only in negative mode, his subsequent argument that, in fact, all agents apprehend reality 'indirectly and symbolically' through a range of 'social fictions', and that literature, as a fiction that declares itself to be fiction, can provide a more probing (though supposedly 'euphemized') representation of this process than accounts which take their epistemic status more seriously.³ For at this stage, literary study itself is credited by Bourdieu with no part in any such lucidity. If it is particularly revealing, it is so despite itself. It has much to teach, but it cannot itself understand its teachings.

Thus Bourdieu notes that 'if arts students hold a particular place in our analyses, it is because (...) they exhibit in exemplary fashion that relation to culture which we took as our object of study' (*I*, ix; translation modified). For those whose social backgrounds equipped them with the requisite rhetorical lexis and cultural frames of reference, their 'happy' relation to literary syllabuses was 'ratified' rather than 'produced' by the system as it operated (see *I*, 24). At the other extreme, students whose social background equipped them with none of these things entered into an 'unhappy' relation with these syllabuses. The existing 'pedagogy by default' did little to remedy this disjuncture, and its verdicts, at a statistical level, served simply to consolidate it. Indeed the very distance between these students' backgrounds and the arbitrary preciousness of valorized literary culture served to bring out all the more clearly the truth of the educational process as a form of 'acculturation' for these students (*I*, 22). The various charismatic 'mystifications' inherent in the pedagogical relation were 'never more true than in literary teaching', even if they were never absent elsewhere.⁴ If literary education evinced such characteristics to a higher degree than other modes of education in the French system, it was because its effective function amounted to little more than '[reproducing] the legitimate culture as it stands and [producing] agents capable of manipulating it legitimately' (*R*, 59).

These analyses were, of course, 'reductive'. At one level, that was their achievement. In a quasi-chemical sense, they reduced through sustained scouring an elaborate growth of belletristic foliage to statistically discernible forms of stratificational functionality. That is not to say the undoubted truths they disclosed were somehow disincarnate. Annie Ernaux has described the 'violent ontological shock' she experienced on assimilating them, and H  l  ne Merlin-Kajman the

‘violent narcissistic wound’ that she and other contemporaries endured when coming to terms with these and other works by Bourdieu in the 1960s and 1970s (of course, many mental routines were also available to contemporaries allowing such truths to be disregarded).⁵ Embedded traits they had internally valorized or suffered as components of their subjective singularity had to be re-cognized in the wake of their encounter with Bourdieu as the products of recurrent social relations and regularities and their own obscurely conscious strategies within these. Bourdieu’s sustained and rarely qualified assault on the presuppositions of a whole literary ‘ethos’ appeared to see in that ethos little worth endorsing or cultivating. He perhaps saw no strategic point in thus attenuating his critique.⁶ The literary ethos as a kind of brute social fact was ingrained into the processes of secondary and higher education, and thereby into more general processes of social reproduction. Its exposure in these terms outweighed any concern to protect any of its elements.

Already in *Reproduction*, however, Bourdieu’s own ‘reductionist’ critique is uncannily mirrored by a different kind of reductionist evacuation of literary concerns. He observes in a footnote that, following survey analysis,

beyond the manifestations of the old alliance between the dominant fractions of the bourgeoisie and those teachers most attached (...) to the traditional mode of recruitment and training, and by the same token, to the traditional conception of culture (the ‘humanities’), one glimpses the first signs of a new alliance between those fractions of the dominant classes most directly tied to production and the management of the State apparatus and those categories of teachers capable of expressing their categorial interests (...) in the technocratic language of rationality and productivity. (*R*, 215)

These prodromes would, two decades later, become in a sense the key theme of *The State Nobility*, his account of the structural transformations of the field of higher education and elite-producing agencies in twentieth-century France. By that time, it was clear to Bourdieu that an economic and productivist ethos and its associated rhetoric had become the dominant logic in this field. The symbol of this mutation was the now multiply attested dominance of the *École Nationale d’Administration* over the *École Normale Supérieure* in France’s ‘field of power’.⁷ But there were other signs, not least the rise of lesser *grandes écoles* and private business schools promoting direct subservience to economic demands and an avowedly ‘anti-academic’ disposition to a student clientele that was already more

than half-converted.⁸ The overcrowded and underfunded humanities departments of French universities were little match for these. Bourdieu would note not just how the attractiveness of humanities degrees was being corroded, but how their very purpose was becoming increasingly unclear in general perception, with arts students appearing as socially 'useless'.⁹ There were now powerfully institutionalized economic and political processes performing their own 'scouring' work on representations of literary education. As these very economic and political processes became the privileged object of Bourdieu's critical concern, his own representation of literature and its teachings became more expressly complex.

Canons, Critique and the Shadow of the Demi-habile

This is not to underplay the enduringly confrontational posture which Bourdieu would continue to adopt in relation to a certain 'universe' of literary studies construed as a whole (as he would, in other components of his *œuvre*, in relation to other institutional and discursive universes such as economics, philosophy, art history, linguistics, or public administration).¹⁰ *The Rules of Art*, published in 1992, was widely perceived as, at worst, an all-out attack on approaches to literature in the academy, or, at best, a comprehensive endeavour to annex literary study under an all-embracing sociology. In it, Bourdieu frequently challenges a founding gesture that permits the teaching of literature as such: the selection of particular textual works and their integration into a canon for pedagogical transmission.

Bourdieu recurrently underlines the decontextualizing operation that this implies as an impediment to the 'true' understanding of the work in question:

Paradoxically, we can only be sure of some chance of participating in the author's subjective intention (...) provided we complete the long work of objectification necessary to reconstruct the universe of positions within which he was situated and where what he wanted to do was defined. (*RA*, 88)

Such formulae recur (here the absolute restriction ('can only... provided') is actually intensified by the concessionary 'some'—see also *RA*, 98). Indeed the contextualization Bourdieu advocates goes substantially beyond reconstructing what may consciously have been in the mind of the writer, as this can only be understood in terms of unexplicated socially structured logics bearing upon his mental operations, both in terms of the evolving specific artistic 'field' within

which he is working, and the equally evolving and interlocking ‘fields’ that make up society as a whole at any given moment. One is tempted to evoke a ‘hypercontextualizing’ imperative at work in Bourdieu’s theorized methodology (as I suggested above, this is not always quite the same thing as his real method). For not only must one reconstruct multiple ‘spaces’ or ‘fields’ within which the work in question takes on its ‘differential value’ or significance. One must also, Bourdieu writes, perform a ‘double historicization’ (*RA*, 309): readers must carry out a reflexive contextualization of their own position and trajectory in a ‘field’, and that field’s position in a wider mutating social space, in order to reach a level of lucidity as to their appropriation of and investment in the particular enliterated object in question.

Where will it, or can it, stop? Engagement in the labile magma of literature is inevitably mediated through readings of readings of readings. A chronologically ordered arithmetic succession of ‘historicizations’ is unlikely to capture much of the process’s exponentialized errancy. Yet the principal objection to Bourdieu’s ‘hypercontextualizing’ imperative need not be that its postulates are false. One can plausibly concede that the heave and slippage of literary magma are caught through and through in the gravitational pull of social force-fields. It seems preferable to demonstrate this, as Bourdieu does in several contexts, rather than leave literary indeterminacy as a night where all cows are black. And the standard objection of ‘reductionism’ seems itself rather reductive. It fails to do justice to the care Bourdieu takes not to fold, in this case, the literary onto the ‘social’ as a whole, but to construct the field of the literary as such, the field of literary position-takings as such, the mutating field of literary styles as such, and so on. One’s principal objection to Bourdieu’s thrust here can instead be formulated in pragmatic terms—both at the level of a day-to-day reading practice, and, to coin a term that might be an oxymoron in Bourdieu’s lexis, at a ‘scholastico-practical’ level.¹¹

One way of suggesting this (*cum grano salis*) is to anticipate what I will present below as Bourdieu’s own real practice, and to tear from its original context a verbal fragment from Pascal’s *Pensées* (formulated as an objection to Descartes), and see where it takes us in understanding differently where Bourdieu’s argument is leading us:

In general terms one must say: ‘That is the result of figure and motion,’ because it is quite true, but to name them and assemble the machine is quite ridiculous. It is pointless, uncertain, and arduous [*pénible*]. Even if it were true we do not think that the whole of the philosophy would be worth an hour’s effort.¹²

Who would ever pick up a new book if the ‘only’ way they had ‘some’ chance of understanding anything at all of what the author could show them was via the fastidious kinds of historicizing hypercontextualization described by Bourdieu? In admittedly excessive manner, Pascal’s note indicates something of the calculus of attention that all interpretative strategies must negotiate. In the case at hand, one might say that an obsessive attention to a text’s genesis (the ‘machines’ of its production and reception) may inhibit the perception of a text’s potential (to unfold itself in different contexts). Bourdieu argues that his theorization of literature in *The Rules of Art* can ‘intensify’ the experience of ordinary reading (*RA*, xvii). That may be so, though it is hard to avoid thinking of a trope recurrently mobilized by Iain McGilchrist in his study of divided brain function: ‘does placing a maths professor in a circus troupe result in a flying mathematician, or a bunch of trapeze artists who can no longer perform unless they have first calculated the precise trajectory of their leap?’ (McGilchrist surmises that such ‘anomalies’ can lead to both ‘unusual talents and unusual deficits’).¹³

As a research strategy, Bourdieu’s ‘strong’ version of field theory as applied to literature is a stimulating horizon for a particular kind of literary–historical and sociological comprehension.¹⁴ As a pedagogical norm, it would appear at first sight to be unworkable. It is hard enough in most pedagogical situations to get pupils and students to pay sustained attention to a single text, let alone the multiplicity of contemporaneous texts alongside which it emerged, and against which alone its putatively original ‘differential value’ can be perceived. The issues emerge in some of their complexity — indeed perhaps more so than Bourdieu had anticipated when embarking on the paragraph — in the following passage from *Pascalian Meditations* (here in relation to analogous canonization processes at work in philosophy as well as the historical constitution of the Bible):

To combat this forgetting of history (...), I am tempted to set authority against superstition and to refer the devotees of hermeneutic philosophy, a strictly ‘philosophical’ reading of the texts consecrated by tradition as philosophical, to the various passages of the *Tractatus* in which Spinoza defines the programme for a genuine science of cultural works. Spinoza there invites the interpreters of the Books of the Prophets to break with the routine of hermeneutical exegeses and subject these works to a ‘historical examination’ seeking to determine not only ‘the life, the conduct and the aim of the author of each book, who he was, what was the occasion, and the epoch of his writing, whom did he write for,

and in what language,' but also 'into whose hands it fell . . . by whose advice it was received into the canon, and how the books now recognized as canonical were united into a single body.' This magnificently sacrilegious programme (. . .) contradicts point by point all the presuppositions of the liturgical reading, which, in a sense, is perhaps not as absurd as it might seem from the standpoint of a rather narrow reason, since it grants the canonical texts the false eternization of ritual embalming. (*PM*, 47–8; translation modified)

There is no doubting the interest of this Spinozist 'programme', for which Bourdieu's work provides an array of marvellous tools. But there are problems in setting it up as a kind of master paradigm for reading (facilitated in the passage above by the projection of an improbably 'pure' liturgical reading as Bourdieu's discursive foil). The final qualifying clause of the paragraph, appended like an afterthought, is revealing for our purposes. Having exposed the 'absurdity' of canons, predicated on 'abstraction' and the concomitant 'forgetting of history', it is as though Bourdieu concedes nonetheless something like their historical necessity. Admittedly, this is here rather in the mode of Durkheim conceding the necessity for the societies he studies of 'religions' as well-founded illusions (whatever their cognitive defects, they 'work' as mechanisms for protecting a society against entropic dispersal).¹⁵ It is as though Bourdieu, reading over his argument, felt his own reasoning to be somewhat 'narrow'. Indeed, one senses here, as elsewhere in the *Pascalian Meditations*, the shadow of the *demi-habile*, Pascal's figure for the detached 'philosophical' critique of the absurdity of the world's ways that understands little of the necessities underlying those ways (see, for example, *P*, 90/83, 101/93). Bourdieu is happy to subsume others (or previous versions of himself) under the epithet (for example *PM*, 189–90), but the term has an uncanny capacity to transmute and re-emerge as a question mark over a new position (a feature of the unsettling Pascalian dynamic producing a 'continuous reversal' of perspective (*P*, 93/86; translation modified)). Bourdieu's reflection is vulnerable to the author under whose 'aegis' (*PM*, 1) he writes.

The pragmatic need which canons address need not be conceived as the 'false eternization of a ritual embalming'. Elsewhere in Bourdieu's work, we find elements of a practical resolution to the apparent antinomy presented above (between a thoroughgoing historicization of works and their integration into a transepochal canon with more than a purely historical interest). Bourdieu was asked on two occasions in the 1980s by socialist governments to head up commissions overseeing the

recasting of school curricula. The transition from scouring sociologist exposing the ‘arbitrariness’ of all educational syllabuses and canons to an advisor outlining in normative mode the shape of a new syllabus was not straightforward for Bourdieu.¹⁶ However, one move that figures prominently in his approach was the integration of the notion of ‘cultural arbitrariness’ itself as a core component of his proposed curricular guidelines.¹⁷ If that really were to be made teachable, one might surmise that some kind of (meta-canonical) ‘canon’ might have to be specified—and one element in that might be a compendium of Spinozan fragments ripped from the *Tractatus* and re-organized for the purpose.

Pascal Out of Place

What Bourdieu actually does with literary resources throughout his œuvre is not reducible to the theory of literary fields as systematized in *The Rules of Art*. Curiously, however, the frames of that theory allow us to grasp something of his actual practice in the movement of its very divergence and *désinvolture* (as flying mathematician, perhaps, rather than inhibited trapeze artist). Jacques Dubois suggests that Bourdieu’s posture in *The Rules of Art* as superpositioned explicator of Flaubert and his place in the nineteenth-century literary field does not correspond to the effective ‘division of labour’ that can be traced across his discussion. The text often reads instead rather like a cross-epochal ‘collaboration’: Flaubert sets challenges, raises objections, interjects, asks questions, offers advice for the sociologist’s work elsewhere, and so on.¹⁸ Similarly, Jérôme David, in a suggestive article, proposes that we distinguish in Bourdieu’s writings between his emphatic self-positioning as a sociologist working ‘on’ literature, and his largely unthematized—and in some ways quite unusual—position as a sociologist ‘in’ literature.¹⁹ To put it another way, Bourdieu is immersed not just in the protocols of sociology, but in a universe of literary and other cultural references. They comprise one compartment of the ‘thinking tools’ (discursive formulae, narrative techniques, ‘takes’ on aspects of the social world) that he has ‘present’ or to hand when confronting a given problem. His deployment of these tools often involves scant or no reference to the original fields of their production (his evocation of the ‘paradigms’ or ‘effects’, ‘models’ or ‘limit-cases’ proposed by such as Kafka or Cervantes involves an essentially ‘internal’ apprehension of their works (*PM*,

229, 160)). This opportunistic and creative appropriation, combining conceptual probing and rhetorical play with authorial authorities, does not invalidate Bourdieu's more self-consciously elaborated theory of literary production. It does allow us, however, to moderate 'from within' the annexionist or sometimes rather stifling claims that accompany the latter.

This practice of literarily available resources, their incorporation into the rhythms and reflexes of his thought, is perhaps nowhere so evident as in the *Pascalian Meditations*. The work carries a certain literary self-consciousness in its very framing: placing his reflections 'under the sign' or 'aegis' of Pascal certainly signals an affinity in conceptual preoccupations, as Bourdieu notes, and allows him to sidestep the usual affiliations in terms of which a sociologist might be expected to situate himself (Marx, Weber, Durkheim . . .).²⁰ But it also announces a certain affective tonality, underscored by the black cover of its original publication (contrasting on the shelf with the creamy white generally encasing Bourdieu's other publications). We expect certain leitmotifs: the vanity of human ends, and the vanity of denouncing distractions from that vanity; the finitude of thought in its bodily embedding; a measure of self-disgust in combination with apparently irrepressible movements of self-aggrandizement; the force of custom and servile 'imagination'; a sustained counterposing of the social animal's *misère* and *grandeur*. And that is indeed what we get. There is almost no engagement with the social or cultural fields in which Pascal's thought emerged. Such mention of these as we find operate in negatively permissive mode. Bourdieu argues that thinkers around Port-Royal, associated with the bourgeois aristocracy of the *robins*, may have been 'inclined' to critical dispositions with regard to the self-legitimizing claims of the traditional nobility, and to the temporal powers of Church and State (*PM*, 3, 157).²¹ But this social interest in social lucidity does not, he says, 'invalidate the truths it uncovers' (3; translation modified). If Bourdieu is not quite 'eternalizing' those truths, he is crediting them with a decisive transhistorical potency, sufficient to unbind (or absolutize) them with regard to the site of their original formulation.

Yet Bourdieu does not simply derive from Pascal a series of abstract transposable propositions on the contingency of human engagement in social worlds. We find instead in the *Meditations* a sustained textual interleaving, indeed an insistent stylistic interpenetration. The purpose is certainly not to produce a 'commentary' on Pascal. Bourdieu rather enlists Pascal's crafted fragmentary artefacts — the semi-dispersed *pensées* of his *Nachlass* — as he circles around the themes

that have driven his own œuvre, looking for ways of putting them into clearer, more acute or more arresting relief. Two extended quotations, selected from many, will give a sense of the conceptual and rhetorical play at work:

To find a way out of this interminable debate, one can simply start out from a paradoxical observation, condensed by Pascal into an admirable formula [*une très belle formule*], which immediately points beyond the dilemma of objectivism and subjectivism: ‘By space the universe comprehends and swallows me up like an atom; by thought I comprehend the world.’ The world encompasses me, comprehends me as a thing among things, but I, as a thing for which there are things, comprehend this world. And I do so (must it be added?) *because* it encompasses and comprehends me; it is through this material inclusion—often unnoticed or repressed—and what follows from it, the incorporation of social structures in the form of dispositional structures, of objective chances in the form of expectations or anticipations, that I acquire a practical knowledge and control of the encompassing space (. . .).

The reader will have understood that I have tacitly expanded the notion of space to include, as well as physical space, which Pascal is thinking of, what I call social space, the locus of the coexistence of social positions, mutually exclusive points, which, for the occupants, are the basis of points of view. (*PM*, 130; *P*, 113/104).²²

Such might be the anthropological root of the ambiguity of symbolic capital—glory, honour, credit, reputation, fame—the principle of an egoistic quest for satisfactions of *amour propre* which is, at the same time, a fascinated pursuit of the approval of others: ‘The greatest baseness of man is the pursuit of glory. But that is the greatest mark of his excellence; for whatever possessions he may have on earth, whatever health and essential comfort, he is not satisfied if he has not the esteem of men.’ Symbolic capital enables forms of domination which implies dependence on those who can be dominated by it (. . .). (*PM*, 166; *P*, 470/435)

In the first quotation, the recourse to Pascal gives Bourdieu an abruptly authorized *entrée* into his subject that allows him to cut short a more conventionally philosophical discussion on the division of ‘comprehensive’ and ‘explanatory’ labour. The crystalline chiasmus of Pascal’s fragment sends its expanding ripples into Bourdieu’s amplificatory gloss and development. Its effects are both aesthetic and conceptual, as it becomes ingrained in the structures of Bourdieu’s thought. The second passage works rather differently. The two discourses are held apart, each maintaining a relatively discrete lexis. The hinge is the colon, and one is reminded of Fowler’s original definition of its function as being (in English) to ‘[deliver] the goods that have been invoiced in the preceding words’.²³ Pascal delivers the

goods promised by Bourdieu's abstract concept of 'symbolic capital'. He brings it down to a certain existential ground. He can talk freely of man's 'baseness' or 'vileness', just as Bourdieu can 'use' him later to evoke directly the anthropological 'datum' of death and the refuge that 'we' as 'wretched and powerless fools' forlornly seek from this in 'society' (*PM*, 239; *P*, 151/141) (if Bourdieu were to invoke these terms in his own name, the ensuing 'naive' metaphysical pathos might tarnish his own scientific-symbolic capital). Just as Bourdieu admires in Kafka a certain 'brutality' of the imagination (see *PM*, 142) that he could not permit himself as a 'scientist', so he can use Pascal's uncompromising bluntness to underscore his more scholastic formulations. 'How can we not envy the freedom of writers?' he asks, only half-rhetorically, at the beginning of *Pascalian Meditations* (*PM*, 10; translation modified). His working solution appears to have been to integrate selected shards of that freedom into his own writing.

In a sense, Pascal anticipated such uses of his writing. He seems to have cultivated an art of writing that was an art of 'fighting' verbal fragments such that they would travel beyond the place where he crafted them and 'insinuate' their way not just into other writings, but into more ordinary verbal exchanges:

The style of Epictetus, Montaigne and Salomon de Tultie [an anagram of the pseudonym under which Pascal published his *Lettres provinciales*] is (...) the one which insinuates itself the most effectively, stays longest in the memory and is most often quoted, because it consists entirely of thoughts born from everyday conversations (...). (*P*, 745/628; translation modified)

Pascal thus anticipates and facilitates the fragmentary pragmatic redeployment of his *pensées* (a redeployment to which he himself had, of course, subjected in their turn authors such as those cited above). At the same time, the textual embrace to which Bourdieu subjects Pascal's writings also embodies a certain interpretative violence (while also, as Michael Moriarty notes, allowing us to see things in Pascal that otherwise would have remained undisclosed²⁴). Admittedly, Bourdieu's intention is to bend Pascal's work to his purposes rather than provide a faithful account of that work. Nonetheless, by pointing up some aspects of the 'forcing' in question, we can not only avoid simply superimposing Bourdieu's 'science of man' upon Pascal's 'study of man'.²⁵ We can also bring into focus blind spots in Bourdieu's own thought.

Bourdieu's analysis of modern societies revolves around the genesis of 'fields' and 'sub-fields' through which they become internally

differentiated, and which work as relatively autonomous domains each with their specific stakes, codes, laws of competition and forms of ‘capital’ (the legal field, the commercial field, the political field, the academic field, the journalistic field, the literary field, etc.). Perhaps unsurprisingly, he views the Pascalian scheme of ‘orders’ as an anticipation of his own distinctive field theory (*PM*, 15). The result is a certain folding of Pascal’s scheme within the Bourdieusian frame of reference:

Each field, like the Pascalian ‘order’, thus involves its agents in its own stakes [*enjeux*], which, from another point of view, the point of view of another game, become invisible or at least insignificant or even illusory: ‘All the glory of greatness [*grandeurs*] has no lustre for people who are in search of understanding [*dans les recherches de l’esprit*]. The greatness of clever men [*gens de l’esprit*] is invisible to kings, to the rich, to chiefs, and to all the worldly great. The greatness of wisdom (. . .) is invisible to the carnal-minded and to the clever. These are three orders differing in kind.’ (*PM*, 97; *P*, 308/290)

Undeniably, an exposition of Pascal’s scheme of incommensurable ‘orders’ provides a telling demonstration through defamiliarization of the principles underpinning Bourdieu’s more general theory. In particular, Pascal brings into compelling relief the Bourdieusian concept of the *illusio*—the agent’s prereflexive investment in the particular stakes (the *lusiones*) of the ‘social game’ that has invested him, and that may appear to agents otherwise invested as mere ‘illusion’. Bourdieu sees in literature and the literary field areas where agents’ relations to an *illusio* become particularly complex and thus revealing, due in part to the sustained and reflexive engagement with illusion qua illusion that is a necessary feature of participation in the field. Yet the Pascalian scheme, like other literary treatments one could name, does more than illustrate the Bourdieusian frame: it also stretches and challenges it.²⁶

It may be that the Pascalian orders are more illuminatingly set athwart rather than within Bourdieusian fields. The ‘order of the flesh’ (or of worldly *grandeurs*) and the ‘order of the mind’ do not really correspond to discrete fields. The point may be made clearly if we map these two Pascalian terms onto their Augustinian correlates (that Bourdieu also uses elsewhere). The *libido sentiendi* and *libido dominandi* (broadly the ‘order of the flesh’ for Pascal) and the *libido sciendi* (the order of the mind) operate transversally across all fields in different combinations—both directly ‘economic’ fields and the kinds of economically ‘anti-economic’ fields represented in Bourdieu’s

analyses by the worlds of art, literature, science, and so on. At this level, the Pascalian terms give us a way of apprehending different modes of cathexis within the same field (Bourdieu approaches this in describing the attraction exerted by different ‘poles’ within a given field). However, the third of Pascal’s orders (of ‘charity’ or ‘wisdom’) not only does not resemble a social field in Bourdieu’s sense. On the contrary, it is constituted as the very antithesis of the principles that are deployed by Bourdieu to explain human behaviour across all social fields: the pursuit of imagined self-interest as prereflexively represented in specific forms of ‘capital’, recognition, or position. Pascal’s ‘order of charity’ is organized around a set of vanishing points with regard to the logic of what he calls ‘the world’: ‘God’ as participation in ‘universal being’ whose value is not dependent on relative scarcity or position (*P*, 420/397); ‘love’ as a decentering of the self (597/509); an embrace of an ‘obscurity’ (‘what the world calls obscurity’ (300/282)) which Bourdieu tends to equate to ‘social death’. Clearly, Pascal is writing of these dimensions of socio-affective life within the divided religious culture of his time. But they nonetheless represent a significant challenge to the frames of Bourdieu’s analyses, and it is perhaps not surprising that the evocation of this ‘order’ is followed almost immediately by explicit ‘digressions’ in Bourdieu’s analyses (*PM*, 97, 102). Bourdieu’s engagement with a literature free to speak of many unscientific things leaves behind an instructive residue.²⁷

Bourdieu can often give the impression that any teachings which literature has to offer need the intervention of a social ‘science’ if they are to be apprehended in their full truth. We saw how the teaching of literature was instructive for the sociologist essentially because it raised to a paradigmatic level the mystifications inherent in the pedagogical relation. Similarly, what Flaubert could teach us about his social world needed to be ‘uncovered’ and ‘explicated’ by the sociologist (putting to one side the disjuncture between this manifest theory and the nature of the real ‘collaboration’ between Flaubert and Bourdieu). Bourdieu would increasingly grant in his later work that literary resources could variously help social scientific work. But it may be that those resources also have teachings that cannot be so readily integrated into the *illusio* of the scientific disposition. In *Reproduction*, Bourdieu includes as an epithet to chapter two of book two the famous *pensée* in which Pascal evokes the ‘red robes’ and the ‘ermine’ of magistrates, the ‘cassocks’ and ‘mules’ of contemporary medics, the ‘over-ample robes’ of academics as apparels designed to distract from the vulnerability of their knowledge and inspire respect. Strangely,

Bourdieu elides from the passage, without marking his elision, Pascal's reference to the 'vain instruments' of 'imaginary sciences' designed to strike blows to people's 'imagination' and 'attract respect' (see *R*, 107 and *P*, 44/41).²⁸ Bourdieu appears scrupulous elsewhere in that book in marking elisions — what are we to make of this apparent 'avoidance of compromising formulations' (*R*, 125)? Was there a fear, perhaps, that Pascal's formulae might lead readers to recognize in Bourdieu's rhetoric certain traits that he did not want recognized as such? Some of the 'free writings' collected as 'literature' may carry teachings that elude an epoch's scientific policing.

NOTES

- 1 Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *The Inheritors: French Students and their Relation to Culture* [1964], translated by Richard Nice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), hereafter referred to as *I*; *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* [1970], translated by Richard Nice (London: Sage, 1990), hereafter *R*; Emile Durkheim, *The Evolution of Educational Thought: Lectures on the Formation and Development of Secondary Education in France*, translated by Peter Collins (London: Routledge, 1977), original French lectures 1905. I am very grateful to Michael Moriarty for his comments on an earlier draft of this article.
- 2 See for example Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* [1984], translated by Peter Collier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988). On the 'conflict of faculties' as originally analysed by Kant, and the place of social science in more recent stagings of the question, see Alain Renaut, *Les Révolutions de l'université: essai sur la modernisation de la culture* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995), 138–46.
- 3 See for example Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* [1992], translated by Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), hereafter *RA*, 32–4; *Pascalian Meditations* [1997], translated by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), hereafter *PM*, 229.
- 4 Bourdieu, *Les Héritiers, les étudiants et leur culture* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), 88 (from a footnote not included in the English translation).
- 5 Annie Ernaux, 'Bourdieu, le chagrin', *Le Monde*, 6 February 2002; and Hélène Merlin-Kajman, 'Ne... que ou l'impossible traque des vanités', in *Bourdieu et la littérature*, edited by Jean-Pierre Martin (Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2010), 155–72 (156). Interestingly, in light of my discussion below, Merlin-Kajman suggests that what prevented her developing like others a full-blown devotion to Bourdieusian 'scientism' as a result of this experience was her concomitant work on French seventeenth-century moralists, which

confronted her with analogous experiences of disruptive ‘recognition’ mediated through literary form.

- 6 Occasional qualifications such as the following are nonetheless important: ‘it is not sufficient to observe that academic culture is a class culture; to proceed as if it were *only* that, is to help it remain so’ (I, 72; translation modified).
- 7 See for example Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* [1988], translated by Laretta Clough (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), 213–14.
- 8 Bourdieu, *State Nobility*, 224.
- 9 Bourdieu, ‘A Refusal to be Cannon-fodder for the Bosses’ [1986], in Bourdieu, *Political Interventions: Social Science and Political Action* [2002], edited by Franck Poupeau and Thierry Discepolo, translated by David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2008), 167–72 (170).
- 10 Bourdieu’s abiding agenda was to show how the presuppositions of such discourses carry but mask certain social logics that a ‘critical sociology’ can disclose.
- 11 Bourdieu, in his simultaneous construction and critique of ‘scholastic’ logic, tends to oppose it to ‘practical logic’ (*PM*, *passim*). For a sympathetic critique, see Pierre Macherey, ‘Bourdieu critique de la raison scolastique: le cas de la lecture littéraire’, in *Bourdieu et la littérature*, edited by Martin, 113–41. My argument at this point is also indebted to Oliver Davis’s discussion of the notions of overcontextualization, anachronism and literarity in the work of Jacques Rancière (see Davis, *Jacques Rancière* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 67–72, 107–15).
- 12 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, translated by A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1995), hereafter *P*. Krailsheimer uses the Lafuma numbering for the fragments. References will give this numbering, and then the numbering of the more recent French edition, Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, edited by Michel Le Guern (Paris: Gallimard, 2004); in this case 84/77 (translation modified).
- 13 Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 12–13.
- 14 See Jacques Dubois, ‘Flaubert analyste de Bourdieu’, in *Bourdieu et la littérature*, edited by Martin, 77–91 (77) and, in the present special issue, the articles by Anna Boschetti, Gisèle Sapiro and Michel Hockx.
- 15 See for example Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* [1912], translated by Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen, 1976), 2–3.
- 16 On these commissions, see Jeremy Ahearne, *Intellectuals, Culture and Public Policy in France: Approaches from the Left* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2010), 138–50.
- 17 See *Propositions pour l’enseignement de l’avenir élaborées à la demande de Monsieur le Président de la République par les professeurs du Collège de France* (Paris: Collège de France, 1985), 14.

- 18 Dubois, 'Flaubert analyste de Bourdieu', 85.
- 19 Jérôme David, 'Sur un texte énigmatique de Pierre Bourdieu', *A contrario* 4:2 (2006), 71–84 (76), translated for this volume by John Speller as 'On an Enigmatic Text by Pierre Bourdieu'.
- 20 See the original French cover blurb, as well as *PM*, 1.
- 21 Compare the classic work of Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensées of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine* [1955], translated by Philip Thody (London: Routledge, 1964). To an extent that his external (non-sociologist) critics seldom acknowledge, Bourdieu takes considerable care to avoid the typical 'reductions' commonly associated with sociological explanation.
- 22 Bourdieu and the English translation refer to the older 'Brunschvicg' edition, not now generally used. For convenience I have indicated where the requisite fragments can be found in the editions indicated above.
- 23 H. W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* [1926] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), under the heading 'Stops'.
- 24 Michael Moriarty, *Early Modern French Thought: The Age of Suspicion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 107.
- 25 For Bourdieu's term, see the cover blurb to the original French edition of *PM*; for Pascal's term see *P*, 687/581.
- 26 Bourdieu sees in the literary figure of the adolescent or youth, not yet definitively invested in any of the social games that are already partially investing him, as a revealing device, particularly in the hands of a novelist like Flaubert, for bringing into focus the logic of social games as such (*RA*, 12–13). One might cite also the converse device, deployed for example in the late novels of Philip Roth, of virtuoso players of specific social games who are displaced from those games through a combination of 'accidentally' contrived social disgrace and/or biological decay, thereby bringing the *illusio* at the heart of those games into startling relief (for example in *American Pastoral*, *The Human Stain*, *Exit Ghost* or *The Humbling*).
- 27 It is possible to see the order of charity as being treated in different ways by Pascal in two of the key fragments in which the concept of orders is developed. At *P*, 58/54, an order of the 'pious' seems to operate on the same level and homologously to orders of the 'strong', the 'beautiful' and the 'clever', even if the specific principles informing these orders are incommensurable (they do indeed function rather like discrete Bourdieusian fields). At *P*, 308/290, however, this incommensurability is, as it were, exponentialized: emphasis is laid on the 'infinite distance' between the grandeurs of the physical world and those of the mind, which itself functions as a figure of an 'infinitely more infinite distance' between these and the principles of 'true charity' (which thereby challenge the functioning of the world's orders).

114 *Paragraph*

I am indebted to Michael Moriarty for suggesting this distinction. The space between these two treatments can be compared, *mutatis mutandis*, to the space in contemporary thought mapped out across differently construed economies and anti-economies of the gift (such as are found in the work of Bourdieu himself, Derrida or de Certeau).

- 28 The elision of the elision is carried into the English translation. Some three decades later, Bourdieu quotes in extended fragmented form the same extract at *PM*, 171, but closes the citation at the point where the references to science as display begin.