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Book Review

Class in the New Millenium: The Structure, Homologies and Experience of the British Social Space

Tim Winzler [1*]

[1] *University of Glasgow*, UNITED KINGDOM

***Corresponding Author:** tim.winzler@glasgow.ac.uk

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Atkinson, W. (2019[2017]). *Class in the New Millenium: The Structure, Homologies and Experience of the British Social Space*. London and New York: Routledge.

Will Atkinson's book, 'Class in the New Millennium', forms part of the recent wave of post-Bourdieusian class scholarship. The distinctive characteristic of these works is to combine multiple epistemologies, methodologies and theories to adapt, twist and employ the Bourdieusian framework to British lands. One quite unique sign of Atkinson's approach is what may be called his relative 'faithfulness' to Bourdieusian methodology. Unlike the Great British Class Survey (GBCS) team around Mike Savage, for instance, he does not use linear statistical techniques such as regression. Instead, he insists on applying Bourdieu's original statistical method (multiple correspondence analysis). Putting more emphasis on relationality, he chiefly looks at the relationship of the British 'Social Space' and the 'Symbolic Space' that represents it. In doing so, he wishes to identify and to explore the 'homologies' that exist between them and other fields.

The book is composed of two main parts. Part I – 'Field Analysis'- involves re-enacting the statistical analyses found in *Distinction* as applied - for the first time in this form - to the British Social Space. For the most part, Atkinson re-uses GBCS data structured by an aggregated standard occupational classification (as well as a few supplementary surveys). Chapter 2 is an exercise in stock-taking, looking at the different volumes and types of capital (economic vs. cultural) of Bourdieu's three major classes (Dominant-Intermediate-Dominated) that make up the Social Space. Chapter 3 looks at the 'space of lifestyles' and maps overlaps of the cultural practices of the various classes and class fractions with specific tastes and knowledge in sports, art, music, TV and body modifications. Finally, Chapter 4 broaches homological links to Social Space in terms of political attitudes. Almost all of part I is remarkably similar in approach *and* results compared to Bourdieu's work 40 years ago: there is the constant replacement of the structure towards ever more accumulation and inflation of higher education degrees. There is a strong intra-class conservation of capitals. There is class- and fraction-compliant knowledge of artists, sports, and newspapers. There is concomitant left-right voting and 'disenfranchisement' among the dominated.

But this is not all. Atkinson, in keeping with post-Bourdieusian scholarship more generally, seeks to go 'beyond Bourdieu' in Part II of the book. His adaptation consists in supplementing the kinds of macro-level analyses characteristic of Part I with a phenomenology-inspired (Schütz, Husserl) 'Lifeworld Analysis' which looks at various levels of 'everyday worlds'. Subsequent chapters thus look at the Nation and City Spaces (Chapter 5), Neighbourhoods (Chapter 6), Home (Chapters 7+8) and finally at the Family (Chapter 9). This is done with an aim to 'complicate' and to 'nuance' the initial analysis. His primary case-study for this is his home city of Bristol.

Utilising a qualitative study on 'ordinary lives', conducted with Harriet Bradley, he attempts to show how people use, and think of, quotidian aspects of their everyday lives such as houses, parks, the supermarket cashier or the rambunctious youngster. Atkinson wishes to sensitise for what he terms 'multiple field pertinence', the 'alloying' of various field influences and their 'dovetailing' into 'circuits of symbolic power'. Class as it was constructed in Part I, he holds, does have a grip on the everyday lives and perceptions of people. But it interacts with, and is complicated, irritated and deflected by, more local and inconspicuous conditions of existence.

There is little to be said against this intention of showing more broadly the complexity of and influences on class-related practices. However, Atkinson's application of the principle leads towards a kind of self-defeat of his original goal of staying epistemologically close to Bourdieu. If the emphasis is so much on showing 'interrelated' and 'interlocking' fields and practices, where does this leave the concept of the field itself? Where are the boundaries of fields such as that of the 'familial field', the 'work field' or the 'field of perception'? What are their specific forms of capital? What are their histories, and the changes that accrue to them? How can we situate various agents within them?

It is this rejection to systematically construct the *particular fields* featured in the analysis in Part II that is the main weakness of the book. For it hampers substantially the aim to tease out hidden homologies of them with the otherwise well-constructed Social Space of Part I. Thus, Atkinson constantly constructs additions, exceptions and qualifications to this model. In this way he rarely shows how the different areas of his analysis interact. As a consequence, the exceptions become the rule, threatening to render the field perspective de facto redundant.

An example: When talking about the gentrification of a particular Bristolian neighbourhood vis-à-vis one that borders right next to it (118-123), Atkinson first detects a few 'binaries' in the perception of the residents there that are 'homologous with the social and symbolic spaces' (119). But then he immediately links a comparatively high worry for littering and graffi in the same area to the 'significant pockets' of non-gentrified space in it (119f.). Implicitly, we are referred to multiple fields - a field that consists of all the areas of Bristol, but also a field of the two parts that border each other, and finally one that consists of the gentrified areas and non-gentrified pockets of the overall gentrified area.

Part II of the book abounds with confusing interpretations of this kind where cultural practices are attributed to multiple fields without their peculiarities being analysed in any depth in any one of them in particular: fondness for a baby grand piano is both 'cultural capital' and the embodiment of a 'family ethos' (134); use of a study in a house is linked to the generation of cultural capital, to demands from family members, but also to work-related fields and activities (148-153); and the taste for raising children in a specific, 'non-pushy' way is clearly linked to the existence of 'cultural capital', but also to 'affective capital' (174-178). Each of these fascinating areas would merit a book-length study of their own from a field-theoretical perspective. But without deeper carving out of distinctive, delineated field areas the bulk of analysis mainly consists in the dispersion of labels – 'cultural capital', 'libido', 'symbolic mastery', 'affective recognition', and so on – that are rather freely attached to the practices and thoughts of the agents.

Thus, once finished, it is as if one has read two works: one a classic Bourdieusian field analysis; the other a form of recalibrated phenomenology of everyday life embroidered with Bourdieusian labels.