Think 53: Food Talks
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Bourdieu’s Distinction

Tuesday, May 1, 2017
Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002)
French sociologist
Public intellectual
Josée Johnston
Professor of Sociology, University of Toronto

Bourdieu on Kinds of Capital

- **Economic capital**  (what you have)
- **Cultural capital**  (what you know)
- **Social capital**  (who you know)
Economical capital
Bourdieu (1977): “Instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed”

My translation: Knowledge, education, and skills which give social advantages/higher status in society, passed down by parents/schools/social groups

• Educational capital: educational credentials and experiences

• Social background: socialization (including knowledge or skills) from parents or group

• Cultural tastes themselves
  ◦ Food and our practices around food consumption
Social Capital

Bourdieu (1986): “The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word”
Social Capital

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Social Capital

possession of a network of relationships – memberships – which provides each of its members with a ‘credential’

- family,
- class,
- school,
- political party, etc.
All the capitals are linked together

“The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected… [this network thus] exerts a multiplier effect on the capital he possesses in his own right.” Bourdieu 1986
Habitus

“Habitus is a system of dispositions, that is of permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking. Or a system of long-lasting (rather than permanent) schemes or schemata or structures of perception, conception and action” (Bourdieu 2002, 27-28)

“Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (Bourdieu 1977, 72).
Habitus

It’s the built-in, subconscious way that we perceive and categorize things in the world, because of how we were raised, without knowing that we’re doing it, that structures our tastes and actions.
Bourdieu’s question in Distinction

What are the “economic and social determinants of taste?”

(*Distinction*, 101)

• a question “which economists strangely ignore” (p. 101)
“Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed. And statistical analysis does indeed show that oppositions similar in structure to those found in cultural practices also appear in eating habits.” (Distinction, Intro)
Bourdieu’s claim: Everyday tastes are not arbitrary, but based on power and social status

“esthetic stances ... in cosmetics, clothing or home decoration are opportunities to experience or assert ones’ position in social space, as a rank to be upheld, or a distance to be kept” p. 57.

Johnston and Baumann (2007) on Bourdieu: “the dominant classes affirm their high social status through consumption of cultural forms consecrated by institutions with cultural authority. Through family socialization and formal education, class-bound tastes for legitimate culture develop alongside aversions for unrefined, illegitimate, or popular culture.”
Bourdieu’s Homology
Dominant/dominated class
High/low culture
Bourdieu on Music preferences

“Legitimized taste”
Bourdieu on 1960s food preferences in France

Working class:
- “the working class meal is characterized by plenty ... and freedom”
- Impression of abundance, especially for men
  - Plates are filled twice
- Abundant dishes brought to the table
  - Soups, pastas, potatoes, served with a ladle or spoon

Bourgeoisie:
- Strict form: sequencing of the courses
  - Fish, meat, cheese, dessert
- Healthy, less fatty
Bourdieu on 1960s food preferences in France

Working class:
  ◦ Preferences for charcuterie, pork, pot-au-feu, cassoulet,

Industrial and Commercial Employers, Foreman, Craftsman, Grocers
  ◦ Similar tastes as working class but more money
    ◦ More wine, fois gras, pastry

Professionals and Executives
  ◦ More meat, fresh vegetables, less fat,

Clerks, teachers,
  ◦ Exoticism: Italian, Chinese cooking, health food, curry
Bourdieu 1960s French “food space”

- Executives, doctors
- Teachers
- Foremen, craftmen
- Manual & domestic workers
Bourdieu’s position

"Curry" and "light meats" like beef are "legitimized"

Cassoulet and stews and “non-light meats” like pork are not

This is an arbitrary distinction
  ◦ Designed to assert/confirm status/power
Omnivorousness theory

Bourdieu: homology between “high” culture and dominant class
- high status: classical music
- low status: pop music

Peterson & Kern alternative: omnivoroussness
- High-status cultural consumption is instead increasingly “diversified, inclusive, or omnivorous”.
- High status can draw from many cultural forms
  - Jazz
  - Hiphop
  - Bluegrass
  - Cuban music
Two views of omnivorousness

**Positive**: It’s different, more inclusive, less centered on one culture

**Negative**: It’s still just another kind of distinction, still associated with power
Rise of omnivorousness in US food
1900s: Fancy Menus are in French

Flounder sur le plat
Eggs au beurre noir
Fried chicken a la Maryland, half
Green turtle a l’anglaise
Sirloin steak aux champignons
French chefs and cuisine in 20\textsuperscript{th} century US

Ritz-Carlton and Waldorf-Astoria
- run by French chefs like Auguste Escoffier

1941 opening of Le Pavillon
- French cuisine clear sign of high status
French still signs of high class true in the 1960s & into the 1970s

1970’s menu guides advised to
  ◦ “Continentalize your menu”

Flaming Coffee Diablo, Prepared en Vue of Guest
Ravioli parmigiana, en casserole
Le Crabmeat Cocktail
But this began to change

Not completely clear why

◦ Perhaps partly as a result of the early foodie movement
◦ Outgrowth of the natural side of hippie movement.
◦ Alice Waters and the Berkeley counterculture
Fancy food now

Doesn’t have to be French

We saw lots of signs of fanciness on menus on Tuesday
  ◦ Minimalism in menus
  ◦ Fancy words on menus

But with the rise of omnivorousness, what constitutes “high status” food now?
Authenticity

“when we take a closer look at many supposedly ‘authentic’ activities, such as loft-living, ecotourism, or the slow-food movement, we find a disguised form of status-seeking.”

Andrew Potter
Carroll at Stanford: many kinds of authenticity


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type Authenticity</th>
<th>Moral Authenticity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Conformity to a code of expectations regarding the type assigned or claimed</td>
<td>Definition: Interpretation of an object or service as embued with moral meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examples: Morton’s (steakhouse), Katz’s (delicatessen)</td>
<td>Examples: Moosewood, Grassfed Farms, Blue Hill at Stone Barns</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Craft Authenticity</th>
<th>Idiosyncratic Authenticity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Application of advanced knowledge, skills, routines, tools and ingredients derived from a craft</td>
<td>Definition: Symbolic or expressive interpretation of aspects of an entity’s idiosyncrasies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples: Charlie Trotter’s, Anchor Brewing, Cowgirl Creamery</td>
<td>Examples: McSorley’s Old Alehouse, Billy Goat Tavern, Linie Aquavit</td>
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Craft authenticity in wine


Interviews with luxury winemakers: what makes wines authentic?

• historicity (stories of the founder, links to Burgundy wine auctions)
• relationship to place (terroir),
• traditional method of production
• focus on the ingredients
• downplaying of commercial motivations
Craft authenticity in beer


Consumers considered Trappist beer (Belgium, Netherlands) more authentic if it was:

• more historic or traditional
• related to a particular place
• small, handcrafted productions by artisans with little commercial motivation
Josée Johnston and Shyon Bauman 2007


They examined articles in gourmet food magazines

Found framings of omnivorous food:
- Authenticity
- Exoticism
Authenticity in Gourmet Food Magazines

Johnston and Baumann 2007

• creation by hand rather than by industrial processes
• local settings and anti-commercialism
• sincere expression, no calculation or strategy
• honesty, integrity, dedication to core principles
• closeness to nature + distance from institutionalized power
## Authenticity in Gourmet Magazines

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<th>Discursive Strategies</th>
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<th>% Articles with at Least One Usage</th>
<th>Median Usage</th>
<th>Average Usage</th>
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<td>Organic/naturally raised</td>
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<td>Rarity</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>.3</td>
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Locality

highly specific places:
  ◦ Bologna, Italy; New Iberia, Louisiana; Lucknow, India; Mesa, Arizona; Cape Town, South Africa; Siglufjordur, Iceland.

“oysters from a particular spot on the Atlantic coast of France are like no others”

“on Phu Quoc, an island thirty miles off the coast of southwest Vietnam, the local fish sauce is sophisticated, nuanced, delicate, and unlike any other fish sauce commercially available"

Johnston and Bauman 2007
Simplicity

Unschooled chefs:
° “‘It’s from my mama’s kitchen,’ she said. ‘I cannot tell you how to do it because she never taught me to measure anything. You just add seasoning and spice until it’s right’” (Gourmet, April 2004, p. 52).

“Simple” preparation
° “Top-notch tempura all comes down to simple things exquisitely done” (Saveur, December 2004, p. 84).

Non-industrial Harvesting
° Farmers who handpick their potatoes: “…doing things the old-fashioned unmechanized way is what [they] care about” (Saveur, November 2004, p. 54).

“Simple” rural life
° eating among “a backdrop of rusted farm machinery and walls that aren’t perpendicular to the ground” rather than at “solemn” Michelin-starred restaurants with “stodgy” food (Gourmet, January 2004, pp. 46–48).
Authentic: chef as artist

Johnston and Bauman 2007

Chefs cooking in elite restaurant settings:
- Mostly men
- Mostly famous: Jean-Georges Vongerichten, Alain Ducasse, Alice Waters, and Thomas Keller

Chefs as culinary artists
- Creating authentic, original piece of culinary art
- As opposed to artless industrial food
Authentic because of historical continuity

Johnston and Bauman 2007

- *Cabrito al pastor*: whole goats have been roasted over hot coals in Monterrey, Mexico, since the 1700s (*Saveur*, June/July 2004, p. 44)
- Vietnamese rolls: “the Vietnamese were wrapping meat and seafood in greens before 100 B.C.” (*Saveur*, August/September 2004, p. 38)
- Espresso and chocolate in Turino; this café has been operating since 1783 (*Gourmet*, May 2004, p. 171)
“chevre ‘avec habitants’—a cheese so ripe that little, maggot-type worms had taken up residence inside” (Gourmet, August 2004, p. 93).

mistela negra, new red wine dosed with brandy “though, we are told, it is not available in the United States” (Saveur, March 2004, p. 62)

ram horn nut, water caltrop (Gourmet, January 2004, p. 104);

brocciu, a fluffy sheep’s-milk cheese from Corsica (Gourmet, August 2004, p. 92).

O-a-chian, a Taiwanese dish of oysters with scrambled eggs (Saveur, March 2004, p. 37);

a Spanish chef’s foie gras with cotton candy and avocado-tomato sorbet (Food and Wine, May 2004, p. 74);

snoek, a hot smoked fish eaten on doughy bread and jam in South Africa (Food and Wine, May 2004, p. 169).
Exoticism: People

Johnston and Bauman 2007

Foods framed as exotic, associated with poor, rural people in developing countries.

“pasta made by women who measure weeks in flour and seasons in egg yolks and every fold and crevice of noodle can seem as eloquent as a sigh” (Gourmet, January 2004, p. 46).

`food that is produced and consumed in “a medieval Italian town” that “rises from oblivion in the mountains of Abruzzo”’ (Gourmet, September 2004, p. 139).
Bourdieu defines high versus low food culture as
- **legitimate** (endorsed by cultural authority) vs **illegitimate** foods

The omnivorous version:
- **Legitimate**: “authentic” or “exotic” cultural tastes
- **illegitimate**: popular, bland, familiar, accessible foods

How do we know this is high-culture?

Only available to those with $$$$$!!
- Expensive ingredients
- Have to be able to travel around the world to find
Our study of restaurant menus: The Tiki Lounge effect

Dishes with these words are more expensive: exotic, oriental, spices, spicy

- **exotic** five spices
- **exotic** blend of indian spices
- island **spices** you crave: An **exotic**, delicious sauce.
- **oriental** vinaigrette
- Thai curry herbs and **spices**
- kick of southwestern **spice**
- **spicy** Santa Fe sauce
- **spicy** garlic & lime grilled shrimp
Notice a class difference in kinds of authenticity

Poor chefs: Exotic, unfamiliar authenticity
- Cheap restaurants are authentic by having exotic ingredients
- By being “replicas” of food in impoverished settings or developing countries.

Rich chefs: Creative artistry authenticity
- Food in upscale restaurants legitimated as authentic through a representation of the personal artistry of an individual chef

Krishenendu Rey 2016
Johnston and Baumann 2007
What about Authenticity in Restaurant Menus?
Traditional authenticity in $$ restaurants:

- fresh **homemade** guacamole and chip
- **old fashioned** beef stew
- annie’s famous pot roast homemade **just like mom’s**
- **grandma minnie’s** fried chicken salad
Expensive restaurants use natural authenticity

How to Read a Menu

What are the modern indicators of an expensive, high-class restaurant? Perhaps you’ll recognize the marketing techniques in the descriptions of these three dishes from pricey places:

- **Eggplant Porridge, Cherry Peppers, Greenmarket Cucumbers and Pine Nut Jus**
- **Pan Roasted King Trumpet Mushrooms, Dirty Girl Farm Romano Bean Tempura Persillade, Extra Virgin Olive Oil**
- **Bison Burger, 8 oz. blue star farms, grass fed & pasture raised, melted gorgonzola, grilled vegetables**

![Graph indicating food provenance mentions per menu across different restaurant price levels.]
One final test of a Bourdieu claim

“the working class meal is characterized by plenty” (*Distinction*)

What about in restaurant menus?
We looked in our 6500 menus
Words promising more food

hearty, enormous, plenty, loads, lots, hefty, gigantic, generous, generously, largest, heaping, refills, bottomless, unlimited, huge, big, bigger, biggest, ginormous, mega, largest, and more, with more, tons of, king sized, texas sized
Words for large portions

![Bar chart showing mentions per dish at different restaurant prices.]

- $: High mentions
- $$: Medium high mentions
- $$$: Medium mentions
- $$$$: Low mentions
Summary:

Bourdieu in *Distinction*: Taste is all about status
- especially high versus low culture

**Omnivorousness**: High status is now expressed by knowing about lots of culture, not just one high culture.

**Authenticity and Exoticism**: It looks like high status is still reflected in modern omnivorous culture by versions of authenticity
Many possible methodologies, all applicable to final projects!

- Bourdieu interviewed people about their food preferences
  - And did anthropological studies in the field
- Johnston and Baumann coded articles in Food and Wine, Saveur, Gourmet
- We counted words on menus
- And words on the back of potato chip bags