RETHINKING THE CULTURAL FIELD

A one-day symposium

Date: Thursday April 6, 2017, 9am - 4.20pm
Venue: Clive Price suite, University of Canberra

Pierre Bourdieu’s writings on the cultural field represent a powerful account of the social space of creative works and cultural vocations. Offering a dynamic vision of the relations between cultural tastes, creative vocations and education systems, one in which the embodied temporality of actors is key to understanding the economy of practice, the cultural field represents an impressively integrated and generative model for understanding the social terrain of cultural activity. This account has supported major national studies of cultural consumption and production, as well as a major alternative approach to the topic of cultural work to that of the ‘knowledge society’ and ‘creative class’ theses.

While the cultural field has clearly been productive for empirical inquiry, researchers have inevitably raised questions about the limits of cultural field theory. To what extent are the dynamics of contemporary cultural fields competitive, as per the descriptions offered by Bourdieu; and even if so, to what extent are the dynamics of discrete cultural fields sufficient as an explanation for observed cultural practices? What role might state agencies have played, both now and in the past, in developing and sustaining the structure of the field, including the variable relations between the autonomous and market-oriented subfields, through instruments such as public arts funding and broadcasting? How have contested prescriptions of distinction arising from within arts and cultural fields themselves operated to limit action, and what legacies of this remain in the present? And what effects might the recent policy emphasis on ‘creativity’ across a range of domains – from economic development through to social inclusion – have had on the field? What impact are new technologies having on the economies of creative production and consumption? And how should researchers take into account the effects of migration and transnational cultural markets?

This symposium brings together researchers undertaking empirical work on the cultural field in order to rethink the opportunities, challenges and limits of cultural field theory.

This event is generously supported by the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, and the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research, University of Canberra.

Hosted by
Centre for Creative & Cultural Research (CCCR)
Faculty of Arts & Design
University of Canberra
www.canberra.edu.au/cccr
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CAMPUS MAP

The Clive Price suite is located above the Refectory in Building 1, highlighted in the map below.

Casual parking is available in selected carparks. Parking rates are listed on the UC website. Timetables for buses to and from campus via the Transport Canberra network are available at www.transport.act.gov.au.

A comprehensive suite of maps, including accessibility maps and those for bicycle shelters and taxi drop-off points, is available on the UC website at www.canberra.edu.au/maps.
KEYNOTE

From social stratification to the cultural field: the genesis of career choices in cultural occupations

Vincent Dubois

Occupations in the cultural field are attractive not because they ensure material comfort in terms of job stability and income, but rather because they bring recognition and self-worth to the people who hold them and offer the promise of self-fulfilment. Why is it so? Who answers this calling? How to interpret these career choices and what do they teach us on the social functions of culture in contemporary societies? To answer these questions, I will draw on empirical research on young applicants in arts management in France, using a framework which combines social stratification and gender, changes in higher education, and the structure of cultural professions. By doing so, I will both reflect on the subjective meanings individuals give to their choices and on the structural factors for such choices. This will provide renewed perspectives on cultural labour and social reproduction in the era of “the new spirit of capitalism”.

Vincent Dubois, sociologist and political scientist, is Professor at the University of Strasbourg. His research fields include cultural sociology, cultural policy, poverty and welfare and more generally sociological approaches to public policy. He belongs to the SAGE research unit (Societies, Actors and Government in Europe) where he coordinates a working group on ‘Transformations in the Market for Symbolic Goods’. Prior to this he was a fellow at the University of Strasbourg’s Institute for Advanced Study, a Florence Gould member of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University, USA, and a member at the Institut Universitaire de France. He has published more than 70 papers in scientific journals and eight books, including Culture as a Vocation (Routledge 2015), The Sociology of Wind Bands: Amateur Music Between Cultural Domination and Autonomy, (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2013) and The Bureaucrat and the Poor: Encounters in French Welfare Offices (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2010).

PAPER ABSTRACTS

The Australian art field: spatial-temporal perspectives

Tony Bennett

Questions of time are central to Bourdieu’s conception of the dynamics of art fields, particularly when they achieve the conditions required for autonomy. In such circumstances, Bourdieu argues in his essay on ‘The historical genesis of a pure aesthetic,’ the time of art history becomes irreversible and cumulative as successive avant-gardes are obliged to situate themselves in relation all the previous attempts at surpassing past models that govern the histories of autonomous art fields. Debates about the subsequent flat temporalities of contemporary art have raised questions about the continuing applicability of this conception, and it is indeed debatable whether currently existing art fields can still claim the forms of autonomy that Bourdieu was concerned with.

However, putting these considerations to one side, it is notable that the attention Bourdieu pays to the temporal coordinates of art fields is not matched by a corresponding attention to their spatial coordinates. Rather, he assumes a national art field centred on Paris in his work on Manet, for example, or more generally an international art field with competing centres (Paris, New York). The questions I pose in this presentation probe the relations between the temporal and spatial dynamics of art fields in a settler colonial society like Australia. I have addressed some of these issues in a publication – Adjusting field theory: the dynamics of settler colonial art fields – which will be circulated to symposium participants. In the presentation I will summarised the main arguments of this paper and then address a set of further issues focused specifically on the shifting space-time coordinates that have characterised Australian art discourses.

Social inertia and the artistic critique of work
Scott Brook

Bourdieu’s account of social inertia provided not only a compelling description of the conditions that dispose individuals towards the cultural field, but arguably a key sociological explanation for the emergence of what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello describe as the Artistic Critique of Work. Indeed, the latter would itself seem to be a major manifestation of the ‘social inertia’ effect.

In this paper I review the social inertia hypothesis concerning a disposition to cultural vocations, highlighting examples from the cultural field. While at a basic level the social inertia hypothesis describes the social prolepsis of those confronted with downward mobility due to credentialism and labour market deregulation, it can also comprehend the active and strategic delays by which subjects invest in their career futures. Such an account suggests that Lahire’s model of the cultural field as a secondary field of vocational identities (rather than jobs) may be a better model of the relationship between the cultural field and work.

Scott Brook is Associate Professor at the CCCR where his research focuses on creative labour and the cultural field. He is currently collaborating with Roberta Comunian and others on an ARC project that applies UNESCO’s model of cultural work to study graduate outcomes in Australia and the UK. His talk draws on interviews conducted for the ARC project ‘Working the field’.

Designer, Artisan, Artist, Craftsperson: Distinction, Boundary Marking and Making’s Fields
Susan Luckman and Jane Andrew

In his book the Invention of Craft (2013), leading craft curator and scholar Glenn Adamson argues that ‘craft’ as we know it today came into being in the mid-nineteenth century when it was cast as the Industrial Revolution’s ‘Other’, deliberately rupturing links between artisanal making and manufacture; craft and technology. In so doing, new distinctions and boundaries within craft’s field came into being which privileged the small-scale, authentic, transparent and organic. Clearly therefore, “[t]here is no way of talking about modern craft that is neutral. It was invented at a time of conflict between the ranks of the skillful and others involved in production, who recognized the unique potency of skill and therefore wanted to contain and control it.” (Adamson 2013, p. xxiv).

Today these contestations continue to be played out. Against the backdrop of modern craft’s pastoral connotations, new boundary contestations in making’s fields of cultural production are being brought into play by two key shifts. Firstly, the now over two decades old rhetoric of the creative industries which sees increasing governmental incentivising of creative self-employment. Secondly, advances in digital technology which are enabling all kinds of new relationships to production and consumption, including increasing designer maker economies of scale and the potential return of high-end artisanal manufacturing to the Global north. Drawing upon interview data generated by a three-year ARC study of Australian design craft micro-enterprises, in this paper we will examine how contested prescriptions of distinction arising from within making’s fields are redefining acceptable forms of art/commerce relationships, within a splintering field marked by its burgeoning nomenclature: ‘designer’, ‘designer maker’, ‘maker’, ‘artisan’, ‘artist’, ‘craftsperson’.

Susan Luckman is Professor: Cultural Studies and Associate Director of the Hawke EU Centre for Mobilities, Migrations and Cultural Transformations at the University of South Australia, and Cheney Fellow at the University of Leeds 2017-2018. She is the author of Craft and the Creative Economy (Palgrave Macmillan 2015) and Chief Investigator on the ARC Discovery Project ‘Promoting the Making Self in the Creative Micro-economy’.

Whose culture? Whose field? Cultural production and consumption in a culturally complex society
Greg Noble

This paper focuses on some of the issues arising from the Australian Cultural Fields project, considered through the category of ethnicity. A starting point for the project was the reshaping of the cultural field represented by Creative Nation, and the ways in which multiculturalism and Indigenous affairs have been promoted as central to cultural policy in Australia. Acknowledging the limitations of the Bourdieusian framework for analysing the dynamics of cultural practices, the paper will attempt to outline a number of key challenges that relate to the place of ethnicity in cultural consumption and production. First, its methodological nationalism means that Bourdieusian analysis doesn’t provide a coherent model for undertaking research in increasingly transnational contexts.
Second, the analysis of fields privileges organisations and tastes of certain national and/or elite standing, without giving due consideration to forms and institutions ‘from below’. Third, these 2 issues have particular significance for a culturally diverse society such as Australia, where the practices of ethnically-defined communities are rarely invisible. This paper considers the ways the ACFS project attempts to come to grips with the cultural field in a settler-colonial society which evinces significant cultural complexity.

Greg Noble is Professor, Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University. His interests include: migration and diaspora; youth, ethnicity and gender; cultural pedagogies and habitus; and multicultural education. Books include Cultural Pedagogies and Human Conduct, Disposed to Learn and Bin Laden in the Suburbs. He is currently working on the Australian Cultural Fields project.

Mapping social interactions in online cultural fields
Mathieu O’Neil

This paper explores the relationship between social structures and social relationships in the online environment. Social network analysis (SNA) measures the properties of nodes, ties, and clusters statistically and can be used to map online hyperlink and semantic networks. To what extent does this mapping accord with a conceptualisation of online activists and journalists as operating in cultural fields? To answer, the emergence of innovations amongst online activists is examined: why do some actors choose to connect to new issues, whilst others do not?

Field theory is mobilised to attempt to account for the goals of actors in choosing to connect (or not) to issues. I define ‘online capital’ as the number of connections accrued by actors in the course of their trajectories across online subnetworks, and introduce the concept of ‘field-force’, the capacity of human or organisational actors to attract online capital in social space or the capacity of issue actors to attract capital in semantic space, through people and organisations promoting them via their websites or tweets. I argue that field-force, online capital and goals are mutually constitutive. I illustrate this conceptual exploration by drawing on studies of Web 1.0 and 2.0 activist fields, finding that field effects are stronger in Web 2.0, and offer explanations as to why this may be the case. Finally, I outline plans for future research into the existence of filter bubbles (online echo chambers) in the Australian journalistic field.

Mathieu O’Neil is Associate Professor in Communication at the University of Canberra and Adjunct Research Fellow in the School of Sociology at the ANU. His research and teaching are multidisciplinary, incorporating communication and media studies, the sociology of fields and controversies, online research methods, social network analysis, and labour and organization studies. Mathieu’s research has been published in Social Networks, Information, Communication and Society, Réseaux, and Organization Studies, amongst others. His latest book, Digital Labour and Prosumer Capitalism: The US Matrix was published by Palgrave in 2015.

Time, Space and the Scholarly Habitus: Thinking Through the Phenomenological Dimensions of Field
Megan Watkins

This paper engages critically with Bourdieu’s notion of field. It questions the emphasis that Bourdieu places on what he terms ‘objective relations’ at the expense of the actual relations of those within a field. This includes not only the relations between human actors but the interactions of humans with the non-human such as with inanimate objects that over time, and in particular spaces, engender certain forms of embodiment. The intention of the paper is to think through these phenomenological dimensions of field. It does this by firstly examining these issues as theoretical questions before siting them within an empirical context, revisiting data from an earlier study into the differential achievement of students of Chinese-, Pacific Islander- and Anglo-Australian backgrounds to ascertain the ways in which various micro-practices performed within the home promote different dispositions to learning, some more and some less of value at school.

Megan Watkins is Associate Professor in the School of Education and Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University. Her publications include Cultural Pedagogies and Human Conduct (Ed) (Routledge, 2015), Disposed to Learn: Schooling, Ethnicity and the Scholarly Habitus (Bloomsbury, 2013) and Discipline and Learn: Bodies, Pedagogy and Writing (Sense, 2012).
Conditions of entry to the field

Jen Webb

A feature of many visual arts and creative writing programs is that their graduates will, and do, find appropriate careers and satisfying professional lives. While this is not necessarily expressed explicitly on recruitment documents or curriculum outlines, it appears consistently in in-class discussions, less formal conversations, and in claims made at conferences that a programme’s graduates are ‘all finding great jobs’.

Statistical evidence from research conducted over recent years tells a different story, one that reinforces Bourdieu’s insistence that the art field operates as the economic world reversed. At the same time, qualitative data from those same research projects reinforces at least some of Bourdieu’s arguments about the shape and structure of the field of cultural production, and the operations of agents within it.

Whether Bourdieu’s map of the field retains its relevance, and whether the conditions for entry are the same, is another matter. In this paper, and referring to the lived experience of artists and writers who participated in the research projects, I re-examine this question, and evaluate the criteria at stake, and the conditions and contexts largely associated with, entry to the creative field.

Jen Webb is Distinguished Professor of Creative Practice at the University of Canberra, and Director of the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research. Her recent works include the scholarly volumes Researching Creative Writing (Frontinus, 2015) and Art and Human Rights: Contemporary Asian Contexts (with Caroline Turner; Manchester UP, 2016), the creative volumes Watching the World (with Paul Hetherington; Blemish Books, 2015) and Stolen Stories, Borrowed Lines (Mark Time, 2015), and the Oxford University Press bibliography on Bourdieu (2017). Her work focuses on representation, and the field of creative production. She is also Lead or CI on the ARC Discovery projects ‘Understanding creative excellence: A case study in poetry’ (DP130100402), ‘Working the Field: Creative Graduates in Australia and China’ (DP150101477), and ‘So what do you do? Graduates in the Creative and Cultural Industries’ (DP160101440).