Bourdieu and the Music Field

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This work as an example of the:

Problem of Aesthetics
A Reflective and Relational Methodology

‘to construct systems of intelligible relations capable of making sense of sentient data’.

Rules of Art: p.xvi

A reflexive understanding of the expressive impulse in trans-historical fields and the necessity of human creativity immanent in them. (ibid).
A Bourdieusian Methodology for the Sub-Field of Musical Production

• The process is always iterative ... so this paper presents a ‘work in progress’ ...

• The presentation represents the state of play in a third cycle through data collection and analysis ...so findings are contingent and diagrams used are the current working diagrams!

• The process begins with the most prominent agents in the field since these are the ones with the most capital and the best configuration.
A Bourdieusian Approach to the Music Field

.........involves.........
Structure

Structuring *and* Structured Structures

Externalisation of Internality and the Internalisation of Externality

=>

‘A science of dialectical relations between objective structures...and the subjective dispositions within which these structures are actualised and which tend to reproduce them’.
Bourdieu’s Thinking Tools

“Habitus and Field designate bundles of relations.

A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital);

habitus consists of a set of historical relations ‘deposited’ within individual bodies in the forms of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action.”

(Bourdieu 1992: 16).
Capital: A Medium for Field Manoeuvres

Bourdieu identifies three distinct forms of capital:

• **Cultural Capital** - embodied dispositions, cultural goods and educational qualifications;

• **Social Capital** - social connections and obligations, including those associated with associations and institutions;

• **Economic Capital** - into which, given certain conditions, all other capitals can be converted.

(based on Bourdieu 1986/83)
3-Phase Methodology

1. Construction of the Research Object

1. Field Analysis:
   - data collection; analysis; presentation

3. Participant Objectivation
Field Analysis: 3 levels

- **Level 3**: Compare the habitus of a range of individuals;

- **Level 2**: Examine the inter-relations between agents and institutions;

- **Level 1**: Field in relation to other fields and the field of power.
The Music Field: Initial Construction

• Began with Beach Boys, then Beatles, then ...
• Made decisions to restrict initial analysis to pop music in the 60s and early 70s.
• Folk, Jazz and Country music was ignored.
• Focus was on groups at least initially. Individual singers were ignored.
• Decided to ignore secondary categories used by other analyses e.g. pop, hard rock, R&B, psychedelic rock ...
The Music Field: Data Collection

**Cycle 1:** Focus on Beach Boys and Brian Wilson

**Cycle 2:**
- We chose a small number of pop groups:
  - Beach Boys, Rolling Stones, Beatles, The Who,
- Collect, read and re-read their early histories.
- Try out tentative definitions of habitus, field/subfield, etc

**Cycle 3:** 30 pop groups which were founded in the 1960s and 70s.
- Approx 120 musicians were included.
- Groups chosen were prominent and successful
- Using Rolling Stone’s 100 Greatest Artists, number of album sales and platinum and gold discs
- American and British groups were included
Level 2
The Structure of the Field
Cycle 3

Level 2/3:

Relationships between Agents And Organisations/ Institutions
Level 2/3

• Data collected for groups with established band names ...

• Each group was analysed as if it were a single institution/organisation with capital accruing from its association with other institutions and from individuals recognised within the field.

• Cycle 3 analysis focused largely on the cultural and symbolic aspects of a band rather than the economic characteristics.
Level 2/3

Template for Analysis: Organizational/Institutional Characteristics
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date of founding</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Band Name</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Names</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Founding Members</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships between founders</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years Active</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Record Label</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size of Band</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Line up/ Number of guitarists</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genre/Influences</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Release/Hit</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Associates and Supporters</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Achievements</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**L2/3 Template for Analysis: Organizations Characteristics**

**Cycle 3**
Further Examples:

John Mayall Bluesbreakers
The Small Faces
Research Presentation

What acted as capital in this subfield?

• **Cultural capital** from being young, male, white, playing electric guitar.

• **Social Capital** was of significance when a group formed ...living in same neighbourhood, going to same school or same art school.

• **Cultural capital** from:
  • Playing at prestigious festivals – Woodstock, Monterey, Isle of Wight,
  • Appearing on TV programmes – Old Grey Whistle Test, Top of the Pops.

• **Symbolic capital** from being in ‘Charts’, Platinum/Gold discs.
Cycle 3

Level 1:
Relationships between the Music Field and the Field of Power
Field of Power (1960s):

Increased prosperity, Consumerism

- **Issues of Equality** — Racial Emancipation; e.g. Martin Luther King, Equality of women -. Equal pay act.
- **Liberalization** — e.g. Sexual Revolution, Legalization of Homosexuality.
- **War** - Vietnam, Compulsory draft in US, Cuban Missile Crisis, Building of Berlin Wall, Testing of Nuclear Weapons.
- **Expansion of Higher Education** in US and Britain, Student protests.
- **Emergence of ‘Youth’ as counter-culture;** e.g. Surfing Culture, Drug Use, Hippy culture - Love and Peace.
Field of Technology

- Development of first long playing record (in 50s), Vinyl, 45rpm single, E.P.
- Increasingly sophisticated electric guitars, e.g. Gibson, Fender, Rickenbacker.
- Innovations in recording methods and amplification equipment.
- 1st Lunar Landing.

Field of Commerce

- TV and Film production.
- Journalism including new magazines and newspapers and re-orientation of established ones.
- New Supporting Roles e.g. Publicity Agents/ Managers emerged to manage public image.
Field of Cultural Production

• **Minimalism**
  • Music, e.g. John Cage, Steve Reich, Phillip Glass
  • Art e.g. Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Frank Stella.

• **Pop Art** — e.g. Andy Warhol, Roy Lichstenstein.

• **Geometric Abstraction** e.g. Ben Nicholson, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth.

• **Folk Music/Protest singers** e.g. Bob Dylan, Joan Baez.
The Music Field: Research Presentation

• The subfield of pop music is situated at the ‘popular’ end of the cultural capital axis.

• Pop group is a hybrid organisation both cultural and economic.

• In the 60s, pop groups were highly unstable in both name and personnel. Most no longer existed by end of decade. Names recognised as capital – so line up changes, but brand stays the same.

• Late 60s saw a new generation of groups being created.
The Music Field: Research Discussion

Since research process is cyclic, the construction of the research object is an ongoing process. Cycle 4 might include:

• Analysis of the characteristics of the music itself.
• Consideration of non-musicians who participate in the field.
• Consideration of agents and organisations of other 60s musical genres e.g. Jazz, folk, classical
• Detailed examination of the individual habitus of each musician: i.e. Level 3
Why do it?

• A Historical Sociology of the Past.

• A Sociological History of the Present.

• ..which, ’seems to be more reassuring, more humane than belief in the miraculous virtues of pure interest in pure forms’

1993: 188
END