

Questions on Pierre Bourdieu, preface, intro and part 1 of *Distinction*

Note: Like Stuart Hall's, Bourdieu's writing style may be initially puzzling to those of you who are new to cultural theory. I recommend reading Bourdieu at least twice. For the first time, start with the concrete examples on pp. 13-18 from his survey, which should help ground the more abstract discussion in the previous pages. Note that you can skip the section on page 18 under the heading of "The Titles of Cultural Nobility."

1. Even though Bourdieu's examples are drawn from an analysis of French social (now done some time ago), he argues that it would also be applicable to North American societies as well. Why?
2. Why is the "critical break" so important?
3. What are the two senses of "culture" and why should they be collapsed?
4. How is consumption of culture like "decoding" and why does that matter?
5. Which comes first, cognitive understanding of a work of art or empathy with it? Why does it matter?
6. What is the difference between the pure gaze and the naive gaze?
7. Why does Bourdieu feel the need to break down differences between kinds of consumption and what does his example of "nudity" demonstrate?
8. What is the social function of taste?
9. How do different conditions of learning shape different relations to culture?
10. Why is it so difficult to put taste aside in cultural analysis?
11. What does Bourdieu's survey demonstrate? How does that fit with the overall argument he's presented thus far?

Questions on Will Straw, "Exhausted Commodities" (this essay is available online at <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1148/1067>)

1. What is the relationship of waste and value?
2. How are 2nd hand stores (or charity shops) similar to superstores?
3. Which is faster, physical decay or semiotic decay, and why does it matter?
4. How do used records and CDs regain lost value?

5. What does his example of Quebec dance singles demonstrate?