

Internet Revolution, attentionalism and slow-thinking, with Alexander Bard and Pierre Bourdieu

[Alexander Bard](#) (1961 -), "Internet sociologist", speaks of the Internet as one of the greatest revolutions of mankind. The capitalist system is being replaced by a netocracy. Bard embraces this new world order and exclaims 'We ought to make revolution and hang all politicians who haven't got any twitter account'. As opposed to this stands [Pierre Bourdieu](#) (1930-2002), one of the most prominent public intellectuals of 20th century, who on one hand dreamed of a society with interaction and participatory information which the Internet is providing, but on the other hand warned of and fought against the superficiality and simplifications which he saw emerging in the new society. Bard represents a liberal let-go-mentality, while Bourdieu clearly stated "I don't believe in [laissez-faire](#)".

No doubt, our society is rapidly changing and one has to adapt. However I want to point out that there are different ways to adapt, I sympathize with Bourdieu's desire for more "slow-thinking", and I find his attempts to find collective intellectual solutions appealing.

A world-changing Internet revolution? Alexander Bard's prophesy of the new netocracy

"Alexander Bard's provocative keynote speech at Next Berlin 2012 challenges the way history is taught, with industrialization presented as the climax of human history. He believes we need to contextualize history not in terms of the Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Industrial Age, but rather in terms of information, such as spoken information, written information, printed information, broadcasted information and finally the Internet as participatory information." (ref: [examined life blog](#))

In the book *Netocracy: The new power elite and life after capitalism* (first published 2000), written by Alexander Bard together with Jan Söderqvist, they speak of a new world order emerging - The netocracy:

"This society is by definition post-capitalist, because the requirements needed to achieve status under capitalism – money, fame, titles, and so on – no longer have any value for entrance applications to any of the higher and more powerful networks. The netocratic status which is now in demand requires entirely different characteristics: knowledge, contacts, overview, vision. In other words: qualities which contribute to increasing the network's status and making it even more powerful."

Bourdieu's dream of an international network of intellectuals and his criticism of the superficiality of the new emerging society

Bourdieu never really saw the Internet coming, his career ended before the Internet boom. We can thus only speculate what he would've thought of Facebook, Google, Twitter etc. I think we can be quite sure though, that he would have had both positive and negative things to say about it.

When Bourdieu spoke on television, he expressed the wish that TV should become more interactive. This kind of interactivity is now very much offered on the Internet. Bourdieu did also say that he dreamed of "an international network where scientists and journalists can fight the simplifications and provide truly sharp analysis" ([ref \(only Swedish\)](#)). To help accomplish this he suggested that one could establish a telephone exchange system where intellectuals could keep in touch and contact each other when needed. If only he would've known about the Internet he would've realized that the Internet would work much better for this purpose. In other words, Internet does to a large extent provide the means which Bourdieu demanded.

On the other hand, Bourdieu was a fierce critic of the superficiality and simplifications in the new society which he saw emerging. And this kind of superficiality and simplifications, I think it's fair to say has only increased with the Internet. While Bard to large extent embraces a let-go-mentality to the Internet, I'm quite sure Bourdieu would've taken a very different stand, as for example indicated in this quote:

“Regarding culture, my beliefs are the same as those I hold for everything else: I don't believe in laissez-faire. What I hope to show [...] is that all too often, [in International exchanges,] the logic of laissez-faire favours the circulation of the very worst ideas at the expense of the very best.” (ref)

Bard's imaginative 17-year-olds vs Bourdieu's intellectual hard-workers

When Bard speaks of an ideal for his vision he mentions 17-year-olds. The 17-year-olds have dreams and see a world full of possibilities. The 17-year-olds often believe that they can change the world, and also have the will to do so. Bard said “my experience is that the absolutely best ones to ask if one wants to find out things about the society is 17-year-olds” (ref (only Swedish)), and another quote “What Korean schoolgirls do today, the rest of humanity will do five years from now. Always remember that sentence.” (ref) When Bourdieu speaks of an ideal, he mentions hard-working intellectuals who are ready to sacrifice attention and fame for rigorous high-quality work. Bourdieu maintains he has a deep respect for “true journalists”, those who take their job seriously and don't let themselves be manipulated by media's “urgency, clichés and commercial logic” ((ref (only Swedish))).

I think this can help us understand the difference in political approach between Bard and Bourdieu. Bard's political enemies include the ones of old systems who don't adapt to new systems, while Bourdieu's political enemies include the “fast-thinkers” who only offer cultural fast-food and perhaps adapt too easily in new systems. Bard's political stance is a kind of laissez-faire, he has for example blamed the liberal party for not being liberal enough, while Bourdieu was against laissez-faire and he has been said to blame the political left for not being left enough (for whatever that is supposed to mean, I'm not quite sure).

The Netocracy's informationalism and attentionalism vs Bourdieu's need for reflection and “slow thinking”

Bard and Söderqvist describes a society where you must always be on the go, always be ready to act quick and without hesitation. It is a society of “informationalism” and “attentionalism”. And their message is clear, either you join this or you'll get ruled over. Here are some quotes from their book:

“The rules will change, but the constant underlying message of the curators [a kind of master netocrats] to their net-citizens will be simple and unambiguous: you can never network well enough, you can never be good enough at communicating, you can never let yourself rest, you must constantly be ready to jump, constantly ready to learn new things. Thus a new set of masters will seize power and the language of power with which to control informational society.”

“The decisive factor governing where in the hierarchy an individual ends up is [---] his or her attentionality: their access to and capacity to absorb, sort, overview, generate the necessary attention for, and share valuable information. [---] Attention is the only hard currency in the virtual world. The strategy and logic of the netocracy are therefore attentionalist rather than capitalist.”

“Anyone trying to resist developments and persist with political agitation in the old way would not survive in the society ruled by the netocracy. He or she would look like a despicable information-tyrant. The new conditions of the informational media landscape mean that the plurarchic public is turning its back on the old political stage.”

If we look at Bourdieu's writings the approach is quite different. He doesn't spend so much time predicting what will happen. He rather speaks from a critic's perspective, and focuses on what kind of change is desired. According to Bourdieu it is the very duty of an intellectual to be a critic, to criticize, give suggestions and provide genuinely sharp analysis. One of his central contributions was a talk he held in television about television. There Bourdieu focused on the need for reflection and slow-thinking, as for example indicated in this quote:

“Sometimes I want to go back over every word the television newspeople use, often without thinking and with no idea of the difficulty and the seriousness of the subjects they are talking about or the responsibilities they assume by talking about them in front of the thousands of people who watch

the news without understanding what they see and without understanding that they don't understand."

Theresa Benér describes in an interview with Bourdieu that according to Bourdieu TV 'loves to summon "fast-thinkers", the kind of semi-intellectual famous people, for some quick, nicely packaged pseudo-thinkings which people take for profundities of topical problems. Bourdieu argues that these media "fast-thinkers" are really harmful types. They destroy both the serious journalism and the true intellectual production of knowledge.' (for more clarification of this issue I recommend this blog post [Pierre Bourdieu, philosophy and empirics](#))

One of Bourdieu's main problems with television was the lack of time. He concludes, [paraphrasing Plato](#), that when you are in a hurry you cannot think. Bourdieu would occasionally refuse to appear on television with the motivation that the time he was offered was so short that he wouldn't be able to say anything at all (however he also claimed that under certain circumstances it was intellectuals duty to appear on TV). With the short time, all you can do is think in "cliches", and "banal, conventional, common ideas that are received generally".

We cannot know what Bourdieu would've thought of the microblog Twitter where you are only allowed to write messages with a maximum of 140 characters, but I think it's fair to guess that he wouldn't have been all too positive about it. He probably would not have subscribed to Bard's: *"We ought to make revolution and hang all politicians who haven't got any twitter account"* ([ref \(only Swedish\)](#))

End discussion

For certain, the times they are a-changing. And when a big change occurs, the worst thing one can do is probably to just ignore, go on as if nothing has happened. The main part of Bard's critique seems to be against these people. He says that the [politicians "lack of interest for the newly emerging society is directly indecent"](#) ([ref \(only Swedish\)](#)). However, I think this criticism doesn't really target someone like Bourdieu. Bourdieu didn't show a lack of interest for the newly emerging society, he just was strongly critical of many aspects of it. Both Bard and Bourdieu take interest in the new society, but while Bard seems more inclined to "go with the flow" Bourdieu raises a more critical voice. Bourdieu's approach is much about looking for collective intellectual solutions which is something I find appealing.

To better understand the difference between Alexander Bard and Pierre Bourdieu, I think it can help to consider the difference in temperament between them. Speaking in Jungian terms, I'm quite sure that Bard is more of an extravert and Bourdieu more of an introvert (see earlier post on [Jung's Typology and Philosophy](#)). The extravert is inclined to underestimate and misunderstand the usefulness of the introvert and the introvert is inclined to underestimate and misunderstand the usefulness of the extravert.

Reference and further reading

External links

[Alexander Bard & Jan Söderqvist - The Netocracy @ Amazon.com](#)

[Pierre Bourdieu - On Television](#) (free full text)

[Alexander Bard's blog](#) - I quite enjoyed this blog, as I think it shows another side of Bard. Here I think he shows more humbleness and thoughtfulness than on twitter and in his public appearances. For example [here](#) and [here](#). I like his concept of publishing mail conversations on the blog.

[Criticism of Netocracy by Slavoj Zizek](#)

[Sociology is a martial art](#) - TV documentary on Bourdieu

[Alexander Bard @ campus party](#) - Public speech by Bard

[Intervju med Bourdieu av Theresa Bener](#) (Swedish)

[Bourdieu - fortfarande inflytelserik eller på väg ut?](#) (Swedish radio)

Internal links

[A philosopher's guide to Pierre Bourdieu](#)

Sartre's "total intellectual" vs. Bourdieu's "collective intellectual", and the philosophers role
Pierre Bourdieu, philosophy and empirics