

Camera Austria

Pierre Bourdieu
In Algeria. Testimonies of Uprooting.

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In the year 2001, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu entrusted Camera Austria with his entire archive of photographs taken during his field research work in Algeria between 1958 and 1961. It was his express wish that Camera Austria make these pictures accessible to the public for the first time in exhibition and publication form. In collaboration with the Fondation Bourdieu, the photographs were viewed, sorted, and have since been exhibited worldwide and featured in a monographic publication that has been translated into eight languages.



The exchange between Camera Austria, Fondation Pierre Bourdieu and the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu between 2000 and 2002 led to a comprehensive project: he entrusted his entire archive of photographs taken during his fieldwork in Algeria between the years of 1958 and 1961, and representing, as he noted, his earliest and at the same time his most topical work, to Camera Austria with the intention of exhibiting and publishing these photographs for the first time. In collaboration with Bourdieu who unfortunately died in 2002, and Franz Schultheis, the photographic documents were looked through, structured and related to the ethnographic and sociological studies Bourdieu carried out in Algeria during the same period.

Representing mainly ethnographic primary material, these photographs must be viewed and interpreted in relation to the specific scientific interest underlying the choice of subject, the angle of view, the inclusion of context and the resulting construction of the object to be captured, if one does not want to indulge in an ahistoric aesthetic purism and to ignore the social meaning and political significance of these images. They are “framed” by their very conditions of production, operating in a specific socio-historical context which they aim to document or, in Bourdieu’s term, “objectify” in a particular way.

All of Bourdieu’s fundamental themes of sociology are already present even at this early stage: he addresses the subliminal rules of exchange, the social embedding of economy, the relation of temporal structures to rationality, the symbolic orders of society, as well as the hierarchies between the sexes, generations and social classes. His photographs serve as a catalyst for carving out the different thematic complexes found in Bourdieu’s theoretic works.

His groundbreaking fieldwork, now supplemented for the first time by his photographs, provides insight into the nascent state of his sociology. Apart from this dimension of shedding light on the evolution of Bourdieu’s work, his images also comprise an impressive socio-historical document. They testify to a society full of uneven developments where people still have not overcome their homeless and uprooted situation their alienation from both tradition and modernity. Maybe it is Algeria’s tragedy that even after four decades these images have still lost none of their topicality and realism.

The exhibition “Pierre Bourdieu: In Algeria. Testimonies of Uprooting.” was curated by Christine Frisinghelli and Franz Schultheis, Fondation Bourdieu and was realised with the financial support of Graz 2003 – Cultural Capital of Europe and was a contribution to its program.

Acknowledgement:

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