The Endless Fields of Pierre Bourdieu

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Abstract. Laying out the logic of Bourdieu’s approach to institutional fields, this essay argues that Bourdieu’s theorization of the logic of practice is a generic contest for domination in a plurality of homologously organized fields. Bourdieu aligns all practices through the logic of domination, which allows him to homologize group relations in every field. This homologization depends on a homogenization of fields, the sociological effacement of their cultural specificity. The essay then contrasts Bourdieu’s model of the practical logic of fields to Friedland’s understanding of the institutional logic of practice. Keywords. Pierre Bourdieu; institutional logic; substance

Like many who looked to the institutional level to theorize above the level of individuals, organizations and groups, but below the totalities of structuralist Marxism and neo-functionalism, I was drawn to and drew from the practice theory of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu built a theoretical apparatus conjoining structure and individual, yet refused the rational, sovereign subject as a starting point, rather positing the body as a social operator, putting embodied practices at the centre of his theory. Working at supra-organizational levels, he made power interior to culture. I was dazzled, and yet dissatisfied, a dissatisfaction that I now better understand and would like to try to articulate, for I think a serious consideration of this great thinker clarifies how daunting the task of developing an adequate institutional theory is going to be.

Bourdieu has been the touchstone for a current of work that has turned towards practice within institutional fields as the site from which it might
be possible to develop a new intellectual space between rational subjects on the one hand, and objective and lawful social structures on the other. This essay will first lay out the logic of Bourdieu’s approach to habitus and field, habitus as the transformation of position into individual disposition, and field as the objective structuring of those positions which command different amounts of the capital dominant in the field. Scholars have criticized Bourdieu’s practice theory for what they see as his economic reduction, pointing to the import of autonomous moral and political dimensions (Alexander, 1995; Lamont, 1992). The problem, I will argue, is not cultural autonomy or economic reduction, as much as it is the theorization of the logic of practice as a generic contest for domination in a plurality of homologously organized fields.

I will argue that power is both the primary interest of practice and motor of field dynamics in Bourdieu’s theory. Bourdieu aligns all practices through the logic of domination, which allows him to homologize group relations in every field. This homologization depends on a homogenization of fields, the sociological effacement of their cultural specificity. I illustrate that effacement by examining first his treatment of culture, which he understands as a primary medium for social reproduction of dominant groups, and next his treatment of the sexual division of labour, which he understands as the originary model for the organization of social domination. In both I seek to show how Bourdieu politicizes culture as opposed to culturalizing power, thereby homogenizing the logic of practice across institutional fields.

In the remainder of the essay I compare Bourdieu’s model of the practical logic of fields to my own understanding of the institutional logic of practice (Friedland, 2002, 2009; Friedland and Alford, 1991). Whereas Bourdieu uses a commensurable logic of practice to differentiate agonistic groups seeking power; I parse practices into incommensurable institutional logics. Within the framework of institutional logics, power is a medium whereas in Bourdieu’s fields, it has primacy both as an end and as a determinant of practice. In keeping with Aristotle’s notion of \textit{praxis}, institutional logics join subjects, practices and objects into bundled sets which have an inner referentiality, a performative order, in which an unobservable substance is enacted in practice. This understanding of institutional logic suggests that love, too, may offer a useful template with which to think the social.

\textbf{Habitus, Capital and Practice}

Bourdieu developed his theory of practice through his early ethnographic studies of the Kabyle Berbers in the highlands of Algeria. For Bourdieu practice is habitual, primarily non-discursive and un-reflexive, routinized behaviours, scripts not scripted, regular but not rule-bound. Bourdieu’s is not a sociology of action, centred on rational or meaningful behaviour of a knowing subject, nor a behavioural sociology centred on determined repertoires that can be described independently of their meaning for those
who act them out. It is in between, objectively meaningful without intention, patterned without rules, logics of action not governed by logic.

Bourdieu deploys the concept of habitus to articulate interested individual action on the one hand, and a constraining social structure, on the other. Social structure is twice objectified: in the human body as habitus and in the spatio-temporal organization of persons and objects in the world. That world is differentiated into different fields within which different forms of capital—economic, cultural, social and symbolic being the generic forms—are differentially active and distributed among positions within that field. Habitus is the incorporation of position as disposition, that is, as an incorporation of the categorical order immanent to that social structure of positions, a structure that is only ‘active’ to the extent it is embodied as habitus (Bourdieu, 1998: 47; 1990b: 146; 1977: 81).

Reproduction of social structure derives from its internalization, not primarily as normative values or rules, but as transposable cognitive classifications, ‘practical taxonomies’, as tastes or preferences, and ‘schemes of action’, all of which undergird the ‘practical sense’ or ‘feel for the game’ by which agents understand ‘what is to be done in a given situation’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 25; 1990b: 146). Habitus is a ‘structuring structure ... which generates and organizes practices and representations that are objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing conscious aiming at ends’ (Bourdieu, 1990b: 53). Common habitus assures that practices always have a common sense, a reasonableness as opposed to a rationality, understood by all, un sens pratique, an intentionless but nevertheless ‘objective meaning’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 80–81, 86; 1990a: 109). Practice is overwhelming organized through this world of doxa, the taken-for-granted, naturalized world of everyday life, as opposed to the reflexive and discursive world of ortho and heterodoxy. Reflexive, self-aware representation accounts for only a small and variable fraction of the actionable. Rules and explicit principles—codes, rules, genealogies—rush in only where dispositions fail to produce the practices required by structure (Bourdieu 1977: 50, 17–21, 33–38, 43–52, 54; 1984: 480). Habitus—theorized, but unobserved—renders the improvised and strategic variations of individuals compatible with the requisites of institutional structure which formed it in the first place (Bourdieu, 1977: 95).

What then are the sources of agency and change? Where the conditions under which habitus was formed are coincident with the conditions of its operation, practice is adapted to structure, anticipation of the future incorporated in the past (Bourdieu, 1990b: 61–62). Intention either becomes epiphenomenal or the circumscribed marginalist variations of the neo-classical world (Bourdieu, 1990b: 53, 58). However, classifications are also resources that can be brought into play strategically to pursue one’s interests. Practical logic has a cultural efficiency, an ability to generate appropriate responses from a minimum of symbolic oppositions (Bourdieu 1977: 141–143). This means that between the generality of the classification and the particularity of life, there is always a gap. Transposable classifications
afford both a generality and a polysemous quality which enable a given act, object, location or time to be looked at from multiple points of view, using a host of loosely interchangeable, parallel, weakly analogical oppositions (Bourdieu, 1977: 117–119, 124–130). On the one hand, this is functional for a culturally efficient integration of the social order in which endless variations on a ‘few generative principles’ structure all practices across all fields (Bourdieu, 1977: 110–112, 141–142). On the other hand, there is always room for maneuver, for manipulation of meanings.

Bourdieu’s society operates through socialization with cunning. It is the gap between habitus and institutional structure—whether due to the conditions of formation of a habitus being misaligned with the conditions in which the agent operates or due to the very economical quality of its operations that depends on a ‘fuzzy logic’—that makes both creative agency and critical social movement possible. It is a theory of path dependency, of social inertia, where both distinctive personal and collective new histories are made out of disjuncture between embodied pasts and institutional presents (Bourdieu 1990b: 62–63).

The Class of Culture

Habitus, as disposition, is the embodiment of ‘conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence’, its foundational layers having been set down in response to the material necessities of one’s youth (Bourdieu, 1990b: 53–54). Class condition permeates all others, making habitus into a class unconscious, a corporeal, cultural mode of being manifest in language, thought, taste, understandings, a socially stratified common sense and a powerful mechanism of social reproduction.

Taste, manifest in cultural capital, is politically powerful, because, as we shall see, power is the sociological content of culture. We, too, have become Kabyle, status honour, the collective recognition of certain behaviours as honourable, the form in which we misrecognize class. Class is transmuted in misrecognized, and therefore legitimating, form as taste through primary socialization in the family and cultivation and consecration through the school (Bourdieu, 1984: 85, 250). Taste is naturalized social position, the ‘sense of the social structure’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 474). Cultural capacities, an inherited ability to appreciate and categorize, and hence to consume, particular kinds of distinguished, and hence distinguishing, cultural objects becomes a marker of one’s superior essence, an unacknowledged criterion for recruitment to and performance within elite schools, which then consecrate that distinction through a title—degree or certificate—which becomes the basis of recruitment to elite positions in the state and corporate world (Bourdieu, 1996). The granting of diplomas, an objectification of symbolic capital, Bourdieu argues, beyond certifying a technical competence, as a result of ‘the hidden linkage between scholastic aptitude and cultural heritage’, creates a ‘veritable state nobility, whose authority and legitimacy are guaranteed by the academic title’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 22). Dominant groups
The Endless Fields of Pierre Bourdieu
Roger Friedland

reproduce themselves through the distinctiveness of their culture and their superior access to scholastic titles, which, like ‘the dubbing of a knight’, makes them ‘licensed to dominate’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 21–22).

In Distinction, his cartography of French consumption patterns, Bourdieu argues that the distinction, or status, which accrues to life style, is the form in which a class essentializes its right to privilege, grounding it in its members’ apparent being, rather than in their historically arbitrary becoming. Capitalist production is legitimated in consumption. Bourdieu’s thesis is that class is both manifested and legitimated in the ways in which class members classify. Class, he writes, is a ‘universal principle of explanation and classification, defining the rank occupied in all possible fields’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 114). Behind the welter of cultural practices arrayed there Bourdieu discerns a unitary, generative principle: ‘class habitus, the internalized form of class condition and of the conditionings it entails’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 101). Specifically he argues that the aesthetic disposition, manifested in the ability to autonomize form from content, to neutralize function, distinguishes the dominant class. Grounded in disinterest, from either pleasure or the good, the Kantian aesthetic is a bourgeois form.

The working class, whose practices all bespeak the coercive force of necessity in their existence, is the zero point against which each class seeks to distinguish itself. The working class embodies pure materiality and function, the vulgar aesthetic par excellence. Distinction is defined negatively, as difference, ['the gaps which are the essence of the race' (Bourdieu, 1984: 251)], against those poorer in economic and cultural capital. ‘The dominated classes’, he writes, ‘intervene in the symbolic struggles to appropriate the distinctive properties … and … to define the legitimate properties and the legitimate mode of appropriation, as a passive reference point, a foil’. In consequence they experience themselves as culturally unworthy, as a nature vis-a-vis the dominant’s culture (Bourdieu, 1984: 251).

The stake of stakes in the class struggle is the ‘legitimate principle of domination’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 254). If the theory has a Marxist motor; it is a Nietzschean frame. It was Nietzsche who declared that in place of ‘sociology’, a ‘theory of forms of domination. In place of “society”, the culture complex, as my chief interest (as a whole or in its parts)’ (Nietzsche, 1967: 255). And like Nietzsche the locus of this most socially productive struggle is not between the dominant class and the dominated class. Nietzsche’s understood value creation as a clash between rival wills to power between the dominants, not between them and ‘the herd’. Likewise for Bourdieu the differences that make a difference are within the dominant class, over the relative efficacy of economic, educational, cultural and social capitals. ‘Social identity’, Bourdieu writes, ‘lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 479). Indeed the dominated do not exist as a class, but as a “mass” of ... contingent, disorganized multiplicity,
interchangeable and innumerable, existing only statistically’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 468). Bourdieu here culturally transmutes class struggle into a clash of differential disinterests, ascetic intellectuals without money versus the mindlessly and luxuriant monied, both of whom distinguish themselves against the popular, base working class weighted down by necessity, propelled by impulse, those who would have registered in Nietzsche’s nostrils (Bourdieu, 1984: 255).

Bourdieu derives the content of dominant cultural forms from their difference, not from anything immanent within them. Aesthetic distinction is organized by its distance from necessity, from bodily hungers, and, just like science, according to internal structures of difference, ‘obligatory pairs of opposites’—whether aesthetic or epistemological schools—which typically have ‘no content’ other than the opposition between the positions in the institutional field with which they are associated (Bourdieu, 2000: 101). Both in his studies of cultural consumption and production, Bourdieu makes the politics of culture into a struggle for an empty cell: the transhistorical space of domination. This allows him to sociologize the logic of structuralist linguistics, where meanings are founded on hierarchical differences between signs and the distribution of capitals with which they are associated. In the domain of cultural consumption the signs by which a group knows itself do not signify by their relation to referents, but by their distance from necessity, from the absence of referents, from poverty with regard to the world of objects. This distance is marked by abstraction, the mastery of codes, refinement, intellection, non-representation, an aesthetic indifference to the sensuous tasks of survival.

The theory is breath-taking; it is also empirically problematic. I am not talking about the research showing that while cultural capital does shape academic success (DiMaggio, 1982), it has not prevented a massive accession of those born to neither cultural or economic capital to higher degrees and powerful positions (DiMaggio, 2007; Goldthorpe, 2007). I am referring to the data that Bourdieu himself provides. Distinction consists primarily of a series of tabular and correspondence analyses of stated preferences or reports about behavior of a random sample of French people organized according to occupational categories. These tables do not demonstrate the relative effects of different forms of capital on these preferences. Although he ranks cultural practices by their degree of legitimacy, he provides no evidence that they indeed legitimate. Bourdieu simply maps cultural differences on to a set of occupational differences.

The problem is that many, if not most, of the differences do not differentiate the class hierarchy. Bourdieu, for example, asked respondents to judge whether a photographer could make a beautiful, interesting, meaningless or ugly photo of a first communion, a folk dance, a pregnant woman, cabbages, the bark of a tree, a snake or a sunset over the sea (Bourdieu, 1984: 35–38). Take the cabbage. To imagine it beautiful, you’ve got to hold cole slaw, the low price of cabbage, and flatulence at bay. But in the case of cabbage, only 7% of the working class, 11% of the middle class and 18% of the upper
classes think it would make a beautiful photograph (Bourdieu, 1984: 37, 526–527). Most French people don’t think it can be pretty. Recall that the dominated classes are hypothesized to refuse meaningless images, to reject treating them as ‘an image signifying itself, and therefore having no other referent than itself’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 42) But the table shows that about half of each of the three classes—working, middle, upper—think it would make a meaningless photo. As for most other cultural practices French social classes are not culturally distinct.

For a practice to legitimate a class, for it to be misrecognized as a sign of its essential nature, it must signify of and for its practitioners. Particularly if the class is not culturally distinct, the cultural practice must be class distinct. In most cases, this does not hold. While there are often class differentials across practices, the larger numbers in the lesser classes tend to wash out the differentials between classes. Enter the cabbage: if you found somebody able to aestheticize its foliated form, it is only even money that they would be from the better classes. It’s difficult to imagine how this aesthetic disposition would legitimate the dominant class if the overwhelming majority of the dominant class doesn’t think it aesthetic and those who do think it beautiful are not overwhelming from the dominant class.

Bourdieu has not erased popular culture, as is sometimes alleged. He has neutered it. Approvingly citing Bakhtin’s analysis of the hierarchical inversions of the carnivalesque in Rabelais, Bourdieu emphasizes the impotence of transgression (Bourdieu, 1984: 491). The dominated can oppose the dominant, but in his schema they can only engage in strategies of inversion, valorizing what is devalued, thereby excluding themselves from the social power to evaluate (Bourdieu, 1984: 477–478, 559). Indeed contests by the dominated within any institutional field tend to reproduce it. In the domain of law, for instance, considering the role of complainants and defendants, Bourdieu generalizes the juridicalization of conflict as an instance of ‘negative functionalism’. ‘These processes’, he writes, ‘urge us to think that any form of opposition to dominant interests fulfill a useful function for the perpetuation of the fundamental order of the social field: that heresy tends to reinforce the very order which, while it combats it simultaneously welcomes and absorbs it and emerges even stronger from the confrontation’ (Bourdieu, 1987: 837).

As a series of class-based homologues, Bourdieu’s theory undercuts the transformative possibilities of any classificatory system. Part of the problem is that he defines the dominant cultural forms not by their content, but by their difference. The politics of cultural contest is a struggle for the space of domination, and only secondarily the logic of domination. This is true not only in consumption of culture, but in its production. Bourdieu speaks about the production of ideas and art as governed by a ‘cultural field’, which defines itself in opposition to other fields, a field dominated by an internal cultural legitimacy as opposed to legitimacy which derives from these other fields (economic, political and religious) (Bourdieu, 1969). Agents are
driven by the field to compete for ‘cultural legitimacy’. Indeed, the logic of
the field is equivalent to this competition. Specifically, the artists, writers,
critics and reviewers, galleries and publishing houses, academies and
universities which constitute the cultural field are driven by competition for
consecration by those recognized as authorities (Bourdieu, 1969). Different
kinds of cultural products have different degrees of legitimacy, marked
by the parallel legitimacy of the institutions which provide legitimation.
Legitimacy is marked by successful claims to universality (Bourdieu,
1998: 142). It is the struggle for legitimacy, for consecration, and to
legitimate the legitimating authorities that makes one’s products legitimate,
that animates the history of the cultural world.

Agents who engage in different practices do struggle for legitimacy, for
authority, for recognition whether by publishing houses, universities or
the state. However, when Bourdieu reduces the logic of the cultural field
to the struggle for cultural legitimacy, he replicates the moves of those
American institutionalists who emphasize the process by which new forms
are made real, legitimate, accountable and general. The meaning of the
cultural production, its hermeneutic content, slips from view, in much the
same way that production studies in culture tend to make the meanings
of what is produced incidental to the analysis. The specific properties of
the production and the product are sociologically inert. The logic of an
institutional field is given by struggles for trans-institutional operators:
domination, legitimacy, universality. Culture has a political content; power
lacks a cultural content. Habitus is a here an embodied relation to means,
class a crass struggle for distinction.

The Power of Sex

That for Bourdieu the logic of practice is overwhelmingly the pursuit, per-
formance, and reproduction of power is very clear in Masculine Domination,
a volume in which he returned to the sexual principles undergirding his
early studies of the Kabyle. The sexed domestic space is, for Bourdieu,
both the ur form and site of the ‘original illusio’, and the medium for the
formation of a habitus that allows us to function in all fields. ‘The initial
form of illusio’, he writes, ‘is investment in the domestic space, the site of a
complex process of the socialization of the sexual and the sexualization of
the social’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 166). It is here that our desire to be recognized,
esteeemed, indeed loved by others is transmuted into a social world by
our becoming objects for the valuations of powerful subjects, where we
first learn to play a game whose mechanism and object—particularly for
men—is domination.

That originary site is organized through a sexualized power structure.
‘The social order’, he writes, ‘functions as an immense symbolic ma-
chine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded’
(Bourdieu, 2001: 9). Bourdieu delineates a trans-historical, androcentric
order which imprints, or ‘somatizes’, power relations between men and
women into their very bodies, their bodily \textit{hexis} as posture, carriage and feeling, their differentiated locations in physical and social space, in a skein of homologous metaphorical oppositions (hard/soft, out/in) which not only convert power into bodily nature, but then grounds those power relations in that ‘naturalized social construction’, thereby grounding domination in the senses (Bourdieu, 2001: 23). These metaphorical orders, this system of classification, is not only applied to sexually marked bodies, but incorporated in their very comportment. It also organizes the social and institutional positions which are sexed by their differential recruitment of men and women, differentials justified by those very bodily differences.

The social world constructs the body as a sexually defined reality and as the depository of sexually defining principles of vision and division. This embodied social programme of perception is applied to all the things of the world and firstly to the \textit{body} itself, in its biological reality. It is this programme which constructs the difference between the biological sexes in conformity with the principles of a mythic vision of the world rooted in the arbitrary relationship of domination of men over women, itself inscribed, with the division of labour, in the reality of the social order (Bourdieu, 2001: 11).

Sexed cognition becomes an act of submission to sexual domination, its ultimate source. This sexed \textit{doxa} derives from the homological alignment of embodiment, classification and social division.

Bourdieu not only makes power into the constituting principle of sexual division, he makes that power-laden sexual division the machine language of all forms of domination. State authority, founded arbitrarily and with violence, itself depends on this primary incorporation of the family structure of domination as habitus, ‘inscription of a relation of domination in the body’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 168). The meaning of sexual difference is the power that constitutes it. Indeed for Bourdieu the family is not only a legitimate structure of domination, a compact between men and women held together by the symbolic violence to which women submit, but between fathers and children by the children’s hateful submission to their father’s mediation of the social ‘reality’ principle. In traditional society family cohesion, Bourdieu argues, ‘lasts no longer than the power relations capable of holding individual interests together’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 65). Later he would view the family as a symbolic non-aggression pact in which the parties forego the use of violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 145). For its members the family is to be primarily understood as a means to accumulate symbolic capital, to assure the lineage, to accumulate affines, an instrument by which patriarchs perpetuate their power. Women’s submission derives from their objectivity as exchangeable tokens in the service of expanding the symbolic capital of men who rule those families and are locked in agonistic competition with one another (Bourdieu, 2001: 42–44). The right to compete for honor, and hence maleness, is the basis of male solidarity.
Power has primacy. Love, which Bourdieu invokes mindful of the risks of ‘comic pedantry’, is to be understood as a fragile, ‘miraculous truce’, a ‘suspension of power relations’. He writes:

... the loving subject can obtain recognition only from another subject, but one which, like himself or herself, abdicates the intention of dominating. He or she freely hands his or her freedom to a master who in turn hands over his or her own, coinciding with him or her in an act of free alienation that is indefinitely asserted (through the non-redundant repetition of ‘I love you’). He or she has the experience of being a quasi-divine creator who makes, ex nihilo, the beloved, through the power that she or he grants him or her ...; but a creator who ... accepts to be the creature of his creature. (Bourdieu, 2001: 112)

Love is here constituted by its distance from domination. Love, for Bourdieu, is an extraordinary exchange of power, a historically recent form of mutual recognition which, echoing Max Weber’s original insight, has become the ‘secular substitute for God’.

Bourdieu gives primacy to the miraculous cessation of mutual objectification, rather than another possibility: love’s necessary role in mutual subjectification, in the recognition, and indeed production, of shared singularity.4

Bourdieu constitutes sexual difference between man and woman not in genital function, in the making of life, but in the power relation between them. The anatomical difference between male and female sex organs, ‘in particular’, he argues, is the mark of male power and the medium for its legitimation (Bourdieu, 2001: 11, 15). And the super-ordination of men vis a vis women is grounded in the subordination of biological to social reproduction, of the making of bodies to the accumulation of power, of the private domestic to the public official spheres (Bourdieu, 2001: 46–47).

That this power differential does not exhaust the meaning of masculinity, and hence of sexual anatomy and the sexualization of the social, is indicated by the very Kabyle ethnographic materials Bourdieu presents in this volume. The ‘phallus’, Bourdieu contends, ‘concentrates all the collective fantasies of fecundating potency’ (Bourdieu, 2001: 12). Yet, as Bourdieu himself shows, it is what men share sexually with women that is emphasized by the Kayle metaphorical order—the generative swelling of the penis, the womb and the breast (‘the fullness of life’), between the egg and the testicle—not their differences. This Kabyle schema itself emphasizes the life-giving powers of both men and women. That it is not sexed indicates that power relations, here condensed in the marking of the male sexual act, do not exhaust the meanings they accord to sexuality.

The primacy given to male penetration is an expression of masculine power. However, life-giving powers are neither arbitrary in their anatomy, nor do they neatly convert to the power of men over women, a transmuting, as Bourdieu claims, of ‘social nomos into a necessity of nature (phusis)’ (Bourdieu, 2001: 13).5 In fact, the Kabyle myth locates masculine primacy in historical time, preserving an earlier moment when it was women who
showed men what their sexual organs were good for and how good it felt (Bourdieu, 2001: 18). Life-giving pleasure, including the knowledge of fire, predates masculine domination. The Kabyle story preserves this original female gift. If the sexual act becomes an act of masculine domination of bodies; it does not begin as one in the Kabyle narrative. It begins rather as a giving of flesh. Kabyle myth does not ground male power in genital function; quite the contrary; it makes the sexed body into a site for the expression of power, but never reducible to it. To be a man is to pursue honor, to be unwomanly, to be defined by one’s distance from that sexed position, to be in the company of only other men who pursue that honor. The Kabyle story perhaps preserves not one code, but two, the power that women take in mutual pleasure as opposed to the pleasure that men take in power, indeed a power that Bourdieu makes the center of his theory of practice. The Kabyle themselves suggest that masculine domination overwrites mutual pleasure, power over love.

Bourdieu, who recognizes the historicity of seemingly natural differences appears to take as the nature of the social, and the nature of the sexual, that very historical act of male sexual domination. Domination, as he says, is the ‘better part’ (Bourdieu, 2001: 33). Men, he declares, understood and understand sexuality as ‘an aggressive and essentially physical act of conquest oriented towards penetration and orgasm’ (Bourdieu, 2001: 20). Bourdieu, like Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, here eroticizes power over bodies as the core of sexuality (Bourdieu, 2001: 20–21). Arbitrary gendered relations of power are the ground of sexual relations of desire, such that gendered organization of domination ‘creates, organizes, expresses and directs desire—male desire as the desire for possession, eroticized domination, and female desire as the desire for masculine domination...’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 21). Bourdieu here understands male pleasure in female pleasure as a power to give pleasure. Erotic love has a kind of sadomasochistic logic.

There are alternatives to domination as the primary term by which to understand the erotic relation as world- and subject-making, and hence their co-implication. Psychoanalysis points to the way in which ego-ideals subjectify through an imaginary identification based on love (Widick, 2003). In Socrates’ philosophy, love is a ‘giving birth in beauty’, a mutual birthing of beautiful life which is the ground of law-making and justice (Plato, 1999: 43). And in Marion’s phenomenology, erotic love is critical to the individualization of subject formation (Marion, 2007). That Bourdieu makes erotic love into a domain of instrumental mastery is integrally related to the ways in which he gives primacy to domination as the modality and meaning of practice in his theory of fields.

Bourdieu’s Endless Fields

A number of prominent sociologists have urged organizational theorists to deploy Bourdieu’s approach to organizational fields (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008; Swartz, 2008). Depending neither on the rationality of
Bourdieu’s theory of fields at first lookseminently promising as a base for thinking institutionally (Lounsbury and Ventresca, 2003). The ‘practical world’ derives from the joining of anincorporated habitus and a field, each of which is organized around ‘already realized ends’ (Bourdieu, 1990b: 53).

With his identification of the institutional sources of practical logic, hisstatement in *The Logic of Practice* looks like a clarion call for institutional theory:

[*T*]he dualistic vision that recognizes only the self-transparent act of conscious-ness or the externally determined thing has to give way to the real logic of action, which brings together two objectifications of history, objectification in bodies and objectification in institutions or, which amounts to the same thing, two states of capital, objectified and incorporated ....(Bourdieu, 1990b: 57)

Institutional fields are relatively autonomous games, arenas each with theirown gravitational logic, zones in which particular forms of capital haveefficacy in the pursuit of that which is at stake in the game (Bourdieu andWacquant, 1992: 97–101). The logic of a field is overwhelmingly definedby its distributive possibilities between groups of people differentiallypositioned within it, the stances and strategies those positions afford, andthe conditions of access to those positions and the capitals they command.Bourdieu neo-structurally locates capitals in the relations between posi-tions, not as substantial objects possessed by interacting individuals, groupsor organizations Capitals only exist in relation to particular fields whoseprofits they command. The limits of a field are defined by the limits of efficacyof particular forms of capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 101).

While Bourdieu’s fields are regional economies, they are not contractarian,exchange-based, markets. While Bourdieu understands practice as inter-ested behaviour, he does not posit fields as markets whose inner structureis revealed by aggregated exchange between rational subjects. Because theworld socially distributes different kinds of resources, the probabilities ofaccess to and return from them, and a sense of these objective potentialitiesis inscribed in individuals, individuals both tend to see the social world as natural and self-evident, and can instinctively do what must be done.Unlike the neo-classical subject who is prospectively rational, Bourdieu’sinterested agent is retrospectively rational, choosing choices that make sense, avoiding potentially valuable information that would change one’s sense of things (Bourdieu, 1990b: 61). Historicized ‘rules of thumb’economize, even at the cost of preventing individuals from seizing unanticipated chances, even seeing new regularities. Under conditions ofequilibrium, one protects one’s sense of reality against anomaly or con-tradiction. Prospective rationality, reflexive estimation of future chances,reflects conditions where the returns to such estimation are high, that is,positions of ‘power over the economy’ (Bourdieu, 1990b: 64). It is, viahabitus, a theory of non-conscious rational expectations.
Unlike neo-classical economics and rational-choice theorists, tastes—or preferences—are endogenous to the model, derived from the principles of habitus and the constraints of positional resources. In the field of culture, income effects on preference orderings are mediated through tastes. Those richer in cultural capital and poorer in economic capital, for example, prefer cultural practices which are ‘culturally most legitimate and economically cheapest’, like avant-garde theatre. It is not just a question of costs and means:

... [T]hrough the relationship between the material costs and the expected ‘cultural’ benefit, each fraction expresses its conception of what specifically makes the value of the work of art and of the legitimate way of appropriating it. (Bourdieu, 1984: 269–270)

In his study of cultural consumption, Bourdieu is interested in group-specific tastes, as they are homologously related to a structure of positions, not in global prices that derive from the aggregation of exchanges. Preferences are adapted to the logic of structure, as group-specific dispositions, or principles of action, produced by that structure. Habitus, not exchange, is the ground of a field’s equilibrium. The appearance of means-end rationality, that the consequences of practice appear as the motivation of that practice, is a consequence of the fact that practices, including those in the market, and the specific valuations immanent within them, are ordered by habitus deriving from one’s position in the structure, and are reproduced across time (Bourdieu, 1977: 72–78). Through habitus people want what they have a chance of getting and learn instinctively how to get what is possible (Bourdieu, 1990b: 57). Bourdieu’s approach, in part, here recalls Gary Becker who daringly sought to make preferences endogenous in the neo-classical model, arguing that individuals choose preferences based on resource endowments that allow them to maximize their utility. The implication is that when neo-classical economic theory takes the distribution of resources and preferences as un-theorized, independent and exogenous constraints, it is genetically incapable of understanding a market. And in fact although, like utility-maximizing rational-actor models, Bourdieu’s use of correspondence analysis assumes an equilibrium mediated through habitus, he is most interested in dimensionalizing valuations as these are distributed among groups, not in a derivation of price or power from volumes of exchange (Breiger, 2000).8

Rational choice theorists seek to specify a temporal process so as to derive its moments; Bourdieu rather seeks to describe a social space, a social cartography, structures of difference between agonistic groups who maintain heterogeneous valuations associated with the different positions they occupy within a field.

In every field practice is always—appearance to the contrary—interested behaviour (Bourdieu, 1977: 65, 76). Interest is dual in Bourdieu’s theory, one that is a relation to means, the real aim and ground of action, and another, a relation to ends, that is derivative from and sustained by competition
over the first. The first interest is given by one's position in the distribution of economic, social and cultural capitals effective in particular fields and the subject’s dispositions which internalize or incorporate the principles of relevance and sense of the game given by that position. In each field the primary interest is the accumulation of this capital and maximization of its return.

Scientific capital, for example, is composed scientific authority based on competency as recognized by peers, and social authority as delegated by organizations, in this case universities or grandes Écoles. A scientific choice is, Bourdieu argues, a ‘social strategy of investment aimed at maximizing the specific profit, inseparably political and scientific, provided by the field …’ (Bourdieu, 1991: 8). The movement of scientific knowledge is not given, à la Kuhn, by the immanent logic of knowledge, or even knowledge-making, by a symbolic order or the substantive rationality of practice, but by the struggle between agents each seeking to define science such that it ‘best conforms to their specific interest, that is, the one best suited to preserving or increasing their specific capital’ (Bourdieu, 1991: 12).

The other interest in a field, that one is invested in the ‘specific goal’ at stake in a field, and hence ‘interested’, Bourdieu terms the illusio, ‘a fundamental belief in the interest of the game and the value of the stakes which is inherent in … membership’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 11). It is through the conjunction of one’s habitus, including the internalizations and investments necessary to enter a field, and the struggles of the field, that the ends at stake in the field are constituted, not as such, but nevertheless impose themselves ‘with absolute necessity and self-evidence’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 151). Membership in the field generates a struggle for domination within it, which Bourdieu understands not only as the principle of its historical transformation, but as the primary guarantee of the arbitrary value of this other ‘interest’.

Those who have capitals in common also internalize a common habitus which generates common tastes or preferences which generate competition for the resources whose distribution shaped the habitus in the first place (Bourdieu, 1998: 25). Kabyle men, for example, learn honor as an unquestionable stake, which generates competition for honour, which maintains the illusion that honour is ‘natural’ both to the world and to men. It is no different in culture, modern science or the state. Competition naturalizes the arbitrariness, the illusio that those stakes have value (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 98, 117). Belief in the value of culture, for example derives from the struggle over culture. And what drives the struggle? Bourdieu writes:

Culture is a stake which, like all social stakes, simultaneously presupposes and demands that one take part in the game and be taken in by it; and interest in culture, without which there is no race, no competition, is produced by the very race and competition which it produces. The value of culture, the supreme fetish, is generated in the initial investment implied by the mere fact of entering the game, joining in the collective belief in the value of the game and endlessly remakes the competition for the stakes. (Bourdieu, 1984: 250)
The Endless Fields of Pierre Bourdieu
Roger Friedland

The ends here are illusory, given by entry into the game, by competition, by being ‘taken in by the game’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 98). The drive for distinction, *homo hierarchicus*, does not see itself, usually has no need to see itself, as such, or what it objectively is: ‘the transfigured, misrecognizable, legitimate form of social class’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 250). The critical moment—entering the game—is not at issue, following, as it does in this case, from class habitus. The value of a field, the *illusio*, is here sociologically derived from a disposition derived from one’s position in a distribution of means. The real, misrecognized meaning of practices is the contribution they make to one’s position in the distributional struggle over means.

In the field of science, Bourdieu likewise refuses the notion that the scientific community is organized around the end of scientific truth, ‘a pure and perfect competition of ideas’ (Bourdieu, 1991: 7). Scientific reason derives neither from ‘ideal norms’, nor from ‘the technical rules of a scientific methodology’, but from struggle for dominance in which reason is a medium through which agents struggle to secure dominance and command the profits of the field. The dominants of the field are able to define scientific knowledge such that the scientific capital they have most in abundance occupies a privileged position in the accepted practice of knowing. Truth is an interest because it is a medium for domination. Because reason is a self-interest in the struggle the struggle advances the production of reason. Power is the reason to know, which is pursued through reason.

In the state, too, the struggle for power secures the purpose of this field. Bourdieu grounds institutional fields primarily in the struggles of agents and groups, not the purposes of organizations. Thus the state, he argues, should not be understood first as an apparatus or prime mover with a purpose, but as a field of antagonistic agents whose ‘apparent orientation toward a common function … are born of conflict and competition, not some kind of immanent self-development of the structure’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 103). The state, as a field of struggle, generates an energy that must be captured by the sovereign. ‘The principle of the perpetual movement that stirs the field’, Bourdieu writes of the absolutist French state, ‘does not lie in some prime mover—here, the Sun King—but in the struggle itself, which is produced by the constitutive structures of the field, and tends to reproduce its structures and hierarchies’ (Bourdieu, 2000: 153). The modern French state is itself formed out of the successful efforts of a corporate group, successors of the *noblesse de robe*, elites endowed only with cultural capital—knowledge gleaned in education—who were formed conjointly with the formation of the state, who ‘had indeed to create the state in order to create itself as holder of a legitimate monopoly on state power’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 22). The public interest—‘the modern ideology of public services, of common welfare and commonweal’ that would ‘inspire the French Revolution … was invented collectively’, he writes ‘… by the class of the robe’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 24). In their struggle with the *noblesse d’épée*, the clergy and the bourgeoisie, this corporate group was able to lay
Organization 16(6)

Articles

claim to the state by universalizing its ‘particular interests’, by inventing the universal in whose objectification their power resided. Just as in science, the struggle for domination between agents, between groups, not only sets a field in motion, but objectifies its telos. The public interest of the state is a refraction of a private group interest, which must realize its power through it. Like reason, the universal is a medium of power.

Bourdieu believes that fields follow ‘invariant laws’, deriving from their homologous logics (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 75). This scope, however, comes at a cost. The homology derives from grounding the social in group relations, and the dynamism of social change from the struggle for group dominance, groups arrayed according to their differential relation to different forms of capital variably objectified in the positions they occupy in the field. Bourdieu’s theory of fields is a political-economics of power. Fields are all structures of power with differential command over ‘the specific profits that are at stake in the field …’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97). An institutional field is a structure of positional power, or as Emirbayer and Johnson, who endorse the re-politicization of organizational theory that Bourdieu’s approach makes possible, note approvingly, ‘…a temporary state of power relations within what is … an ongoing struggle for domination over the field’ (2008: 6; see also Swartz, 2008: 48).

Through his multiplication of capitals, Bourdieu converts Weber’s distinct spheres of class, status and power to a common conceptual metric.10 In the pre-capitalist order, honour or status is symbolic capital, a form of credit or authority which is but a misrecognized form of economic capital, a ‘denied capital, recognized as legitimate’ (Bourdieu, 1990b: 118). Under conditions of late modernity, culture, credentialed and consumed, becomes a capital, the basis, once again of symbolic power. Culture, and the drive for cultural distinction, is but ‘the transfigured, misrecognizable, legitimate form of social class’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 250). The contest over control of legitimate violence—Weber’s criterion for state power—becomes likewise the ‘struggle to accumulate symbolic capital’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 40, 60–61; 1989: 136). Bourdieu ultimately became indifferent about the terminological difference between power and capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97, 99). Efficacious resources in the most performative sector of the state—the judiciary—are referred to as ‘juridical capital’ (Bourdieu, 1992: 99).

To homologize the relation between dominant and dominated across fields requires institutional homogenization. In Bourdieu’s work, every resource—economic, social, cultural, information—becomes another form of capital, every field another ‘market’. Economic capital is the dominant form, the underlying principle of homology. Class, he writes, is a ‘universal principle of explanation and classification, defining the rank occupied in all possible fields’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 114). Seeking to develop a general economy of practice, Bourdieu economizes all realms of social life in which one invests, develops credit, and reaps profits. Public identification with the group, for example, is a ‘symbolic tax’, honour ‘symbolic surplus value’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 95, 195). Bourdieu alerted us to the dangers of reproducing
doxa by relying on folk categories in the construction of our theoretical objects, yet he himself imports the dominant fields—capitalism and the bureaucratic state—into the analytic categories—capital and power—by which we understand all fields. Bourdieu thus reproduces the dominance of the dominant institutions.

It is only because Bourdieu has homogenized the principle of practice across fields—the binary of domination—that he can homologize groups across fields (Bourdieu, 1990b: 72; 1984: 254; 1969). While, for example, Bourdieu historically locates a new modern source of class power and legitimacy in cultural capital, that culture remains a media for power, not its content. The several capitals are ultimately convertible in the ‘division in the labor of domination’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 265; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 99). Accumulation of capital is a trans-historical mode of reproducing domination within a field, this ‘will to power’ being the content of interest within every field. And the ‘field of power’ is the ‘gaming space’ in which holders of these diverse forms of power, the dominant groups within each field, struggle over which will be the dominant form of power, the exchange rate between them, and hence the ‘dominant principle of domination’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 264–265).

Unlike Foucault, for whom discipline is a technology, composed locally through mechanisms colonized and assembled in a plurality of sites with no determinative social origin or institutional locus, for Bourdieu the state is the central medium by which legitimate classification is accomplished and imposed, ‘a bank of symbolic capital, that guarantees all acts of authority’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 51; Foucault, 1979). The modern state, Bourdieu writes:

... possesses the means of imposition and inculcation of the durable principles of vision and division that conform to its own structure, is the site par excellence of the concentration of symbolic power. (1998: 47)

Because he locates the origin of the dominant vision in the political victories of dominant groups, whose domination rests on their constitution of the state, the modern state, too, becomes a culturally empty form, an instrument for the institution of categorical knowledge, a monopoly medium for universalizing and naturalizing knowledge, a cognitive machine which plays a central role in the ‘division of labor of domination’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 58). In Bourdieu's vision of the social, the substantive content of the universal—justice, truth, progress, goodness, grace, honour, rationality, efficiency, democracy—is not of sociological import.

The logic of practice is dominated by an agonistic, instrumental distributional struggle over institutional means, not a common striving to produce substantive ends. Fields are organized as struggles over the relative powers of capitals, which are, in reality, struggles over power, over what it is and by implication who is powerful. In Bourdieu’s hands the multiplicity of institutional ends is subsumed into a unicity of means, so many powers over which groups struggle in their pursuit of legitimate dominance. Power, or
Organization 16(6)
Articles

authority, is the real misrecognized meta-stake organizing each field, such
that the value, or stake, in any given field is an *illusio*, a psychic and material
investment in the game, a sense of relevance given by a *habitus* conditioned
by the kinds of capital with which one is endowed, and the playing of ‘the
game’ itself (Bourdieu, 1990b: 66; Widick, 2003). The social is reduced to
a political *poiesis*, a set of interlocking production-functions of power,
sustained by distributive competition over this empty cell of power. Power
operates through culture, but is not itself cultural. Bourdieu assimilates
the logic of signification to that of domination, thereby de-culturalizing
power, so that capital will serve just as well. Bourdieu can assimilate the
logic of signification to that of domination because it is group conflict, not
institutional contradiction, which stands as the motor of social order and
history.

**Beyond Distribution: The Institutional Logic of Practice**

Bourdieu is not a crypto-Marxist as is sometimes claimed. Marx’s theory
of capitalism has an institutional specificity; Bourdieu’s does not. In
Marxist theory capital is an internally contradictory relation, interlocked
practices of production and exchange, a relation between labor and money
which is culturally phenomenalized as a thing. Capital is constituted both
materially and symbolically, in the reciprocal chains of conversion of use
into exchange, an internally contradictory relation constitutive of profit,
the source of capitalist expansion and economic crisis both. Distribution
follows from and ultimately contradicts the logic of capitalist production,
governed by an unobservable, but presumed real, law of value. Capital is
a practical, temporal relation between production and circulation, not an
objectified thing.

Capitalists may convert position into disposition, but the logic of cap-
italism does not in Marxism derive from this incorporation. Bourdieu writes
of the several capitals as though they were a ‘pile of tokens of different
colors, each color corresponding to a given species of capital she holds …’
(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 99). For Marx capital is neither thing, nor
‘token’; ‘It’ does not exist. Although capital appears as something one has;
in Marx’s theory, it is a relationship one does, a practical relation enacting
a substance, in his case value.

Marxist theorists traditionally derided those who emphasize distribu-
tional struggle over the share of profits as opposed to wages as the critical
engine of capitalist development, as opposed to the logic of commodi-
fication and systemic tensions between money, labour and use as metrics
of value. For Marxists, the internally contradictory capital-labor relation,
not the distribution of capitals, creates the stake, sets the field in motion,
and shapes its relation with other fields. With Bourdieu, the neo-Ricardian,
the distributional struggle appears as the prime mover of history, and of
the changing relation between fields. It is the distribution of the several
capitals which is decisive. He writes:

18
The task of science is to uncover the structure of the distribution of species of capital which tends to determine the structure of individual or collective stances taken, through the interests and dispositions it conditions. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 114)

The objective relations among positions he is referring to are ranks in a distribution of capitals or powers. Social theory has likewise tended to focus on this structural question, the legitimate distributions of the good as opposed to the systemic question of the legitimacy and practical logic of goods, on who gets what as opposed to what and how the goods are produced.

Although distributional contests do sustain the value of institutional values, the institutional logic of practice is otherwise. An institution’s specificity is located in the cultural premises of its production, not its distributions and groups positioned within that distribution. Institutions are not, as in the original statements of institutional theory, forms of social organization invested with value beyond their practical effects, or, as later work showed, with practical effects because they are legitimate net of their practicality (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). They are themselves practical regimes of valuation, in the sense that they constitute institutional objects of value. Capitals, if we can use that term, are purposes before they are powers; indeed they are only powers because they are purposes, purposes constituted not only externally through difference, but internally through enactment and practical belief. Practice is constituted by that which it produces, of which, in fact, the producers are products.

Bourdieu’s practice is not praxis, neither Marxist nor Aristotelian. For Marx, the specificity of the human is located not in the production of power, but in the making of life, a making which historically remakes the makers and ultimately contradicts the institutional relations through which that life is made. Nor is Bourdieu’s concept of practice Aristotelian, from whom it—and habitus as habitual disposition—originally derived. Aristotle distinguished between poeisis and praxis, which he also termed the distinction between production and action (Aristotle, 2004). In the former, an act is derived instrumentally from an end external to the act, as in the case of a craftsman who uses his skill, or techné, to execute a pre-existing plan for a chair. Word and act are related as a making. In praxis the standards of action are internal to the action and the goal of the action is the action itself. Word and act are related as a doing, or a performance.

Aristotle understood virtue, exercised by free men in the public sphere, as the privileged domain of action. Speaking of prudence, Aristotle noted, is not like science or production. ‘For production aims at an end other than itself; but this is impossible in the case of action, because the end is merely doing well’ (Aristotle: 2004: 150). Whereas poeisis is governed by a means-ends logic; praxis is not. In praxis, subject and object are both immanent in the act, a prudent man practices prudence. Praxis, unlike production, is an internal, self-contained, order of action. In production, Aristotle says, the actuality of the making is in the thing being made; in action, the actuality
of action is located in the actor himself (Aristotle, 1998). Bourdieu converts all the domains of Aristotle’s praxis into production sites of power.

Institutions are constituted by orderings of means-ends couplets, regimes of practice, what I have called ‘institutional logics’, that is, stable constellations of practice, and the subjects and objects coupled to them (Friedland, 2009, 2002; Friedland and Alford, 1991). (See Thornton and Ocasio, 2008 for a review, critique and extension of institutional logic in organizational research.). Institutional objects are not ontologically objective. One cannot understand institutions by starting with an autonomous subject in an instrumental relation to an exterior object, a sovereign consciousness confronting a thing present-at-hand. The central objects of institutional life are meaningful, ready-at-hand in a particular way, that is, they only exist as collective representations, representations collectively accepted as real. Institutional practices are both media for subjectification in that they enable and possess practitioners, and of objectification in that those practices, and hence the subjects, hinge on their symbolic and performative production of the objects. It is through the institutional logic of practice that the two are co-constituted.

Every institutional resource allocation—of votes, money, property, force, knowledge, meals, love, territory, blessings and sacraments—is a material semiosis in which the categories, instruments, and agents through which that object is produced or distributed are brought to life and made real. All objects of institutional life are dually constituted, both conceptually and practically, as categories that point to objects of action, and actors who engage in material practices that enact them. Institutional objects, as such, do not exist. They are known only through their conjoint conceptual and practical specificity (Breiger, 1974, 2000; Mohr and Duquenne, 1997). The constitution of the object is both causally and narratively linked to the practice, as that from which the practice is understood to derive. This interdependent duality of category and practice is the core of an institutional logic (Mohr and Duquenne, 1997; Mohr and White, 2008).

Meaning is materially constituted at the same time that materiality is meaningfully constituted. Language’s constitutive role is operative in every institutional domain (Searle, 1995, 2006). Institutional languages constitute before they justify, and they can justify only because they constitute. Institutional language operates not truthfully through denotation, but performatively through the production of the real. One cannot interpret institutions by relying solely on words or on things, but by both as they are deployed in practice, in that categories point to the nature, and hence genesis, of an institutional object of which the material practice is productive or to which it is responsive. Material practices indexically fix the referentially independent meanings of institutional languages, turning meanings into functions, signs into performances. Categories and practices are mutually constitutive, that is, categories are known by the practices applied to them just as much as practices only have sense in terms of the
categories to which they are applied. An institutional logic exists when institutional objects have a practical specificity and institutional practices have an objective specificity.

Organizational researchers have pointed to the way new organizational practices reconstitute both the objects and the subjects of practice. In various domains major shifts in practice—nouvelle cuisine; relief organization, alternative dispute resolution, the HMO, recycling, brand wine, interest groups, the hospice—were tied to ontological changes in the meaning of a meal, marriage, health care, waste, wine, poverty, democracy and life itself, as (Clemens, 1993; Lounsbury et al., 2003; Mohr and Duquenne, 1997; Monin et al., 2008; Morrill et al., 2007; McAdam and Scott, 2005). In the corporate market place, Neil Fligstein has shown how the construction of the American firm sequentially changed from a site of production, to a seller of commodities, to a bundle of financial assets, each of which has been associated with distinct practices, organizational forms and types of subjects thereby authorized to assume control over it (Fligstein, 1985, 1990). Market structures and strategies derive from these alternative conceptions of control (Fligstein, 1990). Patricia Thornton has shown the same thing with regard to American publishing firms, in which the book moved from a literary production in which editors had primacy to a marketable commodity in which managers had control (Thornton, 2004). And Michael Lounsbury showed how new professional finance associations transformed the practices by which money was constituted through mathematical economics in the field of finance in conjunction with governmental deregulation (Lounsbury, 2002). An institutional logic exists when material practice and ontology become tightly coupled.

Institutions are ideological formations, not just in the sense that they are organized around languages that legitimate power as control over persons and things, but in that they produce powers by authorizing practices that constitute subjects and objects through which the authority relation is organized. Institutional theory thus points beyond distribution, the classical ground of ideology and the theoretical center of Bourdieu's theory of fields—measured either as control over objective means or in trans-institutional operators like power, capital or utility—to the hegemonic construction of incommensurable self-referential domains of activity and the extent of their scope as the systemic, as opposed to structural, ground of ideology. Institutional fields are structures of symbolically constituted, iterated powers whose exercise through interlocked congeries of practices—voting and legislating, buying and selling, officiating and participating in religious rite, marrying, cohabitation and love-making, the fighting of wars and signing of treaties, controlled experiment and observation—carried out by collectively recognized subjects—citizens, owners, congregants, families, officials, scientists—which presume and performatively produce values—democracy, property, divinity, love, sovereignty and knowledge.

I call these institutional substances, the central object of an institutional field and the principle of its unity. The category derives from Aristotelian
metaphysics where substance, or substantial form, is the foundation, or essence, of a thing which cannot be reduced to its accidental properties which attach to it nor to the materiality of its instances (Aristotle, 1998). For Aristotle, substance is not matter, but the form that makes matter a ‘this’, ‘that by virtue of which the matter is in the state it is in’ (Aristotle, 1998: 167, 229). A substance exceeds its attributes, cannot be reduced to a thing’s materiality, and thus cannot be described, only pointed to and named. Bourdieu explicitly aimed at moving beyond what he calls ‘Aristotelian substantialism’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97). While the category of substance may be epistemologically problematic, it captures institutional reality rather well. Like Aristotle’s soul as the substance of human, an institutional substance does not exist; it is rather an absent presence necessary to institutional life. Institutional substances are unfounded, not because they are arbitrary and misrecognized media for empowerment—they are that too, but because they depend on practices of good faith.

Institutions are domains of praxis in the Aristotelian sense. Praxis lacks an ontologically objective object. Praxis is organized around ontologically subjective objects, objects that can only approximate appearance through practice, through acts of subjects whose actions and subjectivities depend on them. In praxis, subjectification and objectification are co-constitutive. The objects of praxis are not objects at all, but rather substances, non-observable reasons that cannot be reduced to rationality or sense, that can only be phenomenalized through practice. One can never arrive at them; only repeat the approach through practice. By comparison to the presence of things, an institutional substance is an absent presence towards and around which practice incessantly moves, known only through this movement. Institutional logics are ontological enactments, a what done through a how, popular sovereignty through democratic election, justice through juridical practices that classify actions according to the binary of legal and illegal, divinity through pilgrimage and prayer, romantic love through intimate exchange of body and word. Institutional logics depend on making the invisible substance visible. Institutional practices are the visible face and the condition of possibility of institutional substances, and hence the source of their identity across time.

Institutions are not primarily structures of power whose purposes are analytically external to their constitution. Institutional logics are not, as in Bourdieu, first ordered by the distributive struggle over capitals that sustain the stake as an illusio, in which categorical oppositions are arbitrary transpositions of positional oppositions. Institutions have a logic because practices and substances are internally co-constitutive. Deontic powers—authorizations and obligations—trace out the logic of practice with respect to a purpose, a value, or in my terms, a substance, the most general ‘function’ in an institutional field. These institutional de-ontologies rest on their ontologies, the institutional content of power. Substances are known through their powers, but are not reducible to them.
As every prophet knows, divinity cannot be reduced to church practice, but neither can it be divorced from it either. Institutional life requires us to act as if we believe in the value and, in fact, we tend to refuse to reduce it—knowledge, property, sovereignty, love, let alone divinity—to the practices that index, perform, produce and distribute it. Because substances are indeterminate and excessive to the practices, practices can be contested and change without necessarily transforming the substance which is their ground. Institutional practices come in congeries, a symbolizing skein whose self-referential interlocking helps substantiate that institutional logic. While ontological transformations require new regimes of practice, belief in the objectivity of the substance also affords space in which new practices can be added and subtracted, and yet still legitimately claim to index the same substance. Institutional logics are unstable orders. The open, even dialectical, relation between substance and practice—between transcendence and immanence—whose effects thinkers have a tendency to either absolutize as idealism, the influence of analytically separable values or categories, or materialism, the influence of control over the analytically separable materialities of practice—is a critical source of agency and institutional change.

Situations, organizations and even fields are always composite (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006), sometimes by design (Stark, 2008). Beyond the contingent relation between substance and practice, contest is also possible because individuals live across institutional fields and because situations and organizations involve more than one logic of practice, so that actors can engage, as Boltanski and Thévenot put it, in ‘attributing value to the common good of a different polity’ and so contest ‘the very reality of the common good underlying the legitimacy of the test [of worth] ....’ (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 219, 223). Like my own approach, their conventions of valuation were developed in opposition to what they saw as the institutional poverty of Bourdieu’s power-centric social world. Although there are many parallels with Boltanski and Thévenot’s original work on plural conventions of equivalence, or ‘orders of worth’—which I have just begun to study, I would argue that institutions, unlike situations, have an ontological specificity, such that their central substances become bases for evaluation and coordination, as well as hierarchical ordering, for determining those who are more or less ‘worthy’.

Boltanski and Thévenot’s conventions of equivalence, and the material, embodied practices through which they are enacted, are intentionally conceptualized so as to be transposable across institutional domains. So, for example, while they find its template in the receipt of divine grace in Augustine’s City of God, the world of worth they ‘compose’ to account for its ‘harmonies’ is organized around a more general logic of ‘inspiration’, an involuntary, immeasurable, uniqueness characterized by affective relations of ‘creation’ (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 159–164). In this inspired world, the ‘relevant beings are, for example, spirits, crazy people, artists, children’, not to mention creative executives (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999: 370). The institutional specificity of divine grace is not germane to
their conceptualization. Or in what they call ‘the domestic world,’ which ‘does not unfold inside the circle of family relationships alone,’ worth is given by one’s position in habit-based, embodied generational hierarchies of personal dependence which climax at the point of origin, or engenderment, around the figure of a ‘father’ who incarnates tradition (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 164–178). Leaders, like fathers, ‘constitute the very being of less worthy,’ such that leaders and followers are of ‘the same flesh’ manifest in relations of pride, shame and respect that bind them (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 171). Domestic worth is found not just in families and households, but potentially in any milieu or ‘respectable social group,’ particularly professions. These grammars of worth, which sometimes do have a home domain, are constructed so as to transcend it. This is due both to the primacy of situation, particularly situations of critique in which these are deployed, but also, I suspect, because their framework is organized around hierarchies of worth among ‘beings’, whereas my own is anchored in institutionally specific production of substances, from which hierarchies derive.

Actual institutional fields are always admixtures, affording space for agentic deployment and expansion of practices alien to the core, to remix authority and exchange, regulation and competition, to use a classic example. But I still believe that institutions have central practical tendencies and the most important politics are those that shift institutional boundaries. We should distinguish between shifts in the institutional architecture of society as opposed to the social architecture of institutions, that is, the difference between extending an institutional logic to a new domain of activity, such as the commodification of health care or the religionization of state authority, from the social extension or contraction of access to practices that follow existent institutional logic to different groups of people, such as the civil rights movement, feminist incorporations of women or micro-lending, although these distributional shifts may involve institutional shifts elsewhere, as, for example, in the case of the promotion of civil and political equality for women. The movement of African captives and the prerogatives of rule out of the category of property—that is, the end of slavery and the rise of state bureaucracy—were distributional struggles because they were conflicts over institutional boundaries. Giving primacy to the former occludes the determining importance of the latter.

**God, Love and Institutional Logic**

Institutional substances are unfounded and unfoundable. Institutional logics are religious, not as secularizations, but as enactments of transcendent substances immanent to them. Like an unknowable God, a substance is known through its enactments, its operations, the practices which presume it. Institutional substances cannot be directly observed, but, like a transcendent God immanent to all His creation, are immanent in the practices that organize an institutional field, values never exhausted...
by those practices, practices premised on faith. Institutions invoke their substances in language; they repeat names. They are not, for all that, loosely coupled ceremonial legitimating exteriors (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), but unquestioned, constitutive interiors, the sacred core of each field, unobservable, but socially real. Unlike lesser institutional objects, they are the God-terms of social life, the limited set of things ‘for the sake of which’ we live our lives, what Augustine referred to as that thing which is ‘enjoyed,’ or loved for its own sake, unchangeable, eternal and majestic—obviously the Trinitarian God in his case—as opposed to those changeable and uncertain things which are loved because they enable one to possess other objects, and hence not enjoyed, but used (frui vs. uti) (Heidegger, 2004: 203–205). Institutional substance is the unobservable purpose of a field.

Like religion, an institution’s practices are ontologically rational, that is tied to a substance indexed by the conjunction of a practice and a name. An institutional substance is the highest, most general value in a field. Prayer to God is not so different from the realization of profit, which is, after all, an accounting convention derived from monetized property rights. Property does not exist in itself, but is rather a substance immanent to the exercise of a set of rights, which are themselves created ex nihilo by the state. Like God, one can never know the substance in itself, either through one’s senses or through one’s reason. Institutions all depend, not on illusio, but on faith in the substances around which their practices are organized. Every institution is a religious institution: a linked set of practices, subjects and an unobservable substance that joins the two.

Transcendence and eternity are immanent within praxis, in that their ‘objects’ both exceed and outlive the finite persons whose practice approaches them in that they are given from elsewhere, institutional transpersonal cultural objects that depend on others for their enactment, on a prior and projected history of enactment. And like a God beyond being, that is a God not modeled in the mirror of a human being, as a superior being, these objects are transcendent substances, anonymous, beyond predication, neither true nor false (Carlson, 1999). Eternity is immanent to institutional praxis because the substance must be perpetually enacted, or signified, through practice in order to exist at all. It also entails the possibility of idolatry because members—and analysts—are apt to conflate practice and substance, to reduce substance to human purpose.

In closing, I want to suggest that such an institutionalism also requires us to think beyond domination as the machine language of the social, indeed to posit love as a trope to theorize the social. This institutionalism implies that the world loves us in a multiplicity of ways. Let me explain. Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenology makes eroticization of the flesh critical to love, to an individualization through flesh and oaths received from and given to the other (Marion, 2007: 126–129, 176). Is from an other, from such others, that one is given one’s flesh, one’s individuality, one’s person, one’s ‘proper ipseity’, indeed an assurance that one’s being is lovable because
one is and has been a lover (Marion, 2007: 195). There is a sense in which institutional logics follow this phenomenological logic of love, in which it is you who are given through its practice, called into being through its substance. Like the beloved, whose distance, her alterity, both enables and requires you to repeatedly give yourself and that sustains her as an ‘object’ of desire, institutional substances are the goods that possess you much more than you will ever possess them precisely because you can never have them as objects, only perform, or ‘do’, them as substances. They are the absent presences that matter. Institutional substances—whether love, justice, popular sovereignty, God, property, beauty or truth—individualize you precisely through this lack, not as exterior objects you possess, but as transcendent substances that ‘possess’ you by the very condition of your never being able to possess them, and hence to which you give yourself over and over again, things you cannot lose because you can never have them. Institutional logics work not by a psychoanalytic logic where the desired object is forbidden and hence internalized in misrecognized form. One rather gives oneself as to a beloved whom one can never possess, never access, and one is thereby given oneself by these substances who afford you a subjective interiority, a me, a particular self who loves this or that, who is afforded his status as a lover, his very wordliness, his creative capacity for world-making, by the world.

Objects can exist in their exteriority; substances must be interior to exist at all. Objects can be objectified; substances can only subjectify those whose practice is organized by them. Institutional substances are the world’s beloveds, around which modalities of loving are organized by which one is loved, afforded, given by the world. To reduce substances to objects, to identify them with their objectifications, is both to fetishize and destroy them, for they depend on their distance, on their living eternality, their incommensurability and immeasurability. Institutional substances are places where one will never arrive and that draw you by their distance, that inhabit you by the interiorization necessary to their enactment. Institutional logics depend on incarnation, not just incorporation. In institutional life the word is made flesh and the flesh made word, across an institutional transom of immanentization and transcendentalization.

Perhaps the phenomenological structure of love, the impossibility of imposing one’s signification upon another without effacing the other, without objectifying the other, is part of logic of world-making. But perhaps this is because love is an outworking of the institutional logic of the worldhood in which we are given to ourselves by these substances that exceed us, that this institutionally iconic form of our givenness becomes abstracted, such that the incorporation of places of culture is transformed into a structure of mutual giving of persons. I want to close with this opening, the co-implication of loving another being and being loved into being by the world. Not just domination, but love, too, may animate institutional life.
The Endless Fields of Pierre Bourdieu
Roger Friedland

Notes

1 My understanding of Bourdieu has grown out of conversations and arguments with many friends and interlocutors over the years including Jeff Alexander, Ron Breiger, Nick Entrikin, John Mohr, John Sutton, Ivan Szelényi, and Richard Widick. I have learned to talk rigorously about love with Tom Carlson and Colleen Windham. I am particularly indebted to my editor Damon Golsorkhi who graciously called me to order and kept me from error, and to Michael Lounsbury and Glenn Morgan who tried to cut the fat.

2 For Bourdieu’s own critique of structuralist Marxism, see Bourdieu (1990: 41).

3 For the origin of the distinction between class distinctive parties and politically distinct classes, see Alford (1963).

4 There is also the issue of other dimensions of boundary construction and the relationship of aesthetics to them. For example, Michele Lamont, in her comparison of the construction of symbolic boundaries by the French and American upper-middle classes, has shown the importance of moral boundaries in both countries. Lamont criticizes Bourdieu for not only neglecting moral boundaries, but for subordinating them to the interested hierarchicalization of socioeconomic and cultural criteria. Lamont finds that in fact there is no relationship between mobility and the practice of moral exclusion (Lamont, 1992).

5 And Bourdieu knows it as he here refers to the ‘structural ambiguity’ (2001: 12).

6 Green, who creatively uses Bourdieu’s theory to prove ‘a social cosmology of eroticized objects,’ forwards the concept of an ‘erotic habitus’, ‘the unconscious somatization of the social order’ as a way to theorize the social forms of libidinal investment, sexual fantasy as imaginary investments in particular objects (2008: 599, 614). Not surprisingly Green’s analysis and cases center on erotic objects, and hence the subject as a social object, constituted through domination, such as the unloved, lesbian Chicana who declares, ‘In the effort not to feel fucked, I became the fucker, even with woman’ or the Latino homosexual who was excited by ‘[r]ough sex with white men in adult bookstores’ as a way to ‘getting revenge, sort of like getting into the White world’ (2008: 617, 620).

7 Widick shows the way the figure of the ‘Super Trader’ operates as an imaginary ego-ideal on the floor of an options trading floor of the Pacific Exchange. ‘As they learn to trade from their peers and their texts, the Super Trader rises, offering its character as a partial substitute, a helpful addition to the subject’s imaginary—that is, to its ego, its ongoing embodiment of the social imaginary’ (2003:715).

8 Ron Breiger shows the ways in which the rational-choice theorist James Coleman and Bourdieu are both field theorists whose mathematical matrix techniques presume equilibrium as an attribute of the field (Breiger, 2000). Coleman dually infers power and value through the magnitudes of resources exchanged between agents with different exogenous desires who control them in which equilibrium values or prices are derived from the volumes of their exchanges. Coleman derives single dimensions of powers of individuals and values of events from the interaction of matrices of exogenously given and independent control and desire. Bourdieu, in contrast, derives structures of difference in a field based not on the volumes of resources exchanged, but from the similarities of particularly positioned individuals’ practices from which he infers latent groups and their respective valuations (2000: 108). As Breiger pointed out to me, although both operate from matrix eigenvectors, ‘Coleman’s single dimension (power, when applied to people; value, when applied to events) is
essentially about the “size” of actors (or events), whereas Correspondence Analysis, used by Bourdieu, “nets out” sheer size, and therefore focuses on dimensions that represent the joint patterning of relations among individuals and properties (email from Ron Breiger to author, April 12, 2009). Bourdieu, in fact, is uninterested in the first dimension of the interaction matrix which captures individuals’ capital volumes, rather centering his studies around the second dimension which captures the modalities, or practices, in which differently positioned individuals engage. Bourdieu infers the structure of power from the heterogeneity of valuations and principles of action corollary to distributions of resources.

9 Bourdieu avoids the categories of voluntarist social theory, eschewing ‘subject’ in preference for ‘agent’. With regard to ‘preference,’ however, part of the neo-classical lingua franca, he is quite comfortable, easily associating ‘taste’ and ‘preference’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 25; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 84).

10 See John Hall’s insightful essay where he seeks to reverse Bourdieu’s derivation of status from class, arguing instead that class is but one form of status grouping (Hall, 1992).

11 Stark argues that whereas Boltanski and Thévenot understand orders of worth as resolving uncertainty problems and thereby making calculable action possible, it is precisely this admixture of different orders, and the resultant uncertainty, that create opportunities for action. Following Frank Knight who understood entrepreneurship as an ability to exploit uncertainty, as opposed to a reward for risk, Stark notes that entrepreneurship is an ability ‘to keep multiple principles of evaluation in play and to benefit from that productive friction’ (Stark, 2008: 14). It is the very ambiguity of assets due to a multiplicity of evaluative criteria that provides opportunities to recombine them, a trait he espies in an organization form he calls ‘heterarchy’, ‘in which units are laterally accountable according to difference principles of evaluation’ (2008: 25).

12 ‘The problems raised by relations among worlds cannot be dismissed by associating the various worlds and the worths they manifest with different persons, culture, or milieus, the way classical sociology treats relations among values and groups.’ (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 216).

References

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