

tinuous genesis of discontinuity. When we retrospectively project the concept of artist before the 1880s, we commit absolutely fantastic anachronisms: we overlook the genesis, not of the character of the artist or the writer, but of the *space* in which this character can exist as such.

And the same is true of politics. We take the risk of formidable historical fallacies when we fail, as do some historians who, today, take a fancy to "political philosophy," to pose the question of the social genesis of the political field (Bourdieu 1981a) and of the very notions that political philosophy eternalizes by treating them as transhistorical essences. What I just said about the words "art" and "artist" would apply to notions such as "democracy" and "public opinion" (see Bourdieu 1979e, Bourdieu and Champagne 1989, Champagne 1990). Paradoxically, historians often condemn themselves to anachronism because of their ahistorical, or dehistoricized, usage of the concepts they employ to think the societies of the past. They forget that these *concepts* and the reality they capture are themselves the product of a historical construction: the very history to which they apply these concepts has in fact invented, created them, oftentimes at the cost of an immense—and largely forgotten—historical work.<sup>41</sup>

### 3 The Logic of Fields

**The notion of field is, together with those of habitus and capital, the central organizing concept of your work, which includes studies of the fields of artists and intellectuals, class lifestyles, *Grandes écoles*, science, religion, the field of power, of law, of housing construction, and so on.<sup>42</sup> You use the notion of field in a highly**

41. This fruitful tension between history and sociology encouraged by Bourdieu is particularly well illustrated by the historical research of his colleagues and collaborators Christophe Charle (1987, 1990, 1991), Dario Gamboni (1989), Alain Viala (1985) and Victor Karady, who has undertaken an ambitious long-term project in the historical sociology of Hungary and other Eastern European countries (see Karady 1985, Don and Karady 1989, Karady and Mitter 1990). On the question of historical discontinuity and the temporal rootedness of conceptual categories or *épistémés*, there are many parallels between Bourdieu and Foucault, some of which can be traced directly back to their common training in the history of science and medicine under Canguilhem (Bourdieu 1988e: 779). The major differences are rooted in Bourdieu's historicizing of reason via the notion of field.

42. On the intellectual and artistic field, see Bourdieu 1971a, 1975b, 1975c, 1983a, 1983d, 1988a; on the space of classes and class lifestyles, Bourdieu 1978b, 1984a, 1987b; on

technical and precise sense that is perhaps partly hidden behind its commonsense meaning. Could you explicate where the notion comes from (for Americans, it is likely to evoke the "field theory" of Kurt Lewin) and what its meaning and theoretical purposes are?

I do not like professorial definitions much, so let me begin with a brief aside on their usage. I could refer here to *Le métier de sociologue* (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron 1973), which is a didactic, almost scholastic, book,<sup>43</sup> but a book which nevertheless contains a number of theoretical and methodological principles that would make people understand that many of the gaps or shortcomings for which I am sometimes reproached are in fact conscious refusals and deliberate choices. For instance, the use of *open concepts*<sup>44</sup> is a way of rejecting

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cultural goods, Bourdieu 1980h, 1985d, and Bourdieu and Delsaut 1975; on the religious field, Bourdieu 1971b, 1987h, Bourdieu and de Saint Martin 1982; on the scientific field Bourdieu 1981d, 1987e, 1990e; on the juridical field and the field of power, Bourdieu 1981a, 1986c, 1987g, 1989a, and Bourdieu and de Saint Martin 1978, 1982, 1987; the field of private housing construction is explored in Bourdieu et al. 1987 and in the articles that make up the March 1990 issue of *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*.

Others studies of fields conducted at the Center for European Sociology include, *inter alia*, the fields of comic books (Boltanski 1975) and of children's book publishing (Chamboredon and Fabiani 1977), the field of the French university and intellectuals at the turn of the century (Charle 1983 and 1990, Karady 1983, Fabiani 1989), the field of power under the Third Republic (Charle 1987), and the fields of religion (Grignon 1977), the arts and sciences in the classical age (Heinich 1987), seventeenth-century literature (Viala 1985), the management of the "elderly" (Lenoir 1978), peasant trade-unionism (Maresca 1983), social work (Verdès-Leroux 1976, 1978), political representation (Champagne 1988, 1990), and feminist studies in France (Lagrave 1990).

43. This book (whose translation was for years blocked for obscure copyright reasons and has just been published by Walter de Gruyter) is essential to an understanding of Bourdieu's sociological epistemology. It consists of a dense exposition of the foundational principles of "applied rationalism" in the social sciences, and of a selection of texts (by historians and philosophers of science, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Mauss, and other sociologists) that illustrate key arguments. Each comprises three parts which theorize the three stages that Bourdieu, following French epistemologist Gaston Bachelard, considers central to the production of sociological knowledge and that he encapsulates in the following formula: "Facts are conquered [through rupture with common sense], constructed, confirmed (*les faits sont conquis, construits, constatés*)" (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron 1973: 24). A worthwhile critical introduction to Bachelard's philosophy can be found in Tiles 1984; see MacAllester 1991 for a selection of texts.

44. For examples of criticisms of Bourdieu for the lack of closure or rigor of his concepts, see DiMaggio 1979: 1467, Swartz 1981: 346-48, Lamont and Larreau 1988: 155-58.

positivism—but this is a ready-made phrase. It is, to be more precise, a permanent reminder that concepts have no definition other than systemic ones, and are designed to be *put to work empirically in systematic fashion*. Such notions as habitus, field, and capital can be defined, but only within the theoretical system they constitute, not in isolation.<sup>45</sup>

This also answers another question that is often put to me in the United States: why do I not propose any “laws of the middle range”? I think that this would first of all be a way of satisfying a positivistic expectation, of the kind represented in earlier times by a book by Berelson and Steiner (1964) which was a compilation of small, partial laws established by the social sciences. This kind of positivistic gratification is something that science must deny itself. Science admits only systems of laws (Duhem showed this long ago for physics, and Quine has since developed this fundamental idea).<sup>46</sup> And what is true of concepts is true of relations, which acquire their meaning only within a system of relations. Similarly, if I make extensive use of correspondence analysis, in preference to multivariate regression for instance, it is because correspondence analysis is a relational technique of data analysis whose philosophy corresponds exactly to what, in my view, the reality of the social world is. It is a technique which “thinks” in terms of relation, as I try to do precisely with the notion of field.<sup>47</sup>

To think in terms of field is to think relationally.<sup>48</sup> The relational

45. The distinction between relational or “systemic concepts” (rooted in a theoretical problematics of the object) and “operational concepts,” defined in terms of the pragmatic requirements and constraints of empirical measurement, is elaborated in Bourdieu, Chamboredon, and Passeron 1973: 53–54.

46. The now famous “Duhem-Quine hypothesis” states that science is a complex network that faces the test of empirical experience as a whole: evidence impinges not on any particular proposition or concept but on the entire net they form.

47. The technique of correspondence analysis is a variant of factor analysis developed by the school of “French Data Analysis” (J. P. Benzécri, Rouanet, Tabard, Lebart, Cibois), which has elaborated tools for a relational use of statistics that are increasingly being employed by social scientists in France, the Netherlands, and Japan in particular. Two useful and accessible presentations in English are Greenacre 1984 and Lebart et al. 1984; correspondence analysis has recently been included on standard computer packages by SAS and BMDP.

48. Bourdieu (1982a: 41–42, my translation) explains: “To think in terms of field demands a conversion of the whole ordinary vision of the social world which fastens only on visible things: the individual, this *ens realissimum* to which we are attached by a sort of primordial ideological interest; the group, which is only in appearance defined solely by the temporary or durable relations, formal or informal, between its members; and

(rather than more narrowly "structuralist") mode of thinking is, as Cassirer (1923) demonstrated in *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff*, the hallmark of modern science, and one could show that it lies behind scientific enterprises apparently as different as those of the Russian formalist Tynianov,<sup>49</sup> of the social psychologist Kurt Lewin, of Norbert Elias, and of the pioneers of structuralism in anthropology, linguistics and history, from Sapir and Jakobson to Dumézil and Lévi-Strauss. (If you check, you will find that both Lewin and Elias draw explicitly on Cassirer, as I do, to move beyond the Aristotelian substantialism that spontaneously impregnates social thinking.) I could twist Hegel's famous formula and say that *the real is the relational*: what exist in the social world are relations—not interactions between agents or intersubjective ties between individuals, but objective relations which exist "independently of individual consciousness and will," as Marx said.

In analytic terms, a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.).

In highly differentiated societies, the social cosmos is made up of a number of such relatively autonomous social microcosms, i.e., spaces of objective relations that are the site of a logic and a necessity that are *specific and irreducible* to those that regulate other fields. For instance, the artistic field, or the religious field, or the economic field all follow specific logics: while the artistic field has constituted itself by rejecting

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even relations understood as *interactions*, that is, as intersubjective, actually activated connections. In fact, just as the Newtonian theory of gravitation could only be constructed against Cartesian realism which wanted to recognize no mode of action other than collision, direct contact, the notion of field presupposes a break with the realist representation which leads us to reduce the effect of the *environment* to the effect of direct action as actualized during an interaction."

49. Jurii Tynianov (1894–1943) was, with Roman Jakobson and Vladimir Propp, a leading member of the Russian Formalist school which advocated a structuralist approach to the study of literature and language.

or reversing the law of material profit (Bourdieu 1983d), the economic field has emerged, historically, through the creation of a universe within which, as we commonly say, "business is business," where the enchanted relations of friendship and love are in principle excluded.

**You often use the analogy of a "game" to give a first intuitive grasp of what you understand by field.**

We can indeed, with caution, compare a field to a game (*jeu*) although, unlike the latter, a field is not the product of a deliberate act of creation, and it follows rules or, better, regularities,<sup>50</sup> that are not explicit and codified. Thus we have *stakes* (*enjeux*) which are for the most part the product of the competition between players. We have an *investment in the game, illusio* (from *ludus*, the game): players are taken in by the game, they oppose one another, sometimes with ferocity, only to the extent that they concur in their belief (*doxa*) in the game and its stakes; they grant these a recognition that escapes questioning. Players agree, by the mere fact of playing, and not by way of a "contract," that the game is worth playing, that it is "worth the candle," and this *collusion* is the very basis of their competition. We also have *trump cards*, that is, master cards whose force varies depending on the game: just as the relative value of cards changes with each game, the hierarchy of the different species of capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic) varies across the various fields. In other words, there are cards that are valid, efficacious in all fields—these are the fundamental species of capital—but their relative value as trump cards is determined by each field and even by the successive states of the same field.

This is so because, at bottom, the value of a species of capital (e.g., knowledge of Greek or of integral calculus) hinges on the existence of a game, of a field in which this competency can be employed: a species of capital is what is efficacious in a given field, both as a weapon and as a stake of struggle, that which allows its possessors to wield a power, an influence, and thus to *exist*, in the field under consideration, instead of being considered a negligible quantity. In empirical work, it is one and the same thing to determine what the field is, where its limits lie, etc., and to determine what species of capital are

50. On the difference between rules and regularities and the equivocations of structuralism between those two terms, see Bourdieu 1986a, and 1990a: 30–41.

active in it, within what limits, and so on. (We see here how the notions of capital and field are tightly interconnected.)

At each moment, it is the state of the relations of force between players that defines the structure of the field. We can picture each player as having in front of her a pile of tokens of different colors, each color corresponding to a given species of capital she holds, so that her *relative force in the game*, her *position* in the space of play, and also her *strategic orientation toward the game*, what we call in French her "game," the moves that she makes, more or less risky or cautious, subversive or conservative, depend both on the total number of tokens and on the composition of the piles of tokens she retains, that is, on the volume and structure of her capital. Two individuals endowed with an equivalent overall capital can differ, in their position as well as in their stances ("position-takings"), in that one holds a lot of economic capital and little cultural capital while the other has little economic capital and large cultural assets. To be more precise, the strategies of a "player" and everything that defines his "game" are a function not only of the volume and structure of his capital *at the moment under consideration* and of the game chances (Huygens spoke of *lusiones*, again from *ludus*, to designate objective probabilities) they guarantee him, but also of the *evolution over time* of the volume and structure of this capital, that is, of his social trajectory and of the dispositions (*habitus*) constituted in the prolonged relation to a definite distribution of objective chances.

But this is not all: players can play to increase or to conserve their capital, their number of tokens, in conformity with the tacit rules of the game and the prerequisites of the reproduction of the game and its stakes; but they can also get in it to transform, partially or completely, the immanent rules of the game. They can, for instance, work to change the relative value of tokens of different colors, the exchange rate between various species of capital, through strategies aimed at discrediting the form of capital upon which the force of their opponents rests (e.g., economic capital) and to valorize the species of capital they preferentially possess (e.g., juridical capital).<sup>51</sup> A good number of struggles within the field of power are of this type, notably

51. For an illustration of the growing conflict between juridical and economic capital involved in the rise of new legal professions (notably "bankruptcy experts") at the intersection of the two fields, see Dezalay 1989.

those aimed at seizing power over the state, that is, over the economic and political resources that enable the state to wield a power over all games and over the rules that regulate them.

**This analogy displays the links between the core concepts of your theory, but it does not tell us how one determines the existence of a field and its boundaries.**

The question of the limits of the field is a very difficult one, if only because it is *always at stake in the field itself* and therefore admits of no *a priori* answer. Participants in a field, say, economic firms, high fashion designers, or novelists, constantly work to differentiate themselves from their closest rivals in order to reduce competition and to establish a monopoly over a particular subsector of the field. (I should immediately correct this sentence for its teleological bias, the very bias attributed to me by those who construe my analysis of cultural practices as based on a search for distinction. There is a production of difference which is in no way the product of a *search for* difference. There are many agents—I think for instance of Gustave Flaubert—for whom to exist in a given field consists *eo ipso* in differing, in being different, in asserting one's difference, oftentimes because they are endowed with properties such that they should not be there, they should have been eliminated at the entrance to the field.) Their efforts to impose this or that criterion of competency, of membership, may be more or less successful in various conjunctures. Thus the boundaries of the field can only be determined by an empirical investigation. Only rarely do they take the form of juridical frontiers (e.g., *numerus clausus*), even though they are always marked by more or less institutionalized "barriers to entry."

We may think of a field as a space within which an effect of field is exercised, so that what happens to any object that traverses this space cannot be explained solely by the intrinsic properties of the object in question. The limits of the field are situated at the point where the effects of the field cease. Therefore, you must try by various means to measure in each case the point at which these statistically detectable effects decline. In the work of empirical research the construction of a field is not effected by an act of imposition. For instance, I seriously doubt that the ensemble of cultural associations (choirs, theater groups, reading clubs, etc.) of a given American state or of a French region form a field. By contrast, the work of Jerry Karabel (1984) suggests that major American universities are linked by objective rela-

tions such that the structure of these (material and symbolic) relations has effects within each of them. Similarly for newspapers: Michael Schudson (1978) shows that you cannot understand the emergence of the modern idea of "objectivity" in journalism if you do not see that it arose in newspapers concerned with standards of respectability, as that which distinguishes "news" from the mere "stories" of tabloids. It is only by studying each of these universes that you can assess how concretely they are constituted, where they stop, who gets in and who does not, and whether at all they form a field.

### **What are the motor causes of the functioning and transformation of a field?** ✓

The principle of the dynamics of a field lies in the form of its structure and, in particular, in the distance, the gaps, the asymmetries between the various specific forces that confront one another. [The forces that are active in the field—and thus selected by the analyst as pertinent because they produce the most relevant differences—are those which define the specific capital. *A capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field*. It confers a power over the field, over the materialized or embodied instruments of production or reproduction whose distribution constitutes the very structure of the field, and over the regularities and the rules which define the ordinary functioning of the field, and thereby over the profits engendered in it.

As a space of potential and active forces, the field is also a *field of struggles* aimed at preserving or transforming the configuration of these forces. Furthermore, the field as a structure of objective relations between positions of force undergirds and guides the strategies whereby the occupants of these positions seek, individually or collectively, to safeguard or improve their position and to impose the principle of hierarchization most favorable to their own products. The strategies of agents depend on their position in the field, that is, in the distribution of the specific capital, and on the perception that they have of the field depending on the point of view they take on the field as a view taken from a point *in* the field.<sup>52</sup> ✓

52. Bourdieu takes pains to emphasize the discontinuity between a social field and a magnetic field, and therefore between sociology and a reductionistic "social physics": "Sociology is not a chapter of mechanics and social fields are fields of forces but also fields of struggles to transform or preserve these fields of forces. And the relation, practical or reflective, that agents entertain with the game is part and parcel of the game and may be at the basis of its transformation" (Bourdieu 1982a: 46, my translation).