Relationality and social interaction
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Abstract

This paper explores Bourdieu's account of a relational social space, and his relative neglect of social interaction within this framework. Bourdieu includes social capital as one of the key relational elements of his social space, but says much less about it than economic or cultural capital, and levels of social capital are rarely measured in his work. Bourdieu is reluctant to focus on the content of social networks as part of his rejection of substantialist thinking. The neglect of substantive networks creates problems for Bourdieu's framework, because many of Bourdieu's core concepts rest upon assumptions about their interactional properties (in particular, the prevalence of homophilous differential association) which are left unexamined. It is argued here that Bourdieu's neglect of the substance of social networks is related to the criticisms that Bourdieu's framework often encounters, and that this neglect bears re-examination, since it is helpful to think of the ways in which differentiated social networks contribute to the development of habitus, help form fields, and so *constitute* the intersubjective social relations within which sociality, and practice more generally, occur.

Keywords: Bourdieu, relationality, habitus, homophily, field, intersubjective, social interaction

Introduction

Bourdieu's relational approach to sociology advocates relational analysis as a means to avoid the problems - of objectivism, substantialism and individualism - which recur in social theory. However, Bourdieu's framework is itself accused of objectivist and individualist leanings. This paper explores how these charges relate to Bourdieu's particular approach to relationality. Bourdieu's approach is *relational* but does not focus on *social relationships*, understood as social networks or as an interactional order. This emphasis is deliberate, part of Bourdieu's attempt to avoid reifying 'substantialism'. However, this neglect of the substance of social interaction has problematic consequences for Bourdieu's theoretical framework, not least because many of Bourdieu's key concepts presuppose the predominance of a particular, very concrete form of network relation – homophily, a pattern of differential association in which agents are more likely to associate with those who are socially similar to themselves. The significance of homophily is 'bracketed off' from Bourdieu's more detailed account of social practice, creating a number of difficulties in his account, in particular allowing Bourdieu to sideline the intersubjective aspects of joint practice. In what follows, I examine how problematic limiting assumptions about homophily underpin Bourdieu's key concepts (habitus and field) in both earlier and later versions of his analysis. These assumptions are directly bound up with many of the charges that critics levy at his work.

Bourdieu's relational sociology

Bourdieu's relational emphasis is part of his project to transcend the key dualisms of 'individuality/society, individual/collective, conscious/unconscious, interested/disinterested, objective/subjective' which dog social analysis (1998a: viii). Bourdieu argues conventional approaches reify 'the properties attached to agents - occupation, age, sex, qualifications - as *forces* independent of the relationships within which they "act"' (1984: 22). But by taking 'the relationship itself as the object of study' (1984: 22), positivism or methodological individualism can be avoided. By insisting that 'what exist in the social world are relations - not interactions between agents and intersubjective ties between individuals, but objective relations which exist "independent of individual consciousness and will"'(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 97), Bourdieu's relational approach also avoids 'subjectivism', going beyond agents' representations to recognize the 'structure of objective relations which determines the possible form of interactions and of the representations the interactors can have of them' (Bourdieu 1984: 244).

In stressing the impact of objective relations in social life, Bourdieu distinguishes his account from conventional structural approaches (which see regularities in social life as the product of rule-following), insisting that actors do not simply follow internalized rules as the *reflection* of social structure, but pursue strategies based upon their imperfect practical knowledge of the world and respond creatively to new situations. Gift-exchange, or the operation of 'honour' in social life, are not the result of the enactment of 'rules' determined by objectively constraining social structures, but rather emerge from practical, time-dependent, *strategies* (Bourdieu 1977). Bourdieu's agents are 'virtuosos' of practice: drawing creatively upon a 'sense' of how to behave in given situations, which derives not from 'conscious, constant rules, but practical schemes' (1990a: 12). Such schemes are embedded pre-reflective dispositions 'inculcated in the earliest years of life and constantly reinforced by calls to order from the group, that is to say, from the aggregate of the individuals endowed with the same dispositions, to whom each is linked by his dispositions and interests' (1977: 15). As King notes (2000), Bourdieu's theory of practice sharply distinguishes *structural* relations from objectivist *structures*:

> 'On his practical theory, individuals are embedded in complex, constantly negotiated networks of relations with other individuals; isolated individuals do not stand before objective structures and rules which determine their actions but in networks of relations which they virtuosically manipulate.' (King 2000: 421)

However, as King also notes, this interactional view of social structure is not the only, nor even predominant, way in which Bourdieu emphasizes 'relationality'. There are a number of different aspects to Bourdieu's relational focus: his account of social space as a 'space of relations' (Bourdieu 1985: 725); his use of field analysis to emphasize the multi-dimensional properties positioning individuals relative to one another; his insistence on the contrastive nature of practices; his characterization of fields as sites of contestation and struggle over properties and practices; and his stress on 'homologies' between relational practices in different fields. In all of these aspects, the interactional view of relationality tends to be eclipsed by a more abstract emphasis on objective structural relations.

In Bourdieu's account, social position depends not on the intrinsic properties of groups or locations ('substantionalism'), but on the configuration of relations which

link and give them their significance. The social space is made up of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic resources: differential relations to these resources position individuals and groups within the space, with agents 'defined by their relative positions within that space' (Bourdieu 1985: 723-4). The space is multi-dimensional:

> 'constructed in such a way that the agents, groups or institutions that find themselves situated in it have more properties in common the closer they are to each other in this space; and fewer common properties, the further they are from each other.' (Bourdieu 1990b: 127)

Both the general social space and specific social arenas are conceived as 'fields' of *forces*, in which underlying objective relations structure manifest social relationships. Field analysis is a relational method, since 'To think in terms of field is to *think relationally'*, with a field 'defined as a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 96, 97). Fields are fields of forces but also fields of struggle, with objective relations 'strategic emplacements, fortresses to be defended and captured in a field of struggles' (Bourdieu 1984: 244). Bourdieu aims to identify the underlying principles of contestation which generate regularities in behaviour, rather than simply describe those regularities, since patterns are 'only the balance sheet, at a given moment of…symbolic struggles' (1984: 249).

The distribution of different kinds of capital define the dimensions of all fields, so agents in a sector of one field can feel 'elective affinities' to people or practices in the same relative position in other fields. Relationality therefore encourages the examination of 'homologies' between sets of practices. In *Distinction*, it is the 'homology' between the space of lifestyles and the space of social positions which gives practices their meaning. Such homologies express systematic oppositions across fields, irrespective of specific content:

> 'the practices or goods associated with the different classes in the different areas of practice are organized in accordance with structures of opposition which are homologous to one another because they are all homologous to the structure of objective oppositions between class conditions.' (Bourdieu 1984: 175)

Whilst Bourdieu's approach to sociology is distinctive, his particular approach to relationality is no guarantee against charges of reification, or excessive objectivism or individualism. Bourdieu's claim to transcend the key dualisms of social analysis rests on his argument that social conditions shape *dispositions*, with objective structures bodily incorporated, transformed into habitual tastes and pre-reflective aspirations. Yet critics argue that Bourdieu's framework collapses back into the very determinism, objectivism and methodological individualism it was designed to sidestep, with the concept of habitus coming under particular attack (Alexander 1995; Barnes 2000; Bohman 1998; Butler 1999; Jenkins 2000; King 2000). Bourdieu rejects such claims (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), however, the charges recur. In what follows, I suggest that it is Bourdieu's particular approach to relationality which lays his framework open to criticism. Whilst Bourdieu's approach is *relational,* it does not focus on *social relationships*, understood as social networks or as an interactional order. This is a part of Bourdieu's resistance to substantialism. However, the neglect of empirical social connection means that Bourdieu fails to fully confront some of the implications that substantive social interaction has for his framework.

Relationality and social interaction

Bourdieu's relational account of the contrastive nature of practices does not include a detailed focus on social interaction or social networks. Social capital is less theoretically developed than the other capitals (Erickson 1996; Field 2003), and levels of social capital are seldom measured in Bourdieu's work (Swartz 1992; Warde and Tampubolon 2002). Social capital is seen as a hierarchically differentiated resource arising from networks, where the agent's volume of social capital 'depends on the size of the network connections that he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected' (Bourdieu 1997: 47). However, Bourdieu shows little interest in the nature of the networks that generate such resources. Although Bourdieu describes the 'social space' as a 'space of relationships' (1985: 725), he generally uses relations to economic and cultural capital to describe the overall social space and specific field relations. Social capital, and the network of social interaction that underpins it, receive much less attention in Bourdieu's framework.

This reluctance to focus on the interactional properties of social networks is related to Bourdieu's rejection of substantialist thinking. Bourdieu insists a *relational* network (of relative power and resources) should not be reduced to an *empirical* social network, distinguishing between 'structure and interaction or between a structural relation which operates in a permanent and invisible fashion, and an effective relation, a relation actualized in and by a particular exchange' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 113).

> 'In fact, the structure of a field, understood as a space of objective relations between positions defined by their rank in the distribution of competing powers or species of capital, is different from the more or less lasting networks through which it manifests itself. It is this structure that determines the possibility or the impossibility (or, to be more precise, the greater or lesser probability) of observing the establishment of linkages that express and sustain the existence of networks. 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. In network analysis, the study of these underlying structures has been sacrificed to the analysis of the particular linkages (between agents or institutions) and flows (of information, resources, services, etc.) through which they become visible.' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 113-4)

In *Homo Academicus,* Bourdieu plots the location of French intellectuals within the academic field, but these are not the 'empirical individuals' of a 'partial analysis' but are rather 'epistemic' or 'constructed individuals', defined by their relational position within a theoretical space (or field) of differentiation (1990c: 3, 22-3).

However, whilst Bourdieu prefers a 'relational' rather than a 'substantialist' reading of social position, his retreat from the substance of social interaction creates a number of problems in his explanatory framework. There are three issues here. Firstly, by stressing the relational properties of social position, Bourdieu sometimes places an undue reliance on homologies between structurally equivalent positions to explain social action, without sufficiently attending to the substance of those social positions. Secondly, many of Bourdieu's core concepts – habitus, field and, more generally,

social space – depend upon assumptions about their interactional properties which are left unexamined. Key elements of Bourdieu's conceptual framework presuppose the prevalence of a particular network pattern – homophily, where agents associate on the basis of social similarity. But the significance of homophily for Bourdieu's account of social practice is never fully confronted, and is treated as a theoretical *a priori* on which concepts like the habitus sit. However, the existence of homophily cannot simply be assumed, and to adequately situate Bourdieu's account of the habitus (and field) greater attention must be paid to the substance and patterning of social networks. Thirdly, by 'bracketing off' the concrete nature of social networks as a feature of social space, Bourdieu ignores the variable interactional properties of that space, and so downplays the intersubjective character of practice.

The problem of homologies

Bourdieu's relational approach emphasizes the 'homologies' between practices in different fields, or between positions with equivalent relations of dominance and domination within the same field. He sees an equivalence between the dominated fraction of the dominant class and the dominated class, arguing that those who occupy a dominated position within the dominant class, such as intellectuals, are more likely to support groups who occupy an overall dominated position in the field of power (working class groups), a homology he uses to explain alliances between students and workers in the May 1968 crisis in France (Bourdieu 1985, 1990c). Critics point out that this stress on relational homologies as the basis of felt solidarity misses crucial steps in the development of collective affinities:

> 'While structural location may indeed help explain the reciprocal relationship between groups, a fuller understanding of such connections must be sought in factors such as status group co-membership, network ties, and common world views. What is needed in addition is a politics of collective mobilization.' (Swartz 1997: 136)

Where Bourdieu does address issues of group mobilization he stresses the role of symbolic representation by political entrepreneurs, whose likelihood of galvanising 'groups' depends on the shared conditions and durable links which predispose people to attend to their message (Bourdieu and Passeron 1996: 25; Bourdieu1998a: 11). However, this account privileges the process of symbolic representation and 'tends to reduce collective conflict to one of competition among the leaders of different organizations...the groups they actually represent fade into the background' (Swartz 1997: 187). As de Nooy argues, the substance of interpersonal interaction is important to this process, as leaders and followers:

> 'do not just occupy homologous positions; they gather and interact, and this they prefer doing in places where they confront (hence interact with) the establishment. Their interaction gives rise to classifications, stigmata, identity, to which other groups react…objective relations are not autonomous forces that directly and continuously affect each field. They become operative when people or organizations take part in the interaction within the field, bringing to bear properties and qualifications characteristic of another field.' (de Nooy 2003: 323)

However, Bourdieu gives scant attention to the composition of social groups, or the characteristics of interpersonal social connection more generally. There is little

sense within Bourdieu's sociology of how the social ties of potential group members play a part in their mobilization. Yet, social movement theory suggests that concrete social connections must be explored to explain group formation (and dissolution) (Crossley 2002). Furthermore, social networks are a component feature of the field relations which agents must negotiate, and by failing to address the properties of social networks, Bourdieu effectively ignores a key aspect of the social conditions which help to shape 'the possible form of interactions and…the representations the interactors can have of them' (1984: 244).

Bourdieu does make a series of presuppositions about the substance of the social networks that underlie a shared position in social space (and habitus), but as an undeveloped element of his framework. This leads to the second problem generated by Bourdieu's non-substantialist reading of relationality: his assumptions about (and neglect of) homophily.

The problem of homophily

Bourdieu's reluctance to explore the substance of social networks is intriguing, because key elements of his theoretical framework are predicated upon the prevalence of a particular form of network structure: homophily, in which agents tend to associate with those who have similar social characteristics. Bourdieu gives short shrift to the substance of social ties, a surprising omission, because he sees similarities of lifestyle (and thus habitus) as inseparable from processes of social interaction, arguing for example, that 'Taste is what brings things and people that go together' (1984: 241) and 'the surest guarantor of homogamy and, thereby, of social reproduction, is the spontaneous affinity...which brings together the agents endowed with dispositions or tastes that are similar' (1990a: 71).

Bourdieu's account of social conditions is one of individuals and groups positioned by their access to differential resources. But networks emerge in his account not only in the form of social capital as a relational asset, but also – implicitly - in a more substantialist manner, as enduring homophilous linkages generated by shared habitus and proximity in social space. People similarly located in social space are more likely to be seen as 'the same', and 'the proximity of conditions, and therefore of dispositions, tends to be translated into durable linkages and groupings' (Bourdieu 1985: 730).

> 'Inasmuch as they correspond to classes of material conditions of living, and thus to classes of similar conditionings, they [positions in social space] bring together agents who have in common dispositional properties (habitus), hence a certain propensity to come together in reality, to constitute themselves into real groups.' (1990b: 117-8)

Bourdieu's model of relative distance within a social space has substantive implications for social networks and category membership, since position in social space:

> 'defines distances that are *predictive* of encounters, affinities, sympathies, or even desires. Concretely, this means that people located at the top of the space have little chance of marrying people located towards the bottom, first because they have little chance of physically meeting them (except in what are called 'bad places', that is, at

the cost of a transgression of the social limits which reflect spatial distances); secondly because, if they do accidentally meet them on some occasion, they will not get on together, will not really understand each other, will not appeal to one another. On the other hand, proximity in social space predisposes to closer relations: people who are inscribed in a restricted sector of the space will be both closer (in their properties and in their dispositions, *their tastes*) and more disposed to get closer, as well as being easier to mobilize.' (1998a: 10-11)

The implication is that 'those who are similar in terms of lifestyle prefer to interact socially and those who choose to interact socially tend to be similar in terms of lifestyle' (Prandy 1999: 229). Bourdieu's claim about the links between homogamy and lifestyle is a theoretical *a priori* which he never fully develops. Yet assumptions about the nature and impact of differential association lie at the heart of Bourdieu's theoretical framework, particularly in his account of the habitus as both generative and reproductive, and raise serious questions about how the relation between habitus and field is formulated.

Take the significance of differential association on the formation of the habitus. In Bourdieu's account of the habitus, social conditions become bodily incorporated into a dispositional 'social instinct' for how to behave in given circumstance, shared by those in the same region of social space. However, early experiences have 'particular weight' in shaping such dispositions because Bourdieu (1990a: 60-1) argues the habitus tends to *avoid* new experiences or challenges which might call 'into question its accumulated information', seeking out people and situations which reinforce it, again through differential association and preference:

> 'One has only to think, for example of homogamy, the paradigm of all the 'choices' through which the habitus tends to favour experiences likely to reinforce it (or the empirically confirmed fact that people tend to talk about politics with those who have the same opinions). Through the systematic 'choices' it makes among the places, events and people that might be frequented, the habitus tends to protect itself from crisis and critical challenges by providing itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible, that is, a relatively constant universe of situations tending to reinforce its dispositions.' (1990a: 61)

Bourdieu explores social connection as social capital in a number of different ways in his work, but his general emphasis is on how patterns of social connection derive from 'strategies of reproduction' which reflect, and are adjusted to, the underlying field of power. The habitus, operating with a 'social conservation instinct' (1990c: 150), shapes apparently free choice, as 'amor fati', the choice of destiny (1984: 244). In earlier, more anthropological studies, in Béarn and Kabyle, Bourdieu explores kinship relations as 'strategies of reproduction', in which a combination of fertility, marriage, and educational strategies work to transmit inherited advantage between generations (Bourdieu 1976, 1977, 1990a). In later field analyses, he maps how social capital (through marriage, educational contacts, friendship, 'esprit de corps', and institutional connections) is bound up with the distribution of economic and cultural capital of given fields, serving to reproduce that advantage, often in increasingly 'invisible' ways (1998b,1990c). The theoretical conclusion of earlier and later work is that apparently 'free' or 'spontaneous' social contacts are structured in relation to the distribution of power, through the 'affinity of tastes and lifestyle that

arises in the homogeneity of habitus' (1998b: 360). This affinity serves to increase the homogeneity of groups, discouraging mismatches and misalliances:

> 'As social positions embodied in bodily dispositions, habitus contribute to determining whether (biological) bodies [corps] come together or stay apart by inscribing between two bodies the attraction and repulsions that correspond to the relationship between the positions of which they are the embodiment.' (1998b: 182-3).

Throughout his work, Bourdieu implies a systematic connection between habitus, social networks, and the membership of social categories, with the patterned differential association of different categories of people leading to different lifestyles, routes through life, and thus different dispositions and worldviews. He is right to imply this, because networks research indicates a powerful relationship between 'association and similarity', a *social sorting* process in which the people we interact with tend to be very similar to ourselves in education, social class background, race/ethnicity, religion, and attitudes etc. (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001: 416). However, similarity of lifestyle is an *outcome* of social interaction as well as a precipitant of it. Through interaction, via processes of mutual adjustment and the sharing of information, networks of agents actively converge on lifestyles, transforming prior aspects of their lifestyles to unify practices. The situation is further complicated, because whilst Bourdieu focuses upon class habitus, other collectives such as 'nations, eras and status groups…may manifest a distinct habitus' (Crossley 2002: 72). Networks may be sorted on multiple dimensions, all of which has consequences for the milieux within which agents form and operate their habitus.

Networks are systematically ordered by category characteristics such as class, but also gender, race, ethnicity, religion and so on, so the people closest to us also tend to be socially similar to us along many dimensions of difference and inequality. This is undoubtedly an important factor affecting routes through life and subjective lifeworlds. However, we cannot leave this as an *a priori* assumption, because differential association is contingent and a matter of degree. Although differential association means 'distance in terms of social characteristics translates into network distance' (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001: 416), the extent of homophily should not be overstated. The influence of social similarity on social networks is an aggregate tendency - we sit at the centre of associates with a range of social characteristics, *more or less* similar to ourselves. Yet the *degree* and *nature* of differential association is consequential for the *extent* to which people share pre-reflective dispositions and common worldviews. That is, the pattern of differential association is likely to affect the way in which social space, habit and reflection are bound up in each other.

Bourdieu argues groups develop a different habitus because they live their lives under very different circumstances so, as Crossley notes, 'the notion of the habitus points to *the importance of individual and group lifeworld* in shaping action' (Crossley 2002: 173). But the 'lifeworld' that emerges within more heterogeneous networks will be different to that created in networks marked by a high degree of homophily or social similarity, not least in the extent to which practices can be shared in common and unreflectively taken-for-granted. The degree of differential association affects the *extent* to which any habitus is protected 'from crisis and critical challenges by providing itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible' (Bourdieu

1990a: 61). But Bourdieu emphasizes the acquisition of habitus as a 'once and for all' process (emerging from early social experience, in networks characterized by homogamy, which the habitus conservatively reinforces), limiting consideration of the impact of networks upon lifeworld and practice.

Bourdieu's emphasis on homogamous networks reinforced by a conservative habitus acquired in childhood also limits the reflexive aspects of the habitus, since:

> 'The earlier a player enters a game and the less he is aware of the associated learning (the limiting case being, of course, that of someone born into, born with, the game), the greater is his ignorance of all that is tacitly granted through his investment in the field.' (1990a: 67)

The assumption of homophily that runs through Bourdieu's framework 'locks down' the habitus into a relatively homogenous, self-contained and reproducing region of social space. Individuals in that region absorb essentially the same conditions and dispositions, and the homophilous conservatism of the habitus ensures that they instinctively seek out more of the same. Such conservatism, in dispositions and connections, ensures individuals share the same instinctive 'feel for the game', with few disruptions to spark reflexivity. Bourdieu presents the encounter of a habitus with a field to which it is adapted as generally seamless, generating pre-reflective practice based on 'social instinct'. Practice is tacit and dispositional because the habitus of the agent is embedded in a 'milieu to which it is pre-adapted' (1990a: 61).

However, Bourdieu's assumptions (that the habitus is acquired early in life, and reinforces itself by avoiding dissimilar people and experiences) can be challenged and must be empirically examined. Bourdieu stresses the 'inevitable priority of originary experiences and consequently a relative closure of the system of dispositions that constitute habitus' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 133). Yet as Lahire notes, social agents have a 'broad array of dispositions, each of which owes its availability, composition, and force to the socialization process in which it was acquired…the intensity with which dispositions affect behaviour depends on the specific context in which social agents interact with one another' (Lahire 2003: 329). Bourdieu's account of the inculcation of dispositions tends to assume too strongly that these processes are general and homogeneous in nature, and Lahire suggests, needs a greater 'focus on the plurality of dispositions and on the variety of situations in which they manifest themselves' (Lahire 2003: 329). By emphasizing early socialization in shaping the habitus, Bourdieu underplays firstly, the degree of potential heterogeneity of any given milieu which may shape the lifeworld; and, secondly, the way agents modify and reconstruct their dispositions throughout their lives, as they traverse different social contexts and contacts.

Bourdieu acknowledges that encounters with fields to which the habitus is not adapted will be disruptive to dispositional practice, as a poor 'feel for the game' leads to greater reflection upon, and planning in relation to, 'the rules'. When habitus is dissonant with field, practices cannot be 'taken-for-granted'. But the disruptions of a field dissonant with habitus also implies a shift in social connections, with increasing heterophily, since the agent also encounters other agents with different dispositions and characteristics. In earlier formulations, Bourdieu presents this as rare, emphasizing the consonance between habitus and field, because the 'conservative',

homogamous nature of the habitus discourages disruptive encounters. Later field analyses seem to allow for a looser fit, with practice emerging from complex combinations of habitus, field and resources. But in opening up this possibility, Bourdieu raises unanswered questions about the impact of differential association on the operation of dispositional practice *in any context*. The problem of homophily persists in both earlier and later formulations of Bourdieu's framework.

Of course, Bourdieu does not assume there is always a 'homogeneity of habitus', nor does he see social situations as invariably homophilous. Indeed, his account of social change explores shifts in both these aspects. His earlier, more anthropological accounts, (of Béarn and Kabyle) give an account of kinship relations and partnership choice as conservative strategies which result in 'simple reproduction' (where the 'self-evident' practices adjusted to a social formation reproduce it); but also describes modernising forces of change which rupture this cycle, producing more complex trajectories amongst agents, shifts in the 'morphological' composition of fields, and variations in the 'fit' between habitus and field. Bourdieu's later field analyses detail wide-reaching 'morphological changes' in the numbers and composition of students and lecturers in French universities, creating a 'break in the cycle of simple reproduction' (1990c: 156, 1998b). This occurs through 'a transformation in the dispositions of the agents, linked to a change in conditions of recruitment' in which 'the automatic harmony between expectations and probable trajectories, which led people to see as self-evident the order of their succession, was broken' (1990c: 161, 156). However, the *manner* in which Bourdieu deals with such situations tends to rein in the implications of such variations in differential association for his framework.

Whilst Bourdieu argues contemporary social changes undermine 'simple reproduction', this does not contradict his general view of the habitus as tending to produce homophily. Field relations, and the conversion rates between different kinds of capital, change, but strategies of reproduction (and patterns of association) must adjust to these changes if advantage is to be maintained (as 'strategies of reconversion'). Bourdieu repeatedly notes that field struggles and reconversion strategies (even failing ones, 1990c: 127) are bound up with homophily. Despite enormous changes in the French academy, Bourdieu notes a continuing process of 'aggregation and segregation' in the routes of entrants, which he identifies as 'one of the hidden mediations through which social homogamy is achieved' (1998b: 182-3, 1990c). The increasing significance of the education field, and of women's education, has served to 'insure homogamy at least as effectively, but in a much more unobtrusive manner' as more direct matrimonial strategies (1998b: 275). The recruitment problems of French universities generate 'commonsense strategies [adjustments of age and gender requirements] which tend to maintain the homeostasis of the professorial body', with these seen as analogous to matrimonial strategies (lowering age at marriage) which ensure access to partners of the appropriate status in the face of sex-ratio imbalances (1990c: 138). Struggles within the field of power over conversion rates between economic and cultural capital are nonetheless bound up with the emergence of an increasingly homogeneous, 'self-enclosed' 'state nobility' (1998b: 260). Bourdieu continues to explore the ways in which the habitus adjusts in the face of that change to produce homophilous relationships. Bourdieu's account of change frequently serves to reinforce his overall assumptions of the conservative nature of the habitus (and its tendencies towards homophily).

Bourdieu also argues that 'morphological changes' in the composition of groups within a field can change the structure of field relations (1990c, 1998b, 1993). Bourdieu's discussion of 'morphological change' supports his general theoretical stress on a variable relation between habitus and field, since the 'homology between positions and the dispositions of their occupants is never perfect':

> 'Deviant trajectories, which lead some students to the pole opposite the position to which they were promised and which was promised to them…along with the interrupted trajectories of those who have remained within their universe but have not attained their probable future, are undoubtedly one of the most important factors in the transformation of the field of power, as well as the transformation of specific sectors of this field, such as the literary or artistic fields.' (1998b: 183-4)

But although Bourdieu stresses the importance of 'morphology' on field relations, and by implication, acknowledges the likely impact of social networks on dispositions to act and collective practices, his analysis focuses on objective *field relations* rather than (interpersonal) *social relationships*. For example, he uses correspondence analysis to explore connections as social capital, abstracting from the substance of interpersonal relations within fields (de Nooy 2003). Bourdieu also tends to frame morphological change (changes in the pattern of differential association) in terms of the 'fit' between disposition and position: that is, as the relation of the agents' habitus to their field, rather than in terms of the *relationships between variously disposed agents within the field*. Whilst Bourdieu does discuss how those occupying 'orthodox' and 'heterodox' positions within a field often have different social origins and trajectories, his account focuses on their field relations to different kinds of capital, and points out that even in their status struggles they share the same underlying field doxa (1990c, 1993). The nature of this treatment limits the potential consequences of heterophily for Bourdieu's framework.

Furthermore, related to his focus on the 'fit' between habitus and field, Bourdieu generally frames morphological change, and increasing heterophily, as a *crisis* in the normal operation of the field (because it disrupts the 'self-evident' nature of practices). He does not explore the significance of variations in differential association as a continuing, constituent feature of *all* field relations (and dispositions to act), but rather as a precipitating event which disrupts dispositional practice and reorders fields. Whilst Bourdieu notes the significance of 'deviant trajectories' for field change, he presents them as an unsatisfactory basis for reproduction strategies, since they 'always lead to unstable, unsteady positions favouring stances that are themselves entirely unstable, shaky, and often doomed to constant shifts or, in time, to reversals' (1998b: 184). Again, this relates to his depiction of the character of 'stable' reproduction as resting on the fit between habitus and field. The most effective practices are 'self-evident' and result from a shared group habitus:

> 'The objective homogenizing of group or class habitus that results from homogeneity of conditions of existence is what enables practices to be objectively harmonized without any calculation or conscious references to a norm in the absence of any direct interaction or, a fortiori, explicit co-ordination.' (1990a: 58-9)

So although Bourdieu does discuss shifting homophily, and does not always assume the homogeneity of the habitus, his treatment of 'morphological changes' is very particular. It does not support detailed analysis of the *degree* and *nature* of differential

association, nor examine how differential association might affect the *extent* to which people share pre-reflective dispositions and common worldviews. Bourdieu makes a clear distinction between the 'social space' as a theoretical space of relations, and concrete social networks as substantive social relationships, preferring to examine the former rather than the latter. However this distinction – between structural relations and empirical connections – is not easy to maintain and, in fact, Bourdieu does not maintain it. Concrete social connections are implicit in his account as a series of *a priori* assumptions about the differential nature of association which underpin the habitus and structure fields. By reining in the issue of differential association and its impact on lifeworld and disposition, Bourdieu sidesteps any detailed consideration of how, and in what social interaction contexts, we develop our 'second natures'. To seriously address the empirical characteristics of the networks that underpin habitus is also to open up a whole series of questions about variations in social milieux, and thus variations within the habitus, and in how it is operationalized. This in turn re-opens questions about the orderly coordination of practices, which the shared nature of habitual predispositions was meant to address. To reframe the shared nature of the habitus as a *matter of degree* is to recognize practice as a more intersubjective and negotiated phenomenon than Bourdieu's framework usually allows.

The problem of intersubjectivity

Bourdieu's relational focus is part of his attempt to reset social analysis away from the debilitating dualisms and the explanatory deficiencies which have dogged previous accounts. Yet Bourdieu's own framework is accused of slipping from an emphasis on structural relations back into a statement of an objective and deterministic social structure. These charges relate to Bourdieu's neglect of substantive social interaction. By limiting consideration of the concrete nature of social networks as a feature of social space, Bourdieu ignores the interactional properties of that space, and so underplays the intersubjective character of practice.

To provide a more 'structural' adaptation of phenomenology, Bourdieu 'grounds' Merleau-Ponty's pre-reflective body-subject within a generative-structuralist account (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 20). This provides a structural context for the pre-reflective body-subject, but one theorized in terms of sedimented dispositional practice, and the intersections of habitus and field. As a consequence, the intersubjective dimensions of that practice, emerging though the concrete interactions of agents with other agents, is only very weakly acknowledged. As a result, Bourdieu lays himself open to charges of both objectivism and methodological individualism. Drawing upon adaptations of phenomenology rather different to Bourdieu's own (King 2000; Barnes 2000), I argue for a greater emphasis both on the intersubjective negotiation and coordination of practices, and on the concrete interpersonal networks of interdependency, obligation and constraint through which intersubjective negotiation and accountability flow.

Take the charges of individualism and objectivism. The concept of the habitus, in particular, has been subject to charges of objectivising determinism, seen as the 'reflection and replication of exterior structures' so that 'Far from an alternative to social structural explanation, habitus merely operationalizes it' (Alexander 1995: 136). Barnes argues that such difficulties emerge because - despite Bourdieu's struggles to

avoid determinism - he still 'describe[s] macro-order as constituted by individual persons who separately orient themselves to the same rules, or give expression to the same principles, or unfold the same competences' (2000: 55). This is because Bourdieu presents shared dispositions and joint practice as the result of individuals internalising their shared conditions in the same fashion, rather than as the result of intersubjective negotiation:

> 'Admittedly, it is stressed that individuals may adjust or creatively interpret rules and principles. And social interaction is acknowledged as important. But there is no clear recognition of the essential role of interaction in the constitution of order…Macro-order reflects the existence of similarities between individual human beings, not the interaction that overcomes the differences between them.' (Barnes 2000: 55)

Barnes' critique of Bourdieu rests upon the limits of dispositional habitus as a basis of shared practice. To operate within the 'rules of the game' is not just a question of acting upon embedded social instinct, nor of the interface of that instinct with objective structural relations; it also depends upon the active alignment 'coordination and standardization of practical actions' by networks of interdependent social agents 'who profoundly affect each other as they interact' (Barnes 2000: 66, 64). Because 'social practices are neither unitary objects nor individual habits but collective accomplishments', agents must take account of, and act in accord with, the expectations of the people that they encounter in given social situations, with joint action 'the creation of agreement out of difference as a continuing ubiquitous project' (Barnes 2000: 63, 59, 55). As I have argued, Bourdieu's emphasis on the 'similarities between individual human beings' as the basis of joint practice is made possible because he makes a general assumption of the prevalence of homophily. But if co-ordinated routines are the result of negotiated intersubjective agreement rather than the identity of individual dispositions, then we must pay more detailed attention to the variable nature of social interconnection and the substance of social interactions. Conversely, acknowledging in any detail the substance of (differential) social interaction, means conceiving social practice as an indeterminate and intersubjective accomplishment.

By refusing to engage with the substance of social interaction, and implicitly assuming homophily in social situations, Bourdieu limits consideration of the intersubjective dimensions of dispositional practice. Bourdieu's sociology is premised on the assumption that people tend to associate with others much like themselves, both for reasons of structural opportunity and proximity, and because their embodied predispositions make them seek out the comfortably familiar and similar. In this model, shared dispositions result from the internalization of shared conditions of existence, which Bourdieu presents as shared relations to the different forms of capital, but which also implies homophilous social networks. Yet Bourdieu never explores the substance of social networks, and tends to assume that the shared lifestyles of the habitus are bound up with homophily. As a result, he presents the inculcation of the habitus as a situation in which alike individuals internalize the same relationship to objective conditions. Because Bourdieu brackets off issues of differential association, he is able to rein in the potentially very wide variation in relations to social conditions (including relations to other individuals) and so downplay the possibility of significant variation within the habitus of groups of individuals, even within the same broad region of social space. As a result, Bourdieu

tends to present practice as the outcome of the relation between the individual's habitus and objective conditions, rather than as the outcome of negotiated relations between variously disposed individuals.

Sympathetic commentators claim Bourdieu's more elaborated theory of practice avoids the potential determinism of the concept of habitus, offering a more flexible account of practice as the outcome of the relations between habitus, capital and field, rather than simply as a reflection of the internalization of objective conditions. This more sophisticated formulation does present more complex influences on practice, but it does not open up the intersubjective aspects of practice, and does not escape the charge of objectivism. For:

> 'although when connected to the field the habitus suggests a richer account of social life because it highlights the struggle inherent in social life, both concepts fail to provide an adequate sociology because they transform the interactions between individuals into objective, systemic properties which are prior to individuals. Once society has been turned into an objective rather than intersubjective reality by the use of concepts like the habitus or field, individual agency and intersubjective negotiation and struggle are necessarily curtailed, even though that may not be the intention of the theorist.' (King 2000: 426)

There is a tension between an objectivist and an 'interactional, intersubjective' reading of social life *throughout* Bourdieu's work, in both earlier accounts of kinship and exchange and later field analyses (King 2000). Whilst the intersubjective nature of practice is an element of Bourdieu's framework, it is an element too easily effaced, with this linked to the slip into objectivism in his work. As King notes, Bourdieu's early accounts of gift exchange do provide an intersubjective account of the 'sense' of the game, as 'individuals renegotiate their relations with other individuals by manipulating common understandings about gift exchange in their favour' (2000: 21). Here 'the "sense of the game" refers ultimately to a sense of one's relations with other individuals and what those individuals will regard as tolerable, given certain broadly shared but not definitive understandings (King 2000: 419). However, despite the relative improvization and unpredictability that Bourdieu's early use of the concepts of habitus and strategy permits, within this initial framework change only occurs exogenously (rather than being inherent to the habitus); and so such concepts 'ultimately remained subordinate to the imperatives of social reproduction' and 'the ramifications of that improvization remained strictly limited' (Lane 2000: 108, 107). Bourdieu's adoption of field analysis represents a move away from the potential determinism of 'simple reproduction', but in the process the intersubjective dimensions of Bourdieu's early framework also slip further from view. The emphasis now is on the intersection of habitus and field, rather than the interactions of agents. The indeterminate virtuosity which derives from interpersonal interaction is lost:

> 'effaced by a solipsistic theory where the lone individual is now attached to an objective social structure. There are no "calls to order by the group" nor any subtle consideration of the reactions to others when Bourdieu discusses the habitus, nor does there need to be, for the habitus ensures that the individual will inevitably act according to the logic of the situation.' (King 2000: 423)

In his later field analyses Bourdieu's account provides numerous opportunities to explore the implications of network patterns on both the organization of fields and on

how the dispositions of agents intersect within fields. But Bourdieu draws back from the substance of interpersonal relations, limiting any consideration of the implications of differential association for the intersubjective dimensions of practice. Bourdieu either 'brackets off' issues of differential association; considers them as situations of crisis (exceptions to more normal and, by implication, homophilous, field relations); or abstracts from social interaction to focus instead on field relations. For example, in his examination of the crisis in the French academic field, Bourdieu explores how 'variations in the degree of social and educational homogeneity…correspond to variations in the intensity of the crisis' (1990c: 168), finding that the two are correlated. Here differential association has a considerable potential impact on fields, dispositions to act, and the nature of social interaction within the field, as Bourdieu himself indicates:

> 'the principle of a person's practical relationship to their position is in fact based on the objective *gap* between the slope of their actual trajectory and the modal trajectory of their group of origin, in other words, between the slope of their actual trajectory and the modal slope of the probable career that remains inscribed in the deepest regions of a person's habitus …this gap is concretely felt in a sense of being either at home in a group, as a likely member among likely members, or out of place, when the improbability of one's presence is felt as a practical difference (experienced as a malaise or antipathy) in relation to the most likely dispositions.' (1998b: 185-6)

However, Bourdieu's account moves quickly from concrete 'morphological changes' and 'deviant trajectories' (and their potential affect on interpersonal interaction and group practice), to a more abstract discussion of the relations between agents' habitus and their field (in the case of the French educational field the 'permanent dialectic between the properties of a school and the properties of its students' (Bourdieu 1998b: 183)), and the sense of 'comfort' or 'fit' such relations provoke.

Bourdieu's account of 'morphological change' is mostly discussed in relation to situations of crisis, in which the alignment of position and disposition has come unstuck. That is, the impact of differential association on the relation between position and disposition is not discussed as a *matter of degree*, but as a shift between two distinct types of situation: between 'self-evident' pre-reflective practice and explicit critical reflection; 'normal' and 'critical' moments; 'organic' and 'crisis' states; and between 'social equilibrium' and social 'breakdown' (Lane 2000: 15). For example, morphological change in academia transforms 'the diffuse and ungraspable complicity which was the basis of networks', but also destabilizes that field by destroying 'one of the main pillars of the old order, ignorance, or, in other words, faith' (Bourdieu 1990c: 150-1. This 'suspends the ordinary order of succession' (1990c: 182), with the implication that a new order will emerge, in which disposition and position are better adjusted.[1]

Whilst Bourdieu prefers to focus on the objective structural relations of fields, his neglect of variations in the pattern of substantive social connection means he fails to properly explore how 'the interaction within the field is consequential to its structure and to the classifications and qualifications used within the field' (de Nooy 2003: 325). But relations between habitus and field, whether dissonant or consonant, are crucially bound up with issues of differential association. The milieu of the field is partly made up of other agents, so the relation between habitus and field is also an encounter *between agents*, with more or less similar dispositions and characteristics.

Bourdieu prefers instead to deal with shifts in the 'morphological' composition of fields (the differential association of agents) as variations in the 'fit' between habitus and field, rather than through any detailed discussion of group relations or social interaction. As King argues, this means 'The origin of individuals' actions lies not in their interaction with other individuals but in the objective structures which confront them' (2000: 423).

Conclusion

Bourdieu prefers a 'relational' rather than a 'substantialist' reading of social position, but his avoidance of the substance of social interaction creates a number of explanatory problems in his framework, not least because many of Bourdieu's core concepts depend upon assumptions about their interactional properties which are left under-developed. By failing to explore the concrete nature of social networks as a feature of social space, Bourdieu ignores the variable interactional properties of that space, and so neglects the intersubjective character of practice. In the process, Bourdieu's framework is vulnerable to charges of both excessive objectivism and individualism.

Intersubjective negotiation is a condition of all practice. However, the nature of the social connections within which intersubjective negotiation takes place will substantially affect the outcome of any such project, and it is important to attend to the patterned nature of intersubjectivity as a concrete interactional order. The 'calls to order by the group', and the intersubjective 'sense' of what is acceptable, or what one can get away with, will partly depend upon the nature of the social networks within which such activities occur. A 'community' of shared dispositions cannot be assumed. The forms of social connection, and the degree of network heterogeneity or differential association that surround agents, will strongly affect the manner in which any 'sense' of how to behave must be negotiated and operationalized. The operation of the habitus, and its intersection with field, is partly a question of the interactional properties of networks, in which our practice is subject to the characteristics and dispositions of the (contingently variable) people around us.

The fact that the spectres of both objectivism and individualism re-emerge in relation to Bourdieu's work is perhaps not surprising, given that the history of social analysis is littered with unsuccessful attempts to escape them, and shows the difficulty of establishing a solution to analytical problems in a form which does not simply re-state them (Holmwood and Stewart 1991). Holmwood and Stewart point out that a succession of social theorists have set out to adopt a more 'balanced' dualistic perspective on action, only to be accused of undue objectivism or subjectivism in their turn. For Barnes, this inability of social theory to escape the action/structure merry-go-round is due to the failure of successive theorists to properly explore the intersubjective character of social interaction:

> 'The relationship between 'the individual' and 'society', or 'social structure', has been addressed without proper regard for social interaction, with the result that 'society' itself has been conceived in unduly individualistic terms and the understanding of its components has been marked by attention to the 'subjective' and the 'objective' at the expense of the intersubjective.' (2000: x).

I have argued that some of the criticisms that Bourdieu's framework encounters can be traced back to his relative neglect of the interactional properties of habitus and field, a neglect which also results in him understating the intersubjective and negotiated nature of practice.[2] For if we accept that social practice is a flexible, fuzzy system, with a good deal of variation in practice at any given point, then it is important to explore how synchronic variation in practice relates to the patterning of social networks, and to the different but overlapping 'constituencies' of durable linkages which the habitus helps form. Such networks exhibit different degrees of internal variation and heterogeneity, and it is important to explore how this variation bears upon divergent interpretations of correct practice, and the intersubjective negotiation of what is appropriate, or what the individual can get away with, in any given context.

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Notes

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[1] Bourdieu's discussion of 'restricted' fields of production (amongst artists and intellectuals) raises the possibility of a permanent 'crisis' state in field relations, the 'institutionalization of anomie', where ruptured homophily creates a symbolic struggle in which no 'ultimate authority' exists (1993: 252). In 'restricted' fields (defined by relative autonomy from the market or 'temporal' forces) practices are primarily oriented to peers ('art for art's sake') according to the rules established by the members of the field. Here practices are likely to be strongly affected by the degree of social network heterogeneity, offering the possibility of a more intersubjective reading of habituated practice. However, Bourdieu clearly sees such cases as limited, noting the increasing 'heteronomy' of the artistic and literary fields, as they become increasingly subject to market forces (1996).

[2] Bourdieu's approach to relationality derives from his epistemological stance, 'a rationalist version of critical realism' (Vandenberghe 1999) which attempts to explain manifest phenomena in terms of underlying generative fields of 'forces'. It should be noted that part of my objection to Bourdieu's version of relationality derives from a more pragmatist approach to epistemology, one sceptical of the distinction between structural relations and social relationships. There is not space to elaborate such differences here; but in any case, whatever the status of the deeper relations which may be said to underlie the play of 'substances', they will be not be uncovered by neglecting key aspects of the complexity and differentiation of those substances.