

Practice and field: revising Bourdieusian concepts

Alan Warde

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Alan Warde, Department of Sociology,
University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL

alan.warde@man.ac.uk

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Abstract

This paper seeks to clarify for purposes of sociological analysis two overlapping concepts, field and practice. Its point of departure is an observation about changes in direction in the work of Pierre Bourdieu. The concept of practice, upon which he worked extensively in the first half of his career, was demoted, replaced by the concept of field, previously a minor thematic concern. The initial focus of the paper is the relationship between the two concepts in *Distinction* where, uniquely, practice and field are given equal and explicit treatment, but where neither concept is very effectively applied and their relationship is obscure. His subsequent development of the concept of field, though very impressive, resulted in its becoming overstretched. Some of its inadequacies are identified, especially its dependence on the analogy with games. The central claim of the paper is then advanced; that the remedy lies in the introduction of some elements of a reconfigured theory of practice. This permits consideration of aspects of conduct ignored or marginalised by Bourdieu in his depiction of the logic of fields, among which are non-strategic action, purposeful behaviour in non-competitive circumstances, internal goods arising from participation in practice, and discrepancies between competence and social position. The distinctive remits of the two concepts are specified and illustrated through a discussion of the practice of eating out and the culinary field. Some theoretical implications are discussed in conclusion.

Keywords Bourdieu, distinction, field, practice, theory of practice

1 Preamble

This paper examines two concepts, practice and field, in the hope of clarifying their jurisdiction and sharpening them for purposes of empirical investigation.

Both were central to the conceptual armoury of Pierre Bourdieu, the power of whose sociological analysis derived from his capacity to bring to empirical explanation distinctive intermediate-level concepts, concepts like capital and habitus, as well as practice and field. However, his general reluctance to formalise his concepts makes it

difficult for others to produce equally cogent analyses of other empirical phenomena. Yet sociology needs as much as ever complex and coherent meso-level concepts which can account for the mechanics of structural and institutional change. Field and practice are both promising candidates to this end. The former is increasingly being applied, to considerable effect, in a manner directly bequeathed by Bourdieu. Usage of the concept of practice is much more patchy, its place in Bourdieu's conceptual legacy being far from clear, as is the appropriate means of its application. It is my general contention that more precise specification, drawing on other traditions of thought offering alternative formulations of the concept of practice, provides an avenue for making a helpful distinction between practice and field. This paper therefore works outward from a critical review of Bourdieu's use of the two concepts, identifying problematic elements which I argue should be jettisoned in order to achieve a more adequate and serviceable formulation.

The paper starts from a puzzle of exegesis. Bourdieu worked extensively on the concept of practice in the first half of his career, resulting in significant theoretical formalisation in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977 [1972]) and *Logic of Practice* (1990 [1980]). He never subsequently disclaims his attachment to the theory of practice developed in those works. Yet, apart from constant reiteration of the epistemological position which contrasts practical sense with scholastic reason, he allows most other aspects of the theory of practice to fall into desuetude. Its place was taken by the concept of field, the primary analytic tool for his major empirical studies in the 1980s. Only in *Distinction*, which constitutes a crossroads in Bourdieu's conceptual progress, are the two concepts dealt with in tandem. The resulting meeting was far from satisfactory, as shown in section 2. Section 3 considers various explanations of the demise of the concept of practice.

Bourdieu developed the concept of field in a most impressive way, but at some cost. Section 4 identifies the key features of the fully developed concept of field and identifies some of its limitations, in particular a tendency to become overextended. I then argue in section 5 that some of these inadequacies could be remedied by reviving elements of a theory of practice. That Bourdieu himself did not resort to this solution is partly the consequence of defects in his own conception of practice. I advance some propositions about the ways to develop a more adequate theory of practice which I

believe are compatible with the basic propositions of Bourdieu's theory of fields. Some of the consequent differences between the refined concepts of field and practice are depicted in section 6 through a critique of the analogy with games as the means to identify the logic of conduct in fields. Section 7 offers a brief example of how such a resolution might enhance the analysis of consumption by applying it to a concrete example, the understanding of the practice of eating out and the culinary field.

2 *Distinction*: between practice and field

The formula presented in *Distinction*: [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu, 1984:101) has caused a good deal of puzzlement among commentators (eg Crossley, 2001). It is not unreasonable to read this as Bourdieu's attempt to encapsulate the fundamental theoretical thrust of the analysis, one which, as Bourdieu (1984:ibid) continues, would reveal 'the structure of the life-style characteristic of an agent or class of agents, that is, the unity hidden under the diversity and multiplicity of the set of practices performed in fields governed by different logics and therefore inducing different forms of realization.' It is not clear whether this passage is suggesting that there are many practices in each field, or one practice to each field. Neither is it clear whether it is practices or fields, or both, which have logics. And if both do indeed have logics, whether they are similar or different logics. What it does say is that practices are performed in fields and that many diverse practices and fields are part of a process whereby profits are realized. The formula is impenetrable; maybe that should not matter since it may have been intended merely as a literary flourish. But in fact the rest of the book fails to make the relations between these concepts much clearer. The formula is testament to the general theoretical inadequacies of *Distinction* which lie in the way these four concepts, and particularly the last two, are articulated. For *Distinction*, though a wonderful book in almost every respect, sits uneasily at a crossroad in the theoretical development of its author. Arguably, it was written without being entirely clear how the concept of practice could be applied to contemporary France and before a theory of field had been adequately developed.

Distinction (1984 [1979]) was written at about the same time as the commitment to a theory of practice was reaffirmed with the publication of *Logic of Practice* (1990 [1980]) which laid out the principal concepts of Bourdieu's theory - habitus,

structures, embodiment, *doxa*, symbolic capital, domination and practices. *Logic of Practice* makes a very few references to field (1990: 51, 58, 66-8). *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977 [1972]), published eight years earlier, which has substantially the same content though organised differently, makes none at all. *Distinction*, by contrast, uses the term field fairly extensively, referring to it almost as frequently as to the concept of practice. My contention is that neither concept is very clearly or effectively applied in *Distinction*. Neither do very much analytic work. And nowhere is it shown how they relate to one another.

The formula appears in Part 2 of the book entitled ‘The Economy of Practices’, at the beginning of its first chapter ‘The social space and its transformations’ which discusses understandings of social class, the construction of classifications, the foundation of classes in different types of capital, the structuring of social space by principles of domination, and the conditions and strategies behind the accumulation and reconversion of capitals. The formula promises to establish ‘the systematic nature of life-styles’ which is to be done through a ‘return to the practice-unifying and practice-generating principle, ie class habitus, the internalized form of class condition and the class conditionings it entails.’ (1984: 101) The formula is then quickly left aside. The remaining two principal theoretical chapters deal with ‘The habitus and the space of lifestyles’ (chapter 3), in which the concept of practice is often deployed, and ‘The dynamics of fields’ (chapter 4). *Distinction* is remarkable for having extended treatments of the both the concepts of practice and field, for it is a feature of Bourdieu’s work generally that discussions and analyses of each are kept resolutely apart. Yet, even here, he deals with them in separate chapters.

Distinction says comparatively little *theoretically* about practice or practices. It is discussed briefly in relation to the formula, extensively in chapter 3, and occasionally in passing thereafter. Chapter 3 is, however, primarily a discursus on habitus (170ff). The properties of habitus are expressed in terms of how it generates, with respect to many varied areas of practice, schemes of action and the dispositions that generate meaningful practices and meaningful perceptions.

In *Distinction*, practice is used in three senses.¹ First it is used, as it was consistently throughout Bourdieu’s work, in contrast to theory; the argument that science and

scholastic reason operate with a different form of logic and reasoning to that characterising everyday life is a basis of Bourdieu's epistemological position. Practical conduct neither requires nor exhibits the level of conscious reflexive thought characteristic of theoretical reason. Second, the term is used to identify some kind of more or less coherent entity formed around a particular activity, for instance golf or clothing. This usage has intimations of the notion of *Praktik*, a coordinated, recognisable and institutionally supported practice. Bourdieu observes that the generative schemes of habitus apply 'to the most varied areas of practice' (170). He uses the term 'areas of practice' elsewhere (175, 208, 223). He also occasionally names practices – eg 'sports, games, entertainments' (173), 'sporting practices' (218), 'tennis' (212) – as part of an analysis of their symbolic significance. In these instances he is surely referring to some sort of coordinated entity, a recognisable domain of activity with a history and a reputation. Third, Bourdieu uses the term simply to mean performance, the carrying out of some action or other. Thus (170) he says that habitus is defined by two capacities: 'to produce classifiable practices and works .. and ...to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products.' He also says that habitus 'generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions' (170). In both instances he can mean only that practices are manifest behaviours, for habitus *per se* would not generate a coherent entity since some set of institutional processes would inevitably also be required to that end.

Bourdieu introduces the concept of field in making a methodological point in the chapter on habitus, where he lists fields 'of sport, or music, or food, decoration, politics, language' and suggests each has affinities to 'the major areas of practice' (208). Identifying the nature of those affinities is a principal objective of this paper. That they remain obscure in *Distinction* is unsurprising given the imprecision of the use of the term field. Bourdieu links his third and fourth chapter, which moves focus from *habitus* and practice to fields, with a bemusing paragraph:

'There are thus as many fields of preferences as there are fields of stylistic possibles. Each of these worlds – drinks (mineral waters, wines and aperitifs) or automobiles, newspapers or holiday resorts, design or furnishing of house or garden, not to mention political programmes – provides the small number of distinctive features which, functioning as a system of differences, differential deviations, allow the most fundamental social differences to be

expressed almost as completely as through the most complex and refined expressive systems available in the legitimate arts; and it can be seen that the total field of these fields offers well-nigh inexhaustible possibilities for the pursuit of distinction.’ (226)

One might see roughly what he means substantively, but this is a conceptual morass. Fields of preferences is perplexing. Fields of stylistic possibilities is puzzling too, and in what way are they worlds? Why worlds and not fields? Does the term world refer to domains, universes, or areas of practice, following terminology used earlier? Can there be a total field of other fields? Perhaps this is a reference to a social field, though the book most uses the distinct term social space for such a phenomenon. In later exposition, fields do not add up, partly because each is relatively autonomous, partly because the principal image of homology is of superimposition, of their being offset and stacked (Benson, 1999). The concept of field is very ill-defined at this point in Bourdieu’s career.² He refers to general and specialised fields. But he says very little about how fields operate, the substantive analysis in *Distinction* being devoted to the main thematic oppositions which provide the axes for class division within fields, for example luxury and necessity. Many of its inadequacies were subsequently cleared up as the concept was gradually refined into a very coherent and analytically powerful notion. But that was not achieved in *Distinction*.

Practice and field, though central and essential to the theoretical foundation of the analysis, play little substantive role. Habitus and economic and cultural capital do all the interpretative work. All explanation is calibrated by types of capital, as in the key correspondence analysis diagrams placing agents, artefacts and activities in social and lifestyle spaces. Thus the demonstration in Part 3 concerns the correspondence between social space and the symbolic space of lifestyles. The correspondence diagrams are not interpreted as fields *per se*; though the interpretation assumes basic parameters of conflict between the class agents, it is description of differences between groups which predominates. The analysis is thus a rather mechanical one, as Bourdieu almost admits in his resume of the study for a Japanese audience in the late 1980s (see his 1998 [1991]: 1-13). The story is coordinated through the structuring and generative capacities of class *habitus*. Ultimately *Distinction* gets much of its

authority from juxtaposition of many sources rather than from any theoretical systematicity.

3 The eclipse of practice?

Subsequent to *Distinction*, despite it appearing that Bourdieu would like his overall theoretical contribution to be ‘a general theory of the economy of practices’, reference to practices diminished. The conceptual machinery which is the focus of elaborate and formalised theory in *Logic of Practice* apparently disappears - except in the intermittent, but surprisingly frequent, revisits to the Algerian fieldwork. This is sufficiently puzzling to justify speculation as to why Bourdieu lost interest in examining practices empirically and, effectively, abandoned the use of the term. There seem to be at least five possible explanations.

(1) Bourdieu tacitly abandoned practice theory.

It is possible, given Bourdieu’s disavowal of a conscious theory building project and his indifference towards auto-critique, that practice theory was laid quietly to one side. The multiple uses of the term having resulted in its failing to fulfil any effective function in empirical analysis, the term may have become theoretically redundant, except to found his critique of scholastic reason. He clearly retained throughout his career the first use of the term in discussions of epistemological and methodological issues as a contrast to scholastic and theoretical reason (eg Bourdieu, 2000). Perhaps the other main senses ceased to have any significant explanatory role.

(2) Practices were considered isomorphic with fields.

Alternatively, it is possible to conceive that practices are the activities which provide the content of fields. Practices happen in fields. If so, it might be maintained that practices are, for most empirical purposes the same as fields, having the same content (for instance with political practice constituting the political field, literary practice the literary field) and the same logic (ie a search for ‘profit’). As we have seen, this is implied in at least one passage in *Distinction*. But its relation to practice was never really confronted; the ‘affinities’ between fields and ‘the major sources of practice’

were never elucidated. In passing, in *Distinction* (209-11), Bourdieu implied that any differentiated practice can be understood as a field, and presumably the converse, that a field can be constructed upon any differentiated practice. If this were the case then the logic of practice would be the same as the logic of the field. This does not seem to be a position which Bourdieu explicitly reiterated elsewhere. The refinement of the concept of field makes it unlikely that this remained the case for Bourdieu. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine a definition which would render them identical. As the discussion below seeks to establish, fields and practices are not isomorphic.

(3) The concept of practice did useful work in the analysis of Kabylia but proved ineffective when applied to 20th century France.

Calhoun (1995) sees practice and field as relevant to different types of society. According to Calhoun, the concept of practice gives a sound account of the operation of social affairs in a traditional, comparatively undifferentiated society where understandings of appropriate conduct are widely shared. However, in the more complex setting of an industrialised and highly differentiated society the relational and structural features of fields gives better purchase. In support of Calhoun, it is noticeable that *Logic of Practice* is addressed to the application and clarification of theories of rites, rituals, gifts and honour, typical topics of concern to anthropologists, and to institutional arrangements central to traditional societies but much less prominent in understandings of rationalised, formal, socially engineered arrangements. *Homo Academicus*, *The State Nobility* and *Rules of Art*, by contrast, are examinations of positions, dispositions and position-taking in specialised fields of activity, designed to uncover structural and relational features of positions homologous with other key fields. Calhoun's claim seems highly pertinent and a reasonable explanation of how Bourdieu can continue to use both terms, but rarely uses them as part of the same analysis. Thus for instance in *Practical Reason*, published in French in 1994, some essays refer to practice but not at all to fields, a significant example being the reflection on *Distinction* (1998:1-13), while others, like that on the state, talk of fields but not practice.³

The implication is that the elements of a theory of practice have no role in the analysis of modern societies. It is unlikely that Bourdieu would assent to this, and nor would

other contemporary theorists of practice. De Certeau's (1984:50-2, 59-60) critique of Bourdieu rues his unwillingness, or conceptual inability, to identify any parallels in modern France to the strategic and tactical manoeuvring which, in its detail, makes his analysis of social relations in Kabylia so persuasive – for example in the use of timing in gift exchange or the concealment of self-interest in economic transactions. For De Certeau, the theory of practice is as essential to understanding France as it is to Algeria. While such a resolution might solve the puzzle about Bourdieu's usage it seems to have the consequence of abandoning some of the fundamentals of his sociological theory and of reducing radically at a stroke the conceptual tools available for analysis.

(4) The essential features of the notion of practice were incorporated into the concept of habitus for purposes of empirical analysis.

Another option is that practice theory is the foundation to the concept of habitus but thereafter is no longer required for the purpose of empirical analysis. Over time, habitus and field become largely self-sufficient and mutually supporting primary concepts. This is a particularly compelling explanation. Bourdieu's successors, and those seeking to apply his concepts in other empirical contexts (eg Benson, 1999; Brown & Szeman, 2000), very often use habitus, capital and field as their major tools, but without any specific technical reference to practice or practices. Clearly the concept of habitus is founded in a theory of practice which was originally formulated in the analysis of the Kabyle and that the concept would be even more contentious were it without such thorough grounding. This is not the place to enter the debate about the usefulness of Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Suffice it to note: (1) that the earlier condemnations of the concept have excited plausible defences from Bourdieu, his collaborators and other commentators suggesting the concept's applicability to modern contexts (eg Bourdieu, 2000:60-65; Crossley, 2001; Fuchs, 2003:394-401); (2) that if the generative power of habitus were to operate effectively only in undifferentiated societies then the concept of field would have to bear even more weight in analysis of modern societies; and (3) that the elements of a theory of practice in their entirety can hardly be summed up or condensed in the concept of habitus. Yet that would appear to be what Bourdieu does, placing the theory of

practice at one remove from the theory of field through its inscription in analysis through the concept of habitus. This manoeuvre occurs in *Distinction*.

Rules of Art is probably the most sustained and reflective formulation and application of the concept of field in the works of Bourdieu. There is barely a mention of practice.⁴ Habitus, though, features prominently, promoted as a means of counteracting the undue emphasis put on consciousness in social science, while field is applauded for its capacity to represent the relational nature of social organisation, to found comparative analysis around a general mechanism, and for having an associated systematic set of concepts – ‘capital, investment, interest, etc.’ (183). In one of only two references to the concept of practice, after elaborating on his development of the concept of field, he remarks that ‘The general theory of the economy of practices as it is progressively disentangled from the analysis of different fields ought thus to escape all forms of reductionism’ (183). The phrase ‘the general theory of the economy of practices’, echoes the usage in *Distinction* and perhaps implies that a theory of practices is somehow a backbone of his theoretical project at its highest level of abstraction. But there is little more said about this in later works leaving the same problem of how the specific precepts and propositions adumbrated in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* or *Logic of Practice* (where there is virtually no discussion of fields) are to be reconciled with the concept of field in substantive analysis.

(5) There were unrecognised incompatibilities between the theory of practice and field theory.

These considerations leave a suspicion that there are some generally concealed incompatibilities between the concepts of practice and field. It seems that practice and field are distinct concepts whose specific domains and whose interdependence requires specification. My conjecture is that the theory of practice requires further development and elaboration to make it consistent with field theory. This is important not simply as matters of exegesis or consistency of the architecture of Bourdieu’s conceptual schema, but because they refer to different (though related) aspects of institutional structure which need to be separated in substantive analysis. In the next section I show that field, though powerful, has some inadequacies. The subsequent

section notes ways in which the concept of practice could be developed in order to resolve problems of his final conceptualisation of field in a manner compatible with it.

4 Field

Despite discrepant usage of the concept during his career, by the time that he wrote *Rules of Art* Bourdieu possessed a thoroughly worked out theory of field, one which in general is coherent and persuasive. It is complex and nuanced, and is the basis of an impressive analysis of the changing world of French Culture in the second half of the 19th century.⁵ The key properties of the field according to *Rules of Art* are as follows.

A field is a relatively autonomous structured domain or space, which has been socially instituted, thus having a definable but contingent history of development. One condition of the emergence of a field is that agents recognise and refer to its history. Some fields have more autonomy than others and some parts of fields more than other parts.⁶

A field is an arena of constant struggle for ‘stakes’, particular types of field-specific and generic *capitals*. Struggles involve legitimising the stakes themselves, thereby establishing what sorts of capital holdings have what degree of value. The dynamics of a field, it is said, arise from the positions, dispositions and position-taking of agents. That is to say, a field has structured positions, whose occupants typically have different resources and dispositions. These resources and dispositions are partly brought from without the field – a matter of their generic capital holdings and *habitus* of origin. These features also alter in accordance with experience within the field itself. Agents orient themselves towards the field, or take their positions, in light of their resources and dispositions. Participation implies a shared commitment to the value of the activities of the field and of field-specific capital, to the *illusio*.

The field operates like a game wherein agents adopt strategies in competition with others to gain the stakes. All play the same game. Conduct is always strategic, though not necessarily consciously so. Strategies may involve redefining the value of the game and its rules. The boundaries of the field, and the definition of who populates the field, is a matter of constant struggle, specifically a by-product of attempts to

establish legitimate domination within the field. Hence boundaries are fluid and subject to periodic adjustment. Key strategies include conservation, succession and subversion. There are many fields, and thus many field-specific capitals, which have similar properties, logics and even ‘laws’. They are interdependent and are characterised by homology of structure and positions.

To sum up its specific defining features,⁷ a field is integrated around:

- 1) some particular stakes and commitment to the value of those stakes
- 2) a structured set of positions
- 3) a set of strategic and competitive orientations
- and 4) a set of agents endowed with resources and dispositions.

The concept of field has met with a mixed, but largely positive reception from critics. Apart from Jenkins (1992:84-91),⁸ most find it with merit. Swartz (1997:9), in the probably best book on Bourdieu’s *oeuvre*, sees it as under-regarded and excellent.⁹ Robbins (2000:37-40) sees it as exemplary of Bourdieu’s admirably flexible use of concepts for empirical analysis. Crossley (2002:168, 178-82) makes the claim that through the concept of field Bourdieu more effectively than any one else solved (or at least provided a working and workable solution to) the structure – agency problem. Lahire (2000:23), though critical of its application, considers it heuristically very valuable. Martin’s (2003) recent review of the development of the concept across the social sciences commends Bourdieu for having made a major contribution which supports an alternative to American sociological orthodoxy. Another indicator of its success is its effective application by other scholars, even if sometimes in a partial manner or with explicit reservation (eg Benson, 1999; Couldry, 2003; Ferguson, 1998; Hipsky, 2000; Lopes, 2000, Sapiro, 2003; Swartz, 2003). It has a coherence which permits its application as a battery of persuasive propositions and procedures at the meso-level of social analysis.

However, the concept of field even when fully developed by Bourdieu does give rise to some questions and quandaries.¹⁰

First, it is not totally transparent how one identifies the activity which provides the content, or *raison d'être*, for the existence of a field. There are many hints in *Rules of Art*, including mutual recognition of participants, contents of a shared *illusio*, conventional strategic manoeuvres, constant reference back to a common history of activity, etc. But the distinguishing characteristics of the relevant activity are not subject to specific analysis. As Lahire (2000:41) complains, there is no once-and-for-all answer to the question 'what is literature?' or 'what is politics?'. Ultimately it is just what participants take it to be. Some sort of Wittgensteinian notion of 'family resemblance' would probably get closest to Bourdieu's understanding, but this strong dash of social constructionism will not satisfy everyone. This poses some difficulties when it comes to identifying which are the key, among multiple, purposes and objectives of agents engaged in a field.

Bourdieu skirts around the problem in a pragmatic fashion, implicitly appealing to common sense – the field of culture is about cultural production, that of politics about the activity of politicking. This might imply that fields are isomorphic with practices, that all fields have a central component practice and all practices constitute a field (for instance, the cultural field is exclusively organised around cultural practices, etc.). Such a solution is hinted at very occasionally, in *Distinction* (1984:211) and in *Rules of Art* (1996:183). But this is unsustainable.

Second, and a principal reason for arguing that the concept is overstretched, Bourdieu's use of field conflates competence and power. In field analysis Bourdieu implies that all agents are competent, though some may be more accomplished than others, in relation to the demands of their position; agents are always seen as fitted for their role and always have the strategic orientations appropriate to their position. He does this through the use of the concept of habitus, which incumbents of position in a field bring with them to the field as their dispositions. Notwithstanding his suggestion that people add dispositions as a result of their experience of activity in a field – they assume features of the habitus of the field through position-taking – it is implausible to imagine that all are equally prepared.¹¹ Agents arriving in positions via different trajectories almost certainly bring with them features of their distinct habitus which might be expected to generate different strategic responses and different levels of success. Indeed, one of the key arguments concerning the fairness of highly

differentiated societies is that positions are not always distributed according to merit.¹² A perfect fit between position and competence cannot be presumed.

Third, for the purpose of the analysis of fields, Bourdieu tends to suggest that all conduct worthy of sociological investigation is strategic and competitive.¹³ The insights obtained from such a presumption are considerable when considering the field of art, where the grounding of judgment in terms of Kantian universalism and disinterestness is to collude in the distribution of cultural and social power. By such means Bourdieu can reveal symbolic violence and pursuit of self-interest which is otherwise masked as dispassionate and disinterested judgment. However, there is much conduct within the field of art which has not the same competitive logic. This is even more the case in other fields like cooking or caring.

Fourth, the emphasis on continual strategic manoeuvring within the field, and the drive for profit, means that there is no way to appreciate the internal goods (in MacIntyre's (1985) sense) arising from practice. Besides producing a variety of external goods, activity occurring within a field often provides moral satisfaction, self-esteem, personal development and social interaction. The specificity and the value of such internal benefits are obscured if reduced to self-interested posturing. On this point Bourdieu has been taken to task by a number of critics, not least by proponents of conventions theory (Benatouil, 1999; see also Sayer, 2001). As Lahire (2000:35) notes, the logic of the field applies more readily to professional and productive activities, where competition for defined stakes is mostly transparent, than to the orientations of amateurs and consumers.

Finally, Bourdieu's explanatory accounts of the dynamics of field depend heavily on the plausibility of the analogy of games,¹⁴ increasingly used in association with the concept of habitus. Several other metaphors were used earlier - market, force field and military field.¹⁵ However, as time passed, Bourdieu became ever more likely to use the analogy of the game to explain the dynamic processes occurring in fields.¹⁶ Many of his demonstrations are based upon the analysis of actual sports (eg Bourdieu, 1984:208, 1990c:61) But sports, while manifesting particularly well most of the features attributed to a field, have very particular characteristics making it potentially

highly misleading to think of the whole world in such terms. As demonstrated below, the analogy is flawed if applied universally.

These defects suggest that the concept is overstretched, subsuming too many indirectly related phenomena. *Inter alia*, the concept of field is incapable of appreciating non-strategic action, purposeful behaviour in non-competitive circumstances, internal goods arising from participation in practice, and discrepancies between competence and social position. Thus it eliminates from view a whole range of aspects of social activity, ones that we would want to know about even if our sole concern was with the understanding of domination and injustice - arguably the greatest achievement of Bourdieu's applications of the concept of field.¹⁷ Sociological traditions harbour several ways of capturing the phenomena omitted from the concept of field; theories of everyday life and theories of social worlds are among the candidates. I propose that the concept of practice as an appropriate means, partly at least because it had been intrinsic to Bourdieu's own repertoire.

5 Recovering practice

From the point of view of sociological analysis, a theory of practice has several potential merits. It is not dependent on presumptions about the primacy of individual choice, whether of the rational action type or of expression of personal identity. Practice theories also comprehend non-instrumentalist notions of conduct, emphasizing the role of routine, on the one hand, and emotion, embodiment and desire on the other. Bourdieu explicitly appreciated these. But, as we have seen, Bourdieu's account relied on several different senses of the term practice and, because the relations between these senses was never established, his concept was of dubious consistency. The several meanings need to be kept distinct and the sources and operations of each specified carefully. Otherwise it is difficult to capitalise on any of the benefits that theories of practice confer.

Central axioms of theories of practice were recently restated in a most helpful way by Reckwitz (2002). A distinction between practice and practices is summed up concisely by Reckwitz (2002: 249):

Practice (*Praxis*) in the singular represents merely an emphatic term to describe the whole of human action (in contrast to “theory” and mere thinking). “Practices” in the sense of the theory of social practices, however, is something else. A “practice” (*Praktik*) is a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, “things” and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.

While Bourdieu recognised both senses in *Distinction*, he made very little use of the notion of ‘Praktik’, in my view the major reason for his failure to appreciate the role that practice might play alongside field. In the terminology of Schatzki (1996:89), a practice is both a ‘coordinated entity’, ‘a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings’, and also a series of performances. For Schatzki, a performance presupposes a practice, and practice presupposes performances. Practices are thus coordinated entities which require performance for their existence. They have a fluidity arising from performances which are variable across time and space. That practices consist of both doing and sayings, entails that analysis be concerned with both practical activity and its representations.

Schatzki also usefully distinguishes between dispersed practices and integrative practices. ‘Dispersed practices’ (1996: 91-2) appear in many sectors of social life, examples being describing, following rules, explaining and imagining. Their performance primarily requires understanding; an explanation, for instance, entails understanding of how to carry out an appropriate act of ‘explaining’, an ability to identify explaining when doing it oneself or when someone else does it, and an ability to prompt or respond to an explanation. ‘Integrative practices’ are ‘the more complex practices found in and constitutive of particular domains of social life’ (1996: 98). Examples cited include farming practices, cooking practices and business practices. These involve, sometimes in specialised forms, dispersed practices, which are part of the components of saying and doing which allow the understanding of, say, cooking practice, along with the abilities to follow rules governing the practice and to evaluate performances.

In such a view, practices are the basic components of social existence and therefore the primary focus of social analysis. Any established practice is a collective and historic achievement. Practices are developed over time by groups of practitioners who are engaged in that practice. In general, as an integrated practice begins to diffuse, institutions emerge to make it more widely known, to teach novices, to improve performance, to promote and legitimate it and its virtues. In modern societies this institutionalisation is very pronounced and occurs through formal vehicles like practitioner organizations and training schools, but also through informal means like listening to mass media and personal conversation. This is true of cooking, voting and sports. Practices are nurtured and protected, becoming collective properties based on shared understandings, know how and standards, a fact particularly well described by Macintyre (1985: 190, 193-4).

These observations suggest a means to compensate for some weaknesses of Bourdieu's formulation. Bourdieu lacked a sufficiently strong and pertinent distinction between practice as a coordinated entity (Praktik) and practice as a series of performances. On rare occasions he does recognise practice as a domain of activity – sporting practices; tennis; golf, piano (eg 1984:212; 1984:218; 1990c:6). But usually when Bourdieu talks of practice(s) in substantive analysis he is talking either of practical sense or performances. Lacking of a notion of practice as a coordinated entity he is denied both a strong sense of institutionalisation¹⁸ and the means to recognise the existence of what MacIntyre (1985) would describe as the 'internal goods' of a practice. Additionally, acknowledging the distinction between dispersed and integrated practices makes it apparent that to operate in a field will almost always require agents to be competent in several different practices. Politicking requires competence in communication and social skills as well as those of political calculation if the holdings of capital associated with particular positions in the field are to be turned to advantage. The same practices appear in several fields, and most fields have effects upon many practices. Field and practice cannot be isomorphic.

That the concept of practices encompasses some of the phenomena overlooked by the concept of field can be seen by looking at some of the defects of the analogy between field and game. The next section will attempt to demonstrate that tennis, an example which Bourdieu uses, is both a field and a practice, and that the characteristics of each

are distinct and cannot be subsumed one by the other. I then make the further argument that if this is the case for a sport, which fits Bourdieu's outline of the principles of operation of a field better than almost any other type of example, then a sole focus on field will fail to account adequately for other domains of activity.

6 The limits of the analogy of game

As with other sports, tennis has a set of distinctive attributes. It is easy to identify the relevant activity and its scope and to appreciate its autonomy. It has specific rules which make it different from rugby or boxing. It is highly institutionalised, with special organisations - national and international lawn tennis associations - devoted to its reproduction and the orchestration of competition. It is unabashedly competitive. It is clear that the primary goal of the game is to win more points than an opponent which constitutes a victory. And victory is achieved mostly by being superior to the opponent with respect to a decidedly narrow form of activity. True, some other assets are required - a certain athleticism, for the game involves running and twisting; a degree of emotional control; and some recognition of conventions - but it is mostly a matter of being technically competent at hitting a ball over a net with a tennis racket. Furthermore, there is similarity of purpose between expert and novice: the game is played to the same rules; the definition of success is the same; value of victory can be just as important personally, as can be seen by kids who pretend to be playing at Wimbledon and adults at the local club who play just as competitively and passionately as if they too were there. The contest is easily redescribed in terms of strategy and counter-strategy. Tennis exhibits all the properties of a field and properly be characterised as a (sub-)field within the field of sports.

However, even tennis has some attributes which are not field-like. First, some people do not try to win. For some it is the exercise rather than the contesting of the result that attracts them to play. For others it is a social affair, entertaining children or socialising with friends. Moreover, defeat is sometimes said to be honourable: there are many homilies to the effect that a gallant performance is more important than mere victory. In some contexts this might be deemed naive; but it clearly has been a common element in the historical understanding games. Second, competence is routinely measured through channels other than success in tournaments.

Effortlessness and elegance are criteria of the practice of tennis which are not achieved by successful but awkward players; some of the successful would never be copied or emulated.

These two significant common orientations towards the game of tennis, are not well understood in terms of the properties of fields. Performances on a tennis court cannot be sufficiently explained solely in terms of the component element of fields. How then shall we understand the residual attributes? One way is to see tennis as both a practice and a field. The importance of this point is made clearer by considering why many other activities are much less easy to interpret as games.

First, not all recognisable activities, and not all coordinated integrative practices, can be likened to games. Not all practices are so obviously competitive as a sport. Neither are there, for most practices, such explicit rules governing the range of acceptable behaviour. Second, the idea that all practices are fundamentally competitive is also problematic. There are many games which are not intrinsically competitive - for example swimming without racing or solitaire - and not everyone plays competitive games to win. More important, with reference to other types of practice, not everyone who is engaged shares the *illusio*. While one would expect those disillusioned with tennis to cease to play, exit is not an easily available option with regard to schooling, parenting or preparing food. Third, in many fields the goals are less clear than in sport. With perhaps the exception of capitalist economic activity, where not making a loss is an equally clear constraint, the ultimate objective of participation, and the certainty about what sort of conduct will bring anticipated rewards, is often hazy or ambiguous. Fourth, sporting contests are perfectly relational, both in the way they are carried out as players confront each other, and in their outcomes, where results confirm the superiority of victors. Other practices, even say home decoration where expression of taste may establish and reinforce social hierarchy through evaluation of differences, exhibit less prominently and less certainly the features of relationality and hierarchy. Fifth, sporting contests are *legitimately* competitive such that one is not required, and usually not expected, to have mercy upon the opponent, nor to help her to play better, nor to share the honour of victory. Neither morality nor altruism are called for in sport; the injunction not to cheat is a minor feature by comparison with the range of other-regarding norms which govern other practices. Finally, success in

many fields depends on command of a wide range of practices (including communicating, civility, presentability etc.). Often, people fail because they do not have mastery of the supporting competences – including publicity and self-presentation, ability to court support, or having the right contacts.

The list could be augmented but these are sufficient grounds for deeming contentious a widely extended use of the metaphor of game. It appears to account for the dynamic processes within a field, but only by taking a case with very particular characteristics. By using the metaphor of sport, the theory of field postulates that all (relevant) action is strategic, but in most instances reasonable practical conduct contains only a very weakly strategic component. Other practices, and other fields, do not exhibit the characteristics required to allow us confidently to extend the mechanics and dynamics on a general basis to all realms of activity.

A more adequate concept of practice might build upon the claim that fields and practices are different. Certainly there are similarities between them. Agents hold 'positions' within a practice, because of different levels of competence and commitment, which in turn are powerfully affected by the attributes Bourdieu accords to habitus. Class of origin, ability to use educational provision, the social capital required for introduction into a practice - all condition access and the potential to feel at home in the the context of a practice . The 'practical sense' works in both, manifest in appropriate performance. Hence, we should certainly not underestimate the extent to which Bourdieu is correct that almost every activity may have elements of capital-seeking, internal differentiation, distinction and position taking. Field and practice nevertheless each have a different logic and account for different phenomena. Practice can account for aspects of everyday life and the conduct of a full range of activities, can delineate activity as a coordinated entity which is temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed, can encompass a wide range of motives, goals and values, and can appreciate diversity of competence. There are then two separable levels of analysis – of practice and field – with practice offering a better grasp of experience, of phenomenological rather than strategic aspects. Thus, the critique of the universal application of games shows two things: that the concept of field is overstretched because there are many relevant aspects of conduct which cannot be encompassed by

the logic of games; and that many aspects lost by subsumption in the game are rather well revealed by recourse to the concept of practice.

7 An application: the culinary field and the practice of eating out

One major cultural change in Britain in the second half of the 20th century was the growth of interest in aesthetic dimensions of eating. The ‘foodie’ was a figure of fun of the 1980s standing for a transformation in the fastidiousness with which sections of the British population began to come to a new accommodation with culinary matters (see Barr & Levy, 1984). The concern with the aesthetic quality of food had many manifestations, among them the enormous popularity of cookery books and cookery programmes on television; an exoticisation of diet, involving the spread of ethnic cuisines available through supermarkets as raw ingredients or prepared meals, in take away shops and in restaurants; and a new concern with the provenance of foods - their authenticity, locality and conditions of cultivation.

One principal feature of these developments which illustrates the argument of this article was an increase in eating out. This activity does lend itself to field-like behaviour in some of its aspects. This is patently clear if we consider processes of cultural production. Businesses and chefs are obviously in competition, with aesthetic values often primary instruments in the process. Those values are fought over in mass media. One influential force in the transformation of eating out in the UK has been the proliferation of guides to restaurants, foremost nationally among which was the *Good Food Guide (GFG)*. The *GFG* is a channel for the recommendation of individual establishments and a means to educate both restaurateurs and customers about the standards to be expected of fine food. It thus plays a part in the orchestration of a field. Entry to the annual guide is a coveted achievement and form of free publicity for the restaurant. Also, through the grading scheme and listing of dishes typically appearing on menus, it supplies a form of gastronomic education for the reader of the guide.¹⁹

Eating out in restaurants has, arguably, brought a set of possibilities for a majority of the population to engage, at least at the edge, in the pursuit of gastronomic distinction. Though there had for centuries been some concern with fine dining in the UK, it was

restricted to the upper class and sections of the upper middle class who had a monopoly on gastronomy which was mostly pursued in private – in clubs, country houses and the like. Arguably a mix of the popularisation of the movement heralded by the Good Food Club and increasing mass media attention to matters culinary has spread such concerns to a significant proportion of the population today. Eating is now a part of the cultural field; it is a field of cultural production. The culinary field operates like other domains of ‘high’ culture and art. It has specialised organisations. There is a hierarchy of cuisines and a hierarchy of outlets. A group of professional practitioners and critics engage in expert aesthetic discourse. The competitive logic of field does explain some of the positioning and activity in the field of culinary production, for some restaurateurs do play the game to meet the stringent, if rather arbitrary, criteria for inclusion in the *GFG* and to gain introduction to the world of celebrity chefs. The restaurant trade is oriented towards the logic of a field, a point most easily understood in terms of production and the professionals.

However, the field was also made in part by consumer intervention and mobilisation.²⁰ Preferences with regard to eating out correspond to positions in social space. Distinction is conferred through selection both of both places to eat and of dishes. For instance, Warde and Martens (2000), in study undertaken in 1995 in England, report a significant statistical association between incumbency of higher positions in social space and tendencies to eat out in restaurants serving specific ethnic cuisines - French and Chinese and Thai especially. Their research shows that factors like parental class, education, economic resources and social connections do, as described by Bourdieu, influence behaviour and preferences in the field and reflect positions of social domination and subordination.

Analysis in terms of field does, then, reveal echoes of Veblenesque display, forms of distinction, and modes of aesthetic competition among producers and critics. But that is far from exhaustive of its social significance, such considerations being, by and large, a minor aspect of the activity. For at the same time, eating out has all the features of a practice. It is an identifiable *Praktik*, a roughly coordinated entity, recognisable through doings and sayings, which is reproduced through its continual and widespread performances. Warde & Martens (2000:43-51) also provide the evidence to establish that this regular and popular activity is reproduced as a nexus of

shared understandings, competences and reasons for engagement. Eating a meal in restaurant is governed by a set of understandings about what it is 'to eat out'; interviewees defined it as occurring away from home, involving none of their labour, requiring payment, being a social occasion, itself relatively special, and involving eating a meal rather than a snack.²¹ A dominant template governs the organisation of a meal out, both socially and materially, for though there are variations within the population and rules are somewhat informal there are some well respected procedures, etiquettes and conventions. Passing judgment on quality is compulsory. There is also agreement that there are several purposes or satisfactions to be obtained, the priority being determined by context. Among the reasons given for eating out,²² aesthetic considerations were far from being the most important aspect, economic satisfaction, sensual pleasure, convenience and, especially sociability, being prominent goals.

Thus, it would be impossible to understand a great deal of the meaning of eating out by considering it only as a strategy for distinction, for there is far more to the practice than jockeying for position in a cultural field on the part of the consumers. Recourse to a concept of practice captures common understandings, conventional procedures, internal goods, non-purposive and non-competitive behaviour. The concepts of practice and field encompass different facets of the phenomenon.

8 Conclusion

I have argued that the concepts of field and practice are neither synonymous nor isomorphic. Each concept refers to domains of activity, but each identifies different attributes or properties of activities. Most simply, if practices were the content of the activities occurring in fields, then all practices would be game-like. But they are not. Even in the rare and exceptional cases where the boundaries of a field and a practice do coincide, as perhaps with tennis, we would still observe different aspects of the associated activities. Two sociologically consequences follow. First, and most importantly, it would be advantageous to focus attention more firmly on the analysis of what is distinctive to practices. This allows consideration of their mutual relationships with fields, with particular benefit for the understanding of the mechanisms of change in both practices and fields. Second, we become better able to appreciate the essential features of the concept of field thereby to modify it, and

specify its analytic jurisdiction, in the light of the problems apparent in its final formulation by Bourdieu.

The limits of the analogy of the game as a general account of the dynamics of fields suggested the reintroduction of the concept of practice because the concept of field omits highly relevant phenomena. I have argued that features outwith the concept of field can, much of the time, be mopped up by a more refined concept of practice. Bourdieu did not devote his attention to that task and overlooked the possibility that practice and field are useful complementary concepts for analysis. One reason was his entirely worthy objective of revealing the social structure of power nestled beneath the seemingly innocuous arena of cultural taste and preference. Another reason, perhaps, was his lack of clarity about the application of a concept of practice in complex and highly differentiated societies.

The institutionalisation of practices, the processes through which they become identifiable coordinated entities, seems of particular importance to the advance of a comprehensive version of a theory of practice. Formalisation and rationalisation of a domain of activity is a prerequisite of its becoming ripe for absorption into a field or fields. But institutionalisation does not, *per se*, create a field. Nor does incorporation into a field eliminate its other features as a practice. Practices are a complex of understandings, know-how and commitment, their purpose and function not reducible to the pursuit of 'capital'. From this perspective a number of features of conduct not easily subsumed under a metaphor of sporting contest are made apparent: competence; internal goods; purpose without a search for profit; the interdependence of semi-autonomous practices; and the limited possibilities of exit. Most theoretical accounts of practice (notwithstanding the real disagreements about the proper formulation of such a notion) are able to encompass at least some of these.

Hence, with respect to the analysis of domains of activity, we can identify the characteristics of a field – competitive, strategic, oriented to external goods – and the characteristics of practice – cooperative, pluralistic and orientated towards internal goods. The concepts are not mutually incompatible, but they have rather different logics. One consequence is that we might expect to identify tensions between the logics of field and practice which might potentially help understand dynamics.

Competition within a field often contributes to the transformation of practices. Conversely, change in its component practices might disrupt the logic of the field.²³ The concept of practice complements the concept of field by reducing its span, compensating for some of its specific weaknesses, emphasising the phenomenological understanding of activity, and having purchase upon activity where the accumulation of capitals and the gaining of symbolic profit is not of primary importance. To pursue such a mode of analysis would be to reintegrate two concepts which Bourdieu, unproductively, held apart throughout his work.

Second, we might conclude that in one respect the concept of field as developed by Bourdieu is less than satisfactory. The concept of field is a powerful structural concept, but its dynamics are not sufficiently grasped by the analogy with games and, most specifically, with the sporting contest. Not only does the sporting analogy eliminate the appreciation of relevant non-strategic features of practices, it compromises an appropriate understanding of strategic action within fields. Probably the most restrictive characteristic of the sporting contest is that it occurs under the rubric of fixed and formal rules of procedure, or as they are often called, laws of the game. The notion of game overemphasises consensus about the rules governing action. In some of the more truly strategic encounters in the social world agents are likely to modify and subvert the conventions of engagement. Such behaviour will almost always be constrained by concerns to maintain the legitimacy of the outcomes of manoeuvrings in the field. It is usually necessary to appear to act in a field without transgressing conventionally accepted or authoritative standards of conduct. To do otherwise is to risk the charge of cheating and for a victory to be deemed illegitimate and therefore undeserved. In many realms of social life, as Bourdieu knew perhaps too well, to be able to claim legitimacy is a necessary condition for benefiting from a position of power or privilege. A general understanding of the dynamics of fields should be uncoupled from the rigid conceptions of sporting contest.

If this is the case, there is a problem of how to reconfigure a conception of the dynamic mechanisms underlying the field. There is probably no gain from reverting to the other analogies which Bourdieu tried out in *Distinction* – of the magnetic force field, or the military field (although the latter may be suggestive in analysing strategic conduct in a domain where there exists no obligation to follow rules as such).

Perhaps, therefore, we must accept Bourdieu's frequent injunction to rest content with more flexible and less precise concepts, recognising that they often perform better as bases for discovery and explanation. Yet turning insightful metaphor into more highly specified concept surely remains the preferred option.²⁴

To date, the concept of field is primarily applied within sociology in Bourdieusian fashion, hence critique of his use of the term currently provides the principal platform for conceptual development. The concept of practice is a different proposition. A more profound understanding or precise delineation of the processes of change within practices depends to a great degree on which theory of practice one considers most worthy of consideration, a matter beyond the scope of this paper to determine. Given, however, his later reticence in elaborating the concept it may not be towards Bourdieu that most will wish to turn.

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¹ Bourdieu's most elaborate formulation of the theory of practice is offered in *Logic of Practice* (1990 [1980]). There one can find at least six sense of the term:

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- 1) The practical orientation is contrasted with the theoretical and the contemplative. This appears in the notion of practical sense, and in the idea of a logic of practice which is not that of the logician.
 - 2) The practical is contrasted with the discursive, as practical action rather than the making and circulating of meaning.
 - 3) The practical is contrasted with the impractical, with the imputation to (apparently all) agents that they have a degree of practical mastery over the activities in which they engage.
 - 4) Practice is referred to as a domain, or system.
 - 5) Practice may refer to any behaviour, performance or occurrence, whether strategic or habitual.
 - 6) Practice is that which emanates from *habitus*.

² In *Distinction*, Bourdieu uses several metaphors – playing field, battle field, magnetic field – which conjure up very different impressions of the boundaries, forces, layouts and positionings which might depict the features of a field.

³ If Robbins (2000) were right that all Bourdieu's analysis is situational, choosing the concepts for the explanatory task in hand rather than for grand theory building, then the fact that Bourdieu talks of practice among the Kabyle and fields when faced with the French bureaucracy and the art world would be additional corroborating evidence for such an interpretation.

⁴ Practice appears only 227ff, in an attempt to elucidate the notion of the *illusio*.

⁵ The application in *The State Nobility* is equally impressive if slightly less conceptually self-conscious.

⁶ Autonomy increases the further away from the heteronomous end of the field or other more heteronomous fields – like the economy or the field of power.

⁷ Alternatively consider one of Bourdieu's own summary definitions,

a network, or 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 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.). (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 97)

⁸ Jenkins (1992) gives a sound outline of Bourdieu's notion of field (84-6) then offers a range of ungenerous critical observations which lead him to dismiss the value of the concept as economic, deterministic, unoriginal, ontologically unsound, lacking an adequate conception of institutions, ill-defined and functionalist (86-91). (Jenkins makes these points as part of a more general and inter-related critique of concepts of practice and habitus.)

⁹ Swartz (1998) notes that field 'has become a central pillar of [Bourdieu's] conceptual edifice' (p.9) and that 'field is currently the least well understood and yet the most promising for future sociological work' (p.291).

¹⁰ Since it is implausible to imagine that everyone in a field is committed to it and its *illusio* to the same degree, the differential extent to which people engage in, learn from, and thus enhance their competence in the activities of the field will also affect their behaviour to some degree independently of their position in the field

¹¹ I tend to agree with Jenkins that it is theoretically confusing to attribute *habitus* to a field. Conflating the versatile and generative dispositions which an agent brings to a field with the requirements for effective action in that field makes it difficult to contemplate any possibility that agents might be ill-fitted to their positions in a field.

¹² Bourdieu is not without any explanation of this, indeed, for this is one basis of the power of social capital, but apart from the fact that he uses the concept little, he assumes a fit between personal *habitus* and position without reference to competence. Thus, in *The State Nobility* (1996:116-23) he explicitly discusses discrepancies between educational qualification and occupational recruitment, but only at an abstract and functional level, in terms of the consecrating effect of titles conferring through the system of qualifications, but without consideration of any differential effective competence among agents.

¹³ Martin (2003) in arguing for the potential of field theory dubs Bourdieu's contribution an account of 'fields of organised striving' and commends this for its demonstration of the role of social fate and a sociologically powerful version of reflexivity. But he sees no compelling reason for focussing solely on competitive and strategic phenomena.

¹⁴ Martin (2003: 32-3) notes that field theory's general focus on contestation, which he thinks is most plausibly founded on a model of agonistic games, is contentious, but offers no solution other than to affirm that 'not all human action takes place "in the field"'.

¹⁵ see respectively, Bourdieu 1996:249-52; 1984:224, 1990a:143 and 1996:58ff; 1984:244-5.

¹⁶ Swartz (1997:117-42) offers the most extensive and appreciative secondary treatment of the concept of field that I have so far come across, understanding fields essentially in terms of systems (as does Jenkins (1992:85) and Robbins (2000:39). Crossley (2002:178ff) shows to maximum effect the potential of seeing fields in terms of their game-like features. Both Swartz and Crossley agree that although Bourdieu sometimes uses the term market as synonymous with field, and there is an obvious connection to concepts of capital, this is not a very good analogy for understanding the features of fields - as demonstrated by Fligstein's (2001) application of the concept of field to the analysis of markets.

It would be a mistake to imagine that Bourdieu used the concept of field in identical fashion throughout his career. The concept evolves over time, growing in coherence as it is more precisely formulated. Consequently, it would seem that early formulations (for example Bourdieu 1967 and 1971) are better referred to only for exetical purposes.

¹⁷ Note, I am not making the frequently repeated, otiose argument against a concept that it doesn't explain everything. No decent concept ever could or would. I want to preserve the use of the concept of field much in the way that it was propounded in *Rules of Art*, but to restrict the scope of its application. It is my contention that Bourdieu needs other compatible concepts to remedy the weaknesses in current applications of field. Thus, I propose that a return to a concept of practice can compensate for some of these weaknesses. What is omitted can be effectively absorbed within a theory of practice. The irony, I suppose, is that Bourdieu had such a concept once but ceased to work upon its elaboration and application.

¹⁸ Bourdieu has a very strong sense of the social institutedness of practice as performance, but is not much given to analysing the operation of institutions qua organisations or sets of conventions which lie behind performance. Institutions, eg the French Academy, tend to be treated only as agents in struggle in field analysis. This is legitimate because they have positions in the cultural field. However, they have many other functions too, as conservator of the practice, facilitator of transmission through education, etc.

¹⁹ Ferguson (1998) applied the concept of field to the emergence of gastronomy in 19th century France. Surprisingly, she concentrated far more on the education of the public, or that section of it with gourmet pretensions, than on processes of competition among producers or recipients. Arguably the evidence she provided is more consistent with its being a practice, and a domain of enthusiasm, than a field.

²⁰ The *GFG* originated as a social movement of disgruntled consumers who formed the Good Food Club in 1951 (Warde, 2003).

²¹ While not everyone mentioned all six features, this constituted a shared understanding.

²² The main reasons given for eating out were; for a change, a treat, an opportunity to socialise, a celebration, or a social obligation (Warde & Martens, 2000:47). The liking of food or being hungry were not offered as grounds.

²³ In addition, potentially, we can envisage explanations of the ways in which new fields emerge besides through internal differentiation and specialisation.

²⁴ Martin (2003:26-8) suggests that recent work in organisational sociology may be progressing in this regard, but there remains some distance to travel yet.

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