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Cultural field and the habitus

In our previous chapter we described some of the theoretical ideas, attitudes and perspectives that have influenced and informed Bourdieu's work. In the next two chapters we look at how Bourdieu has tried to understand and explain the relationship between people's practices and the contexts in which those practices occur. Bourdieu refers to these contexts—discourses, institutions, values, rules and regulations—which produce and transform attitudes and practices as 'cultural fields'. In the first part of this chapter we identify and describe how cultural fields operate, through reference to notions such as cultural capital, universalisation, illusio, symbolic violence and misrecognition. In the second part we look at how Bourdieu arrives at the notion of the habitus, first through his critique of subjectivist and objectivist accounts of human activity, and then by thinking beyond these two accounts to produce what he calls a 'double historicity' of practice. We will also look at the different aspects that Bourdieu ascribes to the habitus, such as disposition and trajectory, its unconscious dimension, and the various ways it comes to be embodied.

Cultural field and capital

A cultural field can be defined as a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations, appointments and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy, and which produce

and authorise certain discourses and activities. But it is also constituted by, or out of, the conflict which is involved when groups or individuals attempt to determine what constitutes capital within that field, and how that capital is to be distributed. Bourdieu understands the concept of cultural field to refer to fluid and dynamic, rather than static, entities. Cultural fields, that is, are made up not simply of institutions and rules, but of the interactions between institutions, rules and practices.

What do we understand by the term 'cultural capital'? Richard Harker, Cheleen Mahar and Chris Wilkes, in their book *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu* (1990), make the point that:

> the definition of capital is very wide for Bourdieu and includes material things (which can have symbolic value), as well as 'untouchable' but culturally significant attributes such as prestige, status and authority (referred to as symbolic capital), along with cultural capital (defined as culturally-valued taste and consumption patterns) . . . For Bourdieu, capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange, and the term is extended 'to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation'. (Harker et al. 1990: 1)

It is important to remember that cultural capital is not set in stone or universally accepted, either within or across fields. In business, for instance, a corporation might advertise itself as a 'family company', in order to increase or maintain their share of the market. The positive capital associated with such a move is that it personalises the company. A television commercial for Dilmah Tea, for instance, shows the head of the company sitting at a table on a tea plantation with his two sons ('my boys'), who will one day take over the company and run it 'just like Dad'. The point here is to make a particular product attractive by associating it with supposedly familial and other 'agreeable' values (commitment, continuity, caring, loyalty). In different circumstances, however, designating oneself as a 'family company' might constitute negative capital: in an increasingly globalised

economy, it might connote insularity, a lack of ambition, or anachronistic values (because businesses are about profits, not relationships).

The amount of power a person has within a field depends on that person's position within the field, and the amount of capital she or he possesses. Of course, one of the advantages of being in a position of power is that it enables groups or agents to designate what is 'authentic' capital. Generally, the value or otherwise of specific forms of capital is determined within, and often confined to, a particular field—although overlapping does occur.

Reproduction and transformation

Bourdieu explains the competition for capital within fields with reference to two terms, reproduction and transformation. By and large, agents adjust their expectations with regard to the capital they are likely to attain in terms of the 'practical' limitations imposed upon them by their place in the field, their educational background, social connections, class position and so forth. Consequently—and to a certain extent, paradoxically—those with the least amount of capital tend to be less ambitious, and more 'satisfied' with their lot; in Bourdieu's terms, 'the subjective hope of profit tends to be adjusted to the objective probability of profit' (2000: 216). What this leads to is a reproduction of symbolic domination: what Bourdieu describes as:

> the realistic, even resigned or fatalistic, dispositions which lead members of the dominated classes to put up with objective conditions that would be judged intolerable or revolting by agents otherwise disposed . . . help to reproduce the conditions of oppression. (2000: 217)

Of course, this does not stop agents from 'gambling' for capital in order to improve their place within a field. A lowly academic who picks up a job writing a column for a 'respectable' daily newspaper, for instance, could suddenly gain capital (widespread public

recognition, status as a commentator on social issues, becoming a regular 'contact' for media enquiries) that can transform both their own value and place within the field, and ultimately (if this form of capital 'caught on'), even the field itself. Families from migrant communities will often put all their resources into educating one or more of their children in order to effect a similar transformation (in this case, a move from one class position to another).

Bourdieu insists, however, that this kind of 'gambling' is largely doomed to failure. Although a lower class migrant family may strive to get its children educated, the habitus of the children will, in advance, disqualify them from success, both in the sense that the children will signal, in everything they do and say, their unsuitability for higher education, and as a corollary, the children will themselves recognise this, and more or less expect failure. As Bourdieu writes: 'Those who talk of equality of opportunity forget that social games . . . are not "fair games". Without being, strictly speaking, rigged, the competition resembles a handicap race that has lasted for generations' (2000: 214–15).

An example of these different relations and processes comes from the field of sport. Theoretically, this should be the most straightforward and transparent of all fields. After all, sport is supposed to be about competition and fair play, and one would expect that capital would be apportioned according to simple criteria (for instance, winning and losing, or playing in the 'right spirit'). But this is not, and never really has been, the case. At one stage—certainly in the nineteenth century, and possibly well into the twentieth century—sport was relatively autonomous. That is to say, generally speaking its identity and capital were not determined by other powerful fields such as business or government. Rather, like all fields, it reproduced itself in terms of four main modes of operation: what Bourdieu would call misrecognition, symbolic violence, illusio and universalisation.

Misrecognition and symbolic violence

Bourdieu understands misrecognition as a 'form of forgetting' that agents are caught up in, and produced by. He writes:

> The agent engaged in practice knows the world . . . too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he is caught up in it, bound up with it; he inhabits it like a garment . . . he feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of the habitus (2000: 142–3)

Misrecognition is the key to what Bourdieu calls the function of 'symbolic violence', which he defines as 'the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (1992d: 167). In other words, agents are subjected to forms of violence (treated as inferior, denied resources, limited in their social mobility and aspirations), but they do not perceive it that way; rather, their situation seems to them to be 'the natural order of things'. One of the more obvious examples of the relation between misrecognition and symbolic violence can be seen in the way gender relations have, historically, been defined in terms of male domination. Every aspect of women's bodies and activities was 'imprisoned', to some extent, by the workings of the habitus. Female bodies were both read as having significance which demonstrated their inferiority (they were weak, soft, unfit for hard work, unable to take pressure), and were inculcated (at home, school, church) with a 'bodily hexis that constitutes a veritable embodied politics' (1992d: 172).

Patriarchy, in this account, cannot be understood simply in terms of a coercion by one group (men) of another (women). Rather, we can say that gender domination took (and takes) place precisely because women misrecognised the symbolic violence to which they were subjected as something that was natural, simply 'the way of the world'. Consequently they were complicit in the production of those things (bodily performances, for instance) which worked to reinscribe their domination. Of course, as cultures change, there is always the prospect that men can be caught up in the same form of imprisonment; that is, maintain an attachment to certain performances of masculinity which are no longer acceptable or functional, and thus counterproductive.

Misrecognition also helps us make sense of the double-dealing strategies whereby leaders, managers, officials or delegates of a field appear to be acting in a disinterested or

principled manner 'for the field' and its values. So in sport, the legendary American, Avery Brundage, could rule over his domain (the Olympic movement) as a patriarch who had the best interests of the game at heart. In effect he was ensuring that the field and its practices reflected his own values. As a result, the sub-field of athletics and its practices, rules, discourses and forms of capital corresponded to a logic that was clearly political and sectarian (in Brundage's case, upper class values), but which had to be treated as inextricably linked to, and in fact derived from, the field itself. Brundage, for example, hated professionalism in sport, and restricted the Olympics, ostensibly, to amateurs. But of course the best athletes invariably received remuneration (from governments, sports departments, sponsors, organisers). Everyone knew what was happening, but everyone pretended that athletes were still amateurs. The real scandal was not in accepting money; it was either getting caught or telling the truth about what became known as 'shamateurism'.

Illusio and universalisation

This more or less unthinking commitment to the logic, values and capital of a field corresponds to what Bourdieu calls 'illusio', which is:

> the fact of being caught up in and by the game, of believing . . . that playing is worth the effort …, to participate, to admit that the game is worth playing and that the stakes created in and through the fact of playing are worth pursuing; it is to recognise the game and to recognise its stakes. When you read, in Saint-Simon, about the quarrel of hats (who should bow first), if you were not born in a court society, if you do not possess the habitus of a person of the court, if the structures of the game are not also in your mind, the quarrel will seem ridiculous and futile to you. (1998d: 76–7)

The illusio of the (apparently meaningless) quarrel of the hats is similar to what happened in the Olympic movement with the

games that the Olympic movement played over amateurism, which became known as shamateurism. The rules of amateurism forbade athletes from accepting cash for sporting performances. On the other hand there was nothing to stop athletes from receiving travelling expenses, having equipment supplied for free, or from working in highly paid government or corporate jobs that never required their presence. In effect the Olympic movement under Brundage lived out the illusio of their passionate commitment to keeping athletics 'pure', while tacitly allowing most of the best athletes to earn their living as professionals. The situation was best summed up by a sportsman from a field with a similar attachment to shamateurism—tennis. When the Spanish amateur champion Manuel Santana was asked, privately, why he did not turn professional, he replied that he couldn't afford the drop in salary.

Under Brundage the Olympic movement represented itself and its 'lily-white' values as the only true manifestation of the undiluted essence of sport. That is to say, it tried to universalise itself so that its values would become synonymous with the field as a whole. The so-called 'Olympic ideals', which emphasise disinterested values ('sport for sport's sake'), were reproduced by governments, the media, bureaucrats, sports administrators and teachers as criteria (capital) for differentiating 'true' sportspeople. This had a number of manifestations. In the United States in the first half of the twentieth century, professional American football received very little media coverage or public attention compared to (supposedly) amateur college football. And amateur tennis players who won tournaments like Wimbledon became national heroes, while the professional circuit, dubbed 'a circus', was more or less ignored by the media. In both cases the professionals were much better sportspeople than those in the amateur ranks, but this did not translate into cultural (or even economic) capital.

The Olympic movement's attempts to universalise its values and capital were not, of course, universally successful. In some sub-fields (such as golf, soccer and boxing), professionals were generally accorded a higher status, and received more media and public attention, than amateurs. And in rugby league (a sport played predominantly in the north of Britain and eastern

Australia), professionalism became the means by which the sport and its working class fans distinguished themselves from a rival code (rugby union) and its supporters (the upper classes).

But even where a sport was clearly professional (golf, soccer, boxing, rugby league), its core values and discourses—what Bourdieu would call its 'doxa'—were usually articulated (by the media, officials, and by sportspersons giving interviews) as being tied to the notion of 'sport for sport's sake'. This is another example of illusio: although by the middle of the last century many sports were operating on a professional basis (soccer in Europe and South America, golf and tennis in the United States and Europe), most members of the field were still 'spoken' by the discourses of what we might call 'inalienable sport'.

Inalienable culture and the market

When we refer to sport as 'inalienable', we mean that it was supposedly above the values of the marketplace. Soccer players earned high salaries, and were treated—and sold—by clubs as a form of commodity. But if an English soccer star in the 1950s were interviewed about his reasons for playing the game, he would invariably cite a number of motivations—glory, representing his country, helping his teammates, pleasing the local supporters, even just having fun, all of which might be true. What he could not say, however, was that he was doing it for the money; that would have automatically earned him the contempt and anger of the fans and everyone else in the field. The only capital that a soccer player could legitimately refer to was inalienable cultural capital such as international honour, longevity, skill, loyalty to a team or town, toughness or a sense of fair play.

Cultural fields themselves are not autonomous, or uninfluenced by other fields. We made the point that fields are fluid and dynamic, mainly because they are always being changed both by internal practices and politics, and by their convergence with other fields. Again, sport can serve as an example of both these dynamic tendencies. The notion that the field of sport was 'inalienable' with regard to economic considerations changed

very quickly from the 1960s onward, basically as the result of a combination of internal and external pressures: what Bourdieu would call the transformation of an autonomous field into a heteronomous one. An external pressure was that the field of business began to intrude more openly into the field of sport. Initially this came in the form of increased sponsorship and television involvement, but more recently it has manifested itself in the listing of sporting teams (European soccer teams, for instance) as companies on the stock exchange. An internal pressure has come about as different sports organisations have been taken over by officials (Juan Samaranch with regard to the Olympic movement, Primo Nebiolo for international athletics, and Joao Havelange for international soccer) whose primary aim has been to 'corporatise' their sport to the fullest.

The internal and external changes that largely transformed sport from the 1960s onward were of course complementary, as is the case with all fields. External convergences, such as the increased interconnectedness of sport with the field of business and its greater reliance on that field, gave rise to opportunities for internal change. Officials and players who were able to seize the day and run with business invariably increased their own capital (and power), and brought most of the field with them. Officials (and their sports) who refused to 'play the new game' were increasingly isolated, and left behind.

This had a rolling effect: the more business invested in, and controlled, certain sports, the more those chosen sports (American football, English soccer, tennis, golf, the Olympics) prospered in terms of media publicity, attendances, sponsorship and players' wages. At the same time the doxa of 'sport for sport's sake' became more tenuous, with notions such as loyalty (of players to teams, and teams to localities) being replaced by unabashed economic considerations. In English soccer, for instance, players frequently make public demands for increased wages as a condition of their continuing 'interest', and in the United States American football owners threaten to relocate to another city unless local councils meet their financial demands.

It is important to point out that the transformation of a field, whether it is dramatic or gradual, does not occur in a consistent

or homogeneous fashion. Certain sub-sections or even pockets of a field may embrace the transformation of the field much more quickly. As a result, that field is usually 'traumatised' by fairly overt disagreements and agonistics, primarily over which part most truly represents or embodies the field and its values. If we stay with the field of sport we can find numerous examples of this phenomenon, particularly in areas that have lagged behind these changes.

A good example is Australian sport, which for most of the twentieth century was able to embrace professionalism to a qualified extent (in sports such as rugby league, Australian rules football and soccer), while maintaining a strong discursive and practical commitment to the ethos of sport's inalienability, particularly through an emphasis on its 'tribal' nature (that is, teams were closely associated with classes, suburbs or other communities). However, in the 1990s the two main football codes—rugby league and Australian rules—became increasingly corporatised; and as a consequence the rituals, traditions and ethos of those games began to give way to business decisions. Seemingly inviolate traditions such as the design of team jumpers, the time and day for playing matches, and even the viability of teams were changed to accommodate sponsors and television. This has resulted in an ongoing battle, played out in newspapers, television, radio, public rallies and in the courts, between those representing the tradition of a field supposedly 'of and for itself' (that is, relatively autonomous and above the market), and those who see the sport as a corporate activity.

The transformation of a particular field always results in concomitant transformations or modifications of the identity of members of the field. One of the more interesting aspects of the 'agonistics' that currently characterises different sports in Australia is the way in which it impinges upon individual identities, practices, dispositions and values. Some people condemned the corporatisation of their sport, and strongly resisted it, even when it went against their own economic interests. Others, who were originally closely associated with, and championed, the inalienable ethos of their sport were also able to change identities, and move from being sportspeople to businesspeople without too much trouble.

Much the same has happened to the identity of players in all sports, but most particularly in those that have been thoroughly corporatised. Prior to the 1960s, a sportsperson's identity was strongly informed, at least at a discursive, public level, by a strong commitment to the game and its values (that is, an attachment to fair play, loyalty, selflessness, the good of the game) and supposedly 'masculine' qualities such as strength, determination, discipline, courage, tolerance of pain. With the advent of corporatisation, sporting identities were influenced by a different form of commoditisation which emphasised and valued (or at least didn't negatively value) individuality, selfishness, arrogance, a lack of discipline, disrespect for authority, sexuality and most importantly, an ability to create headlines or initiate scandals.

Figures such as George Best, Diego Maradona and David Beckham in soccer, John McEnroe, Illie Nastase and, more recently, Anna Kournikova in tennis, Joe Namath in American football, Jose Canseco in baseball and, most famously, Dennis Rodman in basketball were viewed and treated more like pop stars than sportspersons. And crowds would turn up, not necessarily to see them exhibit sporting skills, but because of their penchants for excessive behaviour (McEnroe, Nastase, Rodman), their sexual attractiveness or notoriety (Namath, Kournikova, Beckham, Rodman), or because of their 'larger than life' reputations (Canseco, Namath, Rodman). Even the masculinist character of sporting identity has been replaced, to a certain extent: Rodman's cross-dressing and Beckham's reported penchant for wearing his wife's underwear are symptomatic of this.

Habitus and objectivism/subjectivism

We pointed out in Chapter 1 that Bourdieu had a tendency to pick up on theoretical conundrums or debates that characterise a field, and transform them; and this is very much the case with his notions of habitus. Most of the fields in which Bourdieu has worked, such as sociology, anthropology, ethnography and linguistics, have been split between objectivist and subjectivist explanations of human practice. In his introduction to *The Logic*

of Practice, Bourdieu writes that 'Of all the oppositions that artificially divide social science, the most fundamental, and the most ruinous, is the one that is set up between subjectivism and objectivism' (1990b: 25). The notions of cultural field and the habitus were 'created' by Bourdieu primarily as a means of thinking beyond this subjectivist–objectivist split.

What do the terms 'subjectivist' and 'objectivist' actually mean? Loïc Wacquant describes subjectivism, or the subjectivist point of view, as that which:

> asserts that social reality is a 'contingent ongoing accomplishment' of competent social actors who continually construct their social world via 'the organized artful practices of everyday life' . . . Through the lens of this social phenomenology, society appears as the emergent product of the decisions, actions, and cognitions of conscious, alert individuals to whom the world is given as immediately familiar and meaningful. (1992d: 9)

The most prevalent and recognisable example of this way of thinking in popular culture is the conventional hero of Hollywood films. Think of any Arnold Schwarzenegger film (for instance, *Predator*, *Total Recall*, *True Lies*) and the characters he plays in them: they are usually in control of their ideas, thoughts and behaviour, and they determine their environment through the strength of their will and their physical prowess, much more than their environment (in the form of the government, bureaucracies, conventional wisdom) determines them. In fact in most of Schwarzenegger's films (and in action films starring actors such as Sylvester Stallone and Bruce Willis) the story is really about the battle between the individual hero who is courageous, strong, principled and free thinking, and his environment which is invariably bureaucratic, deterministic, dehumanised, corrupted and narrow minded.

Bourdieu accepts that subjectivism is useful in that it draws attention to the ways in which agents, at a practical, everyday level, negotiate various attempts (by governments, bureaucracies, institutions, capitalism) to tell them what to do, how to behave, and how to think. In other words it serves as an antidote to those

Marxist theories (associated with the Frankfurt School) which presume that people are 'cultural dupes' mindlessly consuming the ideologies of government and capitalism. But Bourdieu rejects the subjectivist approach because it fails to take into account the close connection between the objective structures of a culture, which include the values, ideas, desires and narratives produced by, and characteristic of, cultural institutions such as the family, religious groups, education systems and government bodies, on the one hand, and the specific tendencies, activities, values and dispositions of individuals, on the other.

Objectivism is useful for Bourdieu because it allows him to decode 'the unwritten musical score according to which the actions of agents, each of whom believes she is improvising her own melody, are organized' (1992d: 8). The best known body of objectivist theory is structuralism, which was practiced in, and influenced, just about every major humanities and social sciences discipline, including linguistics (Saussure and Jakobson), anthropology (Lévi-Strauss), literature (the Russian Formalists), cultural studies (Barthes), Marxism (Althusser) and psychoanalysis (Lacan).

There are three main insights which Bourdieu takes from structuralism, and which clearly influenced his notions of cultural field and the habitus. First, structuralist accounts of practice start from the premise that people more or less reproduce the objective structures of the society, culture or community they live in, and which are articulated in terms of ideas, values, documents, policies, rituals, discourses, relations, myths and dispositions. The catch cry of structuralism was Lévi-Strauss' observation that 'myths think in men, unbeknown to them' (Hawkes 1997: 41). In other words, while people think that they are employing various modes of communication ('sign systems' such as written and spoken language, or bodily gestures), in fact those sign systems produce them, and their activities, thoughts and desires.

Second, sign systems not only 'think' people into existence; they also determine how they perceive the world. What this means is that 'reality' is both produced and delimited by whatever sign systems we have at our disposal. In contemporary

society we perceive and understand people aged, say thirteen years and under, in terms of the word 'child'. This connotes a number of things, including distinguishing that person from an adult. But as the French historian Philippe Aries has pointed out, what we understand by that word did not exist in the sixteenth century; up to then twelve-year-olds would have been viewed and treated as miniature adults.

The third point Bourdieu takes from structuralism is the notion of relational thinking. Reality and people are 'processed' through the meaning machines that constitute our sign systems; but the signs in those systems mean nothing in themselves; they only 'mean' insofar as they are part of a sign system, and can be related to other signs in that system. For instance, the term 'Coca Cola' does not derive its meaning from any real thing that is out there in the world. Rather, we understand 'Coca Cola' in relation to other terms, called 'binaries' ('Coca Cola' means, among other things, not 'Pepsi', not 'Perrier', not 'yak juice').

These three points can be summed up as follows:

- objective structures produce people, their subjectivities, their worldview; and, as a consequence
- they also produce what people come to know as the 'reality' of the world; and
- every thing, object and idea within a culture only has meaning in relation to other elements in that culture.

Structuralism can be understood, then, as a form of objectivism which:

> sets out to establish objective regularities (structures, laws, systems of relationships, etc.) independent of individual consciousness and wills. . . . It raises, objectively at least, the forgotten question of the particular conditions which make doxic experience of the social world possible. (Bourdieu 1990b: 26)

But this emphasis on the deterministic aspect of human practice is, for Bourdieu, both a strength and a weakness. Objectivism can see practice only as the reproduction of structures, and no more.

Perhaps the most obvious example of this shortcoming in objectivist readings of practice is to be found in the activities of anthropologists when they are investigating, describing analysing and explaining so-called 'primitive' or 'native' cultures.

Bourdieu himself did anthropological work in Algeria in the 1960s, and he was struck by the incongruous, even comical aspect of anthropologists seeking out so-called primitive cultures, then observing, recording, describing, questioning and evaluating what was going on in front of them, in order to bring it all back home as fresh anthropological knowledge. Bourdieu had problems with this kind of activity for two reasons. First, just as subjectivist accounts of practice edit out, and even repress, the relationship between cultural structures and individual practices, objectivist accounts of 'other' practices or cultures, such as those engaged in by anthropologists, have no place for the forgotten question of the particular conditions which make, say, anthropology possible. In other words, in order for an anthropologist to objectify another culture as primitive, that anthropologist must naturalise the values that characterise one culture as civilised or advanced, and another culture as its opposite.

Anthropologists observing other cultures have, to a certain extent, already written their books before they arrive. Designating a culture as primitive is a form of (usually negative) evaluation which determines, to no small extent, what questions the anthropologists will ask, what things they will see and miss, and what aspects they will emphasise as important, or as the keys to the culture. Anthropologists objectify other peoples, but they invariably fail to objectify their own practices.

The second major difficulty Bourdieu has with objectivist accounts of cultures and practices is that he sees them as failing to understand that descriptions of objective regularities (That is, structures, laws, systems) do not tell us how people use—inhabit, negotiate, or elude—those objective regularities.

An example of this point is to be found in the John Carpenter film *Starman*, which demonstrates how the difference between laws and practices is forgotten—or repressed—by practitioners. In the film an alien, played by Jeff Bridges, is travelling across the United States by car with a woman played by Karen Allen.

The woman does all the driving until Bridges points out that he has been closely observing her driving the car, has analysed and taken in all the rules and skills involved, and would like to drive himself. Allen reluctantly agrees, but almost immediately Bridges runs a red light and only narrowly avoids an accident. Allen abuses him, but Bridges replies that, after watching her drive, he had concluded that the rules about road lights were as follows: green means go fast, orange means go slightly faster, and red means go very fast.

Subjectivism and objectivism remain useful notions in attempting to account for practice, mainly because they point to the shortcomings of their 'other'. Subjectivism draws attention to the point that objectivist maps of a culture (such as laws, rules, and systems) edit out intentionality and individuality (or what is referred to as 'agency'). Objectivism points out that individuality and intentionality are regulated by cultural contexts—that is, we can only 'intend' what is available to us within a culture.

Bourdieu, reading across both subjectivist and objectivist approaches simultaneously, insists that practice is always informed by a sense of agency (the ability to understand and control our own actions), but that the possibilities of agency must be understood and contextualised in terms of its relation to the objective structures of a culture—what he refers to, generally, as cultural fields. For Bourdieu this relationship between field and habitus does not completely determine people's actions and thoughts, but no practice is explicable without reference to them.

Habitus and bodily hexis

Bourdieu refers to the partly unconscious 'taking in' of rules, values and dispositions as 'the habitus', which he defines as 'the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations . . . [which produces] practices' (1977a: 78). In other words, habitus can be understood as the values and dispositions gained from our cultural history that generally stay with us across contexts (they are durable and transposable). These values and dispositions allow us to respond to cultural rules and contexts

in a variety of ways (because they allow for improvisations), but the responses are always largely determined—regulated—by where (and who) we have been in a culture.

We pointed out in Chapter 1 that Bourdieu's 'anti-intellectualism' could be understood as an attempt to free himself, as far as was possible, from aspects of the intellectual or academic habitus. As agents move through and across different fields, they tend to incorporate into their habitus the values and imperatives of those fields. And this is most clearly demonstrated in the way the relationship between field and habitus functions to 'produce' agent's bodies and bodily dispositions: what Bourdieu refers to as the 'bodily hexis'. We may think of the body as something individual, as subject to, belonging to, and characteristic of, the self. But, as Bourdieu points out, this notion of the 'individual, self-contained body' is also a product of the habitus:

> this body which indisputably functions as the principle of individuation . . ., ratified and reinforced by the legal definition of the individual as an abstract, interchangeable being . . . [is] open to the world, and therefore exposed to the world, and so capable of being conditioned by the world, shaped by the material and cultural conditions of existence in which it is placed from the beginning . . . (2000: 133–4)

We referred, in Chapter 1, to academics cloistered in their 'ivory towers', who are disposed by their physical milieu (libraries, book-filled offices, lecture theatres) and spatial location (the university is a kind of 'world within itself', set apart from the rest of society) to 'bracket off' the rest of the world. This disposition manifests itself, however, not just in attitudes, approaches and values (real problems are made 'academic', and treated as abstractions), but in terms of the production of an 'intellectual body'. If you look at any number of jackets of academic books, you will find the author 'arranged' and posed in particular ways (a sombre expression, hands on chin, wearing glasses) which are meant to connote, say, seriousness, or a contemplative state of mind.

Much the same process can be seen with regard to the field of sport. Sportspeople, of course, are expected to have strongly

exercised and finely honed bodies, which fit as closely as possible to the demands of their particular discipline (a rugby body, for instance, is very different from the body of a distance runner). What is particularly interesting, however, is what happens when sportspeople move into different fields, such as public relations or the media, where there is no 'coincidence' between their bodies and their new work. The overwhelming impression, in most cases (although sportspeople are now tutored in, say, working with the media) is of awkwardness, not just in what to say or when to say it, but in the relationship between their bodies and their new surrounds (where and how to move, facial expressions, when to laugh). They appear, that is, like fish out of water.

Aspects of the habitus

There are a number of further points that Bourdieu associates with habitus. First, knowledge (the way we understand the world, our beliefs and values) is always constructed through the habitus, rather than being passively recorded. Second, we are disposed towards certain attitudes, values or ways of behaving because of the influence exerted by our cultural trajectories. These dispositions are transposable across fields. Third, the habitus is always constituted in moments of practice. It is always 'of the moment', brought out when a set of dispositions meets a particular problem, choice or context. In other words, it can be understood as a 'feel for the game' that is everyday life. Finally, habitus operates at a level that is at least partly unconscious. Why? Because habitus is, in a sense, entirely arbitrary; there is nothing natural or essential about the values we hold, the desires we pursue, or the practices in which we engage.

This is not to say that these arbitrary practices are unmotivated, and that we act out of disinterestedness. On the contrary, and as we pointed out with regard to the field of sport, all practices are informed by notions of power, politics and self-interest. But in order for a particular habitus to function smoothly and effectively, individuals must normally think that the possibilities from which they choose are in fact necessities, common sense,

natural or inevitable. Other possibilities are ruled out precisely because they are unthinkable.

The rules and structures of perception that pertain to a particular habitus are inscribed on, and in, individuals as if they were 'human nature' or 'civilised behaviour', and things outside those rules and structures are usually understood, when forced upon us, as amounting to the horrific and barbaric, or the absurd and comic. An example of how arbitrary structures and rules are produced as a naturalised habitus can be seen in western meat-eating patterns. Cows, pigs, chickens, ducks, turkeys and sheep are all slaughtered, packaged and consumed as staple components of a western diet, while domestic animals such as cats, dogs and hamsters are (unconsciously) excluded from this category. When stories circulate about foreigners eating cats or dogs, the usual response is one of disgust and incomprehension.

What is implicit in this reaction is the notion that it is proper to eat some animals because they are 'depersonalised' (we have herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, but not hordes of hamsters); and we often reinforce this act of depersonalisation by naming the meat differently from the animal (we eat beef, not cow; mutton, not sheep). Animals which we personalise and regard as pets, on the other hand, are almost impossible to think of as food. Imagine, if you can, an English monarchist, starving in the wilderness, faced with the prospect of having to eat a 'royal' corgi to survive. Cannibalism might be a more palatable option.

Systems, rules, laws, structures and categories of meaning and perception can only function effectively as habitus if we do not think about the specific sociocultural conditions or contexts of their production and existence: or what Bourdieu calls 'the forgetting of history which history itself produces' (1990b: 56). An example of this is history itself—or, more specifically, the way in which the teaching of history in the West (particularly in schools) has edited out the political, artistic, philosophical and scientific achievements of Islamic cultures from the sixth century to the present. The term 'the Dark Ages' has been used, for instance, to describe the period of the Islamic military and cultural eclipse of the west. What this term implies, and the perception it creates, is that non-western societies are effectively irrelevant, or at least

incapable of producing 'civilisation'. Equally importantly, this version of history effectively universalises western experience, with the conventional narrative points of western history (Greece, Rome, Christianity, the Renaissance, the age of exploration, the Enlightenment, the Industrial age) coming to refer to, and incorporate, the history of all peoples. New historical details (for instance, the recent discovery of evidence of metal work in Southeast Asia which challenges the notion that the fertile crescent was the 'cradle of civilisation') can modify the western narrativisation of human history, while still leaving it more or less intact.

The most crucial aspect of habitus, then, is that it naturalises itself and the cultural rules, agendas and values that make it possible. But there are also a number of other important points that can be identified in Bourdieu's definition. First, conditioning associated with a particular type of existence, based on shared cultural trajectories, produces the habitus. Now this can seem a difficult notion, because we are not talking about something as straightforward as, say, the Marxist idea of class categories based on positions occupied within the economic sphere. Habitus is certainly informed by, without being entirely explicable in terms of, class affiliations.

An example of this occurs in the British comedy series *Blackadder*. The fourth and final series is set in World War I, with assorted members of the British army awaiting the order to advance towards the German lines. The troops are more or less divided into two groups: those in the trenches who are involved in the fighting (and who will be killed), and those behind the lines giving orders (who will not be killed). Now, throughout the series clear delineations are drawn between different groups in terms of class. General Melchett and Lieutenant George, for instance, both come from upper-class, private school backgrounds, and share values, social connections, and banter which is incomprehensible to lower- and middle-class characters such as Baldrick and Blackadder. General Melchett, who gives orders from behind the lines ('Remember men', says the general, 'we're right behind you'. 'Yes', says Blackadder, 'about three miles behind us'), is enthusiastic about the war, and oblivious to the dangers

involved. Curiously, despite being in the trenches and having to eat rats, sleep in puddles and be shot at by the Germans, Lieutenant George shares the general's views—at least at first. In fact one of the more obviously comic aspects of the series is the way in which George is able to maintain his class disposition and its concomitant discourses (which reduces the war to a kind of school game, involving 'giving Harry Hun six of the best, trousers down') despite the mounting evidence of the absurdity of this position, and the danger to his life.

George is clearly 'written' by his class habitus to the extent that he is effectively blind to what is happening around him. However, after his upper-class friends have all been slaughtered and his own death becomes inevitable, he undergoes an ever-so-subtle transformation. As the four soldiers—the lower-class Baldrick, the middle-class Blackadder and Darling, and the upper-class George—prepare to charge suicidally towards the enemy guns, they speak with one mind about not wanting to die. In that moment, George's acceptance and naive (mis)understanding of the war is replaced—too late—by fear and disbelief. In other words, George finally throws off his upper-class-based belief in the war, and briefly takes on the habitus—shared by Blackadder and Baldrick—of a soldier at the front.

The important point here is that the habitus is both durable, and oriented towards the practical: dispositions, knowledges and values are always potentially subject to modification, rather than being passively consumed or reinscribed. This occurs when the narratives, values and explanations of a habitus no longer make sense, as is the case with Lieutenant George; or again, when agents use their understanding and feel for the rules of the game as a means of furthering and improving their own standing and capital within a cultural field. It must be stressed, however, that such 'interests' are themselves produced by, and through, the habitus.

This is also played out in *Blackadder* where two characters, Captains Blackadder and Darling (both middle-class), attempt to avoid, from the very beginning, the perils of trench warfare. They each have a different way of doing this: Blackadder schemes to get posted to Paris, or Tahiti, or London; while Darling works as

a bureaucrat at headquarters (Private Baldrick proposes to survive, rather less realistically, by dressing up as a woman and marrying General Melchett). Their intentions are not to overthrow or challenge the 'game', or to intervene in what is clearly a morally indefensible situation: rather, they just want to avoid what is happening to everyone else at the front (that is, death). They do not believe in the game, but they continue to define their interests within its parameters, narratives and values by serving the war effort.

Habitus always makes a 'virtue out of necessity'. This means that just because there is a close relationship between 'objective probabilities (for example, the chances of access to a particular good) and agents' subjective aspirations ("motivations" and "needs")' (Bourdieu 1990b: 54), people do not necessarily make those kinds of calculations and decisions freely, uninfluenced by habitus. On the contrary, Bourdieu makes the point that those decisions are always already made: 'The most improbable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable' (1990b: 54).

The decisions taken by Captains Blackadder and Darling correspond to this 'logic of the habitus'; unlike Baldrick, they understand that they will never be admitted into the upper class, through marriage or any other means. They calculate that the best they can do to achieve safety is to perform 'usefulness' with regard to the war effort. This will not stop the killing (in fact, it will effectively perpetuate it), but it is their best chance to avoid being killed.

What these examples from *Blackadder* and our earlier examples from the field of sport point to is that while the habitus is subject to modification and even change, such a process is usually gradual (an exception would be something like Paul of Tarsus' dramatic conversion from a persecutor of Christians to Christian zealot—but then God apparently had something to do with that). The habitus can tolerate social upheavals, and agents moving from one field to another, because there is a 'continuity of meaning' (or a doxa) that characterises and even permeates

most national cultures, and is usually promoted by governments, bureaucracies, the media and education systems.

Habitus and globalisation

The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has raised the question, however, as to the effect that the forces and processes of globalisation have on the habitus. Appadurai suggests that the more or less unregulated flow of cultural texts, in concert with the continuous 'flowing of peoples' that characterises the contemporary world, works to 'move the glacial forces of the habitus into the quickened beat of improvisations for large groups of people' (Appadurai 1997: 6). He picks up on the work of the French theorist Michel de Certeau to argue that people are continuously confronted with images, narratives, information, voices and perspectives from all corners of the globe that don't equate with the received ideas of their habitus. Rather than having stable identities, people have to 'make do' with whatever is at hand, so to speak. So, for instance, regardless of their own national or ethnic identity, they might borrow identities from Hong Kong kung fu films, American sitcoms or Indian melodramas. This means that they are necessarily distanced not just from 'official' cultural texts and their meanings, but from any institution or text which claims to have a monopoly on meaning—simply because, in a globalised world, what is understood as normal is always subject to (very rapid) challenge and change. We will deal with this aspect of the habitus, and its relation to cultural fields, in our next chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at the three most important theoretical concepts developed by Bourdieu—cultural field, cultural capital and the habitus.

- Cultural field can be defined as a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations, appointments and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy, and which

produce and authorise certain discourses and activities. But it is also constituted by, or out of, the conflict which is involved when groups or individuals attempt to determine what constitutes capital within that field, and how that capital is to be distributed.

- Cultural capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange, and the term is extended 'to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation' (Harker et al. 1990: 1).
- Bourdieu refers to the partly unconscious 'taking in' of rules, values and dispositions as 'the habitus', which he defines as 'the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations . . . [which produces] practices' (1977a: 78). In other words, habitus can be understood as the values and dispositions gained from our cultural history that generally stay with us across contexts (they are durable and transposable). These values and dispositions allow us to respond to cultural rules and contexts in a variety of ways (because they allow for improvisations), but the responses are always largely determined—regulated—by where (and who) we have been in a culture.

Further reading

Bourdieu, Pierre 1990a, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, Stanford University Press, Stanford

Bourdieu, Pierre 1990b, *The Logic of Practice*, Polity Press, Cambridge

Bourdieu, Pierre 1977a, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge