

A critical appraisal of Holland et al.'s (1998) appropriation of Bourdieu

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Abstract

This paper takes forward analyses of the difference between two theoretical perspectives on agency and practice in general and specifically in educational context: that of “Activity theory” (in the lineage of Vygotsky/Leontiev and Bakhtin/Volosinov), and Bourdieu’s sociology (1990). Holland et al. (1998) draw on Bourdieu’s notion of field in their conceptualization of Figured Worlds (hereafter FW), especially to understand power relations through ‘positionality’ in the field/FW; on the other hand their key sources for conceptualising identity in practice regarding ‘figuration’, ‘self-authoring’, and semiotic mediation in a zone of proximal development draw on activity theory. The aim of this paper is to provide a critique of the appropriation of Bourdieu in Holland et al.’s theory (op cit.) so that we can provide a basis for further development of syntheses attempted in previous work (Williams, 2011a; 2011b). We analyse three of Holland et al.’s concerns regarding Bourdieu raised by: his insufficient “localism”, his over-emphasis on ‘embodiment’ of identity, and his ‘intergenerational’ perspective on change. In conclusion, we argue that some of these concerns imply a partial reading of Bourdieu’s work, while others require consideration: we are left with Bourdieu’s overwhelming concern to map and explain the field of ‘power’ in all its manifestations, perhaps at the expense of the important work of the imagination/dreaming in ‘self-authoring’ and ‘world-making’.

Introduction

The trend in the past few decades has suggested that history of institutional and individual change is mediated by the changing nature of cultural forms (see Willis, 1977 and Bourdieu, 1977; 1990). Holland et al. (1998) recognize such contributions to social anthropology and education. Holland and Lave (2001) focus investigation and theorization predominantly on the relation of struggles to identify (figure oneself) in contested local practices. Thus, Holland (2007) recommends, one should study the sites outside of the classroom (and school) along with the classroom itself in order to capture the ‘history in person – the developing subjectivities of the classroom participants’ (ibid, p.169). This view has become influential in studies of identity in educational research. For example Boaler and Greeno (2000) make use of Holland et al.’ concepts of ‘figured worlds, positioning and authoring’ (op cit.: 173) in order to form an understanding of ‘practice-based interpretations of mathematics learning’ (ibid: 173). Boaler and Greeno argue that ‘the mathematics classroom may be thought of as a particular social setting – that is a figured world – in which children and teachers take on a certain roles that help define who they are’ (ibid: 173). Holland et al. (1998) criticize Bourdieu’s theory of social practice for similar reasons, that is, change in habitus happens from one generation to another rather than within

a lifetime; they ask how this can be consistent with rapid changes in sites of struggle such as those reported in Holland & Lave (2001). On the other hand, Bourdieu's writings (e.g. see 1997) discuss changes in a person's dispositions (habitus) 'in response to new experiences' (ibid: 161) and these include intra-generational changes along with inter-generational ones. Besides, Bourdieu (1990) argues that changes in one's life trajectory (i.e. changes in practice) are dialectic between the external structures and one's internal structures (in the form of embodied dispositions). For example, Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) show how the reproduction of cultural and economic class relations in the French society are reproduced through pedagogical practices of French schools in terms of selection and organization of students, which then impacts the students' trajectories. Indeed in times of rapid change in the field, the hysteresis effect (i.e. the lag between the habitus - dispositions – re-adjusting itself to new opportunities in the field, see Bourdieu, 1997) can be dramatic (example of case studies that can be interpreted in terms of the hysteresis effect can be found in Bourdieu, 1993b).

Given the theoretical and analytic nature of this paper, the methods applied for this analysis can be described as theoretical analysis of literatures. In the background is our study of Bourdieu in contrast with the founders of Activity Theory including Vygotsky, Leontiev and Bakhtin (see e.g. Williams, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). We focus on a critical review of parts of the book titled 'Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds' Holland et al. (1998) relevant to the points above and its positioning in relation to Bourdieu by – among other things - combing through all mentions/use of key Bourdieusian concepts ('field', 'habitus', etc.) and cross referring to the key works of Bourdieu cited (see 1977, 1990 etc.) and to other significant works that are not cited (e.g. see 1997, etc.). When important discrepancies have been found, these have then been further investigated by expanding the search to other writings of Holland (such as Holland & Lave, 2001 – if required) in order to check for inconsistency and theoretical development.

We thus pose the questions "How does Holland et al.'s concept of Figured World utilize Bourdieu's conceptual framework, and with what consequences for understanding agency and identity in practice?"

Analysis and Discussion

At the heart of Holland et al.'s (op cit.) theorization is the aim to establish an understanding of a person's developing identity and its link with activity or as they call it 'identity in practice' (ibid: 271), thereby, adding to the existing debate of such theoretical synthesis (see Lave & Wenger, 1991; Black et al., 2010; etc.). This form of 'practiced identity' (ibid: 271) can be understood in four contexts of activity:

1. Figured Worlds: 'The first context of identity is the figured world. The notions of "cultural," "intentional," "virtual," or "imaginary" worlds are quite common across the disciplines of contemporary social science' (ibid: 271).
2. Positionality: It 'has to do with more than division, the "hereness" and "thereness" of people; it is inextricably linked to power, status, and rank' (ibid: 271).

3. Space of authoring: This is 'Bakhtin's rendition of the normal world faced by any person or collective' (ibid: 272).
4. Making worlds: 'through "serious play," new figured worlds may come about, in the peculiarly Bakhtinian way that feeds the personal activities of particular groups, their "signatures," into the media, the cultural genres, through which even distant others may construe their lives (ibid: 272). The notion of play is also heavily rooted in Vygotsky's analysis of play during child development i.e. imagination.

The aim of this paper is to assess Bourdieu's appropriation by Holland et al. in their book (ibid). From an initial analysis of all the quotes and citations of Bourdieu's work (see appendix A for a complete list of citations that refer to Bourdieu), it appears that there are mentions or serious references to Bourdieu's theory throughout, and hence, this paper has been structured in three sections. Each section will look at a concept of Holland et al. that refers to Bourdieu's theory explicitly or implicitly and will first establish Holland et al.'s argument; then go back to Bourdieu's texts (to not only elaborate his cited concepts but also those expand on those texts which haven't been cited but could potentially address the criticism raised by the authors) and lastly draw out any contradictions and/or discrepancies (if any). These sections are structured around the Holland et al.'s four contexts of activity as described above, by examining Holland et al.'s claim that:

- Bourdieu is not sufficiently 'local' (→ section 1);
- Bourdieu's concept of identity is too much embodied, not enough symbolic-semiotic (→ section 2);
- 'Bourdieu's notion of change is 'inter-generational', offering insufficient agency (→ section 3)

1. Figured World(s) /field(s)/positions

In this section, we have, firstly, built an understanding of the concept of FW as Holland et al. portray it as that is most relevant to our analysis; followed by a critical reflection of their appropriation of Bourdieu's concept of field **vis-à-vis** the notion of localism. Undoubtedly, there are other issues that could have been explored here (such as *multiplicity of FW(s)/fields*), but we focus our attention on to the one that we find most critical in relation to applying and understanding Holland et al.'s and Bourdieu's theoretical stances in the field of education (and in general).

Holland et al. (op cit.) describe FW as dependant on 'people's abilities to form and be formed in collectively realized "as if" realms' (p.49); in other words FW can be seen as social constructions of hypothetical *scenarios* as envisaged by the people. The authors refer to Vygotsky's notion of 'collectively developed signs and symbols as the media by which children's mental and emotional faculties were culturally formed' (ibid, p.50) as a 'competence that makes possible culturally constituted or figured worlds and, consequently, the range of human institutions' (ibid, p.51).

This is further substantiated in the following quote:

Figured worlds take shape within and grant shape to the coproduction of activities, discourses, performances, and artifacts. A figured world is peopled by the figures, characters, and types who carry out its tasks and who also have styles of interacting within, distinguishable perspectives on, and orientations toward it (Ibid: 51).

Additionally, a FW can be seen as a hypothetical scenario that is ‘socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation’ (ibid: 52) and it is these interpretations (sometimes also referred to as imaginations) ‘that mediate behavior’ (ibid: 52) through the use of artifacts either in the form of objects, people or even discourse itself (see pp. 61 – 62). FWs provide a space for imaginations and interpretations of *actions*, as well as, a space of authorship, i.e for the formation of people’s identities (and agency) dialogically and dialectically (in a Bakhtinian way, see p.49) in which discourse or meaning of words can be interpreted contextually. Words uttered at any instance can serve as identity markers or indexes in a FW.

There can be multiple FWs interacting with each other at any given time (hence provide uncertainty as to which FW an interaction belongs to, see p.56). Holland et al. also refer to the capacity of sensing a FW (i.e. through seeing, hearing, touching, feeling, etc.) as becoming ‘embodied over time, through continual participation’ (ibid: 53), hence as becoming habituated.

Hence FWs can be seen as a space where identities are developed. This is also further re-affirmed in the following quote:

Figured worlds provide the contexts of meaning and action in which social positions and social relationships are named and conducted. They also provide the loci in which people fashion senses of self—that is, develop identities (ibid: 60).

The above quote refers to the relational aspects of positions and their social surroundings similar to *field* as described by Bourdieu (see 1977). The difference here lies in what Holland et al. describe as ‘loci’ to ‘fashion sense of self’ drawing on Bakhtin’s concepts of cultural narratives (see 1986). A FW is also structured in the form of a hierarchy and it is here where Holland et al. make the use of the term ‘field’ (Bourdieu’s concept) as an analytical tool that adds another layer of understanding to FWs.

However, the shortfalls of Bourdieu’s concept of field is described by the authors as follows:

Had Bourdieu mediated his understanding through “figured world” instead of “field,” he would have told us more about the discourses of academia and the cultural constructions that constituted the familiar aspects of academic life: the taken-for-granted generic figures (professors, graduate students, undergraduates, provosts, secretaries) and their generic acts—both such formal tasks as giving tutorials, administering tests, firing, hiring, and granting degrees, and the less formal stories of tenure granted, tenure denied, and teaching responsibilities juggled against writing and scholarly research—as situated in a particular institution.¹⁴ He would have more closely detailed the terms of academic discourse—such as “quality,” “originality,” and “brilliance”—as ways in which

academics come to evaluate their efforts, understand themselves, and interpret the positions they hold in the academy (ibid: 59).

Holland et al. thus suggest that Bourdieu's perspective offers too little to 'localism', and that if he had taken a FW approach, this would have led him to a more detailed discussion of the local practices involving persons acting in the fields he studied, with richer descriptions of how everyday folks experienced these practices:

In *Homo Academicus* Bourdieu directed his field analysis less to these day-to-day aspects of cultural figuring than to social relations among the more powerful and influential players. He paid attention to the positions of academic personages and institutions in the French educational hierarchy, the markers of position, the symbolic capital accruing to the scholars and institutions, and the cultural productions created by them.¹⁵ We learn much from *Homo Academicus* about the interrelations of scholars and institutions in France according to their relative prestige and influence; we learn much less about the day-to-day content of activity—and the ways positions of prestige play out locally—for the vast number of academics (ibid: 59)

Holland et al. elaborate on their criticism by highlighting how Bourdieu focuses in *Homo Academicus* (i) on only the dominant players of the French Education System; and (ii) on how they and the dominant institutions are positioned in the education field according to the symbolic power they possess. At the same time, the authors acknowledge that 'a field analysis is relevant to any figured world' (ibid: 59) as 'figured worlds could be described as nodes that together make up the fields that Bourdieu analyzes' (ibid: 299n16).

This characterisation of Bourdieu's work draws perhaps a little too much from some of his sociology (for example as described above from *Homo Academicus*) and is rather unfair in regards to much of his other work, where the detail of his ethnography is at least as elaborate and concerned with the experience of 'just plain folks' as anything in the richest anthropologies (e. g. his studies of life of 'The Algerians' – see 1962, or in the housing Market in 1960s France – see Bourdieu 2005, or in the – 'Weight of the World' – see Bourdieu 1993b).

Bourdieu's concept of field, specifically, has only been developed and extensively applied in his later (or more recent) writings. It has been completely left unmentioned in his most cited theoretical text 'The outline of a theory of practice' (1977) and only mentioned twice in 'Logic of practice' (1990: 58, 66-68). Holland et al. (op cit.) cite Bourdieu in 'The field of cultural production' (ibid, 1993a) in order to elaborate his notion of field. Indeed this book, a collection of essays on literature and art, focuses predominantly on locating the cultural production field in a field of power, which in itself is located in a larger economic class field; hence, supporting Holland et al.'s criticisms of Bourdieu's use of his notion of field. Bourdieu himself has described the notion of field, specifically the field of power, as follows:

The field of power is a field of forces defined by the structure of the existing balance of forces between forms of power, or between different species of capital. It is also simultaneously a field of struggles for power among the holders of different forms of power. It is a space of play and competition in which social agents and institutions which all possess the determinate quantity of specific capital (economic and cultural capital in particular) sufficient to occupy the

dominant positions within their respective fields [the economic field, the field of higher civil service or the state, the university field, and the intellectual field] confront one another in strategies aimed at preserving or transforming this balance of forces... This struggle for the imposition of the dominant principle leads, at every moment, to a balance in the sharing of power, that is, to what I call a division of the work of domination. It is also a struggle over the legitimate principle of legitimation and the legitimate mode of reproduction (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1996: 76).

The truth is, thus, that Bourdieu's approach and methodology is almost always concerned with *explanation* of power relations in a cultural field rather than with their description (as the above quote demonstrates). He sees each cultural field as a realisation or cultural 'refraction' (at any particular time and space, i.e. a moment in history) of the Field of Power in society as a whole, i.e. the objective socio-economic system of production-and-consumption (and distribution and exchange) that allows the dominant classes to oppress/dominate the dominated. It is always the relation between the local instantiation of dominance in a cultural field and the socio-economic field as a whole which Bourdieu is concerned with, and which he argues reveals the 'objective' relations of dominance in the local.

A field is a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies (Bourdieu 1998: 40-41).

It is because the objective truth in cultural fields is most often obscured, or 'misrecognised' that this project is radical and potentially life-changing according to Bourdieu's conception of his work as a reflexive/critical sociologist (see also Bourdieu 2008).

We could argue that this is a missing element from Holland et al.'s own accounts (in 1998): there is a danger that in focussing on the local experience of practice sight of the wider social relations gets missed. Perhaps, notwithstanding their reference to the symbolic violence women inflict and have inflicted upon them, for instance, it is not quite made explicit and clear whether (and in what sense) the various groups of women on the 'sexual auction block' form a dominant/dominated group, and how (if at all) this relates to the wider socio-political and economic relations in society (though of course the gender inequalities are obvious and their view of 'withdrawing from the game' is implicit, and we can form our own inferences).

One could likewise wonder how life-changing the Tj songs are that complain of the women's abuse by their drunken husbands; one notes that the real opportunities for resistance and change arise through the intervention in the festival of a Maoist revolutionary movement as documented in Holland and Lave's later work (see 2001). There Holland and Lchicotte describe how the festival becomes a cultural terrain of struggle, with contending political forces being fought out in songs between conservative and revolutionary political forces.

2. Identity/figuring of oneself/symbolic capital/habitus/doxa/illusio

Holland et al. refer two forms of identities that are associated with FWs:

- (i) Figurative (narrativized) identity i.e. 'storylines, narrativity, generic characters, and desire' (ibid 125) and their role within stories, acts, and characters that make the world a cultural world (ibid: 128).
- (ii) Positional identity i.e. 'aspects that have to do with one's position relative to socially identified others, one's sense of social place, and entitlement' (ibid: 125). Other quotes re-iterate the same emphasis on local social positioning in relational terms:

Positional identities have to do with the day-to-day and on-the-ground relations of power, deference and entitlement, social affiliation and distance with the social-interactive, social-relational structures of the lived world (ibid: 128).

Positional identity, as we use the term, is a person's apprehension of her social position in a lived world: that is, depending on the others present, of her greater or lesser access to spaces, activities, genres, and, through those genres, authoritative voices, or any voice at all (ibid: 128 – 129).

Holland et al put forward the concept of FW as a Bourdieusian 'field' of power (in which power is defined by relations between 'positions' in the field, that Holland associate with 'positional identities').

However, it seems that this description of the field is not adequate' to their purpose, and they add 'Figurative identity' – drawing on CHAT notions of semiotic mediation, Bakhtinian self-authorship mediated by narratives etc. Why is this regarded as a missing/weak feature in Bourdieu?

They argue that Bourdieu underplays the symbolic, and that his notion of identity/habitus is rather too much embodied rather than semiotic: thus, equating habitus with 'embodied identity' they state that:

In Bourdieu's work, identity seems principally embodied; he pays much less attention to objectifications of identity or self-understandings. For our work, the more interesting cases of identity are those which are objectified, for they are the ones more likely to mediate sustained "agentive" action. The positional aspects of identity, such as the discomfort a woman may feel on entering a space she has experienced before as for men only, are most often embodied, and may be unmediated by any linguistically realized apprehension. But to grasp the potential for ennoblement, for moving beyond such "mute" positioning, we must consider how the symbolization of identities can come about and be used to direct the behavior of others and oneself (ibid: 278).

Thus so far, identity is differentiated from habitus through:

- ⇒ two forms i.e. positionality and figuring;
- ⇒ its objectification (e.g. in the form of linguistic expression) that can lead to sustained agentive action.

We defend Bourdieu in part from this accusation. First, for Bourdieu, habitus is not 'identity', and these two concepts must not be confused. His work on 'Language and Symbolic Power' (1991) makes clear that he sees a role for identification, the formation of groups, nominalisation through language, and its centrality in political struggles. Here he is close to the recent/modern work on social-representations of the self (Moscovici).

Struggles over ethnic or regional identity – in other words, over the properties (stigmata or emblems) linked with the *origin* through the *place* of origin and its associated durable marks, such as accent – are a particular case of the different struggles over classifications, struggles over classifications, struggles over the monopoly of the power to make people see and believe, to get them to know and recognize, to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world and, thereby, *to make and unmake groups*. (Ibid: 221)

Indeed, Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic capital' explicitly allows that the symbolic aspects of cultural capital have a key role in the realisation of power (and hence positionality) in the field:

These symbolic struggles, both the individual struggles of everyday life and the collective, organized struggles of political life, have a *specific logic* which endows them with a real autonomy from the structures in which they are rooted. Owing to the fact that symbolic capital is nothing other than economic capital or cultural capital when it is known and recognized, when it is known through the categories of perception that it imposes, symbolic relations of power then to reproduce and to reinforce the power relations that constitute the structure of social space (Bourdieu 1989: 21).

Symbolic capital is (at least in part) an aspect of habitus – actually a relation of the habitus to the field that allows an individual to claim a position, and hence exert authority/power relations over others in the field. As such it plays a key role in exerting domination in the field. Thus, for instance, if Holland et al had adopted a Bourdieusian approach to the sexual auction block (rather than a FW one), they might have emphasised that a woman possessing great amounts of 'beauty capital' is able to exert power over / dominate other woman in weaker positions in the field, but only assuming these other women 'play the game' of dating, and accept the doxa/orthodoxa of values in the field. They would also have looked more closely at how this structure of the local cultural field is in fact a refraction of 'the field of power' at large, i.e. the positioning of beauty capital in a world where women are dominated by men. The important thing here is to recognise that the symbolic capital of beauty does NOT belong to the body-habitus, but is a relation between the habitus and the field: beauty capital is of course not worth a damn in a world where woman don't 'play the game'.

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Having said this, we can still recognise that Holland's view of the figurative aspects of identity in practice is NOT REDUCIBLE to Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital. The concept of social identity holds a specific meaning in Bourdieu's texts, mostly pertaining to the re-presentations of the perceptions of the social world, inherent of the political and social struggles over their classifications i.e. struggle over symbolic power. This then further alludes to the understanding of symbolic power/capital in relation to doxa, heterodoxy, *illusio*, etc. as elaborated in Bourdieu's analogue of a *game*:

We can indeed, with caution, compare a field to a game....Thus we have *stakes (enjeux)* which are for the most part the product of the competition between players. We have an *investment in the game, illusio* (from *ludus*, the game): players are taken in by the game, they oppose one another, sometimes with ferocity, only to the extent that they concur in their belief (*doxa*) in the game and its stakes; they grant these a recognition that escapes questioning. Players agree, by the mere fact of playing, and not by way of a "contract", that the game is worth playing, that it is "worth the candle", and this *collusion* is the very basis of their competition (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996: 98).

Also:

Orthodoxy, straight, or rather *straightened* opinion, which aims, without ever entirely succeeding, at restoring the primal state of innocence of doxa, exists only in the objective relationship which opposes it to heterodoxy, that is, by reference to the choice-*hairesis*, heresy-made possible by the existence of *competing possibilities* and the explicit critique of the sum total of the alternatives not chosen that the established order implies. It is defined as a system of euphemisms, of acceptable ways of thinking and speaking the natural and social world, which rejects heretical remarks as blasphemies (Bourdieu, 1977: 169).

Holland et al make little use of this side of Bourdieu's work, though they come close in concept when they speak of the fetishization of the symbolic capital of female 'beauty' in the sexual auction block.

Similarly, 'sustained agentive action' can be seen as being brought about when an agent has entered a form of heterodoxy, hence this directly addresses Holland et al.'s criticism on habitus. Furthermore:

The relationship between language and experience never appears more clearly than in crisis situations in which the everyday order is challenged, and with it the language of order, situations which call for an extraordinary discourse...(ibid: 170).

The relation of linguistic exchanges and positioning has also been expressed by Bourdieu as:

To speak is to appropriate one or other of the expressive styles already constituted in and through usage and objectively marked by their position in a

hierarchy of styles which expresses the hierarchy of corresponding social groups. These styles, systems of differences which are both classified and classifying, ranked and ranking, mark those who appropriate them (Bourdieu 1991: 54).

And here as:

As is very evident in this case, what expresses itself through the linguistic habitus is the whole class habitus of which it is one dimension, which means in fact, the position that is occupied, synchronically and diachronically, in the social structure (ibid: 83).

Holland et al. acknowledge Bourdieu's contribution in this regard, although they do not refer to doxa/orthodoxy/etc or the linguistic habitus:

Bourdieu (1977) makes some useful observations about the way the phenomenon that we are labeling positional identity manifests in different social situations. Here he extends his notion of habitus to speaking, to encompass one's sense of the value that is likely to be attributed to what one has to say in a particular situation. Bourdieu acknowledges, as did Bakhtin (1986), speakers' awareness of the differential social valuing of languages, genres, and styles of speaking, and he emphasizes the habitual, out-of-awareness assessments one makes before and during conversation: judgments of the linguistic forms that are likely to be valued, of one's command over those linguistic resources, and of the social privilege (or lack thereof) that a person of one's relative position has to employ such resources. The assessment reveals itself in the way speech is marked, leading the speaker to strained, self-conscious, "correct" speech or to effortless, unselfconscious speech; to comfort or to discomfort; to voice or to silence (ibid: 128).

In summary, the analysis in this section has shed some light on the in-text contradictions in claims made by Holland et al. mostly pertaining to the concept of habitus and identity. The elements of identity that Holland are concerned with the 'figurative' in terms of self-authoring of identity and narrative 'world-making' do seem to go beyond what Bourdieu was mainly interested in (vis-à-vis the exertion of power of the dominant over the dominated in the field.) We should recognise this aspect of Holland's concern, and welcome this as a mobilisation of the imagination in creating agency.

But in saying this we should not lose sight of Bourdieu's own elaborations of the importance of the symbolic in the field, especially in the way symbolic capital exerts symbolic violence and misrecognition, *illusio* and *doxa/orthodoxa*.

3. Improvisations/agency/hysteresis effect

Holland et al. outline the significance of impromptu acts or improvisations in relation to agency as follows:

Gyanumaya's climb up the house, no matter how striking and dramatic an improvisation, is, in the regard of Bourdieu's practice theory, characteristic of everyday behavior. Improvisations are the sort of impromptu actions that occur when our past, brought to the present as habitus, meets with a particular combination of circumstances and conditions for which we have no set response. Such improvisations are the openings by which change comes about from generation to generation. They constitute the environment or landscape in which the experience of the next generation "sediments," falls out, into expectation and disposition. The improvisations of the parental generation are the beginning of a new habitus for the next generation. Pace Bourdieu, we suggest that the process is also condensed into the space of a lifetime. In our view, improvisations, from a cultural base and in response to the subject positions offered in situ, are, when taken up as symbol, potential beginnings of an altered subjectivity, an altered identity (ibid: 17-18).

Furthermore they say:

The particular inspiration that we draw from the sociohistorical school is its attention to continuing adjustment, reorganization, and movement. This continual development contrasts with Bourdieu's conception: for Bourdieu, the improvisations that are characteristic of all social behavior make a difference to the habitus of the next generation. That is, the forms of novel activity created by a senior generation provide the experiential context in which their children develop the habitus of the group. Such innovation has little impact on the established habitus of the elders. For proponents of the sociohistorical school, in contrast, improvisations make a difference for the next moment of production³⁴ (ibid: 45).

Here several points have been raised by Holland et al.:

- ⇒ Improvisation, a concept claimed to be by Bourdieu, results from the habitus meeting a particular circumstance which it is not accustomed to.
- ⇒ Such improvisations bring about changes but *only* inter-generationally in Bourdieu's theory.
- ⇒ Therefore Holland et al. propose a theoretical framework that encompasses such changes within a lifetime.

Holland et al make a serious accusation when they suggest that Bourdieu's notion of agency is limited by the essentially inter-generational time-lag in changing habitus. It is true that Bourdieu agrees that habitus is shaped primarily in the early years of life and built on successively thereafter. But one can also find evidence in Bourdieu's work that he took the re-shaping of habitus by conscious reflection seriously. Bourdieu, indeed, has described the hysteresis effect as a lag in adaptation, as he states:

In the particular (and particularly frequent) case in which the habitus is the product of objective conditions similar to those under which it operates, it generates behaviors that are particularly well suited to those conditions without being the product of a conscious, intentional search for adaptation...In this case, the effect of the habitus remains, so to speak, invisible, and the

explanation in terms of habitus may seem redundant in relation to explanation in terms of the situation (one may even have the impression that we are dealing with an ad hoc explanation along the lines of the explanation of sleep by some 'dormitive property'). But the specific efficacy of habitus can be clearly seen in all the situations in which it is not the product of the conditions of its actualization (increasingly frequent as societies become differentiated): this is the case when agents formed in a precapitalist economy run up, in some disarray, against the demands of a capitalist cosmos; or when old people quixotically cling to dispositions that are out of place and out of time; or when the dispositions of an agent rising, or falling, in the social structure - a nouveau riche, a parvenu or a déclassé - are at odds with the position that agent occupies. Such effects of hysteresis, of a lag in adaptation and counter-adaptive mismatch, can be explained by the relatively persistent, though not entirely unchangeable, character of habitus (Bourdieu 2005: 213-214).

At the same time, he also emphasizes that a 'habitus changes constantly in response to new experiences' (Bourdieu 1997: 161).

But, more generally, the diversity of conditions, the corresponding diversity of habitus and the multiplicity of intra- and intergenerational movements of ascent or decline mean that habitus may, in many cases, be confronted with conditions of actualization different from those in which they were produced. This is true in particular whenever agents perpetuate dispositions made obsolete by transformations of the objective conditions (social ageing), or occupy positions demanding dispositions different from those they derive from their conditions of origin, whether durably, in the case of *parvenus*, or temporarily, like the most deprived agents when faced with situations governed by the dominant norms, like certain economic or cultural markets (Bourdieu 1997: 161).

Further quotes also re-emphasize the above argument:

...as a result of heightened consciousness associated with an effort of transformation (such as correction of accents, manners, etc.), there is an inertia (or hysteresis) of habitus which has a spontaneous tendency (based in biology) to perpetuate structures corresponding to their conditions of production. As a result, it can happen that, in what might be called the Don Quixote effect, dispositions are out of line with the field and with the 'collective expectations' which are constitutive of its normality. This is the case, in particular, when a field undergoes a major crisis and its regularities (even its rules) are profoundly changed (ibid: 160).

The hysteresis of habitus, which is inherent in the social conditions of the reproduction of the structures in habitus, is doubtless one of the foundations of the structural lag between opportunities and the dispositions to grasp them which is the cause of missed opportunities and, in particular, of the frequently observed incapacity to think historical crises in categories of perception and thought other than those of the past (Ibid: 83).

A crisis in the field - which can be brought about by, for example, 'the appearance of a new and effective agent' or 'the adoption of a new technology' or 'the acquisition of greater market share' (2005: 202) - can give rise to new positions which can be acquired within that field. In such a situation the hysteresis effect or inertia of a habitus of an agent can lead to two potential outcomes:

- One in which the conditions of existence of the habitus in the first place are re-perpetuated, leading to the non-acquisition of the new positions and missed opportunities. (This is what Holland et al. are attributing to inter-generational changes.) This is most likely to happen to agents who *cling to their old dispositions*: "this is not for the likes of me".
- The other in which the inertia of the habitus is quick to respond to new opportunities intra-generationally.

As Bourdieu states further:

In a general manner, it is the people who are richest in economic capital, cultural capital and social capital who are the first to head for new positions (Bourdieu 1996: 262).

This change comes about through the awakening of the consciousness or in other words through the realization of the new positions to be held in the field:

Not only can habitus be practically transformed (always within definite boundaries) by the effect of social trajectory leading to conditions of living different from the initial ones, it can also be controlled through awakening consciousness and socio- analysis (Bourdieu 2005: 116).

Indeed he wrote an entire book on the work of the reflexive sociologist (see 1990 and 2008). Furthermore, we can take Bourdieu's notion of hysteresis as a serious contribution to understanding where and when reflexivity is likely to occur and make profound and rapid change possible: hysteresis suggests that it is in profound changes in the habitus-field relation rather than in the habitus itself.

This can and does occur all the time whenever in fact changes in the field occur and generate unanticipated and unexpected habitus-field mismatches, or sudden re-evaluations of capital. Suddenly the Greek nation is told (apparently by the old enemy) that they can no longer be allowed to elect and run their own government, for instance: a rather sharp movement of capital in the field and politics is suddenly upended ... the habit of democracy and democratic dispositions become suddenly a potentially revolutionary force for change.

As we suggested above, Holland et al are right to suggest that dialogism, narrative and self-authoring add something to theory that Bourdieu perhaps neglects. However, we may consider whether and to what extent hysteresis can do some of the work they seek in FWs. As Bourdieu further elaborates:

It follows that one cannot establish a *mechanical* relation between positions and position-taking: position-taking always involves a greater or lesser element of free play, which agents can use to a greater or lesser extent

depending on their dispositions, which themselves match their positions more or less closely (ibid: 129).

Bourdieu has asked in many of his writings the question whether there is a rule that 'can provide for all the possible conditions of its execution' (Bourdieu 1997: 162) leaving no scope for such an interpretation to the habitus, explicitly stating, no such rule exists.

Moreover, the degree to which one can abandon oneself to the automatisation of practical sense obviously varies with the situation and the area of activity, but also with the position occupied in social space; it is likely that those who are 'in their right place' in the social world can abandon or entrust themselves more, and more completely, to their dispositions (this is the 'ease' of the well-born) than those who occupy awkward positions, such as the *parvenus* and the *declasses*; and the latter are more likely to bring to consciousness that which, for others, is taken for granted, because they are forced to keep watch on themselves and consciously correct the 'first movements' of a habitus that generates inappropriate or misplaced behaviors (Bourdieu, 1997: 163).

The above quote reinforces Holland et al.'s first claim, and Gyanumaya's climb up the side of the house can be seen as representative of *inappropriate or misplaced behaviors*. Here it is to be noted that Bourdieu is not referring to improvisations in the sense of Holland et al. In fact, Bourdieu states:

... the improvisations of the pianist or the so-called freestyle figures of the gymnast are never performed without a certain presence of a mind, as we say, certain form of thought or even of *practical reflection*, the reflection in situation and in action or posture just produced and to correct a wrong position of the body, to recover an imperfect movement (the same being true, *a fortiori*, of the behaviors of learning) (Bourdieu, 1997: 162).

In Summary

We have considered Holland et al.'s appropriation of Bourdieu in their attempt to synthesise his sociology with the work of CHAT (Vyotsky-Leontiev and Bakhtin-Voloshinov). We defend Bourdieu from some of the criticisms concerning (i) his neglect of 'localism'; (ii) his over-emphasis on embodied identity in the 'habitus', and (iii) his confinement of 'agency' (e.g. to inter-generational change). In some respects we argue that Bourdieu's actual positions on these issues offer Holland et al opportunities they want to claim for radical affordances for action/agency in the social world.

However, Holland et al. specifically call on semiotic mediation, the power of dialogism and self-authoring for building alternative identities and even worlds. It is hard to find this role for the 'imaginary' in Bourdieu's own work. His theory is strong in its depiction of power and its symbolic violence, and of a critical, reflexive sociological 'resistance' to this domination by the dominated, and even (in hysteresis) an analysis of contradictions. But we do not find in such tools the 'imaginary' that Holland's 'world-making' stories would require. For example, Williams (2011c) applies this aspect of Holland et al's work to the narrations of two mathematics teachers and shows the impact of such narratives on pedagogic development i.e. 'these narratives might 'make worlds' and provide future teachers in turn with figures for their own professional identity work' (ibid: 131). Wenger (2011) supports this argument:

It seems like an excellent idea to expose future teachers to a range of 'figures' as resources for developing a repertoire of ways of being a mathematics teacher (ibid: 146).

But he also emphasized that these stories need to be understood in the context of practice and engagement i.e. 'it would be important not just to hear their stories, but to learn from them in person' (ibid: 146).

Nevertheless, the outcomes of this investigation are essentially theoretical, involving clarification of the system of concepts used in FW and how these relate to relevant Bourdieusian conceptualizations; as such we may have a direct impact through this paper on (a) the way empirical investigations are conceptualized and carried out in the educational context (and in general) from a socio-cultural perspective; and (b) future work on synthesizing the 'cultural psychological' with the social anthropology of agency and practice, and field and identity.

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Appendix A – Complete of citations of Bourdieu in Holland et al. (1998) including references and notes

Chapter 1

Bourdieu (1977a), for one, has shown that the two perspectives we have considered cannot be collapsed into each other. Culturalists might be tempted to claim that they can encompass the constructivist position. They might say that, as a child, Gyanumaya learned a context-sensitive cultural principle: in the presence of higher-caste persons, ideas about the hearth and pollution are important; otherwise, they are not. But this argument by “context rule” turns out to be unending, impossible. We know from our ethnographic research in Naudada that certain caste-related restrictions are contested and often not followed in the local schools. Does this mean we should add another aspect of context sensitivity: when in school ignores the former context-sensitive rule? We know that Debra, who was neither within nor without the caste system, invited people of lower caste into her kitchen. Had the lower-caste people who came into her kitchen really learned context-sensitive rules to take care of such an eventuality? Bourdieu explains that context-sensitive rules are impossible because situations always arise that do not fit the rules. It is simpler to admit the possibility that different discourses can be hegemonic in different locales, an admission that obviates the need for a myriad of context-sensitive rules. (p. 3)

Constructivists think of improvisation as an expected outcome when people are simultaneously engaged with or pushed by contradictory discourses. They view it as an endpoint, however, not a beginning. Others have attempted to connect culture and subject position conceptually in order to understand people’s behavior. Bourdieu has made one of the most significant efforts in this regard, and his metatheory of practice has been extremely consequential for anthropological theories of culture. Under the tutelage of Bourdieu and others, anthropological attention has turned from the analysis of culture as an objectified and abstract system to the immanent analysis of cultural forms, of their constant improvisation within ever-changing social and material conditions (see Ortner 1984 for an early review). (P.17)

Gyanumaya’s climb up the house, no matter how striking and dramatic an improvisation, is, in the regard of Bourdieu’s practice theory, characteristic of everyday behavior. Improvisations are the sort of impromptu actions that occur when our past, brought to the present as habitus, meets with a particular combination of circumstances and conditions for which we have no set response. Such improvisations are the openings by which change comes about from generation to generation. They constitute the environment or landscape in which the experience of the next generation “sediments,” falls out, into expectation and disposition. The improvisations of the parental generation are the beginning of a new habitus for the next generation. Pace Bourdieu, we suggest that the process is also condensed into the space of a lifetime. In our view, improvisations, from a cultural base and in response to the subject positions offered in situ, are, when taken up as symbol, potential beginnings of an altered subjectivity, an altered identity. ¹³ (p.17-18)

The sociohistorical school's vision has points in common with that of Bourdieu. For instance, compare the work of Vygotsky's influential student A. N. Leontiev (1978) with Bourdieu's concern with the concept of "practice." Leontiev—a figure often associated with the sociohistorical school²⁶—has insisted on the importance of "activity" in understanding human behavior. (p.38)

Practice theory shares this understanding of people as actively engaged with their environments. Bourdieu (1977a) highlights the similarities between the two theories when he explicitly describes "practice" as a third way to grasp social action, one that mediates between objectivism (environment) and subjectivism (person or group).²⁸ (p.39)

The particular inspiration that we draw from the sociohistorical school is its attention to continuing adjustment, reorganization, and movement. This continual development contrasts with Bourdieu's conception: for Bourdieu, the improvisations that are characteristic of all social behavior make a difference to the habitus of the next generation. That is, the forms of novel activity created by a senior generation provide the experiential context in which their children develop the habitus of the group. Such innovation has little impact on the established habitus of the elders. For proponents of the sociohistorical school, in contrast, improvisations make a difference for the next moment of production.³⁴ (p.45)

Chapter 3

A woman's prestige derived largely from the treatment she received from men, and that treatment was formative of and responsive to her attractiveness. Attractiveness was, in Bourdieu's terms, a symbolic capital of the field. The endless energy and hours spent on beautification made sense in such a world.⁸ (p.56)

None of the concepts we have so far used to elucidate social construction in figured worlds accounts well for this aspect of hierarchy and status. Bourdieu's concept of field helps to bring out this additional aspect of figured worlds.

Like habitus, field is too potent and pervasive a theme of Bourdieu's thought to be precisely delimited. Bourdieu uses the world of authors and writings as an example:

What do I mean by "field"? As I use the term, a field is a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy. The existence of the writer, as fact and as value, is inseparable from the existence of the literary field as an autonomous universe endowed with specific principles of evaluation of practices and works. To understand Flaubert or Baudelaire, or any writer, major or minor, is first of all to understand what the status of writer consists of at the moment considered; that is, more precisely, the social conditions of the possibility of this social function, of this social personage. In fact, the invention of the writer, in the modern sense of

the term, is inseparable from the invention of a particular social game, which I term the literary field and which is constituted as it establishes its autonomy, that is to say, its specific laws of functioning, within the field of power. (1993: 162–163)

Fields are not absolutely autonomous, for they subsist in what Bourdieu calls the field of power, which is itself an aspect of class relations. They are instead relatively autonomous, for the relationship any field has to other fields or to the field of power is refracted by the mode of cultural production specific to the field. In this sense the field is a game like the games Vygotsky described. Bourdieu further intended the concept to be a kind of translation of “structure” that would not stand apart from persons. A field is “structure-in-practice,” and as such is a world of relationships, of social positions defined only against one another (Bourdieu 1985a). It is also a peopled world; its positions, which are producers as well as products, are also social personages. Field thus closely parallels our notion of figured world and elucidates our later emphasis on positionality (Chapter 6).¹²

Bourdieu elaborated the concept from his sociological studies of French arts and letters and the French academic scene as it was in the 1960s. The concept of field directed attention to the aspects of the collectively defined activities that make up the arts and the academy that relate to what Weber (1978) would have called “status.”¹³ Had Bourdieu mediated his understanding through “figured world” instead of “field,” he would have told us more about the discourses of academia and the cultural constructions that constituted the familiar aspects of academic life: the taken-for-granted generic figures (professors, graduate students, undergraduates, provosts, secretaries) and their generic acts—both such formal tasks as giving tutorials, administering tests, firing, hiring, and granting degrees, and the less formal stories of tenure granted, tenure denied, and teaching responsibilities juggled against writing and scholarly research—as situated in a particular institution.¹⁴ He would have more closely detailed the terms of academic discourse—such as “quality,” “originality,” and “brilliance”—as ways in which academics come to evaluate their efforts, understand themselves, and interpret the positions they hold in the academy.

In *Homo Academicus* Bourdieu directed his field analysis less to these day-to-day aspects of cultural figuring than to social relations among the more powerful and influential players. He paid attention to the positions of academic personages and institutions in the French educational hierarchy, the markers of position, the symbolic capital accruing to the scholars and institutions, and the cultural productions created by them.¹⁵ We learn much from *Homo Academicus* about the interrelations of scholars and institutions in France according to their relative prestige and influence; we learn much less about the day-to-day content of activity—and the ways positions of prestige play out locally—for the vast number of academics. Hence we miss, for French academics, the focus that Favret-Saada provides for French witchcraft: the everyday construction of actors.¹⁶

Although Bourdieu’s interests in *Homo Academicus* were directed towards the prominent men and women of the system, a field analysis is relevant to any figured world.¹⁷ Indeed, as we have said, lived worlds are organized around positions of status and influence (in the case of American college students,

attractiveness and prestige; in the case of the Naudadans of Nepal, caste and wealth as well as gender) and the cultural narratives that posit particular sorts of characters and their dealings with one another (the loving boyfriend and the flirt; the attentive therapist and the recalcitrant “borderline”; the Naudadan husband who threatens his wife by telling her he will bring another woman into the house).

We agree with Bourdieu’s vision: the as-if character of possibility that marks fields (and figured worlds) is not an indifferent, “mental” abstraction, an “imaginary” in its usual sense, but a social reality that lives within dispositions mediated by relations of power. This point is most clearly made in Bourdieu’s analyses of “silencing” or self-censorship, a theme later amplified by Skinner and Holland in their exploration of women’s experience in Nepal. Indeed, positions that have become dispositions, of privilege and prestige are especially important to our case analyses of the worlds of romance in the United States and gender relations in Nepal.¹⁸ Identities form in these figured worlds through the day-to-day activities undertaken in their name. Neophytes are recruited into and gain perspective on such practices and come to identify themselves as actors of more or less influence, more or less privilege, and more or less power in these worlds. (p.58-60)

Chapter 4

Telling AA personal stories also helps members identify with one another in ways that are harder to document. As a public event, one that is not only observable but material and co-participatory, the telling encompasses body practices, including vocalization, that realize structures of affect and disposition. Not only social theorists, from Durkheim and Mauss to Bourdieu, but any participant in such performances would tell you that the fellow-feeling born in these ceremonies is a powerful means of identification. (p.87)

Chapter 5

Judging from the women in the study, this less often articulated view was the more accurate one. The more common notion that everyone has similar levels of competence in and involvement with romance did not hold up. Some women were quite ambivalent about romance (southern style) and had less-than-compelling images of themselves in romantic relationships. And the women differed in their facility with romantic situations. That is, they had been recruited to the figured world of romance, and they had rehearsed in the repertory of activities, the scripts, of that world, but not all of them had rehearsed to the same level. They differed both in their degree of involvement with the world of romance and in their levels of expertise in conceiving and responding to romantic situations—that is, their skills as romantic actors and their “feeling” or sense (Bourdieu’s *sens pratique*) for the game of romantic relations. (p.104)

Chapter 6

Bourdieu (1977b) makes some useful observations about the way the phenomenon that we are labeling positional identity manifests in different

social situations. Here he extends his notion of habitus to speaking, to encompass one's sense of the value that is likely to be attributed to what one has to say in a particular situation. Bourdieu acknowledges, as did Bakhtin (1986), speakers' awareness of the differential social valuing of languages, genres, and styles of speaking, and he emphasizes the habitual, out-of-awareness assessments one makes before and during conversation: judgments of the linguistic forms that are likely to be valued, of one's command over those linguistic resources, and of the social privilege (or lack thereof) that a person of one's relative position has to employ such resources. The assessment reveals itself in the way speech is marked, leading the speaker to strained, self-conscious, "correct" speech or to effortless, unselfconscious speech; to comfort or to discomfort; to voice or to silence.² (p.128)

Localized figured worlds have their own valued qualities, their own means of assessing social worth, their own "symbolic capital," to use Bourdieu's term. In the world of community relations figured among the Kabyle peasants (Bourdieu 1977a), men and families were ranked by honor. Men of high honor had more symbolic capital; what they did and said as men of honor was likely to be accorded more credence and more authority than the actions of men of low honor. Their word was more likely to be honored by others; a sort of social credit was more likely to be extended to them than to men of low honor. Likewise, relations among Kabyle men were generally figured in the idiom of honor. Gifts were a central cultural artifact, for example, that positioned the giver relative to the recipient in a script of reciprocity; if the recipient could not reciprocate he lost honor. (p.128 -129)

Viewed over the long term, these day-to-day practices are social work, acts of inclusion/exclusion, of allowing/compelling only certain people to evince the sign, that maintains positions and the value of artifacts as Indices of position. Bourdieu (1977a) shows that maintaining one's relative position in the Kabyles' figured world of honor demanded such social work on a day-to-day basis. The value of relational indices and the relative right to use them are maintained through social work of the kind performed by Tila Kumari and Shanta's brothers. These valuations and the restrictions that enforce them have to be imposed, and the outcome of their imposition is uncertain. There is no guarantee that those upon whom they are imposed will not try to refuse the implicit positioning, as did Muna. There is no guarantee, in fact, that everyone will have been brought sufficiently "into" the "language" of the relational markers to understand the would-be impositions and take them seriously. (p.134-135)

Bourdieu (1984, 1977a) addresses the issue of timing: the point in their development when children are given the opportunity to learn behavioral markers of privilege. He argues that many styles of acting and matters of taste that serve as indices of high social position are more easily learned in childhood. Those who learn activities in childhood perform them in a more natural, less self-conscious style, itself prestigious. Those who learn later usually retain an awkwardness, a more "mechanical" than "organic" sense of

the activity. It is a complicated point for Bourdieu, one aspect of which concerns the proprioceptive acuity of childhood learning. (p.135 – 136)

Bourdieu is careful to point out that the Kabyle man's protection of his status in honor, and of the indicators of honor itself, goes on in a largely automatic way; he does not mean to suggest, although he is often misinterpreted in this regard (Bourdieu 1990a), that consciously strategic maneuvers are the rule. Rather, just as Fordham focuses on the dispositions to silence and effacement that some of the women students at Capital High had developed in the school context, Bourdieu focuses on the embodied dispositions developed among Kabyle men to protect their honor. He details how adult men, in ways beyond their awareness, maintained a constant vigilance for slights to their honor. They noticed and were ever likely to react to social claims made by others of greater honor, and they worked indefatigably to refuse the positions of inferiority afforded them by those claims. Social positions, in other words, become dispositions through participation in, identification with, and development of expertise within the figured world. (p.136)

It is important, in understanding positioning, to pay attention to the fact that positional identities develop heuristically over time. The Vygotskian emphasis on semiotic mediation is helpful for understanding the process by which children, or neophytes to figured worlds of any age, develop the dispositions of relational identities. Semiotic mediation is also a means by which these dispositions can be countered and some- times overcome.¹³ People may develop a "sense" (in Bourdieu's terms) of their worlds, an expertise in the use of cultural artifacts, that may come to remediate their positions in them. (137)

In the ordinary developmental sequence proposed by the sociohistorical approach, the child first interacts the sign in concert with others. The interaction of the sign, for the child, is part of a behavioral sequence that may have no meaning in and of itself. It is likely that relational identities are borne in a similar way, in what phenomenologists used to call the natural attitude, the uninterrupted flow of everyday life, Bergson's *durée*. The meaning of actions remains transparent or taken for granted in the natural attitude, and response follows as a matter of course. The formation of identity in this posture is a byproduct of doing, of imitation and correction, and is profoundly embodied. Positional identities inhabit the landscape of Bourdieu's *habitus*.

Children in their development and neophytes entering into a figured world, then, acquire positional dispositions and identities. At some level of apprehension, they come to know these signs as claims to categorical and relational positions, to status. More important, they learn a feel for the game, as Bourdieu calls it, for how such claims on their part will be received.¹⁶ They come to have relational identities in their most rudimentary form: a set of dispositions toward themselves in relation to where they can enter, what they can say, what emotions they can have, and what they can do in a given situation. (P.142 – p.143)

Chapter 7

In our study of college women in the southern United States (see Chapter 5), the women's identification within the world of romance entailed that they form a sense of the social value of both self and others in that world.¹ Identification with that world meant taking, to varying degrees, what Bourdieu (1977a, 1977b; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) called "symbolic violence" into one's self and perpetrating (and perpetuating) it against others. Settling social position—the subtext of interaction and the stuff of positional identities—is a matter of struggle, often muted or even unrecognized, whose effects live on in personal and social history. (p. 144)

Because of its attention to everyday encounters and to the maneuvers and dilemmas of participants actively engaged in those encounters, the focus on practice, and on the constitution of images and statuses through interaction, is reminiscent of symbolic interactionism. Unlike most traditional forms of symbolic interactionism, however, practice theories go well beyond the encounters at hand. Bourdieu (1977a, 1990b), addressing practice in general, and Connell (1987), addressing practice in relation to gender, both build on symbolic interactionism, adding a critical step. They theorize about how systems of power and privilege render the participants of encounters more or less equal, more or less like agents, and more or less interpersonally powerful. Here too we must situate these interactions in a larger system, by recalling the cultural sources that give these discourses and practices their potency. One important source has already been introduced: the figured world of romance. Along with it, other figured and positional aspects of identities in the United States and the South—race, class, sexual orientation—evoke and give shape to what might be called the playing field of day-to-day romantic encounters. (p.146 – 147)

The women had more trouble responding to such insults from bosses or instructors; they were not so ready to insult the symbolic capital of men in positions of authority. Potential retaliation from a boss or an instructor could be much more damaging. Compared with men of their peer groups, bosses and instructors had more power to impose "their vision of the divisions of the social world and their position within it" (Bourdieu 1985b: 732).¹⁰ It was difficult, indeed dangerous, to resist because the boss or employer had an independent source of attractiveness/prestige as a result of his position. It was also difficult because of the double-talk nature of the clandestine discourse. Shannon Hoffman, who participated in Pryor's experiments, commented in the video that, even though the situation was artificial and sure to end quickly, she experienced a sense of powerlessness. She was being treated as a low-status object, a person of few entitlements, and placed in a position where she could be ridiculed if she protested. (p.158)

This political-cultural "process," however, is less a matter of choice, of the "marketplace of ideas," than a matter of production, the labor of constituting Bourdieu's habitus. The contention of figured worlds is not one that simply presumes its audience. Instead a public is located, cultivated, created from a cultural system become desire. At this point again the notions of Vygotsky and

Bakhtin are important. Figured worlds move through us as spoken discourse and embodied practice. By continual rehearsal they are transfigured within the activity of inner speech into the vocal images, the virtual voices that are the resources of pro(to)action. The interplay of a person's identities is thus open to and dependent upon a field of continuing social discourse and everyday interaction. (p.251)

Chapter 13

In order to set forth our own figuring of this connection between the social and the intimate, we have followed closely Vygotsky (and the sociohistorical school), Bakhtin, and Bourdieu. (P. 270)

For her, her own caste identity no doubt was “embodied” and, as Bourdieu has insisted, powerfully affected her behavior through habitual associations that she might not have been able to verbalize. Her body carried a sense of caste, and of her caste position in respect to others about her, wherever she went. At the same time, she both knew and could generate figurings of caste and possessed an embodied sense of how caste was practiced in Naudada. She could probably tell herself (and others) about herself as a person of a particular caste, as well as consciously monitor and edit her own behavior to fit an image of proper caste behavior. She was, in sum, highly susceptible to figuring herself and being figured by others according to caste, and to positioning herself and being positioned as a lower-caste person—one prohibited from entering the kitchens of higher-caste persons. She lived in a web of constraints organized around caste and was probably propelled at times by purely ideological constructions; at other times by an almost purely “tactical” social reckoning of what it would cost her to refuse the caste position afforded her in a given situation; and, probably a majority of the time, by a mixture of the two. (p.274-275)

Vygotsky and Bakhtin have allowed us to elaborate a theory of human action that also takes advantage of Bourdieu's shift to the study of culture in practice and his correlative appreciation of embodiment and rejection of the conception of culture as rules. The two Russian theorists' fascination with the relation of language and other means of expression to consciousness—taking into account both everyday genres and such specialized forms as literary and artistic works—led them to devise conceptual tools that we have used to augment practice theory's understanding of human action. Improvisations crafted in the moment are one of the margins of human agency. Self-directed symbolizations are a second means by which a modicum of agency is made possible.

In Bourdieu's work, identity seems principally embodied; he pays much less attention to objectifications of identity or self-understandings. For our work, the more interesting cases of identity are those which are objectified, for they are the ones more likely to mediate sustained “agentive” action. The positional aspects of identity, such as the discomfort a woman may feel on entering a space she has experienced before as for men only, are most often embodied, and may be unmediated by any linguistically realized apprehension. But to grasp the potential for ennoblement, for moving beyond such “mute”

positioning, we must consider how the symbolization of identities can come about and be used to direct the behavior of others and oneself.

Bourdieu (1977a) makes improvisation the predominant form of agency. He argues conclusively that it is fruitless to make up a set of cultural rules to account for people's behavior. The material and social conditions of activity vary in a plenitude of ways; even in highly restrictive environments, it is difficult to avoid unusual combinations of people and things. Rules that handle "all possible combinations" in real-world settings are impossible to devise. Instead, Bourdieu suggests, our bodies are repositories of a complex set of associations—of actions (movements), figures (categories), and contexts (environments)—sedimented from experiencing concrete instances of their combination, their work together. More complicated experiences, sequences of joint action coordinated among actors as a relation to particular "qualities," such as honor, produce sensitivities toward a set of culturally devised games or contexts of action like our figured worlds, where there are general, dispositional motives and acts and ways of faring well and faring poorly. Agency lies in the improvisations that people create in response to particular situations, mediated by these senses and sensitivities. They opportunistically use whatever is at hand to affect their position in the cultural game in the experience of which they have formed these sets of dispositions.

Bakhtin and Vygotsky, too, emphasize that we have our existence not in repose but in practice. Bakhtin takes the culturally specific games that Bourdieu elucidates (which compare to Bakhtin's notion of speech genres), gives them voice, and directs them to a more general, even universal, condition of human activity. If we are alive, says Bakhtin, then we are engaged in answering what is directed to us. We are always engaged in the activity of making sense of what is happening as one who will respond. We are always authoring the meaning of action. If, for Bourdieu, we can best understand cultures and the people who enact them by considering behavior in the space of practice, then, for Bakhtin, we can best understand languages and the selves constructed in and through the words and voices of others by attending to the space of authoring. Improvisation using the resources at hand, and the limited agency improvisation entails, characterize both spaces. Furthermore, both spaces are shot through with the activity of social positioning. Bourdieu's action, Bakhtin's utterance, take place within an always present, partially durable construction of stratified social differences, positions, languages, and other cultural media of action.

Vygotsky's work, in comparison with that of Bourdieu and Bakhtin, often appears both socially naive and simplistic. Vygotsky neglected the social forms and constraints to which the others attend so carefully. He was nearly silent on the kinds of human domination that they reveal. He focused instead on a fantastic, seemingly utopian and liberatory power granted by symbols and the human ability to play with symbols: the power to create worlds, effective contexts of action, that may never exist apart from the pivot of imagination. Yet it is Vygotsky's focus that enables us to link Bourdieu's space of practice with Bakhtin's space of authoring and so helps us envision this second kind of agency. (p.278 – 280)

Bourdieu calls attention to the taken-for-granted or out-of-awareness associations between the important categories of social division and social

spaces, body postures (hexis), the uses of colors, and so on. These connections are especially important for understanding how relational (positional) aspects of identity work. But worlds are figured through language and images as well, and these means of objectification make possible the kind of “re-cognition” that Kondo experienced when she saw her reflection (Chapter 6) and even the deliberate efforts of persons and groups to direct their own behavior. Through the transfiguration that commentary provides, people may even increase their awareness of, and thus their capability to inhibit, such “automatic” responses as the deferential body postures assumed in the presence of higher-status people. (p. 281)

If persons and figured worlds are in the making over months, years, decades, even centuries, then so must be the groups with which people affiliate. Critics of the concepts of culture successfully argued, during the period we call the critical disruption (see Chapter 2), that social positions cannot be disregarded in any cultural figuring of the world of human action. Accounts that conceived cultures as shared webs of meaning, in which all are equally suspended regardless of such structured social divisions as gender, class, and race, were called into serious question. This recognition of the importance of social position in shaping people’s experience led to experiments in ethnography. This trend was marked, for example, in gender studies’ descriptions of women’s cultures and socialities, of gendered “worlds”; in British cultural studies’ emphasis on subcultures, whether based on gender, race, class, or generation; and in Bourdieu’s even more ambitious concepts of class (and potentially other forms of) habitus. (p.286)

Our use of identities—informed by these two dependent, but noncoincident processes, figuring and positionality—leads to another way of conceptualizing personhood, culture, and their distributions over social groups. Figured worlds and their situated realizations, rendered collectively and personally as spaces of authoring, are socially animated by groupings that may not be reified as social groups. The politics of participation in figured worlds—for example, who may enter the activities of an AA chapter and how members gain or lose place among themselves—may not reproduce a group according to the categories of currency in social positioning. Furthermore, these same politics may bring together persons who share little else: few means of figuring common action and few of the common markers of social position. As Bourdieu’s fields are meant to be, though in an even less structured and durable form, our spaces of authoring are games peculiar to themselves.⁴ Yet, as the examples of courtly love and nationalisms attest, these spaces have the potential to expand, and their players may become social groupings and categories of newer currency. (p.286-287)

Notes in Holland et al. (1998) citing Bourdieu

Notes 11 – 19

7. The incident happened in 1986. Note that, although Holland had already read the convincing theoretical treatises of Bourdieu (1977a) arguing for a

shift away from culturalist views in the field, she still first went through a culturalist interpretation.

Notes 31- 35

23. Bourdieu's emphasis on embodiment at the expense of symbols has helped move anthropologists away from the notion of culture as beliefs— as linguistically mediated, symbolically encoded conceptions and convictions about the world—and toward a notion of culture as dispositional, out-of-awareness orientations toward the world (see Strauss 1992). With "semiotic mediation," Bourdieu and the sociohistorical school diverge in emphasis. Bourdieu alludes to "symbolic mastery" in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977a: 83), but does not develop the concept. In *The Logic of Practice* (1990b) he says enough to indicate that his idea of symbolic mastery is of a representational rather than a heuristic sort. His "symbolic mastery" is a rationalist view of symbolic mediation and does not capture what Vygotsky was describing. For a Vygotskian semiotic mediator, the important fact is its investment within the pragmatics of communication, which includes its representation. Heuristic development is replete with symbolic forms—forms whose "meaning" is not solely, or even principally, representational.

Notes 38 – 39

28. Bourdieu develops ideas about specific practices less than activity theorists develop ideas about specific activities. Sometimes he writes of games (e.g., 1990b); "game" as he uses the term is somewhat equivalent to activity.

Notes 40 – 52

33. Especially in practice theory, these aims are conceived to take form out of awareness. They nonetheless constitute a point of view. See Bourdieu (1977a; 1990b).

34. For Bourdieu, social and material conditions can change rapidly, affecting the interrelations of positions in the field of production. Forms of behavior are modified in response to the altered conditions, but the habitus is slower to change and the lag between the two produces "hysteresis" (1977a: 78).

Notes 56 – 59

13. Bourdieu (1985a) acknowledges Weber's concept as suggestive in his thinking.

Notes 59 – 60

15. For the sake of contrasting "field" and "figured world," we downplay one of Bourdieu's main points: that status is multidimensional, the value of its various dimensions itself constituting a source of struggle.

16. Field, as Bourdieu has used it in his sociological studies of French intellectual production, encompasses the interconnections among related figured worlds. Bourdieu is careful to point out that semi-autonomous fields—of academic and artistic production, e.g.—are embedded and limited in social space by the field of power and the political-economic system of class relations (see esp. Bourdieu 1993). The embedding notion is important for us as well. We are suggesting that figured worlds could be described as nodes that together make up the fields that Bourdieu analyzes.

17. Bourdieu in other works attends to the effects of fields of power on life in the figured worlds embedded in them. He attends, for instance, to the ways day-to-day school activities (e.g., grading exams) transmute signs of privilege or elite background into “intelligence” and thus into a symbolic capital that figures in the reproduction of elite status and access to power and wealth (see Bourdieu and Saint-Martin 1974). He also offers a powerful commentary on the ways status pervades linguistic practice—such as how one’s sense of the (lesser) value attributed to one’s dialect or style of speaking can lead to silences in, or withdrawal from, interpersonal encounters (Bourdieu 1977b).

18. Bourdieu’s writings on fields (collected in Bourdieu 1993) are also suggestive for figured worlds in other ways. They remind us that the lived worlds of romance, Alcoholics Anonymous, or gender relations in Naudada—as only somewhat independent sites of cultural production—intersect with and are affected by social actions carried out in the name of other lived worlds. Holland and Skinner (1995a) reveal the intersection between the lived worlds of domestic gender relations and political activity in a community in Nepal; Holland and Reeves (1994) argue that students’ perspectives on classroom activities were not formed by what the teacher said but by discourses coming from outside the classroom.

Notes 107-128

9. This notion of fossilization as habituation is also pertinent to Bourdieu’s conception of the habitus, and of the processes of embodiment that ground learning in the habitus. It suggests, for instance, that nonverbal (proprioceptive) forms of practice interact with verbally mediated practice in the reproduction of the habitus more intimately, and perhaps more convertibly, than Bourdieu seems to think.

Notes 130 -136

5. Others who picture social and cultural life as organized around semi-independent spheres include, besides Bourdieu (1993), Connell (1987), whose idea of gender “regimes” combines development in local institutions and settings, themselves intricately related, with their ties to state interventions, to make up a “gender order.”

Notes 151 – 163

9. As with the symbolic capital of honor among the Kabyle, attractiveness is claimed and validated through face-to-face interaction (Bourdieu 1977a). Its reification as “physical attribute” is a characteristic form of misrecognition (*méconnaissance*).

10. Bourdieu contrasts the insult, in which individuals try to impose their point of view of the divisions of the social world and their position within it, with “official nomination.” An insult is made by an individual who takes the risk of reciprocation. An official nomination is backed up by force (Bourdieu 1985b).

Notes 164 – 177

2. Bourdieu’s (1977a, 1990b) practice theory and a stream of the cultural-historical school, activity theory, also reflect this conception; see Chapter 3.

Notes 209 - 221

11. Compare Habermas’s examinations (1975, 1984, 1987) of the general forms of communicative practice in relation to authoritative, often state-sponsored, discourses. Our view owes a more obvious debt to Bourdieu.

Notes 223 – 231

9. This notion of “sense” is, in Vygotsky’s conception, the currency of “inner speaking.” When extended to the embodiment of all means of expression (as “inner activity”), it becomes like Bourdieu’s understanding of practical sense, *sens pratique* (see Chapter 8).

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