Bourdieu in the North: Practical Understanding in Natural Resource Governance[1]

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Abstract. Natural resource management (NRM) analyses often avoid a position on environmental governance as arising from and shaped by social practices and power relations in resource conflicts, contested property rights, and political-economic strategies. I examine a northern Canadian Aboriginal community's experience of a structured yet dynamic sociocultural response to a period of social and political change. Drawing from Pierre Bourdieu's conception of social practice I suggest that a diffuse, or less determinist, theory of practice may help explain how power relations are interwoven throughout yet applied differentially in NRM governance. Drawing on ethnographic research on watershed management and protection of Aboriginal cultural landscapes in the Northwest Territories, I refine the notion of practical understanding to explain the ways government resource managers and community leaders challenge and negotiate one another's conceptions of environmental governance in a dual process of cooperation-conflict.

Keywords: social practice, practical understanding, Bourdieu, environmental governance, Aboriginal, Canadian North

Résumé. Les études portant sur la gestion des ressources naturelles (GRS) sont souvent muettes sur la gouvernance environnementale vue comme résultat évident des pratiques sociales et des relations de pouvoir dans les domaines suivants : conflits sur le partage des ressources, contestation de droits de propriété et mise en place de stratégies politico-économiques. Mon article décrit la réaction tout aussi structurée que souple d'une collectivité autochtone du Nord canadien à une période de changements politiques et sociaux. On verra que cette réponse est marquée socioculturellement. Tout en m'inspirant du modèle de pratique sociale de Bourdieu, je démontre qu'en adoptant un point de vue moins déterministe que celui du sociologue français, on explique bien comment les relations de pouvoir

marquent toute action de gouvernance en matière de GRN, même si elles s'y manifestent de façon fort particulière. En m'appuyant sur des études ethnographiques sur l'aménagement des bassins hydrauliques et sur la préservation des paysages culturels dans les Territoires-du-Nord-Ouest, j'ai affiné la notion de compréhension pratique pour décrire de quelle façon, dans une espèce de jeu duel coopération-conflit, les fonctionnaires responsables de la GRN et les leaders locaux contestent réciproquement leur conception respective de la gestion des ressources naturelles.

Mots clés: Pratique sociale, compréhension pratique, Bourdieu, gestion de l'environnement, Nord canadien, Autochtones, GRN

Introduction

In the Northwest Territories (NWT) of Canada environmental governance is beset by a level of complexity that would likely astound many analysts of energy economies. Federal custodianship of most natural resources in northern Canada is often at odds with territorial government responsibilities, Aboriginal comprehensive land claims,[2] and most recently Aboriginal self-government of social services, lands, and natural resources.[3] The product of this federal-territorial-Aboriginal relationship is a matrix of land-claim based collaborative management (comanagement) boards in areas *with* settled land claim agreements, and federal/territorial government led management boards in areas *without* land claims. In such thorny environs, singular sets of rules, intended to govern a large expanse of territory and diverse ecological niches, are bound to fail (Ostrom 2007). An unintended result of relying on policy panaceas is that natural resource management (NRM) analyses often avoid understanding environmental governance as arising from and shaped by social practices and power relations in resource conflicts, contested property rights, and political-economic strategies.

    With increasing mineral, oil, and gas development in the western Arctic Sahtu region of the NWT, communities, governments, and environmental organizations have all raised concern about environmental protection and resource conservation. The general approach to sustainable economic development in the NWT is through conservation and land use planning. In this essay I examine an Aboriginal community's experience of a structured yet dynamic sociocultural response to a significant per-

2. Hereafter I refer to Northern Comprehensive Land Claim Agreements as "land claim agreements."

3. In Canada northern (territorial) governments do not have complete responsibility and control over natural resources. Some territories, however, are in the process of attaining provincial-like powers through devolution of authority, as seen, for example, in the transfer of lands and resource management from the Government of Canada to the Government of the Northwest Territories at the time of this writing.

iod of transformation in the context of NRM planning and comanagement around Great Bear Lake. Drawing on three years of ethnographic fieldwork on northern watershed management and protection of Aboriginal cultural landscapes, I refine the notion of practical understanding to explain the ways both government resource managers and community leaders challenge and negotiate one another's conceptions of environmental governance in a dual process of cooperation-conflict. Utilizing Pierre Bourdieu's conception of social practice I suggest that a diffuse, or less determinist, theory of social practice may help explain how power relations are interwoven throughout yet applied differentially in NRM governance.

BOURDIEU'S LOGIC OF SOCIAL PRACTICE

Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical explication of social practice is a mode of practical engagement with the world. It is a way of seeing the world with potential for reproduction and transformation by considering the relationship between an individual's interests and that of the actions of others within structured social contexts. Practice theory helps explain the struggle for power through the subtleties of meaning, the strategic use of resources, and the influence of history or practical experience on one's habitus in the context of social change. Practical action comprises the relationship between structural conditions of existence and subjective experience within those conditions, and how individuals position themselves or are manipulated into a given position or circumstance. Social context is instilled in both individual cognitive/mental and corporeal/bodily structures, which in turn creatively act on the world through strategies (as feel for the game) to reproduce or, under certain conditions, change external social structures. Practice is thus a way of seeing the world and potential for transformation by considering both interests as well as that of the established orders of the social world. Bourdieu's contribution is unique in that his theory of social practice is situated within embodied practical and lived experiences of time, critically addressing modes of power and domination within social fields, all the while explicated through a set of powerful theoretical and empirical tools. With increasing exploration and application of Bourdieusian social theory in North America (Sallaz and Zavisca 2007), practice theory has seen little application to environmental governance, specifically northern natural resource governance where power, land, and culture collide and collude.[4]

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4. Instead, environmental sociology and studies scholars are more inclined to adopt a second wave approach to social practice theory that focuses less on power dynamics and structure and more on attitudes and behaviours relating to consumption and climate change (Shove et al. 2012, Shove 2010, Hards 2011, Hargreaves 2011).

Key to a Bourdieusian interpretation of social practice is the conceptually interconnected apparatus of habitus, field, forms of capital, and strategy. Habitus is an internal embodied sensibility that goes beyond simply the mental faculties of individuals. Each person (or group) is the product of internalized structures that guide attitudes, values, perceptions, and dispositions and behaviour (the habitus), which is in turn a product of objective external social and political structures and historical circumstances (the field). Practice therefore, is the process and product of the encounter between habitus and field, and directed by strategies, which are unconsciously modified as external conditions change. But the habitus is not static; rather, it is an "open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:133). The term "disposition" is essential to defining the habitus as it expresses those behavioural tendencies that produce a routinized or habitual state.

Although resilient and structured, habitus is also generative and transportable in that it is capable of producing an array of actions and perceptions in contexts other than those in which it was originally acquired. For example, Aboriginal people, in adopting NRM modes of thinking, manners of speech, and management styles in comanagement and other governmental board practices, often come to take on a particular habitus of western-based state management practices that advance particular assumptions and understandings (Stevenson 2004). As a form of socialization, individuals learn from the way they perceive, assess, and understand what they encounter in their day to day lives, and then classify, according to social principles, what is taking place around them; hence one's habitus. One outcome of habitus is that these socially derived classifications may serve to maintain those very same external structures that sustain power imbalances and thwart social change.

The concept of habitus can be understood in a more dynamic light with more interplay between subjective and objective conditions when applied with the concept of field and associated forms of capital or resources than if used as a singular concept (Swartz 1997, 2013). Field, the key spatial metaphor in Bourdieu's theory of practice, defines the structure of the social setting in which the habitus operates. A field is constituted by social positions consisting of individuals and groups with specific interests and stakes, power relations, and strategies for legitimation. The relationship between habitus and field is one of complicity; habitus does not simply encounter a particular field. A given field structures the habitus, which is embodied materially, while the habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:18). Field and habitus thus mirror each other: objective social structures and internal structures make up and contribute

to one another in an ongoing adaptive and accommodating process, in what Lizardo (2004:376) refers to as a "generative dynamic structure." As Bourdieu (1996:38) emphasizes, "action … lies neither in structures nor in consciousness, but rather in the relation of immediate proximity between objective structures and embodied structures in habitus." The closer the fit between habitus and the field, the more likely someone is to feel at ease and more easily manipulated in maintaining culture-challenging NRM practices. The use of capital, or the resources used to attain, sustain, or challenge the fit between habitus and field, contributes as a driver of change.

Bourdieu's conception of capital is proposed as the capacity to exercise control over one's future as well as that of others, thus implying the competitive nature of fields. Capital consists of social, cultural (including linguistic), and economic forms but essentially refers to all valued resources that an actor can access and employ.[5] The real value of capital however, consists in how it is accepted by others and thus converted into symbolic forms. The misrecognition and legitimation of capital allows it to become power in a symbolic form. Symbolic power is not explicitly recognized but rather tacitly accepted, even to the point of instilling a strict hierarchical relation of debt on one's habitus (Bourdieu 1990a:105–106). While an individual's capital is always relative to one's habitus, struggles over how capital is used take place in fields where it is symbolically accumulated and in certain cases converted into material capital, and vice versa.[6] Explained this way social practice can be understood in terms of the dynamic strategies and relationship between habitus and current capital as carried out within the specific logic and context of a given field.

Bourdieusian practice theory has, however, been accused of presenting an over-socialized view of individuals (Jenkins 2002) where social reproduction is more likely to occur than transformation, perhaps due to the conflictual character of social life predominated by the wielding of an array of powerful resources by the dominant over the dominated. But it is also Bourdieu's presentation of a prereflexive actor over a more agentic and reflexive actor in social settings that has garnered such critique (Bohman 1999).

A social practice theory tempered by reflexivity is required to better explain how social change might occur in highly structured contexts,

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5. Bourdieu sees economic capital as real money and possessions, social capital as contacts and networks, and cultural capital as education, qualifications, and marks and actual objects of distinction.

6. See for example, David Mosse's (1977) fascinating historical analysis of how the political control over water (storage) tanks in India is converted to symbolic power and further into economic benefits.

and satisfy those critics who demand a mechanism or explanatory power by which the habitus might operate. Reflexivity is the continuous examination of our actions and the behaviour we expect of others (Giddens 1984:3). It entails a subjective capacity to stand back from a given field and possibly transform it through "conscious deliberations that take place through internal conversations" (Archer 2007:3). For Bourdieu the habitus operates at both conscious and unconscious levels but primarily at the unconscious taken-for-granted level. In order for the field to be dramatically challenged and transformed through conscious action, a perceived crisis of the habitus is required (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:131). A commonly held discomfort with the concept of habitus is that reflexivity and agent-driven change only occur during these rare periods of crisis. Some observers argue that a compromise of sorts is needed between the assumed nonreflexive workings of the Bourdieusian habitus and a reflexivity that is free from structural and cultural constraints (Adams 2006; Elder-Vass 2007). One way to approach a more nuanced social practice theory is to see crises as increasingly prevalent situations in which actions are reflexively determined as well as prereflexively determined by the habitus (Sweetman 2003). Understood this way, endemic crises lead to a more or less constant disjuncture between habitus and field. Reflexivity is not just an aspect of temporary habitus-field fissure as Bourdieu might suggest; rather it might be seen as routinized and incorporated within habitus. Following Luntley (1992), I consider this a diffuse practice thesis where crises between habitus and field are of a more frequent and thus common nature than Bourdieu suggests, opening the door to a more agentic view of social practice. During a perceived crisis event, reflexive and rational strategizing occurs in an *attempt* to alter the field, in this case the bureaucratic governance structures that control how natural and cultural resources are utilized in the management of Great Bear Lake in the NWT of Canada.

The above discussion of Bourdieusian social practice implies that an examination of understanding within a northern NRM setting cannot be explained solely from a cognitive nor purely philosophical standpoint as it misses articulating the rich, variable, and flexible practical experiences within social contexts (Wahlstrom 2006). In what follows I examine how a practice-induced or practical understanding developed during the course of NRM planning.

The Management of Great Bear Lake

Délįne (pronounced "Del-in-ay"), is a hamlet located at the mouth of the Great Bear River on the most westerly arm of Great Bear Lake, 550 km northwest of Yellowknife, the capital of the NWT (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Map Showing Délįne Relative to Canada and the Northwest Territories
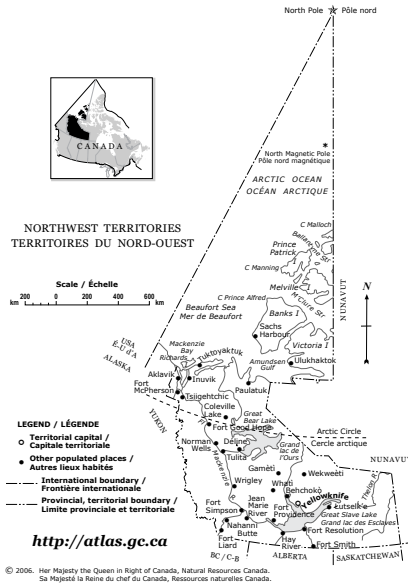
(Used with permission: Natural Resources Canada)

Great Bear Lake, or "Sahtu" as it is known in the North Slavey dialect of the Dene language, is the largest lake entirely within Canada's borders and ninth largest in the world at 31,326 km². Saoyú and Ɂehdacho (pronounced "Sah-yu" and "Ay-da-cho") are two major peninsulas, encompassing a total area of approximately 5,550 km², facing one another in the western arm of Great Bear Lake.

Délįne consists of 470 people of whom more than 90 percent are Dene or Métis Aboriginal people and beneficiaries of the 1993 *Sahtu Dene Métis Comprehensive Land Claim* (Statistics Canada 2012). The signing of the Sahtu land claim led to the creation of resource comanagement boards addressing economic development, land use planning, wildlife management, and environmental impact assessment requirements in the region. The land claim also required the Government of Canada to negotiate *community* self-government with Délįne providing for more culturally appropriate arrangements of governance. In the past decade two key environmental governance projects were undertaken in the community, both of which are presented and analyzed here.

Case Study 1: The Great Bear Lake Watershed Management Plan

In 2002 the Great Bear Lake Working Group (GBLWG) was formed in Délįne with a vision that "Great Bear Lake must be kept clean and

bountiful for all time" (Hamre 2002:9). Initiated through a conventional planning model, a draft management framework was presented in 2003 resulting from a series of community workshops and meetings. In this framework the principles for management of Great Bear Lake established the foundation of the management plan and outlined a long-term and evolving management and stewardship relationship between Délįnęot'ınę (people of Déline) and the other management authorities for the lake and watershed. However, Déline leaders' concerns with a non-Dene planning process and lack of Délįnęot'ınę input into planning led to a perceived crisis and resulting reorientation of the working group's foci. The reorientation altered the process from that of a linear, conventional planning exercise to one that was nonlinear in design, community-led and -based, and culturally informed. The influence of community Elders in meetings and workshops led to stories of ancient and traditional lake management driving the process and moreover being artfully woven into the final management plan's structure and land-use designations. From a Dene perspective the management plan was seen as a transformative "opportunity to bring Dene traditional laws and values into the [Western] system of laws" (GBLWG 2005:5). In 2004 *The 'Water Heart': A Management Plan for Great Bear Lake and its Watershed* was completed by federal and territorial government organizations and community leaders and subsequently formalized as a draft plan in 2005.

Case Study 2: Saoyú-ʔehdacho Aboriginal Cultural Landscape

In Canada, an Aboriginal cultural landscape is formally recognized by Parks Canada as

> a place valued by an Aboriginal group (or groups) because of their long and complex relationship with the land. It expresses their unity with the natural and spiritual environment. It embodies their traditional knowledge of spirits, places, land uses and ecology. Material remains of the association may be prominent, but will often be minimal or absent. (Buggey 1999:27)

The concept of Aboriginal cultural landscapes opens the door for a new way of understanding social practices, place, and history through the consideration of intangibles such as knowledge and skills, faith practices and beliefs originating in human and nonhuman relations, and place (Neufeld 2007). Less clear, however, is the way potentially divergent perceptions of resource management and conservation practices by Aboriginal groups and state are addressed in the integration of the new concept of Aboriginal cultural landscapes with the older biological but ahistorical construct of ecological integrity.

In 2003 Parks Canada had yet to protect a cultural landscape on the scale of Saoyú-Ɂehdacho. Apart from its novelty, the policy implications were of concern within Parks Canada. There are two key reasons for Sahtúot'ine (pronounced "sah-tu-ohtinay," meaning "Bear Lake people") interests in protecting these cultural landscapes through the *NWT Protected Areas Strategy* and Government of Canada National Historic Site processes. First, permanent protection was part of the process for ensuring the continuation of the Sahtúot'ine relationship with the land, including oral history and traditional lifeways (Hanks 1996). Second, with increasing oil, gas, and mineral exploration and potential development in the district, there was a concern that industrial pressures and defacement of the landscape as foreseen by the legendary Great Bear Lake prophet Ɂehtseo Ayah (1858–1940) would, in the words of Déli̲ne leader Leeroy Andre, physically "strike at the heart of Sahtúot'ine culture" (Hanks 1996:886). More formal and enduring protection was therefore needed. After 20 years of local advocacy for the protection of this Aboriginal cultural landscape, the community and territorial and federal governments signed a final agreement for its permanent protection. The Saoyú-Ɂehdacho working group completed their assessments and final report in 2007, and a Protected Area/Cooperative Management Agreement led to the establishment of a cultural landscape managed as the Saoyú-Ɂehdacho National Historic Site of Canada (Government of Canada 2012). A comanagement board, the members of which are appointed jointly by Sahtu leadership and Parks Canada, provides advice on all aspects of planning and management of the site.

As discussed in the preceding section "fields" are contextualized social spaces that define struggles for power and positioning over valued resources. In these two cases I present the field under analysis as one of environmental governance where the conservation and exploitation interests of governments, extractive industries, and Aboriginal communities with strong legislated rights all interact to attempt a delicate balance between socioecological, cultural, political, and economic interests. When and where legal rights have not been institutionalized through land claim agreements or self-government, the field described here could be seen as fractured and fragmented; perhaps even understood as subfields between government and traditional local practices of governance.[7] However, with the establishment of land claims and self-government in certain regions (and a resulting clearer place and role for industry proponents), environmental governance has solidified as a field in which historical divisions are *less* pronounced with greater potential for agreed upon nat-

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7. In the NWT, land claim agreements have not been completed in a number of regions resulting in complex and conflictual issues around environmental governance.

ural resource governance plans. Where perceived crises arise, the field of environmental governance is visibly delineated, with established roles and responsibilities that can be identified and clearly challenged.

For many observers the outcomes of these two cases illustrate successful examples of new community-based natural resource management practices in the Canadian North. Seen through the lens of social practice theory, an examination of the context leading up to the outcomes reveals the role of culture, power, and knowledge in NRM practice. From 2003–2006 while living in Déline I undertook ethnographic fieldwork participating as a member of the Saoyú-ʔehdacho Working Group and the Great Bear Lake Watershed Working Group. In addition to participant observation in working group and related land-based activities as a community resident, semistructured interviews were conducted with working group membership from community, government, environmental nongovernment organizations (ENGO), and comanagement organizations.[8] The context required to understand the success of these cases was acquired through in-depth access to local-government-ENGO discussions on conservation and development planning. My social location as having previously worked within the Government of the NWT, as well as being a "resident researcher" and established in the social milieu of the community (not to mention being male in a predominantly male planning exercise), allowed me deep access into the cases as well as developing strong social relationships with participants. Key to my research was the internal access to the cases and involvement with the community, providing in-depth understanding of the social context behind the two cases. Both of these cases were precedent setting in the Canadian North: a community directing a culturally appropriate watershed management plan and Parks Canada-sponsored protection of a large land base premised on Aboriginal cultural landscapes in which language and stories predominated.

Language, narratives and power

The relationship between language and power in the study of contemporary NRM institutions has a specific logic of engagement. Language is a way of codifying the terms and rules or "rites of institution" (Bourdieu 1991:117) towards the normalization of practices (Bourdieu 1990b:80), in this case initiating Aboriginal participants in NRM to think, speak,

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8. Organizations involved in the planning include a number of representatives from Parks Canada, Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), Environment Canada, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), Environment and Natural Resources (Government of the NWT), and Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS). Natural resource extraction industry representatives were invited but chose not to participate.

and thus act toward the land in unfamiliar ways (Stevenson 2006). In many analyses, however, the analytic gaze is on the effect *upon* Aboriginal people tending to obscure the symbolic power of language operating *amongst* actors differentially affecting people at varying times. An alternative and more diffuse approach is to examine language as part of what Tanya Li (2007:273) describes as a relation of "permanent provocation between the will to govern and strategies of struggle." Seen this way, openings and closures for potential change are continually occurring as the outcome of people's situated practices and degrees of agency.

Language as a permanent provocation was established on a number of fronts. Déline leaders were increasingly adamant about mapping traditional place names in the North Slavey dialect of Dene. While seemingly inconsequential to more conventionally trained planners, Déline̗ot'ine̗ were unanimous in its requirement as a relational starting point. As one leader so passionately told me, "it's so important to get those place names … the history of the Dene people is written on their land. That's how it's passed on" (interview transcript). But such concern for language also recognizes that "[s]ymbolic power is a power of creating things with words" (Bourdieu 1990b:138). The use of traditional place names on maps was strategically integrated with the use of the North Slavey language in Déline workshops where the majority of participants were North Slavey speakers and most Elders did not speak English well enough to participate. This process allowed community people to lead planning in their own language and styles, requiring simultaneous translations for non-North Slavey speakers. Interestingly, an unintended effect was that it provided time and space for outside resource managers to step back and take on a greater listener-observer role. A government scientist admitted

> from the start of the [GBLMP] process it was hard doing that. But as we went through it there were things that were learned … and they could discuss it on their own without having someone always translating and then you talking back to them and going back. It takes a lot longer but it's a way better way to do things especially for the Elders because it's in their own language. (interview transcript)

The use of Dene language in planning demonstrated that language can come to have symbolic power (Bourdieu 1991). The evolving linguistic habitus of Déline̗ot'ine̗ community leaders contributes to its symbolic power as evidenced by a local leader's confident statement "the kind of language in the [Sahtu Land Use] plan is hard to understand but once we discuss it then we'll use that language to get what we want" (interview transcript). In addition to language, powerful narratives contribute to affecting change in planning.

The Water Heart

Social transformations are based on societal and cultural changes (Castles 2001), but are also driven by unique and powerful events. I was part of one such event: the influence of a powerful Sahtúot'ine story that had not previously been told in English. In 2003 after eight months of watershed planning, primarily under a conventional planning process, community members raised concerns about their mode of involvement and level of engagement. As a narrative corrective to conflicting ideas about planning, the story of the heart of the lake, or "Water Heart" [*Tudza*, in the North Slavey language], was carefully told to the Great Bear Lake Technical Working Group. In the storytelling process a Sahtúot'ine habitus began to be inadvertently specified. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:127) remind us, "the habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world; a world endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one's energy."

> The Elders of Délįne have passed down a story through many generations. In times past, their spiritual teachers were often "mystically tied" to different parts of the environment: some to the caribou, some the wolf, some the northern lights and some the willow. Kayé Daoyé was one such person. He lived all around Great Bear Lake, or "Sahtu" in the Slavey language, but made his home primarily in *Edaiila* (the Caribou Point area), on the northeast shores of the lake. Kayé Daoyé was mystically tied to the loche [ling cod or burbot]. One day, after setting four hooks, he found one of them missing. This disturbed him — in those days hooks were rare and very valuable — and that night he traveled in his dreams with the loche in search of the fish that had taken his hook. As he traveled through the centre of GBL, he became aware of a great power in the lake — the heart of the lake or the "water heart" [*Tudza* in North Slavey]. Contemplating this heart, he became aware that it is connected to all beings — the land, the sky, plants, other creatures, people — and that it helps sustain the entire watershed of GBL (the Water Heart, as told by Charlie Neyelle, in GBLWG 2005:29).

The story of the Water Heart was subsequently recognized as a powerful narrative tool in altering people's personal thinking about ecosystems and organizational practices around resources and management. It was a powerful enough part of Sahtúot'ine oral history for Elders to justify translating into English and taking it out of its intended Dene context and so risk losing its cultural significance. In the process of repeated tellings the story took on metaphorical and epistemological significance for participating NRM scientists connecting it to ecosystem-based management. Shared understanding within a practical circumstance led to the powerful association between Aboriginal oral history and formal planning by members of the working group. The result of the decision to

use the story in the plan was a distinctive shift in planning thought and process.

Narratives, and by extension language, are integral to practical understanding between people from different types and scales of organization. While Bourdieu (1990b:84) argues that the formalization of language economizes invention and improvisation, language is also used to challenge thinking and stimulate shared understanding and cooperation. Yet, a weakness in social scientific inquiry is the study of shared understanding that fails to address power relations (Flyvbjerg 2001). It was clear to Délįne leaders that even with the power imparted by the land claim and self-government, the community was working in a highly structured bureaucratic and corporatist environmental management system, over which they historically had very little control. As one local leader observed, the feeling in Délįne was that when governments discuss the values and principles of the Délįnęot'įnę "it's always got to be under the terms of government policy and industry, and that we have to fit into their picture … and try to maximize *our* values with *that* process" (interview transcript, emphasis added). Moreover, he understood that government consisted of more than neutral and rational rulings by the state but rather included self-government in a coercive, hegemonic sense (Foucault 1991). This same Délįne leader observed that

> [p]eople need jobs … government throws something on the table, we either take it or don't take it but I think predominantly we've been taking it because we've been trained that we need to run these programs and services. Over the years we've been really modified I guess, to some degree, that the control mechanisms that have been put in place by government are so that they have become more or less our masters. But I think we want to change that over the next little while. (interview transcript)

As the last sentence of this quote implies, the desire to alter the system under which people are induced to live indicates that for change to take place, new approaches are necessary. While people are "modified" or understood as the product of a government generated "conduct of conduct" — the shaping of human conduct by calculated means — there is also a place for "counter-conduct" (Gordon 1991:5). There is a recognition of existing forms of control but at the same time a desire to change the system in place, if only so that the Délįnęot'įnę are not "predominantly taking it." From a diffuse practice thesis, the Bourdieusian "feel for the game" (system) consists of both rational and unconscious based actions being undertaken, and dependent on the forms of capital available. During a meeting in Délįne where key Parks Canada officials were in attendance to explain the Saoyú-Ɂehdacho Options Paper (to present options for formal government protection of the site) to the working group

and community, control of the situation was illustrated by a Délı̨nęot'ı̨nę leader's actions at the start of the meeting.

> He placed his copy of the land claim agreement on the table in front of him. It only took me a few seconds to recognize the book as the same one he had used to explain certain aspects of the land claim to others and me in numerous previous meetings. I would have thought he'd have thrown it out by now and taken a new one from the pile on the shelf. This copy was held together by duct tape along the spine and had what looked like 50 post-it notes with writing on them, sticking out from different pages. The copy was so well worn and obviously used that one would think that he had it memorized and, in the process, understood its intricacies and hidden secrets. He didn't hold it up and make any statements about its legal power. Its symbolic placement there on the table in front of us seemed to speak volumes. The process was enacted as though a routine. (field notes)

The placement and presentation of the land claim agreement document by Délı̨ne leaders recurred often in meetings with outside officials in Délı̨ne. As former Sahtu Grand Chief and land claim negotiator in the late 1980s and early 1990s and thus someone who understood the legislated power of the agreement, he was rarely without it in meetings where governance issues were being discussed. The display of political and symbolic capital was a powerful moment in the meeting. Its circumstance and use of the land claim document illustrated the application of a subtle form of power: an "embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history" (Bourdieu 1990a:56). The gravity of the leader's act was not lost on anyone at the table. All the government agency representatives were silent and seemingly accepting of the symbolic act. In challenging the rules of formal meetings, the agenda was temporarily derailed by a strategic act that was "part of the middle hinterland of cognition, neither conscious nor unconscious" (Jenkins 2002:179).

Community leaders' recognition of and willingness to use the influence and authority originating in their land claim agreement, community self-government agreement-in-principle, and contracts negotiated directly with extraction industries illustrates a symbolic power. It is in this field of environmental governance that forms of capital were misrecognized but, being cumulative, contributed to the legitimation of Délı̨nęot'ı̨nę influence and symbolic power. In extending Bourdieu's insistence that symbolic power is a legitimating power only when dominant and dominated consent to it (Bourdieu 1990a:126), I argue that Délı̨nęot'ı̨nę symbolic power is legitimated through consent in the above examples combined with the increasing leadership in planning that Délı̨ne members undertook.

Délı̨nęot'ı̨nę influence and strategy was countered by government bureaucratic authority and structural ability to slow processes down

while still maintaining a veneer of collaboration. Such power in practice exemplifies a creative performativity where the art of the necessary improvisation is the "exploitation of pause, interval and indecision" over the course of time in practice (Jenkins 2002:71). The practical understanding that was developed during the GBLMP and protection of Saoyú-ʔehdacho was at times beneficial for moving the projects forward while at other times was constrained by resistant power structures. The explanation that local actors are subordinated following the interests of external forces does not adequately explain how resource management is understood in practice and adapted in novel ways for new objectives. Similarly, an account of actors focussed on social learning and social capital formation in planning processes fails to address the power relations, manipulation, and conflict inherent in any social relationship. Rather, cooperative as well as conflictual situations occurred in the same space but at varying times and tempos.

The above sections point to a repositioning of communities not as heroes contesting power from the outside, but as active agents whose struggles are formed within matrices of power. Because strategies are relative to habitus, it is not exclusive of the way that people differentially understand NRM. Northern historian Kerry Abel (2005:265) illustrates how a Dene habitus is premised on an

> aptitude for creative adaptation … [that has] … permitted the survival of a sense of self and community through very different times and challenges. Faced with foreign political, economic, religious and social systems, the Dene have attempted to choose what they found desirable in those systems and reject what they didn't like.

The observed Dene "aptitude for creative adaptation" implies that the structural constraints so often described in Bourdieusian terms may indeed be challenged by a Dene habitus that is more flexible than Bourdieu would suggest. In the final sections I explore how such manifold strategies were played out in these cases.

PRACTICAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH ENGAGEMENT

Despite the bureaucratization of comanagement in the Canadian North (Nadasdy 2003), there is an opportunity for rethinking how practical understanding in NRM can inform, and perhaps even transform, such institutions based on spaces for power.[9] A social practice based approach to practical understanding acknowledges the impact of bureaucratic re-

9. The concept of "practical understanding" is admittedly not new. A number of approaches to human action and forms of knowledge have been theorized (most notably Wittgenstein 2009[1953], but also Bourdieu 1990a, and Schatzki 1997). In this essay I return to

source management structures but also incorporates actions in which people react to, capitalize upon, and in various ways rationalize their responses to bureaucratic conditions. In a Foucauldian sense, it recognizes that "powers that are multiple cannot be totalizing and seamless" and contributes to our understanding of practices "playing across one another" (Li 2007:25–26) to create gaps and openings in resource management practices.

In approaching Saoyú-ʔehdacho negotiations for protection, experienced Délı̨nę leaders understood that Parks Canada would send a team of negotiators with a well-versed strategy in which "they will try to slot Délı̨nę into co-management." This led to the implicit strategy by Délı̨nęot'ı̨nę leaders that Délı̨nę take matters into their own hands and "make its voice heard and be more political … [by] … using established relationships with key players in Ottawa" to ensure resource management reflects community values and interests (field notes and interview transcripts). Comanagement in the North, however, is explicitly as well as subtly promoted by government agencies as a primary instrument of and official discourse for resource management (Nadasdy 2003). The contrast between the above NRM strategies suggests that multiple political and bureaucratic processes occupy similar sociopolitical spaces but with different rules for engagement.

Community leaders have been exposed to government methods and strategies through land claims and habitual interaction. But political engagement is a multifaceted endeavour. On the face of it, that Délı̨nę leaders were forced to travel to Ottawa indicates the establishment and enduring nature of power structures under which they were compelled to operate. Yet, the will, effort, and capacity to travel from a small northern hamlet to the Canadian capital and speak within a political and bureaucratic field suggests a strategic reversibility of power relations. Their actions show how standardized governmental practices, such as requiring their travel to Ottawa, can be turned into a "dissenting 'counter-conduct'" (Gordon 1991:5). One working group member observed that

> ever since I've been on this file, Leeroy has been saying 'we need to get more political about this.'… They want to get more political and if that's what they want to do, then I think that's great because maybe that's what's needed. (interview transcript)

Understanding NRM as a politicized activity is culturally costly for the Sahtúot'ine habitus, which is based on reciprocity and cooperation (Rushforth 1986). The toleration of conflict by the Saoyú-ʔehdacho and

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Bourdieu's habitus-field-strategy-capital assemblage taking a political-epistemological stance on practical understanding as part of social practice.

Great Bear Lake working group members and their organizations contributed to solidifying the structure of the groups and functioning of projects. Conflict was costly in terms of time and other resources but also helpful in exposing differences that might lead to their formal resolution (Simmel 1908[1955], Coser 1956). Issues dominated by conflict, when perceived of as required and important towards the success of the project, were addressed by targeting higher levels of authority than represented by the working group's membership.

Délįne leadership's political habitus developed through historically close interactions with federal and territorial governments. As noted by an ENGO working group member, the general feeling was that

> Délįne was big on going to meet with people who could make decisions. They just go straight to the top, you know. Like, 'don't waste your time'… that [thinking and practice] seemed to come from the Land Claim days. (interview transcript)

In both the Great Bear Lake and Saoyú-ʔehdacho cases political action was spurred by perceptions of crisis over inadequate decision-making power at local levels of planning. For example, in the Saoyú-ʔehdacho working group a member noted that a crisis existed because

> they [Parks Canada] were totally unsure [about authoring the Options Paper for the group]. I mean you definitely had the sense when they were in the room that the power wasn't there. (interview transcript)

Historically, and in nearly all planning projects I observed or participated in while in Délįne a ubiquitous Délįnǫot'ınę leadership strategy included implied and real threats to go to places where higher formal authority could be accessed. The strategy was so well-used that it became second nature for young leaders as well as Elders. The underlying threat by leaders to go places of decision-making was backed by historical evidence of doing so. Once an issue was recognized as critical the political habitus of Délįne leadership perceived going to the national capital of Ottawa as being no further away than the territorial capital of Yellowknife (when in fact Ottawa was 5000 km further east).

Bourdieu (in Wacquant 1992:25) tells us that for a group to gain control, they must be "…capable of wielding several forms of domination effectively. Pure economic domination never suffices." Although Bourdieu's explanation reflects power by a dominant group, it can also be used to explain counter-conduct resulting from a crisis understood through a diffuse practice thesis. During the three years that I was involved with the Saoyú-ʔehdacho working group, the conceptualization and ability to go to places of power to effect change was a frequent leadership tool

used in Délįne. During Saoyú-Ɂehdacho and Great Bear Lake working group meetings, threats of leaders to go *en masse* to Ottawa to influence federal leaders were sometimes subtly hinted at and at other times openly strategized at great length. The history of real action combined with implicit threats to go to where decision-making power lay, represented a power in practice that was tacitly embedded in the agenda of all meetings. Such strategic playing out of symbolic power changed the dynamic of the relationship making government officials more careful about the strategies they themselves employed. Reflecting the tension within Parks Canada agency on their historical commitments to Délįne, a regional manager explained the delicate balance in working on community based conservation projects such as Saoyú-Ɂehdacho:

> if you overcommit to them, something's gonna happen; then that's dangerous because you've overcommitted. But if you kind of go [along] with them [and undercommit], what I find sometimes is they won't lose their trust in you but their frustration then moves to another level, and then they start going to the Minister and things like that, and that changes the dynamics of your working relationship. (interview transcript)

Continual political engagement was recognized as necessary to support the practical understanding that developed between group members. Délįnęot'įnę actions support the suggestion that Aboriginal people must address the power imbalances they often confront in dealing with governments to influence resource management in meaningful ways (O'Faircheallaigh 2008). Engaging with power structures is the most direct means of influencing change. Yet, in the process of social and political engagement, various forms of disengagement inadvertently occur.

PRACTICAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH DISENGAGEMENT

In studies of northern NRM, disengagement is often presented as part of, and associated with, local people's resistance as an attempt to maintain Aboriginal values and knowledge systems in resource management discourse. Forms of resistance in northern comanagement include complete avoidance, intermittent attendance, and noncooperation in meetings. On the one hand there are claims that "[i]nvariably, neither direct nor subtle indirect forms of resistance have been very effective tools for Aboriginal participants to affect change in contemporary co-management practice" (Stevenson 2006:174). Others, on the other hand, suggest that resistance to forms of unacceptable NRM discourse or practice can force the reexamination of issues in comanagement practice (Freeman et al. 1998). This latter interpretation, implying a practical disengagement, provides a

starting point for an examination of disengagement as a form of temporally influenced engagement.

To fully understand practice, time as tempo must be introduced into one's analysis (Bourdieu 1990a: 81). The tempo of social interaction is integral to the strategies that take place in political engagement. In Délı̨ne, a combination of western political and Aboriginal cultural practice produced a community engagement process that was blurred between legal-traditional histories, and linear-ephemeral processes. Reflecting on community deliberations, a Délı̨ne chief told me "I've been involved over the last twenty-five years when we negotiated the claims and there's always room for time to discuss issues" (interview transcript). This is not only a Délı̨ne leaders' sense of power over the tempo of the process; the use of time was couched in western legal terminology that found commonality with aspects of local cultural meanings of time. In both the GBLMP and Saoyú-Ɂehdacho processes, a common practice for controlling the tempo of engagement was referred to by leaders as "caucusing" where group members "stepped back" to consider, discuss, and coordinate actions. Swartz (1997:99) notes how actors can always find a place for strategizing, and further observes that "actors can always play on time." Délı̨ne group discussions frequently occurred in the course of meetings when Elders or leaders were unsure of a working group process or concept. Younger leaders would often speak first to explain the circumstances or issues being faced. Following this, Elders would provide guidance toward decisions. Where the issue was too significant for a discussion in a limited time period it was addressed outside of bureaucratic planning in evening informal visits between community members. In this sense, a practical disengagement was culturally associated with social relationships outside of a strict clock-time regime (Pickering 2004:87).

Practical disengagement was similarly employed by government agencies for organizational reasons. Rationale for this approach might be as simple as an obvious delay that originates from bureaucratic complications and new policy development to the complex strategies behind maintenance of the balance of control and symbolic power. In the case of the Saoyú-Ɂehdacho Options Paper, a delayed release of the discussion paper would in effect limit formal discussion of the management of Aboriginal cultural landscapes.[10] As a result, the Options Paper was repeatedly delayed by Parks Canada, often with varying reasons given to the Working Group and other concerned government agencies. Given that the development of Aboriginal cultural landscapes were in their infancy

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10. The significance of the management options that Parks Canada was willing to consider would not only signal formal sponsorship but also further form the basis for negotiations and long term relations with Délı̨ne leadership.

and had yet to be operationalized within Parks Canada, it may be that organizational capacity within Parks Canada was unable to accommodate new conservation approaches and potential development issues at the same time, or that it allowed time for policy and management practices to fully develop. However, some working group members suggested it was "tactical institutional paralysis" and noted Parks Canada's inconsistency with other federal departments' actions:

> you know, DIAND put their resources and money out to meet and give contracts and everything else but Parks Canada just really, in my opinion, sat on their haunches and just waited…. (interview transcripts)

Parks Canada has a long history and extensive experiences in working with Aboriginal communities on protected areas (Neufeld 2007). Their delays cannot be explained away as bureaucratic inefficiency or unpreparedness. Rather, the practical disengagement by withholding the Options Paper is an example of what Steven Lukes (2005:111) describes as "the power to decide what is decided." An informal nonagenda was established by the three-year delay of the Options Paper preventing issues from being raised, and possibly decisions from being made, that might negatively affect Parks Canada in future precedents and more importantly the development of community relationships.

   For Parks Canada, practical disengagement likely allowed in-depth policy analysis and review of the impact of Aboriginal cultural landscapes in setting precedents in Canada. Despite the organizational policy benefits to Parks Canada, the transaction costs of practical disengagement were high as Délı̨ne-Parks Canada relations were weakened, leading to a period where the entire project was in question. One Parks Canada working group member, reflecting on the implications of such a strategy after the Options Paper was found to be so weak in substance, noted

> we're really at a community crisis level with them [Délı̨ne] over this whole thing because they've lost when we were supposed to release these terms of reference [Options Paper] of what we were going to do. I said 'you know we pissed away for a whole year here' and when they see this, they're gonna go 'What? What did you hold this for a year for?'… like, you lose, I find the organization loses credibility, and then you end up 'wearing' some of that. (interview transcript)

   In spite of the attempt to avoid political embarrassment, the symbolic power of the Options Paper, which Parks Canada had relied upon for three years, had eroded. It illustrates that, like the forms of resistance described at the beginning of this section, practical disengagement is a risky strategy to undertake with potentially serious repercussions. As an

element of practical understanding, however, it contributes to forcing change in the short term that may be integral toward larger structural and social transformations.

The engagement/disengagement strategies and use of language and narrative illustrate how struggles within the field of environmental governance cannot be ascribed to simply domination or resistance. Rather, the extremely complex nature of the governance field in the NWT,[11] which in the past 25 years has increasingly become established in land claims legislation, means that perceived environmental crises by Aboriginal groups have legitimate grounds for challenge and modification of NRM practices. Swartz describes these as "conditions for change" (1997:113) in which agency is more relational "emerging from the intersection of the dispositions of habitus and the structures of constraint and *opportunities offered by the fields in which it operates*" (1997:114, my emphasis). It is these radically different sociopolitical structures (compared to a colonial pre-land-claim and pre-self-government era) in which the Dene creative adaptation bolstered by a real shift in power relations can respond with a "differential identity" implying a degree of control over one's habitus (Bourdieu as cited in Swartz 1997:114).

CONCLUSION

In this essay I suggest that the dynamics and practicalities between local and outside perceptions and understandings of NRM, or "practical understanding" of NRM is a powerful explanatory tool to not only conceptualize how land and resource governance is changing in the Canadian North, but perhaps more importantly explains how social change might occur. If social transformation can be thought of as phenomena in which new conceptual ways of understanding arise, practical understanding as presented here helps us to better understand the underlying social practices by which changing social relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people occurs.

Analysis of the cases of the Great Bear Lake watershed management plan and protection for the Saoyú-Ɂehdacho Aboriginal cultural landscape contribute to understanding NRM in a new way. With a powerful foundation in the Sahtu land claim agreement and Délįne community self-

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11. Political and environmental governance has increasingly become linked to federal government legislation and Supreme Court decisions around Aboriginal rights in northern Canada. For example, in the region where this study took place, the Mackenzie River Valley of the NWT is well-known for its complexity in environmental and resource management decision making that is legislatively and culturally reliant on a number of considerations, many of which have slowed or delayed oil and gas development in past and recent times (cf. Government of Canada 2008, 2010; Berger 1977).

government agreement, an approach to resource management founded on epistemological and ontological plurality in planning, respect for value systems, cultural institutions, and deeply entrenched ways of being-in-place, offers new ways to understand NRM and environmental governance in rural areas. What I consider "practical understanding" occurs in a social context and has great potential for providing ways to improve NRM practices. In the two cases explored here, opportunities to explore divergent epistemologies and create new NRM arrangements were discovered through narrative, metaphor, and language. The Great Bear Lake and Saoyú-ʔehdacho working groups were shown to operate within a field of power relations, yet members still developed a shared understanding of one another's conceptions of resources and management. A space for exploring and exchanging one another's perceptions and understanding was created within local and governmental power dynamics. The concept of practical understanding focuses on the intersection of beliefs, values, and interests and arises from increased time commitments and meaningful interaction among people early in NRM planning.

Contrary to those who would search for policy panaceas, NRM cannot be so easily bounded and applied with a broad stroke. Rather it should be envisioned as informal and flexible with untold possibilities and permutations. Practical understanding in NRM is an intersubjectively driven but power-laden approach toward novel approaches to environmental governance at local levels. Power relations as strategies, integral to the practical application of shared understanding, were illustrated by the cases of the Great Bear Lake management planning and protection for the Saoyú-ʔehdacho Aboriginal cultural landscape as a reciprocal relationship between engagement and practical disengagement. The significance of a practical understanding approach to exploring issues of environmental governance is that it offers a cultural framework with which to explore institutional hybridity. Such a framework requires an examination of the ways in which we perceive, conceive, and actively apply local culture and power relations in resource management planning that is dominated by the increasingly globalized nature of natural resources.

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