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## **Intersubjectivity and Bourdieusian approaches to 'identity'**

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### **Abstract**

Bourdieu's emphasis on the socialised subjectivity of habitus is increasingly used in discussions of 'identity' to indicate the limits to reflexivity, situating 'identity' in tacit practice. In emphasising the dispositional nature of 'identity', analysts also acknowledge more explicitly reflexive and self-consciously mobilised aspects, however Bourdieu's restrictive treatment of reflexivity makes it difficult to theorise the relations between these different aspects. The 'problem of reflexivity' is more properly a question of the intersubjective nature of practice, and the different aspects of 'identity' are better theorised as features of situated intersubjectivity. With practice the negotiated outcome of intersubjective coordination, then 'calls to order from the group', the routine monitoring of conduct, agents' reflexive accounts of their activity, and the mobilisation of agents into collectivities can be explored as features of the collective accomplishment of practices, by networks of variously disposed agents, whose actions, whilst dispositional, must nonetheless be accounted for and aligned.

Keywords: identity, habitus, reflexivity, socialised subjectivity, intersubjectivity, disposition

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## Introduction

The contemporary focus on questions of 'identity' is strongly related to the 'cultural turn' in social analysis, and raises issues of representation, reflexivity and symbolic construction which are core to the domain of cultural sociology. However 'identity' itself is nebulous and subject to diverse usage. And if, as Tilly says, 'identity' is a 'blurred but indispensable' concept which defines:

'an actor's experience of a category, tie, role, network, group or organization, coupled with a public representation of that experience; [which] often takes the form of a shared story, a narrative' (1996:7)

it is striking how often analysts have focussed on one at the expense of the other. The 'cultural turn' eclipsed an older, 'positional' view of identity (which argued that social location *determines* subjective identity) in favour of more 'discursive' treatments, focussing on representations and categorisations considered relatively independent of social position. Alternatively, arguments of increasing reflexivity in social life see individuals as active agents, shaping their destinies, with their identities 'disembedded' from social constraints. Those who still see social position as a decisive aspect of experience, for example in class analysis, often downplay self-representation, with structural factors seen to operate 'behind the backs' of the people involved (Scott, 2001:141). For many, this sundering of the analysis of social location from the analysis of subjectivity and symbolic representation is troubling; another manifestation of the structure/agency split in social analysis. But with the history of social analysis littered by unsuccessful attempts to bridge the divide, the question is how they might be reconciled (Holmwood and Stewart, 1991).

Bourdieu's theory of practice claims to transcend these debilitating dualisms and, using his framework, a number of analysts have tried to reforge the links between social location and 'identity'. Using the concept of habitus, a 'socialised subjectivity' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:126), they rethink 'identity' in *dispositional terms*, located within the pre-reflective, embodied nature of practical activity. The theory of practice identifies limited reflexivity in social life, arguing that agents operate through an embodied 'sense' of how to behave, rather than through conscious calculation. This aspect of Bourdieu's account is seized upon by theorists who emphasise the involuntary and entrenched elements of 'identity', situated in practical and pre-reflective routines, in 'social instincts' and a 'feel for the game'. Dispositional accounts of 'identity' are thus used to rein in the voluntarism of accounts which focus on discursive reconstructions of 'identity' or on 'identity' as a product of reflexive projects of the self, accounts which - it is argued - present 'identity' in unsituated, over-rationalised, and unduly reflexive terms. For critics, such accounts overstate 'the emancipatory expressive possibilities thrown up in late capitalism' (McNay 1999:98) and ignore the restrictions on 'identity' (re)constructions which derive from the bodily incorporation of social location.

Bourdieu's agents, as 'virtuosos' of practice, draw creatively upon a 'sense' of how to behave which derives not from 'conscious, constant rules, but practical schemes' (1990a: 12), 'inculcated in the earliest years of life and constantly reinforced by calls to order from the group' (1977: 15). Because 'the essential part of one's experience of the social world and of the labour of construction it implies takes place in practice, without reaching the level of explicit representation and verbal expression' (1991:235) social practice is generated by 'deeply buried corporeal dispositions, outside the channels of consciousness and calculation' (1998:54-55).

But if 'identity' is shaped by dispositional practice, it too is 'beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit' (1977: 94).

However, in emphasising the dispositional nature of 'identity', analysts also acknowledge more explicitly reflexive and self-consciously mobilised aspects. How do such activities relate to dispositional processes? Critics argue that Bourdieu's restrictive treatment of reflexivity is reductive, making it difficult to theorise the relation between reflexive, dispositional and mobilised aspects of 'identity'. Bourdieusian approaches to 'identity' raise questions about the *connection* between different aspects of 'identity', and feed into concerns about whether the concept of habitus deals adequately with the extent and nature of reflexivity in social life (Adkins, 2004; Sweetman, 2003; Crossley, 2001a). In what follows, I argue that the 'problem of reflexivity' identified in accounts of dispositional practice is better explored as a question of the intersubjective nature of practice, and that the different aspects of 'identity' can be related to the features of situated intersubjectivity.

Questions of intersubjectivity are necessarily phenomenological questions. However, there are many routes from phenomenology into social analysis (Ferguson, 2006). Bourdieu, in his attempt to rethink the subject-object dualisms of social analysis, draws upon Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of the pre-reflective body-subject (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Bourdieu's adaptation *situates* the body-subject, locating the pre-reflective embodied habits of agents more firmly within a 'generative-structuralist' account which stresses the concrete intersections of habitus, practice and field. But this account of 'socialised subjectivity' focuses more on how 'identity' emerges from the interrelations between habitus and field, rather than from the intersubjective relationship *between agents*. I argue here that some of the difficulties identified in Bourdieusian inspired accounts of 'identity' relate to this particular version of 'socialised subjectivity': a version which underplays important aspects of the differentiated nature of intersubjectivity, as a context-specific, shared, but negotiated, social lifeworld. Drawing upon versions of phenomenology more influenced by ethnomethodology (King, 2000; Barnes, 2000) I argue that a greater emphasis on the intersubjective negotiation and coordination of practices (and on the concrete interpersonal networks of interdependency, obligation and constraint through which intersubjective negotiation and accountability flow) can help locate and connect the different aspects of 'identity', as they have emerged in recent debates.

## Dispositional 'identity'

Analysts arguing that social location remains an important constraint on 'identity' formation have stressed the tacitly practical nature of identities, with Bourdieu's emphasis on the dispositional adapted to indicate the limits to reflexive 'identity' (re)construction and to emphasise the intractable, involuntary and pre-reflective aspects of 'identity', embedded in embodied and habitual social practices. In emphasising the restrictions arising from the bodily incorporation of social location, Bourdieu's account corrects 'the enormous significance accorded to voluntarism and choice in both the modernist and the postmodernist visions of contemporary life' (Campbell 1996:165). Because 'habitus suggests a layer of embodied experience that is not immediately amenable to self-fashioning' (McNay 1999:102), the concept helps rebut theories of reflexive transformation and provides a:

'counter to over-rationalised views of behaviour and...to symbolic interactionism and to more recent idealist views of dispositions as mere constructions of discourse ('subjectivism without a subject'), having only an arbitrary relation to the material world' (Sayer, 1999:406).

So, for example, Bourdieu's framework is employed to emphasise gender as 'a lived social relation in contrast to Butlerian accounts where gender is understood primarily as location within discursive structures' (McNay 2004:180). Arguing that 'identity' cannot be construed as 'a process of symbolic identification without considering its mediation in embodied practice' (1999:98) McNay sees limits to the reformulation of gender identities, because of 'deep-seated, often unconscious investments in conventional images of masculinity and femininity which cannot easily be reshaped' (1999:102). Emphasising the 'involuntary' and 'entrenched' elements of 'identity', McNay sees shifts in gender identities as rooted in practical social relations rather than in processes of symbolic destabilization and insists that reflexivity 'arises unevenly from embeddedness within differing sets of power relations' (1999: 98,110). Whilst acknowledging that conventional notions of femininity have been challenged, McNay suggests this arises not from 'a greater array of alternative images of femininity but from tensions inherent in the concrete negotiation of increasingly conflictual female roles' (1999:110, 111). Similarly, Bourdieu's account is used to address the *absence* of reflexive consciousness in class processes by reformulating class 'identities' in a more dispositional direction – with 'class' now a tacit form of 'identity'. The concept of habitus helps tackle the class paradox, that 'class' shapes people's lives but does not translate into consciously 'claimed' cultural identities, by allowing 'culturalist' class theorists to argue that class remains a significant social 'identity', but an 'identity' *implicit* in social relations rather than in explicit self-identifications or collective mobilisations. Social position, via habitus, constrains aspirations and tastes and so remains an important element shaping social 'identity', albeit an 'identity' embedded in (differentiated) practice (Savage 2000; Reay, 1998; Skeggs, 1997). Bourdieu's arguments 'lead not to an emphasis on class as heroic collective agency, but towards class as implicit, as encoded in people's sense of self-worth and in their attitudes to and awareness of others - on how they carry themselves as individuals' (Savage, 2000:107).

Similar arguments occur in discussions of racialised 'identity', with 'whiteness' presented as a tacit 'identity', embedded in practices and *a priori* assumptions. As Reay argues, 'despite whiteness remaining an unspoken taken-for-granted for white women, it powerfully influences actions and attitudes' (1998:265). A Bourdieusian emphasis on 'tacit, taken-for-granted background knowledge, embodied in persons and embedded in institutionalised routines and practices' is also used to analyse national and ethnic identities (Brubaker, 2004:17). Billig argues that accounts of national identities have focused on collective mobilisations and 'dangerous and powerful passions', overlooking 'routine and familiar' forms of 'banal nationalism' (1995:8) located in pre-reflective routines. Situated in the 'embodied habits of social life', nationalism exists not just in the 'flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion' but in 'the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building', in routines of life which 'constantly remind, or "flag", nationhood' but as 'such a familiar part of the social environment, that they operate mindlessly, rather than mindfully' (1995:60, 38).

Bourdieu's account is drawn upon by analysts emphasising the practical, pre-reflective, aspects of 'identity'. But whilst arguing for the dispositional as a key aspect of 'identity', such accounts acknowledge that it does not exhaust all the possibilities. McNay argues that agents may inhabit gender positions in an ironic or detached fashion (1999:107), indicating more reflexive aspects to gender 'identity'. Similarly, the debates on class and ethnic/national identities refer not only to (i) dispositional 'identities' expressed through implicit modes of 'being', but also to (ii) explicit 'identities', expressed through reflexive identifications, and (iii) 'group' identities, expressed through collectivised behaviour and mobilisations. Billig refers to the 'flag hanging unnoticed from the public building' to illustrate the tacit nature of national identities, but also recognises that such flags can be found being fervently waved in street demonstrations, and in the formation of new nations. Indeed, Bourdieu's dispositional notion of 'identity' is used comparatively rarely in accounts of racial or national identities, areas which exhibit flourishing reflexive and mobilised forms of 'identity'.

Whilst emphasising *dispositional* identities, analysts also acknowledge more explicitly reflexive and self-consciously mobilised 'identities'; recognising that people do reflect strategically on their own 'identity' and that of others, and use such self-representations to coalesce 'groups' and to mobilise collective activities. Such accounts place a greater significance on these other aspects of 'identity' than Bourdieu, who restricted his focus to the dispositional. But by allowing a greater role to the reflexive a question occurs: what is the connection between these different aspects of 'identity'? Identification and categorisation entail 'at least some degree of explicit discursive articulation' and are 'intrinsic to social life' since 'one may be called upon to identify oneself - to characterize oneself, to locate oneself vis-a-vis known others, to situate oneself in a narrative, to place oneself in a category - in any number of different contexts' (Brubaker, 2004:45, 39). But, as Brubaker notes, the question remains of how reflexive identifications and collective behaviour *relate* to more implicit, dispositional processes.

## Relating different aspects of 'identity'

How do tacitly dispositional 'identities' relate to more reflexive or mobilised 'identities'? Bourdieu himself provides a deliberately restrictive framework for understanding the relations between the dispositional and the reflexive. He indicates that reflexive activities become dispositional through sedimented practice, an 'embodied history, internalized as a second nature and forgotten as history' (1990:56), in which the stable reproduction of practices institutionalises them as 'second nature'. This presents the dispositional as the enduring form of more fleeting reflexive activities: a submerged strata which, under particular circumstances, becomes more reflexive or mobilised. But how, and why, do dispositional 'identities' transform into conscious calculation, representation and struggle? Bourdieu sees reflexivity emerging from disruptions to the habitus. There is considerable force to this idea, which sees individuals becoming reflexively aware of, for example, their nationality, when travelling abroad, or of their working 'classness', when negotiating middle-class environments. But problems arise when we argue that reflexive or collectivised forms of 'identity' *only* emerge from the disruption of dispositional forms.

Firstly, even if we concede that the major part of 'identity' is located in implicit modes of being, and that dispositional forms of identity underpin reflexive and mobilised forms, we are left with the question of just how, and why, dispositional 'identities' convert into conscious calculation, representation and struggle? Can we assume that reflexive representation and collective mobilisation take their force from underlying dispositional principles? Take Bourdieu's model of collective mobilisation, which focuses on how political activists symbolically generate 'groupness'. In his account it is shared habitus that facilitates galvanisation, as agents similarly located in social space are 'probable' classes, (1991:237), more likely to see, and be seen, as 'the same' (1990b:117-8). Symbolic work is required to galvanise those with shared dispositions into 'groups', however, the 'successful prophet':

'addresses a message which the objective conditions determining the material and symbolic interests of those groups have predisposed them to attend to and take in' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1996:25-6).

Yet in suggesting that reflexive identities draw their force from underlying dispositional subjectivities, Bourdieu raises the question of why *certain elements* of dispositional identities become mobilised, reflexive and explicit whilst others do not, with Bourdieu conceding that 'mental structures do not simply reflect social structures' (1999:513). Most analysts acknowledge that the dispositional identities which they frame in a particular fashion (as 'classed', for example) also contain other aspects (are also 'gendered', 'raced' and so on). Why do *participants* frame their broader dispositional practice in particular ways? Class relations have increasingly been characterised by analysts as an implicit 'identity', embedded within differentiated social

relations, whilst racial and ethnic identities have generally been seen as reflexive identities, explicit and symbolic. However, class too has its 'symbolically' enacted moments, just as racialised identities are sometimes unspoken and implicit. And the *same people* who enact explicitly racialised identities also presumably have tacitly classed, gendered, sexualised etc. social practices. Why do certain aspects of habituated practice, and not others, become reflexively drawn upon under given circumstances? As Brubaker notes (2004), whilst ethnic divisions may be part of the situated subjectivities that arise from everyday practices, they are not always the divisions which people reflexively draw upon or organise around, even in the face of 'ethnic entrepreneurs'. Thus, when thinking about race/ethnicity/nationality as *dispositional* forms of 'identity' it is also important to specify:

'how - and when - people identify themselves, perceive others, experience the world and interpret their predicaments in racial, ethnic or national rather than other terms' (Brubaker, 2004:18).

Of course, such emphases will relate to broader public discourses current at particular times and places, and to specific contexts and agendas, but if we want to examine the connections between dispositional and reflexive identities, we must question the notion that the reflexive is the dispositional made manifest.

As Taylor argues:

'To situate our understanding in practices is to see it as implicit in our activity, and hence as going well beyond what we manage to frame representations of...[since] much of our intelligent action in the world, sensitive as it usually is to our situation and goals, is carried on unformulated. It flows from an understanding which is largely inarticulate. This understanding is more fundamental in two ways: first, it is always there, whereas sometimes we frame representations and sometimes we do not, and, second, the representations we do make are only comprehensible against the background provided by this inarticulate understanding...Rather than representations being the primary locus of understanding, they are...islands in the sea of our unformulated practical grasp on the world.' (Taylor, 1998:34)

But if representations really are 'islands' in 'the sea of our unformulated practical grasp on the world', then reflexive representations are 'slices' into a more complexly experienced practice, which indicates considerable slippage in the relationship between the two. Bourdieu recognises:

'the movement from the implicit to the explicit is in no way automatic, the same experience of the social being recognizable in very different expressions' (1991: 237)

and acknowledges gendered and racialised aspects of the habitus (1991:232-3). Yet he focuses on the classed nature of dispositional practice, saying little about why specific reflexive representations or collective mobilisations should take a 'classed' (rather than a 'raced', or 'gendered' etc.) form. But if we acknowledge that relations in social space are not just classed, but raced, ethnicised, gendered, and so on, the relation between the points occupied within space and the points of view on that space (1991:242) becomes very

complex.

Bourdieu's framework is adopted by theorists of 'identity' because it offers the possibility of reining in discursive 'identity' constructions and reflexive 'identity' 'projects of the self' within the limits of habituated, tacit practice. However, the more we think about the *relations* between different aspects of 'identity', the more issues of framing and representation seem to re-open the possibility of multiple reflexive interpretations of the dispositional. Whilst we might agree with Bourdieu that reflexive identifications and mobilisations must *chime* with the substance of people's dispositional practice to be socially meaningful, this does not help us to address the ways in which dispositional practice can be diversely interpreted. There is immense value in Bourdieu's insistence on relating 'the objective relations of material and symbolic power' to the 'practical schemes (implicit, confused and more or less contradictory) through which agents classify' (1991:227), but we cannot analyse the dispositional and the reflexive as simply flip sides of the 'identity' coin. We can explore their *connection*, by viewing reflexive identifications as a reflection *on*, not a reflection *of*, dispositional practice, but to do so we have to reconsider the collective nature of dispositional practice, and subjectivity.

### **The 'problem of reflexivity'**

Bourdieu's harsher critics frequently identify a 'problem of reflexivity' in his framework, arguing that he exaggerates the fit between habitus and field, so that his agents lack the capacity to develop any critical distance from their situation, with reflexivity an adjunct of disposition. For such critics, Bourdieu's framework is reductive, too quick to reduce agents' ideas to the content of their social location; 'too practical by half' with his agents 'in a state of continuous adaptation to - not communication with - their external environments' (Alexander, 1995:135-6). It is suggested that 'because for Bourdieu practical mimeticism works almost always to produce a conformity or congruence between the field and the habitus, the question of ambivalence at the core of practical mimeticism - and, hence, also in the very *formation* of the subject - is left unaddressed' (Butler, 1999:118). So Bourdieu is 'unable to adequately equip practical agents with reflective and critical abilities which would make it possible to describe how they might initiate...transformative processes, or to understand how they might succeed in enlisting the cooperation of other agents in transforming social identities and conditions' (Bohman, 1998:143). From this perspective, Bourdieu's overwhelming emphasis on the dispositional nature of subjectivity makes it difficult, if not impossible, to adequately explain more reflexive or mobilised aspects of 'identity'. The claim is that Bourdieu's framing of 'identity' in dispositional terms gives short shrift to other key aspects of subjectivity: such as the ambiguities or dissonances people often experience in the performance of social roles; the narratives they construct in processes of reflection and self- and other- identification; and the use of such narratives in the mobilisation of groups of agents. For such



critics, Bourdieu's account reduces these other aspects of subjectivity to the ink in the etched grooves of disposition, rubber-stamped in the routines of practice.

Bourdieu does limit the role of reflexivity in his framework, rejecting the 'scholastic fallacy' of agentic models of social life (1998:133). He is aware that people reflect upon their practice, construct narratives, and plan; it is the *significance* of these activities in shaping practice that he questions. Reflexivity emerges under restricted circumstances and:

'does not involve reflection *of* the subject *on* the subject...It entails, rather, the systematic exploration of the "unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought"' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:40).

But 'reflexive' fields which institutionalise collective self-analysis (like art or the sciences) are limited in scope, viewing social issues as abstract ideas rather than practical problems (Schirato and Webb, 2003). Reflexivity also emerges from moments of 'crisis', from mismatches between habitus and field which reveal the taken-for-granted assumptions of the 'game' (1977:169); but such crisis-driven 'calculation' tends 'to carry out at a conscious level the operations that habitus carries out in its own way' reflecting the underlying pre-reflective mode of behaviour (1992:131). Moreover, 'consciousness and reflexivity are both cause and symptom of the failure of immediate adaptation to the situation' (1990b: 11); so the normal adaptation of habitus to field makes reflexivity the *exception* to more general processes of pre-reflective practice. Habitus is 'one principle of production of practices amongst others' but 'more frequently in play than any other' (1990b:108). By siting reflexivity in habitus/field disjunctures, Bourdieu makes reflexivity simultaneously the exception to, and reflection of, underlying normal dispositional practice. This deliberately restrictive model of reflexivity is challenged by critics who variously argue that there is insufficient reflexivity in Bourdieu's model; challenge Bourdieu's 'crisis' model reflexivity; and attack Bourdieu's treatment of reflexivity as an adjunct of habitus. The conventional critical concern is that there is more reflexivity in everyday life than Bourdieu acknowledges.

Some attempt to circumvent this problem by arguing that disruptions between habitus and field - and thus reflexivity - occur more often than Bourdieu suggests. McNay, for example, argues that gender reflexivity emerges from frequent mismatches between gender habitus and field, 'resulting in ambiguities and dissonances...in the way that men and women occupy masculine and feminine positions' (1999: 107). Gender reflexivity emerges because women must negotiate distinct fields, opening their tacit presuppositions up to question. But whilst this makes (gender) reflexivity more common, it retains the 'crisis' model of reflexivity as critical realisation of underlying practice. This leads to a further problem identified with Bourdieu's account - in situating reflexivity in mismatches between habitus and field, the 'crisis' model presents reflexivity as a critical transformatory force. But reflexivity may also be bound into habitual action, reinforcing habit and acting to perpetuate norms. As Adkins argues, gender reflexivity should not be confused

with a 'liberal freedom to question and critically deconstruct the rules and norms which previously governed gender' (2004:191), and may also act in a conservative, reproductive manner. Indeed, a range of authors have generated 'hybrid' accounts of 'reflexivity' and the habitus (Adam, 2006), by suggesting that 'everyday' or 'agentic' forms of reflection are bound up in habitual practice.

These sympathetic commentators concede that Bourdieu's framework curtails the 'life of the mind', underestimating the degree to which agents can stand back from their milieu, reflect critically on their habitus, and act to transform it (Sayer, 2004:23), and attempt to insert more 'everyday reflexivity' into Bourdieu's account. This challenges the sharp divide between reflection and habit, because if reflexivity emerges routinely from habit, when 'agents take up a reflective or reflexive posture they do not thereby cease to be creatures of habit' (Crossley, 2001a:159). Some identify 'routinised' forms of reflexivity, emerging from specific contexts or types of habitual practice (Featherstone, 1991; Lash, 1994; Calhoun, 1993). Others suggest that in late modernity the 'pre-reflexive state of certain contemporary individuals is to be definedly ill-at-ease', with an 'instinctive' self-consciousness arising from 'a more or less permanent disruption of social position' so 'reflexivity ceases to reflect a temporary lack of fit between habitus and field but itself becomes habitual...incorporated into the habitus in the form of the flexible or reflexive habitus' (Sweetman, 2003: 546, 541). Still others see reflexivity as a *generic* capacity of agents engaged in habitual practice. So 'agentic reflection', a less intense form of reflection than Bourdieu's critical 'meta-consciousness', emerges from habitual routines, as a way of 'putting daily conduct into discourse' (Noble and Watkins, 2003:531). Or the reflective attitude derives from our relationships with others, as an internalisation of the dialogical process (Crossley, 1995:47). The capacity for reflexive thought emerges from the 'incorporation of the role or perspective of the other within our own habitus', so 'habits fit into an ongoing dialogue between social agents and their world' (Crossley, 2001a:112, 116).

In these accounts the term 'reflexivity' covers a range of meanings, from the routine monitoring of conduct; to the need for agents to provide accounts of their actions to themselves, and others; to more 'self-conscious' habitual activity generated by particular types or contexts of interaction. Taken together, these contributions suggest that the problematic role of 'reflexivity' in Bourdieu's sociology is perhaps better framed as a question of the *intersubjective* nature of practice. In what follows, I argue that if practice is framed as intersubjective, then the routine monitoring of conduct, agents' accounts of their activity, and the mobilisation of groups of agents into collectivities, can all be seen as part of the way in which practices necessarily extend beyond agent's predispositions, as the *collective accomplishment* of networks of variously disposed agents, whose actions must be accounted for, negotiated and aligned. And if practices extend beyond the agent's dispositions, then so too does 'identity', with 'socialised subjectivity' a situated intersubjectivity.

### **Situated intersubjectivity**

If routinised social practices are a core component of social 'identity', then we must address not just the dispositional underpinnings of practice, but also the manner in which practices are collective, intersubjective, accomplishments. In Bourdieu's framework, common practice results from shared dispositions, between individuals with the same 'sense' of how to behave as a consequence of internalising shared conditions in the same fashion. Group habitus is the 'conductorless orchestration' which 'enables practices to be objectively harmonised without any calculation...and mutually adjusted in the absence of any direct interaction or...explicit coordination' (1990a: 58-9). However it is one thing to deny that practice is primarily the product of conscious coordination, quite another to argue that practice contains *no* conscious coordination, and Bourdieu's 'emphasis on the non-conscious grounding of social action, leaves little room for giving validity to the world as it is experienced by actors who must negotiate their day-to-day interactions with their social physical surroundings' (Throop and Murphy, 2002: 199).

To operate within the 'rules of the game' is not just a question of acting upon embedded social instinct, nor of the interface of that instinct with objective structural relations; it also depends upon the active alignment 'coordination and standardisation of practical actions' by networks of 'interdependent social agents, who profoundly affect each other as they interact' (Barnes, 2000: 66, 64). Barnes' account draws upon a more ethnomethodological version of phenomenology, which places a greater emphasis on practices as collective accomplishments, the result of intersubjective negotiation and coordination between agents. For as Barnes argues, even where individuals routinely engage in the same practices, shared dispositions are not enough to explain such routines, since negotiation and interpretation are required in the coordination of *any* activity.

'The successful execution of routine social practices always involves the continual overriding of routine practices (habits, skills) at the individual level. Think of an orchestra playing a familiar work or a military unit engaged in a march-past. Any description of these activities as so many agents each following the internal guidance of habit or rule would merely describe a fiasco. Individual habituated competence is of course necessary in these contexts, but so too is constant active intervention to tailor individual performances to what other participants are doing, always bearing in mind the goal of the overall collective performance.' (Barnes, 2000:55-56)

Because 'social practices are neither unitary objects nor individual habits but collective accomplishments', agents must take account of, and act in accord with, the expectations of the people that they encounter in given social situations (ibid: 63, 59). Much of this occurs tacitly, but not exclusively, and shared dispositions alone cannot account for joint practice. As Crossley notes, 'the notion of the habitus points to *the importance of individual and group lifeworld* in shaping action' (2002: 172,173, original emphasis), but the lifeworld is an 'interworld', one often 'structured through cross-purposes' (1995:78). Mutual understanding, much less mutual purpose or coordination of practice, is not guaranteed by a shared habitus, because even a 'social instinct' of how to behave must be interpreted and operationalised in each given circumstance, and because the coordination of habitus depends upon group dynamics.

A number of commentators suggest Bourdieu's framework overlaps more with phenomenological approaches than he acknowledges (Endress, 2005; Throop and Murphy, 2002). Certainly, it can be argued that the theory of practice already contains an intersubjective account of behaviour, since dispositions are 'constantly reinforced by calls to order from the group' (Bourdieu, 1977: 14-15). If practice is framed as intersubjective, collectively accomplished and negotiated within the context of wider networks of individuals, as 'virtuosic and indeterminate interactions between mutually susceptible and constraining individuals' (King, 2000:422), then:

'individuals act according to a sense of practice which is established and judged by the group. The final determination of correct action is not whether one rigorously followed an *a priori* rule but rather whether one's actions are interpreted as appropriate and proper by other individuals' (King, 2000: 419, 420).

On this reading of Bourdieu, 'the "sense of the game" refers ultimately to a sense of one's relations with other individuals and what those individuals will regard as tolerable, given certain broadly shared but not definitive understandings' (King, 2000:419). However, as King notes, there is a tension in Bourdieu, between an objectivist and an 'interactional, intersubjective' reading of social life. The latter slips from view:

'effaced by a solipsistic theory where the lone individual is now attached to an objective social structure. There are no "calls to order by the group" nor any subtle consideration of the reactions to others when Bourdieu discusses the habitus, nor does there need to be, for the habitus ensures that the individual will inevitably act according to the logic of the situation. The origin of individuals' actions lies not in their interaction with other individuals but in the objective structures which confront them' (King, 2000:423).

Bourdieu's tendency to emphasise the correspondence between social structures and mental structures presents practice as the outcome of the relations between habitus and objective conditions, rather than the outcome of negotiated relations between variously disposed individuals. As a result, Bourdieu tends to overstate the uniformity of group dispositions in generating joint practice, and to understate the adjustments, constraints, and calls to account, that all joint practice necessitates.

This tendency to underplay the intersubjective aspects of practice, as concrete negotiations between agents, is related to Bourdieu's adaptation of phenomenology. As earlier indicated, Bourdieu's account of 'socialised subjectivity' draws on Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology. But whilst Merleau-Ponty's account is centrally concerned with questions of (intercorporeal) intersubjectivity, these questions are considered in a relatively abstract fashion (Inglis and Howson, 2001). Although Merleau-Ponty has a theory of social structure, it is relatively poorly developed (Crossley, 1996, 2001b) and his account of intersubjectivity has no detailed consideration of the consequences of social context for the shared social lifeworld or for practice. As

Crossley argues, Merleau-Ponty is ‘insufficiently aware of the effect of different interaction contexts upon interaction’, moving straight from an ‘abstract discussion of face-to-face encounters to a concrete account of historical social systems without any consideration of the field of social interaction and the world of culture which binds these extremes’ (1996: 76). In attempting to provide a more ‘structural’ adaptation of phenomenology, Bourdieu ‘grounds’ Merleau-Ponty’s pre-reflective body-subject within a generative-structuralist account (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:20). This provides a structural context for the pre-reflective body-subject, but one primarily theorised in terms of sedimented dispositional practice, and the intersections of habitus and field. As a consequence, the intersubjective dimensions of such practice, emerging though the concrete interactions of agents with other agents, is much more weakly acknowledged.

However, it is important to retain a sense that the encounter between habitus and field is also an encounter between agents, and that embodied dispositions to act are ‘constantly reinforced by calls to order from the group’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 14-15) – that is, to retain a more central place for intersubjectivity. And framing the ‘socialised subjectivity’ of the habitus as a situated intersubjectivity means exploring the *links* between dispositions, the monitoring and coordination of conduct, agent’s reflexive accounts of their activity, and the mobilisation of groups of agents into collectivities, as *component* features of the collective accomplishment of practices. This has consequences for how we think of ‘identity’ and its disparate and discrete elements. If practice is seen as the negotiated outcome of intersubjective coordination, then it must also be explored as the collective accomplishment of networks of variously disposed agents, whose actions, whilst dispositional, must nonetheless be accounted for and aligned, forcing us to trace the connections between embodied dispositions, routine self (and other) monitoring, reflexive accounts and accountability, and collective obligations and influence.

### **Intersubjectivity, the interaction order, and ‘identity’**

Bourdieu’s account of the ‘socialised subjectivity’ of habitus has been criticised for downplaying other more ambiguous, detached and reflective aspects of subjectivity. But this is not so much a problem of reflexivity, but rather a difficulty that emerges because Bourdieu fails to fully address the intersubjective and collective accomplishment of practices. By bracketing out the network of mutually accountable and susceptible individuals within which practice occurs, Bourdieu presents practice as the outcome of the relation between the agent’s habitus and objective conditions, rather than the outcome of the (negotiated) relationships between variously disposed agents. In doing so, he overstates the homogeneity of the habitus as the basis of the coordination of practices, and downplays the routine maintenance and accountability necessary in the accomplishment of (shared) practices. Bourdieu, in short, overstates the smooth operation of the habitus as a basis of joint practice, at the expense of exploring the intersubjective interpretation and operationalisation of dispositions in processes of mutual adjustment and constraint. However, by framing practice as intersubjective,

questions of ambiguity or detachment in the performance of subject roles, the generation of reflective accounts, and the mutual obligation and influence that agents bring to bear upon each other can all be explored as integrated features of the collective accomplishment of practices.

Firstly, a stress on the collective and intersubjective nature of practice suggests greater slippage between disposition and collective practice, with dispositions to act always oriented, and adjusted, in relation to the ‘calls to order from the group’ of those engaged in joint practice. Because it is anchored intersubjectively, practice is experienced not just in terms of dispositions to act but also as a relation to the expectations and influence of concrete networks of others. This potential indeterminacy between dispositions and collective practice creates the space for ambivalence or irony in relation to the constraints of collective practice; not simply in the interface between habitus and field when dissonant, but as a general feature of practice. Our engagement with practices as collectively held means that individuals often feel it is impossible to swim against the tide, a situation which may generate ambivalent, resigned or even cynical stances to the enactment of practices. We routinely take part in practices which are both habitually reproduced, and widely experienced as troubling, even absurd, but which are seen as resistant to change because of the collective nature of such practices. But the very interdependence, mutual influence, and accountability which constrain individual actions, also *enable* joint practice, collective pursuits, and group mobilisation. One key question is how people perceive and construct the constraints they experience and, in particular, how the constraints of collective practice come to be seen as amenable (or not) to forms of social intervention. It is certainly the case that many aspects of social life:

‘are, generally, seen to lie beyond the competence of any identifiable social group or individual to change. They are, for most people, facts of existence determined by an impersonal social system’ (Stewart and Blackburn, 1975:481-2).

But such constructions can be – and are – challenged. People reframe their accounts of their practice, and through networks of influence and obligation are able to reconstruct their situation in ways that open it up to intervention, and mobilisation. This is no doubt influenced by public discourses, past experience and so on; but it also crucially bound up with the intersubjective nature of practice, in which mutual accounting and accountability emerge through concrete networks of interaction, in which a continual negotiation over the nature of practice is a constituent feature of everyday routines.

Secondly, agents continually provide each other with a commentary on what they are doing, and in generating such accounts routinely expect, and provide, *accountability* to each other, as a basis of coordinating understandings and practice, and of sustaining ‘a shared sense of what they are likely to do in the future and hold each other to account for the mutually recognised outcomes of what they have done in the past’ (Barnes, 2000:74). This calling to account is:

‘part and parcel of the activity that secures and maintains co-ordination...it is never a matter merely of ‘finding’ existing knowledge or shared understandings or meanings. The co-ordination implied by these terms has to arise out of interaction itself: it has to be collectively accomplished’ (ibid: 66-7).

‘Calls to account’ are a *constitutive* feature anchoring joint practice; a means of establishing practices as, in fact, shared and ‘the same’. Reflections upon practice are also practices in themselves, for as forms of accounting for action they are also the basis for the accountability of actions. Of course they are partly generated by dispositional *a priori*, but – like all practice – are not solely constituted by them. The operation of ‘calls to order from the group’, in which the members of shared practice align their actions by reference to shared ways of living, does not necessarily operate through calls to *enforce* rules or norms of conduct, but rather through the *accountability* that agents demand from each other: through the ability to provide plausible and intelligible narratives of what they are doing, which make reference to shared ways of living and the expectations they encounter in given situations (Barnes, 2000). The indeterminate creative ‘virtuosity’ of agents rests in their orientation to the collective nature of practices, not as rule conformity, but in their ability to intersubjectively negotiate and account for practices. In routinely providing such accounts as a feature of joint practice, agents locate and provide plausible justifications of their activities – to themselves and others. Such accountings are *claims*, selective interpretations and justifications, always drawing on wider discourses. But their intelligibility and reasonability rests in their continuing reference back to shared practices, not least because such accounts are part of how we constitute practices as what they are and, through calls to order, establish what is acceptable and what ‘one can get away with’. With such accounts a core component of the intersubjective negotiation of practices, the importance of reconnecting Tilly’s two components of ‘identity’ - relating the ‘experience of a category, tie, role, network, group or organization’ to the ‘public representation of that experience; [which] often takes the form of a shared story, a narrative’ (1996:7) - becomes clearer.

Thirdly, an intersubjective concept of habitus also means that the ‘repertoire of permitted actions is circumscribed by a particular cultural horizon’ (King, 2000:420), raising questions about the nature of that ‘cultural horizon’. The ‘calls to order by the group’, and the intersubjective ‘sense’ of what is acceptable, or what one can get away with, will depend upon the nature of the ‘groups’, or social networks, within which practices occur. So viewing the coordination of routines - and so practice - as the result of negotiated intersubjective agreement, rather than the ‘identity’ of individual dispositions, also entails exploring the patterned nature of intersubjectivity as a concrete interactional order. Again, this is something that Bourdieu tends to downplay, since he sees ‘calls to order’ as arising from ‘the aggregate of the individuals endowed with the same dispositions’ (1977:15). But a ‘community’ of shared dispositions cannot be assumed, so the degree of network heterogeneity that surrounds agents will affect the manner in which any ‘sense’ of how to behave must be negotiated and operationalised. Bourdieu’s account of the inculcation of dispositions tends to ‘capitalize too strongly on the ideas that these processes are general and homogeneous in nature’ (Lahire, 2003:329). Lahire notes that social agents have a ‘broad array of dispositions, each of which owes its availability, composition, and force to the socialization process in which it was acquired...[and] the intensity

with which dispositions affect behaviour depends on the specific context in which social agents interact with one another' (ibid.). The implication is that any account of the dispositional aspects of 'identity' must also 'focus on the plurality of dispositions and on the variety of situations in which they manifest themselves' (ibid).

Much of Bourdieu's sociology is premised on the assumption that people tend to associate with others much like themselves, for reasons of structural proximity and because their embodied predispositions make them seek out the familiar and similar. Bourdieu argues the habitus avoids interruptions, crises or challenges which might call 'into question its accumulated information....providing itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible, that is, a relatively constant universe of situations tending to reinforce its dispositions' (1990a:61). By emphasising early socialisation in shaping the habitus, Bourdieu ignores firstly, the degree of potential heterogeneity of any given milieu which may shape the lifeworld; and, secondly, the way agents modify and reconstruct their dispositions throughout their lives, as they move through different social contexts and contacts. But to seriously address the empirical characteristics of the networks that underpin habitus is also to open up a whole series of questions about variations in social milieux, and thus variations within the habitus.

Bourdieu's network assumptions (that the habitus reinforces itself by avoiding dissimilar people and experiences) must be explored as a matter of *degree*. For Bourdieu, practice is the outcome of the relations between the internalised habitus and the objective relations of the field, so when habitus is dissonant with field, practices cannot be 'taken-for-granted'. But the disruptions of a field dissonant with habitus also implies a shift in *social connections*, and increasing heterophily, as the agent encounters others with different dispositions and characteristics. In earlier formulations, Bourdieu presents this as rare, emphasising the consonance between habitus and field, because the 'conservative' nature of the habitus discourages disruptive encounters. In later field analysis, Bourdieu seems to allow for a looser fit, with practice emerging from complex combinations of habitus, field and resources. But in opening up this possibility, Bourdieu raises questions about the impact of differential association on the operation of dispositional practice *in any context*.

The milieu of the field is partly made up of other agents, so the relation between habitus and field is also an encounter *between agents*, with more or less similar dispositions and characteristics. Bourdieu prefers to focus on the objective structural relations of fields, but 'the interaction within the field is consequential to its structure and to the classifications and qualifications used within the field' (de Nooy, 2003:325). Relations between habitus and field, whether dissonant or consonant, are bound up with issues of differential association, and the intersubjective negotiation of practice in concrete networks of social obligation and influence. If we reframe the shared nature of the habitus as a *matter of degree*, then we must recognise practice as more intersubjective and negotiated than Bourdieu usually allows. The operation of the habitus, and its intersection with field, is partly a question of the interactional properties of networks, in which our practice is subject to



the contingently variable characteristics and dispositions of the people around us. And so the operationalisation of dispositions to act, the collective accomplishment of practices, the generation of accounts and accountability, and the mutual obligation that permits collective pursuits, will all vary according to the interactional properties of the networks within which intersubjective practice takes place.

## Conclusion

Embodied social practice is an essential element of any meaningful account of 'identity'; however, dispositional understandings of 'identity' do not displace other, more reflexive or mobilised aspects, so the emergent emphasis on situated subjectivities raises a particularly thorny problem for Bourdieusian analysis: what is the *relationship* between the dispositional component of 'identity' and more reflexive or mobilised aspects? Bourdieu presents reflexivity as the recovery of the tacit assumptions that already structure practice. But reflexive identifications are better seen as a reflection *on*, not a reflection *of*, dispositional practice, and to pursue this we must address the intersubjective nature of practice, exploring the different aspects of 'identity' as elements of situated intersubjectivity.

In later works, Bourdieu acknowledges 'blips' in the habitus, 'misfirings' which can generate a 'practical reflection', but one 'turned towards practice and not towards the agent who performs it' (2000: 161). Similarly, 'discordances' for those occupying contradictory social positions may generate a 'destabilised habitus, torn by contradiction and internal division' (ibid). Representations of 'ordinary suffering' may emerge from the troubled experience of social location, with the 'occupants of precarious positions':

'extraordinary "practical analysts"...constrained, in order to live or to survive, to practice a kind of self-analysis, which often gives them access to the objective contradictions which have them in their grasp, and to the objective structures expressed in and by these contradictions' (Bourdieu, 1999:511).

However, as Bennett argues (2007), such modulations are the exceptions proving the rule of Bourdieu's core emphasis on the systematic *unity* of dispositional schema, in which agents placed in 'homogeneous conditions of existence' experience 'homogenous conditionings and trainings...producing homogeneous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar practices; and...possess a set of common properties, objectified properties' (Bourdieu, 1984:101). The discordancies which provoke reflection remain a crisis model of reflexive 'recognition', emerging from the relations of habitus and field (Bourdieu et al, 1999:513), whilst normal practice is overwhelmingly dispositional. Further, Bourdieu's interest is in how such accounts reflect objective situations, as either critical recognitions or 'projections, that mask the malaise or suffering as much as they express it' (Bourdieu et al, 1999:629). But since we can, and most often do, operate practically in the world with 'distorted' perspectives of it, the issue is less whether we have 'recognised' or 'misrecognised' an

underlying reality, but rather how such accounts routinely emerge through, and bear upon, the intersubjective accomplishment of shared practices.

Practice is the negotiated outcome of intersubjective coordination, in which dispositions to act are shaped by ‘calls to order from the group’, so individuals must account for their actions, and call others to account, as routine features of practice. Such negotiation is a condition of all practice, regardless of the context within which practice occurs, but it is necessary to attend to the patterned nature of such intersubjectivity: the concrete interaction which shapes ‘calls to order’. Our practical schemes are imperfectly realised, and intersubjectively coordinated and adjusted, with the interdependence of agents making them mutually (albeit unequally) susceptible, so mutually accountable to each other for their actions. Even in dispositional practice, agents must account for their actions to others, as a basis of coordinating and establishing the identity of practices, in order to make sense of their difficulties, and to accommodate to constraint. This mutual influence and accountability is also the means by which individuals coordinate to reconstruct their problems in ways that open them up to collective human agency. In thinking through the connections between the reflexive, collective and the dispositional components of ‘identity’, we must consider the intersubjective nature of practice, and the concrete ‘calls to order’ that arise from networks of variously disposed agents, whose actions must be accounted for, negotiated and aligned.

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