ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN SOCIOLOGY

Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields

Concepts and applications

Edited by
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ROUTLEDGE

Introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social fields

Mathieu Hilgers and Eric Mangez

> Thinking in terms of fields requires a conversion of one's entire usual vision of the social world, a vision interested only in those things which are visible ... In fact, just as the Newtonian theory of gravitation could be developed only by breaking away from Cartesian realism, which refused to recognize any mode of physical action other than impact, direct contact, in the same way, the notion of the field presupposes that one break away from the realist representation which leads one to reduce the effect of the milieu to the effect of the direct action that takes place in any interaction. It is the structure of the relations constitutive of the space of the field which determines the forms that can be assumed by the visible relations of interaction and the very content of the experience that agents may have of them.
>
> (Bourdieu, 1982: 41; Bourdieu 1990c: 192)

This work aims to introduce the reader to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of fields, to evaluate it critically and, through case studies, to test its implementation in the analysis of new objects. While the use of Bourdieu's concept of the habitus has given rise to countless discussions, the literature strangely remains more silent on the theory of fields, although it lies at the heart of his work. A series published by Éditions du Seuil, started and initially edited by Bourdieu, includes a number of monographs that apply the theory of fields;[1] some journals have devoted whole issues to explicitly mobilizing the theory in order to study specific areas, and a growing number of works make use of it. However, critical discussions that seek to give an account of this theory both in general terms and in particular areas remain rare. The aim of this work is to fill that gap. One of the hypotheses put forward in this book is that the theory of fields constitutes an adequate tool for explaining and understanding the social world but that its use must be rigorously circumscribed and correspond to certain methodological principles.

The book is in three parts. The first is made up of contributions that present, analyse and discuss the theoretical and epistemological foundations of Bourdieu's theory of fields. The second consists of research papers that critically mobilize this theory to study education, journalism, cinema, literature and culture. The third is devoted to the analysis of the state, power and the bureaucratic field. Some reflections are developed in the afterword to put theory of social fields at work in the postcolonial age.

To make this book easier to read for those who are less familiar with Bourdieu's theory, this Introduction offers a presentation of the theory and develops some points of discussion with regard to it. To do so, we start by reconstituting the epistemological background from which it arises in order to emphasize its primary specificity: *social reality is conceived as fundamentally relational* – it is therefore the relationships among the elements, and not the elements themselves, that must be at the heart of the analysis. Once these epistemological bases have been established, we present the theory of fields, particularly emphasizing the process of the emergence and autonomization of fields and then discussing the place it gives to reproduction and social change. Finally we present a method for implementing this theory, point to some problems that arise when one tries to use it, and briefly present the various chapters.

The epistemological basis of field theory[2]

Bourdieu developed the main arguments of his theory of fields at a very early stage. Three important articles set out the first principles: 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur' (1966), 'Genèse et structure du champ religieux' (1971a) and 'Une interprétation de la théorie de la religion selon Max Weber' (1971b). In these works, devoted to distinct objects, Bourdieu shows how the differentiation of the domains of human activity that accompanies the process of modernization of societies leads to the creation of social spaces with a specific legitimacy and functioning.

When Bourdieu was developing his theory, the concept of the field was already in common use in other disciplines. Physics, mathematics and psychology had devised field theories with various degrees of systematicity. While the theory of fields developed in sociology by Bourdieu was constructed in a relatively autonomous fashion, it nonetheless shares a common epistemology with them.[3] It seems useful to outline briefly this common epistemological background.

There is an abundant literature on the origin of the concept of the field, the various field theories in physics and the associated philosophy of nature (see for example Hesse 1961). In classical theories of physics, space and time were conceived as the forms within which the world – of which matter is the substance – is actualized. Through all its changes in appearance, matter remained fundamentally unaltered: 'Matter was imagined to be a substance involved in every change, and it was thought that every piece of matter could be measured as a quantity, and that its characteristic expression as a substance was the Law of Conservation of Matter which asserts that matter remains constant in amount throughout every change' (Weyl 1920: 1). Here, matter is the principle of change and form is the principle of determination that permits change. According to Cassirer, modern field theory displaced the old substance theory: 'The field itself can no longer be understood as a merely additive whole, as an aggregate of parts. The field is not a thing-concept but a

relation-concept; it is not composed of pieces but is a system, a totality of lines of force' (Cassirer 2000: 92). In mathematics, too, 'the relational structure as such, not the absolute property of the elements, constitutes the real object of mathematical investigation' (Cassirer 1923: 93). The true 'elements' of mathematical calculation are, in this sense, not so much magnitudes as relationships. For Cassirer, it is precisely this shift from a substantialist mode of thought to relational thinking that characterizes modern science. Only the set of relationships on which a system is based, and which is to be found in each particular configuration, truly gives access to the object. From this standpoint, it is not so much the properties of an object or a configuration as the network of (cor)relations that is woven between them and other neighbouring formations that is the focus of analysis. Thus field theory rejects an absolute space-time, which, by definition, would have to refer to an individual object, in favour of a relational space-time that no longer designates an individual but a system of relations (cf. Ghins 1990: 16–28).

Jean-Claude Passeron points out that Bourdieu and he took over the concept of the field from *Gestalt* theory, in particular the work of Kurt Lewin (Passeron 2003: 42–43). The concept of the psychological field developed by Lewin (1935) shares only the background of a relational epistemology with the concept of the 'physical field'. Knowing the individual from 'observation of his behaviour, one can deduce the properties of the field around him, and, conversely, knowing the properties of the field around the individual, one can deduce his properties from observation of his behaviour' (Faucheux 1959: 7). Thus, 'a certain distribution of forces determines the behaviour of an individual possessing particular properties' (Faucheux 1959: 6). The structure of the relations between the individual and the environment is central – the former is a function of the latter and vice versa. The behaviour thus depends on the configuration of the psychological field at a given moment.

One of Lewin's objectives is to construct a psychology that breaks away from Aristotelian substantialism, in which 'the environment plays a part only in so far as it may give rise to "disturbances", forced modifications of the processes which follow from the nature of the object concerned' (Lewin 1935: 29). The vectors that define the movements of an object are completely determined by the object itself; they do not depend on the object's relation to the environment and they inherently belong to the object, regardless of its setting, at all times. By contrast, in modern science, the dynamics of a phenomenon are no longer analysed as immanent to the object but as consubstantial with the relational space in which it takes place. The vectors that determine the dynamics of a phenomenon can therefore themselves only be described in terms of 'concrete totalities' encompassing both the object and the situation.

Gestalt therapists still work with a methodology inspired by field theory. Malcolm Parlett (1991) sets out five principles at the heart of field theory. The principle of 'organization', derived from Lewin, asserts that the meaning of an individual fact depends on the total situation and more particularly on its

position in the 'field'. The principle of 'contemporaneity' postulates that a situation 'at a given time' includes 'the past-as-remembered-now' and 'the future-as anticipated-now', and that these are part of the 'field' in the present. The principle of 'singularity' assumes that 'circumstances are never quite the same, and each of several persons ... has a different perspective'. The principle of 'changing process' refers to the fact that 'experience is always provisional rather than permanent: nothing is fixed and static in an absolute way'. The field is constructed and reconstructed moment by moment. Finally, the principle of 'possible relevance' asserts that no part of the total field can be excluded in advance as inherently irrelevant; everything in the 'field' is part of the total organization and is potentially meaningful.

What can we draw from this for our purpose? First, according to Lewin, field theory is here primarily a method rather than a theory: '[It] can hardly be called correct or incorrect in the same way as a theory in the usual sense of the term. Field theory is probably best characterized as a method: namely, a method of analysing causal relations and of building scientific constructs' (Lewin 1943: 45). Next, field theory, as described above, when used methodologically, implies, first, that 'the dynamics of the processes is always to be derived from the relations of the concrete individual to the concrete situation' (Lewin 1935: 41); second, that the structural properties of the totality of a dynamics, in the social field as in the physical field, are different from the structural properties of the parts of the dynamics, and that these structural properties are characterized by the relations among the parts rather than by the parts themselves (Lewin 1949: 280–81);[4] and consequently, third, that a 'social event' depends on the whole social field rather than some selected elements. It is indeed a property of fields that they are 'systems of relations independent of the populations defined by those relations' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 82). Finally, with regard to the physical field, it can be said that to speak of a field 'is to give primacy to this system of objective relations over the particles themselves' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 82). Social agents are of course not particles, mechanically pushed and pulled by external forces: 'They are, rather, bearers of capitals and, depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy in the field by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in capital, they have a propensity to orient themselves actively either towards the conservation of the distribution of capital or towards the subversion of that distribution' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 108–9).

There is no need to pursue further the comparison of the different field theories; moreover, this work has already been done in some research (Martin 2003) and is taken further in Martin and Gregg's contribution to this book (Chapter 1). Field theory in sociology naturally has a number of features specific to the discipline (the aim of superseding dualisms, the importance of the history of the field, etc.), but what characterizes field theories, regardless of the discipline, and therefore constitutes their common epistemological background, is that they reject the existence of an absolute (social or physical) space and consequently of individual objects or agents existing independently

of a set of relations. Space, whether social or physical, is relational. The field implies the existence of an indivisible dynamics between a totality and the elements that constitute it (Passeron 2003: 41). It does not designate an entity but a system of relations. The effectiveness of the principles underlying the theoretical method of analysis in terms of field therefore stems from the fact that they express the general characteristics of the mechanisms of interdependence (Lewin 1949: 284). The field is the analytical space defined by the interdependence of the entities that compose a structure of positions among which there are power relations.

From field theory to the theory of social fields

The epistemological basis of field theory is transversal to Bourdieu's work: the social world is a relational space. However, in Bourdieu's work the notion of the field is not only meant to imply a relational form of epistemology, but also serves to designate distinct sub-spaces within the global space. There are various fields within the social world, and each field is a relational space of its own, dedicated to a specific type of activity. In this sense, as Lahire has pointed out, Bourdieu's theory of fields sets itself in a long line of reflection on 'the historical differentiation of social activities or functions and the social division of labour' (Lahire 1999: 26; see also his contribution to this volume, Chapter 2). The theory of fields explicitly refers to Durkheim as regards the historical constitution and autonomization of fields, to Marx for the interpretation of the effects of this autonomization, and to Weber for the construction of the autonomy of a field and its internal struggles..

In the course of this process, various domains, occupations and groups are led to codify their functioning. More precisely, for Bourdieu a field is a relatively autonomous domain of activity that responds to rules of functioning and institutions that are specific to it and which define the relations among the agents. Each field has its specific rules: the political field has to maintain a close relationship with the individuals external to the field, because political agents derive their legitimacy from the representation of the citizens (Bourdieu 2000b); the scientific field is marked by a competition among agents so specialized that only they are able to judge the scientific value of the works of their competitors (Bourdieu 1976); the economic field is distinguished by the fact that 'within it the sanctions are especially brutal and behaviours can overtly be directed towards the maximization of individual material profit' (Bourdieu 1997d: 57), and so on. However, beneath the substantial variations that distinguish each of the fields and the specific rules of their functioning, it is possible to bring to light the invariants that shape and structure them.

Indeed, Bourdieu went on to apply, develop and refine his theory, bringing it to bear on a wide range of domains that seemingly had nothing in common except the fact of being specialized: religion (Bourdieu 1971a, 1971c; Bourdieu and de Saint Martin 1982); education (Bourdieu and de Saint Martin 1987a, 1987b; Bourdieu 1989); science (Bourdieu 1975a, 1976, 1978, 1984a,

1995, 1997a, 2001b); symbolic goods (Bourdieu 1971c, 1972a, 1977a); culture (Bourdieu 1979a, 1991a, 1992); the economy (Bourdieu 1990a, 1997d, 2000a); haute couture (Bourdieu 1975b, with Delsaut); the state (Bourdieu 1989, 1990a, 1994, 1997c); law (Bourdieu 1986); politics (Bourdieu 1981, 1990a, 1996b, 2000c); journalism (Bourdieu 1996e); power (Bourdieu 1990a, 1994), etc. As he criss-crossed between studies devoted to particular domains and more general formulations, his theory of fields was constantly refined to become a fruitful and effective sociological theory. To present the main lines of this theory, this second section will now focus on: 1 the genesis and impact of field autonomy; 2 the field of power and its relations to specific fields; 3 homologies of position between fields; and 4 the social field and the habitus.

The genesis and impact of field autonomy

What happens when a domain of activity wins its (relative) autonomy from social, political and economic constraints? The autonomization of spheres of activities, functions and groups generates elites responsible for the legitimate interpretation of practices and representations in specific areas of activity. These elites rationalize an implicit system of schemes of action, systematizing it in the form of explicit norms. This autonomization is marked by the emergence of a type of capital (for example, in the religious field it is religious capital, i.e. a specific form of accumulated symbolic capital), whose main holders constitute the elites of the field. All specific capital in a field, whether religious, artistic, political or scientific, is in reality a capital of recognition. As soon as the rules that define the legitimate activity in a field are modified, so too is the distribution of recognition. The struggle in a field is thus a struggle to impose a definition of legitimate recognition, in which victory leads to more or less monopolistic control of the definition of the forms of legitimacy prevailing in the field. The history of the field is the history of the internal and external struggles that animate it, the history of the distribution of the specific capital and the variation of this capital. The field is temporalized along with them.

The progressive autonomy of a domain of activity transforms the relationships among the individuals who are linked to the activity in question. Increasingly, their practices and productions are evaluated according to criteria internal to the domain of activity. The creation of authorities and mechanisms for selection and consecration that are partly immune to external influences is an indicator of this autonomy. The growing autonomy of the intellectual field leads to the emergence of autonomous intellectuals, that of the artistic field leads to the emergence of the figure of the artist, etc. The example of the religious field, the focus of Bourdieu's first articles, is illustrative. According to him the expansion of monotheism is linked to the emergence of a tightly organized body of priests, whose autonomy facilitated the systematization and moralization of beliefs. This autonomy is seen in the

emergence and legitimation of a religious esotericism, autarkic references, knowledge and practices only accessible to those who occupy certain positions in the religious field. Through its knowledge and practices, a corps of specialists is consolidated and proceeds to monopolize a rare, socially recognized knowledge of which it is the exclusive holder. It thereby becomes the repository of 'the specific competence necessary for the production or reproduction of a deliberately organized corpus of knowledge', whose authority is reinforced by 'the objective dispossession of those who are excluded from it', who are thereby constituted as the profane laity (Bourdieu 1971a: 304; Bourdieu 1991b: 9).

In becoming more autonomous, the functioning of a field also increases the closure effects. The greater its autonomy, the more the field is produced by and produces agents who master and possess an area of specific competence. The more it functions in accordance with the interests inherent in the type of activity that characterizes it, 'the greater the separation from the laity' (Bourdieu 2000c: 58) and the more specific become the capital, the competences and the 'sense of the game'. This closure is an index of the autonomy of the field. It is for the politician to speak of politics, for writers to speak of literature, and so on. As the field closes in on itself, the practical mastery of the specific heritage of its history, objectified and celebrated in past works by the guardians of legitimate knowledge, is also autonomized and increasingly constitutes a minimum entry tariff that every new entrant must pay. The autonomization of a domain of activity generates the *doxa*, an *illusio* that forms the prereflexive belief of the agents of the field, i.e. a set of presuppositions that implies adherence to a domain of activity and implicitly defines the conditions of membership.

The more autonomous a field, the more it produces an autonomous and specific language, representations and practices, and the more the perception of realities is subject to the logic specific to the field. The autonomization of the criteria (aesthetic, religious, scientific, etc.) that govern production, and the importance of these criteria in building a structure of relations specific to a domain of activity, leads the agents who are active within it to perceive the real on the basis of the principles shared in this field. In other words, as autonomy increases, the refraction effect grows and the agents tend to divert, translate and interpret external phenomena in terms of the stakes, logics and beliefs specific to the field and the positions they occupy within it. The agents of the field then tend to perceive the world – inside and outside the field – through a prism constructed within the field.[5]

The study of the genesis of fields provides an articulated set of theoretical propositions that make it possible to identify the features marking the emergence of a new domain of activity, notably, the appearance of a specialized elite, the rationalization and constitution of specific knowledge (a specific language), the creation of authorities providing recognition and consecration, the setting of a tariff for entry into the field, transformation of the schemes of perception, growing refraction.

The field of power and its relation to specific fields

The autonomy of fields is relative. Each field is subject to two opposing principles of hierarchization – 'an external or heteronomous principle of hierarchization that applies to the field the hierarchy prevailing in the field of power, and an internal or autonomous principle that hierarchizes in accordance with the values specific to the field' (Mounier 2001: 71). The 'field of power' is thus a key concept for understanding the structure of specific fields. In contrast to other fields, whose content can in a sense be grasped intuitively, the field of power has a more abstract character. It is not linked to a specific activity; it is 'the space of relations of force between agents or between institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy dominant positions in the different fields' (Bourdieu 1992: 300; Bourdieu 1996a: 215). Within the field of power two fractions compete with one another: an economic fraction and a cultural fraction. The economic fraction (usually situated at the top right-hand side of Bourdieu's schematization of the social structure) is the dominant fraction of the dominant class, while the cultural fraction (situated at the top left-hand side of the schema) is the dominated fraction of the dominant class (see Figure I.1). The field of power is thus structured by the opposition between cultural capital (dominated) and economic capital (dominating).

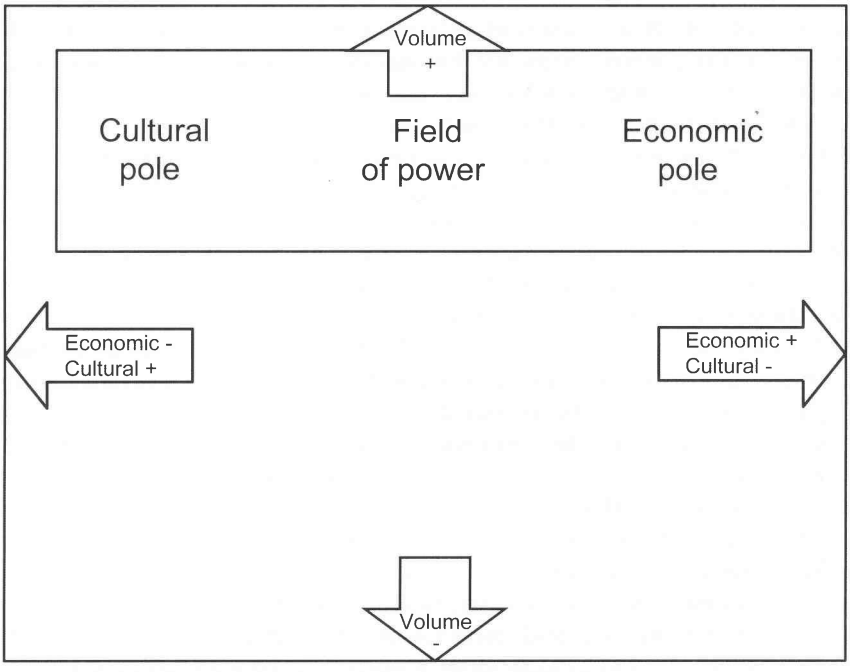

Figure I.1 The field of power
Source: Adapted from Bourdieu 1992:178

Every specific field is likely to be affected by the field of power, generating within its own structure two opposing poles that correspond structurally, albeit indirectly and in a more or less refracted and unrecognizable manner, to the tensions between the competing poles of the field of power (Figure I.2, adapted from Bourdieu 1992: 178; see also Bourdieu 1983: 329). The literary or artistic field, for example, will generate 'an autonomous pole (e.g. 'art for art's sake') and a heteronomous pole 'favourable to those who dominate the field economically and politically (e.g. "bourgeois art")' (Bourdieu 1983: 321). Hence in the literary field, new avant-gardist products are opposed to mass products, just as the pole of 'high culture' is opposed to another pole producing commercial cultural goods in the artistic field. Following the same logic, in the field of science, fundamental research (knowledge produced for the sake of knowledge) is opposed to more applied or oriented forms of knowledge production (Bourdieu 1995). In education, one can also note an opposition between those who conceive education as an autonomous domain primarily concerned with cultural matters, and those who emphasize education in relation to external concerns such as economic prosperity and competitiveness (see André and Hilgers in this volume, Chapter 4; see also Mangez and Hilgers 2012; Mangez 2008). All such oppositions are the refracted and more or less misrecognizable manifestations of the tensions within the field of power.

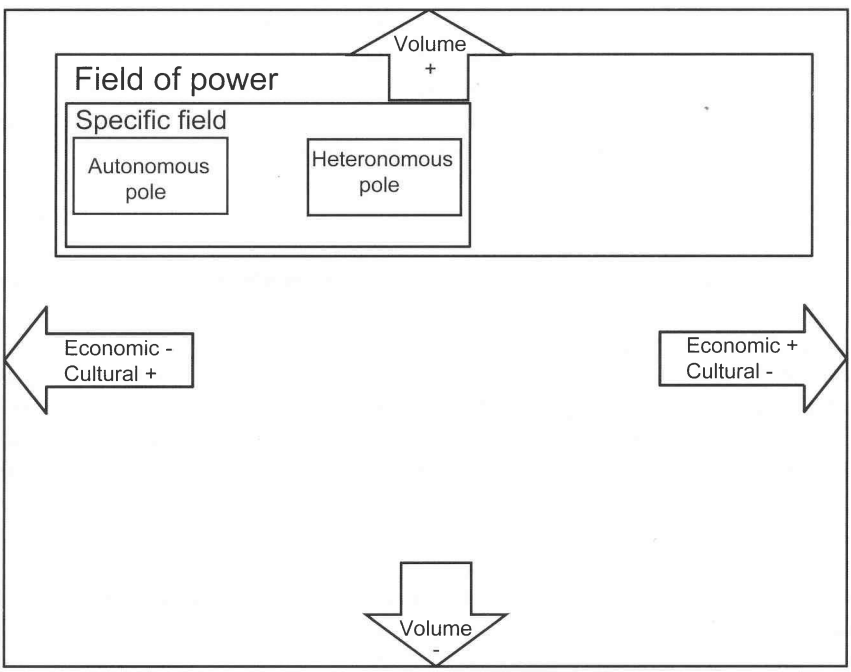

Figure I.2 The field of power and its relation to specific fields
Source: Adapted from Bourdieu 1983: 329; and Bourdieu 1992: 178

Each specific field is therefore a social space structured – vertically – by a criterion of volume of resources (dominated/dominant) and – horizontally – by a criterion of structure of resources (an autonomous pole, where specific or 'spiritual' capital predominates/a heteronomous pole, where 'temporal' capital predominates). In addition, each field is structured, in accordance with an internal principle of hierarchization, by the history of its internal struggles and it is therefore also marked by other specific dividing lines.

The more autonomous a field, the less sensitive it is to the external principle of hierarchy, and vice versa. This is particularly clear when one considers, for example, the shift from a totalitarian system towards democracy with regard to the transformation of the hierarchies that shape legitimacy in science and art, as Sapiro puts it in this volume (Chapter 5), or when one studies the relations between economic journalism and the market (see Duval in this volume, Chapter 6). Transformations of the equilibria in the domains of power thus have more or less direct effects on the internal dynamics of autonomous domains of activity. For example, in the overall structure of the capital effective in the field of power, the growth in the relative value of economic capital that characterizes our neoliberal societies tends to reduce the autonomy of the fields (Mangez and Hilgers 2012). The growing domination of the economic field over the educational field or the literary field is transforming the role, place and power of the agents active in these fields by consolidating the relative value of economic capital and weakening that of cultural capital (Mangez 2008). The erosion of the relative autonomy of the literary field vis-à-vis the economic field has the effect of consolidating the position of the values that are most guaranteed in commercial terms ('best-sellers') at the expense of subversive agents (Bourdieu 1992; Sapiro 2003); and this, quite logically, affects their subversive strategies.

Positions and position-takings

A field is a structure of relative positions within which the actors and groups think, act and take positions. These relative positions are defined by the volume and structure of their capital. In their position-takings, persons and groups – sometimes unconsciously – pursue interests linked to their relative positions in the field, which may consist in preserving or transforming the position they occupy and the resources associated with it. The position of an actor or a group depends not only on the way in which it manages to renew itself but also on the ways in which all the other actors in the field evolve or seek to evolve (Vandenberghe 1999).

According to Bourdieu, 'If one takes seriously both the Durkheimian hypothesis of the social origin of schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action and the fact of class divisions, one is necessarily driven to the hypothesis that a correspondence exists between social structures (strictly speaking, power structures) and mental structures' (Bourdieu 1971a: 300; Bourdieu 1991b: 5). There is a correspondence[6] between the objective

divisions of the social world, social structures and the mental structures that agents mobilize in order to act in a world structured in this way (Bourdieu 1989: 7). Hence one can distinguish the symbolic order from the social order of the field. Symbolic structures order the field (and the social world) by classifying and categorizing it at the level of meaning: how do people think, how do they order the world cognitively within the field, what are their position-takings? Social structures, on the other hand, order the world by classifying and categorizing it according to the objective resources, positions and trajectories of individuals and groups.

Examining the structures of positions will often lead one to identify actors relatively well established in the field, who therefore have a certain interest in the maintenance of the established order or the modification of this order within limits that enable them to strengthen their domination. Conversely, newcomers will tend to implement strategies aimed at subverting the symbolic order; otherwise they will tend to undergo a form of symbolic violence that leads them to recognize the legitimacy of a symbolic order that is unfavourable to them. The chances that established actors will succeed in preserving the order are, however, greater than the probability of subversion. The more legitimate an agent, the more her peers consume her products, and the more they consume her products, the more legitimate she becomes. The accumulation of this symbolic capital makes it possible to secure a more or less complete monopoly over the definition of the forms of legitimacy prevailing in the field. The stabilization of a hegemonic version of legitimacy helps to fix the distribution of positions in the space of relations that constitutes a field. The field is thus subject to a generalized Matthew effect[7] – which is why the theory of social fields may appear a theory of reproduction.

It would, however, be reductive and mistaken to see in the theory of fields only a theory of reproduction. In reality, the theory of fields makes it possible to understand and explain the phenomena of reproduction while also giving a central place to change and movement within a field (Boyer 2003). In fact, fields are marked by struggles that constantly modify their internal power balances. The question of change within fields is therefore crucial.[8]

Bourdieu's theory comprises, for example, a theory of cultural change (Gartman 2002)[9] which offers important insights for understanding the dynamics of fields. It explains how innovative cultural goods are usually first produced by an avant-garde situated at the lower level (bottom) of the autonomous pole (position A in Figure I.3) of their field (whether the literary field, the scientific field, the field of art, or any other 'cultural' field). They attempt to produce 'pure' products (art for art's sake, knowledge for the sake of knowledge), they seek recognition by their peers and try to distinguish themselves from the more established senior figures of their field who are situated higher up (consecrated avant-garde) at the autonomous pole of the field (position B). As the avant-garde gain access to symbolic recognition, they and their products move up (from A to B, i.e. consecration) in the direction of the more consecrated avant-garde. From there on, successful

producers are then eventually likely to 'sell out' and be attracted by the more heteronomous pole of the field. Hence they move laterally (from B to C: selling out) towards heteronomous interests. Such a move is all the more likely as the economic elite always seeks new cultural products to secure and renew its distinction from the masses. Products that are used and consumed by the dominant economic interests are, however, eventually likely to become mass products because the masses tend to imitate them (from C to D: massification).

It is important to underline that the products' characteristics and their utilization will vary as they move along this inverted U-curve (from A to B, from B to C, from C to D). As cultural goods move from one social space to another, they are reconstituted or reinterpreted to suit the requirements and the 'logic' of that space: translation from one social space to another is necessarily accompanied by a translation of meaning, form and shape. The products produced on the left-hand side (pole A or B), which are originally meant to be consumed by the producers' peers (restricted audience), are constructed according to the internal rules of the field, and that gives them specific characteristics. Once attracted towards the right-hand side (pole C), their meaning, purpose and conditions of fabrication evolve. Indeed, they are then meant to support external interests: hence their shape and form is defined accordingly (rather than according to the internal requirements of the field).

This theory of cultural change does not exhaust the range of possible dynamics. Every field is subject to contingency and is, moreover, capable of functioning in accordance with logics that are specific to it. Nonetheless, all fields are structured and historicized. Because they each have a "structural history' (Bourdieu 1989: 265–328; Bourdieu 1996c: 188–229), they are subject to homologous transformative logics, seen particularly in the positions taken by the agents of the field. As has been seen by following the path of the inverted U-curve, these position-takings vary according to the agents' positions within the fields.

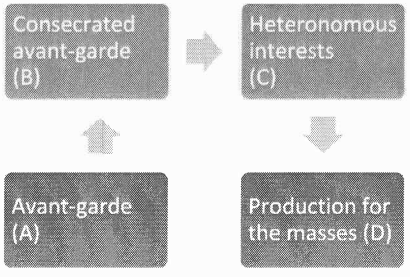

Figure I.3 Bourdieu's theory of cultural change and the 'inverted U-curve'
Source: Inspired by Gartman 2002: 259

Homologies of position

The relations among fields and those between fields and the overall social space constitute another key to the analysis of change. This is why the relations among fields, and the specific dynamics they imply, merit specific, detailed analyses. One of the key aspects of this question is the structural homology among fields. Fields are spaces of oppositions and they are related through the homology of their structures (Bourdieu 1971a: 319; Bourdieu 1991b: 22). More precisely, Bourdieu hypothesizes that there are structural affinities between individuals occupying homologous positions in different fields or in the social structure. Hence actors situated in a given position within a given field are likely to be sympathetic to – and 'close to' – actors who occupy a homologous position in another field or in the general social structure: when acting in different specific fields, those who occupy a homologous position (for example, a dominant position), will tend to be related to one another by an invisible homology of position. This stems from the fact that 'the homology of positions (...) encourage[s] a *practical recognition* of interests' (Bourdieu 1988b: 110; Bourdieu 1991d: 97), the actors being linked to one another through 'the invariant, or indeed universal, content of the relationship between the dominant and the dominated' (Bourdieu 1984c: 10; Bourdieu 1985: 737).

A distinction must be made between homologies of position among dominant positions and homologies of position among dominated positions. By definition, the former *mainly* link economically dominant actors who as such have an interest in the consolidation of the established order. Thus, for example, the annual meetings of the World Economic Forum in Davos bring together economic and political actors who occupy dominant positions in a range of fields and sub-fields. However, the fact that dominant actors, united by a homology of position, have an interest in maintaining and consolidating established order, and therefore in reproducing the space of relative positions, does not necessarily mean that they are opposed to change. In reality, as Bourdieu and Boltanski observed as early as 1976, one of the means used by the dominant actors to consolidate and reproduce their position consists in developing a discourse that presents change as an imperative that is incumbent upon all: we must change our ways, be ready to make sacrifices to meet the challenges that face us, the demands of competitiveness, the new economic challengers, etc. (Bourdieu and Boltanski 1976).

The change in question is 'heteronomous': it is presented as a necessity imposed 'from outside'. It therefore differs radically from the theory of cultural change mentioned earlier, which made autonomy the key to and source of change in the field. The discourse on the necessity of change propagated by the economically dominant actors functions in reality as a means of weakening the relative autonomy of the specific fields. Heteronomizing the specific fields amounts to placing them at the service of external economic (and political) ends. It can be seen at the present time that the situation of economic

and financial crisis is reinforcing even more the relative power of the dominant economic actors, allies in the field of power, and tends to subordinate cultural capital (and therefore the activity of the specific fields) to 'external' criteria. The situation is deleterious to the autonomy of the specific fields. All these fields are put under pressure, they are subjected to external evaluations and 'accountability', required to furnish indicators proving their utility and efficiency. Heteronomous criteria play an increasing role in the specific fields and help to normalize 'new' practices: marketing has entered the political field, entrepreneurialism into the social field, performance measurement into the field of education, etc. Change is omnipresent but it is change oriented towards external control of the specific fields and conservation of the established order.

Faced with this dominant discourse, the position taken by intellectuals, who are objectively situated in an ambivalent position, dominant in the social space but dominated in the field of power, is crucial. Either they introduce into their own field this imperative of permanent change, of a race to modernize, and so become the (possibly unwitting) accomplices of the dominant economic actors; or they perceive this discourse as a means of domination serving the interests of the dominant and strive to analyse and expose it. In this second scenario, an alliance between those dominated in the field of power and those dominated in the social space can then be constructed on the basis of their homology of position.

The homology of positions that relates dominated actors to one another is indeed a key mechanism that may support a different, more subversive, process of change. Most often, when Bourdieu identifies and analyses homologies of position between dominated positions, it is the alliance between those dominated in the field of power and those dominated in the social space or other specific fields that interests him. This is indeed how he outlines what one could call a sociology of Marx's sociology, observing that the sociological reason why Marx could develop a theory tending to serve the objective interests – and hence transform the position – of the agents 'most completely dispossessed of the economic and cultural means of production' was that he and they occupied homologous positions: as a producer of cultural goods Marx was dominated among the dominant within the field of power while they occupied a dominated position within the field of class relations (Bourdieu 1984c: 9; Bourdieu 1985: 736).[10]

The World Social Forum and the various anti-globalization protest movements typically seek to forge alliances based on a homology of dominated positions. The counter-summit to the 2003 G8 meeting in Évian, for example, modelled on the 1999 Seattle protests, brought together on the one hand 'occupationally and socially precarious' actors (unemployed or low-skilled) and, on the other hand, a significant proportion drawn from more favourably positioned socio-occupational categories, culturally dominant but economically dominated, among which 'the most strongly represented were the higher intellectual occupations (teaching and research, 34%), the higher scientific or

technical occupations (12%), the health and social work professions (6%) and, more generally, intermediate public-sector occupations (primary and secondary teachers and associated categories)' (Fillieule *et al.* 2004: 25). The homology between dominated positions, in contrast to that between dominant positions, unites actors who have an interest in changing the established order. The complicity that can be constructed between those dominated in the field of power and those dominated in the social space then constitutes a factor of change oriented towards emancipation since it can lead the former to provide the latter with 'a view of the social world that breaks with the dominant view' (Bourdieu 1984c: 9; Bourdieu 1985: 736). The struggles by the dominated among the dominant within the field of power can thus 'advance ... at least formal recognition of the interests of the dominated' (Bourdieu 1997b: 124; Bourdieu 2000c: 103). In some cases, this may simply lead the dominated to try to preserve 'the rights they have won' against the demands for change formulated by the economically dominant actors. A situation can thus develop in which the dominant actors implement conservation strategies that involve the demand for change, while the dominated actors implement subversion strategies that involve the demand for the maintenance of their threatened rights (Bourdieu 1998a).

Thus the theory of fields foregrounds certain types of solidarity that are objectively linked to the homologous positions that individuals occupy in differentiated domains.[11] It remains limited as regards the understanding of solidarities that go beyond this homology of position but which nonetheless bring individuals and groups together around common struggles (such as the gay, feminist or antiracist movements), even if, in some cases, it can be observed that, independently of the variations of positions, the individuals share a common experience of relative exclusion and relegation. In other cases, as with the ecologist movements, the solidarities linked to the logics of fields prove insufficient to account for the dynamics at work. Thus, contrary to some unwarranted generalizations, it is important to note that even if it can serve as a basis for a more general reflection, the theory of fields constitutes an analysis whose scope is limited to bringing to light the particular logics of specific domains.[12]

Bourdieu shows that homologies between dominant positions can engender alliances favourable to the conservation and consolidation of the relations of domination (which sometimes use discourse on the necessity of change as a means), in contrast to homologies between dominated positions, which generate alliances among actors who are objectively interested in the transformation of the structures of established positions (even if they sometimes defend the maintenance of rights that have been won). These two types of homologies and alliances among actors must also be examined in terms of the habitus that they link. From this standpoint, what fundamentally distinguishes these two types of homologies lies in the fact that homologies between dominant positions tend to link actors with similar habitus, who are thereby more likely to 'understand' one another and come to 'spontaneous

agreements', whereas homologies among dominated positions, when they include those of actors dominated within the field of power, are more likely to bring together actors whose habitus are 'divergent and, at least potentially, antagonistic' (Bourdieu 1984a: 233; Bourdieu 1988a: 180). The description above of the participants in the Évian 'counter-summit' is a good illustration of this.

The articulation of the concept of the habitus with the concept of the field gives rise to a complex theory that makes it possible both to identify the conditions favourable to change and understand why the process of change in the service of the preservation of the structures of positions is sociologically more probable than change oriented towards transforming them. It can then be better understood why alliances between dominated positions, potential motors of change oriented towards social transformation, are sociologically more fragile and less durable than the alliances among dominant actors that are generally at the heart of conservative revolutions. Bringing to light the importance of the relationship between field and habitus enables us to offer some clarifications as regards the relationship between the structure of the relative positions that compose the social space of a domain of autonomized activity and the system of incorporated dispositions generating schemes of perception, appreciation, thought and action of each agent who occupies it.

Field and habitus

The relationship between field and habitus is the product of the meeting of two histories, always incomplete and different. It is the encounter of a reified history – inscribed and objectified in things and structures, in the form of a field, the structure of a relational and differential space – and an embodied history, the incorporation of the division of the objective structures in the form of a habitus, a practice-generating system structured by this internalization (Bourdieu 1982: 37–38; Bourdieu 1990c: 91). From it stems a complicity that is 'the basis of quasi-magical participation between these two realizations of history ... In the relationship between habitus and field, between the feel for the game and the game itself ... the stakes of the game are generated' (Bourdieu 1997b: 170; Bourdieu 2000c: 151); they are non-thetic stakes that present themselves with the self-evidence of the naturalization effect of the field. Depending on the degree of penetration of the objective structures of the field into the shaping of the habitus, this relationship is more or less well adjusted. The habitus will correspond more or less well to certain positions in the field.

Practical reality is made up of constant misalignments and multiple uncertainties, which generate the history and the dynamics of the field. However, Bourdieu himself often focused, at least at the theoretical level, on the case of perfect congruence (Vandenberghe 1999), one that would be characterized by perfect adjustment between the positions, the dispositions, the subjective aspirations and the objective situations encountered by all the actors. In

reality, the situation of perfect congruence (and hence identical reproduction) corresponds to a purely theoretical state, highly improbable in practice. Moreover the knowledge, the language, the authorities, the positions and oppositions that develop in the genesis of a field are never fixed once and for all; their definition and redefinition are constantly contested by the participation of the agents in the functioning of the field. This dynamic of misalignments has to be analysed by clarifying the relationship between the field and the habitus.

Phenomena of hysteresis are one of the possible forms of mismatch between the cognitive structures and the objective structures that originally corresponded to them. In the course of his socialization, the agent internalizes, according to his milieu and trajectory, the objective rules that govern the social world (and in particular the functioning of a field). The closer the correspondence between the habitus and the objective rules, the more the potentialities of the habitus have a favourable space to emerge. In a field or beyond it, the greater this coincidence, the more the agents are at ease with the rule, so that they can keep in line with its demands, play regularly with the rule and thus distinguish themselves by an excellence that is opposed to the conformity of individuals limited to pure and simple execution of the rules. Conversely, the less congruence there is, the less the agents manage to 'fall into line with rules that are made against them' (Bourdieu 1980a: 185 n.18; Bourdieu 1990b: 298 n.12). The 'Don Quixote effect' (Bourdieu 1979a: 122; Bourdieu 1984b: 109) perfectly illustrates this phenomenon of hysteresis: with the nostalgia for a vanished order in which it coincided perfectly with the world, a habitus corresponding to a past state of the social order perpetuates dispositions that now run 'in neutral' (Hilgers 2007).

Every habitus is subject in one way or another to more or less strong effects of hysteresis, i.e. a 'negative secondary reinforcement' (Bourdieu 1972b: 260; Bourdieu 1977e: 78), when, struggling to adapt themselves, practices deviate too far from their space of legitimacy, in other words, from the objective structures within which they are most legitimate. Because the structures of a given environment shape the habitus and are subsequently transformed, while the habitus partially rigidifies, it is necessarily subject to more or less great hysteresis effects. Within a field, hysteresis can thus explain the difficulty some agents have in grasping the import of historical crises – the discrepancy between their capacity to perceive objective opportunities and the effective manifestation of these opportunities (see for example Bourdieu 1979b: 15). The rigidity of cognitive structures is reinforced by ageing and by the fact that agents tend not to expose themselves to situations that call into question the information they have accumulated in the course of their existence (Bourdieu 1987).

Just as some agents lag behind change in the social world, so others run ahead of it and anticipate structures or oppositions that exist only latently. The champions of subversion, of whom the figure of the messiah, or the *nomothete*, such as Flaubert in literature (Bourdieu 1991a), or Manet in painting (Bourdieu 2013) i.e. the producers of new norms within a field, are

the strongest incarnation. The subversive, the innovator, 'can mobilize groups or classes' or even the dominated fractions within a field 'who recognize his language because they recognize themselves in it' and because it actualizes a meaning that already existed there in latent or implicit form (Bourdieu 1971a). Sometimes, the individual or group that brings about subversion in a field activates a series of schemes that make it possible to conceive another representation of the world, other logics of interests, other games and other stakes. In other words they are key components in the emergence of symbolic revolution. Crisis situations favour the emergence of prophetic or radical discourses because they throw up configurations and conditions of reception that make an alternative discourse audible. In these extreme moments, the struggle can then be a battle to transfer specific capital from one position to another.

Because agents are rarely socialized in one single universe, they often have a 'cleft habitus' (Bourdieu 1997b: 79; Bourdieu 2000c: 64), in other words they have several repertoires of dispositions that they activate according to the circumstances (Hilgers 2009; Lahire 2010), and whose contradictions may induce reflexivity. Depending on their capacity to activate these dispositions, on the circumstances and on the position they occupy in the field, these cleavages may lead them to occupy positions marked by a more or less strong hysteresis or a more or less strong nomothesis.

After this presentation of the main lines of Bourdieu's theory of fields, we turn to the issue of its implementation.

Implementing the theory of social fields: the visible and the invisible

'The real is relational', Bourdieu often said (e.g. 1992: 97), pastiching Hegel – but can these relations (between positions, between products, between positions and productions) be grasped if they are not directly observable? How can one identify the effect of the interrelations if they only rarely produce simple causalities? How do we observe the unobservable and empirically ground the analysis in indicators? To put it another way, how do we proceed in concrete terms to make the theory operational?

A number of difficulties can be overcome by applying the following principle: we have to study the field through its effects, and from its effects we infer its specific properties. Since these effects are moreover rarely the product of a simple causality, at each stage in the process we must not only consider the properties of the objects and actors but also relate and interpret our empirical observations in terms of the networks of relations within which they are set. It should be noted that multiple correspondence analysis, much used by Bourdieu, is a powerful tool here because it makes it possible to produce data that can be handled relationally (Bourdieu 1992: 72; Bourdieu 1996a: 96). It more readily exposes the interrelations while avoiding the substantialist fallacy which assigns explanatory factors to variables.

Multiple correspondence analysis is a technique that makes it possible to treat a group of variables as a set without establishing relationships *a priori*

(Legros 1989). It differs from traditional approaches inasmuch as the variables all have the same status: 'there is therefore no question of considering that certain variables are dependent or independent, i.e. explanatory or to be explained' (Legros 1989: 137). Using this approach one can break with the illusion of the constancy of variables and better identify the meaning that the indicators take on in the relationship, but also 'the meaning they receive from it' (Bourdieu 1979a: 17).

It makes it possible to construct graphic representations that project onto the same plane, simultaneously, relationships that are generally represented in a succession of cross-referenced tables (Legros 1989: 16). These representations are constructed in such a way that the positions that the agents, groups or institutions within them occupy 'on paper' form a representation of their relative positions in the social space. To avoid errors in interpretation of such figures, however, it is important to understand the relationships among the points in this space by relating them to the scalar product of their coordinates. With the aid of social topology, one can then analyse relative positions and objective relationships between positions 'occupied in the distributions of resources which are or can become active, effective' (Bourdieu 1987: 152).

To put the theory of fields to work we can distinguish three main stages (cf. Bourdieu 1992), which must then be articulated together.

Evaluating the degree of autonomy of the field

First stage: locate the position of the field in question in the overall social space and in relation to the other fields, in order to evaluate its degree of relative autonomy with respect to external interests and to neighbouring fields (in particular the field of power, the economic sphere and the political sphere). How does one proceed? How is the relative autonomy of a field to be measured? It can be estimated by identifying the 'nature' of the constraints on the various actors in the field and examining whether these arise from the field itself – in other words, whether they result from rules specific to the particular activity that prevails there, or whether they derive from the imperatives of another field, i.e. are the agents in field X subject to constraints stemming from field Y or Z? More concretely, in the field of literature, for example (Sapiro 2003, and Chapter 5 in this book), are writers subject to strong political or economic constraints? When such constraints are exerted on the producers or consumers in a field, one needs to show – in accordance with a logic that remains centred on the effects of the field – how they affect the 'internal' characteristics of the goods produced and consumed and the forms and conditions in which they are produced and consumed. So the characteristics of the products and the conditions of their production and consumption are understood in terms of the set of relations in which they are involved, and the substantialist fallacy is avoided.

In a general way, one can also evaluate the relative autonomy of the field by examining whether and to what extent species of capital and resources

derived from other fields have value and can legitimately be used and produce effects there. A deficit of autonomy can be detected when capital and resources from other fields have some legitimacy and produce an effect on the structure of positions in the field in question. The more autonomous a field is, the more potent its specific capital.

The question of autonomy raises different issues in different fields. In a democratic context, the autonomization of the political field with respect to social demands and 'external' social interests is liable to produce effects that run counter to its representative function (Bourdieu 2000c). By contrast, in the scientific field, the increasing autonomy of the field and the reflexive awareness that the agents of the field have of external pressures and demands are conducive to the development of the field (Bourdieu 1997a). Just as the problematic of relative autonomy varies between fields, so too, within a given field, the actors are not all subject to the same constraints. Depending on their position and the volume and structure of their capital, they are more or less constrained and capable of acting in compliance with the autonomy of the field.[13]

Describing the symbolic order

Having established the degree of autonomy of the field, the next step is to analyse the activity that constitutes the specificity of the domain in question. The aim is to grasp the particularity of the field – its specific capital, its specific rules and the symbolic order of its specific productions. One has to situate its productions relative to one another, identifying the connections and oppositions among them (schools, movements, polemics and battles). In this way one can map the symbolic structure of the field.

In a field, symbolic ordering consists in a declarative activity in which agents participate through statements, practices, labelling, naming, interrelating (of actors, actions, qualities, 'seminal works', means, objects, values, etc.). Symbolic orderings constitute efforts at constructing reality (Bourdieu 1977c). One of the axioms of the theory of fields is that naming and classifying operations always play a partisan role in the unending struggle to impose the legitimate definition of the symbolic order. Sociological analysis has to keep its distance from these terms, which are implicitly or explicitly weapons in the struggle. The sociologist cannot make use of them as analytical terms without himself becoming involved in the symbolic struggle, which is not his role, and above all because they mask the processes through which classifications and categorizations are generated in the domain in question. To describe the symbolic structure of a field, one has to detach oneself from the emic categories and make them the object of analysis.

The efforts deployed to produce and transform the symbolic order of the field (in a conservative or subversive direction) are based on a structure that they themselves structure and which can be brought to light by means of an

internal analysis, by establishing the whole set of relationships among the elements of this symbolic order and identifying the relations among these elements.[14] Once again it is the relational dimension – and not the supposed substantial characteristics of the products and actors – that lies at the centre of the analysis.

Reconstituting the structure of positions

In the struggle for the definition of the legitimate symbolic structures, individuals and groups have unequal means at their disposal, linked to their positions. The third stage in implementing the field approach has to concentrate on objectifying the structures of relative positions. Who are the main (individual or collective) actors engaged in the work of production, distribution and consumption? What is the organizing principle of the structure of positions that links, opposes, distinguishes and hierarchizes them? The approach of external analysis goes beyond internal analysis of the specific products of the field and gives priority to study of the positions and trajectories of the agents in the social structure, in the given field, and possibly in other fields.[15] As in the other stages of the analysis, examination of the structures of positions has to include a diachronic perspective (the trajectories and the changes in the structure and volume of the resources of the various actors).

The first requirement is to describe the structure of the objective relations among the positions occupied by the competing agents or institutions in the field, in particular the relative positions and resources of the producers and also the relative positions and resources of producers and consumers. These multiple oppositions which structure the field are played out against a background of shared beliefs and interests that cause them to exist and give them meaning. Objectifying a space of positions presupposes that one relates each individual to a system of coordinates that enable him/her to be situated objectively in a space structured by various dimensions. Each dimension must correspond to a type of resource (capital) effective within the field. Indicators (material and immaterial properties) adapted to the particularities of the field in question must be devised, to make it possible to objectify the resources of the agents in the field.

Articulating the symbolic and the social

We have now presented three major stages in implementing the theory of social fields. They make it possible to produce information that is essential for analysing a social universe from this relational standpoint. The heart of the analysis consists, however, in dynamically articulating the empirical elements yielded by these three stages of work. The latter should not be seen as successive operations but rather as levels that are superimposed and feed into each other to produce the analysis. None of these levels of analysis is sufficient in itself – they have to be interrelated. The internal and external levels of

the analysis are articulated dialectically. The symbolic order of the field has a complex relationship with the structures of objective positions. It results from a social order at the same time as it prefigures it in a dynamic of permanent transformation.

The examination, in relational terms, of the positions that the agents (especially the producers and the receivers) occupy relative to one another, the resources they have or aspire to have, and the trajectories that have brought them there, is what enables one to grasp the specific interests that they (partly unconsciously) pursue. It is then possible to *understand*, in all the senses that Bourdieu gives to this term (Bourdieu 1993d: 903–35; Bourdieu 1999: 607–26), the meaning of their production (or their reception/consumption). This meaning is not to be sought exclusively within the products specific to the field but rather in the structure of social relations in which the agents are immersed.

Open questions and concluding remarks

The stages of work suggested here are useful as soon as one studies (and defines fields as) domains of specific activity. In its conventional interpretation, Bourdieu's sociology of fields is used to account for the social organization of a domain of activity that has become increasingly autonomous (Bourdieu 1968, 1971a, 1991a). The three stages of work that have been outlined should be seen in this perspective.

However, when one tries to put this theory to work some difficulties arise and have led to several critical discussions that are analysed from many standpoints in this book. The first is perhaps the status of the theory itself. Should we regard it as a nomological theory or as a strictly methodological one? Is it strictly methodological, arguing that we should think the real relationally, that an object cannot be defined by its intrinsic properties alone and that it has to be re-placed in the structure of relations in which it is embedded? Or is it nomological, postulating that the real is relational, being concerned with the functioning of relatively autonomized domains of specific activity and highlighting their 'social laws'? No definitive answer can be derived from the Bourdieusian *corpus*. Some authors see it only as a method (Pinto 2000) or 'a *pense-bête*, a memory jogger', as Bourdieu (1992: 228) himself put it, whereas others reflect on its ontological scope (Moessinger 1994; Gautier 2012). These two tropes subsume many of the discussions that concern the theory. One group appears more concerned by ontological matters, the other by methodological aspects. To illustrate this dissent, we will briefly deal with two questions generally faced when trying to put the theory of fields to work. The first – is all action in a field guided by a principle of maximization of utility? – will be developed in relation with the nomological aspect. The second – what is a field and how are its limits to be defined? – will be associated with the methodological dimension of the theory.[16]

In a field, on the basis of their dispositions towards the future and the volume and structure of their capital, agents develop strategies (with or without strategic intentions) oriented towards the conservation or increase of their assets. Thus, even when no conscious rationality is in play, in objective terms, given the dispositions of the agent, action seems to be the product of a maximizing tendency, as if the structures of practice were informed by an immanent teleological principle leading the agent to act optimally, without necessarily being aware of it, to 'achieve the objectives inscribed in the logic of a particular field, at the lowest cost' (Bourdieu 1980a: 85; Bourdieu 1990b: 50). Here, Bourdieu's statement clearly lies beyond purely methodological questions. It also concerns the nomological aspect of the theory, i.e. the ambition of bringing to light the *laws* of functioning of the social (Bourdieu 1980b: 113; Bourdieu 1993c: 72). However, this postulate of the interest inherent in practice is problematic.

According to Bourdieu, when an individual lets his social nature follow its inclinations in a field where the objective rules are congruent with his dispositions, without even trying to do so he produces acts that correspond to the course that rational action would recommend. His acts have the appearance of rational actions without necessarily being guided by rationality. They are simply *reasonable*, Bourdieu tells us. Paradoxically, reasonable action is not based on reason; it springs from the practical sense. The common mistake made by economists is to confuse this practical sense with the rationality of the agent. However, even if this action does not spring from logical rationality, it is always guided by a logic of maximization of (not necessarily economic) utility. Without being linked by a logical calculation, practical logics always seem subordinated to an axiomatic of interest.

Bourdieu gives an excellent example of the over-interpretations to which this axiomatic can lead (or what an ironist would call the 'scholastic fallacy') in his analysis of the scientific field: 'There is no scientific choice … that does not constitute, in one or other of its aspects, a social strategy of investment aimed at maximizing the specific profit, inseparably political and scientific, provided by the field' (Bourdieu 1976: 91; Bourdieu 1991c: 9–10). However, not all agents are driven by the same *libido sciendi* to the point of objectively (and deliberately or not) organizing each of their acts in relation to a potential profit. Even in the hyper-competitive neoliberal context of contemporary research, experience shows that the scientific choices of all agents do not systematically imply a principle of maximization (Hilgers 2013). This is even more true when one considers the agent as a consumer rather than as a producer.[17] Thus, the axiomatic of interest, even when 'reasonable' rather than rational, does not seem capable of accounting for all the practices of an agent.

A social field is indeed governed by investment in the game (*illusio*) and the 'feel for the game' that is played in the domain of activity that specifies it, but this investment varies from one individual to another. Internalization of the objective rules leads one to acquire dispositions (the sense of the rules, play, stakes) specific to the field in question, but the dispositions actualized in this

structure of positions also result from individual trajectory and capital. A 'cleft habitus' (Bourdieu 1997b: 79; Bourdieu 2000c: 64) may lead agents to make a hybrid investment in a domain of activity rather than (consciously or not) seek to maximize social, symbolic, cultural or economic utility. The efficacy of dispositions and of the different species of capital depends on how far they correspond to the dominant tendencies of the field.

By contrast, if one regards this axiomatic of interest as a methodological decision taken in order to analyse the logic of a field, one can simply assert that all choices (here, scientific ones) are made in a space of relations within which they constitute, *nolens volens*, an objective investment whose pertinence can be interpreted in terms of the profit of recognition that they secure. In other words, this way of perceiving action is deliberately constructed for the purposes of analysis, it effects a reduction, a simplification, an abstraction of empirical reality which makes it possible to apprehend the reality but which does not aim to describe its principle. The answer to the question of the axiomatic of interest is thus quite different depending on whether one considers the theory of fields as methodological or nomological.

In this Introduction we have deliberately tried to consider the theory of social fields from a methodological point of view and to delimit its application. This presupposes that one methodologically and empirically define what a field is. However, how can one draw the boundaries of fields if they interpenetrate, if each field contains sub-fields that themselves contain others, and if at the same time 'a field does not have parts, components [since] every subfield has its own logic, rules and regularities, and each stage in the division of a field ... entails a genuine qualitative leap' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 104)? Bourdieu himself sometimes applied the term 'field' to social universes much broader than domains of specialized activity, sometimes to much more restricted social universes. Sometimes it seems that the social space in its totality can be analysed as a field: 'The position of a given agent in the social space can ... be defined by the position he occupies in the different fields ... One can ... construct a simplified model of the social field as a whole, a model which allows one to plot each agent's position in all possible spaces' (Bourdieu 1984c: 3; Bourdieu 1985: 724). Sometimes Bourdieu refers to the field of the social classes (Bourdieu 1984b). By contrast, in other cases, the concept is applied to much more limited social spaces. The family, for example, is considered as a field (Bourdieu 1993b), i.e. both as 'a field of forces, whose necessity is imposed on agents who are engaged in it, and as a field of struggles within which agents confront each other, with differentiated means and ends according to their position in the structure of the field of forces, thus contributing to conserving or transforming its structure' (Bourdieu 1994: 55; Bourdieu 1998c: 32). So it is not surprising that those most familiar with the theory, such as former disciple Nathalie Heinich, have a particularly broad interpretation of the idea of the field.[18] The question of the limits appears even more complicated and less decidable if one explicitly adopts a nomological point of view which aims to define a field *per se*.

If, however, one opts for a pragmatic approach, the theory of fields appears to be a *model* in the sense defined in *The Craft of Sociology*: a 'system of relations among selected, abstracted, and simplified properties which is deliberately constructed for purposes of description, exposition and prediction and which is therefore kept under full control', but which 'in no way leads to the principle of the reality that it mimics' (Bourdieu *et al.* 1972: 75; Bourdieu *et al.* 1991: 52). In the project to forge an analytical approach to grasping a specific domain of activities relationally the notion of the limits of the field can constitute a useful epistemic tool but it has to be theoretically constructed in conjunction with empirical research. When he seeks to define what a field is, Bourdieu states that 'we may think of a field as a space within which a field effect is exercised, so that what happens to any object that traverses this space cannot be explained solely by the intrinsic properties of the object in question' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 100). This definition may be considered tautological. This problem commonly arises in work based on a relational epistemology (Martin 2003). It stems from the fact that a field only exists and can only be analysed through its effects. So how can we define the limits of a field?

By articulating the three stages that we have described to analyse specific social universes, one can 'assess how concretely they are constituted, where they stop, who gets in and who does not, and whether at all they form a field' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 101). The question of the boundaries is then raised and resolved pragmatically 'in the field itself and therefore admits of no *a priori* answer' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 100). The boundaries can be observed where the field effects cease. They are apparent in the social space through the inefficacy of the rules or capital that are specific to it. In some cases, the boundaries are extremely codified, in others they are porous, but they are always fought over, because 'to define boundaries, defend them and control entries is to defend the established order in the field' (Bourdieu 1992: 369; Bourdieu 1996a: 225). When one bears in mind the three stages of work and their articulation – evaluating the degree of autonomy, describing the symbolic orders, reconstituting the structure of positions – it is easier to understand the answer that Bourdieu gives to Wacquant on the question of the boundaries of the field: 'In empirical work, it is one and the same thing to determine what the field is, where its limits lie, etc., and to determine what species of capital are active within it, in what limits, and so on ... In order to construct the field, one must identify the forms of specific capital that operate within it, and to construct the forms of specific capital one must know the specific logic of the field' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 98, 108). It is necessary to articulate the internal and external analyses and avoid what has been called the substantialist fallacy.

The theory of social fields is a methodology but while this methodology appears useful to highlight the laws of the social, some problems arise that are not limited to strictly methodological issues. The question of the status of the theory remains open and more fundamentally the theory could be useful for different purposes. Bourdieu's theory is not a fixed theory. It can even be said

that it remained provisional, since its author died before he could complete his project.[19] Today the theory is 'in the public domain'; it belongs to the common heritage of social sciences, with all the latitudes that this permits. This being so, rather than limit ourselves to an orthodox hermeneutics that seeks in the comparison of texts the resolution of their contradictions, rather than seeing these contradictions as limitations, we have opted to consider them as the mark of the provisional character of the theory and to seek to establish its fruitfulness from a pragmatic point of view. In other words, our aim has been to establish an effective way to work with Bourdieu's theory of fields and this is also the clear aim of the following chapters of the book.

The book is in three parts. Part I, 'theoretical investigations', offers a theoretical account of the theory, while also identifying some of its limitations and discussing several strategies to overcome them. Part II, 'education, culture and organization', presents case studies focusing on educational and cultural institutions. They show the theory at work and identify how field theory can make us see things differently while also noting what it does not allow us to see. The focus in Part III, devoted to 'the State and public policy', is on the formation and evolution of the State in different contexts. The chapters show the usefulness of field theory in describing, explaining and understanding the functioning of the State at different stages in its historical trajectory, including its recent redefinition with the advent of the neoliberal age. The afterword discussed the theory from a postcolonial angle.

In Chapter 1 John Levi Martin and Forest Gregg deepen the epistemological background that we have outlined in this Introduction. They trace the history of field theory from German philosophy and psychology and physical theories. Martin and Gregg show that while this genealogy was largely extinguished within American social theory somewhere in the 1970s, as it was dying out in the United States, Pierre Bourdieu was resurrecting field theory in France. Their chapter emphasizes certain aspects where Bourdieu made important advances that will be necessary for any similar field-theoretic approach. They also discuss the potentially problematic or confusing aspects of Bourdieu's own work – in particular, the relation between social space and particular fields; the relation between capital and field position; and the relation of vectors to extra-field positions or outcomes.

In Chapter 2, Lahire develops a very clear and rich critique of the concept of the field which highlights the relevance of the concept while also providing analytical tools to overcome some of its limitations. In particular, the chapter develops and enriches Grignon and Passeron's well-known critique of Bourdieu's lack of consideration for the productive capacity of the dominated segments of the social world (1989). Indeed, one of the limitations of the concept of the field lies in its tendency to consider consumers, the users (including the middle class) as forming a social space structured by the same principles as those that structure and divide the elites. The chapter offers several insights as to how to overcome these limitations by refining the theory. Lahire points out that the concept of field (like those of 'world' or 'game') is

linked to a long tradition of sociological and anthropological reflections on the social differentiation of activities or functions. From this starting point, he develops propositions for a critical extension of Bourdieu's work. Not only does the emergence of autonomized domains of activity presuppose that there have been societies 'without fields' but, moreover, in differentiated societies Lahire argues, not every action context is a field. For Lahire, in analysing a field, in the historical sense of the concept, one must above all avoid slipping into a reductive explanation of practices or productions (works, discourses, etc.) in terms of the field. He develops a critique of the reductionist abuse of the theory which especially applies to 'secondary fields' that offer low rewards, are barely institutionalized or professionalized, and which he calls 'games'. Contrasting 'fields' with 'games', Lahire points out the difficulties related to transferring the general theory of the 'field' in order to describe and analyse the functioning of an autonomized domain of specific activities. Finally, he considers the positive or negative effects of the autonomization of these multiple social microcosms and the progressive self-enclosure to which it can lead.

Chapter 3, by Louis Pinto, aims to clarify the notion of the field. Pinto argues that Bourdieu's theory of fields attempts to overcome certain oppositions that formed social sciences. The posture appears 'Leibnizian' and develops an original 'rationalist empiricism' to reduce the gap between theory and experience. This relational thinking combines a typically Leibnizian ethic of treatment of opposing paths (objectivism and subjectivism, structure and history, interest and disinterestedness) with a use of Marx, Durkheim and Weber to show the interest of 'situating oneself at the geometric vantage point in the various perspectives from which one can see, at the same time, both what can and what cannot be perceived from each of these separate points of view' (Bourdieu 1991b: 2). Moreover contrary to many prejudicies and as we have shown from a different perspective in this introduction, this chaper shows that field theory makes it possible to develop a rigourous structural conception of social change.

Part II sets Bourdieu's theory to work in various domains of activity: education, literature, journalism, cinema and public policy. Chapter 4 by André and Hilgers puts field methodology back into research in education that is one of the central domaine of reseach of Bourdieu. This chapter shows the importance to bring back the notion of field to grasp some dynamics recently analyzed by sociology of education. In the early 1990s, new research highlighted the growing instability and many uncertainties of teachers' judgement, characterized by the pluralization of its systems of reference, and many researchers turned away from Bourdieu (André 2012). However, this chapter shows that even in a context of plurality and uncertainties, field theory remains extremely useful in shedding light on the sociological foundations of teachers' judgement. Indeed, in spite of many changes, this judgement remains profoundly linked to structural influences such as the position of their school in the school field. In order to identify schools' positions in a local

field, André and Hilgers suggest establishing their economic capital and their cultural capital. Identifying a school's position presupposes that concepts used to describe the positions of individual agents be transposed to collective agents. By constructing the positions of three schools in a local field they establish the impact of position in the field on teachers' judgement and on the positions they take in the educational and vocational orientation of their pupils.

Chapter 5 is devoted to an analysis of the literary field another central domain of research for Bourdieu. According to Pierre Bourdieu's analysis, the emergence of the literary field results from an historical process by which literary activity became autonomous from different types of external constraints. Sapiro gives a provisional account of these types of constraints, focusing on the French case. She suggests classifying national literary fields according to their dependence on the state or on the market. In authoritarian regimes, the state is an instrument of control put at the service of an ideological system in favour of the ruling class which in turn determines the supply of cultural goods. The liberalization of the book market has favoured the relative liberation of literary field from state control. However, the market also has constraints of its own, which implies, notably for literature, the risk of standardization and a widening of the gap between professionalized author of best-sellers and innovative writers.

In Chapter 6 Duval shows the benefits provided by the field approach when studying economic journalism and the cinema. First, the notion of the field is useful in facilitating a shift away from common-sense representations and providing a point of entry into structural and scientific representations of social phenomena. The model is a fruitful instrument in the task of refining analysis of relations between political power, the economy and the press. The notion of the field serves to outline a general view of a social realm. A second advantage lies in it requiring the researcher to investigate questions systematically and to elaborate an ambitious analytical framework. This framework challenges the dominant explanation produced by economic models and involves questions that highlight numerous aspects of the realm studied. Third, it fosters a comparative approach and brings to light some specification of the universe studied. Comparison of the journalistic, literary and cinematic fields shows that these domains can never be totally autonomous and that the structure and efficacy of a field vary according to its national embeddedness. In other words, the author demonstrates concretely how to use the notion of the field as a tool for research which aims to combine empirical and theoretical perspectives to further the understanding of economic journalism and the cinema.

Part III focuses on the State and public policy. The field of power is at the centre of Chapter 7 by Mangez and Liénard. More precisely, they examine the problematic of the relative autonomy of fields in the Belgian context, focusing on the relationship between the field of power and different specific fields. Does the concept of the field still function in the same way (and as effectively) when translated into a context other than that of French society?

Is it equally pertinent in all contexts marked by a form of differentiation of spheres of activity? Studying the Belgian context leads them to consider not only the process of functional differentiation that gives rise to fields but also a process of cultural fragmentation from which emerge what Belgian and Dutch intellectuals habitually call the 'pillars'.

In Chapter 8, Dubois advocates a more systematic use of the theory of fields in policy analysis. Policy analysis has constructed its own concepts to describe groups and relations within the policy process. The latter include notions such as 'policy networks' or 'policy communities', 'iron triangles', 'advocacy coalitions', 'issue networks', 'epistemic communities'. Yet Bourdieu's field .sociology remains seldom applied in this subject. The theory of fields can nevertheless prove particularly useful in avoiding normative bias or the analytical limitations of ad hoc policy analysis categories. It is very helpful in objectifying the specific positions and systems of relations in which decisions and policies are made. Dubois shows that it can also contribute to the understanding of both concrete relations and the more abstract relationship between this specific field (the policy field, *stricto sensu*) and other social fields: first, those directly concerned with a particular policy (for instance the arts field vis-à-vis cultural policy); second, those involved at different levels of policy making (e.g. the scientific field providing expertise to shed light on a problem or used by policy makers in a legitimization strategy). It shows how this theory could be incorporated into policy analysis, which has been constructed as a specific academic subject in sociological research and theory. It offers examples taken from Bourdieu's work (on the state, housing policy and the 'field of power'), and from recent research (on cultural and social policies, for instance).

In Chapter 9 Medvetz focuses on the growing breed of 'think tanks' which he understands as a useful case for thinking about power in organizations. The chapter extends the scholarly discussion about the relationship between organizations, power and fields by identifying four ways of thinking about organizational power from a standpoint informed by field theory. Medvetz compares the analytical advantages of considering a) think tanks as inhabitants of a larger field, b) think tanks as a field itself, c) think tanks and power of sporning multiple fields, d) think tanks as a boundary organisation that creates and maintains symbolic and legitimate institutional separations and notably spaces between fields. Medvetz analyse the benefits and pitfalls of four approaches rooted in one particular analytical perspective.

In *The Weight of the World* and related essays, Pierre Bourdieu proposed conceiving the state as a 'splintered space' of forces competing for control over the definition and distribution of public goods, and which he call the 'bureaucratic field'. In Chapter 10, Wacquant argues that the bureaucratic field is traversed by a double struggle. The first pits the 'higher state nobility' of policy makers against the 'lower state nobility' of executants attached to the traditional missions of government. The second sets the 'left hand' against the 'right hand' of the state. The left hand in charge of 'social functions' –

public education, health, housing, welfare and labour law while the right hand, is charged with enforcing the new economic discipline via budget cuts, fiscal incentives and economic deregulation. Wacquant shows that Bourdieu concept of bureaucratic field constitutes a valuable tool to grasp and analyze these struggles at the heart of the neoliberal state and a powerful analytical key to develop a tick sociological specification of neoliberalism.

At the end of the book, we put forward a view from another angle on the theory of fields, considering it from the subaltern point of view of societies described as little or non-differentiated. Examining Bourdieu's theory from this point of view opens up three new areas of questioning. The first concerns the functioning of the theory in contexts that are not characterized by unification of the cultural market, the second discusses the links between social differentiation and capitalism, and the third considers how the theory of fields can shed light on the process of globalization.

Notes

1 Notable examples are the works of Christin 1997; Geay 1999; Bourdieu 2000c; Lebaron 2000; Boschetti 2001; Lenoir 2003; Duval 2004; Mary 2006; Pinto 2007; Tissot 2007; Durand 2008; Garcia-Parpet 2009, etc.

2 This section draws freely on extracts from texts written in collaboration with Yves Patte for a book on field theory, which never came to completion. Some passages, some quotations and the structure of some paragraphs in this history have been previously published in Patte (2006). We take the liberty of reproducing them, with his agreement, since they were several times discussed among us and written collectively. As acknowledged in the first note in Patte (2006), part of that article was to appear in a work then being co-written with Mathieu Hilgers.

3 As Martin (2003) points out, Bourdieu explicitly compared social fields with electro-magnetic fields but later criticized those who make such comparisons.

4 This point is debatable, since Bourdieu sometimes considers that a field has no parts, that the sub-fields are relatively autonomous domains, and that a move from a field to a sub-field is a qualitative leap. Nonetheless, even when considering that a field is a whole, one can say that these elements have relationships; the dominant fraction of the dominated class or the dominated fraction of the dominant class, the group of the producers, the group of the consumers and the group of the distributors are interrelated, so that they can be regarded as non-independent parts of a totality.

5 One of the difficulties of this thesis is that it refers to a quasi-pure situation. Indeed, as some contributors to this volume show, in the empirical world people often belong to different more or less institutionalized fields, and their perception can rarely be reduced to one field.

6 Such correspondence is never direct, it is not a simple reflection (see for example Bourdieu 1999: 1101).

7 'For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.' Matthew 13:12.

8 In envisaging the theory of social fields as a theory of social change rather than as a theory strictly limited to reproduction, we pursue here the critique of a vast literature that reduces Bourdieu's work to a crude determinism; we have previously examined the relationship between habitus, freedom and reflexivity (Hilgers 2006, 2009).

9 Gartman offers one of the most illuminating presentations and applications of Bourdieu's theory of cultural change. 'Cultural innovations follow the path of an inverted U-curve. They start at the bottom of the restricted subfield among unknown avant-garde artists, rise to the top of the subfield as works of the consecrated avant-garde, and then migrate laterally to the top of the large-scale subfield as bourgeois art, until imitation by the petty bourgeoisie lowers them to the status of commercial art' (Gartman 2002: 259).

10 According to Bourdieu, the problem with Marx is that he did not objectify what his scientific production owed to his specific position.

11 Postulating the existence of these objective solidarities, Bourdieu argues for a 'corporatism of the universal' (Bourdieu 1992: 543–58; Bourdieu 1996a: 337–48) that would facilitate the production of a 'collective intellectual' capable of resisting the ravages of neoliberalism (Bourdieu 2001a). The homology of the structure of fields is thus potentially the bearer of effects capable of extending beyond the domain of activity itself.

12 The relational epistemology that underlies this theory has an explanatory potential that goes far beyond the domains of autonomized activities. It has sometimes led to uses that confuse 'context' and 'field'.

13 The figure of Mallarmé, for example, is emblematic of the autonomy of the modern poetic field. Benefiting from a literary tradition to which he could implicitly refer and with which he could play without fearing hermeticism, freed from the need to be accessible to the outsider but subject to the sense of the forms and formalities of the literary field (Durand 2008), his production, eventually sanctified by school textbooks, was not subject to economic considerations, although he did not have the financial autonomy to break free of all constraints (unlike Flaubert, who had a secure private income and no children to provide for).

14 One element 'is more important than' some other element; a given element 'serves' a finality; one event 'is preliminary to' another event; an actor 'has' some characteristic and quality; a given action 'is' legitimate or illegitimate; a given product or attitude is presented as 'outstanding' or 'sacred' as opposed to 'ordinary', 'vulgar' or 'profane' products and attitudes, etc.

15 The more or less clear correspondences between the structure of the positions specific to the field and the relative positions of the actors in the field within the overall social structure constitute, moreover, a possible indicator of the degree of relative autonomy of the field in question vis-à-vis the field of power. A strong correspondence between a part of the overall social space (e.g. the fractions of the upper classes combining high economic capital with high cultural capital) and a specific sub-space within a field (e.g. judges within the legal field; Bourdieu 1986) will be the objective index of a low autonomy of the field in question with respect to the structure of the social classes.

16 Needless to say, the opposite would have been possible: the axiomatic of interest could be approached as a methodological question while the limits of the field could be seen as an ontological problem.

17 Lahire in this book shows that the question of reception remains at this stage relatively unexplored in Bourdieu's theory.

18 'Of all the concepts that make up the Bourdieusian "toolbox", the idea of the "field" is perhaps the most universalizable, because its very definition makes it a constituent foundation of all human activity: everyone is capable of being set in a context, in a history, in relation to specific stakes, which make it a collective phenomenon without, however, belonging to a framework as general as "society"' (Heinich 2007: 134).

19 'This chapter, which aims to draw out of the historical analyses of the literary field presented above some propositions which are valid for the whole set of fields of cultural production, tends to leave aside the specific logic of each of the specialized

fields (religious, political, juridical, philosophical, scientific) that I have analysed elsewhere, and which will be the subject of a future work' (Bourdieu 1992: 298–99; Bourdieu 1996a: 380). See notably the posthumous manuscript 'Sur Manet: Une révolution symbolique' (Bourdieu 2013).

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