

PRACTICE AS PRESENCE:  
Reading Bourdieu Against the Grain

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a critique of Pierre Bourdieu's Outline of a Theory of Practice (1986) using some of the deconstructive strategies associated with the work of Jacques Derrida. It is argued that the derivative nature of theoretical accounts of practice extends to all manifestations of social action. Bourdieu cannot provide an account of the subject's reflection upon his activity without slipping into the language of the rule. The habitus, as a symbolic construct, extends the domain of signification infinitely: there is no strategy or improvisation which is not inscribed in this play of representations. As such, practice can never serve as a ground for discourse.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article présente une critique de Esquisse d'une Théorie de la Pratique (1986, en version anglaise) de Pierre Bourdieu, en exploitant quelques-une des stratégies déconstructives associées à l'oeuvre de Jacques Derrida. On avancera le point de vue selon lequel le caractère second des développements théoriques par rapport à la pratique s'étend à toutes manifestations de l'activité sociale. Bourdieu n'arrive pas à fournir une explication satisfaisante de la réflexion du sujet sur ses activités sans dériver vers un discours de la "règle". L'habitus, en tant que construire symbolique, étend le domaine de la signification à l'infini: il n'y a pas de stratégie ou d'improvisation qui ne soit déjà inscrite dans ce jeu de représentations. Ainsi, la pratique ne peut jamais servir de fondement au discours.

The argot of the post-modernist has become the lingua franca of contemporary debates. Even its opponents now speak of discourse, closure and intertextuality. But the attempt to incorporate textual analysis into mainstream Critical Anthropology is not without its little ironies. Tyler's use of dialogics, for example, tends to smooth over the agonistic element in signification which brings him closer to Habermas than the French philosophers. A practical/communicative or emancipatory interest in language is emphasized at the expense of hierarchy and domination (1986:148). Metaphor, in Nietzsche or Foucault's sense of a struggle between interpreting forces, is strangely absent. And Edward Said, despite an extremely sophisticated reading of Derrida, can only preserve agency at the expense of the deconstructive critique of the subject (1980). The world is still opposed to discourse: text requires the context of history. In the end, Orientalism can only be understood by the re-introduction of the realist notion of the superstructural.

This comes, I think, of a purely instrumental understanding of what the analysis of rhetoric in the human sciences is all about. Clearly, the full weight of the post-structuralist critique has yet to be felt. By reducing deconstruction to a technique in the service of entirely incompatible approaches, the central problem becomes one of synthesis rather than difference. It becomes a matter of once again setting limits, imposing closure on the critical programme which the self-styled avant-gardistes have initiated. There has been an attempt to explore the subversive potential of the deconstructive agenda, while preserving the authority of dialectical and historical grand narratives. The supreme irony is that difference is associated with the critics of the new experimentalism. Post-modernism is regarded as one more vast syncretic effort (Rabinow 1986:348).

Now, this philosophic nicety is not entirely academic. On the contrary, it is crucial in as much as it defines the limits of rapprochement between Critical Anthropology and textual analysis. Perhaps the recent interest in Pierre Bourdieu comes from his perceived role as something of a mediator between the old-guard materialists and the new aesthetes. Nowhere are the contradictions and collusions more apparent. Bourdieu's texts seem to embody the philosophical uncertainties of a generation of anthropologists -- and here the tendency to retreat from the more radical implications of the deconstructive agenda is all too apparent.

This paper presents a post-structural critique of Bourdieu's ground-breaking Outline of a Theory of Practice (1986), and brings

to bear some of the close reading techniques associated with the work of Jacques Derrida.<sup>1</sup> It is argued that the derivative nature of inscribed behavior, which Bourdieu attributes to the anthropologists' notion of rule-governed practice, extends to all manifestations of improvisation in social life. I contend that Bourdieu cannot provide an account of the 'native' actor's reflection upon his own activity without slipping into the language of the rule which he roundly condemns in other ethnographies. The habitus, as a symbolic construct, extends the domain of signification infinitely: there is no strategy or improvisation which is not inscribed in this play of representations. As such, practice can never serve as a ground for discourse.

Where structural Marxists like Godelier have used anthropological research to critique theory, Bourdieu uses theory to determine the conditions of possibility of anthropological research. In Outline of a Theory of Practice (1986), he is determined to root out the pernicious effects of intellectualism. To this end, he attacks what he considers to be the practical privilege in which all ethnography occurs. A 'science of man', he argues, presupposes not only an epistemological separation, but a social one. This estrangement leads to an implicit theory of practice born of the neglect of the conditions under which such research is possible: the exclusion of the observer from the real play of social activities. As Bourdieu sees it, it is a question of externality and intellectualism. The impartial spectator is condemned to see the practice as spectacle, as actors playing roles. This leads to the creation of a repertoire of rules rather than an appreciation of the improvisation or strategy which governs actual practices.

The habitus represents Bourdieu's attempt to thwart the reification of practices induced by the notion of activity as rule-governed. It is intended to redress what he calls the fetishism of social laws characteristic of theoretical knowledge. Rather than a system of rules, the habitus is a socially-constituted system of motivating structures. Structures characteristic of particular historical and economic conditions produce habitus, which becomes, in turn, the basis of perception. Thus, by means of a few transposable generative schemes, a practical, rather than an abstract, logic organizes all aspects of social life.

However, Bourdieu's critique is predicated on a concept of practice which is rhetorically opposed to a domain of pure discourse. In attempting to maintain this distinction he anticipates, against his best intentions, and certainly against the grain of his argument, the case made by contemporary post-structuralists. His materialist

presuppositions strain to the point of collapse as he effectively replicates, I will argue, the epistemological rupture which Derrida recognizes in Saussure, Husserl and Lévi-Strauss.<sup>2</sup> For Bourdieu is unable to recover a notion of practice that can serve as a ground and eventual guarantor for free play.<sup>3</sup> In this respect, his use of the Hegelian, dialectical, interpretation of difference reveals itself as a ruse, an attempt to conceal the disquieting implications of différance.<sup>4</sup>

Now Bourdieu's oeuvre exists in a complex relation of contradiction and collusion with his intellectual inheritance: it is his particular strength, I think, but it also leaves him open to misunderstanding. The casual reader might think that he is being taken down well-trodden paths. In arguing for practice and against discourse, his work resembles a classic materialist critique of idealism, in which real, practical, relations are opposed to ideological obfuscation. Thus he would, in the tradition of Feuerbach and Marx, "put objectivist knowledge back on its feet", as he says in the first chapter. This is the sense in which one might be inclined to take the following passage:

Understanding ritual practice is not a question of decoding the internal symbolism but of restoring its practical necessity by relating it to the real conditions of its genesis, that is, the conditions in which its functions, and the means it uses to attain them, are defined (1986:114).

But his use of such conventional gambits proves, on a closer inspection, to be considerably more problematic, despite the similarity of structure, the polemical tone, and what can only be called the radical pose. For example, Bourdieu raises a typical critical objection. A structuralist conception of society is static, he charges, and must be opposed with a dynamic alternative. But for Bourdieu, social dynamics are invariably understood with respect to what he calls dynamic taxonomies, and refer, more often than not, to variations in meaning within the structure of particular games, like the Kabyle Code of Honour or genealogical strategies. Dynamics, in terms of social change (let alone a grand historical sense) is strangely absent.

This idiosyncratic interpretation of fundamental ideas from the critical canon makes him vulnerable from a number of different quarters. For one thing, the text is open to the same charge which has been levied at the Frankfurt School's criticism of positivism.

The object of his critique is primarily the intellectualist tendency inherent in the objectivist approach; that is to say, bourgeois social scientists, rather than class societies. More significantly, he stresses consensus as a condition for knowledge, an epistemological prerequisite for mutual intelligibility. He argues, for example, that the corrections and adjustments that agents consciously carry out presuppose a common code, and that all interaction is predicated on the existence of such structures (1986:80). But this consensus interpretation of knowledge brings him closer than he would like to the notion of conscience collective, and to the accusation that he has at least as much affinity with Durkheim as with Marx. By the same token, the concept of objective relations, in his hands, comes dangerously close to meaning shared belief, with the result that the role of ideology or conflict at the level of ideas is conceived in a manner that would be anathema to the old guard. Social groups, moreover, are defined in terms of common conditions for the inculcation of the habitus rather than in terms of a position in relation to the means of production. Bourdieu argues, against the Marxist canard, that even conflicting and contradictory social relations presuppose some degree of consensus in order to occur at all.

Examples of his flagrant revisionism might be multiplied ad nauseam. Suffice it to say that, from a classical Marxist perspective, Bourdieu's project is highly suspect. But to see his work as a travesty of radical critique is to misrepresent his intentions and to lose much that is remarkable in his theories; for Bourdieu invariably uses familiar arguments in unfamiliar ways. By rearranging received concepts, in a kind of gauchiste bricolage, his work manages a precarious existence in the interstices of contending schools of thought. For this reason, it remains one of the few examples of productive engagement between post-structuralism and critical thought, in a debate which has too often degenerated into mere name-calling. I hasten to add that this is not because of his declared agenda, which is often at odds with the post-structuralist esprit, but because the text embodies conflicting inclinations; acts them out, as the Freudians say, in a kind of repetition/compulsion. To the extent that he assumes a critical relation to his own (received) discourse, he anticipates the post-structural critique. To the extent that he retreats from the implications of this critique, and attempts to recuperate presence through dialectics, he is firmly in the tradition of Western European metaphysics.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, the affinities with the post-structural agenda are really quite striking. The unstructured discourse, which eschews

centring in favour of the fragmentary understanding of the participants, might easily be taken for a contribution to the post-structural critique of closure. He writes:

We must escape the realism of structure, which hypostatize systems of objective relations by converting them into totalities, already constituted outside of individual and group history (1986:97).

This is certainly consonant with Derrida's view of totalization as the consummate act of metaphysical thought. It represents, moreover, a brave, if Quixotic, sally against the realism implicit in the critical approach. Bourdieu's trenchant critique of totalization, for example, anticipates the decentred discourse which Derrida apostrophizes in Lévi-Strauss (Derrida 1977:289).<sup>6</sup>

The privileging of the abstract results, he argues, in the suppression of the discontinuities of lived experience. Logical structure and closure are imposed at the expense of actual practices: social life must be viewed as a coherent, rational whole. Bourdieu decries the imposition of logical structure upon practice. To this he opposes the spatial and temporal discontinuities of practical life (1986:105). In some passages, dynamic taxonomy even suggests Derrida's notion of free play. The proliferation of interpretations, of improvisations upon the basic schemes, does not permit a recuperation of a unified whole but, rather, an endless displacement of meaning. Identity is perpetually deferred. "The mind is a metaphor of the world of objects which is itself but an endless circle of mutually reflecting metaphors" (Bourdieu 1986:91).

At the same time, his denigration of reified structure is clearly a rejection of what Derrida calls *écriture* (writing); that is to say, a repudiation of all signifiers of a practice which is supposed to be prior to representations, and to which the sign system is never adequate.<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu regards all formulations of activity as a dangerous supplement to practical understanding, an unwarranted intervention between reflection and activity. Inscriptions, native or anthropological, are considered to be a travesty of practice as a privileged signified. Like the corruption of speech by writing, practice is perverted by the rule. The constitution of practical activity as a representation is, he writes, "a fundamental and pernicious alteration"; the ethnographer is "condemned" to see life at one remove, as spectacle (1982:2). It is simply a question of mistaking the second-order activity, the ersatz theoretical apprehension, characterized by abstract codification, for the genuine

practical. There must be, he argues, a natural independence between innocent practice and its wicked inscription.

Unfortunately, it is never quite that simple. Activity, *per se*, can never be confused with practice as Bourdieu understands it, because, strictly speaking, practice is never the brute factum of empirical behaviour. Bourdieu takes great pains to distinguish expressions of practice, "the sum of stimuli", from what he regards as practice proper: the principle which governs the generation of practices (1986:18-19; 1986:78).

The most specific properties of a ritual corpus, those which define it a system coherent in practice, cannot be perceived or adequately understood unless the corpus is seen as the product (opus operatum) of a practical mastery (modus operandi) ... (1986:111).

But the denigration of mere representations of practice comes to include all conceivable activities. What initially applies to the anthropologist's codified laws, rules, customs and so on, comes to refer to contingent, particular acts whose meaning derives from the transformation of schemes in the habitus. This is because the meaning of an action depends on its position in a game. Its significance derives from a context that is outside the present moment and the immediate requirements of the task at hand. The habitus, we are told, is a system of cognitive and motivating structures. It is comprised of basic schemes and their transformations rather than the internalization of specific events. Thus, the discrete action is intelligible only in terms of a system of generalized reference. Individual acts lie in the same relation to practice as the particular act of speech does to language in Saussure. Its meaning is purely contextual.

As such, the derivative character of theoretical inscriptions extends to virtually all aspects of practice. Bourdieu tries to oppose the dead letter of the rule to the living spirit of improvisation, but everywhere this has the effect of reducing all concrete manifestations of this spirit to external reflections of practice: mere signifiers. In his search for a kind of Bergsonian vitalism behind every manifestation of practice, Bourdieu turns practice into something abstract and transcendental. It is reminiscent of Hegel's notion of abstract freedom, which, in its flight from all determination, is simply a negation, an empty abstraction.

One wonders if the irony is lost on him; for all appearances of practice -- the codes, laws, and institutions, which he dismisses as

reified structures -- are forced to serve as signs, signs of a mode of generation of practices which is, in a crucial sense, beyond them, and to which they are never adequate. As Bourdieu would have it, practice names an authorizing presence behind or prior to discourse. In this respect, he is open to precisely the same accusation that he levies at the objectivists: that of constructing practice negatively. In a typically theological move, practice is defined in terms of what it is not, and named that which is not to be names, that which is ineffable.

This systematic denigration of representations of practice has another effect, one which gives rise to a subtle distinction in his terminology. In one sense, when speaking of practice, he refers to something which is able to serve as a ground for discourse and a foil to the intellectualist or theoretical apprehension of social action. This results, as we have seen, in banishing it to the realm of the transcendental. In speaking of practice in its other sense, Bourdieu attempts to avoid the reification of structure, and ends by proffering a notion of practice that is indistinguishable from discourse itself.

The equivocation points to a critical aporia. Bourdieu cannot maintain the crucial difference between what he calls a "universe of discourse" and a "universe of practice" (1986:110). And yet his argument hangs upon a distinction between practical understanding, which corresponds to the requirements of activities, and the intellectual understanding, characterized by abstract, formulated or legalistic inscription. But as Bourdieu moves from the ethnologist's body of rules, to the informant's "outsider related discourse", to codification of customary law, and the strategist's ad hoc rationalizations, it becomes apparent that he cannot maintain the distinction he needs between formal abstraction, which is supposed to be peculiar to the anthropologist, and the self-understanding of the native.

This separation between practice and its inscriptions clearly breaks down with native representations. Native theories, we are told, are dangerous; they re-enforce the intellectualist tendency inherent in the objectivist approach to practices (1986:19). The convergence of habitus and rule is especially apparent in indigenous forms of education. He writes;

The imposition and inculcation of the structures is never so perfect that all explicitness can be dispensed with. And inculcation is, itself, together with institutionalizing, which, always accompanied by a certain amount of



objectification in discourse (oral or written) or some other symbolic support (emblems, rites, etc.) is one of the privileged moments for formulating the practical schemes and constituting them as principles (1986:20) (*italics added*).

Note the rather coy use of the euphemism "explicitness" where he means formal or abstract apprehension, and the description of the reflection of the native as a "privileged moment", by which he means an exceptional one.

In addressing the question of representations the members of a society make of and for themselves, the thesis of formulation as a product of objectivism breaks down entirely. After arguing that representation is the sin qua non of objectivist apprehension, Bourdieu's ideal type of legal formalism dies the death of a thousand qualifications. He must appeal to "a science of common sense representations" (1986:21). Clearly, Bourdieu is forced to concede that the capacity to reflect on, to generate formal representations, codes, even rules about one's own activity is not unique to the anthropologist. Indeed, the manipulation of codes, and the calculations of the strategist presupposes it (1986:22).

But Bourdieu's terminology strains to the breaking as it attempts to accommodate these inconsistencies. Thus, he is forced to speak of "practical formulations" and "the objectifying process through which the group teaches itself ... inscribing in objectivity its representation of what it is ..." (1986:22) (*emphasis added*). Bourdieu can only speak of practice in the language of the rule: "The habitus is precisely this immanent law, lex insita, laid down in each agent ..." (1986:81; 1972:181). Ritual is said to function as a "regulatory device" (1986:21). Even his Kabyle informants refer explicitly to rules:

But the subtlest pitfall doubtless lies in the fact that such descriptions freely draw on the highly ambiguous vocabulary of rules, the language of grammar, morality, and law, to express a social practice that, in fact, obeys quite different principles (1986:19).

Bourdieu refers throughout to "different social games (such as elbahadla in the honour game or marriage with a parallel cousin among the matrimonial strategies" (1986:19), and speaks of the various "moves" the players make. Of course, the analogy between

games and practices is nonsensical in the absence of rules. Indeed, the existence of rules is the presupposition of the strategist.

... [A]gents have an interest in obeying the rule ... one is liable to forget the advantage in abiding by the rules, which is the principle of second-order strategies through which the agent seeks to put himself in the right (1986:22).

The contradistinction to the intellectual understanding of the ethnologist, the mentality of the practitioner is regarded as implicit in nature and nonintellectual. Practice is always associated with forgetfulness. The savage mind attains, at best, a "quasi-theoretical" apprehension of its own behavior (1986:19). Natives are capable of only "semi-learned grammars of practice" or "spontaneous 'theories'" (1986:20). And who, in Bourdieu's estimation, is able to transcend the "learned ignorance" of the practitioner? The epistemological privilege accorded to the anthropologist is never so candidly expressed as when he describes the nature of the ethnographic encounter:

[t]he relationship between informant and anthropologist is somewhat analogous to a pedagogical relationship, in which the master must bring to a state of explicitness, for the purpose of transmission, the unconscious schemes of his practice (1986:18).

Throughout the text, western theory is to native practice as consciousness is to unconsciousness. The informant is the quintessential low-brow. How disturbing, then, when he displays a precocious predilection for abstract thought. Bourdieu writes:

It is not easy to rigorously define the status of the semi-learned grammars of practice -- sayings, proverbs, gnomic poems, the spontaneous 'theories' which always accompany even the most automatic of practices ... and of all the knowledges produced by an operation of the second power which ... presupposes the structures it analyses (1986:20) (emphasis added).

One would think that when Bourdieu confronts the self-understanding of the native, a fortiori with respect to pedagogy or institutionalization, he must allow that every practice admits of some

degree of theory. But Bourdieu, for all his talk of virtuosity and practical mastery, cannot provide a convincing account of the actor's reflection upon his own activity. He refuses to acknowledge that the reification imposed by abstract, objectivist, thought is not an aberration peculiar to western culture but a manifestation of power which is inextricable from signification. He writes as if constituting the world as an object of thought, a representation, were something unique to intellectualist theories rather than a characteristic of the understanding itself.<sup>8</sup>

Bourdieu attempts to salvage the constitutive opposition of his discourse by an appeal to objective conditions for the inculcation of the habitus. He locates this objective moment during the infancy of the actor, in which time he is supposed to have internalized the basic schemes which comprise the habitus. But as we have seen, it is precisely with respect to the question of pedagogy that the difference between theoretical and the native's practical understanding breaks down. What is more, his use of the term 'objective relations' is quite as indeterminate as that of practice. The habitus is the product of objective conditions, but in which sense? Betimes, Bourdieu speaks of objective conditions in the Marxian sense. "The structures constitutive of a particular environment e.g. the material conditions of existence of a class condition produce habitus" (1986:72). Sometimes it refers merely to shared belief. "The orchestration of the habitus constructs the common sense world which is objective because of a consensus of meaning" (1986:80).

The equivocation is nothing if not useful. The appeal to the social construction of the habitus allows Bourdieu to escape the reification of structure, in this case, the fetishism of modes of production, and the accusation that he is promulgating yet another vulgar materialist account of cognition. Thus, consciousness mediates, within certain socially constituted constraints, the way that men act on their environments, natural and social. On the other hand, the appeal to material conditions to account for the inculcation of the habitus puts a limit on the play introduced by the previous principle. Without this link to objective conditions that are in some sense empirical, that is, a practice which is not in some way derivative of a more fundamental practice, a signifier of a signifier, there is nothing which distinguishes it from discourse, tout court. The habitus, we are told, as the principle of regulated improvisations, tends to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of this generative principle. At the same time, it is supposed to adjust itself to the demands of a given situation,

as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus.

But in this interaction there is never a point where material conditions can act upon habitus. On the contrary, what is reproduced is an earlier, forgotten habitus, which is itself the product of a still earlier one. It is the forgotten structuring agencies which constitute objective conditions for Bourdieu. The condition of possibility of the habitus is always a prior habitus: it is always habitus acting upon habitus. Thus, the primal scene, the encounter with objective relations that are innocent of discourse upon practice, never occurs because the habitus is structured a trace, as the constantly deferred as a ordinary moment of social action.<sup>9</sup> History forgotten is always the (non) origin of the process.

For Bourdieu, then, the last instance is indefinitely postponed. The practical, qua material, base is always a culturally and politically structured space, always within the realm of interpretation and improvisation, and, hence, within the dominion of the sign. For Bourdieu, like Derrida, "Il n'y a pas de hors-text" (1967:147). There is no extra-discursive space. It is only through the invocation of practice as a transcendental abstraction that the difference between theoretical and practical apprehension can be maintained. In its absence, all practice shares in the derivative character of an inscription upon activity.

We have seen that the elements of practice are meaningful only as a system of differences, of distinctions within games, like the Code of Honour, genealogical or matrimonial strategies. This being the case, activity can be understood only in relation to these codifications which are systemic, not in the sense that they are not flexible or dynamic, but to the extent that they defer to context. One simply must appeal to other games or structures which give meaning to practical activity, but which are never "present to hand", as Heidegger would say, with the pristine quiddity of a machete or a bullock cart. Practice is constituted, however provisionally, and I might add, with infinite plasticity, within this play of signification and this field of unlimited substitution. In Derrida's phrase, we are "always ready" with the play of inscription, formulation, improvisation upon practice.<sup>10</sup>

In a crucial way, the inscription which Bourdieu attributes to the derivative intellectualist impulse is understood to be more fundamental and prior practice. Bourdieu would have us believe that the notion of practice can serve as a privileged signified, a kind of centre which provides a reassuring constant behind the play of representations. Real practices represent an epistemological ground

for mere discourse. But everywhere practice is discovered to be the product rather than the source of the play of signification. The whole foundation of his argument, resting as it does on a rhetorical trope, is decentred with the recognition of the textuality of practice.

Here, Bourdieu's discourse effectively replicates the epistemological rupture which Derrida detects in Lévi-Strauss, Rousseau, Husserl and Saussure (Derrida 1984:97). The difference between activity and the rule is undermined with the recognition that, in Saussurian terms, the character of signifier of signifiers extends to both practice and its abstract inscription. Rather than a perversion of practice, inscription or codification is the prerequisite of improvisation upon conventional actions.

We have seen that the intelligibility of every manifestation of practice is predicated on a play of differences. But in deferring to context, the differential structure of these games also defers, in the sense of suspension and delay, the encounter with the referent; real concrete activity, without the taint of discourse, and a pristine world of material conditions in which to act. Because signs of practice are intelligible only in relation to other signs of practice, they represent the present in its absence, and defer the encounter with things as they are in themselves. A differing/deferring economy comprehends all expressions of social action; in Derridian terms, there is no presence prior to or beyond différance.<sup>11</sup>

Here, the ramifications for Bourdieu's conception of time are staggering. The present, the domain of practice, has become elusive. It is intelligible only in relation to non-presence; that is to say, through a system of generalized reference which extends back into the past and ahead to the future. Bourdieu writes:

The system of dispositions -- a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles, an internal law relaying the continuous exercise of the law of external necessities ... is the principle of the continuity and regularity which objectivism discerns in the social world without being able to give them a rational basis (Bourdieu 1986:82).

The present as the privileged moment of improvisation for Bourdieu, the domain of real concrete practice, is deeply divided, and constitutes itself only a kind of subterfuge or disguise. The forgetting of origin, far from being an aberration perpetrated by

objectivism, as Bourdieu would have it, is the condition of possibility of presence, the present, of practice. Action, in Nietzsche's phrase, requires veils of illusions: it presupposes forgetfulness.

As we have seen, the difference and deferral which occurs by virtue of différance extends to the nature of time. Like all dialecticians, however, Bourdieu requires time, in the conventional sense of unilinear progression, to off-set the deleterious effects of free play. He requires the notion of series to ensure the eventual recuperation of difference in unity. This is how he would like to interpret the relationship between theoretical knowledge and primary experience; as essential moments in the development of an adequate account of practice. Thus, the relationship between objective structures and structured dispositions is considered to be dialectical, as is the native's reflection upon practice. The "doubling" which occurs through interpretation, in a meta-theory, a variation upon a basic scheme, or between practice as an inner dynamic and its outward manifestations, is always regarded as a momentary lapse in what is essentially a correspondence theory of truth. It is Bourdieu's article of faith that, in time, these differences will be recuperated and identity restored.

But, by turns, abstract understanding is accused of imposing linear time and being essentially a-temporal. In rejecting the coherence which theoretical understanding imposes, for example, Bourdieu rejects linear time, as a manifestation of objectivism, in favour of the intermittent, discontinuous, fragmented time of practice. He writes:

a calendar substitutes a linear, homogeneous, continuous time for practical time, which is made up of incommensurable islands of duration, each with its own rhythm, depending on what one is doing ... on the functions conferred upon it by the activity in progress (1986:105).

Elsewhere, he must return to a more conventional account of time; for example, in those passages where he stresses the dynamic nature of taxonomy. In his analysis of gift giving among the Berbers, he argues that abstract understanding tends to suppress the temporal structure of the exchange. Here, his work presupposes a naive, realist view of time as he speaks of events unfolding in time, or having temporal structure and direction (1986:9). In a similar vein, he charges that explanations of social activity in terms of the rule ignore the temporal dimension which is necessary for improvisation.

To substitute strategy for rule is to reintroduce time with its rhythms, its orientation, its irreversibility (1986:9).

Thus, Bourdieu rejects linear time as characteristic of the totalizing objectivist logic; and yet, he requires that notion in order that representations might become moments in the progressive development of adequate knowledge of practice. He vacillates between discontinuous practical time, the logical outcome of his critique, and traditional time, which is necessary for a dialectical interpretation of différance.

It could be objected, of course, that the inconsistencies that I have detected are contrived, and that Bourdieu's discourse is intentionally ambiguous. Perhaps the habitus ought to be regarded as an endlessly deferred encounter with the real: we are always at one remove -- the negotiated, indeterminate, quality of his discourse being precisely the point. This would, indeed, constitute a valid objection if Bourdieu had embraced the prospect of interpretation without absolutes in a complete repudiation of centred discourse. But his appeal to dialectics, in an attempt to put a limit on the proliferation of meaning and once again impose closure, is sufficient evidence, I think, of his resistance to a deconstructive agenda.

Here, I hasten to add that it has never been a question of whether or not his interpretation of the relationship between improvised strategies and the rule is accurate -- I think that it is -- but whether or not this represents a convincing repudiation of discourse as free play. A dynamic and flexible notion of taxonomy does not necessarily imply his theory of practice, nor does it preclude an explanation in terms of discourse alone. It does, however, rule out the possibility of a dialectical interpretation of the relationships involved.

Bourdieu cannot use dialectics to resolve these questions because his discourse is decentred. The text is ruptured and, as such, lacks the first condition of dialectical thought, which is closure. By virtue of différance, he is unable to recuperate identity in the face of a multiplicity of interpretations, of variations on basic schemes. This precludes the second condition of dialectical thinking, the Hegelian notion of determinate negation, that is, a negation which has a specific content and represents a positive moment in the development of truth.<sup>12</sup> Bourdieu effectively argues himself into a radically anti-essentialist position from which he retreats by a kind of conceit in which he is a games player among fellow games players, a master strategist. But it is precisely this approach which

he is quick to deride in the phenomenologists and ethno-methodologists.

Finally, Bourdieu cannot comprehend native theories of the social world because he attributes the construction of an intellectual order to the imposition of the anthropologist's idiosyncratic view. This lends itself to entirely inconsistent accounts of the theoretical impulse. The imposition of a centre is at once attributed to the effects of abstraction, and yet, formulations of practice are accused of lacking a centre, like the ego in genealogy, "devoid of landmarks or any privileged centre" (1986:2). But his own critique of the "synoptic illusion" makes nonsense of the charge that abstraction lacks a centre. Bourdieu must also misunderstand centring because he interprets it in terms of the schoolman's opposition between free will and determinism. For this reason he is unable to account for any centre in social activity without becoming a slave to it. He flies from all expressions of order, form, intelligibility, preferring to rhapsodize on the heady pleasures of "spontaneous semiology". Thus, the contrast is always drawn between the tyranny of the rule and habitus as free improvisation. It is, unfortunately, also free of content, an empty, abstract protest against the limitation and confinement which is inextricable from goals pursued and deeds done.

#### NOTES

1. The paper assumes a working knowledge of the basic concepts in Derrida's Writing and Difference (1977) and Of Grammatology (1976). However, brief notes will provide a gloss on some of the specialized terminology for those not yet fluent in the language.
2. The recognition that discourse is a system of differences, signifiers without any referent to ground them, entails that the centre, or transcendental signified, is never present outside that system. The centre around which the system coheres is in fact a product of that system. This results in what Derrida calls an epistemological rupture (1977:264).
3. In contradistinction to presence (the belief in a metaphysical substratum or essence behind discourse) free play is unlimited interpretation without an absolute ontological or epistemological ground. In the absence of a centre or privileged signified to



control the production of meanings, everything is "free play" (Derrida 1977:266).

4. Différance is one of Derrida's strategies in this revaluation. Literally, neither a concept nor a word, it is a play on words which depends on a purely graphic intervention. In French, the pronunciation of the 'e' and the 'a' is the same. The intrusion of the anomalous "a" is a difference which can be read but not heard. The mark is a silent rebuke to the tradition of voice-centred philosophy. It stands for all aspects of language, in the broadest sense, which resist the subordination of writing to speech.
5. Derrida's philosophy is critical in the Kantian sense of the term. Like Heidegger and Nietzsche, he sees philosophy largely as a subversion of metaphysics. Derrida is interested in the rhetorical devices which give credence to what he calls philosophies of presence: those systems of thought which argue for some underlying essence, being, or substance which provides a permanent foundation for 'mere' interpretations.
6. Metaphysics requires an organizing principle, a fixed origin or centre. But the concept of centred structure is contradictory, Derrida argues, because the centre is both part of the structure and something that, by definition, escapes structuring. Because the centre is at once inside and outside the totality, Derrida refers to it as decentred.
7. Derrida argues that the voice word or Logos, is the model of self-presence and immediacy to which all theological knowledge aspires as it connotes a pure transmission of truth without distortion. In contrast, the sign, especially the written sign, twice removed from the source, represents untruth or perversion. Derrida deconstructs this opposition in Rousseau and Lévi-Strauss by inverting the priority given to speech and showing the sense in which writing may be said to be prior to speech (1976:216).
8. It is a curious position for one whose work is so reminiscent of Durkheim's search for an immanent Kantianism. To understand interpretation in the Nietzschean sense, as power, as interpretive force, as something that is pre-eminently practical and form-giving, is to destroy the metaphysical

opposition between the material and the ideal to which Bourdieu's argument ultimately appeals.

9. If the notion of a source or final end to discourse is rejected as a rhetorical strategy in complicity with Western European metaphysics, it becomes necessary to speak of "inscriptions", "marks", or "traces" to describe a play of signification that can never be an origin.
10. "Henceforth," he writes, "it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no centre. It was the moment when language invaded the problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse. The absence of a transcendental signified extends the domain of the play of signification infinitely" (Derrida 1977:265).
11. Once again, Derrida's neologism suggests differing, in Saussure's sense of a system of differences, but also deferral, the temporal delay which occurs with the intrusion of the sign. All metaphysics aspires to knowledge of Kantian noumena, or "thing-in-itself". But this encounter with the 'real' is deferred because of the intervention of writing, and by extension, signifiers in general, graphic or otherwise.
12. This argument is developed at length in my Master's thesis, Anthropology Under Erasure: Bourdieu, Derrida and the Genealogy of the Perverse (1988). See also Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's excellent preface to Of Grammatology (1976:ix - lxxxvii), where Derrida is situated with respect to Hegel and the German Idealist tradition.

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