

- of reproduction: the one affecting the peasant universe of his origins, the other, slightly more contemporary, calling into question the foundations of the university itself.
- 26 For this reason the analysis of the conditions of transmission of (symbolic) cultural capital are what best lead to an understanding of both the formation of the *habitus* and the condition of the heir.
- 27 This extremely general formulation should not serve to obscure the existence of a multiplicity of different forms of capital, corresponding to the multiplicity of socially differentiated universes.
- 28 P. Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron, *Les Héritiers: Les étudiants et la culture* (Paris: Minuit, 1964), in English, *The Inheritors – French Students and their Relation to Culture* (1964), trans. R. Nice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
- 29 *Un art moyen*, p. 17; *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*, p. 1.
- 30 See the study, “Le sens de l’honneur”, (reproduced in *L’Esquisse*) where one can find, particularly on p. 43, a first draft (1960) of the later analyses of the relations between honor and economy, gift and exchange, etc. See *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 48.
- 31 *Les Héritiers*, p. 83ff; *The Inheritors*, 54 ff.
- 32 There were of course also attempts to adapt structuralism to the terrain of more developed societies, but they seemed to inevitably become embroiled in the formalism and idealism which characterized semiological approaches to fashion, literary texts, etc.
- 33 See the article cited above, “Genèse et structure du champ religieux”, (p. 295): “In order to escape from one of these magic circles without simply falling into the next one [...] one should try and situate oneself in terms of a geometrical relation, where different perspectives come into play, i.e. at a point from where one can see at the same time everything that is both visible and invisible from all the other points of view”.
- 34 By allowing us to make explicit the question of the unity of analysis, and obliging us to revise quite comprehensively naive ideas about choice and causality in the social world, the notion is clearly indispensable to the theory of practice, which it completes and renders considerably more complicated.
- 35 On the historicity of reason see, for example, P. Bourdieu, *Choses dites*, p. 43 ff, as well as *Réponses*, p. 162 ff.
- 36 *Le Sens pratique*, p. 30; (Engl., p. 15).
- 37 “To ‘dissolve’ the big questions by applying them to objects that from a social point of view were minor or indeed insignificant, and in any case closely defined, and thus capable of being empirically apprehended such as photographic practices”. P. Bourdieu, *Choses dites*, p. 30 (IOW 19).

7

Performativity’s Social Magic

Judith Butler

Modalities of practices...are powerful and hard to resist precisely because they are silent and insidious, insistent and insinuating.

Pierre Bourdieu

The work of Pierre Bourdieu has become important to a number of intellectual inquiries across the social sciences and the humanities as much for its interdisciplinary range as for the theorization of social and linguistic practice that it offers. Clearly informed by a Marxian conception of class, although reformulated in less substantializing terms, Bourdieu’s work offers a reading of social practice that re-introduces the market as the context of social power, and argues that social power is not fully reducible to the social practices they condition and inform.

Bourdieu will insist that a certain intellectualism, taking place recently under the rubric of “literary semiology” or “linguistic formalism”, misconstrues its own theoretical construction as a valid description of social reality. Such an intellectual enterprise, according to Bourdieu, not only misunderstands the positions of social power that it occupies within the institutions of the legitimate academy, but it also fails to discern the critical difference between *linguistic* and *social* dimensions in the very textual practices that it attends.

He will also argue, however, that a certain subjectivism¹ undermines the effects of an ethnographic practice that imagines itself to inhabit the very social practices that it reveals, and which does not consider the problem of translation that inevitably emerges between the taken-for-granted reality of the ethnographer and those of the subjects he attends. In relation to this latter problem, Bourdieu elaborates the conception of the *habitus*, those embodied rituals of

everydayness by which a given culture produces and sustains belief in its own “obviousness”.² In this way, Bourdieu underscores the place of the body, its gestures, its stylistics, its unconscious ‘knowingness’ as the site for the reconstitution of a practical sense without which social reality would not be constituted as such. The practical sense is a sense of the body, where this body is not a mere positive datum, but the repository or the site of incorporated history.³

The *habitus* maintains a constrained but non-causal relation to the practices that it informs. Composed of a set of dispositions that incline subjects to act in certain ways, the *habitus* does not determine that action causally. These dispositions may be said to motivate certain actions and, to the extent that these actions are regularized, to compel a set of practices. But practices are not unilaterally determined by the *habitus*; they emerge at the site of conjuncture between the *habitus* and what Bourdieu will call specific social “fields” where the ultimate or ultimately determining field is “the market”.⁴ Practices presuppose belief, where belief is generated by the *habitus* and, specifically, the dispositions out of which the *habitus* is composed. And yet, as a necessary counter to this apparently subjectivistic account of practices, Bourdieu will argue that a set of fields and, indeed, the market as ultimate field, will inform and limit practices from an objective direction.

For the moment, I propose to consider first the generative capacity of the *habitus* on practice, and then consider the “objective” determination of practice performed by fields. I will propose that the distinction between the subjective and objective dimensions of practice is itself difficult, if not impossible, to maintain, considered from the point of view of practice and its theoretical reconstruction. The distinction between subjective and objective will be shown to operate homologously to the distinction between the linguistic and the social, and to what is claimed for the “internal” dimension of performative language over and against what is “external” to language.

Bourdieu will invoke the phenomenon of *social magic* to characterize the productive force of performative speech acts, and yet this same term might well apply to the *habitus*, his notion of “the bodily hexis”, and the social effects that this embodied practice produces. The generative or productive domain of the *habitus* is not linked to the problem of performativity that Bourdieu elaborates in relation to the problem of intellectualism and linguistic formalism. In these latter contexts, Bourdieu rethinks the meaning of performative speech acts in a direction counter to Austin’s in order to establish the dual and separate workings of social and linguistic elements in constituting what makes certain kinds of speech acts into “social

magic”, that is, what gives certain speech acts the efficacious force of authority. To what extent is the *habitus* structured by a kind of performativity, admittedly one that is less explicit and juridical than the examples drawn from the operation of state power, i.e. marriage, declarations, pronouncements of various kinds? To what extent can performativity be thought as an embodied activity for which the distinction between the social and the linguistic would not be readily thinkable?

Bourdieu’s work thus gives rise to two interrelated questions which will form the focus of this essay: (1) can the “generative” dimension of the *habitus* be thought in relation to the efficaciousness of the illocutionary performative speech act, (2) can the social and linguistic dimensions of the performative speech be strictly separated if the body becomes the site of their convergence and productivity? In other words, once the body is established as a site for the working through of performative force, i.e. as the site where performative commands are received, inscribed, carried out, or resisted, can the social and linguistic dimensions that Bourdieu insists on keeping theoretically separate, be separated at all in practice?

The Body and its Belief

The body believes in what it plays at: it weeps if it mimes grief. It does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it *enacts* the past, bringing it back to life.

Bourdieu, “Belief and the Body”⁵

Following Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu understands the body as a form of engagement with the world, where this engagement is understood as a kind of regularized activity that conforms to the “objective” demands of a given field. The body does not merely act in accordance with certain regularized or ritualized practices, but it *is* this sedimented ritual activity; its action, in this sense, is a kind of incorporated memory.⁶ Here the apparent materiality of the body is recast as a kind of practical activity, undeliberate and yet to some degree improvisational. But this *habitus* that the body *is* is generated by the tacit normativity that governs the social game in which the embodied subject acts. In this sense, the body appropriates the rule-like character of the *habitus* through playing by those rules in the context of a given social field.⁷ Its participation in the game is the precondition for a mimesis or, more precisely, a mimetic identification, that acquires

the habitus precisely through a practical conformity to its conventions. "The process of acquisition," Bourdieu writes, is "a practical *mimesis* (or mimeticism) which implies an overall relation of identification and has nothing in common with an *imitation* that would presuppose a conscious effort to reproduce a gesture, an utterance or an object explicitly constituted as a model."⁸ This acquisition is historical to the extent that the "rules of the game"⁹ are, quite literally, *incorporated*, made into a second nature, constituted as a prevailing *doxa*. Neither the subject nor its body forms a 'representation' of this conventional activity, for the body is itself formed in the *hexis*¹⁰ of this mimetic and acquisitive activity. The body is, thus, not a purely subjective phenomenon that houses memories of its participation in the conventional games of the social field; its participatory competence is itself dependent on the incorporation of that memory and its knowingness. In this sense, one can hear strong echoes of Merleau-Ponty on the sedimented or habituated "knowingness" of the body, indeed, on the indissociability of thought and body: "Thought and expression...are simultaneously constituted, when our cultural store is put at the service of this unknown law, as our body suddenly lends itself to some new gesture in the formation of habit."¹¹

To the extent that Bourdieu acknowledges that this *habitus* is formed over time, and that its formation gives rise to a strengthened belief in the "reality" of the social field in which it operates, he understands social conventions as animating the bodies which, in turn, reproduce and ritualize those conventions as practices. In this sense, the *habitus* is formed, but it is also *formative*. The *habitus* is not only a site for the reproduction of the belief in the reality of a given social field – a belief by which that field is sustained – but it also generates *dispositions* which are credited with "inclining" the social subject to act in relative conformity with the ostensibly objective demands of the field.¹² Strictly speaking, the *habitus* produces or generates dispositions as well as their *transposability*. The problem of translating between competing or incongruent fields is potentially resolved through recourse to the habitus. Resolving the problem of translation is not simply a matter of conceptually or intellectually demarcating the conventions that govern a given social field other than one's own, but, rather, suspending the intellectualist conceit of a representational demarcation in favor of a mimetic and participatory 'knowledge' decidedly more incorporative.

What precisely is the formative capacity of the *habitus*, and how does it work to "incline" action of a given kind without fully determining that action? First of all, the *habitus* does not act alone in the

generation of dispositions, for the field exercises its demands as well. The distinction between the *habitus* and the field is a tenuous one, however, since the *habitus* does not merely encounter the *field*, as a subjective phenomenon encounters a countervailing objective one; rather, it is only on the condition that a 'feeling for the game' is established, that is, a feeling for how to operate within the established norms of the social field, that the habitus is built up. Indeed, the *habitus* is the sedimented and incorporated knowingness that is the accumulated effect of playing that game, operating within those conventions. In this sense, the *habitus* presupposes the field as the condition of its own possibility.

And yet, Bourdieu will invoke the trope of an epistemological encounter or event both to separate and to render dynamic the productive convergence of the subjective domain of the *habitus* and the objective domain of the field. The dispositions generated by the *habitus* are themselves "durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions"; further, the *habitus* will "generate dispositions objectively compatible with these conditions and in a sense pre-adapted to their demands."¹³ The dispositions are thus generated by the *habitus*, but the *habitus* is itself formed through the mimetic and participatory acting in accord with the objective field. Indeed, the rules or norms, explicit or tacit, that form that field and its grammar of action, are themselves *reproduced* at the level of the *habitus* and, hence, implicated in the *habitus* from the start.

This mutually formative relation between *habitus* and field, however, is occluded by the dramatic trope that figures their relation as an "encounter" or epistemological "event". This staging of the relation presumes that the *habitus* must be adjusted by the field and that an *external* relation between them will be traversed through the action by which a *habitus* submits to the rules of the field, thus becoming refashioned in order to become "congruent" or "compatible". Hence, the ideal of *adaptation* governs the relation between *habitus* and field, such that the field, often figured as preexisting or as a social given, does not alter by virtue of the *habitus*, but the *habitus* always and only alters by virtue of the demands put upon it by the "objectivity" of the field. Clearly an effort to avoid the pitfalls of subjectivism and idealism, the thesis of the objective field nevertheless runs the risk of enshrining the social field as an inalterable positivity.

Indeed, the question of whether or not the field itself might be altered by the *habitus* appears ruled out by virtue of the objective

agency attributed to the field. Bourdieu continues the above remarks with the following: “The most improbable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable.”¹⁴ Bourdieu thus draws on the Althusserian formulation of ‘subjection’ to ideology as the mastery of a certain practice in showing how submission to an order is, paradoxically, the effect of becoming savvy in its ways.¹⁵ For Bourdieu, however, there is an “order” which “inclines” agents to “submission”, but “inclination” is also conditioned by the *habitus*, and so remains to a certain extent a site where the demands of the objective order and “regulated improvisations”¹⁶ of the *habitus* are negotiated. If the order “inclines”, but if the *habitus* is also that which produces dispositions that “incline”, then whatever discrepant pressures exist between these separate sources that bear on inclination may well produce inclination itself as a site of necessary ambivalence. Indeed, the psychoanalytic argument would doubtless underscore that the mimetic acquisition of a norm is at once the condition by which a certain resistance to the norm is also produced; identification will not “work” to the extent that the norm is not fully incorporated or, indeed, incorporable. The resistance to the norm will be the effect of an incomplete acquisition of the norm, the resistance to mastering the practices by which that incorporation proceeds.¹⁷ But because for Bourdieu practical mimeticism works almost always to produce a conformity or congruence between the field and the *habitus*, the question of ambivalence at the core of practical mimeticism – and, hence, also in the very *formation* of the subject – is left unaddressed. Indeed, where there is discrepancy or “misrecognition” in Bourdieu, it is a function of an “encounter” between an already formed subject in an epistemological confrontation with an external and countervailing field.

For Bourdieu, practical mimeticism for the most part *works*, and this achieved congruence between field and *habitus* establishes the ideal of adaptation as the presiding norm of his theory of sociality. If the *habitus* is from the start implicated in the field, then the *habitus* only disingenuously confronts or “encounters” the field as an external and objective context. On the contrary, the “inclining” produced by the *habitus* and the “inclining” produced by the field may well be the *same* inclining. Discerning the discrepant pressures of either side of this conjectured encounter would be rendered impossible.

Indeed, one might well argue that if the incorporated and mimetic participatory engagement with the world that marks the *habitus* as such is constituted by the very field that it comes to

encounter, then the figuring of the “encounter” as an epistemological face-to-face is itself a belated and imposed scenario, one which occludes the formative operations of the field in the formation of the embodied subject itself. Indeed, is there a subject who pre-exists its encounter with the field, or is the subject itself *formed* as an embodied being precisely through its participation in the social game within the confines of the social field? This question is important not only to underscore that the *habitus* does not primarily “encounter” the field as an external or objective field, but to show that the field could not be reconstituted without the participatory and generative *doxa* of the *habitus*. Conversely, the *habitus* presupposes the field from the start, and is itself composed of sedimented rituals framed and impelled by the structuring force of that field. Indeed, it seems that the subject, insofar as it is necessarily embodied, and the body is itself the site of “incorporated history”, is not set over and against an “objective” domain, but has that very “objectivity” incorporated as the formative condition of its very being.

When Does a Speech Act “Act”?

The essentially performative character of naming is the precondition of all hegemony and politics.

Ernesto Laclau¹⁸

The distinction between the subjective and objective domains of practice are offered by Bourdieu in order to illustrate both the necessary convergence of the two domains and their irreducibility to one another. This dualism, however, comes to haunt the very notion of practice that is supposed to render those disparate aims congruent or compatible. The presumptions of an objective field or the “market” as a preexisting context, on the one hand, and a subject spatially positioned in that context, on the other hand, are sustained in the very notion of practice, constituting an intellectualist dualism at the core of a practical activity that may well enact the refutation of that very dualism.

The distinction between social and linguistic practice that emerges in the context of Bourdieu’s various remarks on performative speech acts suggests not only that this distinction is a tenuous one, but that it holds significantly restrictive consequences for his understanding of performativity as political discourse. Further, it seems that, apart from the “official” use of the speech act on the part of

state authorities, there is a more tacit or covert operation of the performative that produces prevailing *doxa* in much the same way that Bourdieu describes the *doxa*-generating capacity of the *habitus*.

In particular, there is the question of interpellations that might be said to “hail” a subject into being, that is, social performatives, ritualized and sedimented through time; that are central to the very process of subject-formation as well as the embodied, participatory *habitus*. To be hailed or addressed by a social interpellation is to be constituted discursively and socially at once. Being called a “girl” from the inception of existence is a way in which the girl becomes transitively “girled” over time. This interpellation need not take on an explicit or official form in order to be socially efficacious and formative in the gendering of the subject. Considered in this way, the interpellation as performative establishes the discursive constitution of the subject as inextricable from the social constitution of the subject. Further, it offers an account of the social as formative of the subject where the dramatic scenario of the “encounter” between *habitus* and the social reduces that relation to that of a naive and disingenuous epistemological exteriority. Although Althusser’s own account of interpellation does not suffice to account for the discursive constitution of the subject, it sets the scene for the misappropriation of interpellating performatives that is central to any project of the subversive territorialization and resignification of dominant social orders. Before elaborating this latter point, however, I would like to turn to Bourdieu’s intervention in the debate on performative speech acts, and consider the extent to which the dualism he maintains between the linguistic and social dimensions of performative acts produces a set of conceptual difficulties that undermine the political promise of his own analysis.

Linguistic utterances are forms of practice and are, as such, the result or consequence of a linguistic *habitus* and a linguistic market, where the market is understood as the ultimate field or, equivalently, the field in which a practice receives its final determination.¹⁹ The linguistic *habitus* of the performative is, for Bourdieu, the *habitus* of official state speech or official discourse in general. Thus he argues that “politics is the arena *par excellence* of officialization strategies” and further, “the principle of the magical efficacy of this performative language which makes what it states, magically instituting what it says in constituent statements, does not lie, as some people think, in the language itself, but in the group that authorizes and recognizes it and, with it, authorizes and recognizes itself.”²⁰

Bourdieu’s references here to the “some people [who] think” that the principle of the performative is to be found in language itself

appears to be a reference to “literary semiology”, the tradition of structuralism and poststructuralism:

bracketing out the social, which allows language or any other symbolic object to be treated like an end in itself, contributed considerably to the success of structuralist linguistics, for it endowed the “pure” exercises that characterize a purely internal and formal analysis with the charm of a game devoid of circumstances.

It was therefore necessary to draw out all the consequences of the fact, so powerfully repressed by linguists and their imitators, that the “social nature of language is one of its internal characteristics”, as the *Course in General Linguistics* asserted, and that social heterogeneity is inherent in language.²¹

This last phrase is, I think, rich in ambiguity, for if this “social heterogeneity” is “inherent in language”, then what is the status of its “heterogeneity”? Indeed, the two terms appear to war against one another, producing the question of whether the social that is internal to the linguistic is self-identically social or whether it does not, by virtue of its instrumentality, become a specific dimension of the linguistic itself. This problem reemerges for Bourdieu when he tries to account for the problem of performativity, itself a linguistic practice, in terms that recall his discussion above of *habitus* and field in their convergent and productive relation to practice more generally:

Every speech act and, more generally, every action, is a conjuncture, an encounter between independent causal series. On the one hand, there are the socially constructed dispositions of the linguistic *habitus*, which imply a certain propensity to speak and to say determinate things (the expressive interest) and a certain capacity to speak, which involves both the linguistic capacity to generate an infinite number of grammatically correct discourses, and the social capacity to use this competence adequately in a determinate situation. On the other hand, there are the structures of the linguistic market, which impose themselves as a system of specific sanctions and censorship.²²

It seems that the “action” which is the speech act is the conjuncture not merely between *any* causal series, but between the *habitus* and the field, as Bourdieu defined them. Further, there are two “hands” here, which appear to be divided as the linguistic and the social. Here the question is precisely how to read Saussure’s claim that “the social nature of language is one of its internal characteristics”; what does it mean for the social to be “internal” to the linguistic? In the above, Bourdieu refers to “socially constructed dispositions of the linguistic *habitus*,” but is there a linguistic *habitus* that is distinguishable from a social *habitus*?²³ There is a linguistic capacity, considered as an abstract and infinite potential, that is then subjected to a *social* capacity to use this competence adequately in a determinate situation.

But to what extent does the distinction between the social and the linguistic in this instance presuppose the linguistic agent as a language *user*, that is, one who uses or deploys language in an instrumental way? Can the rich sense of the “practical” offered elsewhere by Bourdieu, related as it is to the non-deliberate and ritualistic production of belief in the social order’s claim to ontological weight, be reckoned against this notion of linguistic practice as the instrumentalized use of language? If the subject only comes “to be” within the *habitus* that renders that subject intelligible and possible, what does it mean to position that subject in an exterior and instrumental relation to the language without which it could not be?

This becomes a problem for Bourdieu’s account of performative speech acts because he tends to assume that the subject who utters the performative is positioned on a map of social power in a fairly fixed way, and that this performative will or will not work depending on whether the subject who performs the utterance is already authorized to make it work by the position of social power it occupies. In other words, a speaker who declares a war or performs a wedding ceremony, and pronounces into being that which he declares to be true, will be able to animate the “social magic” of the performative *to the extent* that that subject is already authorized or, in Bourdieu’s terms, *delegated* to perform such binding speech acts.²⁴ Although Bourdieu is clearly right that not all performatives “work” and that not all speakers can participate in the apparently divine authorization by which the performative works its social magic and compels collective recognition of its authority, he fails to take account of the way in which social positions are themselves constructed through a more tacit operation of performativity. Indeed, not only is the act of “delegation” a performative, that is, a naming which is at once the action of entitlement, but authorization more generally is to a strong degree a matter of being addressed or interpellated by prevailing forms of social power. Moreover, this tacit and performative operation of authorization and entitlement is not always initiated by a subject or by a representative of a state apparatus. For example, the racialization of the subject or its gendering or, indeed, its social abjection more generally is performatively induced from various and diffuse quarters that do not always operate as “official” discourse.

What happens in linguistic practices reflects or mirrors what happens in social orders conceived as external to discourse itself. Hence, in Bourdieu’s effort to elaborate the paradox of a “social heterogeneity inherent in language”, he construes a mimetic relation between the linguistic and the social, rehabilitating the base/superstructure model whereby the linguistic becomes epiphenomenal:

the social uses of language owe their specifically social value to the fact that they tend to be organized in systems of difference . . . which reproduce . . . the system of social difference . . . To speak is to appropriate one or other of the expressive styles already constituted in and through usage and objectively marked by their position in a hierarchy of styles which expresses the hierarchy of corresponding social groups.²⁵

Referring to the “generative capacities of language [to] produce statements that are *formally* impeccable but semantically empty,” he proceeds to claim that “rituals are the limiting case of situations of *imposition* in which, through the exercise of a technical competence which may be very imperfect, a social competence is exercised – namely, that of the legitimate speaker, authorized to speak, and to speak with authority.”²⁶ Of interest here is the equivalence posited between “being authorized to speak” and “speaking with authority”, for it is clearly possible to speak with authority *without* being authorized to speak. Indeed, I would argue that it is precisely the *expropriability* of the dominant, ‘authorized’ discourse that constitutes one potential site of its subversive resignification. For what happens when those who have been denied the social power to claim “freedom” or “democracy” appropriate those terms from the dominant discourse and rework or resignify those highly cathected terms to rally a political movement?²⁷

If the performative must compel collective recognition in order to work, must it compel only those kinds of recognition that are already institutionalized, or can it also compel a critical perspective on existing institutions? What is the performative power of claiming an entitlement to those terms – “justice”, “democracy” – that have been articulated to exclude the ones who now claim that entitlement? What is the performative power of calling for freedom or the end to racism precisely when the one or the “we” who calls has been radically *disenfranchised* from making such a call, when the “we” who makes the call reterritorializes the term from its operation within dominant discourse precisely in order to counter the workings of dominant discourse? Or, equally important, what is the performative power of appropriating the very terms by which one has been abused in order to deplete the term of its degradation or to derive an affirmation from that degradation, rallying under the sign of “queer” or revaluing affirmatively the categories of “blacks” or “women”?

The question here is whether the improper use of the performative can succeed in producing the effect of authority where there is no recourse to a prior authorization; indeed, whether the misappropriation or expropriation of the performative might not be the very

occasion for the exposure of prevailing forms of authority and the exclusions by which they proceed?

Would such strategies work, though, if we were to accept Bourdieu's description of the constraints on who can wield the "social magic" of the performative?

Most of the conditions that have to be fulfilled in order for a performative to succeed come down to the question of the appropriateness of the speaker – or, better still, his social function – and of the discourse he utters. A performative utterance is destined to fail each time that it is not pronounced by a person who has the "power" to pronounce it, or more generally, each time that the "particular persons and circumstances in a given case" are not "appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked".²⁸

Bourdieu's larger point is that the efficacy of performative speech acts (he refers to illocutionary acts in Austin's account) is based not in language, but in the institutional conditions that produce and receive given linguistic practices. The "social magic" of the performative is thus extra-linguistic, and this extra-linguistic domain – marked as "institutional conditions" – is figured in a productive and mimetic relation to the linguistic practices that it authorizes. Here one would want to know whether this "productive and mimetic" relation is not itself one of signification, broadly construed, and whether the relationship of "reflection" figured as existing between language and its institutional conditions is not itself a theory of representation and, hence, a theory of language as well. For if "language" will signify "institutions", then surely an account of this notion of signification is in order given that it appears to condition – and, hence, to refute – the very claim of a set of institutions outside language.²⁹

One might well return to the fields of "linguistic semiology" in order to ask a set of questions about how, in fact, institutions do come to operate their specific forms of social magic. If a performative brings about what it names, does it do this by itself, or does it proceed through a kind of citation or appropriation of "authority" that effectively produces the *effect* of authority at deauthorized sites on the social map? What happens when this authority-producing effect takes place at "sites" that the social map fails to include as authorized "positions"?³⁰ If institutions "position" subjects, what are the means by which that positioning takes place? The domain of the social cannot be reduced to a spatialized context "in which" a temporalized *habitus* in general or the linguistic *habitus* in particular effects its rituals. For the question of how social positions are produced and reproduced will raise the question of the "temporality" of positions themselves.

Although Bourdieu understands himself to reject the Marxian notion of class in its substantializing form through embracing a notion of "class position," is it not the case that the spatial metaphors of "positions" can be as equally reifying as the monolithic conception of class itself?³¹ For "positions" are not mere spatial locations, but temporally reproduced effects and, hence, as subject to a logic of iteration, dependent on unstable forms of rearticulation.³² Although Bourdieu underscores the temporal dimension of the *habitus* and of social practice as *ritual*, it seems that the focus on temporality disappears when he shifts into the "objective" domain of the social field, a field described almost exclusively in spatialized terms. Left unaccounted for within this topography is the critical question of how "positions" achieve their spatial status within the current political imaginary, and how this achievement might constitute precisely an erasure of the historical formation of "positions" as a theoretical foundation?

If a "social position" is produced in part through a repeated process of interpellation, and such interpellations do not take place exclusively through "official" means, could this reiterated "being hailed into social existence" not become the very occasion for a reappropriation of discursive power, a further articulation of the *habitus*, a "regulated improvisation", to use Bourdieu's terms. Further, if this "unofficial" operation of the social performative does become repeated and ritualized as a *habitus*, how would such a notion of performativity recast Bourdieu's notion of a corporeal history, the embodied history of *having been called a name*. One need only to consider how racial or gendered slurs live and thrive in and as the flesh of the addressee, and how these slurs accumulate over time, dissimulating their history, taking on the semblance of the natural, configuring and restricting the *doxa* that counts as "reality".

It is in this sense that the performative calls to be rethought not only as an act that an official language-user wields in order to implement already authorized effects, but precisely as social ritual, as one of the very "modalities of practices [that] are powerful and hard to resist precisely because they are silent and insidious, insistent and insinuating." The performative is not merely an act used by a pre-given subject, but is one of the powerful and insidious ways in which subjects are called into social being, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations. In this sense the social performative is a crucial part not only of subject *formation*, but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well. In this sense, the performative is not only a ritual practice: it is one of the influential rituals by which subjects are formed and reformulated.

How would one distinguish – in practice – between the social and the linguistic on the occasion of that ritual of social inauguration and maintenance by which a subject is alerted to its “place” through the name it is called or a subject is formed through the name that it understands itself to be called without there having been an official call? If the *habitus* is both formed and forming, and if such interpellations are central to both that formation and its formative effects, then social interpellations will be performatives on the order of the *habitus*, and their effects will be neither linguistic nor social, but indistinguishably – and forcefully – both.

Notes

- 1 Bourdieu's work conducts a critique of intellectualism and subjectivism that draws on the kind of critical work of exposing false antinomies that Merleau-Ponty initiated in relation to the discipline of psychology in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 1962).
- 2 Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus* might well be read as a reformulation of Althusser's notion of ideology. Whereas Althusser will write that ideology constitutes the “obviousness” of the subject, but that this obviousness is the effect of a *dispositif*. That same term re-emerges in Bourdieu to describe the way in which a *habitus* generates certain beliefs. Dispositions are generative and transposable. Note in Althusser's “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” the inception of this latter reappropriation: “An individual believes in God, or Duty, or Justice, etc. This belief derives (for everyone, i.e. for all those who live in an ideological representation of ideology, which reduces ideology to ideas endowed by definition with a spiritual existence) from the ideas of the individual concerned, i.e. from him as a subject with a consciousness which contains the ideas of his belief. In this way, i.e. by means of the absolutely ideological ‘conceptual’ device (*dispositif*) thus set up (a subject endowed with a consciousness in which he freely forms or freely recognizes ideas in which he believes), the (material) attitude of the subject concerned naturally follows”. See Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).
- 3 See J. Thompson's editor's introduction, in P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 13.
- 4 Bourdieu argues that this conjuncture between *habitus* and field is for the most part congruent or compatible.
- 5 *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 73.
- 6 Bourdieu argues in a vein highly reminiscent of Henri Bergson's argument in *Matter and Memory* that the body acts as a repository for the entirety of its history. Bourdieu writes, “the *habitus* – embodied history,

internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product” (The Logic of Practice p. 56). The metaphors of the body as “depository” or “repository” recalls Bergson (and Plato's discussion of the *chora*, that famous receptacle in the *Timaeus*). But the presumption that the entirety of memory is preserved or “acted” in the present characterizes the temporal dimension of the body's materiality for Bergson: “. . . memory itself, with the totality of our past, is continually pressing forward, so as to insert the largest possible part of itself into our present action”. Earlier in *Matter and Memory*, he writes, “Habit rather than memory, it acts our past experience but does not call up its image”. See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone, 1988), 151, 108.

- 7 To participate in a social game is not the same as acting according to a rule, for the rules that condition and frame actions are not fully explicit, and the “following of the rule” is not fully deliberate. For an interesting and helpful discussion of this Wittgensteinian problem as it emerges in Bourdieu's social theory, see Charles Taylor, “To Follow a Rule . . .”, reprinted in this volume.
- 8 *The Logic of Practice*, p. 73.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- 11 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 183.
- 12 For an interesting and thoughtful consideration of the paradoxes produced by Bourdieu's theory of “inclination” and “motivation”, see Theodore Richard Schatzki, “Overdue Analysis of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice”, *Inquiry*, 30 (March 1987), pp. 113–35.
- 13 *The Logic of Practice*, p. 54.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 Note the equivalence implied by the disjunctive “or” in the following passage from Althusser: “The school teaches ‘know how’ . . . in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its ‘practice’.” “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, p. 133.
- 16 *The Logic of Practice*, p. 57.
- 17 See Jacquelyn Rose on the failure of identification in *Sexuality and the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986), p. 91.
- 18 Ernesto Laclau, “Preface” to Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. xiv.
- 19 “It is in relation to the market that the complete signification of discourse occurs”, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 38. Bourdieu appears to presume the unitary or systematic workings of something called “the market” without questioning whether there are not competing market forces that are not contained by a unitary notion of the market (i.e. the thesis that capitalism produces excess market phenomenon that it cannot control and that undermines its own hypostatization as a unity). Nor does he consider that there might be a genealogy of “the market” that would undermine the thesis of its unitary and ultimately determining character. Further, he appears to codify the distinction between the

- economic and the cultural which Karl Polanyi has argued is the symptomatic conceptual effect of capitalism itself. See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*.
- 20 *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 109–10.
 - 21 Bourdieu, Introduction, in *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 34.
 - 22 *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 37.
 - 23 For an excellent discussion of this problem, see William F. Hanks, “Notes on Semantics in Linguistic Practice”, in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, ed. C. Calhoun, E. Lipuma, and M. Postone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) pp. 139–55.
 - 24 Bourdieu also argues that this magic is to be understood as the power to produce collective recognition of the authority of the performative, and that the performative cannot succeed without this collective recognition: “One should never forget that language, by virtue of the infinite generative but also origination capacity – in the Kantian sense – which it derives from its power to produce existence by producing the collectively recognized, and thus realized, representation of existence, is no doubt the principal support of the dream of absolute power.” *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 42.
 - 25 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
 - 26 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
 - 27 For a relevant discussion of the phantasmatic promise of the performative, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 94–120.
 - 28 “Authorized Language” in *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 111.
 - 29 One might consider the usefulness of transposing Baudrillard’s critique of Marx to a critique of the social and linguistic distinction in Bourdieu. Working within a very different tradition, one might consider the task that William Hanks holds out for rethinking the relation between linguistic formalism and semantics: “. . . the challenge is to see the literal core of language as already permeated by context and subject to reconfiguration and novel production in activity.” See William F. Hanks, “Semantics in Linguistic Practice”, in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, p. 155.
 - 30 Derrida remarks that no performative can work without the force of iterability, that every appearance of a subject who works the performative is the effect of a “citation” that both offers the performative an accumulated force and belatedly positions “the subject” as the fictive and intentional originator of the speech act itself. See Jacques Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context”, *Limited Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graff (Northwestern University Press, 1986), p. 18.
 - 31 “Concluding Remarks: For a Sociogenetic Understanding of Intellectual Works,” *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, p. 264.
 - 32 See the appropriation of the Gramscian notion of rearticulation in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1986).

8

Practical Reason and Cultural Constraint: Agency in Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice

James Bohman

Most explanations of rational action in the social sciences regard practical reason as both individualist and instrumental. On this view, social actions are in the first instance to be explained intentionally. In such explanations, what explains an action is the particular agent’s beliefs and desires. Sometimes a collective agent’s intentions may be invoked, but, more often than not, only as an individual agent “writ large.” Such explanations are also generally instrumental, since what makes actions rational is the relation of consistency between means and ends, no matter what they happen to be. This idealized picture of the rational actor is perhaps best captured by Carl Hempel’s description of the well-informed engineer, who masterfully and fully consciously chooses among all the available alternatives. A competent engineer is one who chooses the optimal solution to a problem of design, since “the range of permissible solutions is clearly delimited, the relevant probabilities and utilities are precisely specified, and even the criteria of rationality to be employed (e.g., maximization of expected utilities) is explicitly stated.”¹ But short of these improbably well-defined and ideal conditions, it is hard to see how such standards of rationality, more accustomed to rarified air of theoretical reason, are supposed to apply in actual social settings.

In contrast to these idealized accounts, both philosophers and social scientists have developed other, more contextual, accounts of practical rationality, building on Aristotle’s phronesis or practical judgement and on Wittgenstein’s rule-following. In *The Logic of*