The Constitution Of Organizational Analysis:
Insights From Bourdieu’s Sociology Of The Literary Field

*Stream 3: Organization / Literature: Beyond Equivalence and Antinomy*

**Olivier Ratle**

*Lancaster University*

Department of Organisation, Work and Technology
Lancaster University Management School
Bailrigg, Lancaster
LA1 4YX, UK
o.ratle@lancaster.ac.uk
tel.: +44 1524 594049
fax: +44 1524 594060
Introduction

Over the last decade, many organization scholars have looked at the constitution of the knowledge of their own field. However, it is arguable that many of these studies are too restricted in their outlook. While some authors focus on the internal characteristics of theoretical texts at the expense of an adequate articulation of their relations with social structures, others try to account for the constitution of theories, merely by relating them to their context. Yet contributions on themes like deconstruction of ideologies (e.g. Calás and Smircich, 1992), construction of opportunities for contribution (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997), or rhetorical construction of authorial credibility (e.g. O’Connor, 1996) contrast with those that claim a social determination of the researcher’s work, this determination taking various forms such as economic (e.g. Barley and Kunda, 1992), cultural (e.g. Perry, 1992), aesthetic (e.g. Guillén, 1997), etc. The gap between these approaches leaves open several questions about processes of knowledge constitution. Hence, my aim is to show the value of establishing some links between these approaches, and to present a method that enables it.

This methodological problem that I am concerned with is a fundamental one to literary analysts, who have struggled with it for a much longer time. Thus, my assumption is that a detour through sociology of literature can be fruitful. In this paper, I will focus on an approach to sociology of literature developed by Pierre Bourdieu. His sociology of ‘cultural works’ is precisely concerned with overcoming the dichotomy mentioned above. While I begin the paper by locating that approach within Bourdieu’s works, I end with a reading of a set of studies on the new institutionalism within organization analysis. In between, my intention is not so much to give a shortened version of Bourdieu’s sociology of cultural works as to outline the main methodological principles which will guide the analysis.

The Rules of Art within Bourdieu’s Works

Some might question the relevance of the detour proposed. I am not referring here to a possible objection to establishing a parallel between literary and scientific texts. The idea that literature can be used as the material for a sociological investigation is nothing revolutionary (an early example being Goffman, 1959), or that scientific texts can be seen as literary artifact is unlikely to generate a lot of disagreement. Today, Bourdieu’s own justification for such a project (see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) seems even a little out of place. When, for instance, the study of the literary effects of scientific texts is already well on its way (e.g. Gross, 1996; Nelson et al., 1987; Simons, 1989; Simons 1990), writing nowadays that literature can ‘liberate’ researchers from their positivist blinkers would really look like building a straw-man. As some approaches to science studies are gaining more and more adepts through art sociologists, and while science studies scholars themselves turn to some literary analysis icons such as Kenneth Burke, dialogue seems already well engaged.

When I question the relevance of the detour proposed, I am rather referring to the simple fact that Bourdieu has already dedicated many writings to an approach to sociology of science (e.g. Bourdieu 1975/1999, 1997). Furthermore, the publication in 2001 of a complete outline of his program (Bourdieu, 2003) could be seen as

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1 For that, readers will certainly be better served by a set of short texts from Bourdieu himself (see Bourdieu, 1990a, and especially 1993).
annihilating any hope of relevance for this detour. However, there are, I would argue, three reasons to do so.

A first is merely that The Rules of Art (Bourdieu, 1996) – a series of studies on the French literary, artistic, and intellectual fields – is three times bigger than Science of Science and Reflexivity (Bourdieu, 2003) – the annotated transcription of Bourdieu’s last course at the Collège de France. Hence, the reader will find in The Rules... a deeper and more elaborated discussion of the relevant concepts of a sociology of cultural works. The notion of field, especially, receives here its most extensive treatment. This is surprising as the word appears as early as 1966 (Bourdieu, 1966). But as Bourdieu (1996: 380n3) explains, although the notion was introduced to account for some forces that may be observed within artistic or literary fields, the content of the notion has only been made more precise thanks to some later research published in 1989 (Bourdieu, 1995). As Mounier (2001: 58) observes, although the notion of field is present in The Logic of Practice (Bourdieu, 1989), it is used only as a complement to the notion of illusio. But in The Rules..., the notion becomes much more important than the notion of habitus, central to The Logic...

Seen in the light of The Rules... many critiques addressed to Bourdieu’s early outline of a sociology of science (Bourdieu, 1975/1999) lose some of their grip. Dubois (1999), for instance, provides a long series of critiques based on that foundational article. He deplores that in wanting to overcome the dichotomy between internal and external readings of texts, Bourdieu has more or less abandoned the first. Although it is true that he never goes into deep textual analysis (an exception being Bourdieu, 1991), this is not because he denies the usefulness of these approaches, but because he rejects approaches which would only focus on the texts.2 The reading of Flaubert’s Sentimental Education, with which The Rules... starts, is in fact an assemblage of various methods of analysis. The same comment applies to Dubois’ critique of Bourdieu’s determinism and of his notion of interest. While the question of the nature of agency is dealt with extensively in The Rules..., the restricted notion of interest that Dubois is referring to has almost disappeared to give way to the notion of illusio, which is the collective belief in the importance of adhering to the game (a move justified in Bourdieu, 1990b).

It is also easy to observe that the studies on the literary and artistic fields have had much more impact than the programmatic statements on science. Hence, many more critiques of the former are available, as well as more studies done within that perspective. A bibliography compiled by Thumerel (2002) lists more than 30 literary analysts who refers to Bourdieu’s sociology. Each of the 70 references is not equally relevant, but compared to the numbers of science studies scholars who refer to Bourdieu, it is enormous. Breslau (2002) argues that science studies scholars have not followed Bourdieu’s research program, as their intellectual strategy has been that of establishing their independence from existing disciplines by emphasizing intimacy with the local context of science, neglecting the social relations that extend beyond this context. Hence, in a personal communication (December 2002), he is at pain to list other authors than himself (Breslau, 1997; 1998) and Lebaron (2000).

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2 It worth here quoting Bourdieu as he describes his project of writing The Rules...: “all the oppositions habitually made between external and internal, hermeneutics and sociology, text and context, are totally fictitious; they are meant to justify sectarian refusals, unconscious prejudices (…) or, quite simply, the desire for the least expenditure of effort. This is because the method of analysis that I am proposing cannot really be put into operation other than at the cost of an enormous amount of work. It demands that you do everything done by the adepts of each methods known (internal reading, biographical analysis, etc.) in general on the level of one single author…” (1990a: 148)
A second major reason not to neglect The Rules... at the expense of Science of Science... is that the author engages with a different set of authors, and hence a different set of problems. That does mean that there are no common grounds. For instance, the critique addressed to Knorr-Cetina (1981) – that her analysis neglects how rhetorical strategies of scientists are linked with peculiar positions and dispositions within a scientific field – can be literally interchanged with the critique addressed to textual genetics of Sentimental Education. The latter, indeed, is worth quoting literally:

the analysis of the successive versions of a text could not take on its full explanatory force unless it tried to reconstruct (no doubt a little artificially) the logic of the labour of writing understood as a search accomplished under the structural constraint of the field and the space of possibilities it offers. One could better understand the hesitations, the regrets, the returns by knowing that the writing, a perilous navigation in a universe of threats and danger, is also guided, in its negative dimension, by an anticipated knowledge of probable reception, inscribed in a state of potentiality in the field. (Bourdieu, 1996: 197)

Many similar parallels can also be found: between the critiques of Goldmann’s (1975) sociology of novels and of Bloor’s (1991) sociology of science, of Becker’s (1984) interactionist perspective on the appreciation of art and of Collins’ (1985) studies of scientific controversies, etc.

Ultimately, if there is a difference between the two projects, it lies less in the content of their framework than in their target. Science of Science... is mostly a critique of science studies for its inability to understand the production of knowledge in relation with a political economy of the scientific field. In comparison, The Rules... address as well the problems of both internal and external approaches to literary analysis. Yet what really distinguishes it, and hence explains the massive wave of disagreement that it has generated, is a questioning of one of the more deeply taken-for-granted assumptions within the literary field: the belief in the singularity of the ‘creator’, a belief that forbid any attempt to understand the literary work in any other way than by literary means. But Bourdieu, whose intellectual strategy has always been that of developing a single framework through the confrontation of different objects refuses to give a special status to art or literature and appropriates Goethe’s following statement: “Our opinion is that it well becomes man to assume that there is something unknowable, but that he does not have to set any limit to his enquiry” (quoted in Bourdieu, 1996: XV). For Bourdieu, this is not a mark of naivete, but a belief that literature can really open new avenues, in the same way than photography raised new problems to 20th century painters. However “The very intention to write a science of the sacred has something of the sacrilegious about it…”, Bourdieu (1996: 185) writes, not without reasons. It is a risky enterprise as the belief is protected by the veneration of all those who were raised from their earliest youth to perform “sacramental rites of cultural devotion” (Bourdieu, 1996: 184). Hence, literature and art pose major obstacles to scientific objectivation. Obstacles that comes from a refusal by sociologists to play the game, to contest art within the rules of art.

Why such insistence on conferring upon the work of art – and upon the understanding it calls for – this status of exception, if not in order to stamp with prejudicial discredit the (necessarily laborious and imperfect) attempts of those who would submit these products of human action to the treatment of the ordinary science, and thereby assert the (spiritual) transcendence of those who know how to recognize that transcendence? (Bourdieu, 1996: XIV)

In the end, it is only if the ascendancy of the belief in the singularity of the ‘creator’ is recognized that a science of cultural works become possible. In other words, it is necessary to suspend “the relation of complicity and connivance which ties every
cultivated person to the cultural game, in order to constitute the game as object” (Bourdieu, 1996: 230).

**Bourdieu’s Sociology of the Literary Field**

There would be a great deal to say in order to explicate the main concepts of Bourdieu’s sociology, namely the notions of field, capital, habitus, doxa, illusio, etc. (for a discussion of these concepts in the context of organization analysis, see Everett, 2002). I will focus merely on the notion of field since it is the most important one. Important here, not so much because of its place in Bourdieu’s works, but because it is a device that is especially well suited for what is aimed at in this paper. The notion of field, Bourdieu writes, enables us “to escape the alternatives between internal interpretation and external explanation (…) by reminding us of the existence of social microcosms, separate and autonomous spaces, in which works are generated” (1996: 181). These microcosms are structured systems of social relations in which struggles take place over resources and legitimacy. Their structure being the sedimentation of previous struggles, fields, in the case of cultural production:

> propose to those who are involved in them a space of possible that tends to orient their research, even without their knowing it, by defining the universe of problems, references, intellectual benchmarks (…) concepts in –ism, in short, all that one must have in the back of one’s mind in order to be in the game. (Bourdieu, 1993: 176)

The field is hence, a mediating notion between a text and its context, a notion that enables the articulation of a critique of internal and external approaches.

Bourdieu’s principal target then, is the belief in the singularity of the ‘creator’. He directly links this belief to the importance of internal approaches in literary analysis, and especially to what he terms: the ‘biographical illusion’. That is, the search for the explanatory principle of a work internal to an author taken in isolation (1996: 186). Against that, he proposes that the meaning of a biographical event must be put in relation to the corresponding states of the structure of the literary field. Any event is understood as placement/investments and displacements/disinvestments in this space. Otherwise, trying to understand a career as a unique and self-sufficient series of successive events, without any other link than being associated with a ‘subject’, becomes almost as absurd as trying to make sense of a train trip without taking the structure of the network into account, that is the matrix of objective relations between the different stations. (1996: 258)

A similar critique is made of the Russian Formalists. In refusing to consider anything other than the intertextual system of works, they are forced to find in the ‘literary system’ itself the principle of its dynamics. That does not mean that they ignore the tensions between opposed literary schools and the struggles between the canonized and the non-canonized, but they remain trapped, Bourdieu (1996: 201) argues, within a problematic Saussurean philosophy of history when they assert that everything can be determined only by previous states of the ‘literary system’. For Bourdieu, there is no doubt that any change depends on ‘state of the system’, that is the repertory of actual and virtual possibilities that are offered by the space of position-takings. But it depends above all on the relations of symbolic force between agents, who have vital interests linked with some specific positions offered in the field. These agents use all the power at their disposal to activate the positions which fit the most their intentions and interests.

All these approaches, Bourdieu argues, owe their apparent universality “only to the fact that they are upheld almost everywhere by the scholastic institution of the teaching
of literature…” (1996: 194). Yet they ignore the very simple and basic idea that every author, to be significant, has to engage with the heritage accumulated by collective work. This heritage forms “an ensemble of probable constraints which are the condition and the counterpart of a set of possible uses” (1996: 235) Within that space of possible, absolute freedom “belongs only to the naive and the ignorant” (1996: 235). And this is, of course, even more important in scientific fields where new entrants must absolutely show their credentials, and where programs of research can exercise a strong structuring effect on scientific practices (1996: 383n27).

This set of critiques (along with many others) can easily lead to the expectation that Bourdieu will then offer a determinist account of literary works, but external approaches are also dismissed. To understand the literary field as an autonomous social universe is to get away from the idea that “understanding the work of art would mean understanding the vision of the world belonging to a social group which has figured either as starting point or as intended recipient for the artist in composing the work” (Bourdieu, 1996: 202). The idea which is present, for instance, in Goldmann’s (1975) work, is never completely spelt out, Bourdieu argues, “perhaps because it would not withstand the test of being made explicit” (1996: 202).

It is in the analysis of Flaubert’s Sentimental Education that Bourdieu exemplifies the consequences of his critiques. The first part of The Rules… is an attempt not to interpret but to comprehend Flaubert’s novel. The purpose of the analysis is to understand the process of objectification of the author’s position within the literary field. As Thumerel (2002: 45) underlines, Sentimental Education is not a mere transposition of the sociocultural context in which Flaubert lived, but a retranscription of the ambiguous situation of an author who tries to keep himself at distance from all the poles of social space and of the literary field. Its hero, Frédéric Moreau, a young man torn between several women who represent the various worlds of art and business, is not, as many have argued, the sublimation of its author. Instead, as Bourdieu summarizes:

Sentimental Education reconstitutes in an extraordinarily exact manner the structure of the social world in which it was produced and even the mental structures which, fashioned by these social structures, form the generative principle of the work in which these structures are revealed. (1996: 32)

Together with that refusal of establishing a direct relation between Flaubert and its hero, Bourdieu refuses also to use Flaubert’s social origin as an explanatory principle. As he argues, the effect of the properties attached to an agent depends on the state of the field. Similar dispositions may engender the taking of very different positions, according to the state of that field (1996: 83). From there, it is not difficult to imagine that Bourdieu will not allow either the establishment of a direct relationship between positions in the field and position-takings. Between them is the space of possibles, that is the space of position-takings identifiable as objective potentialities: movements to launch, adversaries to combat, established position-takings to be overtaken, etc. (1996: 235). This space of possible, Bourdieu reminds us:

does not present itself as such to the writer’s consciousness; that would oblige us to interpret his choices as conscious strategies of distinction. It emerges here and there, in fragments, notably in moments of doubt about the reality of the difference that the creator intends to assert in his work itself, and quite apart from any quest for originality. (1996: 93)

3 A step taken too enthusiastically by Heinich (1998). Against the sociologism of Bourdieu, she proposes taking seriously the belief in the singularity of the artist, and to constitute it as an object. As a result, we might wonder if she has really read The Rules…, especially part 3, chapter 1.
Rather than being another ‘proof’ of Bourdieu’s determinism, this idea appeals to the notion of practical consciousness, to the fact that being a writer, an artist or a scientist is first and foremost, mastering a craft that appeal to a tacit form of knowledge. In other words, it is about having a sense of the game. This is why Bourdieu avoids attributing cynicism in agents’ strategies. If there is a elective affinity between a social position and a position-taking, it is less the result of rational calculation than ‘effects of pre-established harmony’. An illustration of that is the relation between a journalist and his newspaper. If the journalist ‘fits’ the tone and fulfills the expectations of the readers, it is not as much because he is cynically trying to please them, than because he is probably himself the ideal reader of that paper. If he has to anticipate something, it is not the expectation of the reader with whom he shares similar dispositions, but the positions of his colleagues from the other newspapers (1996: 165).

There is hence a enormous difference between saying that a position-taking is determined by a social position, and that agents actualize a specific position within a space of position-takings. Ultimately, if the structure of the field is present in every act of production, it is merely because, as the field is the result of the struggle for a monopoly of the imposition of legitimate categories of perception and appreciation, these categories are also “the categories of perception and appreciation which structure the perception and appreciation of the different positions offered by the field and its products” (1996: 164) But that ‘action of works upon works’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 199) is only ever exercised by the intermediary of authors whose strategies remain an actualization of a position that fits their dispositions and interests.

I will stop here this attempt to explicate the notion field, which itself has not being completely explicated, and is still debated and refined (for a recent discussion, see Fabiani, 1999; Lahire, 1999; Saint-Jacques and Viala, 1999). My aim is now to illustrate how the sociology of the field can account for the constitution of a school of thought within organization analysis.
The New Institutionalism within the Space of Organization Analysis

Various authors and school of thoughts could have been the object of the following discussion. If I have chosen to focus on the new institutionalism, it is because the existing set of studies gives us a good starting point, since discussing them will enable me to highlight the problems that a sociology of the field is trying to overcome. More interestingly, I would say that the new institutionalism within organization analysis offers a peculiar problematic to look at, in terms of the constitution of its object of inquiry.

This problematic is set by Bowring (2000) in the following terms: in the course of the development of the new institutionalism, the inspirational idea of Berger and Luckmann (1967), of social reality as a construct, has given way to a view more in line with the dominant functionalist approaches within North-American organization analysis. The idea of reality as a social construct has shifted away from a conception of reality as objective and independent of human affairs. She then proposes a ‘deconstruction’ of Meyer and Rowan’s (1977/1991) classical article, where she tries to “illuminate some of an article’s hidden meanings that are often overlooked” and to show how “the article is representative of the type of article that is viewed as legitimate in positivist organizational theory” (Bowring, 2000: 265).

My aim here is not to criticize the deceptively triviality of her analysis (which enlightens us with thoughts such as: “The authors’ academic affiliation immediately follows their names and is used to locate them within the academic community” [266] or that “The formulation of a problem, followed by the statement of propositions in an attempt to solve that problem, is a style borrowed directly from natural sciences” [266]), but rather to emphasize the lack of any adequate explanatory principles. As Leuenberger and Pinch (2000) write in a reply, to argue that Meyer and Rowan wrote their article as they did, merely to fit within a dominant paradigm, is to fall into a problematic idealistic tradition of the history of ideas. What is interesting in Leuenberger and Pinch’s reply is that what they propose to reorient Bowring’s inquiry is in many different ways, very much in tune with the principles of a sociology of the field.

A first suggestion is that if we want to understand how different theoretical paradigms influenced the new institutionalism, it is necessary to look at the institutional manifestations of the different schools. In the Rules..., Bourdieu constantly challenges the idea of a direct determination by economic and political conditions over the literary field. The field is not a reflection of these influences, but a refraction. The more a field is autonomous, the more its specific logic is imposed on external influences (Bourdieu, 1996: 220). It is thus not a surprise to see Leuenberger and Pinch asking questions that try to explicate, for instance, the relations between sociology and organization analysis, the wider impact of Berger and Luckmann on North American sociologists, or the role played by more radical traditions influenced by phenomenology, such as ethnomethodology.

A second suggestion is to explore the different meanings of interpretativism and constructivism in different areas. As Leuenberger and Pinch point, Berger and Luckmann’s social constructivism has been transformed into a very different form of constructivism in the sociology of science. If there is such a thing as an ‘interpretative’ paradigm, it houses a multitude of interpretations of the key concepts. As it is possible to see in the well-known anthology of Powell and DiMaggio (1991), the new institutionalism is anything but a monolithic approach. Especially since in more recent years, there have been many attempts to modify the agenda with a focus on the process
of institutionalization rather than the outcome (eg, Barley and Tolbert, 1997; Tolbert and Zucker, 1996) and the role of discourses in that process (eg, Phillips, 2003; Townley, 2002; Whittington, 1992). Again, we find in The Rules… a similar concern, when Bourdieu reminds us that the categories engaged in perception and appreciation of the work of art are doubly linked to historical context: they are associated with a social universe which is situated and dated, and they are the object of usages which are themselves marked by the social position of their users. For him, most of the notions that are employed by artists and critics to define themselves and to define their adversaries are weapons in struggles (1996: 297). A condition for a science of cultural works is to refuse to use categories of classification that are nothing more than classificatory schemes issued from these struggles. Hence, Leuenberger and Pinch point to something very important when they underline that Bowring’s text is structured around a problematic binary opposition between interpretative and (without any distinction and interchangeably) functionalism, realism, and structuralism.

The second study that I want to discuss offers a very different perspective that could seem much closer to a project of comprehending the constitution of a peculiar school. Mizruchi and Fein (1999) are concerned with the fate of DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) seminal essay. In that essay, DiMaggio and Powell try to understand why modern organizations all look similar, or in other words, to account for the diffusion of the ideas about modes of organizing. What they term ‘institutional isomorphism’ occurs, it is proposed, through coercive, mimetic and normative pressures. From a content analysis of a sample of 160 articles that refer to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), Mizruchi and Fein observe that mimetic isomorphism has received disproportionate attention compared to the two others. That is despite the fact that DiMaggio and Powell gave each of the three mechanisms a comprehensive description and many illustrations. The thesis proposed is that since coercive and normative isomorphism raised some delicate issues about power, users of that text have only appropriated aspects of it that fit comfortably within prevalent discourse in the field.

This intuition comes partly from Usdiken and Pasadeos (1995). Through a citation analysis of the journals Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ) and Organization Studies (OS), they have shown that authors writing in ASQ are less likely than those writing in OS to put emphasis on external power and coercive forces. Mizruchi and Fein interpret this finding as a wider pattern differentiating legitimate American and European scholarly work in organization studies. But of course, it does not explain a lot. Arguing for the existence of an homology between the content of some articles and the content of a dominant discourse still leaves open the question of why would an author feel compelled to fit within it.

To answer this question, Mizruchi and Fein introduce a simple version of the idea of social position. They propose that for an interpretation to become dominant, it must attain prevalence within central locations in a discipline. That means that centrally located scholars should be heavily influenced by that dominant interpretation while peripheral scholars would be less conversant with it, because they are less likely to be exposed to it, but also because they are more likely to get their interpretation straight from the text, in a relative vacuum of their peers’ influence. Hence, they propose to test

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4 Coercive sources of isomorphism are similar to what Contingency theory looks at: formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations. Mimetic ones points to fact that in an uncertain environment, organizations, for various reasons, will take benefits of modelling themselves on each others. Finally normative pressures refer mostly to the influence of professionalization; organizations tend to become similar through the influence of professionals who share common knowledge, are educated in the same schools, and who socialize together.
the following hypothesis: “Scholars who are employed in top-ranked sociology or organizational behavior departments will be more likely than will other scholars to operationalize mimetic isomorphism to the exclusion of coercive and normative isomorphism” (1999: 672).

Perhaps, it would be possible to criticize Mizruchi and Fein as well for falling into idealism. Instead of adhering to a peculiar tradition of research, scholars seem here to be ‘contaminated’ by a dominant discourse (the closer they are, the more they are at risk!) But the bulk of the critique should go to the unreflective use of that notion of ‘top-ranked’ department. From the perspective of the sociology of the field, if we take the example of the space constituted by management schools, there are twice as many different ranks as there are different principles of differentiation within that space. I do not know, for instance, if the opposition between research universities and teaching universities is a relevant principle of differentiation to position them. If it is, from that single principle emerges two opposite rankings, where the ‘top’ positions are merely the two most extreme positions of the space, the poles of that principle of differentiation.

My critique will certainly seem irrelevant as in the end, Mizruchi and Fein do provide statistical evidence that supports their hypothesis. I would argue that the implicit principle of differentiation contained in their notion of ‘top-ranked’ department is the key to the trick. Mizruchi and Fein assume that the closer to the ‘centre’ (in opposition to the periphery) a scholar is, the more he will be subjected to the dominant interpretation. But this is quite simplistic since that scholar might also be closer to the two authors. DiMaggio and Powell could themselves have pointed to the problematic interpretation of their work. I will hence make mine one of Bourdieu’s remarks, when he reminds us that:

> the problems of sampling which confront all specialists cannot be resolved by one of those arbitrary decrees of ignorance which are known as ‘operational definitions’ (…): the semantic flux of notions like writer or artist is both the product and the condition of struggles aiming to impose the definition. In this way, it belongs to the very reality which it is concerned to interpret (1996: 224)

To go back to Mizruchi and Fein (1999), they do not make explicit what do they mean exactly by ‘top-ranked’ department, but it is significant that nowhere in the article is discussed the crucial issue of the sources of funding of research and the way in which they influence research agendas.

A last study that I will look at is by McKinley et al. (1999), who argue that successful and enduring schools of thought must display a combination of novelty, continuity and scope. Therefore, the more a theory is novel, the more it is in continuity with previous approaches, and the broader scope it has, the more likely it is that it will be detected and assimilated by organization scholars, who are assumed to work under strong constraints of time and attention. Hence, they explain the success of the new institutionalism by its mixture of novelty and continuity. In arguing that organizational structures reflect much more the rationalized myths of their environment than the requirements of the technical activities of the organization, Meyer and Rowan (1977/1991) were in rupture with the then-dominant idea. However, at the same time, and simply by their choice of object, their approach was strongly resonating with other schools of organization analysis.

Again, what is proposed by McKinley et al. is nothing very surprising from the point of view of the sociology of the field. What is interesting to look at is the critique by Hassard and Kelemen (2002). As they argue, although there has been a change in recent years, consumption of knowledge has played a minor role in the explanations of scientific progress, as the focus has mainly been on actions of producers and the
characteristics of their theories. In that regard, the work by McKinley et al. is a notable exception. But Hassard and Kelemen criticize McKinley et al. for limiting to a very narrow role the consumption of knowledge. As they look in their own article at the consumption of the paradigm debate, Hassard and Kelemen argue that a wider understanding of processes of paradigm proliferation and regulation would require looking at those maneuvers available to the consumers in the space created by the producers.

Speaking from the perspective of the sociology of the field, I agree with Hassard and Kelemen that something is missing from the analysis of McKinley et al. What I disagree with is their emphasis on the importance of focusing on the processes of consumption. *The Rules*, some authors argue (e.g. Lahire, 1999), offers nothing more than a revamped version of a sociology of production. It is not even a sociology of the works themselves, but of the producers. Against that view, I would argue that a sociology of position-takings is perfectly in tune with Hassard and Kelemen’s project, without having to emphasize a heuristically more or less useful distinction. What distinguishes a sociology of position-takings from Hassard and Kelemen’s approach is rather Bourdieu’s emphasis on the importance of the craft of being an author, on the tacit dimension of the act of writing. Hassard and Kelemen’s question – what maneuvers are available to the consumers? – becomes: how do researchers make sense of their own belonging to a field, and of the located and contingent character of their work. From there, how do they access the Universal?

This is, ultimately, the most ambitious aim of Bourdieu’s sociology of the literary field. As he writes, and I will conclude on that, sociological analysis, far from creating a disenchanted world, “allows us to describe and to understand the specific labour that the writer had to accomplish, both against (...) determinations and thanks to them, in order to produce himself as creator, that is, as the subject of his own creation” (1996: 104).
References


