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# Newsroom ethnography in a field perspective

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## Abstract

The reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu offers a promising analytical framework for extending the insights offered by the classical tradition of ethnographic newsroom studies. On a methodological level, Bourdieu's analytical framework has the potential to help us address one of the key questions in ethnographic research: how should we theorise and empirically investigate context? The question is, not least, practical in nature. When it comes to newsroom ethnography, one of the traditional problems concerns the 'invisibility' of certain structures such as the political economy of everyday news work which guides journalist practice. By employing the analytical concepts of 'journalistic field', 'news habitus' and 'newsroom capital', reflexive sociology offers a research strategy for simultaneously studying journalistic practices and the structures that enable and constrain them. A case study of Danish news values is used as a vehicle for presenting Bourdieu's field theory, which is discussed in relation to newsroom studies more generally. It shows how the 'context', often missing in ethnographic studies, can be analysed using the framework of reflexive sociology.

## Keywords

Bourdieu, ethnography, field, journalism, media, news production, newsroom, practice, sociology

## Introduction

The classical newsroom ethnographies of American and European scholars such as Herbert J. Gans (1979), the Glasgow University Media Group (1976), Gaye Tuchman (1978) and Philip Schlesinger (1978) have been – and still are – important sources of knowledge and inspiration for journalists and journalism scholars (for a review of this

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literature see Cottle, 2000, 2003; Schudson, 1989; Tuchman, 2002). Newsroom ethnographies have enabled us to go straight to the heart of news organisations and show us how journalists go about their daily routines (see Epstein, 2000[1973]; Ericson et al., 1987; Esser, 1998; Fishman, 1980; Gitlin, 1980; Golding and Elliot, 1979; Hannerz, 2004). Today, the development of online journalism and the new digital ways of organising news work have only highlighted the importance of studying journalistic practices, and several recent publications have continued and developed the newsroom study tradition in relation to these problems (Deuze, 2007; Paterson and Domingo, 2008, 2011). The strength of newsroom ethnographies, old as well as new, is their documentation and analyses of journalistic practice. However, the classical newsroom ethnographies of the 1970s and the new wave of newsroom ethnographies from the 21st century are less convincing when it comes to documenting and analysing the structures that enable and constrain journalistic practice. It is the contention here that the work of Pierre Bourdieu can provide the inspiration for filling this methodological gap. Before examining this possibility, we provide a brief overview of his reflexive sociology and field theory.

Bourdieu was the author of over 30 books, hundreds of articles and is one of the most acclaimed sociologists of recent times. His outstanding work, published in 1979, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, has been rated the sixth most important social scientific work of the last century, and his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977[1972]) was assessed to be one of the 10 most influential books of the past quarter of a century (Swartz, 2002, 2003). A few years before his early death in 2002, Bourdieu began to take an interest in mass media and news journalism, applying the same critical and analytical approach to address such phenomena as the Parisian university elite in *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu, 1988[1984]), and social exclusion and marginalisation of the ghettos in *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu, 1993).

Bourdieu's book *On Television* was one of his more concrete writings, adapted from a lecture presented on French television. The book is an essayistic critique of French media culture, news journalism and the symbolic power of television (1998[1996]). The underlying theoretical framework of *On Television* follows Bourdieu's general field theory in which the social (or society) is understood as being composed of different fields which, although related, are fairly separate as each field has its own specific logic. From this perspective, journalism can be understood as a subfield within the larger, more general, field of cultural production. As in all other fields, the field of cultural production is partly constituted by its relations to the economic and political fields; this is also the case for the specific field of news media and news journalism. The major argument of *On Television* is that the journalistic field has lost its autonomy to the economic field; this is not least due to commercialisation and the symbolic power of television.

*On Television* can be criticised for not being academic. However, this was not its aim: *On Television* was primarily written with public debate in mind. Read as such, the book offers relevant theoretical conceptualisations and a critical diagnosis of the state of media and journalism in France. This can serve as an inspiration for developing a framework for contemporary media sociology (Schultz, 2006, 2007).

In addition to *On Television*, there are two other sources of inspiration for media and journalism researchers who are looking to benefit from Bourdieu's work. The first is the work of Bourdieu on the social in general, the concepts of practice, cultural production, and on arts and literature. This provides a possible theoretical and methodological base for analysing the journalistic field (Bourdieu, 1981, 1988[1984], 1989, 1990[1980], 1993, 1996, 1998; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu et al., 1999[1993]). The other sources of inspiration are the applications and developments of the field perspective undertaken by international scholars working specifically with field theory and journalistic practice (see e.g. Benson, 1998; Benson and Neveu, 2005; Benson et al. 2012; Chalaby, 1996; Champagne, 1993; Couldry, 2003; Dickinson, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Hovden, 2008; Kunelius and Ruusunoksa, 2008; Marchetti, 2005; Schultz, 2007; Thorpe, 2009; Wiik, 2009). This article draws on both bodies of literature and presents a framework for conceptualising and investigating context using the approach of an ethnographic field analysis which was developed in a study of Danish news values (Schultz, 2005, 2006).

## **The journalistic field, journalistic habitus and journalistic capital**

Bourdieu is first and foremost an empirical scholar and his work includes studies of families, households and every day life in the Kabylean villages of Algeria (1990[1980]), as well as a critique of power based on an extensive statistical mapping of cultural dispositions, and de-naturalising concepts like 'taste' in France (2003[1979]). Although Bourdieu has shown diverse empirical interests throughout his career, the concept of field has had a prominent place in Bourdieu's voluminous work.

The key concepts of reflexive sociology are defined in relation to each other and are very difficult to separate (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Defining a field is primarily an empirical question, and the structure of a field depends on the kind, amount and distribution of capitals which structure the possible positions of agents. Key to the area of study discussed here are the concepts of field, doxa, habitus, and capital (Bourdieu, 1998). An initial understanding of these concepts can be gained through a simple metaphor of a game (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) applied to journalism (Schultz, 2007): *the journalistic field* is the journalistic game. Looking at journalism as a *field* means understanding journalism as a semi-autonomous field with its own logics of practice as an ongoing game or struggle over defining what journalism is, what good journalism is, and so forth. *The journalistic doxa* is the unspoken, unquestioned, taken-for granted, understanding of the news game and the basic beliefs guiding journalistic practice. *The journalistic illusio* is the necessary belief in the game, the unquestionable conviction that the journalistic game is worth playing. *Journalistic habitus* is a specific way of playing the news game, the certain dispositions which the player (agent) has for positioning himself in the game, or, more simply, the embodied 'feel for the game'. *Journalistic capitals* are the resources the agent (media or journalist) can put into the game, resources that are recognised in the field and by the other agents in the field.

## Towards a second wave of news ethnography

In the article 'New(s) times: Towards a "second wave" of news ethnography', Simon Cottle argues that in-depth newsroom studies, or news ethnographies, are still a relevant and needed empirical basis for researching news production. As the title suggests, the major argument of the article is that the 'first wave of news ethnography' is part of the same theoretical family, as the studies focus on the bureaucratic routines of news organisations (Benson, 1998; Cottle, 2000). Although the first generation of newsroom studies has given us important insights into journalistic practice and newsworthiness from an 'individual' perspective (e.g. White, 1950), a 'group' perspective (e.g. Breed, 1955) and from an 'institutional' perspective (e.g. Tuchman, 1973), the theoretical framework has still predominantly been that of organisational studies. From the critical, reflexive and relational standpoint of field theory, it is important that the analytical framework used to investigate news production is designed to address not only organisational questions but also questions of economy, culture, power, politics, etc. According to Cottle (2003: 19), the challenge for a possible 'second wave of newsroom studies' is to conceptualise all three levels of analysis within the same theoretical framework in order to overcome the theoretical limitations (and methodological inference problems) of earlier studies.

What the two traditions of newsroom ethnography and reflexive sociology have in common is, not least, an empirical interest in social practice and the differentiation of values. In the case of media sociology, these can be translated into research questions concerning *journalistic practice* and *news values*. The next section introduces the key concepts of reflexive sociology and puts them to work in the context of the journalistic practice and news values by drawing on a study of Danish news values and news culture (Schultz, 2005, 2006, 2007). The key analytical concepts of the ethnographic field approach are 'journalistic field', 'journalistic doxa', 'news habitus' and 'newsroom capitals'.

## The journalistic field

In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu characterises fields by discussing another field within the field of cultural production, namely the 'literary field' which goes hand in hand with the 'writer'.

What do I mean by 'field'? As I use the term, a field is a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy. The existence of the writer, as fact and as value, is inseparable from the existence of the literary field as an autonomous universe endowed with specific principles of evaluation of practices and works. To understand Flaubert or Baudelaire, or any writer, major or minor, is first of all to understand what the status of writer consists of at the moment considered; that is, more precisely, the social conditions of the possibility of this social function, of this social personage. In fact, the invention of the writer, in the modern sense of the term, is inseparable from the progressive invention of a particular social game, which I term the literary field and which is constituted as it establishes its autonomy, that is to say, its specific laws of functioning, within the field of power. (Bourdieu, 1993: 163)

Here, Bourdieu speaks of the 'field' as both a 'separate social universe' and a 'particular social game'. In other places in the book he speaks of fields as 'fields of forces', as 'sites of struggles', and as 'spaces of possibles' (1993). Whatever term is used to describe the specific functioning of the fields, it should be noted that these are always *dynamic* terms. Although somewhat stable in a historical perspective, fields are never static but in constant change as people's positions change, thus changing the relations within the field.

To speak of a field is to name this microcosm, which is also a social universe, but a social universe freed from a certain number of the constraints that characterize the encompassing social universe, a universe that is somewhat apart, endowed with its own laws, its own *nomos*, its own law of functioning, without being completely independent of the external laws. (Bourdieu, 2005: 33)

An example of how to investigate both 'internal' and 'external' laws of the journalistic field can be found in a study of Danish news values (Schultz, 2005, 2006). In this study, the ethnographic material suggested that the norm of objectivity is important in the Danish journalistic field. This conclusion might have been sufficient in an ethnographic study, but from a field perspective, the norm of objectivity needs to be contextualised. We must assume that the norm of objectivity analysed in, predominantly, Anglo-American studies (e.g. Schudson, 2003; Tuchman, 1972) is not the same as the norm of objectivity visible in Danish newsrooms. First, because field theory assumes that the social spaces (or 'societies') of America and Denmark are different in terms of population, culture, history or social systems. Second, because field theory assumes that the journalistic fields of America and Denmark will be different in terms of press commercialisation, media policy or trade union history. Third, because field theory assumes that journalism is part of the field of power and part of the field of cultural production (Benson, 1998), which means that any norm, for instance that of objectivity, is not an essential value or a neutral method, but a powerful discursive practice (making some stories and angles visible while neglecting others). In other words, in terms of field theory the practices and norms visible to ethnographers can be contextualised in relation to the journalistic profession (the journalistic field), in relation to power (the field of cultural production and the field of power), and in relation to questions of the economy, politics and culture (the social field in question, e.g. Denmark). This does not mean that comparative studies of journalism are not possible, rather we must be aware of the very different contexts in which media texts are produced, as suggested by Hallin and Mancini (2004) and Benson et al. (2012).

For the ethnographer, the concept of field is a useful tool for conceptualising context. Using the concept of field as an analytical tool makes it possible to bridge micro and macro levels of investigation, thus overcoming the methodological inference problem found in earlier newsroom studies in which the ethnographers rarely investigated the political economy of journalism or the wider cultural implications of the daily practices of journalists.

## Journalistic doxa

Delimiting fields is first and foremost an empirical activity just as is establishing the relationship between agent and field. 'To exist in a field (...) is to differentiate oneself' (Bourdieu, 2005: 39); that is, to exist in a field is to play the game of the field and to make a difference by playing. But in order to play the game you need a blind belief that the game is worth playing. This is illustrated by the concept of doxa:

Doxa is the relationship of immediate adherence that is established in practice between a habitus and the field to which it is attuned, the pre-verbal taking-for granted of the world that flows from practical sense. (Bourdieu, 1990[1980]: 68)

Doxa are the conventions we do not question, the deeply rooted tacit understandings of the world which are difficult to express in words, or the everyday circumstances that are so naturalised that we do not see them. There are two overall forms of doxa – one general and one specific. We can speak of a general doxa related to social space and thus the entire field (Bourdieu, 1998: 57). For western societies this doxa could be, for instance, consumption or capitalism, which to a high degree are experienced as given, almost 'natural', orders of modern societies but nevertheless are social orders historically created by social, cultural, economic and political institutions. We can also speak of a specific doxa, the doxa of a certain field. A specific doxa is 'a system of pre-suppositions inherent in the membership of a field' (Bourdieu, 2005: 37). How does the ethnographer investigate specific doxa? Danish news journalism has operated with five so-called 'news criteria' for at least 30 years: timeliness, relevance, identification, conflict and sensation. The criteria have been reproduced in textbooks since at least the early 1970s and have been taught at the School of Journalism for just as many years. We must thus understand the five criteria as highly institutionalised and formalised norms of the journalistic field. It would be tempting to conclude that the five criteria are the dominant news values of Danish journalism. However, in terms of fields, these kinds of formalised, explicated norms are only some of the values of a field, the orthodox news values, whereas there will also be more invisible and doxic values at work (Schultz, 2007). From observations of editorial conferences and interviews about the social relations of the journalistic field, it quickly becomes apparent that many other news values are at work. Most importantly, the study isolated 'exclusivity' as a dominant news criterion. Though exclusivity is not mentioned in Danish textbooks or explicitly mentioned in interviews with reporters and editors, it nevertheless is a key to understanding both the selection and angling of news stories. This finding relates to the concept of doxa because the journalistic practices involved in getting a story that the competitor does not have, getting sources that the other newspapers have not got, or pictures that the other TV station is not in position of, are part of the unspoken, taken-for-granted values of journalism. An illustration is when an editor of one of the largest Danish newspapers who was interviewed about exclusivity by a group of students said, referring to the book:

Naturally, the most important thing for us is to have our own stories on the front page, but I disagree with the book. Exclusivity is not one of our news criteria. (Danish editor, 2003)

On the one hand, the editor clearly recognises the deeply rooted journalistic practice of wanting to have an exclusive story; but, on the other hand, exclusivity is not recognised as a formal news criterion. This small illustration points to the fact that there is an important area stretching across the explicit values, norms and practices of a field, and the implicit values, norms and practices which we can understand in light of the concept of doxa.

So what are the methodological implications for the news ethnographer? The analytical concept of doxa urges the ethnographer to look for the tacit presuppositions of a field and for the taken-for-granted knowledge of social practice. It is not least at this level of questioning where the critical ambition and practical potential of field theory is evident: for reflexive sociology, an important *raison d'être* is that it exposes the borders of doxa and displays the unwritten rules of the social, thus making agents more aware and reflect more about their practices. One of the tools for showing doxa is the analysis of the habitus of the practitioners of the field.

## The journalistic habitus

The concept of habitus might best illustrate how the field perspective bridges agency and structure, and the micro and macro levels. In the quote below, Bourdieu speaks of the habitus as a structuring structure:

The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes. (Bourdieu, 1984[1979]: 170)

The quote captures the social condition that we as individuals experience as 'freedom' and 'independence' in our actions. Yet at the same time, we are the products of specific social, economic and cultural conditions and histories. 'Individual choice' is relative and relational (see also Crossley, 2001). This goes both for social practice in general and for journalistic practice.

The structuring structure of the habitus is not least a bodily experience. In the quote below, Bourdieu uses the metaphor of having a feel for the game as a way of explaining what the habitus is and how it works:

Having a feel for the game is having the game under the skin; it is to master in a practical way the future of the game; it is to have a sense of the history of the game (...). The good player is the one who anticipates, who is ahead of the game. Why can she get ahead of the flow of the game? Because she has the immanent tendencies of the game in her body, in an incorporated state: she embodies the game. (Bourdieu, 1998: 81–82)

Habitus is a conceptual tool for analysing how social agents have different positions in the social space, and how these serve as different dispositions for social action. It is possible to speak of a secondary or 'professional habitus' as a mastering of a specific, professional game in a specific professional field (Schultz, 2007). The journalistic habitus is such a secondary, professional habitus. In the quote below, a Danish news



editor explains what a good news story is. The quote illustrates how the journalistic habitus is bodily knowledge which is based on practice and experience:

For me it has to do with a feeling. Can I picture the story? Can I see the headline? Then I'll believe in the story. (Danish editor, 2003)

Having a journalistic habitus thus implies understanding the journalistic game, and being able to master the rules of that game. But the game can be played from different positions, and different dispositions point to different forms of mastering the game (see also Bourdieu, 1998). Journalists will be able to position themselves to a certain extent but always within the structures of the social space which surrounds them (Bourdieu, 2003; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In this way we can assume that there will be different positions in the field and that journalistic autonomy will depend on this (Bourdieu, 2005; Marchetti, 2005).

How can habitus be investigated by the ethnographer? Theoretically speaking it is possible to imagine that there will be more specific forms of journalistic habitus within journalistic fields, for example an 'editorial habitus', a 'reporter habitus' or an 'intern habitus'. But there will also be forms of journalistic habitus differentiated according to journalistic genres such as a 'foreign correspondent habitus', an 'investigative reporter habitus'; forms of habitus according to media 'magazine habitus', 'newspaper habitus', 'television habitus', etc. Different forms of habitus can help to explain seemingly different or even contradictory practices in the newsroom. In the article 'Routinizing breaking news – categories and hierarchies in Danish online newsrooms' an online journalist explains his work and how he goes about it: 'We do not investigate the municipal reform or something like that on the online desk – but we put ourselves in the slipstream of it and sort of write some of the leftovers. And as purely personal or journalistic criteria of success, we basically need to react fast (...)' (reporter quoted in Hartley, 2011). In the first part of the quote, the online reporter tells us that he and his colleagues do not 'investigate' but rather follow up on other journalists' 'investigations'. He uses the term to 'put ourselves in the slipstream' and goes on to explain that it is about being able to 'react fast'. This experience of being an online reporter points towards a specific habitus working as a structuring structure involving 'not investigating' and 'being fast'. This is a kind of habitus that makes perfect sense working online on a news site, but it would be difficult to imagine that this 'not investigating-being-fast' kind of habitus would match the daily work and self-understanding of, for instance, the foreign correspondent working at a news magazine or the investigative reporter at the prestigious print newspaper.

Journalistic capital is by definition one which produces effects in the journalistic field, but this does not rule out the theoretical possibility that journalistic capital can produce effects in other fields, for instance in the political field (we can imagine a highly profiled journalist becoming a spin doctor). In the article 'Media meta-capital', Couldry (2003) discusses the existence of media capital working as meta-capital in not only the media field or journalistic field but in many social spheres such as the political field, the economic field and maybe also the academic field. If we assume that journalistic capital or media capital can have an effect in different fields, we must expect that the effects are different from field to field because the value of journalistic capital will vary from field

to field. Being an academic with good television skills and often invited to join talk shows or news programmes might for instance not be considered good taste everywhere in the academic field (the university management might be thrilled with the branding effects but colleagues might not consider public appearance 'serious').

What are the methodological implications of using the concept of habitus? The analytical concept of habitus is an important tool for the ethnographer who wants to look at relations in the social space, who is interested in questions of differentiation and of power and in questions of social agency. Not least, through the notion of habitus, reflexive sociology helps us to conceptualise the social space of journalism as a hierarchical social space with a multitude of journalistic practices.

## Journalistic capital

Journalistic capital can be defined as the symbolic capital of the journalistic field, just as academic capital is the symbolic capital of the field of academics (see also Bourdieu, 2005; Marchetti, 2005; Marlière, 1998). Journalistic capital is a form of capital closely connected to the concept of peer recognition. Having a lot of journalistic capital means having a lot of respect from journalist colleagues and having a good position internally in the journalist hierarchy. Journalistic capital can be material as well as immaterial. A journalistic award is a very material award, whereas praise from a colleague, a pat on the back, or an appreciative remark in the newsroom can be seen as signs of immaterial symbolic capital. Journalistic capital can be changed into economic capital, for instance, when a journalist gets a pay raise or a promotion. Journalistic capital, however, can also be found in the small details of everyday newsroom practice; for instance, when a journalist gets a little extra time to work on his story, or he gets the best photographer award or the most interesting interview. We must also assume that there are many different forms of competing journalistic capital in a field at any given time. Different forms of capital are the key to understanding the distribution of agents in the social space. Bourdieu points to economic capital as one of the two most dominant forms of capital, the other being cultural capital which is different from field to field (1998). Journalistic capital can be understood as the specific, cultural capital of the journalistic field.

How can the ethnographer use the concept of capital to study context? Jan Fredrik Hovden (2001) has investigated the educational capital of Norwegian journalism students, and is the author of *Profane and Sacred: A Study of the Norwegian Journalistic Field* (2008) which is one of the most elaborate, dense and ambitious field studies of journalism in the research literature. Hovden emphasises Bourdieu's concept of 'misrecognition' and how journalistic capital has to be recognised as such in order to have an effect in the field (Hovden, 2008: 179). If a journalistic prize is understood as an unfair or commercial prize and as such is misrecognised in the field, the journalistic prize has no symbolic value.

In relation to the overall journalistic value, it is possible to speak of other forms of what could be termed *newsroom capital* serving as important capitals in regard to editorial prestige and symbolic capital in the newsroom (Schultz, 2007). These editorial capitals are, for instance, professional experience (years of work experience, kind of experience), 'formal' organisational position (reporter or editor, general reporter or

specialist reporter), news beat (political news or human interest news), or journalistic prizes (Schultz, 2005, 2006). The type and amount of editorial capital of the individual agent and the total distribution of capital in a field will constitute the habitus.

What are the methodological implications? The analytical concept of capital offers a tool for understanding why the social space is differentiated as it is, but, more importantly, the concept of capitals highlights what internal status hierarchies have in a given field, and what principles of recognition are dominant in a field. Empirical investigations of capitals are most often statistical (e.g. Bourdieu, 2003[1979]), but just as a quantitative approach can be used for studying journalistic capitals (e.g. Hovden, 2008) it is also possible to use the concept of capital as a qualitative research tool (Schultz, 2005, 2006).

## **Discussion: A critical, reflexive and relational approach to newsroom ethnography**

The question of how to conceptualise and investigate context is central for ethnographers as well as other researchers interested in social practices. The question is epistemological in nature: how can we understand the social and social action and what are the borders between the research object and its context? For sociology, and ethnographers working within the sociological tradition, the question of context can be reframed in terms of two basic issues: the role of structure versus agency, and the question of micro versus macro levels of investigation. Both issues point to the conceptualisation of the individual in relation to the social, and to the conceptualisation of social practice. Ethnographic methods have a great advantage in achieving a phenomenological understanding of being a journalist, but at the same time the methods are less sensitive to macro level structural forces which also guide everyday journalism. It is obvious that the routines of news work, for instance the availability of sources, affects the selection and framing of news stories. It is, however, much more difficult to see how economic, political and cultural structures affect the decisions in the newsroom. This is where field theory is helpful as it has the potential to bridge the epistemological divide between agent and structure and between micro and macro.

Just as the term field theory covers different analytical and theoretical projects, reflexive sociology should be understood as an analytical approach that encompasses a wide range of methodological tools (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

In order to understand the concept of 'field' it is helpful to begin with the more fundamental sociological question of how to investigate and understand the social world. For Bourdieu, this question has traditionally been posed and answered from two different, often incompatible, scientific perspectives, neither of which, he argues, have fully grasped the complexity of the social world nor developed sufficient theoretical tools (Bourdieu, 1977[1972], 1989, 1998; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu criticises on the one hand what he calls the 'objectivist' position (or 'physicalism'), prominently exemplified in the work of Durkheim and Marx, and on the other hand the 'subjectivist' position (or 'psychologism') which can be exemplified both in the work of Alfred Schutz and in various phenomenological and ethnomethodological approaches. The starting point for Bourdieu's understanding of the social world is an acknowledgment of the importance of the 'objectivist' emphasis on *structures* ('prenotions' in Durkheim,

and 'ideology' in Marx), as well as the importance of the 'subjectivist' emphasis on *constructions* ('common-sense constructs'), and the shortcomings of both approaches.

According to Bourdieu, the 'objectivist' sociologist treats 'social facts as things' (1989: 14), thus neglecting that 'facts' are also objects of knowledge and cognition embedded in discursive practices. The 'subjectivist' sociologist, on the other hand, treats the social as nothing but mere representations or constructions, neglecting the structural basis for different subjective representations, making scientific knowledge nothing but an 'account of accounts' (1989: 15). The answer lies not in choosing either the 'objectivist' standpoint or the 'subjectivist' approach: '(...) just as subjectivism inclines one to reduce structures to visible interactions, objectivism tends to deduce actions and interactions from the structure' (1989: 17). What Bourdieu proposes is that sociology should include a *reflexive* relationship between the two modes of thinking. Using an overly simplifying metaphor, one could say that social structures and subjective representations are two sides of the same coin, the social world. It is within this dialectical mode of thinking that Bourdieu develops his concept of field, trying to overcome the traditional division (oscillation) between structure and agency, while paying his debt to the founding fathers of sociology, to French structuralism as well as to American pragmatism and phenomenology. In the quote below, Bourdieu (reluctantly) answers the question concerning his epistemological position:

If I had to characterize my work in two words, that is, as is the fashion these days, to label it, I would speak of constructivist structuralism or of structuralist constructivism, taking the word structuralism in a sense very different from the one it has acquired in the Saussurean or Lévi-Straussian tradition. By structuralism or structuralist, I mean that there exist, within the social world itself and not only within symbolic systems (language, myths, etc.), objective structures independent of the consciousness and will of agents, which are capable of guiding and constraining their practices or their representation. By constructivism, I mean that there is a twofold social genesis, on the one hand of the schemes of perception, thought, and action which are constitutive of what I call habitus, and on the other hand of social structures and particularly of what I call fields and of groups, notably those we ordinarily call social classes. (1989: 14)

In his understanding of the social world, Bourdieu emphasises a dialectical relationship between objectivism and subjectivism, in order to overcome the 'artificial opposition that is thus created between structures and representations' (1989: 15). One of the key tools for this manoeuvre involves rising above the substantialist mode of thinking that limits our observations of the social to what we can intuitively recognise and make sense of, for instance 'individuals' and 'groups'. Instead of looking at what we immediately recognise as real, we should look behind the substantial and identify the (counter-intuitive) relations between different positions in the social space. The relational aspect in Bourdieu's work is a key to understanding his work. Thinking in a relational mode means that the sociologist needs to look behind the seemingly evident structural features of the social world and behind the 'taken-for-granted' constructions of the social world, to look for the relations between different positions in the social field. In other words, it is not the positions of, for example, the elite that Bourdieu is interested in, but the *relations* between the positions in a field, and the relations between a field and other fields which are the primary object of social analysis. Social space is a system

of relations, not different positions and fields. For example, studying journalism means taking a critical look at the naturalised taken-for-granted positions in the journalistic field such as the serious newspaper or good journalism. The relational perspective forces the researcher to ask questions such as: Why is this serious? What is serious? And, what is it serious in relation to? in order to draw a map of where the 'serious newspaper' is placed in relation to, for instance, the 'tabloid newspaper' or the 'popular magazine'. In this way, the researcher can isolate and lay down the differentiation principles and status hierarchies of the field. In the same way, 'good journalism' is not perceived of as an essential characteristic of texts or as certain institutionalised methods, but as a relational position in the social space of the journalistic field. 'Good journalism' is only good in relation to 'not so good' or even 'bad' journalism, and what is considered 'good journalism' will change as the different relations in the field change; for instance, when newspapers are bought and sold, when new generations of journalists take over the managerial positions or when new media, such as the internet, challenge the definitions of journalism in the field.

The relational aspect of Bourdieu's theory is closely linked to his *critical* interest in power relations. Writing against both the objectivist and subjectivist positions in social science, Bourdieu's strong interest in unravelling the power relations of the social world is, accordingly, not a phenomenological interest in revealing the perceptions and realities of the powerful, neither is it a hegemonic strategy to reveal the structural basis or ideology of the powerful. His use of the term 'symbolic power' and the relational mode of his analytical framework form the basis for his investigation of the different power *relations* of the social space, the relations of different fields vis-a-vis the field of power. In *Social Space and Symbolic Power* (1989), Bourdieu underlines that ignoring the relational aspect of his theory would be a serious and reductionist misreading of his theoretical position as well as his critical intent. Using *Distinction* as an example, Bourdieu explains:

This relational mode of thinking is at the point of departure of the construction presented in *Distinction*. It is a fair bet, however, that the space, that is, the system of relations, will go unnoticed by the reader (...). Thus the chapter of *Distinction* devoted to the different fractions of the dominant class will be read as a description of the various lifestyles for these fractions, instead of an analysis of locations in the space of position of power – what I call the field of power. (1989: 16)

Bourdieu's critical interest in questions of power in the social space is an essential key to understanding his theoretical framework as well as his different analytical projects. Throughout his career, Bourdieu sought to highlight and analyse the power relations of the social world with a clearly normative agenda of showing how power relations that might seem 'natural' are in fact the (historical) outcome of different power struggles within, and between, different fields. Bourdieu stresses that sociological analysis should contribute knowledge that goes beyond our everyday understanding of the world, and in this way make us more aware and more capable of reflection. It was not until late in his career that Bourdieu took a direct and active part in public debate. In his early days, Bourdieu emphasised publishing research results, though often 'less academic' in style than the genre usually prescribes, and let other academics participate in the public debate carried by the media (Swartz, 2002).

This section has discussed the critical, reflexive and relational epistemology of field theory. To sum up, Bourdieu offers an analytical strategy for investigating the epistemologically problematic question of context by bridging structure and agency, and the micro and macro levels in a relational, constructivist-structuralist approach. This makes the field perspective highly suitable as a framework for ethnographic studies, not least because one of the greatest strengths is that it is more than a theory. It is an attempt to develop empirical tools aiming towards a critical mapping of social life and practice, as well as uncovering power relations and social institutions.

## Conclusion

By presenting the analytical framework of field theory and discussing it in relation to newsroom ethnography through a case study of Danish news values, this article has tried to show how the reflexive sociology of Pierre Bourdieu can be used to analyse the structures that enable and constrain journalistic practice and thereby analyse journalistic practice at the same time as macro contexts outside of the newsroom. What are the advantages and disadvantages for the ethnographer of using a field perspective – and the concepts of field, doxa, habitus and capital – to understand and investigate context? The biggest advantage is a consistent, theoretical framework incorporating the analytical concepts highly applicable in empirical research. Another advantage is the theoretical and empirical bridging of the micro-practices visible for the ethnographer in, for instance, newsrooms, and the macro-practices which are often invisible structures outside of the ethnographers' analytical perspective. Also, on epistemological, theoretical and analytical levels, the field perspective is first and foremost an empirical approach just as are media ethnography and newsroom studies. The biggest disadvantage for the ethnographer is that fields are 'research tools' (Bourdieu, 2005: 30) and therefore prescribe rather elaborate methodological demands in terms of both epistemology (i.e. object-objectification, Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), participant-objectification (Bourdieu, 2003) and empirical depth. However, as the illustrations from the Danish case study have shown, it is possible to use field theory as a perspective in combination with other analytical strategies thus developing a more flexible analytical strategy loyal to reflexive sociology.

From a more normative position, it should be noted that the reflexive approach of field theory has important critical potential for both media ethnography and newsroom ethnography. Making invisible structures of power and recognition visible through ethnographic field studies has the potential of making media audiences, journalists and researchers more reflexive about the contexts of media.

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