

News Media as a “Journalistic Field”: What Bourdieu Adds to New Institutionalism, and Vice Versa

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Bourdieu's field theory and the new institutionalism of Cook and Sparrow are similar in that they call for a new unit of analysis for journalism studies: between the individual news organization and the society as a whole, the “mezzo-level” interorganizational and professional environment of the field/institution. Bourdieu's focus on competition and difference, rooted in processes of cultural and economic class distinctions both among audiences and cultural producers, supplements the new institutionalist emphasis on homogeneity; moreover, Bourdieu's emphasis on a professional or intellectual autonomy (however limited) of journalists as a collective body, elided in new institutionalist accounts, remains an essential element of any thorough media analysis. Conversely, new institutionalists' greater attention to the state as a partially autonomous influence on the journalistic field helps fill a crucial gap in Bourdieu's model. Both approaches could be improved by adopting a broader view and analyzing effects on news content and form of variations in national journalistic fields (and field configurations)—in particular the organizational/spatial ecology of journalistic competition, and the cultural inertia of professional traditions rooted in contingent historical processes of field formation.

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In the introduction to their classic new institutionalist anthology, DiMaggio and Powell (1991) note the “natural affinity” between American new institutionalism and Pierre Bourdieu's field theory (p. 38). Yet in the ensuing years, with few exceptions (Mohr, 2000, p. 56; Martin, 2003), these two theoretical schools have only rarely been explicitly compared, especially in relation to news media (see Benson, 1999, and Benson & Neveu, 2005, for preliminary efforts). One looks in vain in Timothy Cook's (1998) or Bartholomew Sparrow's (1999) important books for any mention of Bourdieu, and Bourdieu and colleagues have largely returned the compliment. Yet to the extent that the two approaches are *not* in fact identical, a dialogue on their respective strengths and weaknesses can only serve to advance both intellectual projects and, in so doing, political communication and media research.

In what follows, I first review the broad similarities between field theory and new institutionalism. I then compare the two models in relation to how they account for variation

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among news media outlets, in external constraints on the news media as a whole, and across nation-states, respectively. As Rich Kaplan (2002, p. 7) has so aptly said in relation to Habermas's "public sphere," fields need to be conceptualized so that we can explicitly take into account "the *variable* ways in which media enhance or inhibit democratic discussion" (italics added). Kaplan uses historical comparison to highlight this variation; my own research has emphasized cross-national comparison (e.g., Benson, 2004, 2005; Benson & Saguy, 2005; Benson & Hallin, 2005). By thinking through not only how fields or institutions tend to operate, but how systematic variations in their operations shape different news outcomes, we take a crucial step forward in our ability to analyze an increasingly complex news media environment.

Fields and Institutions: Similarities

Bourdieu's field theory follows from Weber and Durkheim in portraying modernity as a process of differentiation into semi-autonomous and increasingly specialized spheres of action (e.g., fields of politics, economics, religion, cultural production). Similarly, American new institutionalists argue that contemporary societies are composed of a number of competing and semi-autonomous institutional orders (or fields) and that a focus on these "intermediate-level institutions," as Thelen and Steinmo (1992) write, "[helps to explain] variation among capitalist countries" (pp. 10–11). New institutionalists generally leave open the nature of the relations among these fields, implying in some cases a greater degree of pluralism than actually exists. Bourdieu, on the other hand, has insisted on the priority of the economic field, at least at this historical juncture (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 110).

Regardless of the power dynamics among fields, both Bourdieu and new institutionalists emphasize that fields possess some autonomy from external pressures. Once formed, fields or institutions tend to be governed by largely implicit "rules" or "principles of action," producing a certain degree of internal homogeneity. As Bourdieu (1998a) writes, a field is a microcosm set within the macrocosm—"it obeys its own laws"—and thus "what happens in it cannot be understood by looking only at external factors" (p. 39).

Where do these shared rules come from? Cook and Bourdieu both stress the role of historical struggle in the formation and ongoing maintenance of the field or institution. Cook (1998) states: "I start from the presumption that institutions are the current result of long-standing and ongoing conflict and domination" (p. 66). Bourdieu (1996) likewise notes:

The stakes of the struggle between dominants and pretenders [within any given field of cultural production, including journalism], the issues they dispute . . . depend on the state of the legitimate problematic, that is, the space of the possibilities bequeathed by previous struggles, a space which tends to give direction to the search for solutions and, consequently, influences the present and future of production. (p. 206).

History follows no clear direction; however, there is "path dependency." The contingent outcomes of past historical struggles will tend to have a constraining (though not determining) effect on the future—precisely to the extent that these outcomes are transformed into commonsense assumptions about how the world "naturally" works, which then make them seem beyond challenge. Sparrow (1999) portrays homogeneity of journalistic rules and practices as the outcome of organizational dynamics in conditions of "uncertainty" (pp. 13–17), an alternative and potentially quite fruitful explanation.

Whatever the reasons for this underlying unity of the journalistic institution or field, one quickly sees that such a claim is necessary in order for Cook, Sparrow, and Bourdieu to take the next step in their diagnoses—that of an all-encompassing media power. As Cook (1998) writes: "If there were as many different styles of organization as there were news media, we would have little cause to worry about the news media's power, given that they would be diverse and diffuse" (p. 64). Similarly, we find from Bourdieu (1998a) that "all fields of cultural production today are subject to structural pressure from the journalistic field [as a whole], and not from any one journalist or network executive, who are themselves subject to control by the field" (p. 56).

In sum, Bourdieu, Cook, and Sparrow all conceptualize the news media as a social sector at least partially autonomous from external pressures and exhibiting some degree of internal homogeneity, which taken as a whole is able to exert a significant amount of power vis-à-vis other social sectors.

Does the precise term matter all that much? Sparrow (1999), like many sociological new institutionalists (Fligstein, 1990; DiMaggio, 1986; Friedland & Alford 1991),¹ conceptualizes institution as an "interorganizational *field* of other political communicators . . . and other market actors" (p. 5; see also his article in this issue). Cook (1998), despite his protestations against conceptual inflation, has also used the notion of "organizational *field*" (p. 68); in this issue, he now calls for adoption of the term "system." Ryfe and Kaplan, respectively, prefer the terms "public" and "regime." As we will see, field is to be preferred over institution (and these other terms) for the very reason cited by Cook: to provide a model adequate to the task of explaining heterogeneity as well as homogeneity across media organizations. However, new institutionalist theory may be used in turn to highlight a crucial problem for at least Bourdieu's version of field theory: an inability to come to terms with (the possibility of) *external* heterogeneity, that is, multiple and potentially cross-cutting constraints on journalism arising from the political as well as economic fields.

Variation Within Fields

Within any given national journalistic field, how do we account for ongoing consistent differences—to the extent that there really are such differences—among specific news organizations or types of news media? For Bourdieu, a crucial explanation lies in complex class relations involving both cultural production and reception—a factor that seems largely absent from most new institutionalist accounts (although Sparrow, to his credit, does devote considerable attention to economic factors in *Uncertain Guardians*, 1999).

In contrast to new institutionalists' homogeneity hypothesis, Bourdieu's understanding of field emphasizes the ongoing production of difference. In an extension of Saussurean linguistics to the social sphere, Bourdieu (1998b) insists that the real is "relational" (p. 3). Thus, to exist socially is to mark one's difference (however minute) vis-à-vis others, a process which is enacted for the most part unconsciously without strategic intention. This emphasis on the relational construction of the news seems reasonable and useful for media analysis. Nevertheless, I conceive of Bourdieu's model as a starting rather than ending point for the explanation of internal heterogeneity.

According to Bourdieu, the social world, as a whole, is structured around the opposition between two forms of power: economic and cultural capital. By economic capital, he means simply money or assets that can be turned into money. Cultural capital encompasses such things as educational credentials, technical expertise, general knowledge, verbal abilities, and artistic sensibilities. Economic capital, on the whole, is more powerful,

but cultural capital is always needed to transform good fortune into "legitimate" fortune. Fields are arenas of struggle in which individuals and organizations compete, unconsciously and consciously, to valorize those forms of capital which they possess.

The specific form of economic and cultural capital varies within each field. Inside the journalistic field, economic capital is expressed via circulation, or advertising revenues, or audience ratings, whereas the "specific" cultural capital of the field is evident in those forms of journalistic excellence recognized by the U.S. Pulitzer Prizes and other prestigious professional or academic forums. The journalistic field (like all other fields) is structured around the opposition between the so-called "heteronomous" pole representing forces external to the field (primarily economic) and the "autonomous" pole representing the specific capital unique to that field (e.g., artistic or literary or scientific skills).

Using this framework, Bourdieu (1998a) can thus claim that "if I want to find out what one or another journalist is going to say or write, or will find obvious or unthinkable, normal or worthless, I have to know the position that journalist occupies in this space. I need to know, as well, the specific power of the news medium in question" (p. 41). This "position" is made up of cultural and symbolic, as well as economic, elements, as Bourdieu (1998a) specifies when he writes: "This impact can be measured by indicators such as the economic weight [capital] it pulls, that is, its share of the market. But its symbolic weight [accumulated prestige] also comes into play" (p. 41; see also Thompson, 1991, p. 14). In capsule form, this model helps account for the ongoing tension between culturally rich, but often economically starved, alternative or literary journalism (*The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, etc.) and culturally poor but economically rich market journalism (commercial television news). Those news organizations that are able to accumulate both forms of capital, such as the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, are precisely those which wield a symbolic power over the entire field and play a crucial role in establishing or modifying the dominant "rules" of journalistic practice.

How concretely would one go about measuring forms of capital? The beginnings of such an analysis are evident in the work of Julien Duval (2005). In an analysis of the subfield of the French business press, Duval constructs a number of indicators to measure the "volume" of economic capital operating in the field: form of ownership, financial links to other media outlets, size of audience, percentage of audience composed of business owners and managers, and percentage of revenues from advertising. A second set of variables designed to measure the specific journalistic capital of the subfield includes size of the economic reporting beat, symbolic capital as indicated by the geographic location of the main office (measuring prestige of various Parisian *arrondissements* or districts), attachment to the French "political/literary" journalistic tradition (as evidenced by existence or not of signed editorials), direction of the media outlet by a journalist or former journalist, and proportion of journalists employed having graduated from one of the prestigious journalism graduate schools.² While no list of quantitative indicators can explain the entire output of any given news organization, this attempt to measure cultural (professional) as well as economic factors is a clear advance on the all-too-common tendency to blame everything on concentration of ownership or advertising.

If Duval is primarily concerned with characteristics of journalists and journalistic organizations, an alternative approach to "mapping" the field would inquire closely into the demographic characteristics of the audiences for each media outlet. For Bourdieu, the spaces of production and reception are "homologous," meaning simply that they constitute distinct but parallel social spaces, organized around the same basic divisions between economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984).³ With or without conscious coordination, cultural production seeks out its homologous space of reception, that is, an audience

predisposed by education, wealth, and social background to readily accept the kinds of information and ideas being proposed to it. During the classic era of omnibus or "mass media" (discussed by Cook in this issue) from the 1950s through the 1970s, such close attention to the audience might have paid few scholarly dividends, since the audience in fact was so broad and heterogeneous. Omnibus media during this time period—such as the national television news networks—sought out, and in a sense constructed, a cultural realm acceptable or at least minimally offensive to the largest numbers of people.

The dynamic for print media has always been a bit different. Regional newspapers sometimes serve as omnibus media, but even in these cases the average reader is generally higher on the occupational, income, and education scale, and more likely to be male, than the U.S. adult population as a whole. The proportion of Black or Hispanic readership varies significantly depending on the region where the newspaper is published. At elite newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* (data for the *Wall Street Journal* are not publicly available, but one can presume the results would be at least equivalent), readers are twice as likely, or more, than the average American adult to have a college degree, to earn more than \$75,000 per year, and to hold managerial positions and less than half as likely to earn less than \$35,000 and work as a laborer or craftsperson (Audit Bureau of Circulations 2002–2003 Readership Studies; see Table 1 for specific sources).

Table 1

Readership demographics of selected U.S. newspapers, 2002–2003: Percentages

	National adult population	Indian- apolis Star	Orange County Register	Los Angeles Times	USA Today	New York Times	Washington Post
Graduated college	22	42	31	34	33	54	46
Income \$75,000 and up	26	37	50	41	41	51	59
Income \$35,000 or under	31	27	13	20	16	14	10
Managerial/ professional	22	30	32	31	32	40	41
Labor/crafts	13	11	7	8	13	6	5
Female	52	47	49	46	34	43	49
Black	12	12	1	8	15	10	26
Hispanic	12	1	18	25	7	8	6

Note. Total readership (as opposed to subscriber) data are from reader profiles, based on random surveys, produced by Scarborough Research for the Audit Bureau of Circulations/Readership Research Verification Service: the *Indianapolis Star*, owned by Gannett Co. (October 15–November 23, 2002, Indianapolis and surrounding counties); the *Orange County Register* (August 2002–July 2003, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura counties in California); the *Los Angeles Times*, owned by Tribune Co. (February 2002–January 2003, Inyo, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernadino, and Ventura counties in California); *USA Today*, owned by Gannett Co. (February 2002–March 2003, nationwide survey); the *New York Times* (February 2002–March 2003, nationwide sample); and the *Washington Post* (March 2002–February 2003, District of Columbia, and nearby regions of Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia [Reader Profile Study Area 2]).

It is interesting to note that the *Los Angeles Times*'s readership is more like that of *USA Today* and other regional newspapers (*Indianapolis Star*, *Orange County Register*) than that of the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*—despite the fact that the *LA Times*'s journalists themselves and press watchers generally regard the newspaper as part of the elite national press (for instance, it was coded as one of three national newspapers in a recent “framing the news” study by the Pew Center). This poses a larger theoretical question: When circuits of production and reception are seemingly out of sync (a possibility not really entertained by Bourdieu), which circuit plays a bigger role in shaping the news? More research is needed to investigate such potentially nonhomologous processes.

A close examination of Table 1 reveals other anomalies, such as the fact that *Orange County Register* readers are just as likely as those of the *New York Times* to earn \$75,000 or up (of course, how high “up” may vary significantly between the two, and their respective education levels do in fact differ). With its *USA Today*–style emphasis on short stories, colorful graphics, and human interest stories over public affairs, the *Orange County Register* couldn't be more different than the *Times*. Part of the problem is a lack of adequate audience data. Bourdieu conceptualizes class as much more than just income or wealth: In addition to economic capital, there is also cultural capital which serves to distinguish elites at the same rough income levels. Class relations are thus organized according to a complex, multilayered logic: not simply amount of education, but field of study and type of university; not simply manager versus clerical or service worker, but public sector versus private sector, and various subsectors therein; not simply current income, but wealth (and how it was acquired and over what period of time).⁴ Important class differences may thus be hidden in official statistics. For instance, the Audit Bureau of Circulations readership data reported in Table 1 include only six occupational categories: managerial/professional, technical, administrative support (including clerical), sales, service workers, and operative/non-farm laborers/craftsmen. Just at the managerial/professional level, however, there are probably significant differences in political and cultural dispositions among engineers, corporate CEOs, administrators of non-profit agencies, and professors who chair academic departments (and among the various disciplines!). For instance, although readers of *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The Nation*, *The National Review*, and *The Economist* may not be all that different in terms of years of education or income level (overall volume of capital), they probably do differ in the specific forms of cultural capital that they possess (proportions of types of capital).

What about the supposed proliferation of new media voices and the politicization of some media outlets, particularly the U.S. national cable news networks, Fox and CNN? Targeted or segmented media have long coexisted with the omnibus “society-making media” (Turow, 1997). New delivery technologies (cable, Internet) and more sophisticated marketing techniques have simply made it more feasible to extend the reach and scope of targeting to more and more media. For field theory, these developments are in one sense not all that surprising. The ongoing production of difference is the fundamental dynamic of cultural fields. Given that all meaning is produced relationally, any moving of the media's musical chairs will produce some discursive change. The key word is: some.

Fundamental change will not occur unless there is some kind of “external” shock to the field. Elections and subsequent political realignments constitute one type of shock. For instance, the surprising election of socialist François Mitterrand to the French presidency in 1981, after three decades of conservatives in power, forced *Le Monde* and other socialist-leaning newspapers to redefine their mission and identity. During the era of Gaullist and neo-Gaullist rule, leftist politics only served to reinforce a reputation for journalistic independence; with the left now the “establishment,” this equation of course no longer held. Likewise, it is no accident that right-wing radio and cable television consolidated their

ascendancy in reaction to the presidency of Bill Clinton, the first Democratic president in more than a dozen years. Since George W. Bush's first term, the left-leaning *Nation* has seen a significant rise in circulation, while that of the conservative *National Review* has declined (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005). Overall, though, political realignment effects on media content and audiences seem to be quite limited, at least in the United States: Fragmentation of audiences along partisan lines is primarily in cable news (Fox versus CNN), talk radio, and a few small magazines (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005). And even here, it is crucial to emphasize, ideological differences will not be dramatic as long as the journalistic field is produced by and for the wealthiest, most educated class fractions.

Perhaps the more significant shock to the news media in the United States and elsewhere—and one that has been developing over a long period of time—is the broad transformation of capitalism toward a more intensely profit-driven, anti-union, anti-public sector model of "flexible accumulation" (see, e.g., Harvey, 1989; Sassen, 1998). One effect of this transformation has been an increasing polarization of income, wealth, educational, and professional opportunities, which only further isolates the journalistic field from the everyday concerns of working-class and poor citizens. Another effect has been the strengthening of the hand of economic capital against all nonmarket forms of power (the welfare state, "public interest" conceptions of news media, nonprofit associations, etc.). In newsrooms, this hyper-commercialization has manifested itself in the rise of strategic marketing and thus the breakdown of the old "wall" separating the news from the business-side operations. What difference does this make? If Bourdieu is correct, a publication will eventually "find" its target audience anyway. Strategic marketing may only accelerate the process.

At the same time, paradoxically, such highly visible commercial management of the news offers a more visible target for journalistic professional critique and opposition. Criticisms of hyper-commercialization have become a constant drumbeat in the professional journalism reviews (*Columbia Journalism Review*, *American Journalism Review*), as well as in recent books by several respected national journalists (e.g., Downie & Kaiser, 2003; Fallows, 1997; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). This potential clash between economic constraints and professional resistance is (or should be) an important part of field theory, and we will return to the question of how this social phenomenon could be more adequately theorized.

To what extent is the Internet a counterforce to this commodification of news culture? Not much, I would argue. Who are the vaunted bloggers and small media supposedly transforming the media sphere? Clearly, most of these are young, university-educated, middle-to upper-middle income professionals with plenty of disposable income. A closer analysis of their backgrounds, in terms of various types of cultural versus economic capital, remains to be completed (or at least made public). The typical description of bloggers as either "conservative" or "liberal" tends to obscure as much as it reveals. There is plenty of room for a lifestyle "left" to coexist, even thrive, within the new capitalist order. In fact, given the kinds of issues used to distinguish the two major parties during the last presidential election (gay rights, abortion, religiosity in general), what we are probably witnessing is the virtual takeover of politics by cultural concerns—as opposed to more fundamental issues of economic and social justice. Even if this blogosphere represents a more partisan public sphere, this is surely a very different kind of partisan media than that of France during the early post-World War II period or even compared to the lively socialist and labor press in the United States prior to the First World War.

Blogs, targeted to a plethora of niche cultural tastes, are a target marketers' dream. One advertising executive recalls her discovery of Gawker, a New York-themed blogsite, which is now part of a small chain of 10 blogs (Zeller, 2005):

I think it was in mid-2003. It was just myself and some friends and business associates in the professional advertising community. We just started reading Gawker because we thought it was a hoot . . . (after realizing that they were all single, young, well-paid and casting their gaze on this fertile space, she thought): We've got to get on that. (p. 1)

It is unlikely then, that blogs, as a whole, will transform the class bias of the news media. Blogs that do offer more radical political content will receive little or none of this advertising largesse and will become increasingly marginalized and invisible on the net. But within upper-middle-class taste communities, and across those adjacent to one another in the social space, what blogs seem to be doing is intensifying the process of mutual monitoring through which one establishes and reestablishes one's cultural identity in relation to others.

We do not need Bourdieu, of course, to talk about marketing. But perhaps we do need field theory to provide a way of researching this process in a way that "denaturalizes" it and adopts some critical distance from the media industry worldview. In relation to the social class structure as a whole, the so-called diversity of this advertising-funded media system may begin to be seen for what it is: a relatively narrow clustering around a few positions within elite fields of cultural, political, and economic power. To the extent that a society values genuine ideological diversity—diversity rooted in class-structured social experience—it then becomes necessary to confront the limits of this commercial press. In the next section of this article, I thus consider how the public sector can supplement and counter the market.

Finally, it should be noted that this discussion of cross-media outlet variation does not preclude variability at the individual level. Individual action is not simply the enactment of pre-existing structures. Sparrow (1999) insists that "individual preferences are matched to specific organizational and social conditions . . . rather than resulting from prior disposition or heredity" (p. 10), and elsewhere that "from journalists' and news organizations' similar positions . . . come similar behaviors" (p. 13). Rather than choose between "structure" and "history" (prior disposition and heredity), Bourdieu insists that both need to be taken into account in any explanation of journalistic production.

In order to accomplish this task, Bourdieu introduces the individual agent as the embodiment of a complex historical trajectory or "habitus." Habitus emphasizes how social and educational background shape action; early experiences shape those that follow, but in no sense is habitus necessarily unchangeable (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133). Thus, any explanation of attitudes, discourses, behavior, and so forth must draw on an analysis of both structural position (within the field, the field's position vis-à-vis other fields, etc.) and the particular historical trajectory by which an agent arrived at that position (habitus). Especially for research on the distinctive cultural production of columnists, special correspondents, or feature writers—journalistic roles that permit a greater ideological or stylistic range—analysis of habitus is just as essential as that of position in the field. What Sparrow describes as the typical structural determination, Bourdieu would categorize as only one possible situation, that of a close fit between habitus and field position, in which case the effect of habitus largely dissolves into that of field.⁵

What about individual idiosyncrasies, random occurrences and the like? In this issue, Ryfe argues that constitutive and regulative rules of professional journalism make room for considerable creativity in choosing which stories to write, how to formulate a lead, which sources to interview, and so forth. This quite reasonable argument can be summed up more simply: The cultural rules operating in fields are constraining and enabling, not determining.

Habitus intersecting with field offers a probabilistic, not a totalizing explanation. Moreover, through a sort of "socio-analysis," journalists may potentially come to understand how their social experiences and positions unconsciously shape their work, and thus consciously compensate for such influences. Certainly, some journalists break the mold—but as examples of this, I would reference feature writer Charlie LeDuff or essayist Frank Rich rather than R. W. Apple, as does Ryfe. Apple's personality may be colorful, but his reporting and writing are not so much innovative as they are superior examples of the standard formulas.

Variation in External Pressures on the Journalistic Field

Having examined now both homogeneity and heterogeneity within the journalistic field, I turn to situating the news media in their broader social environment. Spatial, relational metaphors are used by Bourdieu to express his conception of the ordering of journalism, other fields, and the broad social world, all of which he conceptualizes in "chiastic" (cross-like) terms.⁶ The vertical axis measures the overall volume of capital, whereas the horizontal axis measures the proportion of cultural to economic capital (by convention, Bourdieu has located the cultural pole on the left and the economic pole on the right). As one moves from left to right in all social spaces, the proportion of (dominated) cultural capital decreases and the proportion of (dominant) economic capital increases. From bottom to top in the space of social classes, the overall volume of all forms of capital increases. Thus, at the "top" of the social space, one finds the "field of power" organized around the same basic cultural/economic opposition but with all actors possessing relatively high volumes of at least some form of capital.

The journalistic field is seen as part of the field of power; that is, it tends to engage with first and foremost those agents who possess high volumes of capital. Within this field of power, however, it lies within the "dominated" field of cultural production—a field within this larger field. At its "left" pole, journalism is part of the field of "restricted" cultural production (produced for other producers, that portion of the field closest to the cultural pole—small literary journals, avant-garde art and music, etc.), while at its "right" pole, it belongs to the field of large-scale cultural production (produced for general audiences, that portion of the field closest to the economic pole—mass entertainment, etc.). In its dominant tendency, the journalistic field belongs to the latter. That is, compared to other specialized fields within the broader field of cultural production, the journalistic field is "characterized . . . by a high degree of heteronomy," which is to say that "it is a very weakly autonomous field" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 33).

In sum, Bourdieu locates the journalistic field within the field of power, caught between cultural and economic power, with the latter, however, generally retaining the upper hand. If economic power *inevitably* wins out over cultural power in Bourdieu's account, however, it is largely because he leaves out the state—or rather because he has no way of talking about the state or political power except as in league with economic power. This elision is evident in his references to a (singular) heteronomous "pole of economic and political power" (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 38; Bourdieu, 2005; see also Benson, 1999, pp. 482–483; Benson, 2005), a conceptualization that lumps together two forms of power that may at least potentially be at odds.

Clearly, the state does not always and only serve to augment market power. Despite the supposedly hands-off dictates of the First Amendment, the U.S. government has crucially shaped the character of the American media system via, as Cook (1998) puts it, "policies designed with the presumption on the part of policymakers that the news media performed governmental and political functions and needed to be assisted in doing so

properly”—policies that in many instances operated in explicit contradiction of market principles, as in the case of “joint operating agreements” between directly competing metropolitan newspapers (p. 60; see also Baker, 2002; Starr, 2004). Bourdieu’s inattention to media policies is especially surprising given that in comparison to the United States, the French state has been much more active in enabling a civic role for the press, particularly via a relatively well-funded public service television and radio sector and targeted subsidies for newspapers with low advertising revenues but which (like the communist *L’Humanité*, the left-Catholic *La Croix*, and even the far right *Présent*) broaden the range of debate in the public sphere (a policy noted quite favorably by Cook, 1998, p. 266, Footnote 78).⁷

How then to restore some analytical consideration of (economically) autonomous political influences over the media? One means would be to simply fold the journalistic field into the political field or an even larger multifield complex. Bourdieu (1998a) almost suggests as much in *On Television* at one point, noting that “in a certain way, the journalistic field is part of the political field on which it has such a powerful impact” (p. 76). In this aspect (similar to Kaplan in this issue), Sparrow (1999, pp. 12–13) views journalism as inhabiting a broader “interorganizational field . . . with other communicators of political information, other news organizations, and other commercial enterprises”—in short, a sort of journalistic-political-economic field. In slightly different fashion, Cook’s definition of news as including two basic elements—what is “important” and what is “interesting”—allows for a consideration of distinctive political and economic contributions to journalistic production. Political news sources largely determine what is important, while economic factors shape what is deemed interesting, especially relative to journalistic “production values.”⁸

But my concern with these attempts to restore attention to political as well as economic constraints on the news is that they seem to come at a price: the sacrifice of any analysis of a distinctive, autonomous journalistic contribution to the news. Media logic is economic and political; it is also “professional” (Hallin, 1996). Though journalists no doubt draw their intellectual, moral, and professional resources from external sources, as Kaplan emphasizes, they also draw strength and indeed a certain autonomy, no matter how feeble, from their colleagues. If new institutionalists appropriately bring the state back in, Bourdieu performs a service by insisting that journalists—as a corporate body, not as individuals⁹—also play a semi-autonomous role in shaping the news. Is journalism a political institution? Perhaps. But first and foremost it is a journalistic institution that *refracts* rather than simply reflects the play of external forces. As noted, this kind of journalistic professional autonomy can be seen in the resistance of many U.S.—and European—journalists to increasing market pressures.

The challenge then is to keep this important aspect of Bourdieu’s model—that of a specific journalistic form of power—while emphasizing that the state as well as the market help to enable as well as constrain such autonomous power. How can we take into account three forms of power while retaining the analytical advantages of Bourdieu’s bipolar (cultural and economic) spatial model? One solution would be to conceptualize the journalistic field as largely structured around an opposition between a state-cultural/civic pole on one side and a state-market pole on the other. This reconceptualization acknowledges what Schudson (1994, p. 535) has termed the “ontological” priority of the state, or to put it in field theory terms, the state’s possession of a “meta-capital” (Couldry, 2003) that allows it to determine the rate of exchange among all other forms of power. Is this state power now challenged by a media meta-capital of “celebrity,” as Couldry argues? While the logic of celebrity, or personality, is increasingly dominant, it is still not the only game in town. It is in the realm of the state that all field logics (economic, cultural, moral/religious, celebrity) are accorded value; to the extent that our politics retain some degree

of democratic malleability, this is a good thing too. It is not a matter of regulation or no regulation, but of kind of regulation, and an emerging media reform movement in the United States and elsewhere is grounded precisely in this crucial battle to rewrite the "rules of the game" (see, e.g., McChesney & Nichols, 2002).

With this rethinking of Bourdieu's model, a cultural/civic pole would thus be seen to be crucially dependent on state support, either financial or regulatory.¹⁰ But likewise, the dependence of economic power on the state, as in the case of privatization, tax, and monetary policies, would also be crucially acknowledged. Such a change would also express the extent to which the state itself is not a singular entity, and in a very real sense is divided among and within its various agencies and elected bodies.¹¹

Journalistic autonomy would consist precisely in the professional and organizational balancing, or tension, between these two opposing heteronomous poles (state-cultural and state-economic).¹² In other words, it is just as much a mistake to locate journalistic (or any other form of specific cultural) autonomy on the side of a paternalistic as on the side of a privatizing state. Professional membership organizations, press reviews, and awards could serve as an indicator of the relative balance of power between competing notions of journalistic excellence; professional reform movements may in some cases succeed in institutionalizing new forms of "negative sanctions" or "positive incitements" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 220) that ultimately transform journalistic practice in one direction or the other. Autonomy is thus an ongoing, contested space somewhere between nonmarket and market-oriented forms of state regulation, though by necessity it is unable to sustain itself without some degree of dependency on one or the other. We cannot assert a priori, as Bourdieu seems to imply, that journalistic autonomy is normatively desirable. Indeed, it may not be (Schudson, 2005): Journalists' interests may not always coincide with those of scientists, activists, or the citizenry at large. Nevertheless, journalists' drive for autonomy is part of the complex reality, part of the dynamic of the field that helps to explain news outcomes.

Variation Across National Journalistic Fields

Both field and new institutionalist theories significantly improve upon the standard theories in the sociology of news (Benson & Neveu, 2005). The concept of the field or institution provides a means to simultaneously take into account external and internal forces shaping the news, as well as their complex interaction. In this section, I discuss how we might theorize variable features of fields to help explain enduring cross-national differences.

A close reading of Bourdieu's *On Television* (1998a) would probably produce a laundry list of journalistic production values much akin to Cook's (1998) summation: "drama, novelty, timeliness, vividness, color, easily described stories with two distinct sides, terseness, good visuals, pithy sound bites." (p. 5). Journalistic accounts in both France and the United States no doubt often express such qualities (though what is meant by "terse" or "good visuals" may not be exactly the same in the two countries). Nevertheless, the French "political/literary" press tradition is sharply opposed in many ways to America's "objective/informational" model. Recent research has shown that compared to the *New York Times*, the French national elite press is more ideologically diverse, more critical, and mixes fact and opinion in news stories to a greater extent (Benson & Hallin, 2005).

These cross-national differences have been maintained even with the growth of editorial partnerships between U.S. and French newspapers—for instance, *Le Monde's* weekly publication of a *New York Times* insert, in English, beginning on a regular basis in 2002. During the spring of 2005, *Le Monde* radically redesigned its Web site. What is striking is

not the new design's similarity to that of the *New York Times* Web site, but the accentuation of differences, in particular, *Le Monde's* treatment of information as an opening for debate and analysis rather than as an end in itself. Each news story on the *Le Monde* site is followed by links to related "points of view," "forums," "interviews," "dossiers," and the like. Elsewhere on the site, one can even link to transcripts and audio-video of academic conferences at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, in English as well as in French.

To what extent can *Le Monde's* continued adherence to a distinctive French journalism of ideas and debate be explained, in part at least, by the constraining power of cultural tradition within the French journalistic field? This question can be reformulated more generally, in terms of what has sometimes been termed "cultural inertia": Under what conditions do the semi-autonomous logics of national fields prove more or less powerful in resisting external pressures toward homogenization?

A second example where the effects of field variation could be explored further concerns internal organizational ecology (Benson, 2004; see also Swartz, 1997, pp. 215–217, and Schudson, 1994). Inside Bourdieu's fields, news organizations compete intensively for scoops and prestige. Likewise, Sparrow's risk-averse outlets closely monitor one another in order to imitate all the more effectively. In both of these worlds, journalists and media organizations seem to be operating at full tilt all the time, and indeed many of them probably are. But surely it is possible that competition and other forms of peer monitoring can be more or less intense, more or less central to the functioning of the field. For instance, there is growing evidence (Benson & Hallin, 2005; Benson & Saguy, 2005; Esser, 1999) that the organizational ecology of a national journalistic field may influence the level of scandal-driven or sensationalistic news coverage of politics.

Sparrow posits that lack of institutionalization—uncertainty—produces homogenized practices. To push this hypothesis further, we would need to ask: How do we measure amount of uncertainty due to level of institutionalization? Do the most uncertain and dynamic fields (Sparrow seems to link uncertainty to change, as in his discussion of recent rapid change in the American journalistic field) also have the most homogenized practices? Conversely, and paradoxically, does greater institutionalization therefore produce greater diversity?

In *On Television*, Bourdieu emphasized how the privatization of a single national television channel (TF 1) was able to transform French journalism. But why was TF 1 able to do this? Organizational ecology is a crucial explanation. At the time of its privatization, TF 1 attracted 40% of the national news audience, and it faced no competition from cable or local television. In the United States, with the television news audience dispersed among four networks and several cable channels, as well as nearly 2,000 local channels, no single commercial television channel can claim equivalent reach or influence. What needs to be emphasized, theoretically, is the level of centralization or fragmentation which organizes competition within the journalistic field. It was not simply commercialization, but commercialization in the context of a highly centralized journalistic field, that made it possible for TF 1 to reshape the French media landscape.

The degree of centralization and concentration may, however, change over time, due to political, economic, or technological shocks. While I expressed some skepticism about the transformative effects of blogs earlier, the Internet may in fact be influential to the extent that it serves to reorganize competition within the American journalistic field (or even an emerging world journalistic field). That is, by breaking down barriers of space and time, and making diverse types of media equally available anywhere via a single medium, the Internet in some ways "centralizes" formerly fragmented media fields. Paradoxically, this American-led technology could thus serve as a Europeanizing rather than

Americanizing force for global journalistic convergence (contra Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Barnhurst & Nerone (2001, p. 294) observe that online media are breaking down local information monopolies that were crucial in establishing American-style nonpartisan media (since a single urban newspaper had to appeal to audiences across partisan divides). Now that audiences can (and increasingly do) access London's *Guardian* just as easily as their hometown newspaper Web site, there is the possibility at least of a global marketplace for news and opinion, with "opinion" in particular serving to distinguish one media outlet from another.

In sum, rather than speaking of "the news" in general, based solely on data from a single country, field and institutional research ought to emphasize—and then explain—the variety of journalistic topical foci, narrative styles, and graphic formats one finds around the world. This is a project that will require new institutionalists and field theorists to draw far more heavily on sophisticated content and form analysis (e.g., Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Entman, 1991; Hallin, 1994; Lawrence, 2000) than has heretofore been the case. Through a series of "structure/discourse" maps of national journalistic fields, we would thus be able to move well beyond the important insight of what matters—state and market forces in interaction with the journalistic field—and show precisely how variable configurations of these structures make a difference in the production of different national conceptions of news.

Such cross-national comparisons could also be oriented toward assessing the extent, precisely, to which the journalistic "field" per se explains news outcomes. Kaplan (2002, and this issue), as well as Hallin and Mancini (2004) and Darras (2005), have stressed the ultimate structuring power of political institutions and political culture. While their arguments are convincing, it is doubtful that politics can provide a complete explanation. Even if the characteristics of the journalistic field (social class structuring, historical formation and enduring professional traditions, organizational ecology) explain only some news outcomes, this will be an important nuancing.

Conclusion

This essay has offered a comparative assessment of Bourdieu's field theory and the new institutionalism of Cook and Sparrow. These two broad approaches are closely linked in correctly demanding a new unit of analysis for media studies: between the individual news organization and the society as a whole, the "mezzo-level" interorganizational and professional environment of the field/institution.

Bourdieu's focus on competition and difference, rooted in processes of cultural and economic class distinctions among both audiences and cultural producers, supplements rather than contradicts the new institutionalist focus on homogeneity. The new institutionalists' greater attention to the state as a partially autonomous influence on the journalistic field helps fill a crucial gap in Bourdieu's model. However, Bourdieu's emphasis on a professional or intellectual autonomy (however limited) of journalists as a collective body, elided in new institutionalist accounts, remains an essential element of any thorough media analysis.

I thus suggest an integration of both approaches to form a new spatial conception of the journalistic field. Between two poles of the state, one constituting market power, the other constituting nonmarket (or even anti-market) civic power, journalistic professionalism plays a mediating role. Comparative research will help sharpen the model and highlight how variable qualities of fields/institutions—in particular, the "cultural inertia" of professional

traditions and the organizational/spatial ecology of competition—account for characteristics of national and even emerging global forms of journalistic practice.

Notes

1. The concept of “field” was originally developed by the American social psychologist Kurt Lewin (see Martin, 2003). However, for clarity’s sake and consistent with their typical usage, I will generally use “institution” in reference to Cook, Sparrow, and other new institutionalists, and “field” in reference to Bourdieu, associated French scholars, and my own research.

2. For business journalism, Duval concludes, cultural and economic capital are not in fact sharply opposed: Those news organizations with the most cultural capital are also those with the audiences most prized by advertisers. In fact, this “lack” of opposition may be typical of many national journalistic fields and subfields. In those cases where it is not, as discussed below, state-civic intervention probably plays a key role.

3. Bourdieu (1984) thus posits that there is a “pre-established harmony between two systems of interests [production and reception] . . . one only preaches to the converted” (pp. 239–240).

4. Brubaker (1985) captures well Bourdieu’s unique understanding of class, one that is distinct from both Marx and Weber: “Class divisions are defined not by differing relations to the means of production, but by differing conditions of existence, differing systems of dispositions, produced by differential conditioning, and differing endowments of power or capital” (p. 761).

5. Such cases of close fit between field and habitus suggest the existence of a type of shared rule that is specific to particular points in the journalistic field rather than common to the field as a whole, which Bourdieu labels “collusion” (1998a, p. 36).

6. For visual representations of the field of cultural production, see Bourdieu (1993, p. 38) and Benson (1999, pp. 466, 472).

7. For more background on the distinctive state policies of the French media, see Benson (2005), Kuhn (1995), and Hallin and Mancini (2004).

8. At first, Cook (1998) seems to portray journalists themselves as possessing significant autonomous power vis-à-vis political actors. For instance, he writes (1998) “while politicians dictate conditions and rules of access and designate certain events and issues as important by providing an arena for them, reporters can and do take this material while deciding whether something is interesting enough to cover and then how to craft it into a coherent narrative. Journalists bring their own particular conceptions of newsworthiness to bear when they approach their work” (p. 89). But later in the book, he clearly emphasizes that journalistic criteria are essentially market driven: “Profit-oriented news organizations . . . seek advertisers to whom they will sell access to their audiences. This economic imperative nurtures ‘production values’ shared by almost all news outlets [producing] a corresponding consensus on routines of newsmaking” (p. 167).

9. Bourdieu’s distinctive notion of *field* autonomy becomes more evident when one sees that Cook’s frequent references to autonomy are always in regard to *individual* “newspersons,” as the wording of the index to *Governing with the News* also confirms. There is no listing of the word *autonomy* in the index to Sparrow’s *Uncertain Guardians*.

10. An alternative institutional basis for this civic/cultural pole, more common in the United States than in most European nation-states, is the generosity of wealthy benefactors or private foundations. Such support has been crucial to many left-progressive magazines in the United States such as *The Nation*, *The Progressive*, *Mother Jones*, and *In These Times*. However, even in such cases, government tax, postal, and other policies facilitate and supplement such philanthropic support.

11. Social movement influence could also be seen as located closer either to the civic (environmental, labor, feminist, civil rights, etc.) or market (conservative think tanks, conservative religious groups, etc.) poles. Given their policy goals and political alliances, many social movements sometimes portrayed as left (or liberal in the American context) would be seen, upon close observation, to actually be located closer to the market pole. How then to account for organizations with an anti-systems orientation of whatever variety (anarchists, small religious sects)? Within the journalistic field, one might

visualize them in the bottom of the field; to the extent that such groups avoid amassing power on a large scale, their capacity to shape the field would also probably be very limited.

12. I want to thank Nick Couldry for helping me work through the full implications of this aspect of my argument.

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