

# Reflexivity

## Freedom or Habit of Gender?

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THE INCREASING significance of Bourdieu's social theory in the social sciences and humanities has been noted by a number of writers (Fowler, 1997; Painter, 2000; Shusterman, 1999). In this article I am concerned to map this influence in recent accounts of gender in late-modern societies. More specifically, I aim to map this influence on a specific thesis that is common (either implicitly or explicitly) to a number of contemporary feminist analyses of gender transformations. This thesis draws on Bourdieu's arguments about social transformation and especially his arguments regarding the constitution of a critical reflexive stance towards formerly normalized – or at least taken-for-granted – social conditions. More particularly, this thesis draws on the Bourdieusian argument that such reflexivity is constituted in circumstances where there is lack of 'fit' between the habitus (the feel for the game) and field (the game itself), that is, when synchronicity between subjective and objective structures is broken. More particularly still, this thesis involves the argument that in late modernity there is a lack of fit between habitus and field in certain public spheres of action via an increasing transposition or movement of the *feminine* habitus from private to public spheres. For those deploying this thesis, two further stages of argument usually flow from this proposition. The first is that this transposition constitutes a heightened critical awareness vis-à-vis gender and the second is that this transposition is linked to specific forms of gender detraditionalization. In short, this thesis concerns a three-fold argument in regard to gender which links feminization, critical reflexivity and detraditionalization.

But while in this article I map the characteristics of this thesis I am also concerned to highlight its limits. In particular, and by drawing on alternative accounts of reflexivity to that of the critical reflexivity found in Bourdieu's account of social transformation, as well as recent ethnographic studies of

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the workplace, the easy association made between reflexivity and detraditionalization is questioned. I will argue that reflexivity should not be confused with (or understood to concern) a liberal freedom to question and critically deconstruct the rules and norms which previously governed gender. Indeed rather than detraditionalizing, it will be suggested that reflexivity is linked to a reworking or refashioning of gender, indeed that reflexivity is perhaps better conceived as a habit of gender in late modernity. This exploration of the limits of the Bourdieusian-style thesis linking feminization, critical reflexivity and social transformation will in turn lead to a critical discussion of Bourdieu's ideas regarding social transformation. In particular it will be asked, why, when thinking about social change does Bourdieu tend to abandon his own principles regarding practice? And how might practice be rethought to move away from problematic notions of liberal freedom of the sort found in contemporary accounts of reflexivity and social transformation? To begin it is necessary that I provide a very brief commentary on recent debates on reflexivity.

### **Reflexivity and Detraditionalization**

One of the most influential ideas in contemporary social theory is that a range of aspects of social life are both characterized by and increasingly require reflexive forms of conduct. Indeed the claim that contemporary social life demands reflexive forms of action has been and continues to be strongly debated in the social sciences (Alexander, 1996; Boyne, 2002; Lichtblau, 1999; Pellizzoni, 1999) and is the centrepiece of a thoroughgoing framework for understanding late-modern societies, that of reflexive modernization or reflexive modernity (Beck et al., 1994). Beck neatly sums up the thrust of this framework when he writes 'the more societies are modernized, the more agents (subjects) acquire the ability to reflect on the social conditions of their existence and to change them accordingly' (1994: 174). Such increased capacities for reflexivity have been understood to be linked to – and constituted by – a decline in the significance of socio-structural structural forms of determination. As a consequence of the retrocession of the structural, agency is understood as being progressively 'freed' or unleashed from structure. Hence it has been claimed that reflexive modernization is a theory 'of the ever increasing powers of social actors, or "agency" in regard to structure' (Lash, 1994: 111), and it is this process which is understood to provide the conditions for increased reflexivity, that is, for critical reflection on prevailing social arrangements, norms and expectations.

But the 'freeing' of agency from structure is understood not only to provide the conditions for the emergence of reflexivity but also for the undoing of what are sometimes termed as 'traditional' rules, norms, expectations and forms of authority associated with modernity, including those organized along axes of gender, class and status. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim have, for example, commented that 'people are being released from the constraints of gender . . . axes of (socially organized) difference, such as class, gender and sexuality (even life and death), are more of a matter

of individual decisions' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1996: 29). Thus with the disintegration of modes of life associated with modernity, external forms of authority are replaced by the authority of the individual. Indeed, individualization intensifies in the context of detraditionalization since individuals are now constantly compelled to create themselves as individuals. So strong are tendencies towards individualization that Beck has claimed that, in the contemporary world, the individual 'is the reproduction unit of the social in the lifeworld' (1992: 90).

### **Situating Reflexivity In-the-World**

While the framework of reflexive modernization enjoys wide-ranging currency, it is certainly not without its critics. One powerful line of critique is that the conception of reflexivity deployed in this framework is far too realist and cognitive in orientation (see e.g. Crook, 1999; Dean, 1998; Lash, 1993, 1994; Lichtblau, 1999; Pellizzoni, 1999). Thus it assumes that subjects somehow exist outside of social worlds and cognitively and objectively reflect on that world in a realist fashion. It tears subjects away from lifeworld contexts (Lash, 1994) assuming that self-conscious (reflexive) forms of conduct are somehow separate from such lifeworlds. While not denying that late-modern societies call for greater reflexivity, a number of writers have therefore suggested that reflexivity needs to be understood not in a realist or objectivist fashion, but needs to be situated in-the-world (Lash, 1994; May, 1998). That is, to break with the problematic objectivism of Beck and Giddens, other writers have forwarded a more hermeneutic understanding of reflexivity. And in providing this alternative account, a number of writers have turned to and extended the social theory of Bourdieu, and especially Bourdieu's understanding of practice.

As is well known, Bourdieu's social theory breaks with the dualisms (objectivism versus subjectivism, structure versus action) characteristic of much classical social theory via an account which integrates an explanation of both the regularity and generative character of social action or practice. For Bourdieu, social action is neither entirely determined nor entirely arbitrary. The notion of habitus is crucial here. The habitus concerns a dynamic intersection of structure and action: it both generates and shapes action. Composed of durable, transposable dispositions and competencies that shape perception and actions, the habitus is a 'system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions' (Bourdieu, 1977: 83). The habitus thus produces enduring (although not entirely fixed) orientations to action. But while the habitus structures and organizes action it is also generative. Specifically, the habitus is productive of individual and collective practices; practices which themselves are constitutive of the dispositions of the habitus.

But more than this, on Bourdieu's conception, the habitus operates within specific fields. Bourdieu understands the social world to comprise of differentiated, but overlapping, fields of action, for example, the economic

field, the political field, the legal field and so on. Each field has its own logic, and it is the field which both informs and sets certain limits on practice. Although habitus and field are not entirely locked together, nonetheless, for the most part Bourdieu sees a compatibility between the two. Indeed, it is such compatibility that ensures the viability of institutions.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, institutions (for example, economic, legal) are only fully viable if they are durably embedded in the dispositions of agents operating within the field (Bourdieu, 1977). Yet agents are not simply the benign carriers of the rules and norms of particular fields. For while the field sets certain limits on practice, nonetheless the actions of agents also shape the habitus of the field and hence the field itself. Thus within fields distinct ‘games’ are played. In the artistic field, for example, players contend for the various goods and resources that are considered and recognized to be of value within this specific field of action. In so doing players both shape the habitus of that field and the forms of action that are constitutive of that field.

This is not done consciously, however. For the most part, players will not be aware of the constitutive role of their actions in terms of the fields of action in which they operate. This is because Bourdieu understands practice – competencies, know-how, dispositions, perceptions – not to be fully consciously organized. They operate below the level of consciousness and language through a ‘feel for the game’. That is, social practice often works through an unconscious practical mastery. As Williams has put it ‘Most of us, most of the time take ourselves and the social world around us for granted, we do not think about what we do because, quite simply, we do not have to’ (1995: 581). The feel for the game is therefore a pre-reflexive, non-cognitive form of knowledge which often cannot be explicitly articulated. Driving a car is an example of such knowledge. It is something that is practised and learnt but which becomes, for the most part, instinctual, pre-reflexive and non-cognitive. The techniques and competencies of the highly skilled athlete are also illustrative of such knowledge. Such skills may be learnt and practised over many years, yet for the athlete are a matter of instinct and non-cognitive habit.

It is this Bourdieusian understanding of practice – as unconscious and pre-reflexive<sup>2</sup> – that has informed the development of a more hermeneutic understanding of reflexivity. For, following Bourdieu’s understanding of practice, as well as his injunction that “‘communication of consciousnesses” presupposes community of “unconsciousnesses” (i.e. of linguistic and cultural competences)’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 80), reflexivity cannot be understood to concern an objective, cognitive reflection on structure. Indeed, reflexivity cannot be understood to be cognitive at all, since knowledge of the world never concerns an external knowing consciousness. As Bourdieu puts it, agents engaged in practice:

... [know] the world ... in a sense too well, without objectifying distance, [s/he] takes it for granted, precisely because he [sic] is caught up in it, bound up with it; he inhabits it like a garment ... or a familiar habitat. He feels at

home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of habitus. (2000: 143)

Following this understanding of practice, reflexivity must therefore be understood to involve reflection on the unthought and unconscious categories of thought, that is, the uncovering of unthought categories of habit which are themselves *corporealized* preconditions of our more self-conscious practices (Lash, 1994). In short reflexivity entails reflexivity and understanding of unthought categories and shared meanings, what Lash (1994) has termed a hermeneutic or aesthetic reflexivity. Lash discusses post-traditional economic communities involved in knowledge-intensive production to illustrate such reflexivity. In such communities reflexive production is guided by communal exchange relations involving personalized trust relations and symbolic exchanges of, for example, shared identities. Such communities are therefore characterized by an ethics of commitment and obligation, not to the self, but to a community. Everyday activities in such communities concern the routine achievement of meaning, that is the production of substantive goods ‘guided by an understanding . . . of what is regarded as substantively good by that community’ (Lash, 1994: 157). The substantively good is not, however, somehow torn away from the everyday, rather it is already present in the world of meanings and practices which are learnt, but become ‘unconscious as if inscribed on the body’ (Lash, 1994: 157). In such communities reflexivity is, in other words, not ‘in’ the subject or ‘in’ the self, but in shared background practices, that is in Bourdieu’s habitus, in the durable yet transposable set of embodied dispositions and competencies which (unconsciously) shape perceptions and actions.<sup>3</sup>

Bourdieu’s social theory of practice leads therefore not to an objectivist reflexivity, but to a situated reflexivity, a reflexivity that is not separated from the everyday but is intrinsically linked to the (unconscious) categories of habit which shape action. The significance of extending Bourdieu’s theory of practice to understand reflexivity does not simply lie in the way it challenges the objectivism of writers such as Beck and Giddens via situating knowers in their lifeworld, however. It also lies in the way it breaks with the assumption found in the reflexive modernization thesis that reflexivity goes hand in hand with individualization. In Lash’s account of hermeneutic reflexivity, for example, there is a break with the view that reflexivity is intrinsically linked to individualization. Thus, unlike Beck and Giddens, whose accounts foreground radical individualization (I am I) and leave little room for collectivity, in Lash’s account reflexivity has a collective dimension. In particular, such reflexivity, based as it is in the *shared* background practices of economic agents involved in knowledge-intensive production, is collective in scope, indeed is characteristic of post-traditional economic communities. In short, in extending and elaborating upon Bourdieu’s social theory, Lash is able to account for the existence of collective identities in the context of the retrocession of the socio-structural.

### **Reflexivity and Social Transformation**

While Lash develops the social theory of Bourdieu to critique the objectivism of Beck and Giddens and to arrive at a hermeneutic understanding of reflexivity, nonetheless at least one question may be asked of this analysis. How is it that situated knowers in post-traditional communities come to reflect on the unconscious and unthought categories that shape action? Why are there reflexive communities in some places and not others?<sup>4</sup> Put another way, while this analysis rightly critiques objectivist modes of thinking regarding reflexivity, it does not attend to the issue of the constitution of situated reflexivity. This issue is also raised by Alexander (1996) in a discussion of Lash's hermeneutic reflexivity. Specifically, Alexander asks, where does this account leave reflexivity? The problem as Alexander sees it is that looking to sources of reflexivity via the social theory of Bourdieu leads to a theoretical dead end. In particular he suggests this move cannot get at 'the kind of critical reflexivity that differentiates contemporary democratic, multicultural and civil societies from earlier more authoritarian, homogeneous and anti-individualistic regimes' (Alexander, 1996: 137). Alexander claims that to be able to account for this kind of critical reflexivity requires connecting ideas about community-situated ethics to the idea that critical thinking depends on the existence of more abstract, universalistic systems of reference. Such a move, he suggests, cannot be made via the social theory of Bourdieu, as this is precisely what it does not do since it embeds meaning-making in historically delimited institutional fields and geographically specific communities. In short, Alexander is suggesting that an analysis of hermeneutic reflexivity cannot account for the kind of reflexivity that characterizes the contemporary condition. Beck and Giddens, he argues, are at least aware that there is something in the contemporary condition that is different and new, and that this newness has something to do with an increased capacity for critical reflexivity.

But Bourdieu's social theory *does* contain an account of social change and, moreover, this account links social transformation to heightened capacities for the kind of critical thinking to which Alexander refers. While this aspect of Bourdieu's work is less developed than his account of social organization,<sup>5</sup> indeed, as I will go on to illustrate, in certain crucial respects this aspect of Bourdieu's writing breaks with his theory of practice, nonetheless his social theory does address issues of social transformation and, moreover, links social change to increased capacities towards critical reflexivity (what Bourdieu [1977: 83] sometimes refers to as an 'awakening of consciousness'). Further, this account is integrated into Bourdieu's overall social theory, that is, it is integrated into his account of habitus and field. Specifically, for Bourdieu social change and heightened capacities for critical reflexivity are understood to be potentially at issue when there is a lack of fit between habitus and field, that is, when there is discord between the previously routine adjustment of subjective and objective structures: a dissonance between the feel for the game and the game itself. While, as noted above, for the most part Bourdieu sees compatibility between habitus and

field,<sup>6</sup> this unity is however neither fixed nor inevitable. The habitus, for example, has a transposable character – a mobility that may disrupt the routine adjustment of subjective and objective structures. In addition, changes in objective structures (fields of action) may disrupt the synchronicity of habitus and field. Such changes may not necessarily lead to either social transformation or increased tendencies towards critical reflection since there is an inertia, or what Bourdieu terms a hysteresis of the habitus (1977: 83; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 130). But nonetheless, when the adjustment between habitus and field is broken increased possibilities may arise for critical reflection on previously habituated forms of action. Indeed, in such contexts agents may secure what Bourdieu terms a ‘symbolic mastery’ of the principles of the habitus and transforming practices may emerge:

... transforming practices and the ‘awakening of consciousness’ take place by the direct or indirect possession of a discourse capable of securing symbolic mastery of the practically mastered principles of the class habitus. (1977: 83)<sup>7</sup>

Bourdieu does not elaborate in any systematic sense on the conditions of the latter. Indeed, it is unclear why some changes in objective structures may lead to increased possibilities for the development of transforming practices and others do not. But nonetheless, for Bourdieu, when shifts in objective conditions precipitate a lack of fit between objective and subjective structures there are increased possibilities for both critical reflexivity and social change. Indeed this kind of reflexivity, constituted in the specific conditions of a lack of fit between the feel for the game and the game itself, must itself be understood as a transforming practice.<sup>8</sup>

### **Gender Reflexivity in Late Modernity**

It is this specific aspect of Bourdieu’s social theory, in particular the view that possibilities for critical reflexivity and social transformation are heightened in the context of a lack of fit between subjective and objective structures, which has been taken up by a number of feminist social scientists and especially feminist sociologists in accounts of transformations of gender. What is at issue in such accounts is the broad idea that within late modernity there has been a restructuring of gender regimes, particularly in regard to the public sphere, evidenced it is claimed particularly in the economic field of action, especially in the movement of women into the labour market, including movements into professional and high-status occupations previously coded as masculine. For those following this line of reasoning these changes in the gender ordering of public fields of action are conceptualized in a Bourdieusian fashion as undoing the previous synchronicity of habitus and field, and hence as leading to the possibilities for critical reflection on the (previously unconscious and unthought) norms, rules and habits governing gender, indeed to a possible transformation of gender. While this line of reasoning clearly has certain resonances with



theories of reflexive modernization (especially in the equation of reflexivity with detraditionalization), nonetheless for those following this line of reasoning – and with the accounts of hermeneutic reflexivity discussed above – the broader social theory of Bourdieu, especially his theory of practice, is understood to place certain caveats on the framework of reflexive modernization. However, here the issue is not so much that Bourdieu's broader social theory can be extended to move away from a cognitive and overly individualized understanding of reflexivity, but that it may be mobilized to correct a perceived overemphasis in the reflexive modernization framework on possibilities for a self-conscious fashioning of identity, particularly gender identity.

Discussing theories of reflexive modernity broadly – but especially the work of Giddens (1991, 1992) – Lois McNay (1999, 2000), for example, has argued that the idea that identity is an issue of reflexive self-transformation, fails fully to consider issues concerning gender identity. She suggests that an examination of questions related to gender (and sexuality) reveal aspects of identity that renders it less amenable to reflexive processes of re-fashioning. Indeed, McNay suggests that, in stressing the potential for a self-fashioning of identity in late modernity, theories of reflexive modernization run the risk of reinstating the disembodied and disembedded subject of masculinist thought and leads to a tendency towards voluntarism. As a corrective to the overemphasis on self-fashioning, McNay turns to the general social theory of Bourdieu. But, as noted above, while writers such as Lash have turned to Bourdieu in order to break with the objectivism of Beck and Giddens and to put forward a more hermeneutic understanding of reflexivity, McNay turns to Bourdieu to highlight embedded and embodied aspects of identity which she suggests render certain aspects of identity less open to reflexive interpretation – even hermeneutic or aesthetic interpretation. For McNay it is the recognition of the unconscious, pre-reflexive and non-cognitive understanding of practice (and the incorporation of the social into the corporeal) in Bourdieu's social theory that is central here. Specifically, for McNay this understanding underscores how rather than as a self-conscious practice, gender identity is in important respects enacted at a pre-reflexive level (1999: 101). In terms of the understandings of identity found in theories of reflexive modernization this conceptualization of identity has a number of important implications. In particular, and as McNay makes clear, it points to aspects of embodied experience which, although not entirely fixed, may be less amenable to reflexive interpretation.

To illustrate these more entrenched aspects of gender identity McNay points to the ways in which men and women may have entrenched 'often unconscious investments in conventional images of masculinity and femininity which cannot easily be reshaped' (1999: 103). In addition, she discusses the ways in which, despite women's entry into the labour force, certain conventional arrangements of gender have not necessarily been dismantled and indeed may have become more entrenched. For example, McNay argues that such moves have not freed women from the burden of



emotional responsibilities (1999: 103). Instead they have made the process of individualization for women more complex, since the ideal of performing an individualized biography – ‘living one’s own life’ – is in sharp conflict with the conventional expectation of ‘being there for others’. For McNay, this kind of unevenness in the transformation of gender relations illustrates how an emphasis on strategic and self-conscious self-monitoring overlooks more enduring aspects of identity. She also points to sexual desire and maternal feelings as examples of unconscious, pre-reflexive, entrenched aspects of identity which throw into question the process of identity transformation highlighted by writers such as Giddens. And, importantly, McNay also notes that the entrenched nature of gender identity concerns the ways in which other social distinctions – such as those of class – may be played out through the categories of gender. McNay suggests that such unevenness in the transformation of gender is again indicative of how Bourdieu’s general social theory is of relevance for theorizing gender. In particular, this unevenness is understood to illustrate Bourdieu’s claim that the habitus may continue to work long after ‘the objective conditions of emergence have been dislodged’ (McNay, 1999: 103), that is, to illustrate the inertia of the habitus.

### **Detraditionalization, Gender, Mobility and Social Fields**

As this suggests, while McNay finds the emphasis on self-fashioning in the theory of reflexive modernization wanting, this is not to say that she does not agree that in late modernity there have been certain transformations of gender. Specifically, while critical of the idea of a straightforward, self-conscious transformation of identity, McNay accepts that there is an ongoing – albeit uneven – detraditionalization of gender. McNay posits that such detraditionalizing processes are currently expressed in women’s entry into the workforce; the opening up of negotiations regarding marriage and the gendered division of labour; and current conflicts between achieving (or choosing) an individualized and a more traditional biography for women. Moreover, and again drawing on the social theory of Bourdieu, but in this instance Bourdieu’s specific ideas regarding social transformation, McNay proposes that this detraditionalization of gender may be fruitfully understood and analysed as concerning the transposition or movement of the *feminine* habitus into different fields of action. Thus she suggests that women’s entry into the workforce (that is into a field previously coded as masculine) may be understood in these terms. But further, and again following Bourdieu’s ideas regarding social transformation, McNay argues that such movements of women into ‘traditionally non-feminine spheres of action’ (1999: 107) may be understood as meaning that in late modernity there is a lack of fit between gendered habitus and field. Indeed, McNay suggests that it is crucial to pay attention to this lack of fit in order to understand gender in late modern societies since it is this lack of synchronicity which, she claims, is leading to uneven detraditionalizations of gender, that is to an undoing of certain rules, norms and habits vis-à-vis gender. Moreover, McNay suggests that this Bourdieusian-influenced understanding of social change – as involving a

lack of fit between gendered habitus and field – provides a further avenue for assessing claims concerning the increasingly reflexive nature of gender identity. In particular she argues that such claims need to be assessed in the light of Bourdieu's understanding of critical reflexivity (the 'awakening of consciousness'): that such reflexivity is constituted when the routine adjustment between subjective and objective structures is broken. In short, while critical of the idea of a kind of self-driven notion of social transformation, McNay is suggesting that in late modernity a lack of fit between gendered habitus and field has led to heightened possibilities for both critical reflexivity and social transformation vis-à-vis gender.

To substantiate these claims McNay considers the example of women entering the workforce after child-rearing. Such women, she argues, may experience difficulties since their expectations and predispositions (constituted largely through the experience of the domestic field) may sit rather uneasily with the 'objective requirements of the workplace' (McNay, 1999: 110). Such dissonance may however lead to greater critical awareness of the shortcomings of a patriarchally defined system of employment. McNay's point here is that the emergence of critical reflexivity towards gender is based on what she terms a 'distanciation of the subject with constitutive structures'. Thus critical reflexivity towards gender – for example, a questioning of conventional notions of femininity – is understood to arise from the tensions in negotiating a lack of fit between habitus and field, in this case the tensions inherent in the negotiation of increasingly conflictual female roles. Indeed, McNay suggests that such reflexivity can only emerge from distanciation provoked by the conflict and tension of social forces operating within and across specific fields. Reflexivity is therefore understood by McNay not to be a generalized, universal capacity of subjects but to arise unevenly from subjects' embeddedness within differing sets of power relations. Thus she suggests any recent shifts in conventional notions of masculinity and femininity are best understood as arising from the 'negotiation of discrepancies by individuals in their movement within and across fields of social action' (McNay, 1999: 111). In following Bourdieu's understanding of social change, McNay therefore tends to view critical reflexivity (however unevenly manifest) as a transforming practice. Indeed, while placing certain important caveats on the framework of reflexive modernization, nonetheless she tends to agree that reflexivity vis-à-vis gender is detraditionalizing.

Other writers have taken up a similar Bourdieusian-style thesis regarding social change, critical reflexivity and gender. In a discussion of Bourdieu's analysis of critical reflexivity Christopher Bryant, for example, also draws attention to the transposable character of the habitus, and how movement across and within fields of action may 'lead to clashes or prompt reflection' (1995: 74). He argues that 'patriarchy at home . . . might clash with educational opportunity for girls and women at school and university' (1995: 74). Thus for Bryant, as for McNay, critical reflexivity in regard to gender is understood to arise via the negotiation of discrepancies in the

context of movements across fields of action, particularly movements for women from private to public fields. Such mobility is therefore understood to be productive of the kind of discrepancies and conflict through which a critical awareness vis-à-vis gender may arise. But also like McNay, Bryant's analysis implies that such reflexivity is made possible because of a kind of *feminization* of the public sphere, that is the transposition of a feminine habitus into public spheres of action. Thus for Bryant while 'patriarchy [exists] at home', school and university offer girls and women opportunities.

Like McNay's, Bryant's analysis therefore also suggests that it is a transposition of the feminine habitus into different fields of action that is central to the constitution of critical reflexivity towards gender. Thus it is the feminization of public spheres of action that is at issue in regard to the lack of fit between habitus and field, movements across fields of action (specifically from private to public fields of action), and the constitution of reflexive awareness towards gender (a distancing of the subject from constitutive structures). Indeed, a number of recent accounts of gender in late modernity either implicitly or explicitly subscribe to this line of reasoning and, more specifically, link a feminization of public sphere fields to a detraditionalization of gender. Arguing for a positive engagement between Bourdieu's social theory and contemporary feminist theory, Lovell (2000), for example, has argued that femininity as a form of cultural capital is beginning to have broad currency in what she claims are unexpected ways. In particular she discusses a general increase in demand for feminine skills in the labour market (Lovell, 2000: 25). Lovell suggests that this increased demand may mean that femininity may begin to have a competitive market advantage compared with the attributes of traditional masculinity, a shift which 'may have profound effects on "*la domination masculine*"' (2000: 25). Thus Lovell, like McNay, implies that a transposition of the feminine habitus into public sphere fields of action is detraditionalizing of gender. In her recent study of medical doctors in Australia and the UK, Pringle (1998) follows a similar line of reasoning. Specifically, she suggests that within the medical profession there is an increasing demand for and recognition of feminine skills, indeed that there is a shifting habitus with regard to gender in medicine. She writes, 'doctors have been compelled to take on a more feminine style, more holistic, and more concerned about communication' (Pringle, 1998: 8). Pringle locates this shift as being part of what she sees as a more general repositioning of gender and work within late modernity, involving shifting relations between public and private fields of action.

A similar line of argument is also put forward by Illouz, who, in an analysis of recent transformations of the workplace, suggests the emergence of the service economy (which demands an orientation towards persons rather than commodities) compelled workers 'to incorporate . . . in their personality . . . so called feminine attributes such as paying attention to emotions, controlling anger and listening sympathetically to others' (Illouz, 1997: 39). Drawing on Bourdieu's general social theory, Illouz suggests that in service economies such feminine attributes are defined as forms of capital

to be traded, a trade that was made possible via the articulation of a new language of selfhood.<sup>9</sup> Thus Illouz too suggests that work in service economies is feminized, involving the breakdown of the distinction between public and private spheres which, she argues, 'tends to blur distinctions of gender and gender roles' (Illouz, 1997: 51), a blurring which Illouz understands to have led to an increasingly prominent model of selfhood characterized by androgyny. The feminization of the economic field is therefore not only widely understood to constitute new forms of power for women through a re-valuing of the skills of femininity at work, but also to signal a reworking of gender identities and gender relations. Indeed this reworking of gender identities is widely understood to concern a detraditionalization of gender in late modernity, with a reworking of traditional notions of public and private and the emergence of a reflexive attitude towards gender typically taken as substantive illustration of such a detraditionalization.

### **Reflexivity as Habit of Gender**

But should such shifts be so easily understood as concerning a detraditionalization of gender? Should critical reflexivity and, more specifically, the emergence of a reflexive attitude towards gender be bracketed off from other forms of social action which are understood to be more habitually rooted and hence as tied in to the constitution and reproduction of the norms, expectations and habits of gender? That is, is it possible to differentiate between reflexive and non-reflexive action in the way that such accounts presume? My suggestion is that such assumptions are doubtful. Indeed, it is my suggestion that, rather than detraditionalizing, reflexivity is tied in to the arrangements of gender in late modernity. That is, it may be said that rather than detraditionalizing or providing a freedom from gender, a critical reflexive stance towards gender is increasingly characteristic of gender in late modernity – a habit of gender in late modernity.

I take as my cue here recent ethnographic studies of the workplace, particularly ethnographies of service sector workplaces and especially those managed in accordance with a performance-based culture. While such studies are not explicitly concerned with the issues I am interested in here, nonetheless they have noted how in the economic field workers are increasingly taking up a critical, reflexive stance towards a whole array of aspects of economic life (Hinchliffe, 2000; Martin, 1994), including a critical stance towards gender at work. Such studies show how management practices, for example training techniques, attempt to incite such reflexivity. Emily Martin's study of the emergence of the flexible body as a new workplace ideal (1994) underscores this point well. Here, Martin describes training techniques which attempt to shift away from the idea of gender as a taken-for-granted characteristic of workers to create a critical awareness and recognition of gender at work, to the extent that workers are encouraged to 'scramble characteristics usually associated with males and females'

(Martin, 1994: 213). Thus such training exercises establish gender not only as a matter of reflexivity but also as a matter of performativity. Further, Martin notes how training techniques attempt to establish reflexive ‘scrambling’ as central to corporate growth and success. Studies of interactive service work have highlighted, in particular, the take-up of this reflexive, performative stance towards gender. Here it has been noted that for both men and women gender is increasingly taking the form of a self-conscious artifice which can be managed, strategically deployed and performed. In Linda McDowell’s (1997) ethnographic study of financial service workers in the City of London for example, workers displayed high degrees of reflexivity toward their workplace performances of gender, to the extent that they would attempt to adapt their gendered style for different audiences (especially for different customers). Thus one respondent in this study commented ‘it depends who I am going to be seeing. Sometimes I’ll choose the “executive bimbo look”; at others . . . [a plain but very smart tailored blue dress] looks tremendously, you know, professional’ (McDowell, 1997: 198).

While such studies have recorded that reflexivity vis-à-vis gender is increasingly routine – even habitual – across a range of workplaces, nonetheless they warn against a simple elision of such reflexivity with detraditionalization. This is particularly evident in regard to the issue of the exchange of such reflexive gender performances into forms of workplace capital. Specifically, while such studies have noted that such reflexive performances of gender may be converted into forms of workplace capital, they also suggest that this process is by no means straightforward, and this is especially so for the case of performances of femininity for many women. Specifically, women’s performances of femininity at work are often defined as not concerning reflexive skills or competencies but rather as ‘natural advantages’ (McDowell, 1997: 154) which should not receive workplace recognition and rewards such as promotion. Thus many women workers are not recognized as taking up a reflexive stance towards gender since the relationship between women and femininity is made immanent. In short, and in contradistinction to those following the Bourdieusian-style thesis of the feminization of the economic field, the emergence of gender reflexivity as characteristic of the economic field may not lead to a straightforward critical deconstruction of the norms, habits and rules of gender and therefore to detraditionalization (for instance to new forms of economic power for women). Indeed, it seems that reflexivity may be linked to (gendered) positions of privilege and exclusion – to gendered (and as Featherstone [1992] has shown, classed) processes of categorization and classification in late modernity.

What this suggests is that the idea of feminization, and especially the idea of the transposition of the feminine habitus ‘into’ the economic field, which leads to a lack of fit between habitus and field, to the take-up of a reflexive stance towards gender and to a process of detraditionalization may be a less than adequate conceptualization of the reconfiguring of gender and gender identities in late modernity. In particular, it suggests that this thesis

blocks out of view the ways in which reflexivity concerns not so much a straightforward detraditionalization of the norms, habits and expectations of gender but may be tied into a *reworking* of gender in late modernity, a reworking characterized by positions of reflexivity and immanence (Adkins, 2002b), indeed that reflexivity may be bound up with modes of classification and with specific forms of power and inequality post (sociological) structure. In short, it suggests that the Bourdieusian-influenced accounts of transformations in gender in late modernity fail to register that reflexivity does not concern a liberal freedom from gender, but may be tied into new arrangements of gender. But what this also implies is that the theoretical tools being used in recent accounts of transformations of gender and gender identities in late modernity derived from Bourdieu's account of social transformation are also less than well suited to come to grips with this task. Specifically, the coupling of critical reflexivity with detraditionalization, and the unproblematic understanding of reflexivity as involving reflection and critique of previously habituated social conditions which then leads to social transformation (indeed that reflexivity itself is a transforming practice), appear to be inadequate assumptions for exploring the relationship between reflexivity and gender in late modernity.

Indeed, if we turn to recent discussions of Bourdieu's social theory there is some critical commentary on his assumptions regarding reflexivity and social transformation – in particular, critical commentary on the way in which, when it comes to social change, Bourdieu's social theory tends overwhelmingly to associate both critical reflexivity and social transformation with a thinking consciousness and to disconnect such forms of action from more habituated, unconscious, corporealized forms. Crossley (2001), for example, has argued that the problem with this set of assumptions is that it underestimates the extent to which reflexivity may routinely enter into everyday life as a matter of course, a point underscored by the Merleau-Ponty-ian motif that thought and the body are indissoluble. Indeed, and echoing aspects of Lash's analysis of hermeneutic reflexivity, Crossley notes that, considered from a more phenomenological point of view, rather than separate from habitual, unconscious forms of action, reflexivity must itself be understood to be rooted in the habitus.<sup>10</sup> In short, even when it comes to the issue of social change, reflexivity may not be as thoroughly disconnected from the realm of habituated forms of practice as Bourdieu's writings on social transformation appear to imply.

This point has a number of implications for the analyses of transformations of gender I have outlined in this article. In particular it suggests that, in separating out critical reflexivity from more habitual forms of action, such analyses may be greatly underestimating the ways in which reflexivity is part of everyday habit and hence overestimating the possibilities for gender detraditionalization in late modernity. Thus, as I indicated in my more substantive discussion of reflexivity, situated men and women in their lifeworlds routinely enact reflexive forms of action in regard to gender. Indeed, in a review of recent studies of social divisions, Boyne has

noted that this is not only the case for gender, but for a whole range of social identities. He argues that a number of such studies show how ‘structural contexts such as class, ethnicity, gender, age, medical status, are now routinely and reflexively incorporated into conceptions of self-identity’ (Boyne, 2002: 119). Class cultures, for example, are now marked by reflexive attitudes: ‘rueful, ironic, envious, reflectively proud’ (2002: 119). And I would add to this, at least in the case of gender, that such reflexive practices may be said to be so habituated that they are part of the very norms, rules and expectations that govern gender in late modernity, even as they may ostensibly appear to challenge these very notions.

Even those analyses such as McNay’s, which have mobilized Bourdieu’s theory of practice to critique the idea that identity is increasingly a matter of reflexive self-fashioning and to set certain limits on the reflexive modernization thesis, may have also greatly overestimated the possibilities for gender detraditionalization in late modernity. In particular, by following Bourdieu’s assumptions regarding social change and critical reflexivity, especially the assumption that critical reflexivity is a transforming practice that is separate from the everyday world of habit and more specifically in assuming that reflexivity is differentiated from the norms and habits of gender, McNay’s analysis ironically ends up reproducing the very problem that she seeks to redress in the reflexive modernization thesis. That is, McNay, along with the analysts of transformations of gender and gender identity in late modernity considered in this article, overstates the possibilities for detraditionalization vis-à-vis gender in late modernity.

### **Bourdieu, Reflexivity and Social Change: Rethinking Action**

In this article I have suggested that reflexivity needs to be decoupled not only, as Lash has argued, from individualization, but also from detraditionalization. Indeed, I have suggested that the relations between reflexivity and detraditionalization or social transformation can in no way be taken for granted. But while this is so, the problems I have identified with the Bourdieusian-derived feminization thesis common to a number of recent accounts of gender transformations in late modernity prompt some perhaps more serious questions in regard to the social theory of Bourdieu, particularly his assumptions regarding critical reflexivity and social transformation. Why is it, for example, that Bourdieu, when thinking about the issue of social transformation, abandons the principles he develops in regard to action? That is, why, when it comes to social change, does Bourdieu tend to disembodify actors and understand action as a matter of thinking consciousness? Why does social change end up being about consciousness when most of his social theory attempts to get away from this view of social action and of the human subject? In other words, why does Bourdieu move towards the prevailing model of power within sociological thinking – as a ‘system of concepts, values and beliefs, *ideology*, that primarily effect consciousness’ (Grosz, 1990: 62, emphasis in original) – and enact the conventional philosophical dualism between everyday life and critical



reflection (Felski, 2000) – when the vast majority of his work critiques this view both theoretically and methodologically?

Of course, and as mentioned above, it is widely rehearsed that Bourdieu's social theory does not contain a developed account of social change and his work is often critiqued on these grounds. However, for the most part most critics do not see this as a problem of his wider conceptualization of the social (as comprising habitus and fields), yet it is my belief that this is where the problem resides. The problem as I see it is that, when it comes to social change, Bourdieu is forced into a position of abandoning his understanding of practice since, ultimately, he tends to understand the field as an 'objective' structure which determines – or at least sets crucial limits on – practice. True this practice is embodied, true habitus and field are in dynamic interplay. But for the most part, and as Butler (1997, 1999) has recently pointed out, for Bourdieu the relation between habitus and field is understood as an 'encounter' or event, that is as an encounter with an *external*, objective phenomenon, an understanding which assumes that the field is a precondition of the habitus and that the habitus will always submit to the field. That is, Bourdieusian social theory tends to assume that the habitus will adapt or accommodate itself to the field, and that the habitus cannot alter the field because of the external, objective status that is attributed to the field. Moreover Bourdieu assumes that the habitus always encounters the field in this way. As a consequence of this understanding of the relation between habitus and field, and again as Butler makes clear, not only is the habitus always inclined to adapt to the field, but agents are always inclined towards submission – since inclination or adaptation is part of the very set of dispositions and competencies that are part of the habitus. In short Bourdieu assumes a mimetic relation between field and habitus, object and subject, a mimesis that produces congruence between habitus and field. Indeed, Bourdieu assumes that mimesis itself concerns a process of adaptation.

This determinism of the field in Bourdieu's social theory has been pointed out by many sociologists but few have considered alternative understandings of mimesis to think through correctives to this determinism. Indeed, most simply argue that a stronger account of social change is required and therefore stay both within a traditional sociological structure–action problematic and close to Bourdieu's own understanding of mimesis (see e.g. Howson and Inglis, 2001). But what is particularly germane here is recent work on subjectivity and subject formation which provides a rather different orientation to this issue (Bell, 1999). The key motif of this body of work is that subjects never fully occupy or identify with norms (see e.g. Fraser, 1999; Haraway, 1991; Skeggs, 1997), indeed that there is an *ambivalence* at the very heart of inclination.<sup>11</sup> Ambivalence, in other words, must be understood to be at the very heart of mimesis. As Butler herself has put it:

... the mimetic acquisition of the norm is at once the condition by which a certain resistance to the norm is also produced; identification will not ‘work’ to the extent that the norm is not fully ... incorporable. (Butler, 1999: 118)

Understanding mimesis in this way requires an emphasis on the *temporality* of action on, for example, iteration and citation, for instance, on how identifications as well as social positions are subject to a logic of iteration (and not simply a singular process of adaptation or accommodation), a logic which explains both how and why possibilities of instability, ambivalence and interruptability are at the core of mimesis or inclination.<sup>12</sup> In short, what such work underscores is that the logic of ambivalence at play within mimesis demands an understanding of instability not as external to but as internal to the operation of norms themselves. As Campbell and Harbord (1999) have discussed, Homi Bhabha’s (1994) account of mimicry and the colonized subject underscores this point well. Rejecting the view of such mimicry as a simple identification with and adaptation to the dominant colonial subject and colonial power, Bhabha suggests that the practice of mimicry is far more ambiguous, indeed that it is characterized by ambivalence. Thus while mimicry may signal an identification with the dominant, as Campbell and Harbord note, it may also ‘mask the language of the other, raising the spectre that this seeming “identification” may indeed be a parody’ (Campbell and Harbord, 1999: 236).

This view clearly questions the tendency in Bourdieusian social theory to assume that incorporation and mimesis ‘work’: that the encounter between habitus and field involves an adaptation of the habitus to the field. Indeed, it highlights the ways in which, because Bourdieu understands norms to be generally incorporated, he closes off any ability to think through ambivalence and hence social transformation within his understanding of practice.<sup>13</sup> Thus he must always place ambivalence outside of the realms of practice. This for me explains why Bourdieu’s understanding of social transformation and critical reflexivity is so incongruous with the rest of his social theory. In short, because Bourdieu understands norms to be incorporated (since agents are generally understood to identify with norms, or perhaps, to put it better, an agreement between the dispositions of agents and the demands of a field is generally assumed) he has to abandon his understanding of practice and resort to a more problematic sociological understanding of action (as conscious, cognitive and disembodied involving a system of concepts, perceptions, values and beliefs) when he wants to talk about social transformation. This contradiction will not be resolved by making Bourdieusian social theory more sociological, however, but via a conceptualization of mimesis which understands norms as never fully occupied and via an emphasis on the temporal aspects of practice. Such procedures, moreover, would allow a move away from problematic notions of liberal freedom of the sort found in recent sociological accounts of reflexivity and social change, indeed from the very dilemma of determinism versus

freedom which in his social theory Bourdieu himself sought to overcome (Bourdieu, 2000: 131).

### *Notes*

1. Indeed, this compatibility is neither fixed nor inevitable and, as I will go on to discuss, in times of crisis the synchronicity between habitus and field may be undone.
2. It is worth pointing out that for Bourdieu the unconscious is 'the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of the habitus' (1977: 78–9).
3. A number of writers have challenged the assumption that reflexivity resides in the self. See, for example, Adkins (2002a), May (1998), Probyn (1993), Vitellone (2002).
4. While Lash recognizes that there are reflexivity winners and losers, nonetheless he does not directly attend to the question of how such unevenness vis-à-vis reflexivity is constituted.
5. It is widely recognized that Bourdieu's social theory has much more to say about social reproduction than social change (see e.g. Calhoun, 1993).
6. Thus Bourdieu notes that for differentiated societies 'a whole series of social mechanisms tend to ensure the adjustment of dispositions to positions' (Bourdieu, 2000: 147).
7. Bourdieu does not spell out how it is exactly that agents may come directly or indirectly to secure such symbolic mastery, that is, he does not discuss the relations between such discourses, the habitus and the field.
8. It is interesting to note that, more broadly speaking, Lash situates his analysis of hermeneutic reflexivity in the context of social change, specifically, a shift from a mode of production to a mode of information, that is, the emergence of what Lash terms the information field. What appears to be at issue in the constitution of hermeneutic reflexivity in Lash's account is therefore the very same issue we find in Bourdieu's account of social change and reflexivity, that is, a change in objective conditions, in this case the emergence of the information and communication field. But for Lash the latter does not comprise of the familiar social structures of sociological analyses (economic, political, ideological), but non-social cultural structures.
9. Illouz suggests that this new language of selfhood was articulated primarily via psychological expertise (see Rose, 1990).
10. While this suggests that phenomenological and/or hermeneutic understandings of reflexivity offer some important resources for the theorization of gender in late modernity, it is important to stress that there may be certain limits to such understandings. Indeed, while it is the case that a number of feminist theorists for the past decade or more have drawn on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, particularly in the theorization of sexual difference and intercorporeality (Grosz, 1990; Weiss, 1999), this has not taken place uncritically. In particular feminists have critiqued the universalism of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body. Thus his notion of body-subjects and the implication that the body *is* the subject and the subject *is* the body can be critiqued for its assumption that all body-subjects are lived in the same way (Ahmed and Stacey, 2000). Indeed, while the notion of reflexive habit with its emphasis on in-the-world corporealized reflexivity acts as an

important corrective to claims that gender is radically detraditionalizing, what appears to be missing from this account is a sense of the ways in which such in-the-world corporealized reflexivity may be bound up with the articulation of differences. Thus it does not seem to be able to attend to the point highlighted in my discussion of reflexivity, gender and economy, that such reflexivity is bound up with particular arrangements of gender characterized by positions of reflexivity and immanence, and that such positions involve relations of privilege and exclusion.

11. While via the development of the theory of practice Bourdieu clearly rejected the notion of the social actor as rule-follower or norm-respecter, nonetheless his understanding of mimesis tends to undermine such claims.

12. Interestingly, Bourdieu's social theory has often been praised for its emphasis on temporality (see e.g. McNay, 2000), especially its emphasis on the temporality of practice. However, Bourdieu tends to understand time as deriving its force or efficacy via the structured spaces of positions operating in social fields. Thus, he writes, we know 'how much advantage the holder of a transmissible power can derive from the art of delaying transmission and keeping others in the dark as to his ultimate intentions' (Bourdieu, 1977: 7). In Bourdieusian social theory temporality is therefore read off from social positions (indeed, is held to be in a mimetic relation to the field) and hence concerns a map of social power. Temporality is thus conceived as only ever reproducing this map of power.

13. For some the move I am suggesting here – that recent work on subjectivity and subject formation may complement and profitably extend Bourdieu's social theory, and in particular that this work will allow for a fuller account of action particularly in regard to questions of social change – may appear problematic. For many have seen in such analyses an inexcusable emphasis on the linguistic which is held unable to account for the specificities of the socio-historical. However, even if one is concerned with language quite literally, Butler (1999) has shown how speech is performed bodily and hence how citation and iteration are social logics.

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