



## **From Rules to Strategies: An Interview with Pierre Bourdieu**

Pierre Lamaison; Pierre Bourdieu

*Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Feb., 1986), 110-120.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0886-7356%28198602%291%3A1%3C110%3AFRTSAI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-1>

*Cultural Anthropology* is currently published by American Anthropological Association.

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/anthro.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

---

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

authors who spearheaded it.

### References Cited

- Bourdieu, Pierre  
 1962 *The Algerians*. Alan C. M. Ross, trans. Boston: Beacon Press. (1958)  
 1977 *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Richard Nice, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (1972)  
 1979 *Algeria 1960*. Richard Nice, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (1977)  
 1984 *Distinction, a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Richard Nice, trans. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (1979)  
 1984a *Homo academicus*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, A. Darbel, J. P. Rivet, and C. Seibel  
 1963 *Travails et travailleurs en Algérie*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Jean Claude Passeron  
 1967 *Sociology and Philosophy in France Since 1945. Death and Resurrection of a Philosophy Without a Subject*. *Social Research* 34:1:162–212.  
 1977 *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.  
 1979 *The Inheritors: French Students and Their Relation to Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and A. Sayad  
 1964 *Le deracinement*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.
- Centre de Sociologie Européene  
 1972 *Current Research*. Paris: Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes.
- Certeau, Michel de  
 1984 *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Steven F. Randall, trans. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Clifford, James and George E. Marcus, eds.  
 1986 *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Foster, Stephen William  
 1981 *Interpretations of Interpretations*. *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly* 6: (4) 2–8.
- Gans, Herbert  
 1974 *Popular Culture and High Culture*. New York: Basic.
- Lemert, Charles C.  
 1981 *Reading French Sociology. In French Sociology, Rupture and Renewal since 1968*. Charles C. Lemert, ed. Pp. 3–32. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rabinow, Paul  
 1982 *Masked I Go Forward: Reflections on the Modern Subject. In A Crack in the Mirror; Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology*. Jay Ruby, ed. Pp. 173–185. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Rabinow, Paul and William M. Sullivan  
 1979 *The Interpretive Turn. In Interpretive Social Science*. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, eds. Pp. 1–12. Berkeley: University of California Press.

## From Rules to Strategies: An Interview with Pierre Bourdieu

Pierre Lamaison

*Terrain: Carnets du Patrimoine  
Ethnologique*

P.L.—I would like for us to talk about the interest you have shown, in your work from “Béarne” and the “Trois études d’ethnologie kabyle” through to “Homo academicus,” in questions of kinship and inheritance. You were the first to address the question of the choosing of marriage partners in a French population (cf. “Célibat et condition paysanne,” *Études rurales*, 1962, and “Les stratégies matrimoniales dans le système des stratégies de reproduction,” *Annales*, 1972) and to emphasize the correlation between modes of property inheritance—nonegalitarian in this case—and the logic of alliances. Each matrimonial transaction is to be understood, you said, as “the outcome of a strategy” and can be defined “as a moment in a series of material and symbolic exchanges . . . which depend largely on the position that this exchange occupies in the matrimonial history of the family.”

**P.B.**—My research on marriage in Béarne was for me the crossover point and the link between ethnology and sociology. From the very first, I had thought of this work on my own country of origin as a sort of epistemological experimentation. By analyzing, as an ethnologist in a familiar although socially distant world, the matrimonial practices that I had studied in a much more remote social universe, Kabyle society, I would be giving myself the opportunity to objectify the act of objectification and the objectifying subject I sought to objectify the ethnologist not just as a socially situated individual but also as a scholar whose work is to analyze the social world, to conceptualize it, and who must therefore withdraw from the game. This means either that he will observe a foreign world, in which his interests are not invested, or he will observe his own world, but while keeping to the sidelines, insofar as this can be done. I wished, not so much to observe the observer in his particularity, which holds no great interest in itself, but to observe the effects which the position of observer produces on the observation, on the description of the thing observed. I wished also to discover all the presuppositions inherent in this *theoretical* posture, as a vision that is external, remote, distant, or simply nonpractical, uncommitted, disinterested. It became apparent to me that a whole social philosophy, a thoroughly mistaken one, derived from the fact that the ethnologist has “nothing to do” with the people he studies, with their practices, their representations, apart from studying them. There is a gulf between trying to understand matrimonial relations between two families in order to arrange the best marriage for one’s son or daughter, with importance equivalent to the concern of people in our milieu to select the best academic institution for their son or daughter, and trying to understand these relations in order to construct a theoretical model.

Thus, this *theoretical* analysis of the *theoretical* vision as an external vision and, above all, as having nothing practical at stake, was no doubt the source of my “break” with what others would call the structuralist “paradigm.” It was the acute awareness—which I did not acquire

through theoretical reflection alone—of the gap between the theoretical aims of theoretical understanding and the directly concerned, practical aims of practical understanding, which led me to speak of matrimonial *strategies* or *social uses* of kinship rather than rules of kinship. This change of vocabulary is indicative of a change of viewpoint. It is a matter of not grounding the practice of social agents in the theory that one has to construct in order to explain that practice.

**P.L.**—But when Lévi-Strauss talks about the rules or models one reconstructs in order to explain it, he doesn’t really take a position opposed to yours on this point.

**P.B.**—As a matter of fact, it seems to me that the opposition is masked by the ambiguity of the word *rule*, which allows one to conjure away the very problem that I have tried to raise. One is never quite sure whether by rule one means a juridical or quasi-juridical type of principle that is more or less consciously produced and controlled by the agents, or a set of objective regularities that must be followed by everyone who enters a game. It is one or the other of these two meanings that we refer to when we speak of the rules of the game. But one can also have in mind a third meaning, that of a model, a principle constructed by the social scientist in order to account for the game. I think that by dodging these distinctions one risks falling into one of the most disastrous fallacies in the human sciences, which consists in taking, according to the old saying of Marx, “the things of logic for the logic of things.” In order to escape this danger, one needs to bring into the theory the real principle of *strategies*, that is, a practical sense of things, or, if one prefers, what athletes call a feel for the game (*le sens du jeu*).<sup>1</sup> I refer here to practical mastery of the logic or immanent necessity of a game, which is gained through experience of the game, and which functions this side of consciousness and discourse (like the techniques of the body, for example). Notions such as habitus (or system of dispositions), practical sense, and strategy are tied to the effort to get away from objectivism with-

out falling into subjectivism. That is why I do not see myself in what Lévi-Strauss calls "domestic societies" ("*sociétés à maison*"), although I cannot help but feel concerned since I was instrumental in reintroducing into theoretical discussion in ethnology one of those societies in which acts of exchange, matrimonial or other, seem to have for their "subject" the household, *la maison*, the *oustan*; and also in formulating the theory of marriage as a strategy.

**P.L.**—Would you like to comment on the lecture on Marc Bloch, "L'ethnologie et l'histoire," published by the *Annales E.S.C.*, in which Lévi-Strauss criticizes what he calls *spontanéisme*?

**P.B.**—Yes. When he speaks of the criticism of structuralism "which just about everybody is mouthing and which takes its inspiration from a fashionable spontaneism and subjectivism" (not a very nice thing to say), it is clear that Lévi-Strauss is alluding in a way that shows very little understanding, to say the least, to a body of work that appears to me to participate in a different theoretical world than his. I will pass over the mixing effect which consists in suggesting the existence of a relation between thought in terms of strategy and what is designated in politics by the term "*spontanéisme*." One's choice of words, especially in polemics, is not innocent and we are aware of the discredit that attaches, even in politics, to the forms of belief in the spontaneity of the masses. Having said this, I might add, parenthetically, that Lévi-Strauss's political intuition is not completely misleading since, through the notions of habitus, practical sense, and strategy, the observer's proximity to the agents and practice is reintroduced as well as his refusal of the distant gaze, factors which indeed are not unrelated to political dispositions and positions. Lévi-Strauss is confined as he has always been within the alternatives of subjectivism and objectivism (I am thinking of his remarks on phenomenology in the preface to Marcel Mauss). He cannot perceive the attempts to transcend these alternatives as anything but a regression towards subjectivism.

Being a prisoner, like so many others, of the alternatives of the individual and the social, of freedom and necessity, etc., he cannot see in the attempts to break with the structuralist "paradigm" anything but a return to individualist subjectivism and hence to a type of irrationalism. In his view, "*spontanéisme*" replaces structure with "a statistical mean resulting from choices that are freely made, or at least not subject to any external determination." How can one fail to recognize in this statement the image or fantasy of the "*spontanéisme*" of May '68, which is evoked by—in addition to the concept used to designate this theoretical current—the allusions to fashion and to the criticism "that just about everybody is mouthing"?

In short, because strategy is for him synonymous with *choice*, a conscious and individual choice guided by rational calculation or "ethical and affective" motivations, and because this choice resists constraints and the collective norm, he is forced to reject as unscientific a theoretical project that in reality aims to reintroduce the socialized agent—and not the subject—the more or less "automatic" strategies of practical sense—and not the projects or calculations of a consciousness.

**P.L.**—But in your view what is the function of the notion of strategy?

**P.B.**—The notion of strategy makes possible a break with the objectivist point of view and with the agentless action that structuralism assumes (by appealing for example to the notion of the unconscious). But one can refuse to see strategy as the product of an unconscious program without making it the product of a conscious and rational calculation. It is the product of a practical sense, of a particular social game. This sense is acquired beginning in childhood, through participation in social activities, and particularly—in the case of Kabylia, and no doubt elsewhere as well—through participation in children's games. The good player, who is as it were the embodiment of the game, is continually doing what needs to be done, what the game demands and requires. This presupposes a constant invention, an improvisation that

is absolutely necessary in order for one to adapt to situations that are infinitely varied. This cannot be achieved by mechanical obedience to explicit, codified rules (when they exist). I have described for example the strategies of a double game which consists in playing according to rule, in being legitimate, in acting in conformity with one's interests while giving the appearance of obeying the rules. This sense of the game is not infallible; it is unevenly distributed, in society as well as on a team. It is sometimes in short supply, especially in tragic situations, when one appeals to wise men, who in Kabylia are often poets too. They know how to take liberty with the official rule and thereby save the essential part of what the rule was meant to guarantee.

But this freedom of invention and improvisation, which enables one to produce the infinity of moves made possible by the game (as in chess) has the same limits as the game. Strategies appropriate for playing the game of Kabyle marriage, which does not involve the land and the threat of partition would not be suitable for playing the game of Béarnese marriage where it is mainly a question of saving the house and the land.

It is clear that the problem does not have to be posed in terms of spontaneity and constraint, of freedom and necessity, of the individual and the social. *Habitus* as a sense of the game is the social game incarnate, become nature. Nothing is freer or more constrained at the same time than the action of the good player. He manages quite naturally to be at the place where the ball will come down, as if the ball controlled him. Yet at the same time, he controls the ball. *Habitus*, as the social inscribed in the body of the biological individual, makes it possible to produce the infinite acts that are inscribed in the game, in the form of possibilities and objective requirements. The constraints and requirements of the game, although they are not locked within a code of rules, are *imperative* for those, and only those, who, because they have a sense of the game's immanent necessity, are equipped to perceive them and carry them out.

This can easily be brought over and

applied to marriage. As I have shown in the case of Béarn and Kabylia, matrimonial strategies are the product not of compliance with rules but of a sense of the game that leads one to "choose" the best possible match, in view of the hand that one has been dealt—the trump cards and the bad cards (the girls in particular)—and the skill with which one is able to play. The explicit rules of the game—for example the kinship preferences or the successional laws—define the value of the cards (the boys and girls, the older siblings and younger siblings). The regularities that one can observe, with the help of statistics, are the aggregate product of individual actions oriented by the same constraints. Again, these may involve the necessities inscribed in the structure of the game or partially objectified in rules or the actors' sense of the game, which is itself unevenly distributed, because there are always, in all groups, degrees of excellence.

**P.L.**—But who makes the rules of the game which you are talking about? Are they different from the operational rules of societies whose description by ethnologists results precisely in the construction of models? What distinguishes the rules of the game from rules of kinship?

**P.B.**—The game image is probably the least inadequate for evoking social things. However, it does carry dangers. As a matter of fact, to speak of a game suggests that there was, at the beginning, an inventor of the game, who made the rules, who drew up the social contract. More seriously, it suggests that there *exist* rules of the game, or explicit norms, etc.; whereas in reality things are much more complicated. One can speak of a game in order to say that a group of people participate in a regulated activity, an activity which, without necessarily being the product of obedience to rules, *obeys certain regularities*. A game is the locus of an immanent necessity, which is at the same time an immanent logic. In a game one doesn't do just anything with impunity. One's sense of the game, which contributes to that necessity and logic, is a form of knowledge of that necessity and logic.

Anyone who wishes to win at this game, to claim the stakes, to catch the ball—for example, the good marriage catch and the profits that go with it—has to have a sense of the game. They must have a sense of the necessity and logic of the game. Is it necessary to speak of rules? Yes and no. One can do so provided one draws a clear distinction between *rule* and *regularity*. The social game is a locus of regularities. Things happen in a *regular* way within it; rich heirs regularly marry rich younger daughters. I can say that this is the starting point for all my thinking: how can behaviors be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules? But it is not enough to break with the *legalism* (as the Anglo-Saxons say) that comes so natural to anthropologists. They are always ready to listen to the lesson-givers and rule-givers that informants become when they speak to the ethnologist, that is, to someone who knows nothing and to whom they must speak *as one speaks to a child*. In order to construct a *model* of the game which is neither simply a reproduction of explicit norms nor a statement of regularities, but which integrates these norms and regularities, one must reflect on the *different modes of existence* of the principles of regulation and regularity of practices.

There is also, of course, the *habitus*, the regulated tendency to generate regulated behaviors apart from any reference to rules in societies in which the process of codification is not very advanced, the *habitus* is the source of most practices. As I have shown in the *Sens pratique*, ritual practices are the product of the implementation of *practical taxonomies*, or, more precisely, of *classificatory schemes* handled in a practical, pre-reflective state, with all the effects we know that entails. Rituals and myths are logical, but only up to a certain point. Their logic is practical, in the sense that a piece of clothing is said to be practical, necessary, and sufficient for practice. Too much logic would often be incompatible with practice, or even in conflict with practical ends.

The same is true of the classifications that we produce relative to the social or political world. I arrived at what I believe to be the right intuition of the practical logic

of ritual action by considering it through analogy with our way of using the opposition between right and left in order to evaluate and classify political views or persons.

**P.L.**—There again, you cross the line between ethnology and sociology.

**P.B.**—Yes, the distinction between sociology and ethnology prevents the ethnologist from subjecting his own experience to the analysis which he applies to his object. To do so would oblige him to discover that what he describes as mythological thinking is quite often nothing but the logic of three-fourths of our actions. For example, our judgments of what are considered the supreme accomplishments of refined culture—historically formed judgments of taste—are based entirely on pairs of adjectives.

But to return to the possible principles of the production of regulated practices, one has to take into account, along with the *habitus*, the explicit, clearly stated rules which may be preserved by being transmitted orally or in written form. These rules may even be formed into a coherent system, one that manifests an intentional, deliberate consistency, arrived at through a labor of codification which is the task of professional formulators and rationalizers, e.g., jurists.

**P.L.**—In other words, the distinction you made at the outset between the things of logic and the logic of things is what makes it possible to raise, in clear terms, the question of the relation between the regularity of practices that is based on dispositions, on a sense of the game, and the explicit rule, the code.

**P.B.**—Exactly. Earlier, I spoke of the regularity as the rules of the game to which one's sense of the game conforms spontaneously and what one "recognizes" in a practical way when one agrees, as we say, to "play the game." The rule as a simple regularity that can be captured statistically does not necessarily derive from the rule *qua* rule of law or "pre-law," a custom, maxim, proverb, or formula stating a reg-

ularity, thus formed into a “normative fact.” I have in mind for example tautologies like the one that consists in saying about a man that “there’s a man,” meaning a *real* man, *really* a man. Yet this is sometimes the case, particularly in official situations, *formal* situations as one says in English. This distinction being clearly drawn, one sees that it is not enough just to record the explicit rules on the one hand, and to establish the regularities on the other. One needs to construct a theory of the work of formulation and codification, of the properly symbolic effect which the codification produces. There is a connection between juridical formulas and mathematical formulas. Law, as formal logic, considers the form of operations without regard to the material to which they are applied. The juridical formula is valid for all the values of *x*. It is because the code exists that different agents agree on universal formulas—universal because they are formal (in the double meaning of the English *formal*, i.e., official, public, and the French *formel*, i.e., relating only to form). But I will stop there. I merely wanted to show all that is covered by the word *rule*, the ambiguity of which makes it possible to confuse, again and again, the logic of things and the things of logic. As a matter of fact, the same error haunts the entire history of linguistics, which, from Saussure to Chomsky, tends to confuse generative schemes functioning in a practical state and an explicit model, a grammar constructed in order to explain utterances.

**P.L.**—So, among the constraints that define the social game, there can be more or less strict rules governing alliance and defining kinship ties.

**P.B.**—The strongest of these constraints, at least in the traditions that I have studied directly, are those which result from the successional custom. It is through them that the necessities of the economy are imposed and it is with them that the strategies of reproduction must reckon, matrimonial strategies first of all. But customs, even highly codified ones, which is rarely the case in present societies, themselves form the object of all sorts of strategies. So it is

necessary in each case to return to the *reality of practices* instead of relying on custom, whether it is codified, i.e., written, or not. Being based essentially on the recording of exemplary “moves” or penalties placed on exemplary infractions (and thereby converted into norms), custom gives a very inaccurate idea of the ordinary routine of ordinary marriages. It forms the object of all sorts of manipulations, on the occasion of marriages in particular. If the Béarnese have managed to keep their successional traditions alive in spite of two centuries of civil code, this is because they learned a long time ago to play with the rules of the game. This being said, we must not underestimate the effect of codification or simply officialization (which is what the effect of so-called preferential marriage comes down to). The successional channels that are designated by custom are laid down as “natural” and they tend to orient—it would still be necessary to understand how—matrimonial strategies, which explains why one observes in European societies a rather close correspondence between the geography of modes of property inheritance and the geography of representations of kinship ties.

**P.L.**—Actually, you also differ from the “structuralists” in the way you conceive of the action of juridical or economic “constraints.”

**P.B.**—Right. The famous articulation of “instances” which the structuralists, especially the Neo-Marxist ones, sought in the objectivity of structures is achieved in every responsible act, in the sense of the English word *responsible*, that is, an act objectively adjusted to the necessity of the game because it is oriented by a sense of the game. The good “player” takes into account, in each matrimonial choice, the whole set of relevant properties in view of the structure that is to be reproduced. In Béarn, these include sex, i.e., the customary representations of male precedence; rank by birth, i.e., the precedence of the older brothers and, through them, the primacy of the land which, as Marx said, inherits the heir who inherits it; the family’s social standing which must be maintained,

etc. One's sense of the game in this case is, roughly speaking, one's sense of honor. But the Béarnese sense of honor, notwithstanding the analogies, is not exactly the same as the Kabyle sense of honor which, being more sensitive to symbolic capital, reputation, renown (*gloire*, as people said in the 17th century) pays less attention to economic capital and to land in particular.

**P.L.**—Matrimonial strategies are therefore an integral part of the system of strategies of reproduction. . . .

**P.B.**—Let me say, by way of anecdote, that it was a preoccupation with stylistic elegance on the part of the editors of the *Annales* that resulted in my article's being called "Les stratégies matrimoniales dans le système de reproduction" (which doesn't make a great deal of sense), and not, as I wanted, "dans le système des stratégies de reproduction." My point here is that matrimonial strategies cannot be dissociated from the whole set of strategies. I am thinking of, for example, strategies of procreation, educative strategies as strategies of cultural placement, or economic strategies, investments, savings, and so forth—by which the family aims to reproduce itself biologically and above all *socially*. It attempts to reproduce those of its attributes that enable it to keep its position, its standing in the social world being considered.

**P.L.**—By talking about *the* family and its strategies, aren't you postulating the homogeneity of this group and its interests. And aren't you ignoring the tensions and conflicts that are inherent in, for example, domestic life?

**P.B.**—Not at all. Matrimonial strategies are often the result of relations of force within the domestic group. These relations can be understood only by appealing to the history of this group and, in particular, to the history of previous marriages within it. For example, in Kabylia when the woman comes from outside, she tends to strengthen her position by looking for a marriage partner in her lineage. Her chances of succeeding will be greater the

more prestigious her lineage is. The struggle between the husband and the wife may be pursued through an intermediary mother-in-law or the husband may find it advantageous to strengthen the cohesion of the lineage by means of an internal marriage. In short, it is via such synchronic relations of power between the members of the family that the history of lineages, and particularly the history of previous marriages, intervenes on the occasion of every new marriage.

This theoretical model has a very general value and it is absolutely necessary in order to understand the educative strategies of families, for example, or, in a completely different domain, their strategies of investment or saving. Monique de Saint Martin has observed in the French high aristocracy matrimonial strategies quite similar to those I observed among the Béarnese peasants. Marriage is not that punctual, abstract operation based solely on rules of filiation and alliance, which the structuralist tradition describes. It is rather an act integrating all the necessities inherent in a position in the social structure, that is, in a state of the social game, by virtue of the "negotiators" synthetic sense of the game. The relations between families that are entered into on the occasion of marriages are as difficult and as important as the negotiations of our most refined diplomats. Reading Saint-Simon or Proust no doubt prepares one better to understand the subtle diplomacy of Kabyle or Béarnese peasants than does reading *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*. But not all readers of Proust or Saint-Simon are equally prepared to recognize a Monsieur de Norpois or a Duc de Berry in a peasant with coarse features and a crude accent or in a *montagnard* who, when the grids of ethnology are applied to him, is treated, whether we like it or not, as truly alien, that is, as a barbarian.

**P.L.**—Ethnology no longer treats peasants or anyone else as "barbarians," I believe. In fact, its studies dealing with France and Europe probably contributed a good deal to this evolution!

**P.B.**—I realize I am overstating things

somewhat. Yet I maintain that there is something unhealthy in the existence of ethnology as a separate science and that because of this separation one risks accepting all that was inscribed in the initial division that gave rise to it and which is perpetuated—as I believe I have shown—in its methods (for example, why the resistance to statistics?) and above all in its modes of thought. The refusal of ethnocentrism which forbids the ethnologist to relate what he observes to his own experiences—as I did earlier by comparing the classificatory operations deployed in a ritual act with those we deploy in our perception of the social world—leads him, under pretence of respect, to establish a distance from the population under study that cannot be crossed. As in the heyday of “primitive mentality,” this is the case even if they happen to be peasants or workers in our societies.

**P.L.**—To come back to the logic of matrimonial strategies, you mean to say that the whole structure and history of the game is present, given the habitus of the actors and their sense of the game, in each marriage that results from the confrontation of their strategies?

**P.B.**—Exactly. I have shown how, in the case of Kabylia, the most difficult marriages, hence the most prestigious ones, mobilize almost all the members of the two groups involved, along with the history of their past dealings, matrimonial or otherwise, so that one can understand them only if one knows the balance sheet of these exchanges at the time being considered and also, of course, everything that defines the position of the two groups in the distribution of economic and symbolic capital. The great negotiators are those who know how to make the most of all that. But this holds true, it would seem, only so long as the marriage is the concern of the families.

**P.L.**—Yes. It may be asked whether the same can be said of societies like ours where the “choosing of marriage partners” is left to the individuals concerned as a matter of free choice.

**P.B.**—In reality, the *laissez-faire* of the

free market hides necessities from view. I showed this in the case of Béarn by analyzing the transition from a planned type of matrimonial system to the free market which is embodied in the *bal*. [A *bal* is a scheduled event for dancing and socializing. Participation is open to the public on payment of an individual entrance fee, or reserved for private groups (*bals selects*). (Translator’s note).] The appeal to the notion of habitus is called for in this case more than ever: in fact, how else does one explain the homogamy that is maintained in spite of everything? There are of course all the social techniques aimed at limiting the field of possible choices, through a kind of protectionism: car rallies, *bals selects*, parties, etc. But the surest guarantee of homogamy, and hence of social reproduction, is the spontaneous affinity (experienced as kindred feeling) that brings together agents endowed with a similar habitus or similar tastes, hence products of similar social conditions and conditionings. There is additional effect of closure that is linked to the existence of socially and culturally homogeneous groups, such as groups of fellow students, secondary school classes, university faculties, which are responsible nowadays for a large percentage of marriages or intimate relationships and therefore owe a good deal to the effect of the affinity of habitus (particularly in the operations of co-optation and selection). I showed at length, in *La Distinction*, that love can also be described as a form of *amor fati*. When one loves, there is always an element of loving in another person a different realization of one’s own social destiny. There is something I had learned by studying Béarnese marriages.

**P.L.**—Defending the structuralist paradigm, Lévi-Strauss says that “to doubt that structural analysis can be applied to some [societies] means that one must question whether it can be applied to any society.” Couldn’t the same thing be said, in your opinion, of the paradigm of strategy?

**P.B.**—I think it would be rather rash to propose a universal paradigm and I have been careful not to do so on the basis of the two cases—rather similar ones after all—

that I have studied. Yet I believe it likely that matrimonial strategies are universally integrated into the system of strategies of social reproduction. As a matter of fact, before concluding in favor of monism or pluralism, one would have to make sure that the structural vision that has been dominant in the analysis of societies without writing is not the effect of the relation to the object and of the theory of practice that are encouraged by the ethnologist's position of exteriority. Certain studies of typically "cold" societies seem to show that matrimonial exchanges are the occasion of complex strategies, and that genealogies themselves, far from controlling economic and social relations, are the object of manipulations designed to promote or prohibit economic or social relations, to legitimate them or condemn them. This is evident provided that one goes into the details, instead of being content to draw up nomenclatures of kinship terms and abstract genealogies and to reduce relations between husband and wife to genealogical distance alone. More generally, all material or symbolic exchanges, such as the handing down of first names, can be understood in these terms as well. One thinks of the work of Bateson who prepared the ground in *Naven* by talking about the strategic manipulations to which the names of places or lineages can be subjected. Or of Alban Bensa's quite recent studies on New Caledonia. As soon as the ethnologist provides himself with the means to grasp in their subtlety the social uses of kinship—by combining, as Bensa does, linguistic analysis of place names, economic analysis of the circulation of land holdings, methodological inquiry into the most quotidian political strategies, etc.—he discovers that marriages are complex operations, involving a host of parameters which the genealogical abstraction that reduces everything to the kinship relation dismisses without even knowing it. One of the sources of the division between the two "paradigms" may be in the fact that one has to spend hours and hours with informants who are well informed and fully prepared to gather the information necessary for understanding a single marriage—or at least to reveal the pertinent parameters for

constructing a statistically grounded model—whereas one can establish in one afternoon a genealogy comprising a hundred marriages and in two days a list of terms of address and reference. I am inclined to think that, in the social sciences, the language of rules is often the refuge of ignorance.

**P.L.**—In the *Sens pratique*, and on the subject of ritual in particular, you suggest that it is the ethnologist who creates an artificial distance, a foreignness, because he is incapable of reappropriating his own relation to practice.

**P.B.**—I had not read the merciless criticism which Wittgenstein addresses to Frazer and which applies to most ethnologists, when I described what appears to me to be the real logic of mythological or ritual thought. What some people have seen as an algebra, I believe should be seen as a dance or a gymnastics. The intellectualism of ethnologists, which is increased by their concern with giving their work a scientific appearance, prevents them from seeing that their own practice—whether they kick the rock that makes them stumble, according to Wittgenstein's example, or classify professions or politicians—obeys a logic very similar to that of "primitives" who classify objects in terms of dry and wet, hot and cold, high and low, right and left, etc. Our perception and our practice, especially our perception of the social world, are guided by practical taxonomies, oppositions between high and low, masculine (or manly) and feminine, etc. The classifications which these practical taxonomies produce owe their value to the fact that they are "practical," that they make it possible to bring in just enough logic for the needs of practice, neither too much—fuzziness is often indispensable, particularly in negotiations—nor too little, because life would become impossible.

**P.L.**—But could it not be the case that there exist objective differences between societies such that certain of them, in particular the most differentiated and the most complex, lend themselves more readily to the games of strategy?

**P.B.**—I am distrustful of great dualist oppositions, hot societies/cold societies, historical societies/societies without history. Yet I would suggest that as societies become more differentiated and as those relatively autonomous “worlds” which I call fields develop within them, the chances of true events appearing, that is, encounters between independent causal series, steadily increase and, consequently, so does the freedom that is granted to the complex strategies of the habitus, integrating necessities of different types. It is in this way that, for example, as the economic field becomes established as such, instituting the necessity that characterizes it, that of business, of economic calculation, of the maximizing of material profit (“business is business,” “one can’t let feelings interfere with business”) and as the more or less explicit principles which govern relations between relatives cease to apply beyond the boundaries of the family, only the complex strategies of a habitus shaped by various necessities can integrate the different necessities into coherent courses of action. Béarnese marriage or, in a completely different universe, aristocratic marriages, are examples of this sort of integration of diverse, relatively irreducible necessities, those of kinship, those of the economy, and those of politics. Perhaps in societies less differentiated into autonomous spheres, the necessities of kinship, not having to reckon with any principle from a competing sphere, can assert themselves in an undivided way. But this would require verification.

**P.L.**—So you think that, provided they are rethought and redefined, studies of kinship have a role to play in the interpretation of our societies?

**P.B.**—A major role. I have shown, for example, in the work that I did with Monique de Saint Martin on French employers, that the affinities that are connected with alliance are the source of certain of the solidarities that unite those perfect embodiments of *homo oeconomicus*, the great heads of corporations, and that in certain economic decisions of the greatest importance, such as company mergers, relations

of alliance—which themselves sanction affinities of life style—can carry more weight than purely economic determinants or reasons. And more generally, it is certain that the dominant groups, and in particular the great families—great in both senses of the word—ensure their perpetuation by means of strategies—foremost among which are the educative strategies—which are not so different in principle from those which Kabyle or Béarnese peasants bring into play in order to perpetuate their material or symbolic capital.

In short, all my work over the past 20 years has been aimed at abolishing the opposition between ethnology and sociology. This residual, vestigial division prevents ethnologists and sociologists alike from adequately framing the most fundamental of the problems that all societies pose, the problems of the specific logic of the strategies which groups, especially families, bring into play in order to produce and reproduce themselves, that is, in order to create and preserve their unity, hence their existence as a group, which is almost always, in every society, the precondition for maintaining their position in the social space.

**P.L.**—The theory of strategies of reproduction is therefore inseparable from the genetic theory of groups, which aims to account for the logic according to which groups, or classes, form and break up.

**P.B.**—Exactly. This was so evident, and important, for me that I went so far as to place the chapter dealing with classes, which I had intended to make the conclusion of *La Distinction*, at the end of the first, theoretical part of *Sens pratique*. There I tried to show that groups, and particularly units with a genealogical basis, existed both in the objective reality of instituted regularities and constraints, and in their representations and all the strategies of bargaining, negotiation, bluff, etc., whose purpose is to modify reality by modifying the representations. I hoped in this way to show that the logic which I had discerned in connection with groups having a genealogical basis, families, clans, tribes, etc., also operated in the most typ-

ical groupings of our societies, those designated by the term classes. Just as the theoretical units which genealogical analysis carves out, *on paper*, do not necessarily correspond to real, practical units, so the theoretical classes that sociological science carved out in order to account for practices are not necessarily mobilized classes. In both cases, one is dealing with paper groups. I had always regarded with suspicion the delimitations of ethnologists, because I knew from experience that the groups of "neighbors," *lou bestiât*, which certain traditional works made into a typical, rigidly hierarchized and limited, unit of Béarnese society, were actually completely different. They were subject to the hazard of conflicts or, on the contrary, dependent on exchanges calculated to *maintain* relations. In short, ethnology teaches us that groups—familial or other—are things which people do, at the cost of a constant labor of maintenance, of which marriage constitutes one moment. And the same is true of classes, when they exist in any significant way (after all, what does it mean for a group to exist?). Membership is constructed, negotiated, bargained over, ventured. Here again, one must transcend the opposition between the voluntaristic subjectivism and the scientific and realistic objectivism that coexist in the Marxist

tradition. In some societies, such as ours, distances are measured in amounts of capital, just as, in other societies, genealogical space defines distances, proximities and affinities, aversions and incompatibilities, in short, probabilities of entering into truly unified groups, families, clubs, or mobilized classes. It is in the struggle over classifications, a struggle aimed at imposing such and such a way of carving up this space, at unifying or dividing, etc., that real rapprochements are defined. The class is never given in things; it is also representation and volition, but which has a chance of being embodied in things only if it brings near that which is objectively near and keeps its distance from that which is objectively distant.

#### Notes

*Acknowledgments.* This interview, conducted by Pierre Lamaison, was originally published in *Terrain No. 4, Carnets du Patrimoine Ethnologique*. Mars 1985. Permission to reprint it is gratefully acknowledged. (Translation by Robert Hurley.)

<sup>1</sup>Hereafter this term is translated as "sense of the game," which better conveys Bourdieu's emphasis on the cognitive dimension of the habitus.