



Fields and Social Networks: Comparable Metaphors of Social Space?

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Bourdieu's Field and the American Sociology's Network concepts have been considered incompatible from an ontological and epistemological point of view. While the former stresses the one's position in a social space based on volumes and types of capital and exercise of symbolic power, the latter assumes an individualistic approach, taking the number of controlled ties as a proxy of capital, and power dimension would be underscored. Harrison White is among the sociologists who harshly criticize the latter approach, for its emphasis on individuals. White recovers the idea of 'social space', deemphasizing the hegemonic methodological individualism in social network analysis. This article seeks to compare Bourdieu's and Harrison White's theories, showing the elements that are irreducible to each other, as well as some common intuitions. Rather than offering a synthesis of these theories, I propose that they are complementary in understanding the dynamics of a social space. Bourdieu's capital-based Field construct leads us closer to explain one's interests in connection to her actions. White's focus on ambiguous action within social networks is relevant to understand how actors uncouple recurrent patterns of social reproduction. Finally, I recover empirical examples where it is possible to combine both approaches.

Introduction: beyond Functionalism

One of the most popular streams of research in the revival of Economic Sociology explores the social conditions where economic transactions take place (GUILLEN et al, 2002; SWEDBERG, 2004). In general, such approach has rejected the radical methodological individualism initially proposed by economics, and lately introduced in the sociology (see for instance, COLEMAN, 1990).

Granovetter (1985) draws our attention to the embeddedness condition of the economic life. Granovetter, among other sociologists, claims that economic phenomena occur within social networks and take in account shared values, cognitive schemata and trust, beyond the instrumental rationality entailed in the traditional economic analyses. Although such approach is not new, contemporary economic sociologists have been able to study economic phenomena as occurring in social contexts, and thus, revitalizing older insights proposed by classical sociologists.

A subset of contemporary economic sociologists has insisted that the study of economic phenomena should not only take the social context as a constraint or resource, but also understand how individual actions and social phenomena are webbed together (EMIRBAYER, 1997). Moreover, these scholars assert that the sheer formation of individual interest takes in account at the same time the broader context and the action of other actors (DIMAGGIO, 1994; SWEDBERG, 2003). As a consequence, the understanding of social action becomes an effort to uncover how social space is explained by patterns of relations. Such patterns of relations are the product of individual action and at the same time the context where individuals act.

Although this rejection to the methodological individualism might be found already in the classical sociology, we owe to Parsons a vigorous criticism of methodological individualism. Parsons (1949) attacked what he called the "randomness of interests", proposed by the Utilitarian tradition¹. In its place, Parsons suggested that individuals take up social roles in their process of socialization. As individuals are allocated to such roles, their action is prescribed by a given script. The connection of roles occurs at multiple levels, eventually reaching the societal level, where norms govern the sustainability of the whole system. Sustainability is a central concern for Parsons, as well as "the problem of order". From that perspective, Parsons understands that in a well-regulated society conflicts are always short-termed, quickly resolved by upper spheres in the system.

The Parsonian architecture received several attacks by the end of the seventies. Among these challenges, one attack came from the micro-sociology. Goffman (1967), for instance, challenged the Parsonian idea of allocation to a social role. For Goffman, individuals are not allocated but they conform to social roles, while partially retaining their freedom of choice. This division between outer conformity and inner subjectivity led Goffman to explore how social interactions could also encompass individual strategic action. Nadel (1957), on the other hand, showed that social relations do not follow the script predicted by social roles. Moreover, Nadel proposed that instead of studying how individuals are allocated to social roles, sociologists should investigate whether the actual networks followed the social roles' prescription.

Another attack came from the conflict sociologists (COLLINS, 1975, 1980; COSER, 1966). Collins, for instance, performed a re-interpretation of Weber, and showed that in the Weberian tradition institutions are the outcome of conflicts in society. Following this logic, Parsons's underrating of the conflict as an explanatory factor was interpreted as misreading reading the Weberian ideas. The last challenge that I present came from the rational choice tradition. As Parsons insisted that economic action is subordinated to societal norms and values, rational choice scholars refused such ideas as transforming individuals in puppets in a "methodological holism". Coleman (1990), for instance, proposed that the institutional changes in society are actually effect of underlying individual actions. As a consequence, a model for social change should always take in account individuals' interests and strategic action.

The concept of field tries to recover the sociological intuition that interests and social action are interconnected, while resisting the over determination of one's action by the social system or societal norms. This article will explore the concept of field and mainly two theoretical traditions: Bourdieu's field theory and Harrison White's social network studies. I will deploy most of my efforts in comparing Bourdieu's approach to the contemporary social network approach, although comparisons against the Parsonian functionalism will be unavoidable, since both Bourdieu's and White's theories proposals sharply contrast with the latter approach. Finally, I'll explore the limitations in both theoretical and methodological methods and point possible directions for future research.

The concept of Field - origins and traditions

Martin (2003) and Mohr (2000) show that the idea of field has its origins in Kurt Lewin's studies of social psychology. For Lewin, the analytical device of field should encompass all relevant factors that influenced one's action. As a consequence, Lewin's diagrams included not only social relations, but also (*inter alia*) institutions and events. Following a Gestalt approach, Lewin attempted to understand how these factors affected social action. In spite of its originality, the complexity of Lewin's approach precluded his tool to become popular among sociologists.

The idea of field would be eventually recovered by Pierre Bourdieu, and later, by neo-institutional scholars. Following, I will recover Bourdieu's concepts related to his field theory.

Bourdieu's concept of Field

Structure and Types of Capital

Bourdieu's theory of field is inspired by Lewin's earlier propositions and Cassirer's ideas of relational construction of reality. Nonetheless, he deemphasizes the role of social interaction, which places his concept of Field at odds with the contemporary social network analysis developments (BOURDIEU; WACQUANT, 1992, p.113). Instead, Bourdieu believed that the most important factor to explain the field structure is the volume and the

kinds of capitals each individual bears, as well as her objective trajectory. As a consequence, for Bourdieu, direct interaction might not be the most important aspect in understanding social action. This is not to say, however, that Bourdieu did not take in account social interactions. Cohn (2003) showed how Bourdieu's construction might be read as a sophisticated elaboration on symbolic interactionism's propositions. Bourdieu (2003) proposed that interactions are ruled by symbolic distinctions, highly correlated to capital differentials (DENNIS, MARTIN, 2005; HALAS, 2005).

Inspired by Marx, Bourdieu proposes that differences of capital among individuals occur in tandem with social stratification. Nonetheless, following Weber's footsteps, Bourdieu doesn't believe that only economic capital is important to one's action. Instead, Bourdieu incorporates the Weberian intuition that the social differentiation occurs in tandem with the emergence of autonomous spheres of value. As a consequence, individuals accumulate and mobilize different kinds of capital. The most prominent kinds of capital in Bourdieu's writings are the economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital (BOURDIEU, 1998).

Economic capital refers to the monetary wealth that one is able to mobilize and spend. For its very nature, it is the most fungible of all kinds of capital. The cultural capital refers to the titles and certifications one received from accredited institutions. Social capital refers to the stable social relations one holds and is able to mobilize in order to obtain other kinds of capital. Finally, symbolic capital refers to awards, recognition and status one receives throughout her trajectory in the field (BOURDIEU, 1986).

Positions and Dispositions

A position in a field refers to a given structure of capitals. One empirical example is found in Bourdieu's study of the late nineteenth century literary field in France. While mass-consumption writers had high volume of capital, and mostly composed of economic capital, avant-garde writers controlled a smaller amount of capital, and most of it was composed by cultural capital (BOURDIEU, 1993a).

A position dictates for its occupants the structure of possible actions one may pursue. Individuals with little capital have fewer resources available in comparison to their capital-rich colleagues. Writers with strong connections with well-established publishing houses are able to tap larger marketing and distribution resources, thus delivering their books to a large audience. Not surprisingly, these writers follow "mass-consumption" styles. As a consequence, newcomers to the field, with little economic or symbolic capital, are compelled to acquire cultural capital and push the field's boundaries towards "avant-garde". Following this logic, Bourdieu would state, innovation is brought by field-young writers, with little access to established channels.

Although individuals that occupy the same position might have the same structure of opportunities, this collocation is not enough to explain one's action (BOURDIEU, 1998). An actor's action is also explained by his disposition, which is constructed throughout his experiences and trajectory in the field. Here, Bourdieu operated a major break with Parsons's concept of role-taking. While Parsons described a tight coupling between one's interest and the script entailed in that role, Bourdieu's model lets the question whether position and disposition are coupled to the empirical assessment.

Habitus and Practices

An important link between Bourdieu's Theory of Action and his propositions on the Field Theory is the concept of *Habitus*. While positions refer to certain volume and structure of capital, disposition refers to one's history in the field. Bourdieu offered the concept of

Habitus, as the individual's schemata that is mobilized as she perceives the functioning of the field. It is:

[S]ystems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at end or express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (BOURDIEU 1990a, p. 53)

The *habitus* helps Bourdieu explain how agents perceive objective structures and take action. Hence, it works as mediator between these two observable stances. Being subjectively given, the *habitus* reveals itself only indirectly. Bourdieu explains how one's *habitus* is responsible for the activity of categorization, the decision process of capital conversion in a field and finally, whether a course of action is good or bad. Ultimately, then, it is important to understand one's *habitus* as an embodiment of the field. While an individual is only a point in a field, the whole field is comprehended in that point (VANDENBERGHE, 1999).

Bourdieu (1998) admonishes his readers to resist the idea that the *habitus* is overdetermined by the field's structure. As shown above, one's *habitus* is a set of durable and stable dispositions. Hence, we could infer that Bourdieu's agency is mostly geared towards habitual action (DALTON, 2004, follows this logic). In addition, one's *habitus* would be challenged only by external crises (BOURDIEU, 1984b). Bourdieu himself suggests a conservative reading of the *habitus*:

Through the systematic 'choices' it makes among the places, events and people that might be frequented, the *habitus* tends to protect itself from crises and critical challenges by providing itself with a milieu to which it is pre-adapted as possible, that is, a relatively constant universe of situations tending to reinforce its dispositions by offering the market most favourable to its products (BOURDIEU, 1990a, p. 61, italics from the original).

As he insists, there is no circular relationship between *habitus* and field. The *habitus* is still a "product of structures and producer of the practices and reproducer of the *habitus*" (BOURDIEU; PASSERON 1970, p. 244). From this perspective, VANDENBERGHE (1999) suggests an understanding of *habitus* closer to Giddens's structuration (GIDDENS, 1986).

The *habitus* is constructed throughout one's trajectory and embodies one's expectations on how her kinds of capitals are exchanged. As a consequence, depending on one's position and *habitus*, he or she might engage in different practices that will eventually lead to different employment of capitals. The heterogeneity of individuals' *habitus* explains why individuals at the same position might pursue completely different ways of action. Again, this perspective differs substantially from Parsons. For Parsons, as individuals' allocation to roles occurs in tandem with their socialization, it is difficult to understand why individuals in the same role would pursue different ways of action.

Power, Struggle and Domination

For Bourdieu, the field is a space where power is exercised as the collocated actors are able to mobilize different quantities and kinds of capital. Actors who control larger amounts of a given resource are able to impose their dominance over those actors with less capital.

Following Weber's closure phenomenon, Bourdieu envisions that the closed networks of powerful actors impose dominance over less powerful actors. Such dominance is translated in the rules of the field. These rules entail how a given capital circulates and is exchanged by other kinds of capitals.

Because powerful actors control the exchange rates and the flows of capital in the field, they are also able to reproduce their dominance. Such dominance, nonetheless, should not be understood as a complete acceptance of the rules of the game by the dominated. Bourdieu proposes that a field also encompasses the struggles among the actors, not only for economic and symbolic resources, but also for the chance of establishing the rules of the game:

[T]he degree of indeterminacy and fuzziness in the objects of the social world, together with the practical, pre-reflexive and implicit nature of the schemes of perception and appreciation that are applied to them, is the Archimedean leverage point that is objectively offered for political action proper. (BOURDIEU, 1985, p.729)

Stability and Change

Needless to say, some actors are more skillful than others in handling their resources and taking advantages of the rules of the field. When Bourdieu studied the field of cultural production, he described the trajectories of three types of actors. First, there are those actors who understand the rules of the game to an extent that they are able to manipulate them. Second, those who naively follow fads and fashions, and their trajectories are shaped by the field's bandwagons. Finally, we observe those who just occupy a middle position between the most skillful and the naïve actors. Although the investigation of all the three types of trajectories is important for Bourdieu, the study of above and below average actors is the most productive in revealing the dynamics of the field.

Naïve actors tend to follow trends when these are almost exhausted, or conversely, they engage in innovations when the field is not yet ready for them. The lack of fit between capital investment (understood in a broad sense) and return obtained, and the subsequent repositioning reveals how capital allocation functions in the field. Naïve actors are manipulated by more powerful actors to engage in actions that are unlikely to yield the expected returns. On the other hand, above average actors are able to capture extraordinary profits from capital exchange.

To be sure, there exist times when non-dominant players are able to manipulate or subvert the rules of the game. Although such events promise a great opportunity for change, Bourdieu reminds us that they are rare. In contrast, most of the time the field dynamics follow the logics of reproduction, which is to say that the struggle among actors will not necessarily yield a change in their relative positioning:

Those who occupy the dominated positions within the social space are also located in dominated positions in the field of symbolic production, and it is not clear where they could obtain the instruments of symbolic production that are needed in order to express their specific viewpoint on the social space (...). (BOURDIEU, 1985, p. 736)

Conversely, Bourdieu envisions that the exogenous changes in the distribution of resources more promising source of social change. As actors are able to tap larger pulls of

resources due to societal or technological changes, the field's internal dynamics might change in tandem with the emergence of the new power configuration. In addition, as suggested above, internal crises might trigger the production and diffusion of new discourses (BOURDIEU, 1985, p. 734). In short, though, Bourdieu's model tends to focus on the reproduction of modes of domination (BOURDIEU, 2005, p.80). Vandenberghe will complain that Bourdieu could "open up his system, avoid deterministic descriptions of stable reproduction, and give voluntarism its due" (1999, p. 62). I'll return to Vandenberghe's point when comparing Bourdieu's approach to Harrison White's.

A fractal model of fields

We should resist the temptation of reification of the concept of the field. The concept of field is not itself a social fact that we may observe directly through empirical investigation. A field is an analytical device applied to understand how *habitus*, capital and practices are intertwined in social life (SUDDABY et al, forthcoming). For that reason, in order to understand the totality of one's action in the society, the researcher should locate the individual in all fields where she invests her capital. Conversely, a social space is defined as the totality of fields present at the societal level (BOURDIEU, 1985, p. 724).

In contrast with Parsons, who understands conceives a tight coupling of different spheres in an overall social system, Bourdieu envisions the overlapping of fields in the social milieu. As a consequence, for Bourdieu, the way that capital flows within and between fields denotes the degree that they are autonomous (or heteronomous) in relation to each other. The embeddedness of fields and the respective flows of capitals impose a homology across all fields in a given society. From that perspective, Bourdieu defends the idea that different fields' inner power logics will be not only comparable, but also quite similar. This is the result of the existence of a "meta-field", the field of power that regulates the relationship among the different kinds of capital. As a consequence, we should find, following Bourdieu, comparable, albeit not the same, power games, be it the whole society, a given field, or a sub-field. Such power games are imposed throughout society as a consequence of the flow of different capitals. This homology suggests a fractal power structure across the societal spaces.

Examples of fields that Bourdieu analyzed comprise the field of cultural production, the field of scientific production, the field of State power and so on. The empirical objects chosen by Bourdieu were traditionally macro, comprising large sets of social actors (artists, scientists, universities, art galleries, publishing houses, etc.). This approach could suggest that he perceived organizations as monolithically actors, equating them to any other social actor. Nonetheless, in his late writings Bourdieu envisioned organizations not only as embedded in fields, but as field themselves, as they are able to control and exchange different types of capitals within their boundaries (BOURDIEU, 2005, p. 81).

As a matter of fact, Bourdieu spent most of his career in empirical investigations of fields, and whether such fields followed the same power logics. Nevertheless, as Bourdieu himself recognizes (BOURDIEU; WACQUANT, 1992) more effort should be devoted to understanding the relationship among fields: how capitals flow from one field to another and how the conversion effectively takes place. Bourdieu claims that such enterprise was underplayed during his career due to its complexity.

Interaction and Social Networks in Bourdieu's theory

Within Bourdieu's theory, social networks play a very limited role. As I showed above, social capital constitutes one kind of capital, where stable social networks are mobilized in order to attain other kinds of capital. Following, I argue that social networks could complement Bourdieu's theory in two dimensions: a broader understanding of social

space, and the complete incorporation of social networks as one explanatory factor for social change and inter-field interaction.

As I pointed above, Bourdieu's idea of social capital is inspired in the Weberian concept of closure. For Bourdieu, powerful actors are able to close a social space to outsiders by imposing high exchange rates to different types of capital. As a consequence, only the mobilization of strong and durable social ties yields access to resources. In contrast, Granovetter (1973, 1983) suggests that weak ties are much more effective when what is on stake is the possibility of receiving fresh information from outside the actor's original social milieu.

In spite of these contributions from the contemporary American Economic Sociology, Bourdieu (BOURDIEU; WACQUANT, 1992) confirms his interpretation that such efforts are related to a "radical Durkheimianism". For Bourdieu, the study of social networks as an explanatory device has its tradition in the Durkheim's teachings on community cohesion. As such, it doesn't take in account, from Bourdieu's perspective, that the most important relationships in a field are not those of direct interaction, but those governed by the power logics that govern the game between different strata.

Nonetheless, Bourdieu (2005) borrows inspiration on Simmel as well, in order to clarify this point. It is worthwhile to recover the original Simmelian proposition, for its centrality in this discussion. For Simmel, it is not the direct contact between producers that explains the market dynamics. In contrast, Simmel (1955) explains, it is the interaction of producers within a common consumer that constitutes competition:

Innumerable times, [competition] achieves what usually only love can do: the divination of the innermost wishes of the other, even before he himself becomes aware of them. Antagonistic tension with his competitor sharpens the businessman's sensitivity to the tendencies of the public, even to the point of clairvoyance, in respect to future changes in the public's tastes, fashions, interests. (SIMMEL, 1955, p. 62)

Bourdieu follows the same simmelian intuition in a later writing on economic anthropology, and suggests a dialogue with Harrison White's network theory:

[The] sometimes lethal constraints the dominant producers impose on their current or potential competitors are invariably mediated by the field: consequently, competition is never other than 'indirect conflict' (in Simmel's sense) and is not targeted directly against the competitor. In the economic field, as elsewhere, the struggle does not need to be inspired by any intention to destroy for it to produce destructive effects. (We may deduce an 'ethical' consequence from the vision of the worlds of production as fields: just as we can say with Harrison White that 'each firm is distinctive,' as a position in a field, a point in a space. (...). (BOURDIEU, 2005, p. 83).

The relational aspect among actors in a field is explained by indirect interactions. As Mohr (2000) and De Nooy (2003) explain, this concept is covered by the contemporary social network analysis by the concept of structural equivalence, sharply different from social cohesion. This distinction will be recovered in the following section, where I develop the

interactionist and social network approach to social spaces, in order to build a comparison with Bourdieu's theoretical body.

The Harrison White School of Social Network Analysis

White, Boorman and Breiger (1976), influenced by Simmel's idea of indirect interaction among competitors, developed the concept of "structural equivalence". Two actors are structurally equivalent if they are connected to the same actors in the network. Also, they do not need to be directly connected in order to be structurally equivalent. Needless to say, few actors will be perfectly structural equivalent. For that reason, the authors proposed an algorithm to build a proximity matrix among all actors in the network. In that matrix, the authors were able to group those actors who were closely structurally equivalent in common partitions. These partitions were labeled "positions", for as in the Social Role Theory (MERTON, 1968; NADEL, 1957), individuals in the same role would be embedded in a similar pattern of relations.

The authors applied this structural equivalent analysis approach to the Sampson's data extracted from social networks in a monastery and built structural positions across time. In contrast to the standard cohesion analysis, these "positions" showed to the researchers which groups were engaged in the conflict that would eventually lead the monastery to its end. As a consequence, "structural position" was incorporated to social network analysis as distinct to social cohesion.

Direct and indirect heirs of White might be divided in three groups. A first group, exemplified by Mark Granovetter (and as a matter of fact, one of the White's supervisees), attempted to understand whole structures and how information flows through these structures. A second group, exemplified by Ronald Burt, reduced the idea of structural equivalence to an individual actor's feature. Thus, a strategic actor should improve his structural position in order to exploit the lack of connections among isolated actors. Burt labeled such lack of ties "structural holes" (BURT, 1992). By focusing on the individual actor, Burt brings back the methodological individualism that was refused by the early economic sociological tradition. Finally, a third stream of scholars, not satisfied to limit themselves to purely structural analyses, chose to understand how the structure of an organizational field affected the diffusion of rules and norms (DIMAGGIO; POWELL, 1983; DIMAGGIO, 1993).

The "linguistic turn" in the Social Network Analysis

White (1992a), in his book "Identity and Control" proposed that markets are organized around "disciplines". A discipline imposes the pecking order that allocates customers and suppliers. As a consequence, the social ties among commercial partners follow a pattern dictated by these disciplines. One might observe a Parsonian departing point in White's theory, as "disciplines" could be compared to "functions". However, White departs from the Parsonian model in at least two dimensions.

First, White stressed the structuralist dimension of social allocation. In one of his early writings, "Chains of Opportunity" (1970), White modeled the migration of priests among temples using stochastic equations. In other words, he seeks to understand in what extent the career ladder is determined not by the skills of an individual, but just "structural luck". The stochastic models provided a random factor in the allocation of priests to churches, where vacancies and individuals flowed. When White reincorporates his idea of "chains of opportunity" to his studies of social networks and disciplines, he proposed that disciplines play an ex-post role of explaining the allocation already occurred. As a consequence, disciplines would be, to a certain extent, affected by purely structural randomness.

Second, White proposed that identities are social constructs aimed at establishing control over a pattern of allocation. Here, in contrast to the Parsonian idea of allocation of

individuals to social roles, White reverted the causality that links social roles and patterns of interaction. It is exactly in order to maintain or change a given pattern of relations that a group of individuals enact a new social identity. In consonance to Abbott's (1988) study of how different professions interact to form a complex system, White understands the coupling of professions as regulated by disciplines that are constantly under revision due to the struggle among the professions.

One may observe here the points of contact between Bourdieu's cultural capital and White's concept of identity, as important institutional devices of allocation of personnel to economic activities. In addition, both see the relationship of different professions as conflictive, as individuals try to control the social interactions to their favor. Although both admit a certain degree of fuzziness in the social allocation, White proposed that in several regions of a given social network disciplines (or identities) and ties are only loosely coupled. In such regions, the phenomenon of "cat-net" emerges. The cat-net phenomenon depicts situations where individuals take up categorical roles, but are able to establish social relations that are not predicted by that category's script (WHITE, 1992b). As individuals establish social ties outside their original social groups, they are led to acquire new information not originally included in their social milieu (in consonance with Granovetter's findings).

Above all, such ties have also the constitutive effect of affecting one's identity. As Mische and White (1998) argued, as individuals cross different social milieus, they are led to develop linguistic skills that enable them to perform such transitions. Here, White established an important departure from his own earlier propositions. While in "Identity and Control" the individual was considered as almost only the confluence of social ties, in his later writings the individual is brought back as the a point of tension among diverse social contexts. That is to say, individuals constantly face streams of experience which are not necessarily consistent with the social roles they took upⁱⁱ. By facing these contradictory situations, individuals develop strategies to handle ambiguously conflictive claims and potentially reenact their identities (WHITE, 2002a). From this perspective, a "too structural approach" is phased out in favor of a phenomenological approach. In the same way that social ties influence one's identity, it is also one's identity and social skills that will permit and explain the establishment of social ties. As a consequence, this later approach places linguistic skills as important as social ties. Conversely, White tries to avoid the reification of social ties, for now they must be understood as the crystallization of linguistic interaction.

White brings these intuitions back to markets as social networks (WHITE, 2002a) in order to understand how suppliers and customers are coupled (and uncoupled) in markets. The starting point to define the relevant unit of analysis is the same of Bourdieu's:

The social field, to use Bourdieu's term (...) is an inhomogeneous collation among levels of embedded identities, and moreover such organizations themselves become embedded in still-larger contexts in diverse ways. Nonetheless we uncover plausible regularities in strategizing across many scopes and domains. (WHITE, 2002a, p. 13)

White states that in any market a price/quality schedule is established. Suppliers who deviate from the expected schedule will either be expelled from the market, for their quality is not consistent with the customers' expectations, or they will lose money, for they will be offering larger volumes at the same quality point. A price/quality schedule depicts the identity of a market, and, again following the simmelian intuition, it is not established by direct contact among suppliers, but through interaction with common customers. In opposition to the neo-classical model of perfect market, White envisions the coupling of suppliers and

customers regulated by the concentration of players and the substitutability of goods. In consonance with Industrial Organization insights, White states, the higher the concentration, the higher the leverage of a given group. As a consequence, if suppliers are few and control scarce resources, they are able to impose an “upstream” logic to a field. This is the case of several industries strongly dependent on basic material supply. Conversely, if customers are powerful and they rely on gatekeepers in order to make their purchasing decisions, a downstream logic is imposed. This is the case of artistic fields, where artists have to submit themselves to critics’ scrutiny in order to have their artistic production distributed. In either “downstream” or “upstream” markets, customers and suppliers are coupled in chains that reflect their positioning in the market’s price/quality schedule. This positioning is established and reinforced through signaling and the narratives around each supplier, which constitute the social construction of reputation. As a market evolves to be a mature field, the web of narratives coalesces around taken-for-granted codes that regulate how individual firms should be coupled to the market.

“Code-switching”, or the capacity of subverting the established taken-for-granted codes, is possible, but it is a rare event and feasible only in those areas where social networks and disciplines are loosely coupled and the outcomes less predictable. In these occasions, firms are able to uncouple or decouple downstream or upstream claims and get fresh action, while enacting new codes for the field. At this point, I’d like to take stock and discuss the points of contact and divergence between Bourdieu’s concept of field and White’s social network theory.

Fields and Networks – is a convergence possible?

Table 1 depicts a comparison between Bourdieu’s field and White’s social network main elements.

Concept	Bourdieu	White
<i>Social Space Unit</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field is an analytical category that depicts the social space where individuals invest their capital • Social Space where actors share cognitive schemata, but also struggle for better positioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspired in Bourdieu’s social space, is defined as a domain where several identities are embedded
<i>Structure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The structure (of a Field) is given by the distribution and volumes of different kinds of capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure is given by the set of relationships among individuals
<i>Position</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given by the individual’s volume and kinds of capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given by an individual’s degree of similarity in its pattern of connections to other actors (structural equivalence)
<i>Actors’ Schemata</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The perception of how a field works is embodied in one’s <i>habitus</i> • The <i>habitus</i> is the product of an actor’s trajectory in the field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An actor’s schemata and linguistic skills is driven by her switching across social domains • Collocation in structural equivalent positions accounts for similar cognitive schemata

Table 1: Analytical Tools

Source: Author's elaboration

As both Bourdieu and White draw on the Simmelian intuition of indirect conflict to understand the phenomenon of competition, we are tempted to consider the two theories as equivalent or at least comparable. From this perspective, comparative studies should be able to depict a given field from both capital structure (following Bourdieu) and network structure (following White and followers). Anheier, Gerhards and Romo's (1995) study on German writers somewhat followed this logic, by testing Bourdieu's propositions against a social network based social space.

To be sure, Bourdieu himself implied that his capital-based construct should be empirical more stable than other constructs. Nevertheless, a comparison of theories solely based on their results might lead us to an "epistemological fallacy". In other words, when we restrict ourselves to compare theories only on the basis of their methodology, we might lose the underlying theoretical assumptions that help us to make sense out of the observed social phenomena.

Swedberg (2004) clearly states this point, as he defends Bourdieu's approach as the one that most makes sense for an interpretative sociology. As Bourdieu builds the *habitus* as an embodiment of the field's structure, he is assuming that individuals are geared towards accumulation and advantageous exchange of capitals (although obdurate schemata might preclude one's adaptability to new circumstances). As a result, stresses Swedberg, the way that we understand one's interest is consistent with our analysis of a field's capital structure. From this perspective, our understanding of one's social network structure is only a second-best, for social ties are conceived as a byproduct of one's action. Again, following Swedberg, one's action is best understood as motivated by her interests, which are better described as constructed in tandem with the evolution of a capital-based field rather than a social network-based field.

But here we face a conundrum: if the establishment and disruption of ties are proxies of social action, we should ask whether all social action is always coupled to capital-driven interests (capital, here, in Bourdieu's broadest sense). Conversely, if not all social action is hastily explained by capital-driven interests, that would open up several novel avenues of investigation: a less intellectualized conception of agency would emerge (SCHATZKI, 1997), while we would be able to avoid an over-determination of social action. In short, even when I advocate that social networks are second-best to explain interests, they are still a promising methodological device to uncover unexpected social action. In short, capital and social network constructs are not reducible to each other.

At this point, I shift our attention to some central substantive themes in both theories, namely how the authors understand stability, change and the role of conflict. Table 2 summarizes Bourdieu's and White's positions around these themes:

Theme	Bourdieu	White
<i>How is stability sustained?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Powerful actors reproduce the domination relationships in the field by defining its "rules of the game" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incumbent actors enact identities that establish a relationship of control over other actors "Downstream" or "upstream" logics are established depending on the concentration of players
<i>How is change possible?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External changes impact the field's internal distribution of capital Crises reveal the dogmatic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Cat-Net" phenomenon permits the decoupling between categorical roles and social networks; this

	dimension of the Field's rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal subversion of rules are rare events 	phenomenon is possible only in certain areas of a social network
<i>What is the role of conflict?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict is central to explain position and position-taking in a Field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actors do struggle around codes (code-enacting and code-switching), but most change is due to ambiguous action

Table 2: Major Theoretical Themes

Source: Author's elaboration

As pointed above, Bourdieu's approach tends to focus on the reproduction of the structures of domination, and social change is best explained as the outcome of a chain of events triggered by either an exogenous change of resources or an internal upheaval. Although White supports Bourdieu's thesis that the system's coupling is a reflection of the power relations, his gaze is always seeking for that action that is played out of ambiguity. Before concluding this article, I will explore an empirical example that brings together both Bourdieu's and White's insights.

The Rise of the Medici in Florence

Padgett and Ansell (1993) recovered the blockmodeling technique proposed by White, Scott and Breiger (1976) (applied to organizational fields by DiMaggio (1986)) to understand the process that led the Medici to power in Florence. For that purpose, the authors reconstructed the following layers of network relationships: economic transactions (mostly capital lending), marital exchanges among families and political affiliation and influence. Their study shows that when the Florentian elite became polarized, due to the ostracism of those involved in the revolt of the Ciompi, the Medici were able to occupy a privileged space among groups that wouldn't be connected otherwise.

While the Medici were able to establish marital relationships with the old aristocracy, at the same time they were the only ones to lend capital to the impoverished mercantilist classes. In other words, the logic of ostracism imposed by the old elite created an obstacle to this very elite to sustain its hegemony in the whole social space. Due to this polarization, the Medici were able to establish connections between opposing groups. For a long period, the Medici followed closely the hegemonic logic imposed by the elite, offering no resistance. Against the flood of conflictive prerogatives stemmed from opposing parties, the Medici utilized ambiguity and geographical compartmentalization in order to keep their relationships apart from one another. It was only when large contingents of the important families in Florence were indebted with the Medici that they seized power. In parallel to the effort of seizing power, the Medici also embraced a Republican discourse that justified their action. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the development of this new discourse (or new category, to use White's terminology) was possible only when the structural positioning allowed such turn.

This analysis contrasts with and complements Bourdieu's theory. How would be a Bourdieusian interpretation of Padgett and Ansell's analysis? My attempt would be to characterize the Medici's action as occupying a position (in Bourdieu's sense) unoccupied by other actors. By accumulating social and economic capital, the Medici were eventually able to achieve political power as well. But two aspects contrast with Bourdieu typical empirical approach. First, Padgett and Ansell's network analysis provided a hint of the underlying conversion of capitals that would be available to Bourdieu only through qualitative research. Second, their study showed a temporal uncoupling of discourse and structure. To be sure,

such temporal uncoupling of intention and results of the action is observed in both Bourdieu and Giddens proposition. Giddens refers to nonintentional action, to that course of action that aims at A but achieves B. And by achieving B (at the structural level) it influenced back the actor's choices. Bourdieu refers to "unconscious" action in a similar way. However, when Bourdieu depicts cross-sectional fields, a tight coupling of categories (and correspondent discourses) occurs in tandem with positioning.

But Padgett and Ansell go beyond the non-intentionality of Giddens and Bourdieu. Following White's footsteps, the authors suggest that the Medici were conscious that they were occupying a privileged position in the field, and were able to sustain this position by the recourse of "Robust Action". Robust Action is the kind of action that permits a multi-voice, or in other words, the actor is able to relate to different, and possibly conflictive, claims. In the case of the Medici, they were able to sustain relationships with opposing groups. The possibility of maintaining a practice that is acceptable by two opposing groups is as important as the construction of the structure itself. As a consequence, it wouldn't be possible to explain how the Medici were able to seize that unique position without, in parallel, explaining how the attached practices were still legitimate to other actors in the field. An orthodox Bourdieusian approach would have troubles to arrive at the same conclusions, for it wouldn't be able to explain why powerful actors, from both opposing sides, refrained from imposing sanctions against the Medici, or conversely why the friction of opposing power turfs was not transformed in a generalized crisis (as described in the educational field in France, in 1968; BOURDIEU, 1984b).

Conclusion and Perspectives for Future Research

Our "background" departing point was Parsons's functional-system architecture. In his model, individuals take up roles, which entail scripts of behavior and pattern of relationships. Such roles are interconnected by a societal system that eliminates enduring conflicts. Norms and rules flow top-down in order to establish social roles changes. A sharp contrast was drawn from both Bourdieu's and White's perspectives.

My approach to Bourdieu's concept of field reconstructed the relationship between one's interests (embedded in his *habitus*) and the construction of a field. While the concept of *habitus* links Bourdieu's practice theory to his concept of field, the grounding of interests on capital and closure restricts the possibility to explain some situations when social change takes place. White, in contrast, recovers the social network embedding of actors to explain how signaling and narratives are constructed. These narratives collectively constitute a market's identity. In the same way, code-switching enables less powerful actors to change a market's dynamics. Although the social network approach follows closely the byproduct of social action, it takes pains to explain *why* the actors took that chain of actions. In spite of this contrast, both approaches might be complementary. As shown above, Padgett and Ansell reconstruction of the social networks among the Florentine families might be analyzed with both Bourdieu's and White's elements, although the authors never mention Bourdieu in their references. As such, White's approach might help the researcher to understand *how* "fresh action" is taken a given field.

Finally, a remarkable point of contact between Bourdieu and White (as well as the Neo-Institutionalist) approaches is the incorporation of Simmel's intuition that competition is best explained as indirect conflict. But while White builds his social network approach to group together actors in structurally equivalent positions, Bourdieu seeks to understand how actors are similarly positioned in relation to the forces in a field. Future research might explore how social changes occur when social networks are uncoupled from other social structures.

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ⁱ Parsons's criticism is the following: if all individuals follow their own aim, it would be impossible society. In order to society exist, it is required that men share common or complementary objectives, so that they engage in common projects.

ⁱⁱ Students of Organizational Theory will notice that White's ideas resonate Weick's (1969, 1976) phenomenological approach to sensemaking and loosely coupled systems.