

Economizing habitus: material calculation and ‘the rules of the game’ in the publishing industry

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Abstract

Pierre Bourdieu’s classical sociology and the actor network based ‘economization’ literature are often considered contradictory, despite some agreement on the constructed nature of economic man. Through an examination of the publishing industry, we argue that Bourdieu’s concept of habitus may offer a useful contribution to the literature on economization. We examine how those new to a field come to understand their position and the role of material devices in structuring this. We argue that Bourdieu’s theory, appropriately stated, sheds light on the tacit assessments made by market agents alongside their involvement in network-based calculative mechanisms, and allows studies of markets to deal with some persistent criticisms of the economization programme.

Keywords: Bourdieu, disposition, economization, Callon, market devices, publishing

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The ‘anthropology of markets’ programme (Callon 1998, Çalışkan and Callon 2009) has highlighted the processes of economization: ‘processes through which activities, behaviours and spheres or fields are established as being economic’ (Çalışkan and Callon 2009, 370). In *The Laws of the Markets* (1998), the book that kick-started the economization research project, Callon set out to establish an anthropology of calculation, recognising that calculative activity is not a taken for granted human ability, but a specific, materially embedded process dependent upon the performative nature of theory (in this case economics) in terms of providing ‘frames’ for decisions. For Callon and the literature that followed his lead, somewhat glibly termed the ‘new, new economic sociology’ (McFall and Osseandón 2014), the economy is a discrete social world characterised by a particular mode of calculation, where ‘calculation’ refers to the ability to distinguish between and order possible states of the world, and thereby to ascertain the content and value of goods. Callon argues that calculative competency must be understood as a ‘socio-technical agencement consisting of material elements and discourses, competencies and embodied skills, routines and so on’ (Callon 2007, 142); calculation is neither native, nor culturally framed, but the result of a complex process of organisation. In other words, Callon’s innovation was to ask *what kinds* of social interaction make up the economy (McFall and Osseandón 2014), and to suggest that studies of economization consider the social construction of the economy via an analysis of the construction of economic agency.

Seeing the economy as a product of framing, or even purification, posits agonistic relations between the economy and other realms of social life – the creative, the artistic, and the literary, for example – and poses some awkward questions. How do individuals navigate the intersections and contradictions between the economy and elsewhere, especially those made manifest by the peculiar oxymoron of ‘creative industry’? What of the tacit judgements and cultural constructions that give rise to modes of calculation, beyond the economic? If the economy is the product of purification, what of those parts of the social that remain unpurified? What of bodies, sensation, taste, and affect? When it comes to the construction of economic agency, embodied skills seem to be drowned in the material and technical, the ‘prostheses’ and ‘habilitations’ necessary for economic action (Callon 2008). Entwistle and Slater (2014) have shown how cultural values may be deflated into a network of relations,

but at the same time suggest that Callon has been too hasty to dismiss culture, together with its values, norms, fashions and aesthetic conceptions, as an inadequate, fuzzy explanation. Cochoy (2014, 119) suggests that we should step beyond an exclusive focus on ‘calculativeness and calculating equipment’ to ‘other ways of agencing cognition’, where ‘agencing suggests the possibility of multiple, coexisting conscious, unconscious and distributed calculative strategies. It has also been argued that ‘economization’ literature should be able to take more account of ‘quasi-actants’ such as social norms, mores and codes (Krarup and Blok 2011). Moreover, different social worlds are distinguished by – indeed, are the product of – rival calculative practices (Law and Urry 2004), which necessarily overlap as social worlds collide. Further research is therefore needed on how the social facts of culture and value apprehended as real by actors themselves (Entwistle and Slater 2014) are interpreted into processes of organizing, qualifications and exchange.

Entwistle and Slater (2014) suggest that studies of culture may benefit from a dose of actor-network-theory (ANT). In this paper we reverse the move, and suggest that the ANT-driven stance of the economization literature (meaning here studies of the construction of markets and the associated anthropology of calculation), while a powerful heuristic device for the deflation of socially constructed concepts such as culture or creativity, may on its own struggle to account for individuals’ evaluations of such things, embedded in complex social networks of distinction. We suggest the concept of habitus may further develop the figure of the agent in the economization literature. Although most notably associated with Bourdieu (1977), habitus has a long genesis, ‘an old Aristotelian and Thomist concept’ (Bourdieu 2007, 10) used in the work of Hegel, Husserl, Weber, Durkheim and Mauss.

We use habitus first of all for its understanding of agency. Rethought by Bourdieu as ‘a way of escaping structuralism without the subject’ and a philosophy of consciousness (Bourdieu 2007, 10), it is an attempt to ‘account for the systematic functioning of the socialized body’ (Bourdieu 2007, 12). Habitus refers to dispositions that are generative – actively and inventively able to adjust to situations – and that are acquired through experience and underpin practical knowledge and reason; while acknowledging that these dispositions are themselves the product of an internalised or embodied social structure that they encounter.

Second – and more importantly – we use habitus because it is a concept that embodies classificatory schemes, categories of perception and assessment, ‘principles of vision and

division' (Bourdieu 2001). While not directly identifying calculation as part of its role, we argue that taxonomies and classifications (allied to what is 'good', 'bad' and 'vulgar') are the basis for calculation. Bourdieu (1977) illustrates this in his examination of the informed habitus' understanding of gift-giving, and in forms of calculation that he sees in the economies of religion and honour (Bourdieu 2007).

Our understanding and use of habitus, however, is not that of a 'primary' habitus (Bourdieu 2006, 157), i.e., the product of family, early socialization, class and education; but rather, a 'specific' habitus, i.e., 'a system of dispositions acquired through a relationship to a certain field' (Bourdieu 2007, 90). By a specific habitus, Bourdieu (2006, 100) refers to the habitus of the 'priest, journalist, doctor, boxer, scientist': the development of dispositions 'to be and to do' as a priest, journalist, doctor, boxer or scientist, where a specific habitus incorporates the particular logic of the field. We articulate here the value of the concept of habitus in addressing some of the issues identified in the economization literature's understanding of agents' actions. An agent who has internalized the architectures of their field such that they develop an unconscious 'feel for the game' is far removed from the carefully formatted and curated economic agency of the 'economization' literature. Nevertheless, as our study will show, classifications and taxonomies, as well as networks of distinction, may be embedded in material devices and calculating equipment, and our analysis presents a nuanced approach to the 'agencing of cognition'.

Our paper presents an empirical study of publishing, as individuals adjust to, are configured by, and navigate the economic, market aspects of a 'creative industry'. It is well recognized that those working in publishing face a precarious existence as they juggle the twin concerns of artistic and commercial logics in the struggle to produce commoditized value (Morgan and Wood 2013). Publishing, a well-established area of economic activity, is a hybrid field like many 'creative industries' (Caves 2002, Entwistle and Rocamora 2006). It must address the twin concerns of literary quality and commerciality, resulting in tensions that have long been recognised by empirical studies (Thompson 2005, Thornton 2004). As with many creative industries, this division is often handled by the separation of personnel: authors and editors are generally involved in the literary side of production, and literary agents, sales and rights personnel with its marketing facets. Changes within publishing, however, increasingly challenge this division, forcing authors and editors to learn to accommodate the market element of their work (Thompson 2010).

By focusing on those new to publishing, we highlight the interplay, or mismatch, between learned dispositions and more distributed modes of doing and being as individuals encounter established ‘market devices’ and industry specific modes of valuation and calculation (Muniesa, Millo, and Callon 2007). As Bourdieu (2006, 99-100) notes, ‘The specific habitus, which is demanded of the new entrants [to the field] as a condition of entry, is nothing other than a specific mode of thought...In reality what the new entrant must bring to the game is not the habitus that is tacitly or explicitly demanded there, but a habitus that is practically compatible or sufficiently close, and above all malleable and capable of being converted into the required habitus’. We examine how individuals are obliged to acquire the ‘*nous*’ or *sens pratique* to be able to function within a specific commercial arena, and how ‘economic behaviour socially recognized as rational arises out of practice’ (Bourdieu 2005, 211). Newcomers must learn the ‘rules of the game’: the narratives and justifications of creative and commercial value. Yet they also must learn to work with market devices, such as the book proposal, to articulate positions in the market and softer claims such as ‘authenticity’, and to manage local strategies of classification that serve to ‘pitch’ and locate authors to publishers. For individuals, this involves being able to move from a perspective whereby a literary or ‘creative’ perspective is dominant, to acknowledging a different logic involved in adapting to ‘the market’. Our analysis explores the complex interplay of calculation embedded in and mediated by material devices and the more tacit strategies and judgments of participants; we demonstrate how both these perspectives illuminate some of the lessons that those new to publishing must learn as they begin to appreciate that publishing is not just ‘about books’, but is ‘the publishing business’.

In summary, we propose that a carefully specified notion of habitus provides a powerful addition to the theoretical armoury of ‘economization’, although to do so we must circumvent some significant obstacles: the criticisms levelled by Callon and Latour against Bourdieu’s ‘classical sociology’.

Bourdieu and ‘economization’: Two accounts of calculation

Combining Bourdieu with studies of economization might, at first glance, be considered problematic. Bourdieu’s ‘field theory’ offers a critique of agency centred explanations or interactionist approaches: structure has an effect independent of agents. Certainly Callon

(1998, 267) is critical of a structuralist sociology ‘in which actors are immersed and sometimes drowned’, seeing this as incompatible with the constructivist sociology of ANT. Latour (1996), still more critical, describes Bourdieu’s sociology as rendering individuals invisible against the structures of fields. He critiques the arrogance of Bourdieu’s intention to show that ‘what *really* goes on...may be very different from what the ‘agents’ think is going on’ (Schinkel 2007, 710). Bourdieu replied that critics are guilty of a ‘fast’ reading of his work, construing constraint as determinism (Townley, 2014).

This debate may be construed – and perhaps bracketed – as a squabble over institutional prestige, or a representation of changing modes of knowledge production: Bourdieu the high priest of state sponsored, politically concerned sociology, Latour the representative of an industry driven, networked, ‘mode 2’ institution (Schinkel 2007, Fuller 2000). However, there is a related methodological element. For Latour, science is propelled by the use of inscription devices, often visual, around which scientists and resources can gather. Calculation and the production of knowledge are visible to all who observe the laboratory, which it is the task of the sociologist to describe (Savage 2009). Thus Latour is a foremost proponent of the ‘descriptive turn’ in sociology, a turn that when not politically mute, comes close to lionizing the innovator and entrepreneur (for example Latour 1988). By contrast, Bourdieu became increasingly politically active, convinced that ‘social sciences cannot remain bystanders of the social suffering...they have made a living of’ (Schinkel, 2007:711). Political activism demands analysis of structure and cause, accessible through the analysis of interview and ethnography.

We suggest that it is possible to find some commonality between these hostile camps. Both Bourdieu and Callon are critical of *homo oeconomicus* and question the universality of the rational economic disposition. Bourdieu (2005, 1) writes that ‘the science of economics’ is a scholastic fallacy, ‘based on an initial abstraction that consists in dissociating a particular category of practices, or a particular dimension of all practice, from the social order in which all human practice is immersed’. Callon (1998) also energized the debate over the naturalness of economic exchange, emphasizing the importance of addressing ‘who (or what) actually calculates (and how) when we say that ‘the market’ calculates?’, and asks ‘under what conditions is calculation possible and under what conditions do calculative agents emerge’ (Callon 1999, 184). Both Bourdieu and Callon assert that the economic actor does exist, the product of particular historical conditions. For Callon, however, it comes into being

as the result of a process of purification. It is constructed and formatted through specific arrangements, bound up in calculative ‘agencements’ – networks of technical artefacts across which calculation is distributed. Callon borrows the term ‘agencement’ from Deleuze and Guattari to signify an arrangement of heterogeneous elements, human, material or theoretical, all of which have the capacity to act and across which agency is distributed (Muniesa, Millo, and Callon 2007). Economic evaluations are framed, momentarily stabilized and calculation made possible in these networks, before frames overflow and must once again be stabilized (Callon 1998). Economic agency is configured by equipping agents with calculative ‘prostheses’, or adapting (habilitating) the architectures of the material environment to produce certain behaviours (Callon 2008).

Dismissing the notion of individual calculation as ‘too demanding’ Callon (1998, 4) argues that economic agent is not person, but a heterogeneous ‘agencement’ (assemblage) of person, device, and scripts. The ‘market device’ is an artefact of co-ordination, something that ‘holds together’ a particular network (Muniesa, Millo, and Callon 2007). In financial markets, for example, fluid networks of economic relations can be stabilized and manipulated – appresented (Knorr Cetina 2005) – by screens, the stock ticker (Preda 2006) or dealer’s telephone (Muniesa 2008). Doganova and Eyquem-Renault (2009) argue that business models are intermediaries or ‘boundary objects’ between the entrepreneur, customers, investors, and other actors. Models hold together and co-ordinate action; they are hybrids, using calculation and narrative to envisage, and thereby perform, a future business (Doganova and Eyquem-Renault 2009). Even rational decision is an organisational achievement: Cabantous and Gond (2010) demonstrate how rational choice is ‘crafted’ by trained analysts, theory and artefacts, working to frame organizational decisions and render them calculable.

For Bourdieu, on the other hand, calculation reflects a *sens pratique*, the ‘responses of the habitus, which, when it is in phase with the world, are often so marvellously adjusted to it that they can *make one believe in rational calculation*’ (Bourdieu 2008, 184, emphasis added). His early work with the Kabyle, for example, identifies the complex forms of calculation involved in the gift economy (Bourdieu 1990). Although this takes the form of social evaluation rather than quantitative calculation, it involves careful calculation of timing and estimates of reciprocity. Calculation is a consequence of embodied behaviour born out of practice, reflective of the habitus of the field. Equally, Bourdieu’s (2000) early work in

Algeria discusses the development of an 'economic' habitus. In pre-capitalist Algeria, economic dispositions such as calculation, anticipation and accumulation are 'not really defined and systematically constituted as legitimate practices' (Lebaron 2001, 125); certainly they are not openly acknowledged as such. He outlines the changes that take place as French colonial powers transformed an agrarian to a commodity based production system and the changes in practices and habitus that ensue (Bourdieu 2000). In doing so, Bourdieu compares the traditions of a pre-capitalist society which he sees as alien 'to the logic of the market' to those functioning in a modern economy, and illustrates how economic dispositions fashioned in a pre-capitalist economy are no longer adequate in a 'rationalized economic cosmos imposed by colonization' (Bourdieu 2000, 17). He talks of acquiring a 'sprit of calculation' and refers to the distress of economic agents where they do not have the dispositions required by an economic order 'that is for us entirely familiar', where they appear 'evident, necessary and universal' (Bourdieu 2000, 18). He likens the process to one of a religious 'conversion' requiring the 'apostasy' of embodied beliefs: it is 'the conversion of the whole mindset that is necessary to break with the universe of deeply embodied presuppositions' (Bourdieu 2000, 23). The 'economic' is a reflection of the outcome of practices sedimented and established as such.

One seemingly formidable obstacle may offer us a way into the topic. It is posed by Callon's own repudiation of economic calculation as some kind of universally, if differentially, available cultural resource, on hand to explain differences in the uptake of rational economic agency among nations and cultures. More particularly, he critiques the idea that cultural frames offer a basis for calculative competence (1998, 5f). In support of this claim he reads Gao's (1998) analysis of the changes in 20th century Japanese management as demonstrating the weakness of culture as an explanatory device. But as Entwistle and Slater (2014) point out, Gao shows quite the opposite: the resources that are employed by managers, internalised by actors and institutionalized within new understandings of labour relations in Japan, are plainly cultural. Entwistle and Slater state the problem thus: 'the broader question for Gao is to ascertain the conditions under which particular meanings and values, such as 'harmony' become institutionalised as rules that govern action. This is a good question, but one which cannot be asked if, as Callon appears to be doing, 'culture' is dismissed as a social theoretical fallacy' (Entwistle and Slater 2014, 167). Entwistle and Slater point out that Callon is asymmetrical in his treatment of culture, ready to disassemble but unwilling to 'reassemble the cultural' into the everyday categories through which it is encountered by actors. We echo

Entwistle and Slater's claim that an ANT analysis must respect the 'empirical realities of culture as it is performed and assembled' (2014, 2); as something experienced in concrete terms, not as a series of 'deflated materialities'. In other words, while the notion of agencement is useful in allowing us to understand the construction of cultural notions of value, worth, look, or fashion, it eventually relies on a common-sense conception of persons that cannot adequately deal with such 'quasi-actants' (Krarup and Blok 2011). The challenge instead is to describe diversity in forms of calculation and the different devices which produce this (Slater 2002, 236)

We would argue that Bourdieu's concept of habitus allows us to interrogate the conditions under which particular meanings and values become internalized and indicates an avenue worthy of more exploration. This is all the more so as both Latour (2005) and Callon (1998b, 250) see purchase in the concept. Indeed, Latour (2005, 209) writes 'Bourdieu's notion of the habitus, once it is freed from its social theory, remains such an excellent concept.' Habitus is the disposition of agents through which the social world is apprehended. A specific habitus develops within a particular sphere of, or field, in which the agent occupies a position. It is the *sens pratique*, the ability to master what is required to function within a sphere, without this being the consequence of conscious, rational calculation. It is what Bourdieu refers to as the 'feel for the game', which occurs when the practical activities of the field become embodied and 'and turned into second nature' (Bourdieu 1998, 63). A sense of the game 'implies an anticipated adjustment of habitus to the necessities and to the probabilities inscribed in the field' (Wacquant 1989, 43); an understanding of what is deemed to be 'reasonable' or 'unreasonable', 'likely' actions, 'natural' ways of behaving, what goes without saying. It is being attuned to the shared habitus, or *modus operandi*, of a collective practice. A 'practical sense of things' or 'feel for the game', is gained through experience and likened to being a 'fish in water', where the habitus is 'at home' in the field it inhabits (Wacquant 1989). Where there is agreement between the habitus and the field, there is no need for calculation. There is practical mastery.

Habitus, however, is only one of a number of basic concepts for thinking about reasonable action, intrinsically related to others, such as field, interest or *illusio*, capital, doxa. Freeing it from these, as Latour recommends, would be problematic, as an illustration of the interplay of field, capital and habitus in the 'economy of cultural goods' illustrates (Bourdieu, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1985). As a field of cultural production, publishing is a set of inter-related

agents and institutions, functionally defined by their role in the division of labour, for the production, consumption and diffusion of books. As with all cultural products, books not only have economic, but also cultural and symbolic, value. Dependent on the relative prominence of these values, the field is subdivided into ‘restricted production’ (largely autonomous, where production and evaluation is for and by other producers, with economic profit secondary to cultural value); or ‘large scale production’ (a heteronomous field with economic criteria predominating). In other words, the publishing field, and the position of authors, literary agents, publishers, and critics, is structured according to the distribution (weight and volume) of capital, economic, cultural and symbolic, that characterizes it, with each agent vying to enhance their position (economic profit/symbolic capital) accordingly. The extent to which they are able to do so is very much influenced by their dispositions or habitus. Bourdieu (1980, 263) writes, ‘entering the field of literature...is...like getting into a select club’; with membership of the field ‘a para-doxal commitment to a set of [cognitive and evaluative] presuppositions’ [*doxa*], linked to the discovery of stakes and demands [interest, *illusio*]’ (Bourdieu 2006, 11).

Making an economic habitus in publishing

Bourdieu (2006) sees habitus as a way to understand ‘mismatches’, citing the example of Algeria in the 1960s, and developing economies today, between the ‘objectives structures’, i.e., economic institutions of a colonizing power and ‘incorporated structures’, dispositions formed in a pre-capitalist world. Our identification of new entrants, or agents talking about their experiences on entering the publishing field, allows us to identify the mismatches that take place in relation to a specific, as opposed to a primary, habitus. New entrants, or those with changing roles, writers and literary editors in particular, are more concerned with the literary merit and value of their work. They are not so familiar with the commercial aspects of publishing. However, new authors and literary agents are gradually obliged to come to understand publishing as being a ‘business’ rather than just ‘about books’. We illustrate this process, drawing on interviews with 5 authors, 4 literary agents, 4 editors, 4 rights managers, and 5 publishers based in Scotland (Gulledge 2011). Interviews are supplemented by observations of the London and Frankfurt book fairs, and conferences and network events where participants discuss and contest changes in publishing, as well as secondary source documents about publishing including the trade press.

The language of classifications

In the economisation literature, classification and categorisation are important mechanisms for rendering goods calculable; even market-alien notions such as ‘love’ may be performed as tradable commodities through appropriate mechanisms (Roscoe and Chillas 2014). In the case of publishing, classifications are a means of making creativity and creative callings economic. Authors enter publishing largely because they wish to write. Authorship was described by one author as a ‘calling’ or as a vocation to which the author feels summoned, with another describing writing as, ‘a walk of life to follow in spite of practical considerations’ (Author A). Although the roles of literary agent and publisher generally isolate the author from the process by which writing is made into literary merchandise, an important element of the experience of authors is their gradual awareness of publishing as a business and an increasing understanding of the role of the market. For many, there is an intuitive awareness of a conflict between economic and cultural capital and the tensions this causes:

There are times when I think ‘why don’t I write a book about lots of sex because people will buy it?’ I am not entirely against stiletto heels and red lingerie, so is it illogical of me to want to write something that could be both literary and thrilling?
(Author B).

Here the author makes use of signs and codes – stiletto heels and lingerie – that show an awareness of the market and ‘what sells’. While there are unlimited possibilities in what may be written, the disposition of the writer limits and constrains (Bourdieu 2006, 116). Here, cultural capital predominates over economic.

An important element of learning to operate within publishing involves an awareness of, and sensitivity to, the categorizations ascribed to manuscripts. Through relations with literary agents and publishers, authors learn to understand how they are valued and on what terms. This involves learning the language of evaluation. Following an economy of symbolic goods, the language of publishing is euphemistic, predisposed to ‘disinterestedness’ (‘art for art’s sake’): there is the presumption of a disavowal of economic calculation and the maximization of material profit. Learning otherwise can be very bruising:

I had heard one of the editors at the house was very ‘professional’ so I thought that meant she was interested in the work itself and developing it. I guess I didn’t understand what ‘professional’ meant in publishing. Because I don’t think she even read anything of mine, she just said ‘OK. Female, Short story. OK, we’ll do that on the side. Get an Arts Council subsidy for it and it won’t cost anything.’ So I went into the project feeling bruised and was more bruised by the end of contracts (Author A)

In this example, the author’s work was quickly labelled as short stories aimed at a ‘female’ market. Based on this label the publisher gauged the amount of money to invest in its marketing and promotion, in this case a negligible amount. ‘Professional’, ‘female’ and ‘short story’ exist as codes, shorthand for valuations understood within the industry. We might trace the network-based calculative arrangements that make ‘female, short story’ an object of lower value, but both the editor and the author recognize the tangible nature of the categorization. Indeed, the author recognizes her own position to be precarious:

They didn’t know anything about women’s fiction and, while I detest being categorized in that way, nevertheless that is what I was, and they sort of begrudgingly agreed to publish my second set of short stories. They were really not keen on making money on my sort of writing and they didn’t really care about me as a writer, which was quite a shock. (Author A)

The categorization develops further refinements:

Now to get your foot in the door you have to become a ‘genre writer’ and you don’t need just one genre, you have to have a sub-genre. So I had to decide whether I was ‘humorous women’s fiction’ or ‘serious women’s fiction.’ (Author A)

The terms used to identify her and her work served to box her into a doubly marginal position of ‘woman’s fiction’ and ‘short stories,’ neither of which are commercially valuable. The editor’s assessment of future profit is in turn performative, and the author, having been described in these terms, feels she is not valued by her publisher. So classifications also order and construct authors. On the one hand, classifications – and the authors and books to which they refer – exist as distributed objects with unstable meanings; their objectivity, like

those of the fashion models' 'looks' described by Entwistle and Slater, exists in a network form 'emergent from and sustained by an extended apparatus of interconnected practices and arrangements' (Entwistle and Slater 2014, 169). On the other, just as 'looks' are perceived as external cultural objects, even exchangeable, objectified commodities (ibid.) classifications act as substantial social facts that shape the way the individual comes to regard their work and themselves through a process of mutual adjustment. Awareness of categories can become so strong that it informs a self-reported identity:

Now writers have turned into creatures that write for a market. You see this a lot in children's books now that everyone has realized there is an enormous market. I met an author the other day who told me she is writing for 9 to 11 year old boys. I just don't get that sort of thinking. I mean how do you know you are writing for something so specific? But a lot of writers are writing for specific markets now and they have a very clear idea of sales. But then there are those writing literary fiction and they are all just dreaming of being the next Pullman. (Publisher A)

The process of categorizing or naming enables the work to enter a calculative space. It is in this space that a manuscript is connected and compared to a list of other products. The book can be 'positioned', competition identified and consumers targeted. Industry jargon indicates that these are well established practices, part of the rules of the game that must be absorbed in order to be a functioning agent within it.

Proposal submissions: the beginnings of calculation

The manuscript the publisher receives is the product of pre-selection; the choice of publisher determined both by the author's position in the field, and the publishers in a system of production and circulation (Bourdieu 1985). Literary agents have to convey to authors 'the space of possibilities' within publishing, in that 'placing' a book is a matter of understanding what sorts of books publishers decide to publish. Again, success is contingent on a process of learning the unspoken rules. One literary agent describes the importance of knowledge that is both extensive and includes the subtleties and nuances of 'insider knowledge.'

To work as an agent you have to learn from the inside all the quirks of publishing, such as how decisions are made, what's realistic to expect in a given situation, and

how best to cultivate publishing personnel, from the editor to the publicist to the cover designer. This includes learning how to ‘place authors’ by comparing them to other successful authors as part of how to sell a book to an editor. But trying to do that can also be detrimental if it's not done right. Learning how to go about comparing a client’s book successfully is tricky. It’s learning to speak a language. (Literary Agent A)

Here, the literary agent describes learning the beginnings of calculation. Although not displaying the calculating disposition of those in an economic field, there is still the element of calculation, performed simultaneously by material devices and the agent’s tacit assessments of what is best placed where. There is substantial work involved in rendering the manuscript – a literary form – an economically calculable object, and the literary agent realizes that her role is to detach, frame and singularize the manuscript for potential publishers (Callon 1998b, Callon, Méadel, and Rabeharisoa 2002). The process involves detaching a ‘proposal submission’ from the manuscript, associating it within a frame of ‘competing titles’, and ‘placing’ it within a ‘proposed market’. The literary agent decontextualizes the manuscript as a piece of writing and constructs it as a potential object to be sold (Callon and Muniesa 2005).

I understand the way proposals have to be packaged. Approaching publishers with a proposal submission that may be just a two page outline of the book is increasingly the way that initial contact takes place. The proposal includes notes that suggest the potential for the proposed book’s market value. This strategy encourages a book publisher to base acceptance on something less than a finished product. The points that must be covered in the proposal submission direct very little attention to the substance of the writing. Instead there is significant emphasis on market value and potential sales. Proposals cover competing titles, likely markets, and time scales, and why the author is specially qualified to write the book. Once I realized this is how books got through to publishers, then it was just a matter of figuring out how to take the books I really believed in and fill out a form about them in a way that got them a foot in. (Literary Agent B).

The book proposal becomes a market device, ‘facilitating the conception, production and circulation of goods, their valuation and construction’ (Muniesa, Millo, and Callon 2007, 4).

It may be more or less legitimate: its authority is dependent on the perceived ‘accuracy’ of the assessments, the extent to which they align with the recipient’s view of the field, and the weight of the authoring voice, namely the symbolic capital the literary agent has in the field.

The book is detached from its author and its substance in terms of writing style and depth of content, to become attached through comparisons to other books within a specified calculative space, delineated by comparisons and their potential ‘market’. As Bourdieu (1985, 3) notes, ‘properties assigned to cultural goods are positional ones’. Once again, tacit assessments of value are objectified by the proposal’s ability to enrol and stabilize claims on the ‘capital’ of existing authors (Herrero 2010), but as the proposal is developed and the book placed, the ability to make claims on existing capital through comparison relies heavily upon the literary agents’ sense of the industry. It is an important element of ‘playing the game’ in terms of marketization.

Once it's [a book] ready to go out, we play what I jokingly refer to as a ‘parlour game’ to figure out exactly how to position the book to editors. Deciding which successful authors you want to compare yourself to is at the heart of the game. Publishers really depend on these ‘comps’ [comparisons] to get a book across to the reps and the bookstores. There's an art to it. The comparison must be apt. For example, if I am trying to tell an editor about a book, I'll position it by comparing it to *Trainspotting* but that it will be shelved next to Dan Brown. It's a very entertaining form of name-dropping. The reason I call it a parlour game is that authors, especially first-time authors, usually have to get over their reluctance to compare themselves to well-known writers. But that's how the game is played. (Literary Agent B).

In this description there is the articulation of the process of making goods calculable, the crucial aspect of which is the decision as to which authors are going to be used as comparators. As with many cultural fields, a known or recognised name is reflective of, and bestows the power of, consecration (Bourdieu 1980). Knowing what names to select enters the manuscript into a calculative space, connecting and comparing it to a list of other products. The book is ‘positioned’ in terms of competitors and consumers. Placing the product depends on the structure of capital extant in the field, reading its signifiers (‘Dan Brown’ for example) as reflecting the relative weight and volume of economic, cultural and symbolic capital. As capital changes, so do the referents. The ability or competence to

decipher this, the practical mastery of classification, is a 'game' familiar to this literary agent. Classifications, however, are not set in stone. The field is characterized by struggles over classifications, thereby conserving or subverting its capital, and is implicitly understood as reflecting shifting capitals of authors, publishers and agents. Those with a well-adapted habitus have a mental map or diagram of the field as it shifts and changes.

The proposal, a market device, co-ordinates the publishers' calculative assessments of the book as a commodity – how much it is worth, or where it will be sold. Once placed alongside comparators, the value of which is already known and traceable through stable accounting conventions, inscriptions which are themselves mobile and easily combined (Qu and Cooper 2011), the potential value of the book may be assessed. The capitals invoked by the proposal are manifested in equally stable forms, perhaps as sales figures, film rights or book prizes, and the book on offer can be valued and traded accordingly. Yet the proposal itself is dependent upon the tacit assessments of the literary agent, the result of her *sens pratique* or market nous, and equally subject to and testable by the dispositions of buyers. For a proposal to be successful it must be credible in the minds of others. Interviewees describe their learned understanding of what is reasonable acquired over a period of time and immersion within publishing; there is the recognition that comparisons must be 'apt'. As Bourdieu (2001, 81) notes 'social agents who have a feel for the game embody a host of practical schemes of perception and appreciation...principles of vision and division of the universe in which they act'. The specific industry jargon indicates that these are well established practices, part of the rules of the game that must be absorbed in order to be a functioning economic actor within publishing. The habitus of the publishing field, its evaluative system of perception and appreciation, is achieved through lasting experience, coexisting with and built upon classificatory schemes and market devices.

'Positioning' in the 'field of publishing'

Although Bourdieu's work makes much of positions and its relationship to capital, it offers little on the processes and mechanisms of positioning. Categorization, placement and comparisons all aid the process of distinction – the positioning of individual authors, and collectively, publishing houses and their imprints. 'Naming' is the predominant means of 'positioning' oneself or others within the field (Callon and Muniesa 2005, Caliskan and Callon 2010), while categorization is an important element of rendering goods calculable, by

detaching them from existing signifiers and positioning them within appropriate market categories (Caliskan and Callon 2010). Here, the processes of meaning, positioning and categorising are used to inform how the finished product of the book will be positioned to be sold: ‘This is all just so an editor or [literary] agent can figure out where to slot you in on a list and decide on a marketing budget.’ (Author A). The claim to ‘authenticity’, for example, is used as a mechanism for positioning. As one publisher remarks, on observing how authors’ respond to the ‘demands of the market’:

Now I see writers of crime novels saying things like ‘Yeah, I was there at the autopsy, to do real research’ and things like that. It’s terrible, that writers have to actually look at entrails to try to get books sold. (Publisher A)

Positioning extricates a singular, personalized object, written in very specific circumstances for individual purposes, and frames it so that it conforms to expectations, as this rights manager describes,

We are publishing a book that is very much like *Train Spotting*. It’s about a guy who didn’t have a great childhood and he wrote this huge manuscript about it. He originally wrote it to apologize to his wife and explain why he was the way he was...why he was a tough guy and treated her poorly. It was huge and written by hand. We signed it up and were really excited to be publishing it. I remember thinking, ‘We have taken this guy’s life, this guy’s huge document and we slashed it down to a small book that will look the part, have the right jacket and be put on supermarket shelves.’ It’s times like that that you think that’s quite tough. You know this is somebody’s life; who has written this for a reason. It’s just that we have taken so much content out and changed it to fit the market and make it sell lots of copies. Whereas he didn’t write it to make money but now he’s going to make money, because we changed it around to get it in supermarkets. It is quite difficult to come to terms with but it’s just the way the industry works. (Rights Manager A)

Having been disentangled from the interactions that prompted its initial writing, the manuscript is framed to become a commodity; separated from the misery it details, it can be sold under the sub-genre of ‘misery memoirs’. The author’s own experiences must be

disciplined and kept in place. If he is to be successful he must develop means of ‘coming to terms’ with this disentangling, a difficult part but necessary part of the publishing habitus.

Using the mental image of a score sheet a rights manager describes how positioning influences the decision to adopt a manuscript.

This most recent book ticked all my boxes. With foreign rights I knew there would be interest. It’s a moving story, so there’s a publicity tick. And also it is from an author based in the UK so there was another publicity tick. And it’s not too ‘foreign focused’ for the supermarkets and bookshops that tend to be quite insular. I knew it wasn’t going to be a book that we could sell through supermarkets, so we couldn’t do 30,000 copies. So we started off with assuming a mid-list sort of title but one that we would make money back on. I just want to know that with buying it, we can get money back, without having to rely on a UK sales team. So with [X], we paid 2000 dollars for it and immediately, two days later sold it for 25,000 Euros to a Dutch publisher. So immediately we made money on the book without even printing the book. And then we sold it to Italy for 15,000 and Poland for 5,000. So immediately [we’re] making money on it. The author’s making money. (Rights Manager B)

In this example, the rights enter circulation before the book has a material form; the book has become a commodity form *even before it has been published*. From the same manager: ‘a book is a product with a price, just like fish fingers.’

Positioning is coordinated – held together (Muniesa 2007) – by classificatory devices within the industry. Literary agents rely on daily news updates, and particularly subscription trade presses that include best seller lists, rights deals and other information for industry insiders. ‘I read the trade press every day, reading the updates that come through the *Bookseller* twice a day, just to see what is happening on rights’ (Literary Agent A). Literary agents also find themselves embedded in a in a rich tapestry of social networks, which they develop and use to elicit ‘gossip’ or ‘cultural intelligence’ about publishers, valuing information that allows them to have a sense of editors’ tastes and find out what material they need: ‘I do a lot of publishers’ lunches and try to get in a lot of just talking to everyone, even other authors I don’t represent. I ask about their editors and who’s working with whom’. (Literary Agent B).

It is inevitable, then, that authors learn to respond to the importance of positioning in the market and develop an ability to calculate their likelihood of success:

Now that I have had a few short stories published I know the odds about one's first novel and how easy it is to become mid-list because you are not successful with the first novel. It can be quite frightening. (Author B)

In acceptance of the commercial nature of publishing, this author has absorbed the language of risk and recognizes how calculations of 'success' are made. The author has adopted the language of ranking, the linguistic acknowledgement and recognition of positioning within a field and its economic consequences arbitrated by the industry's calculative devices. In the end, authors recognize that it is better to be with a well, positioned, powerful publishing house which can maximise the economic potential of an author's cultural capital to maximum effect:

'I just feel like small to medium publishers have no idea what to do with their fiction list. I felt like an experiment for them; that's how I saw it' (Author C).

Discussion: Bourdieu's habitus and the process of 'reformatting'

Our focus in this paper has been on the economization and 'reformatting' of individuals as they become familiar with publishing, both as an industry and as a field in the Bourdieusian sense (Çalışkan and Callon 2009). We have made use of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, suggesting that it might be usefully allied with studies of calculative agencies and agencement in order to further our understanding of varied means of 'agencing cognition' (Cochoy 2014) and to appreciate, within a framework of socio-materially mediated economic action, how individuals might cope with the positions of distinction and capital embedded in such material artefacts as the proposal (Herrero 2010). Although habitus does not come without some confusion (Brubaker 2004), empirical accounts illustrate that there is both complexity and subtlety in the concept, such that habitus serves as a useful analytical tool to illuminate the understanding of new entrants within book publishing. Our emphasis has been on what has been involved in acquiring a specific 'economic habitus': in acquiring a familiarity with the commercial aspects of publishing and the demands of the market. We label it as such because the entrants we present are familiar with the literary or creative

aspects of writing. But it is only through an understanding of publishing as being an economic – not just literary – activity that individuals acquire a ‘publishing habitus’ or an embodied feel for the game and become able to manage the calculative artefacts and classificatory schemes on which economic action are built.

The habitus is, therefore, the product of the embodiment of the structures of the field of publishing including the distribution of capital within the field. As agents entering the field, newcomers have to appreciate the particular form which capital takes and the nature of competitive struggles in the field. Authors and literary agents must develop this habitus. While authors may be more protected from the exigencies of the commercial elements of publishing, they are still aware of positioning within a market, the importance of genres that allow this, and this awareness has an impact on both their self-understanding and presentation of their work. The literary agent is much more directly involved in the process of making goods calculable, in other words in rendering the field's regimes of distinction into the material devices that hold market networks together (Muniesa, Millo and Callon 2007). The agents' role is to define the writer by abstracting them within a proposal, placing them within a frame with other writers, and defining their competition. Bourdieu's concept of habitus aids our understanding of this ‘practical mastery’; the embodied ‘feel for the game’, reflective of long immersion, such that it becomes ‘second nature’. As Bourdieu (2006, 11) notes, ‘because it takes place...gradually, progressively and imperceptibly, the conversion of the original habitus, a more or less radical process (depending on the distance), which is required by entry into the game and acquisition of the specific habitus, passes for the most part unnoticed.’

The concept of a shared ‘publishing’ habitus also helps us understand how agents in different positions come to understand the ‘field’ as a system of strategic possibilities. A field is a social space of structured differentiated positions mapped according to volumes of economic and social capital. Habitus allows this space of positions to be retranslated into a space of position-takings. Both authors and literary agents come to see, first, that they have positions, or they need to position their clients, and in doing so authors and literary agents come to see themselves and others relationally – both in relation to other authors, but also in relation to the categories that are laid out for them by ‘the market’. Such positioning is essential in the construction of rational market agents.

A focus on the construction of calculation, on who calculates and how, and under what conditions calculative agents emerge (Callon 1999, 184) situates rational action as embedded in organisational work. For Bourdieu, on the other hand, 'rational action' depends on dispositions and the specific field that produces them. As Entwistle and Slater (2014, 166) note, the challenge is to ascertain the conditions under which particular meanings and values – here signifiers such as 'women's fiction' or 'Dan Brown' - become institutionalized as rules that govern action. How, in other words, can a proposal marked with the signifier 'Dan Brown' enrol shelf space in distant supermarkets, in a way that one marked 'women's fiction' cannot. Publishing professionals are able to understand and use market devices such as classifications and proposal submissions to place a 'product' in a space and thereby locate its cultural, and its potential economic, capital. The ability or competence to 'play the game', the practical mastery of classification, is indicative of a publishing habitus. While being aware of classifications and thus being able to adjust to, or adopt them is a conscious process; the habitus refers to the adaption and learning that takes place below the level of consciousness, whereby the behaviour of thinking in terms of placing and classification becomes adopted 'as second nature'. It is a practical sense is reflective of someone who has incorporated the sense of the game without having to deliberate (Bourdieu 2006).

Just as Callon (1998) suggests that the *homo oeconomicus* is performed, so there is also a suggestion of performativity in the concept of habitus. Habitus 'performs' the individual, in the sense that that practical knowledge and actions are structured by the habitus, while the habitus is also formed by the practical knowledge and actions.

The traffic between theories is not all one-way, however. Just as habitus may add to our understanding of economization, the corollary is also apparent. Bourdieu's analysis, however, is deficient in its understanding and presentation of material objects, especially in the form of apparatus and prosthesis that become the incorporated element of the habitus. The role of evaluation measures and mechanisms i.e. the very devices that ensure that capital in whatever form may be registered and assessed are given no focus. We have thus attempted to show how devices and calculative frames influence dispositions. On coming new to publishing, without such tools, writers and literary agents are not agenced to function within it; acquiring them is part of developing the 'economic' habitus needed for publishing, a necessary complement to the literary. These devices enable individuals to cast an instrumentally rational eye on what is produced and how they may be placed. It is only

through the accommodation of author and literary agent to these devices and their mutual adjustment that a publishing habitus materializes. Authors, literary agents, editors, rights managers, lists, book proposal submissions all combine to create an *agencement* that, together with editors' profit and loss accounts for each book and annual reviews of sales per imprint and publishing house, constitutes the distributed agency that is publishing. Agency is not possible absent the many material and market devices which construct classifications and positions.

We have noted the telling critique offered by Entwistle and Slater (2014) and, in a different form by Krarup and Blok (2011): powerful though the notion of *agencement* is, it places much emphasis on the *agencement*, reducing here the appreciation of artistic worth to a distributed agency comprising calculations, inscriptions and classifications. Yet, while classifying, positioning, or making claims on existing capital within the field, agents work with tacit, realist assumptions of concepts of worth. We propose that Bourdieu's concept of habitus provides a useful complement to actor-network explanations, providing a means of 're-inflating' or re-assembling cultural valuations in the calculations of actors. Seeing, with Bourdieu, calculation as an unconscious evaluation of field positioning and the availability of capital, at the same time as distributed, quantitative calculation provides, we suggest, a valuable complement to existing literature on the process of economization. In this sense it supplements Callon's (2007, 142, emphasis added) earlier recognition that calculative competency must be understood as a 'socio-technical *agencement* consisting of material elements and discourses, *competencies and embodied skills*, routines and so on'.

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