Pierre Bourdieu, the 'cultural turn' and the practice of international history

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Abstract. The rise of the 'cultural turn' has breathed new life into the practice of international history over the past few decades. Cultural approaches have both broadened and deepened interpretations of the history of international relations. This article focuses on the use of culture as an explanatory methodology in the study of international history. It outlines the two central criticisms often made of this approach. The first is that it suffers from a lack of analytical rigour in both defining what culture is and understanding how it shapes individual and collective policy decisions. The second is that it too often leads to a tendency to exaggerate the importance of the cultural predispositions of individual or collective actors at the expense of the wider structures within which policymaking takes place. The article provides a brief outline of the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu – which focuses on the interaction between the cultural orientations of social actors and the structural environment that conditions their strategies and decisions. It then argues that Bourdieu's conceptual framework can provide the basis for a more systematic approach to understanding the cultural roots of policymaking and that international historians would benefit from engagement with his approach.

Over the past few decades the study of international history has been enriched by cultural approaches to the subject. The 'pervasive rise of culture', both as an object of study and as an explanatory methodology, is widely characterised as the most important development in the sub-discipline for many years.[1] This trend began with analyses of the way culture has been used as a tool of state policy in the ideological battle for 'hearts and minds'. Latterly, however, it has expanded to a much broader approach embracing the role of ethnicity, race, gender, race and religion in shaping the social imagination of policymakers. Such an expansion is most emphatically to be welcomed. Cultural approaches have both broadened and deepened our understanding of the nature of international politics and the sources of policymaking. They have helped to breathe new life into the study of international history – often viewed as 'the most conservative branch of a conservative discipline'.[2] But there is little

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[1] Patrick Finney, 'Introduction: What is International History', in P. Finney (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in International History*, pp. 2 and 17. See also Jessica Gienow-Hecht, 'Introduction', in J. C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Frank Schumacher (eds.), *Culture and International History* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2004), pp. ix and 3–26.

[2] Quotation from Charles Maier, 'Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations', in Michael Kammen (ed.), *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 355–82.

agreement among practitioners as to the best way to study the role culture. This discord reverberates in the vigorous debates that are ongoing among international historians. The crucial disagreements are both philosophical and political. They are philosophical because they usually involve questions of epistemology and ontology. Scholars disagree not only over the extent to which historians can make truth claims about the past, but also over whether a past 'reality' exists at all. The disagreements are also political because they revolve around contending visions of what should and should not be considered the proper study of foreign policy and international politics as well as what can and cannot be considered plausible explanations for change and continuity in world politics.

The article that follows will outline the two central criticisms made of the 'culturalist' literature. The first is that is its unsystematic approach to understanding the nature of culture as a source of policymaking. The second is a tendency to exaggerate the role of cultural predispositions at the expense of wider structures that condition policy choices. Too often the subjective beliefs and perceptions of decision-makers are considered as almost independent of the other elements in the policy process. The result is frequently an exaggeration of their role in policymaking. The central argument of the article is that the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu provides a more rigorous and systematic approach to understanding the cultural roots of policy formulation and decision-making than those deployed to date by culturalist international historians. The central aim of this essay is to illustrate how Bourdieu's theoretical insights can shed light on the nature of cultural beliefs and practices and thus provide a framework for analysing the dynamic relationship between the cultural predispositions of policymakers and the external structures that limit their policy choices. Deploying Bourdieu's concepts could therefore allow scholars to overcome the two chief criticisms made of the cultural approach and to provide more comprehensive analyses of social dynamics of international politics.

'Culturalist' international history and its discontents

Cultural approaches have enriched the study of international history in three ways. First, they have enhanced our understanding of the role of culture as a tool of international policy. The path-breaking studies in this regard have been conducted mainly into the history of the Cold War. These studies focus on the projection of culture as a means of furthering the policy objectives of the state.[3] A second approach examines the role of cultural encounters outside formal state structures. Akira Iriye has played a central role in the development of this approach, which focuses on the role of private individuals and non-governmental institutions as actors in the

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[3] This literature is large and growing all the time. For a useful guide to the American context see Jessica Gienow-Hecht, 'Cultural Transfer', pp 257–78; Akira Iriye, 'Culture and International History', in M. Hogan and T. Paterson, *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 241–56; and Susan Carruthers, 'Propaganda, Communications and Public Opinion', in Finney (ed.), *Advances in International History*, pp. 189–222.

international sphere.[4] Historians using culture in these ways can and do use a variety of methodological approaches informed by various epistemological and assumptions about the nature and import of the evidence they are using. The focus of this essay, however, is on a third manifestation of the 'cultural turn': the use of culture as an interpretive framework for understanding human behaviour. 'Culture' in this approach, which will be defined as 'culturalist' for the purposes of this essay, is less a form of power than the context which conditions (and for some determines) its use.

The rise of culturalist international history is part of a wider 'cultural turn' that has developed within the historical discipline since the late 1970s. This development, which was influenced by engagement first with anthropology and then with the emerging disciplines of cultural studies and literary theory, was a reaction against the perceived elitism and 'assumption of unchanging rationality' at the heart of 'traditional' political and diplomatic history.[5] With its emphasis on practices and representations, the cultural turn was also a reaction against 'the tyranny of numbers, of monocausal explanations, of totalization and closure' that many scholars perceived in Marxist-inspired approaches to economic and social history.[6] The focus of culturalist international history, as part of this wider phenomenon, is on the cultural context in which politics happen and in which policy is made.[7] Historians employing this approach borrow concepts from cultural and literary theory, postcolonial studies, anthropology, sociology and from the 'history of mentalities' school that first emerged in France during the 1960s. The fundamental assumption at the heart of this approach is that action in the international sphere springs from culturally constructed beliefs about the world. Culturalist international history explores the way constructions of national identity that are based on ethnicity, race, religion and gender shape the way actors perceive and respond to international politics.[8] The influence of late-structuralist and post-structuralist thought, in particular the theoretical perspectives of Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida, leads to an emphasis on discourse and text. Culture thus becomes a kind of 'syntax' or a 'software' which is used to interrogate texts.[9] In this way culturalist international history has real affinities with more traditional empirical approaches that also work through a close engagement with textual evidence.[10] Crucial importance, however, is attributed to the destabilising effects of language as a medium for transmitting

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[4] For an overview, see Iriye, 'Culture and International History', pp. 241–56; for an example of this approach see his *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, 2nd edn. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

[5] Quoted in Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), p. 2.

[6] Cited from Peter Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), p. 95; see also Burke, *What is Cultural History?*, pp. 23–5, 30–46 and 112–16.

[7] The term 'culturalist' is used throughout in Andrew Rotter, 'Culture', in Finney (ed.), *Advances in International History*, pp. 267–99.

[8] Susan Brewer, ' ''As Far As We Can'': Culture and US Foreign Relations', in Robert Schulzinger (ed.), *A Companion to American Foreign Relations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 15–30.

[9] See the discussions in Frank Costigliola, 'Reading for Meaning: Theory, Language and Metaphor', in Hogan and Paterson (eds.), *Explaining the History*, pp. 279–302; Rotter, 'Culture' especially pp. 268–74; Anders Stephanson, 'Commentary: Considerations on Culture and Theory', *Diplomatic History*, 18:1 (1994), pp. 107–19.

[10] See, for example, the argument put forward by Carla Hesse, 'The New Empiricism', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), pp. 201–7.

meaning and on the subjective character of all constructions of 'security threats' and formulations of the 'national interest'.[11]

The result has been a host of exciting new perspectives on the international history of the last 150 years. Scholars have used gender theory to argue that conceptions of masculinity played fundamental roles in the American decision to make war against Spain in 1898, the consensus to pursue a firm policy towards the Soviet Union in the 1940s and the robust posture of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in fighting the Cold War during the 1960s.[12] Race has been used as a category of culture to provide an alternative reading of US foreign policy, particularly with regard to the non-aligned states and the 'Third World'.[13] A concern with the construction and reconstruction of national identities has suffused this literature. Scholars have homed in on constructions of 'self/other' dichotomies. These function to create, reaffirm and often to recreate national, ethnic, gender or racial identities which, in turn, shape the political imagination of both policymakers and popular opinion.[14]

A particular benefit of this literature has been to illustrate, in terms similar to Marxist critiques of 'false consciousness' and 'bourgeois mystification', the way

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[11] Marc Trachtenberg rightly characterises this approach as part of a 'constructivist challenge' to the epistemological foundations of traditional historical practice. He is very critical of this phenomenon in *The Craft of International History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 7–14. For a more positive representation, see especially Costigliola, 'Reading for Meaning' and Michael H. Hunt, 'Ideology', in Hogan and Paterson (eds.), *Explaining the History*, pp. 221–40.

[12] For examples of gender-based analyses of US foreign policy, see Andrew Rotter, 'Gender Relations, Foreign Relations: The United States and South Asia, 1947–1964', *Journal of American History*, 81 (1994), pp. 518–42; Michelle Mart, 'Tough Guys and American Cold War Policy: Images of Israel, 1948–1960', *Diplomatic History*, 20 (1996), pp. 357–80; Frank Costigliola, 'The Nuclear Family: Tropes of Gender and Pathology in the Western Alliance', *Diplomatic History*, 21 (1997), pp. 163–83; idem, 'Unceasing Pressure for Penetration: Gender, Pathology and Emotion, in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War', *Journal of American History*, 83 (1997), pp. 1308–39; Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); and Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002). For general discussions of this literature see Glenda Sluga, 'Gender', in Finney (ed.), *International History*, pp. 300–19, and Marc Frey, 'Gender, Tropes and Images', in Gienow-Hecht and Schumacher (eds.), *Culture and International History*, pp. 212–20.

[13] See, for example, the 'Symposium' on 'African Americans and US Foreign Relations', in *Diplomatic History*, 20 (1996), pp. 531–650. See also, among many others, Alexander De Conde, *Ethnicity, Race and American Foreign Policy* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1992); Thomas Borstalman, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and US Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina University Press, 1996); R. L. Doty, *Imperial Encounter: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), and *Eyes Off the Prize: the United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[14] This literature is large, amorphous, and seems to increase daily. Any attempt to summarise it here would lead to misrepresentation. A good starting point for the history of US policy is the essays in Hogan and Paterson (eds.), *Explaining the History*. International relations theorist David Campbell made an important contribution to this debate with *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, 2nd edn. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); see also the thoughtful discussion in Andrew Rotter, 'Saidism without Said: Orientalism and US Diplomatic History', *American Historical Review*, 105:4 (2000), pp. 1205–17. In the British context Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994) is a seminal text. For a trenchant criticism of the use of 'national identity', see Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', pp. 109–13.

subjective constructions of 'interests' become 'naturalised' and thus gain legitimacy and agency within the policymaking process. Another interesting effect has been the debunking of many of the foundational myths of American foreign policy. Where their Marxist-inspired predecessors had revealed the industrial, financial and commercial interests behind much American foreign policy in the early twentieth century, culturalist perspectives have demonstrated that cultural, racist and religious bigotry were active elements in US international policy before and during the Cold War. There has also been a greater sensitivity to the role and agency of the colonised by scholars working on the frontier between the history of imperialism, post-colonialism and the history of international relations. The new perspectives that have resulted have been striking in their novelty and richness.[15] New approaches, moreover, have contributed to the comprehensive questioning of the nature and functioning of some of the basic concepts around which the international system is organised, such as sovereignty and territoriality.[16] More broadly, this scholarship has contributed in important ways to the wider move away from studying the state, its machinery and its elites as the sole source of understanding when it comes to international society.

But the 'cultural turn' in international history is not without its critics. On one level, proponents of culturalist international history have been charged with re-inventing the wheel. A focus on the social and cultural context within which policy is made was a hallmark of the work of distinguished scholars such as William Appleman Williams, James Joll, D. C. Watt and Zara Steiner in the 1950s and 1960s. Similarly, in their writing about the Pacific War, both Christopher Thorne and John Dower placed cultural and racially constructed images at the heart of their analyses.[17]

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[15] See, among many others, Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Mark Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919–1950* (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina University Press, 2000); Andrew Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947–1964* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); and Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997). See also the collection edited by Christian Appy, *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); and Thomas Bender, *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

[16] On this emerging line of enquiry and argument, see Emily Rosenberg, 'Considering Borders', and Nathan Citino, 'The Global Frontier: comparative history and the frontier borderland approach', in Hogan and Paterson (eds.), *Explaining the History*, pp. 176–93 and 194–211 respectively; see also the thoughtful discussion by Charles Maier, 'Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives of the Modern Era', *American Historical Review*, 105:3 (2000), pp. 807–31.

[17] William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Dell, 1959); idem, *The Roots of the Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society* (New York, 1969); James Joll, '1914: The Unspoken Assumptions: An Inaugural Lecture' (London: London School of Economics, 1968); see also his *The Origins of the First World War*, 2nd edn. (London: Longman, 1992), pp. 199–233; D. C. Watt, *Personalities and Policies: Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Notre Dame, LA: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), and idem, 'The New International History', *International History Review*, 9 (1987), pp. 518–52; Zara Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: the United States, Britain and the War against Japan, 1941–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); idem, *Border Crossings: Studies in International History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1987).

This research is too seldom acknowledged by practitioners of the 'cultural turn' in international history. The result is often misleading claims for the revolutionary character of new analyses.[18]

On a conceptual level, there is often a frustrating lack of clarity and precision in the way culture is used both as a term and as a conceptual category. This is linked to the long-standing problem of defining what culture is and, just as importantly, what it is not. The origins of most approaches to this problem among the new culturalists can be traced, whatever the degree of separation, to Clifford Geertz's widely cited definition of culture as 'webs of significance' or 'a system of symbols and meanings' that impose order on the social world.[19] The problem with this conception of culture is that it is potentially limitless and therefore limited as a means of understanding human action. It becomes difficult to conceive of any significant aspect of social life that is not culture. As Volker Dekpat has pointed out '[Arguing for] the omnipresence of social constructs only reveals the basic anthropological fact that men [sic] have to make sense out of the world in which they live because they cannot live without doing so'.[20] Another problem is a tendency to represent culture as essentially static. This would be widely decried by virtually all 'culturalist' scholars in theory. In practice, however, accounts of how the effects of culture evolve over time are relatively rare. This is chiefly because culture is too often conceptualised as independent and largely unaffected by the structural context in which policy is made. Greater rigour is therefore needed in defining what culture is and how it shapes policymaking. This is not to argue for one conception over another. It is instead to stress that scholars using culture as an analytical approach should define, with as much precision as possible, precisely how they understand its function in explaining social life.

Another criticism made against the cultural turn in international history is that it avoids, and may even be incapable of addressing, the key issue of power in international affairs. Focus on gender or race, or culturally constructed images of self and other, fail to get to grips with the centrality of demographic, financial, industrial and finally military power in determining what actors can and cannot do in the international sphere – however culturally constructed their understandings of the world might be. From the radical Left this critique is accompanied with a further charge that to shift one's analytical lens to the margins of policymaking is to shirk the responsibility of the intellectual to criticise the ideological and material practices

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[18] A point made by both Melvyn Leffler and David Reynolds. See Leffler 'New Approaches, Old Interpretations, and Prospective Reconfigurations', *Diplomatic History*, 19:2 (1995), pp. 173–96; and Reynolds, 'International History, the Cultural Turn and the Diplomatic Twitch', *Cultural and Social History*, 3 (2006), pp. 75–91.

[19] Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 5; William H. Sewell Jr., 'The Concept(s) of Culture', in L. Hunt and V. Bonnell (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Direction in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 43–6 and Rotter, 'Culture', p. 267.

[20] Quoted in Volker Dekpat, 'Cultural Approaches to International Relations: A Challenge?' in Gienow-Hecht and Schumacher (eds.), *Culture and International History*, p. 181. Peter Burke, one of the leading practitioners and proponents of the 'new' cultural history, has similarly acknowledged that 'It is increasingly difficult to say what does and does not count as culture', *What is Cultural History?*, pp. 5 and 29; see also Leffler, 'New Approaches, Old Interpretations' and Reynolds, 'The Cultural Turn and the Diplomatic Twitch'.

of American hegemony.[21] While it is certainly true that a substantial portion of the newer literature tends 'to do away with foreign policy questions altogether', this criticism is generally less compelling.[22] The argument that, in order to better understand and critique hegemony, scholars must always focus overwhelmingly on the sinews of state power is not persuasive. The sinews are never understood independently of the cultural or ideological context in which policymakers operate. A more telling critique is that practitioners of cultural history too often fail to demonstrate with much precision how these assumptions shape the way power is understood and used. This leads me to a final, and to my mind most important, criticism of the use of culture.

Too often in culturalist international history, beliefs are considered independently of the structural environment in which they exist. Indeed they are often represented as determining all meaning in social relations. The focus on language, and in particular on the way discursive formations create political reality, too often comes at the expense of all other elements shaping policy choices. In other words, most cultural approaches go only one way: they focus on the dominance of subjective understanding and tend to ignore the role of structural elements in shaping the political imagination of those responsible for policymaking. This often leads to monolithic, all-encompassing and frustratingly vague accounts of causation that are based inevitably on the production and reproduction of identities.[23] Belief systems are represented as free-standing and ultimately unaffected by wider structures. The difficult issue of causality is either ignored or described, with frustrating vagueness, as 'circular'.[24] Robert Dean, a prominent practitioner of culturalist international history, has observed that causation is best understood in terms of a 'feedback loop' rather than a 'billiard table'.[25] This is fine as far as it goes. The problem is that practitioners of the cultural turn tend to focus on the subjective constituents of the 'feedback loop' and to neglect the impact of structural conditions in their explanations. The term 'structural conditions' in this context refers to the material and ideational phenomena which constitute the internal and external context in which policy is formulated: anything from geography and demography to the balance of commercial, financial or military power to the belief systems and policy practices of *other* actors in both the domestic and international spheres.

One result of the propensity to focus on subjective belief systems at the expense of structural context is a tendency toward what one observer has described (with

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[21] Robert Buzzanco has been perhaps the most voluble of these critics: 'Where's the Beef? Culture Without Power in the Study of US Foreign Relations', *Diplomatic History*, 24:3 (2000), pp. 623–32; 'What Happened to the New Left? Toward A Radical Reading of American Foreign Relations', *Diplomatic History*, 23:4 (1999), pp. 575–607. See also Leffler, 'New Approaches, Old Interpretations' and Bruce Kuklick, 'Confessions of an Intransigent Revisionist about Cultural Studies', *Diplomatic History*, 18:1 (1994), pp. 121–4.

[22] Quoted in Dekpat, 'Cultural Approaches', p. 183. Marc Trachtenberg makes the same point when critiquing R. C. Collingwood in *The Craft of International History*, pp. 4–6 and 15–16.

[23] For similar critiques see Frank Ninkovich, 'No Post-Mortems for Postmodernism Please', *Diplomatic History*, 22:3 (1998), pp. 458–60; Dekpat, 'A Challenge?', p. 183.

[24] Many 'culturalist' historians, specialists on the history of mentalities for example, might argue that their work does not engage with issues of causality. This is difficult to admit, however, because any assertion concerning the importance of mentalities in understanding any aspect of human relations must rest, ultimately, on either implicit or explicit causal claims.

[25] Quotations from Robert Dean, 'Commentary: Tradition, Cause and Effect and the Cultural History of International Relations', *Diplomatic History*, 24:2 (2000), p. 619.

approval, sadly) as the 'domestication of foreign policy'.[26] A central tenet of nearly all culturalist approaches is that the traditional distinction between foreign and domestic politics – between *innen-* and *aussen politik* in the parlance of diplomatic historians since the nineteenth century – is a false dichotomy. This view, which is has been common currency among international historians for some time, opens the way toward a more sophisticated reading of the interrelationship between the internal and external contexts in which policy is made. Domestic politics condition the way external affairs are perceived and vice-versa.[27] And yet in many culturalist analyses of policymaking this dynamic tends only to work one way. Foreign policy is represented as emerging out of domestic contestations over identity (usually American identity). The international sphere has little or no agency in this process except in its function as the 'other' in the process of identity formation and reformation. There is insufficient appreciation of the interaction between external forces and the internal political, social and cultural context in which policy is made. The result has been to exacerbate the tendency among revisionist historians of US policy towards a rather myopic view of the world through the lens of American internal politics (whether the focus is on labour, finance or trade on the one hand or identity, gender and race on the other). All international history thus becomes the history of American foreign relations.[28] This is surely to be discouraged.

To sum up, two chief criticisms emerge from this discussion of culturalist approaches to international history. The first is that there is a lack of precision and rigour in the way culture is conceptualised. This inevitably has led to a similar lack of precision in accounts of the way it shapes policymaking. The second criticism is that culturalist approaches ignore the dynamic relationship between cultural predispositions and the environment in which they exist. Geertz himself, in his famous essay calling for 'thick interpretation', recognised the danger that 'cultural analysis' might 'lose touch with the hard surfaces of life – with the political, economic stratifacatory realities within which men [sic] are everywhere contained'.[29] Another way to put this is to observe that, while culturally constructed beliefs condition the way we understand outside structures, they neither create nor control the properties of these structures. Frank Ninkovich has rightly observed that it is one thing to claim that our understanding of reality is mediated through discursive constructions; but it is another thing altogether to claim that language 'creates' reality.[30]

There is an ontological realism at the heart of this critique that echoes other criticisms made of post-structuralism in general, and the 'absolutisation of language' in particular. Too often this approach results in untenably vague accounts of

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[26] Amy Kaplan, 'Commentary: Domesticating Foreign Policy', *Diplomatic History*, 18:1 (1994), pp. 97–105. For a good example of this trend, see Robert Dean, 'Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy', *Diplomatic History*, 22:4 (1998), pp. 29–62.

[27] See the observations of Zara Steiner, 'On Writing International History: Chaps, Maps and Much More', *International Affairs*, 73:3 (1997), pp. 531–46.

[28] See the related criticism of Dekpat in 'Cultural Approaches', pp. 181–2. There have been efforts to counter this trend, among culturally inclined scholars by considering the history of American foreign relations in their 'international' or 'global' context. See especially the discussion in Michael Hogan, 'The ''Next Big Thing''? The Future of Diplomatic History in a Global Age', *Diplomatic History*, 21:1 (2004), pp. 1–21.

[29] Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 30.

[30] Ninkovich, 'No Post-Mortems', p. 460.

causation.[31] The problem of accounting for causation, significantly, has been at the centre of important debates concerning the nature and function of culture in anthropology and sociology for decades. In order to derive interpretations of causation without losing sight of the subjective character of individual perception, sociologist Anthony Giddens has developed the concept of 'structuration' as a means to explain causation as the interplay between agents and structures.[32] Many anthropologists have been moving in the same direction and have begun conceiving of culture in terms of 'practice'. William H. Sewell, who has spent his long career in the borderland between history and anthropology, has provided a compelling conceptualisation the role of culture in social action:

I assume that human practice, in all social contexts or institutional spheres, is structured simultaneously both by meanings and by other aspects of the environment in which they occur – by, for example, power relations or spatiality or resource distributions.[33]

The focus of this approach is therefore on 'human practice' and thus on the interaction of ideas, beliefs and identities with the structural environment in which action takes place to produce practices. The emphasis on practice has led to a deeper and more dynamic understanding of the nature and function of culture in social life than approaches which focus overwhelmingly on language and discourse.

The social theory of Pierre Bourdieu has had a major influence on these trends. Bourdieu's theoretical reflections will be of particular interest to approaches focusing on the cultural context of policymaking. As one scholar of his thought has observed, Bourdieu has developed a 'cultural theory of action'. His concepts of 'habitus' and 'field' provide a useful way of understanding what culture is and how it shapes social interaction at all levels from individuals, institutions and social groups through to the state. His theory therefore has a great deal to offer to historians attempting to understand decision-making in foreign and security policy.

Pierre Bourdieu and 'constructivist structuralism'

One of the pillars of Bourdieu's intellectual project is an attempt to transcend one of the oldest challenges in the Western intellectual tradition: the opposition between objectivist and subjectivist approaches to knowledge. His particular target is the commonly held assumption that it is necessary to takes sides on the question of agency and structure:

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[31] Quote from Perry Anderson, 'Structure and Subject', in *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 32–55. See also Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and idem, 'Interpretation of the Sciences of Man', in Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan, *Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 33–81.

[32] Giddens defines 'structuration' as 'the structuring of social relations across time and space, in virtue of the duality of structure', *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1984), p. 376. For a fascinating argument that narrative history provides the best means to approach the agent/structure dilemma see Geoffrey Roberts, 'History, Theory and the Narrative Turn in IR', *Review of International Studies*, 32 (2006), pp. 703–14.

[33] Sewell, 'Concept(s) of Culture', p. 48.

If I had to describe my work in two words . . . I would speak of 'constructivist structuralism' or 'structuralist constructivism' . . . By structuralism, or structuralist, I mean that there exists in the social world, and not only in symbolic systems (language, myths etc), objective structures, independent of the consciousness or the will of agents, which are capable of orienting or constraining practices and representations. By constructivism I mean that there is a social genesis to both schemes of perception, thought and action on the one hand, and social structures on the other.[34]

'Social structures' and 'schemes of perception, thought and action' are products of social interaction. But they also exist independently of individual thoughts about them. Bourdieu's theoretical approach is in large part an attempt to illustrate how what people say and do is something other than either just a reflection of what is going on in their heads or a product of social and material structures. His approach is to focus on the strategies of social actors and to show how these are produced by the interplay of their individual habitus and the structures of the particular field in which they are acting. Bourdieu's entire project, it is worth noting, is based on a position of ontological or causal realism. Bourdieu believes that objective structures exist. But he also believes that our comprehension of these structures and our orientation toward them is mediated through our 'habitus'.

The 'habitus' is the concept that Bourdieu deploys to analyse the cultural sources of the subjectivity of social actors. The habitus should therefore be understood as the engine of cultural action. It is, as one scholar of international relations theory has observed, 'the semi-conscious (though not innate) orientation that individuals have to the world'. This orientation 'forms a basis for practice'.[35] The habitus is constituted by conscious and unconscious learned experience on the one hand and by cumulative impact of practices on the other. It is first and foremost a 'system of durable dispositions' that have been internalised by the actor over time. This process is both unconscious, through lived experience, and conscious or semi-conscious, through formal learning. Attitudes and inclinations are inculcated by the rhythms and habits of everyday life that are characteristic of the social and economic position occupied by the agent as well as by more formalised types of education and training. The effect of the habitus is to provide the actor with an ingrained set of orientations that influence not only in the intellect but also in the physical relationship of the social actor to the external world. Acquired through a process of inculcation, the dispositions of the habitus become 'second nature' and generate understandings and expectations which in turn set the parameters for strategies of social action. They are socially acquired intellectual and physical 'habits'.

Bourdieu further emphasises that the habitus is both durable and transposable. It functions at the semi-conscious level as a generating principle and organiser of practices and representations. But it can also adapt over time in response to changing external conditions (the 'field') in order to better enable actors to achieve their objectives.[36] This is a crucial point. The habitus is in a continual state of evolution. It is durable but in no way static. Bourdieu also argues that one's habitus functions in many ways at the pre-conscious level. It is thus, as John Thompson has observed,

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[34] Pierre Bourdieu, *Choses dites* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1987), p. 147.
[35] Michael C. Williams, *Culture and Security: Symbolic Power and the Transformation of the International Security Order* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 25.
[36] Pierre Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), pp. 88–9.

'not easily accessible to reflection and conscious transformation'.[37] Changes in the habitus are therefore usually gradual and take place as the structures of the outside world either reinforce existing dispositions or force them to adapt to new circumstances. This leads to the equally important point that the habitus is a 'structuring structure' – that is to say that it also constitutes outside structures by generating strategies of action on the part of other actors that will inevitably affect external conditions.[38]

The habitus concept has been criticised for providing an over-determined explanation of social action stemming from an 'inescapable structural determinism' at the heart of his conceptual approach.[39] Bourdieu's response to this charge is that, although the habitus operates through inclinations and dispositions, it does not determine action. It is instead a 'durably installed generative principle of *regulated improvisation*'.[40] The concept was developed to challenge what he considered to be the excessively rigid conception of cultural rules common among Marxist-inspired structuralists. The term 'habitus' (first used by Aristotle) is deployed to emphasise the actor's capacity for improvisation.[41] Indeed, Bourdieu is at pains to stress that, not only is the habitus in a constant state of evolution, it is also capable of producing a multitude of different practices, depending on the nature of the external structures in which it is functioning.

Two final points about the habitus should be emphasised. First, the habitus animates the action of collective social actors as well as individuals. Actors who share a similar position within a given field are likely to develop similar dispositions and thus similar practices. Bourdieu stresses that institutions inevitably develop a collective habitus in their function as social actors. This is reflected not only in internal debates on specific issues, but also in the rhythms and in the social practices that give shape to everyday working practices and social relations. Secondly, the habitus plays a central role in the durability of hierarchies. It is the means through which the arbitrary is comprehended as 'natural' and even 'inevitable'. It determines what is imaginable and what is unimaginable and thus what is possible and what is impossible in the everyday flow of social life. As Terry Eagleton observes, the concept of the habitus enables a 'matching of the subjective and the objective, what we feel spontaneously disposed to do and what our social conditions demand of us'.[42] It is therefore a central mechanism for the reproduction of political, social and economic structures in society.

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[37] Quoted from J. B. Thompson, 'Préface' to Pierre Bourdieu, *Langage et pouvoir symbolique* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), pp. 24–5 [this is a French translation of the English *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991)].

[38] David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 111–13.

[39] Quote from Swartz, *Culture and Power*, p. 211. For a good discussion of these criticisms, see Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 79–83.

[40] Quote from Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 56 [my emphasis]; but see especially Bourdieu, *In Other Words* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), pp. 110–19.

[41] Burke, *What is Cultural History?*, pp. 56–7. Burke's account of the genesis of 'habitus' as a concept is based on a conversation with Bourdieu in 1982.

[42] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 157.

Bourdieu's habitus concept adds considerably to conceptualisations of the cultural origins of social action such as 'ideology' or 'discourse'.[43] The emphasis on practice as both a constituent element *and* a product of culture better captures the durability of the cultural predispositions. An example that comes to mind as illustrative of Bourdieu's theory is a ritual within the French foreign ministry in the era of the world wars: the *thé à cinq heures*. All permanent members of the Quai d'Orsay gathered in the ministry gardens at 17:00 hours each afternoon where senior diplomats would be served tea by junior officials. This ritual, which Bourdieu might have described as a 'structuring rite', served to reproduce and thus reinforce existing hierarchies and power relationships within the ministry. At the same time, however, memoir accounts of the *thé à cinq heures* also suggest that it also facilitated both social and professional exchanges which, in turn, reinforced shared values and operating assumptions. It contributed to a sense of belonging to a closed community of elites.[44] The tea ritual played an interesting and important role in both shaping and reinforcing the collective habitus of foreign ministry officials. This habitus, in turn, functioned to condition responses to the external problems and possibilities encountered in the various *champs* or 'fields' in which foreign policy was made.

These 'fields' are the second essential Bourdieuan concept. A field is a 'particular social universe' that is defined by the 'stakes' ['*enjeux*'] for which social actors compete. It is among the more problematic of Bourdieu's theoretical constructs because there is a lack of clarity in nearly all of his many explanations of the concept. Matters are further complicated by the fact that Bourdieu rarely ever explains the field in exactly the same way twice. His most quoted description is as follows:

> In analytical terms, a field can be defined as a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions. These positions are defined objectively in their existence and in the determinations that they impose on their occupants, agents or institutions, by their current and potential situations (*situs*) in the [wider] structure of the distribution of different currencies of power (or of capital), possession of which provides access to specific profits that are up for grabs in the field, at the same time, by their objective relations to other positions (domination, subordination, equivalents etc). In highly differentiated societies, the social cosmos is constituted by the sum of these relatively autonomous social microcosms, spaces of objective relations which have a logic and a necessity that is specific and irreducible to those that govern other fields.[45]

A field is therefore a 'network' or a 'configuration of objective relations' between 'positions' that are occupied by the social agents within the field. It is structured by the positions of various actors and their individual habitus. But fields are much more than the sum of the positions of these actors. They are also defined by 'distribution of different currencies of power' and by a 'logic' that is a 'specific necessity' to the field and is 'irreducible to [the logics] that govern other fields'. In other formulations Bourdieu describes the field as a 'social world' that is 'constantly in the process of

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[43] See, for example, the important discussions of Hunt, 'Ideology', of Costigliola, 'Reading for Meaning' and of Rosenberg, 'Considering Borders', all in Hogan and Paterson (eds.), *Explaining the History*.

[44] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Les rites d'institution', reprinted in *Ce que parler veut dire*, pp. 121–34. On the *thé à cinq heures* see the vivid description in the memoirs of Comte de Saint-Aulaire, *Confessions d'un vieux diplomat* (Paris: Flammarion, 1953), pp. 31–4. See also the discussions in M. B. Hayne, *The French Foreign Office and the Origins of the First World War, 1898–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 22–3.

[45] Pierre Bourdieu with Loïc Wacquant, *Réponses . . . Pour une anthropologie réflexive* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), p. 72.

progressive differentiation' and also 'the sum of the structural constraints on the action of its members.' While fields are relatively autonomous, they are also constantly being shaped and re-shaped both by internal struggles and by external developments in related fields.[46]

There is evidently a certain amorphousness to the concept of the field. This imprecision is worth accepting, however, in order to obtain the benefits that can be gained by thinking about social relations in general, and foreign policymaking in particular, in terms of relatively distinct 'fields'. These fields are structured by the positions of various actors within them, by the written and unwritten rules and conventions that condition (but do not determine) the strategies of actors and, finally, by the various forms of capital – primarily power and influence – for which actors compete. Bourdieu frequently explained the concept of a field by using the analogy of a game. Thinking of fields in these terms highlights an essential aspect of the Bourdieu's thinking: that the field is a competitive arena where actors compete for power and domination. The types of power that are up for grabs are the 'stakes' that give the game its character and structure and thus its distinct internal logic. This logic is animated by 'fundamental laws' that are often unwritten and even unacknowledged by participants in the game. But it nonetheless operates to regulate their behaviour by establishing the parameters of what is thinkable and what is unthinkable.[47] There are rules for the game, but these rules do not dictate the actions of participants in a mechanical way. Rules act instead as constraints on the strategies of the various players. But they are rarely immutable. Rather, they are negotiated and renegotiated constantly in the interplay between players and the structures of the game.

Participation in the field constitutes tacit acknowledgement of both the existence and the logic of its structures. Actors internalise the structures of the field by dint of their habitus, which constantly adjusts and develops in response to the conditions of the field. Bourdieu describes this process as the acquisition of a 'faith in practice' that provides the 'right of entry tacitly imposed by all fields' in a process of selection and exclusion that perpetuates the conditions of the field.[48] Actors thus internalise formal and informal structures, spoken and unspoken assumptions. For Bourdieu it is the informal and unspoken structures that constitute the most effective constraint on action because they operate at the level of the unconscious or semi-conscious. They constitute what he defines as the prevailing '*doxa*': the 'silent experience of the world'. Terry Eagleton describes the concept of doxa as 'that which goes without saying'. The doxa is a set of presuppositions that are cognitive as well as evaluative, thus conditioning the actor's responses to external stimuli at an almost instinctive level. At the same time, these presuppositions are rarely subjected to scrutiny because they are rarely acknowledged.[49] Bourdieu's conception of doxa is in some ways akin to the way constructivist international relations theorists understand and use the concepts

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[46] Bourdieu, *Choses dites*, pp. 134 and 86 respectively.
[47] For an excellent explanation of this, see Swartz, *Culture and Power*, pp. 117–36. For an insightful critical perspective, see Charles Taylor 'To Follow a Rule . . .', in E. LiPuma, M. Postone and C. Calhoun (eds.), *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 45–60.
[48] Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, p. 113 and pp. 109–15 more generally.
[49] The latter quotation is from Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 158; the former is from Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, pp. 111–12.

'norms' and 'normative standards'.[50] It is more useful, however, because it captures the unspoken and often even semi-conscious character of the operating assumptions of social actors.

The final important constituent of Bourdieu's fields is the 'volume' or 'distribution' of capital within the field. This is in some ways the most difficult aspect of his overall theory. At a basic level the concept has two dimensions. First, capital constitutes the stakes over which participants in the field are in constant struggle. Second it comprises the resources which these same participants mobilise in pursuit of their aims. It is thus the currency of power within a given field. The object is to accumulate capital and to draw upon this capital in order to secure more capital and a dominant position within the field. Capital is therefore bound up with what Bourdieu describes as the 'objective structures' of the field. Its importance is only understood by participants in the field through the medium of their habitus. Hence this importance, and thus the fundamental logic of the field, may not always be readily apparent to observers *outside* the field. Capital can also assume many forms. It can be economic capital in terms of material possessions and financial resources. But it can also be 'cultural capital' or 'symbolic capital'. Examples of cultural capital include acquired skills, knowledge or qualifications which provide social agents access to certain fields and can be mobilised within these fields in pursuit of agent's aims. 'Symbolic capital' is perhaps best understood as manifest in rituals of recognition and the accumulation of prestige. It stems from success in the acquisition and use of economic and cultural capital, but is a resource that can be mobilised in its own right in the struggle to achieve a dominant position within the field. Nearly all forms of capital, like the habitus itself, are transposable and can be deployed in more than one field in pursuit of varying objectives. But they are rarely directly translatable from one field to another. A certain type of capital (most notably financial wealth) might be vital in one field but less decisive in another. And the process of transposition is part of ongoing struggles between actors to alter the structure of the field in their favour.[51]

Similarly, strategies developed for success in one field are not automatically transferable to other games in other fields. Each field is characterised by distinct rules and norms, by the nature and volume of the capital that is up for grabs and by the positions and orientations of the various actors. Successful action therefore requires a 'feel for the game' [a *sens du jeu*] or a 'feel for practice' [a *sens pratique*]. Such a 'feel' is a reflection of the subtle adjustment of the habitus to the objective conditions of the specific field in which the actor is operating. Successful actors, from multinational corporations to statesmen and bureaucrats to peasants tilling their fields in sub-Saharan Africa, not only internalise the rules and norms of the 'game' but are also able to manipulate them and even to change them by acquiring a dominant position within the field in which they are located.[52]

The example of the social universe inhabited by permanent officials working at the French foreign ministry in Paris in the era of the two world wars provides good

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[50] See Ronald Jepperson, Alexander Wendt and Peter Katzenstein, 'Norms, Identity and Culture in National Security', in P. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 33–75.

[51] A good explanation of the role of capital is provided by Swartz in *Culture and Power*, pp. 73–82 and 122–9.

[52] Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, pp. 33–7 and 108–17.

illustrations of the field concept. The stakes in this field were influence over policymaking and career advancement. Actors mobilised their resources in pursuit of these interrelated objectives. A certain amount of cultural capital was required merely to gain entry into this field. A university degree or a diploma from one of the institutes established to train French military and administrative elites were pre-requisites to sit the ministry's entrance examination [*concours*]. Economic capital, more specifically family wealth, was equally vital. More than eighty per cent of French diplomats of this era were graduates of the *École libre des sciences politiques*, whose annual fee automatically excluded all but the wealthy elite.[53] Aspiring diplomats were also required to work as unpaid interns for at least a year. Thereafter, salaries were modest and diplomats posted abroad were often hit hard by fluctuations in the value of the franc. An independent income was therefore vital for any aspiring diplomat in France during this era . The cumulative effect of these conditions was to close the diplomatic career to all but the academically gifted sons of the aristocratic and the bourgeois elite.[54] Symbolic capital accrued from the status of actors within the ministry's elaborate hierarchy as career diplomats made their way up the ministry ladder from *secrétaire d'ambassade de troisième classe* to *ministre plénopotentaire* and finally, in rare cases, to the rank of *ambassadeur de France*. It could also take the form of awards such as the *legion d'honneur* or the *croix de guerre*. But class was also a source of symbolic power. The characteristics of the ideal diplomat during this period, from discretion and skill in conversation to style of dress and standards of physical comportment, were products of an age when diplomacy was dominated by the European aristocracy.[55]

   The field constituted by the foreign ministry possessed a logic that set it apart from other departments of state. There were detailed rules for personal conduct and career progression. These were the product of ministry personnel policy and parliamentary decrees. But there were also powerful unwritten norms that not only governed the everyday comportment of ministry officials but also their prospects for career advancement. A premium was placed on qualities such as eloquence, judgement, loyalty, tactfulness and subtlety that have been associated with the 'art' of diplomacy since its modern inception in the fifteenth century. These qualities were expected in both interpersonal relations and in the long reports that all diplomats prepared for their superiors. 'Your Excellency can count on my tact in fulfilling your instructions' wrote one envoy to Paris in 1912. 'To speak of it [tact] is to reveal a lack of it' was the caustic reply of his superior.[56] These rules and norms set the parameters for the strategies deployed by individual officials in search of influence and career advance-ment. The most common strategy was the formation of networks that were personal

[53] The upper bourgeoisie were particularly heavily represented – 92 per cent of the students enrolled on this programme were from this socioeconomic group. J. Keiger, 'Patriotism, Politics and Policy in the Foreign Ministry, 1880–1914', in R. Tombs (ed.), *Nationhood and Nationalism in France* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 259–62.

[54] Paul Gordon Lauren, *Diplomats and Bureaucrats: the first institutional responses to twentieth-century diplomacy in France and Germany* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp. 52, 54 and 105–7.

[55] See the interesting discussion in C. Charle (ed.), *Les hauts fonctionnaires en France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard-Julliard, 1980), pp. 155–8.

[56] Cf. Jean-Luc Barré, *Philippe Berthelot: l'éminence grise, 1866–1934* (Paris: Plon, 1998), p. 134. The importance attributed to the characteristics listed above are evident in the foreign ministry personnel dossiers available for consultation in the archives of the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Paris), Personnel, Dossiers, 2ème série.

and professional as well as horizontal. It was through these networks that diplomats obtained the patronage of senior officials or government ministers on the one hand and formed alliances with their peers useful for the future on the other. Success depended to an important degree on the ability of officials to internalise the 'rules of the game' and manipulate them for personal benefit.

At the same time, the foreign ministry was only one component of a wider interministerial field that was structured by the positions of the various ministries that made up the machinery of state. The stakes in this field were a larger share of the national budget and increased influence over national policymaking. Each department developed its own dispositions and orientations which conditioned its relationship to this field and mobilised similar, though not identical, forms of capital in pursuit of larger budgets and increased influence. The strategies they deployed were products of their institutional habitus. These strategies, expressed primarily through various policies and policy proposals, were essential constituents of the structure of the inter-ministerial field. Yet the field was also structured by elements from outside its parameters. The most important of such elements were the dynamics of both French domestic politics on the one hand and the conditions of international politics on the other. Important changes in either of these larger fields forced the foreign ministry to adapt its strategies to new conditions.

These, in sum, are the central elements of Bourdieu's 'cultural theory of action'. Choices and strategies are the result of the interaction between the agent's habitus and the field in which the agent is acting. This interaction is an ongoing dialectical process:

> . . . the relationship between the habitus and the field is foremost one of conditioning: the field structures the habitus which is the product of the incorporation of the immanent demands of the field . . . but it is also a relationship of knowledge and of constructive cognition: the habitus contributes to the constitution of the field as a world of meaning, endowed with sense and value, worthy of the necessary investment of energy.[57]

The dynamic relationship between the habitus of the actor and the field in which action takes place is at the heart of Bourdieu's 'theory of practice'.

This theory has been criticised on several grounds. In addition to the accusation of determinism, cited above, scholars have pointed the materialist and market-inspired underpinnings of Bourdieu's theory which, it is argued, reduce social life to an endless struggle for power between actors pursuing a rather narrow range of interests. Such a model, Bourdieu's critics contend, is better at explaining competition than it is at explaining cooperation between actors. Nor can it account for the role of collective and individual emotions in shaping social interaction.[58] Other scholars have pointed out that Bourdieu's theory of practice is better at explaining the durability of social hierarchies than it is at accounting for change.[59] These criticisms carry some weight. In response, Bourdieu and his supporters have stressed that the interests generated by the habitus are by no means exclusively material but are produced instead by the actors' wider social experience. They stress in addition

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[57] Quoted in Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Réponses*, pp. 102–3.
[58] See especially Alan Caillé, *Don, intérêt et désintéressement, Bourdieu, Mauss, Platon et quelques autres* (Paris: Éditions de la découverte, 1994), pp. 44–52.
[59] See, among others, Richard Jenkins, 'Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism', *Sociology*, 16:2 (1982), pp. 270–81; and Scott Lash, 'Pierre Bourdieu: cultural economy and social change', in LiPuma et al. (eds.), *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, pp. 193–211.

that the key to social change is the fact that actors operate in many different fields at the same time. They change the structure of each field by importing different forms of capital from one field to another. This forces other actors in the field to adapt to changed conditions and ensures that the habitus remains in a constant state of evolution.[60] A more important problem from the perspective of the international historian is the vagueness of concept of the field. Bourdieu does not provide clear guidelines for identifying distinct fields and this makes it difficult to draw hard and fast distinctions between different realms of social interaction. Do interministerial debates over policy, for example, constitute a distinct field from discussions at cabinet level? Or are they part of the larger field of government policymaking? There is also the problem of fields within fields – committees and subcommittees for example. In sum, therefore, Bourdieu's is a complex theory containing terms and concepts whose meaning and character are not always precise. Despite this imprecision, it offers a fruitful way of making sense of the way social action is shaped by cultural predispositions.

The utility of Bourdieu for historians of international relations

Traditionally, international historians have rightly been reluctant to embrace any strain of 'meta-theory' that seeks to establish general rules governing human behaviour. A recent essay by John Dower endorsed this reluctance. But Dower also stressed the potential of 'more discrete and descriptive levels' of cultural theoretical analysis to provide substantial insights into the history of international politics.[61] It is at these levels that Bourdieu's theoretical corpus can help the international historian understand the role of culture.

Bourdieu's central concern, indeed the inspiration for his sociological project, was to expose the way social relations tend to reproduce themselves in order to maintain structures of domination and subordination. He was therefore more concerned with explaining the durability of social hierarchies than with analysing decision-making in foreign policy. Indeed Bourdieu seems to have been relatively uninterested in questions of war and peace or international diplomacy. The concept of the habitus was developed first and foremost to explain the sources of unconscious and semi-conscious actions in everyday life among the Kabyle population in rural Algeria during the 1950s. His early theoretical work aimed at illustrating how these actions are both a product *and* a constitutive agent of durable social hierarchies.[62] Bourdieu's ideas have been influential not only on sociologists and anthropologists, but also among social and cultural historians. They have directly or indirectly influenced the historical study of European elites as well as work on the history of cultural

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[60] See the discussion of Bourdieu's 'theory of change' in Swartz, *Culture and Power*, pp. 211–17.

[61] Both citations from John Dower, ' ''Culture'', Theory and Practice in US–Japan Relations', *Diplomatic History*, 24:3 (2000), p. 526. For recent critiques of 'realism' by international historians, see the chapters by Gehard Weinberg, Edward Ingram, John Lewis Gaddis and Paul Schroeder, in C. Elman and M. Elman (eds.), *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists and the Study of International Relations* (London: MIT Press, 2001).

[62] His best known work in this domain are the case studies in *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précdé de trois études d'ethnologie kabyle* (Berne: Librairie Droz, 1972) translated by Richard Nice as *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

production of all kinds from consumption, to education, to the history of the body.[63] Bourdieu's theory of cultural action is also increasingly influential in the fields of international relations and security studies.[64] But Bourdieu has made little or no impact on the history of international relations.

This is regrettable because Bourdieu's social theory has explanatory power even in such formalised contexts as foreign and defence policymaking, and could contribute to a better understanding of the role of culture in two ways. First, deploying the habitus concept offers insights into both the origins and characteristics of cultural predispositions. Second, conceptualising decision-making in terms of an ongoing dynamic between the habitus of actors and the field in which they are acting sets culture in its wider context. It is particularly over the longer term that Bourdieuan ideas help in identifying and tracing the emergence and evolution of individual and institutional dispositions towards foreign policy issues and to incorporate these into an analysis of cultural sources of institutional strategies in the realm of foreign policy.

Bourdieu's ideas are well-suited to the practice of archive-based international history in several ways. His theoretical approach was developed specifically as a conceptual tool to be applied to detailed empirical research. Indeed Bourdieu had no time for 'theory for its own sake' which he was inclined to dismiss as 'conceptual gobbledygook'. The purpose of his theory was to illuminate empirical research. 'There is no doubt a theory in my work, or, better, a set of thinking tools visible through the results they yield, but it is not built as such . . . it is a temporary construct which takes shape for and by empirical work.'[65] Bourdieu's emphasis on empirical research complements the predisposition towards research into primary sources that characterises international history.

In addition, Bourdieu's 'theory of practice' offers a means by which those responsible for the formulation and implementation of policy (along with the documentary records they left behind) can be placed at the centre of 'cultural' approaches to international history. For many years the international history has faced swingeing (and often unfair) censure for its alleged 'uncritical' focus on 'dead white men'. One response to these charges has been to widen the scope of international history to include non-state actors and institutions of all types and to focus on civil society and popular culture. Another has been to turn to cultural and postcolonial studies for theoretical insights. But the methodologies used in these disciplines were not developed to study policymaking. As Matt Connelly has observed, '. . . postcolonial scholars today catalogue the cultures of empire in novels

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63 For a discussion of Bourdieu's impact, see Burke, *What is Cultural History?*, pp. 56–7, 71–8, 82–5 and idem, *History and Social Theory*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), pp. 66–7, 70–1 and 174–6; Bourdieu's influence is also well-illustrated in Gabrielle Spiegel (ed.), *Practising History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn* (London: Routledge, 2005), especially chapters 9–13 which are grouped together in a section entitled 'Experience and Practice' (pp. 179–263).

64 Stefano Guzzini, 'A Reconstruction of Constructivism in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 6:2 (2000), pp. 147–82; Ronen Palan, 'A World of their Making: An Evaluation of the Constructivist Critique in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 26:2 (2000), pp. 575–98; Williams, *Culture and Security* and an increasingly substantial body of work by Didier Bigo, including 'Global (In)Security: The Field of the Professionals of Unease Management and the Ban-opticon', in N. Sakai and J. Solomon (eds.), *Translation, Biopolitics, Colonial Difference* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

65 Cited in L. D. Wacquant, 'Towards a Reflective Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu', *Sociological Theory*, 7 (1989), p. 50.

and travel writing, museums and expositions, paintings and postcards – everywhere, it seems, but the archives and personal papers of European and US policymakers'. Policy elites in this literature are typically attributed the status of 'the exotic ''other'' '.[66] Some culturalist scholars, including Connelly himself, have attempted to blend the two methodologies. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital can contribute to this project by providing a taxonomy of culture and an original approach to analysing the way cultural practices interact with structural factors to produce the strategies pursued by decision-makers.

There are interesting similarities and overlaps between many of Bourdieu's ideas and some of the influential conceptual innovations in the practice of international history over the past few decades. Bourdieu's framing of the habitus, for example, is very similar, though not identical, to the concept of a 'mental map' deployed by Alan Henrikson in his research into US policy making during the late Cold War.[67] There are also interesting parallels with the Michael H. Hunt's conceptualisation of ideology as 'sets of beliefs and values' that 'cannot be understood apart from cultural context'.[68] But Bourdieu's ideas take us further than those of Henrikson or Hunt in at least two ways. First they allow for the constitutive role of practice in shaping both belief systems and cultural reflexes. The habitus is much more than a set of beliefs. It is a preconscious orientation of the world that is inculcated not only through intellectual development but also through myriad of processes of training and repetition that produce reflexes that seem 'second nature'. Second, Bourdieu's game analogy provides a framework for understanding the way beliefs interact with external structures (including the beliefs of other actors) to produce continually evolving practices and new interpretations of existing rules and norms. The Bourdieuan game, like the international system, cannot function without rules. But rules do not determine the course of either the game or international politics. In both cases they are in a constant process of renegotiation as actors adapt their strategies to prevailing conditions.

Much of Bourdieu's work, as well the interdisciplinary research his approach has inspired, is of a prosopographical character. It aims at identifying and analysing the nature of collective identities and cultural reflexes as they evolve over time.[69] There are striking affinities between this type of practice and the method deployed by Zara Steiner in her analysis of the role of foreign office officials in the evolution of British policy before the First World War. With careful attention to the social background of foreign office personnel, their personal and intellectual formation, the institutional structures that shaped their practices and even the collective habits and rituals that gave work at the Foreign Office its unique and idiosyncratic character, Steiner illuminated the role of 'personalities and casts of mind' in the making of policy. Even

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[66] Cited from Matthew Connelly, 'Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War of Independence', *American Historical Review*, 205:3 2000), p. 739. There is no mention of decision-makers whatsoever, for example, in P. Milza, 'Culture et relations internationales'. *Relations Internationales*, 24 (1980), pp. 361–79.

[67] See especially Alan Henrikson, 'The Geographical ''Mental Maps'' of American Foreign Policy Makers', *International Political Science Review*, 1:4 (1980), pp. 495–530 and idem, 'Mental Maps', in Hogan and Paterson (eds.), *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 1st edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 177–92.

[68] Quoted in Hunt, 'Ideology', pp. 222 and 224.

[69] See, among the titles not cited above, *La Distinction: critique sociale du judgement* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979); *Homo academicus* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1984) and *Propos sur le champ politique* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2000).

more than thirty years after its first publication, her *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898–1914* retains its freshness and continues to reward new generations of readers.[70] Also innovative and important was D. C. Watt's injunction to focus on the perceptions of decision-makers as well as their relationship with changes in both the international and domestic contexts in which policymakers operate.[71] There are also parallels between Bourdieu's notion of 'doxa' (presuppositions which are both cognitive and evaluative) and James Joll's influential discussion of the importance of 'unspoken assumptions'. In his seminal essay entitled '1914: the unspoken assumptions', Joll argued that shared expectations and preconceptions played an important role in decision-making amongst European elites on the eve of the First World War. He emphasised the importance of 'instinctive reactions, traditions and modes of behaviour' and observed that policy decisions are often based on '. . . beliefs, rules or objectives which are taken for granted'. He argued that historians of international relations must 'somehow try to find out what, as we say ''goes without saying'' '.[72] The affinities between this concern for 'what goes without saying' and Bourdieu's version of 'doxa' are obvious. And yet, for all insights they offer, the insights of Joll, Watt and Steiner do provide a conceptual framework for analysing the relationship between the subjective perspectives of decision-making actors and the objective structures that enable and constrain their choices. This relationship is the focus of Bourdieu's theoretical corpus.

   This is not to say that international historians have ignored the complexity of the agent-structure question. Quite the opposite. This issue is addressed either explicitly or implicitly in all sophisticated interpretations of the history of international relations. In 1919 French historian Jacques Bainville addressed this issue in a brilliant essay on the 'character' of the Paris peace settlement entitled 'The fault of things and the fault of men'.[73] In their influential treatise on the practice of international history, published in 1964, Pierre Renouvin and Jean-Baptiste Duroselle outlined a typology of 'deeper forces' shaping strategy and diplomacy which anticipated in many ways the current focus on 'culture'. Interestingly, they also urged historians to focus not only about 'the action of deeper forces on the statesman', but also about 'the action of the statesman on the deeper forces'.[74] But they did not analyse the reciprocal dynamics of this process. Nor, crucially, did their analysis consider the role of rules and norms as 'deeper forces' which both shaped the conceptual horizons of decision-makers but were also in a continual state of evolution as the actions of

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[70] See especially Zara Steiner, 'Elitism and Foreign Policy: The Foreign Office before the Great War', in B. J. C. McKercher and D. J. Moss (eds.), *Shadow and Substance in British Foreign Policy, 1895–1939* (Edmonton, 1984); idem, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898–1914* (Cambridge, 1969) and idem, *The Times Survey of the Foreign Ministries of the World* (London, 1982).

[71] Watt, *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place, 1900–1975* (Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1984) and 'The New International History'.

[72] Cited from '1914: The Unspoken Assumptions'. p. 6.

[73] 'La faute de choses et la faute des hommes', in Jacques Bainville, *Les conséquences politiques de la paix*, reissue with a foreword by Georges-Henri Soutou (Paris: Éditions Godefroy de Bouillon, 1996), pp. 15–23; see also the discussion in Roberts, 'History, Theory and the Narrative Turn'.

[74] Pierre Renouvin and Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Introduction à l'histoire des relations internationales* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1964), The quotations are the titles of chs. 11 and 12. The second edition of this book was published in English as *Introduction to the History of International Relations*, trans. Mary Ilford (London: Pall Mall Press, 1968). See also J.-B. Duroselle and Maurice Vaïsse, 'L'histoire des relations internationales', in F. Bédarida (ed.), *L'histoire et le métier d'historien* (Paris, 1996), pp. 341–58.

decision-makers changed the character of the domestic and international environments. Bourdieu's reflections on the way intersubjective beliefs are shaped and reshaped in an environment of competing interests, where some actors have either more capital or a better 'feel for the game' (or both) holds out the possibility for exciting new interpretations of the history of international politics.

Borrowing from Bourdieu's conceptual framework could help culturalist international historians respond to the two key criticisms outlined in the first section of this essay. The first, which centres on the problem of defining and using culture, could be addressed using the concept of habitus. Bourdieu's conception of habitus offers a fuller and more specific taxonomy of culture than existing definitions. It allows the historian to integrate all of the key cultural 'filaments' used by historians, from ethnicity and gender to intellectual formation to the influence of individual and institutional habits or reflexes. Equally importantly, it forces the scholar to consider the relationship between the constituent elements of the habitus and the structural factors that act to facilitate some policy options and rule out others. Rather than being represented as essentially static, in Bourdieu's conceptual model the habitus of policy actors would be understood as constantly evolving in a dynamic relationship with the various fields in which policy was made. This captures the complex relationship between national policy and the states system. The structural conditions of the latter place constraints on the alternatives open to the former. At the same time, however, the implementation of the former always changes, to a greater or lesser extent, the conditions prevailing in the latter.

This focus on the relationship between habitus and field is also a means of answering the second fundamental criticism of culturalist approaches: that they focus excessively on the subjective constructions of the agent and ignore the role that structures play in shaping belief systems. Bourdieu's approach emphasises the reciprocal character of the relationship between the two. The belief systems and cultural reflexes of individual policymakers, groups of policymakers or policymaking institutions would therefore never be considered in isolation or as static and freestanding entities unaffected by external structures. They would instead be analysed in terms of their interrelationship with such factors as intersubjective understandings and expectations of the rules and norms governing international relations, the distribution of industrial, financial and military power in the international system, the policies of other states within that system, the dynamics of domestic politics, the state of popular opinion and bureaucratic politics within the policymaking machinery of the state. Borrowing from Bourdieu's conceptions would thus provide a means of answering the charge that cultural approaches ignore the role of material power in international relations.

Thinking about policymaking in these terms also helps avoid the danger of excessive focus on either 'internal' or 'external' determinants of policy. The focus shifts instead to the interrelated character of these categories. It also underlines the problems with 'constructivist' international relations theory that stem from attempts to make analytical distinctions between 'material' and 'ideational' determinants in policymaking.[75] Making use of Bourdieu's 'thinking tools', it is possible to bring

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[75] See the critiques of constructivist international relations theory by Guzzini, 'A Reconstruction of Constructivism in International Relations'; Palan, 'A World of their Making' and Williams, *Culture and Security*, especially pp. 1–3 and 23–41.

together diverse approaches to understanding the nature of culture in policymaking and to answer calls for a more systematic approach to studying the role of culture in the history of international relations.[76]

Applying Bourdieu: the case of French security policy after the First World War

A brief discussion of the evolution of French security policy in the post-1918 decade illustrates the potential utility of Bourdieu's conceptual approach to the international historian. The concept of habitus, for example, can be deployed to understand the role of various constructions of France's international identity in the making of security policy. The conviction that France stood for civilisation and justice was pervasive within the French security establishment. Because it was such a key element in the political imagination of policy elites, it played an important role in determining what was thinkable and what was unthinkable in terms of foreign and defence policy. France's 'civilising mission' was used to justify policies ranging from the occupation of German territory to using military force to bolster French imperial power. But it also placed restrictions on policy choices. It was unthinkable, for example, that France would place itself outside international law. Considerable effort was therefore expended throughout this period to ensure that French policy rested on an unassailable legal position. This trend reflected both constructions of France's international identity as that of a just and law-abiding power. But it also reflected France's structural position as a status quo power in the post-1918 international system.[77]

Thinking about the habitus of French policy actors is also useful in understanding the role of institutional culture in general and the legalist reflexes of foreign ministry officials in particular. Of the three major constituencies responsible for the making of security policy in France – political elites, the foreign ministry and the military establishment – politicians and diplomats were better equipped in a cultural sense to adapt to the rules and norms of post-1918 international society. There are two central reasons for this – both of which stem from the distinct formal training and cultural practices common to politicians and diplomats on the one hand and professional soldiers on the other.

First, in the political environment of the 1920s war between European powers was increasingly unthinkable. A core skill of both the politician and especially the diplomat is the ability to negotiate, to find common ground in order to achieve objectives while at the same time avoiding conflict. Indeed the influence of the diplomat decreases dramatically once shooting starts. The progressive marginalisation of the French foreign ministry over the course of the Great War and during the

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[76] See in particular, Stephen Pelz, 'Essay and Reflection: On Systematic Explanation in International History', *International History Review*, 12:4 (1990), pp. 661–880. Pelz offers what is essentially a political science model based on variables in an attempt to derive general laws. This is of course antithetical to the approach advocated in this essay.

[77] On constructions of French identity see, among many others, Pierre Birnbaum, *La France imaginée* (Paris, 1998); Herman Lebovics, *True France: the wars over French cultural identity* (Ithaca, NY: 1996); Michel Winock, *Parlez-moi de la France* (Paris: Plon, 1995); Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); and John Keiger, *France and the World since 1870* (London: Arnold, 2001), esp. pp. 17–22.

Paris Peace Conference had provided clear illustration of this basic rule of inter-national politics. The core function of military officials, conversely, is to apply military force in pursuit of national aims. The corollary, however, is that French military elites were in general less well-equipped to contribute to policymaking in a context where military violence was increasingly ruled out as a legitimate tool of foreign policy. This point may seem obvious, but it is rarely acknowledged in the literature on French security policy after the First World War. Thinking in terms of 'practice' thus helps explain the rise of foreign ministry officials to a position of dominance in the making of French national strategy as well as the inexorable decline of military influence over policymaking during the course of the 1920s.

The second reason politicians and diplomats proved better able to adapt to postwar political conditions is that the majority of members of both constituencies had received legal training as a part of their intellectual formation. This reflected the legalism (or *juridisme*) that was a central component of the political culture of the French Third Republic. Several historians have argued that the influence of law and lawyers over national life in France reached its zenith during the first few decades of the twentieth century.[78] The proportion of French political luminaries that belonged to the legal profession is striking. Two-thirds of French cabinet ministers were drawn from the legal profession, including six of seven foreign ministers.[79] Legal training was if anything even more common within the foreign ministry. International public and private law was a core element of the curriculum of the École libre des Sciences politiques – the 'finishing school' for French diplomats. International law was also a central element of the 'concours' which determined each years' entrants into the diplomatic service.[80] The legal background of both political leaders and foreign ministry officials enabled them to adapt much more easily to unprecedented domestic and international pressure to place international law, collective security and multi-lateralism at the centre of French foreign policy.

The result was a fundamental 'reorientation' in French policy away from pursuit of security through strategic preponderance and military alliances (the policy pursued from 1918 through to 1923) towards security through multilateral pacts based on arbitration agreements (the policy pursued from 1924 through to 1938).[81] The interesting thing about this process is that the way a number of key foreign ministry officials, nearly all of whom had initially favoured a traditional approach to security

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[78] Gilles Le Béguec, *La République des avocats* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2003). See also Yves-Henri Gaudemont, *Les Juristes et la vie politique sous la IIIème République* (Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1970).

[79] Nicolas Roussellier, *Le Parlement de l'éloquence: la souveraineté de la délibération au lendemain de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1997), pp. 44–5; Le Béguec, *République des avocats*, pp. 115–21; and Robert Young, *French Foreign Policy 1918–1945*, 2nd edn. (Wilmington, VA: Scholarly Resources, 1993), pp. 303–4.

[80] On the role of the *École libre* see John Keiger, 'Patriotism, politics and policy in the Foreign Ministry, 1880–1914', in R. Tombs (ed.), *Nationhood and Nationalism in France, 1889–1918* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 255–67. On the role of international law, see especially Jean Baillou et al., *Les Affaires étrangères et le corps diplomatique français: tome II, 1870–1980* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1984), pp. 413–19.

[81] I have outlined this process in 'France and the Problems of Security and Disarmament after the First World War', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 29:2 (2006), pp. 247–80. The term 'reorientation' is from Clemens Wurm, *Die französische Sicherheitspolitik in der Phase der Umorientierung, 1924–1926* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1979). Wurm's interpretation is based on a more traditional approach and attributes little importance to cultural factors however.

based on military alliances, adapted to the structures of the domestic and inter-
national environment to come up with a new approach that combined elements of the
traditional strategy with an increased emphasis on international law and collective
action. A strategic commitment from Britain remained the central aim of this policy.
But the tactic employed to obtain this commitment was to embed it within a wider
multilateral system that reflected the international norms of the postwar era. The
cultural reflexes of the military establishment, conversely, all but ensured that army
and naval officers would oppose this process. The vast majority of French military
elites, few of whom had received legal training and even fewer of whom had any
regard for the legitimating power of international law, were deeply sceptical of this
approach and bitterly resisted the change in policy. The summer of 1924 marked the
end of a period of military dominance over security policy and the beginning of an
era where foreign ministry officials took the lead in pursuing security for France with
multilateral pacts based on international law. This happened because the habitus of
both politicians and foreign ministry officials enabled them to cooperate in devising
a new approach to security that was more in tune with the changed international
norms of the post-1918 era (which, in turn, constituted a key element of the field in
which policy was made). The habitus concept thus provides insight into both the
source of policymakers' cultural reflexes and the way these reflexes interacted with
wider structures to produce new policy practices and thus a new strategy for
achieving security.[82]

Bourdieu's concept of overlapping fields can also provide helpful in conceptual-
ising the external forces that condition policy choices. The structural environment in
which French policy after 1918 was made was comprised of at least three reasonably
distinct fields. The first was the field of international relations; the second was the
domestic political, cultural and social context inside France; and the third was the
interministerial or bureaucratic context in which policy was hammered out. All three
were affected profoundly by the impact of the First World War. Thinking of the
international, national and inter-ministerial contexts as overlapping 'fields' is helpful
in several ways. It reminds us of the inter-relatedness of these spheres. While each
operated according to its own internal logic, important changes in one always had
implications for the other two. French policy was formulated as a response to
conditions in these three fields. But it also played a role in shaping their continual
reconfiguration. Organising the environment in which policy evolved in this way
provides a framework for integrating the more familiar dilemmas of French
policymakers – the Franco-German strategic balance, the policies of the other
powers, the rise of international communism and the postwar financial crisis – with
less well-understood factors such as the impact of new practices of international
politics and transnational discourses of pacifism and international legitimacy. These
new practices and discourses reverberated in both the international and domestic
fields.

The international field was the space in which both state and non-state actors
interacted. There were three key constituent elements to this field: the material
distribution of power in the international system, the foreign and defence policies of

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[82] The significance of this process has not been addressed in the existing literature but constitute a
central argument in a monograph I am preparing entitled 'France and the Politics of Security in
Europe, 1914–1928'.

the various actors within the systems and, finally, the written and unwritten rules and norms that constituted the 'character' of international affairs during the postwar decade. The first two categories have generated considerable attention in the historiography. But, nearly seventy years after E. H. Carr's classic analysis of their impact on international relations, historians are only now beginning to focus again on the role of post-1919 international norms in shaping foreign policy practices during the inter-war period.[83] Familiar practices of security through military strength and alliance politics had been discredited. New approaches to international relations emphasising international law and collective security had secured widespread international support. As a result, new normative standards for state behaviour emerged to change the character of international relations after 1918. Central to these new practices of international politics was an increased emphasis on the power of international law (as laid down in the Covenant of the League of Nations).[84] The very existence of the League of Nations, and the discourses of disarmament, collective security and international law promulgated in Geneva, created pressure for a new approach to international relations that political elites found increasingly difficult to ignore.[85]

The second field, French politics and society, was dominated by the impact of the First World War. The staggering price the nation had paid for victory in 1918, combined with France's geographical position and the way the conflict was represented to the French public, meant that French perspectives on war, peace and security were of a different character than those of the other great powers. The result was a series of apparent contradictions within both elite and popular opinion. On the one hand, the end of the war witnessed an explosion of national and patriotic feeling accompanied by the near unanimous conviction that Germany must pay for the damages of the war. On the other hand, the terrible human costs of the war led many, particularly on the centre and on the left of the French political spectrum, to reject older practices of diplomacy and power politics and to look to new practices and institutions in the hope that they could prevent another such nightmare. This was of course part of a wider trend in international relations. But it was reinforced by the rise of a large and powerful anti-war movement in France during the 1920s. In effect, the First World War exacerbated pre-existing tensions between nationalism and internationalism, patriotism and pacifism. These contradictions in the 'mood' of

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[83] E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1939). For examples of recent studies focusing on the changed character of international politics after 1918, see Keith Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Patrick Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace after World War I: America, Britain and the Stabilisation of Europe, 1919–1932* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[84] For excellent discussions of these developments, see Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 603–19; and William Keylor 'Versailles and International Diplomacy', in M. Boemke, G. Feldman and E. Glaser (eds.), *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 469–505; and Georges-Henri Soutou, 'L'ordre européen de Versailles à Locarno', in G.-H. Soutou and Claude Carlier (eds.), *1918–1925: Comment faire la paix?* (Paris: Economica, 2001), pp. 301–31.

[85] See for example Marie-Renée Mouton, *La Société des Nations et les intérêts de la France, 1920–1924* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1995); and John Lewis Hogge II, 'Arbitrage, Sécurité, Désarmement: French security and the League of Nations, 1920–1925', Ph.D dissertation, New York University, 1994. I consider the impact of these pressures in my 'France and the Problems of Security and International Disarmament after the First World War', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 29:3 (2006), pp. 247–80.

postwar France were central to the domestic context in which security policy was made. They combined with parallel trends in international society to complicate the task of policy elites attempting to deliver lasting security for France.

The third field is the interministerial context in which policy was formulated, debated and adopted. Key characteristics of this field were chronic instability at the level of the cabinet paralleled by relative continuity at the level of the permanent officials. Between 1920 and 1929 France saw the fall and rise of nineteen different governments (although the turnover of foreign ministers was considerably less dramatic). During the same period the hierarchies within the foreign ministry and the army remained largely unchanged. In many ways ministerial instability gave permanent officials greater influence over policy. Newly appointed ministers depended on their permanent officials for expert counsel. This contributed to relative continuity in policy. Only in 1924 did a change in government lead to a pronounced shift in the orientation of foreign and defence policy. It is in this interministerial field that one finds some of the best illustrations of Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and symbolic capital in operation. The foreign ministry mobilised its cultural capital more effectively than did the military establishment. It helped of course that the foreign ministry's chief cultural assets (its expertise in negotiation and international law) were more suitable to the character of European politics after 1918 than were those of their counterparts in the military (experience in the various uses of military force and the threat of military force). In the immediate aftermath of the war, however, the military possessed formidable symbolic capital. Victory over Germany has given the military enormous prestige in French society. France's military chiefs were treated as national saviours whose views were difficult to contravene and impossible to ignore. But this kind of prestige is always a declining asset. And over the course of the early 1920s the influence of the military over security policy declined steadily while that of the foreign ministry increased. Imagining French interministerial politics as a Bourdieuan 'field' thus provides a useful perspective on the politics of security policymaking.[86]

French security policy evolved as the cultural practices of policy elites adapted to the structural conditions that prevailed in the three fields. French security strategies thus moved away from pursuing security through traditional methods of alliance politics, military power and strict treaty enforcement (which led to repeated confrontations with both France's erstwhile allies as well as its former enemies) towards security through multilateral assistance pacts based on arbitration (which resulted in the Locarno Agreement and a brief era of international harmony). Most historians have concluded that this policy was imposed on France by the power of British and American capital in the mid-1920s.[87] This view is in need of revision. While British and American pressures were crucial, they do not explain why French

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[86] Here it is worth remembering the relative lack of precision with which Bourdieu describes and employs the concept of the '*champ*'. This forces one to make choices regarding those fields which are of primary importance and those which are less crucial. It is of course possible to imagine additional fields, including those of the army general staff, the foreign ministry or the French council of ministers. Each of these was structured by the positions of key actors and characterised by competition for power and influence over policymaking. To avoid having to go on identifying more and more fields – a potentially endless task – my analysis considers rivalry and discord within these organisations in Bourdieuan terms, but implicitly rather than explicitly.

[87] See most recently the interpretation of Cohrs in *The Unfinished Peace*. For an excellent discussion of the older literature, see Jon Jacobsen 'Strategies of French Foreign Policy after World War I', *Journal of Modern History*, 55 (1983), pp. 78–95.

policy elites reacted *in the way that they did.* A more compelling interpretation would consider that the way these elites understood their situation and the policies they formulated were conditioned by the cultural context in which they operated. It would demonstrate that they were reacting to conditions inside and outside France – many of which have not been integrated into existing interpretations. One could also argue that the problem with French policy between the wars was not the way policy elites adapted to the structural environment of the 1920s but instead their failure to adapt to the changes in this environment that took place during the early and mid-1930s. Borrowing concepts from Bourdieu allows me to tackle these issues from a new angle and thus gain a different perspective on the dynamics of French security policy during this crucial period.

Conclusion

The chief strengths of Bourdieu's approach are first that it provides a more comprehensive conceptualisation of what culture is, and second that it offers a framework for placing culture in context. The argument on offer here is emphatically *not* that all international historians should embrace every aspect of Bourdieu's conceptual framework. It is instead that borrowing from his 'set of thinking tools' can provide new insights into the cultural sources of policymaking. Bourdieu's concepts provide a means to approach familiar terms as 'worldview' or *mentalité* from a new and more rigorous analytical perspective. They also underscore the problems with interpretations that rely too heavily on either 'structure' or 'agency' by insisting that all structures are themselves structuring agents. Bourdieu should therefore be of real interest to historians interested in these questions and in the role of culture in international relations. What Bourdieu's concepts offer are general categories that are useful in answering central questions such as 'where does culture come from' and 'how does it interact with other factors in shaping the decisions of individuals and collectivities?'. It can thus help illustrate how policymaking practices emerge out of the dynamic relationship between cultural predispositions of policy elites and the wider structural environment that is constituted by general rules constraining policy as well as by the various forms of power that are at stake both domestically and internationally. Decision-making elites with a 'feel for the game' understand not only what is possible and impossible, but also how the written and unwritten 'rules of the game' can be altered to their advantage. Indeed a 'feel for the game' is a fundamental prerequisite for successful statesmanship. International historians, particularly those whose interpretations focus on cultural forces in the policy process, can only benefit by engaging with the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu.